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Shiʿi Theology and Polemics between Iran and India: The Case of Saiyed Nūrollāh Šūštarī (d. 1019/1610)

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ABSTRACT Connected intellectual history is one of the modes in which we can consider the ways in which ideas, theologies and even polemical exchanges travel between different geographical and political milieux. In this case study, I examine the theology and polemics of Saiyed Nūrollāh Šūštarī between his birth and intellectual formation in eastern Iran and his career and eventual death at the Mughal court. I indicate how his polemical works played a role in transmitting theological ideas and debates from the Iranian milieu to Indian scholarly circles, and how the fluctuating fortunes and reception of his work followed the political shifts and patronage at court.

KEYWORDS Theology, polemics, Sunni, Shiʿi, Ǧahāngīr, Mughal

Introduction

One of the distorting lenses of nationalist historiographies and the modern obsession with the boundaries and limits of the state, its inhabitants and its cultural and intellectual history is that we forget that identities, cultures, linguistic and intellectual communities are not bound by such political limitations. The current trends towards more connected histories in the study of the early modern world—especially effected in the work of Sanjay Subrahmanyam and some of his interlocutors, such as Muzaffar Alam and Nile Green—is a mere reflection of a fact that ideas, practices, symbols and tokens move, transform, merge and overlap (Subrahmanyam 1997, 735–62, 2005b, 2005a; Subrahmanyam and Alam 2007; Green 2019).[1] Even the trend of looking at bilateral intellectual and cultural relations—evinced in a number of conferences and cultural products in Iran in recent years celebrating the 'relations' between Iran and India (or perhaps one should say South Asia)—raises the problem of assuming that there is an essential entity 'Iran' and another that we call 'India' that are discrete and distinct.[2] This is [1]

1 For studies of a different kind of connected intellectual history within the same milieu, see Nair (2020) and Truschke (2016).

2 *Čekīda-ye maqālāt-e hamāyeš-e bayn al-melalī-ye mīrās-e moštarak-e Īrān va Hend* 1392; Loṭfī/Aškevarī ([1394a Š] 2015a, 2015b).

neither to deny facts of geography—there are locations identified as being 'in' India and 'in' Iran—nor the dynastic differences between Timurids, Mughals, Safavids and others. Learned elites in the Persianate world—as a number of studies have shown—were mobile by virtue of the fact that they had transferable cultural capital derived from their learning in the skills privileged in the Perso-Arabic cosmopolis in language, literature, philology, the rational disciplines and scriptural hermeneutics, they possessed sufficient material resources to be mobile, and because they were integrated into scholarly networks and the means to proceed through those networks through their connections, letters of introduction, lineage, confessional and spiritual connections (Subrahmanyam 1992, 340–63; El-Rouayheb 2015; Binbaş 2016; Atçil 2017; al-Musawi 2015; Ricci 2011; Kia 2020). Still too much on the literature on intellectual exchange and even polemics in this period is coloured by a political reductionism; as if meaning can only be inscribed in theological and intellectual discourse if and only if it expresses a political theology. The debates between Čištīs and Naqšbandīs or Catholics and Muslims do have a significant political context; however, one ought to pay attention to the texts themselves and not assume that argumentation stands merely for an unarticulated act of opposition and mode of conflict and little else.[3]

[2] I examine the role of one such intellectual and member of a learned and social elite, Saiyed Nūrollāh Šūštarī—a scholar, a *saiyed* and a scion of a notable family from the borderlands of what are now Iran and Iraq as well as relative of the erstwhile Marʿašī rulers of Māzandarān on the cusp of Safavid rule—and his theological contribution in defending Twelver Shiʿi doctrine, which had become the dominant and officially recognised and promulgated religion of the Safavid realms through the mode of his composition of polemics.[4] In that sense, I propose a study in connected intellectual history that considers a figure between Safavid Iran and Mughal India whose polemics challenged, transgressed, and established theologically normative positions. Polemics are thus proposed as a ground for exchange and interaction across differing milieu and even networks but grounded in common idioms of learning and language; as mentioned above, it is all too common for polemics and debates (on tradition, on the nature of Sufism, Shiʿi-Sunni, Catholic-Muslim and so forth) to be reduced to political difference, conflict and positioning. I shall first locate his work within a wider context of the nature of polemics and their relationship to theology and philosophy in learned traditions. Then I will proceed to a narrower contextualisation of the person and his intellectual output. Finally, I will focus on the polemical texts themselves standing as witnesses to an intellectual exchange between Iran and India but whose work also stretched back to early cycles of polemical engagement and whose writing in Persian and Arabic then addresses audiences not just within the Perso-Arabic cosmopolis of South Asia but Arabia, the Ottoman realms and beyond.

[3] However, before commencing a few caveats are pertinent. First, although I shall primarily be discussing Shiʿi polemics, polemical defences and critiques of Sunni theological positions, I do not intend to project a 'sectarian' or confessional framework onto the relationship between

3 Arguably, an example of this is Muzaffar Alam (2021), especially chapter three on Čištī and Naqšbandī debates on the validity of Sufism that are primarily located within the struggle for politics at the Mughal court. Theological polemics are not innocent of their political contexts but ought not to be reduced to them. Similarly, see Alam and Subrahmanyam (2012, 249–10) on ʿAbd al-Sattār Lāhorī and what they consider to be primarily the Mughal encounter with European culture.

4 The Marʿašī dynasty of Māzandarān was established by Saiyed Qavām al-Dīn known as Mīr-e Bozorg (d. 781/1380) from a family of saiyeds claiming descent from the fourth Shiʿi Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Naǧm al-Dīn Maḥmūd left Māzandarān and settled in Šūštar. The lineage from him to our figure is as follows: Naǧm al-Dīn Maḥmūd Āmolī – Mīr Ǧamāl al-Dīn Ḥosain – Mīr Mobārez al-Dīn – Saiyed Moḥammad Šāh – Mīr Żeyāʾ al-Dīn Nūrollāh – Saiyed Moḥammad Šarīf al-Dīn – Saiyed Nūrollāh. See 'Moqaddema', to Šūštarī ([1392 Š] 2014, I/84–101).

Iran and North India in the early modern period, in which Mughal means Sunni and Safavid means Shiʿi. This does not mean that I ascribe to the notion popularised in recent times of 'confessional ambiguity' that is considered as a characterisation of the theological affiliation of the commonality and the learned elites which were then gradually eroded by the Ottoman-Safavid conflict.[5] While all too often religion has been neglected in analyses of Mughal politics and socio-intellectual history, one ought not over-compensate by seeing in every policy or activity a distinct confessional posture. Nevertheless, Šūštarī's own work distinctly makes a Shiʿi confessional case but within a context that he recognises is religiously plural and not unambiguously marked by Sunni supremacy, even while he does not necessarily see his role as a Safavid 'outlier' whose role is to defend a new Shiʿi space against the aggressive 'expansionism' of Sunni Ottomans, Uzbeks and Mughals.

[4] Second, as I just indicated, the effect of the dominance of nationalist, Marxist, Aligarhian and then subalternist historiographies has been to play down and even neglect the cultural, political and intellectual role of religions and religious discourse in society. The question of the nature of Shiʿi confessionalism and politics in the middle Mughal period from Akbar (r. 963–1014/1556–1605) to Šāh Ǧahān (r. 1037–1068/1628–1658) requires careful consideration not just in terms of the effects of the migration of Shiʿi intellectuals—considered perhaps even as missionaries among the many other religious missionaries at the courts of Akbar and after—but in the context of the scholarly and elite dynamics within North India itself, between networks and factions at the centres of cultural and political capital.

[5] Third, even within the parameters of polemical literature, there are clear periodic distinctions in the wider West Asian context as well as South Asia and its environs. One cannot project the polemics of the Mongol period forward to 1600 nor backwardly project the heightened polemics of the later eighteenth century marked by the *Toḥfa-ye Eṯnāʿašarīya* (Gift to the Twelver Shiʿa) of Šāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 1176/1762) and other Naqšbandī divines in the midst of the declining Mughal court and the rise of 'Iranian' and Shiʿi political actors in Delhi, Fyzabad and Lucknow (Rizvi 1982; Alvi 2012).

[6] Finally, it would be unjust to consider Šūštarī merely as a clever polemicist outwitting his interlocutors and then losing out in the political game in the long term with his fall from grace and death during the early reign of Ǧahāngīr. He was a wonderful linguistic stylist in both Arabic and Persian and a prolific scholar across a number of distinct scholarly disciplines. His own rationalist theology (*kalām*) and philosophy (*ḥekma*) and his interventions into the cycle of texts such as the *Šarḥ Hidāyat al-ḥikma* of Mīr Ḥosain Maibodī (d. 909/1504), *Taǧrīd al-iʿtiqād* of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) and *Šarḥ al-Mawāqif* of al-Šarīf ʿAlī al-Ǧorǧānī (d. 816/1413), all layers of texts, super-texts and para-texts well known to the scholarly elites across the Perso-Arabic cosmopolis from the Balkans to the Malaccas, are worthy of analysis in their own right. Thus, what I present is an aspect of his intellectual biography as a contribution to a connected intellectual history, albeit one which is familiar to those who are familiar with this period of Mughal history.

The Nature of Polemics

[7] One did not have to wait until modern Oxford ordinary language philosophy to recognise that language, both in its spoken and written tokens, contains both affirmative and rhetorical aspects, and in fact the latter is a critical element in the successful communication of ideas

5 See Rizvi (2019, 227–55); on confessional ambiguity, see Pfeiffer (2013, 129–68).

and sentiments (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). Polemical writing is often associated with the rhetorical flourishes of language, not because it is devoid of reasoning or dialectical method but because it utilises strategies of othering and affirming the self. Philosophical argumentation without polemics is practically unheard of precisely because of the need to differentiate one's argument from the other. The ancient Greek tradition often considered philosophy to constitute a cacophony of quarrelling sectarian positions, with Stoics opposed to Epicureans arguing with Platonists disputing with Aristotelians. Skeptics drew upon this discord to argue for relativism and the indeterminacy of knowledge, while the new religious groups such as Christians saw in the polemics among philosophers proof not only of their distance from truth but a vindication of the simplicity of their own scriptural belief. Lactantius in his *Divine Institutes* wrote:

> Philosophy has split into a multiplicity of sects, and they all think differently. Which one do we go to for truth? Any one sect dismisses all others in order to confirm itself and its own ideas, and it admits wisdom in no other sect in case it concedes error of its own; but its process of dismissing other sects is the same process by which they dismiss it, for those who condemn a sect for its folly are philosophers none the less: praise any sect and call it true, and philosophers condemn it as false. They will all perish together. (Lactantius 2003, 3.4.3–10; cited in Weisser and Thaler 2016, 2) [8]

He conceded that philosophers used rational methods and argumentation and that their polemics were continuous with their method, but that polemical reasoning could not fail to contain within itself the seeds of its own critique. Perhaps this is an inevitable result of the process of institutionalisation of school positions and the need to defend them. But what constitutes the features that characterise polemic? We assume that they are aggressive and triumphant (they constitute a 'war of words'), argumentative and not above resorting to *ad hominem* and also activating in their recipients feelings of value, and they are directed to a goal of vindicating a position and defeating an opponent.[6] This raises some important questions: At what point does legitimate critique become polemic? When can one resort to personalisation in argument without detracting from its validity? Do polemics assume an absent arbiter who might adjudicate between the two warring parties? Is our Kantian disdain for polemic while praise for critique itself a sort of rhetorical posture? Do polemics not contain argumentation and hermeneutics insofar as they gloss an opponent's position and reflect upon one's own position with respect to texts? We tend to distinguish between polemic and reason in the same way as the ancients tried to differentiate philosophy from sophistry. But both contain argumentation, conceptualization, and the deployment of concepts and categories to make sense of reality.[7] At the same time, polemic is not quite the same as rhetoric—it does not seek to persuade but rather is already persuaded and seeks to confirm with others already persuaded in their position. Does critique entail mutual respect while polemic is strikingly disrespectful? Can polemic be gentle and respectful? Harsh criticism and polemic are still better than neglect—and most thinkers often do not take criticism well and read it as a polemical attack. [9]

Just as polemic is continuous with philosophy, so too is it in a religious context continuous [10]

6 Modifying and drawing upon the excellent Straub (2004). For a useful discussion of polemic and philosophy, see Laks (2016). For a diachronic study of the role of polemic and rhetoric in reasoning, see Albert/Nicolas (2010).

7 While our contemporary intellectual culture tends to disdain polemics, it is difficult not to notice its prevalence. For one recent defence of polemics as a critical aspect of public reason, see Amossy (2014).

with theology. In fact, theology is similarly unthinkable with polemics. Polemics have been a major feature of Muslim theologies from the classical period, drawing upon the polemics that were already present in the scripture. Much of the negative critique of Christians and other religious positions in the Qurʾan is characterised as polemical, especially by progressives and modernists embarrassed by its language, not taking into consideration the rather standard nature of such polemical configurations in late Antiquity.[8] These scriptural polemical constructions about the non-Muslim other were carried over into creedal works (*ʿaqāʾid*) and heresiographies that polemicized against other Muslims.[9] Such works had a dual purpose: to differentiate the thought and practice of the community that was being defended in distinction to its others, and to speak to one's own community, bolster, cajole and console them in their beliefs.

In this paper, as an intellectual historian, I want to show how Šūštarī represents two types of contact and encounter between Safavid Iran and Mughal India.[10] The first is his role in Shiʿi-Sunni polemics and his prolific work in that area that stemmed from the current round of Timurid and post-Timurid texts. These works had a major impact and reflected the ethos of the new resurgent and dominant Shiʿism of the Safavid court. The second was his role in transmitting the ideas of the philosophers and theologians of Shiraz through his works in *kalām*, especially his commentaries and glosses on the *Taǧrīd al-iʿtiqād* cycle of texts. In the course of these two contributions, one might even suggest, as biographers have, that he was the first to disseminate seriously Shiʿi theology in North India, although some teachings had been available through the works of Šāh Ṭāher (d. c. 956/1549), an Esmāʿīlī Imam and Safavid envoy, and Šāh Fatḥ Allāh Šīrāzī (d. 998/1589), eminent thinker from Shiraz before him (Ahmed and Pourjavady 2016, 606–10). As such, what I present is a study that contrasts but stands alongside two important recent works: Ali Anooshahr's study of Fatḥ Allāh Šīrāzī and his networks arising from the Shiraz intellectual milieu that contributed to the promotion of the rational sciences and learning at the court of Akbar, and Corinne Lefevre's study of ʿAbd al-Sattār Lāhorī and his disputation to the court of Ǧahāngīr providing evidence for ideology and rhetoric in the writing of thought and history (Anooshahr 2014; Lefèvre 2017). While their times and networks intersected, Šūštarī's polemics were more marked and scholarly in his corpus and intellectual contribution than Šīrāzī's. My concern, however, is less with networks and ideological formation and more with the transmission and exchange of ideas within a connected but also fractured context. My use of Šūštarī is to show how his composition of polemics constituted a rhetorical expression of his theological and philosophical learning and effected a critical episode in the transmission of learning from the Iranian milieux of the school of Shiraz and Mashhad to North India. [11]

Šūštarī's Life

Saiyed Nūrollāh was a significant figure of the time, featuring prominently in many biograph- [12]

8 Two classical works on the polemics against Christians are McAuliffe (1991) and Sirry (2014). See also, Ridgeon (2001).

9 For a short version of this, see van Ess (2006); for the longer consideration of the heresiography in this context, see van Ess (2011).

10 A third possible area of encounter could be Sufism and whether Šūštarī played a role in the dissemination of the Nūrbaḫšīya into India and especially Kashmīr. See 'Muqaddema', to Šūštarī ([1392 Š] 2014, I/195–198); Bashir (2003, 180–81).

ical dictionaries both Iranian and Indian.[11] One of the earliest accounts of his life is by his son Saiyed ʿAlāʾ al-Molk, who found patronage in Bengal with Prince Šoǧāʿ (which may account for his silence on how his father died, merely mentioning that he is buried in Agra; Šūštarī [1378 Š] 1999, 24–36; Rizvi 1986, II/3).[12] He came from the southern borderlands of the Ottoman-Safavid conflict in Tustar/Šūštar, from a bilingual social context, where he was born in 956/1549. His father, Saiyed Šarīf al-Dīn, who was also his first teacher, had been a student of Šaiḫ Ibrāhīm al-Qaṭīfī (d. c. 945/1539), the independent-minded jurist originally from Eastern Arabia active in the early Safavid period in Iraq.[13] The prominence of his family was indicated by the fact that his father's uncle Saiyed Asad Allāh b. Zain al-Dīn ʿAlī, better known as 'Šāh-Mīr' (b. Najaf 888/1483, d. Tabriz c. 964/1557), served as *ṣadr* under Šāh Ṭahmāsb (r. 930–984/1524–1576) from 944/1537; his son Saiyed ʿAlī became *ṣadr* in 970/1563 and was also made the custodian of the shrine at Mashhad in 984/1577 ("Moqaddema", to Šūštarī [1392 Š] 2014, I/89–95, 1999, 21; Rūmlū [1384 Š] 2005, 362, 510–11; Monšī 1350 Š/1971, I/236), and his other son Saiyed ʿAbd al-Vahhāb was appointed as governor of Dezfūl for a period of time. Saiyed ʿAbd al-Vahhāb's son Saiyed Rašīd al-Dīn became governor of Šuštar in 985/1577 (Šūštarī [1378 Š] 1999, 22). His grandfather, Saiyed Żeyāʾ al-Dīn Nūrollāh (d. 925/1519), after whom he was named, was much feted as a great scholar and propagator of the Shiʿi faith and confidant of Šāh Esmāʿīl I (r. 907–930/1501–1524; "Moqaddema", to Šūštarī [1392 Š] 2014, I/87–89). He had studied in Shiraz with students of the famous philosopher Saiyed Šarīf al-Ǧorǧānī, such as Qavām al-Dīn Korbālī, and had originally thought of migrating to India with his brother. He was also a Sufi disciple of Saiyed Moḥammad Nūrbaḫš (d. 869/1464) and after him accompanied Šams al-Dīn Moḥammad Lāhīǧī (d. 912/1506)—and this may have been the beginning of a family association with that order, which was clearly later reflected in Šūštarī's *Maǧāles al-moʾmenīn* (Maʿṣūm ʿAlī Šāh and Ǧaʿfar Maḥǧūb [1345 Š] 1966, II/319–34, III/127–30; Ṣādeqīyānlū [1351 Š] 1972; Bashir 2003, 29–75, 163–97). Later he gained the favour of the Mošaʿšaʿid rulers of his region and was offered the position of *ṣadr,* which he declined. Sources claim he had a role in spreading the Shiʿi faith in the borderlands. Šūštarī's role in defending the Shiʿi faith and going to India is perhaps an indication of walking in the footsteps of his grandfather—his namesake.

Šūštarī moved to Mashhad to continue his studies, arriving in Ramażān 979/January 1572; [13]
there he studied the rational disciplines and exegesis with ʿAbd al-Vāḥed Šūštarī who was linked to the philosophers of Shiraz especially through Abo-l-Ḥasan Kāšānī (d. 966/1559), the author of a popular work on proving the existence of God (Šūštarī [1378 Š] 1999, 25, 53–63, "Moqaddema", to 2014, I/128–131).[14] This older Šūštarī is credited in various biographical works – including in the account of ʿAlāʾ al-Molk—of prolific sets on glosses on theological works such as *al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafīya* and the *Taǧrīd* cycle of texts, as well as works in metaphysics such as *Šarḥ al-Hidāya* of Mīr Ḥosain Maibodī. ʿAlāʾ al-Molk cites his father's

11 Modern studies include 'Moqaddema', to Šūštarī ([1426] 2005, I, 12–28); 'Moqaddema', to Šūštarī ([1392 Š] 2014, I/80–87); Hansvī (Hansvī 1962); Rizvi (Rizvi 1986, I/342–88); Husted (Husted 1992); Naqvī (Naqvī, n.d.). Classical sources include Afandī ([1401] 1981, V/265); al-ʿĀmelī (1966, I/226); Šūštarī ([1378 Š] 1999, 16–46); Zunūzī ([1390 Š] 2011, V/205–8).

12 Mīrzā Moḥammad Ṣādeq Eṣfahānī (d. 1651) in his *Ṣobḥ-e Ṣāḍiq* draws heavily upon the work of Šūštarī and on his friendship with ʿAlāʾ al-Molk on the biography of Saiyed Nūrollāh. There are numerous manuscripts of this latter work, of which I have consulted MS British Library Or. 1728, a nineteenth-century copy.

13 An *iǧāza* dated 944/1537, authorising the teaching of the legal manual *Iršād al-aẕhān* of ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, is reproduced in Mağlesī 1990, CV/116–23. Qaṭīfī was embroiled in disputes with the leading jurist of the early Safavid period, Šaiḫ ʿAlī al-Karakī (d. 940/1533), on questions of authority and juristic method.

14 For Kāšānī's text, see Kāšānī ([1391 Š] 2012).

gloss on the *Šarḥ al-Hidāya* (suggesting that a copy did indeed exist), in which he narrated an encounter between some scholars from Lāhīǧān and ʿAbd al-Vāḥed on the question of whether the power of God was finite or infinite and how he resolved it with recourse to the notion of mental existence (*vojūd-e ẕehnī*), in a way also demonstrating a critical gloss on Ǧalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502; Šūštarī [1378 Š] 1999, 61–62). In Mashhad, he also studied the scriptural disciplines with ʿAbd al-Rašīd Šūštarī ([1378 Š] 1999, 21, "Moqaddema", to 2014, I/128). ʿAlāʾ al-Molk cites an anecdote from his time in Mashhad when Šūštarī visited his uncle the *ṣadr* Saiyed ʿAlī and heard him talk about his exchange with a Sunni scholar at Ḥaǧǧ on the issue of the impeccability of the prophets (Šūštarī [1378 Š] 1999, 25–27). This encounter is reported to show Šūštarī's attachment to defending the Shiʿi cause as part of his sense of his family's responsibility in that matter.

[14] The turmoil following the death of Šāh Ṭahmāsb in 983/1576 led to his decision to move to India. He was already an accomplished scholar before he left for India in Šavvāl 992/October 1584, partly prompted by the ongoing civil wars and strife and due to the Uzbek threat in Khurasan, and perhaps on the invitation of notables at the Mughal court (Šūštarī [1378 Š] 1999, 25, "Moqaddema", to 2014, I/151). He arrived at the Mughal court in the middle of 993/1585 and through an introduction by Ḥakīm Abo-l-Fatḥ Gīlānī (d. 997/1589) obtained an audience with Akbar, whom he impressed with his learning (Badāyūnī and ʿAlī et al. [1379] 2000, III/173). He quickly gained the patronage of the Mughal emperor such that, within a year of arriving at court, he was appointed a judge in Lahore and the judge for the military (*qāżī-ye ʿaskar*) according to the Sunni legal rites—Rizvi is adamant that the evidence suggests that Akbar knew he was Shiʿi (Rizvi 1986).[15] This might have been partly because after the campaigns in Punjab, engaging with Kabul and the pacification of Sind, Akbar had sent the ʿolamāʾ of Lahore into these regions and there was a need to replenish personnel in this major city; he may also have needed more compliant and loyal ʿolamāʾ following the revolt of the Shiʿi *qāżī* of Jaunpur Mollā Moḥammad Yazdī, and who better to fill that role than another 'foreigner' (Streusand 1989, 155; Abo-l-Fażl 2000, III/415–22; Badāyūnī and ʿAlī et al. [1379] 2000, II/266–76)?

[15] The famous ʿAbd al-Qāder Badāyūnī (d. 1014/1605), despite his antipathy to the Shiʿa, could not help praising the good character, wit, intellect, and the scholarly achievements of Šūštarī. He even said of him that his endorsement of the Qurʾanic exegesis of Abo-l-Fayż Fayżī (d. 1004/1595), despite the text itself not being worthy of any praise, made the work worth perusing. In particular, he praised his role as chief judge in Lahore for providing structure and due process to the procedures and for eradicating corruption that was rife (Badāyūnī and ʿAlī et al. [1379] 2000, III/137–38; Hansvī 1962, 40–41). So being a recipient of imperial favour was certainly Saiyed Nūrollāh's lot. In a letter that was probably penned in the 1590s to Šaiḫ Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmelī (d. 1030/1621), the Šaiḫ al-Eslām of Isfahan and a friend of his father's, he wrote:

> [16] After traversing long distances and undergoing considerable pains and agony, I reached the Indian capital. There, luck favoured me and I obtained an opportunity

15 Šaiḫ Farīd Bhakkarī (1961–1970, I/373), writing in 1060/1649, is clear that his Shi'ism was well known and yet he was still appointed *qāżī-ye ʿaskar*; Rizvi (1986, 2:349). See also Hansvī (1962, 37–38). Corinne Lefèvre also cites an anecdote to the point that Akbar was not so worried about which particular Muslim legal confession his judges professed as long as they ruled according to what he deemed most appropriate; see Lefèvre (2017, 116–19). The post of judge for the military was from the royal prerogative and demonstrates his closeness to Akbar.

> to benefit from the luminous sun and found repose under the shadow of the great Sultan, Akbar …
>
> Through divine grace and blessings, I obtained a lofty position and the honour of the companionship of the emperor…[whose] patronage and favours increase daily. In fact, my success is due to divine munificence and the benevolence of the Prophet and *the* friend of God, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. The high position and nearness to the Emperor did not, however, make me forgetful of myself. I was always conscious of the hereafter and of the ultimate end of mortal beings. In refuting the arguments and the rationale of the *Nawāṣib* [anti-Shiʿi Sunnis], I was guided by the holy traditions of my ancestors. In these circumstances, I came to the conclusion that in India, *taqīya* was a great calamity. It would expel out children from the Imāmīya faith and make them embrace the false Ašʿarī or Mātorīdi faiths. Reinforced by the kindness and the bounty of the Sultan, I threw away the scarf of *taqīya* from my shoulders and, taking with me an army of arguments, I plunged myself into *jihad* against the Sunni ʿolamāʾ of this country. I was convinced that active religious polemics and discussions against the Sunni ʿolamāʾ was the *jihad* which would make the best provision for the world hereafter. First of all, I wrote *Maṣāʾib al-nawāṣib* which refutes the *Nawāqiḍ al-rawāfiḍ*. My arguments in that book smeared the beard of the author of the *Nawāqiḍ* with filth. Then I wrote *al-Ṣawārim al-muhriqa*. Because of my book the bitter attacks by the author of the *Sawāʾiq* on the Shiʿa rebounded upon him and reduced the *Sawāʾiq*, which claimed to be lightening to ashes. God also gave me the strength to perform other deeds.[16] [17]

In such a correspondence with a major figure of the Safavid court—a space that was rife with polemics and in which the Shiʿa need not worry about the consequence of enunciating their version of sacred history and theology—it would perhaps be self-serving for Saiyed Nūrollāh to claim such a courageous position of defending the faith. It also assumes that the court would have a strong religious hue (as one assumed it did in Iran and at the Ottoman and Uzbek courts). One also sees how his own portrayal of his life as a heroic figure is fashioning himself as a major scholar and a leading divine of his age, furthering the Safavid Shiʿi cause—*despite* being in India. By rehearsing elements of his biography, one presents a construction of the life of scholar and his many networks located within the cosmopolitanism of his learning within the Persianate world. [18]

His Works

Saiyed Nūrollāh was an extremely prolific author with over a hundred works enumerated in various bibliographies.[17] Arguably there were few contemporaries whose work in the Persianate context is even close to being comparable—and the breadth of learning was appreciated by his contemporaries and even opponents, as we saw above, because they recognised its value even if deployed in polemical mode. The range of issues demonstrates his wide training: He wrote glosses on the legal and legal theoretical works of al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 725/1325), [19]

16 *Bayāz* of ʿEnāyat Ḫān Rāseḫ, MS Aligarh Habib Ganj Collection 50/335 (Persian), fols. 94r–95r, based on a translation by Rizvi (1986, I/357–58).

17 The manuscript evidence suggests that his most popular works were *Maǧāles al-moʾmenīn* and *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq,* of which there are numerous copies in Iran and India.

such as *Qawāʿid al-ʿaqāʾid* and *Muḫtalif al-Šīʿa*, as well as on works of Ḥanafī *feqh* popular in India, such as *Šarḥ al-Wiqāya* of ʿObaidollāh al-Maḥbūbī, known as Ṣadr al-Šarīʿa (d. 747/1346), no doubt based on his time as a judge in Lahore. He has some Qurʾanic exegetical works, such as *Kašf al-qināʿ*, an extensive gloss on *Anwār al-tanzīl* of Nāṣer al-Dīn al-Baiżāvī (d. 685/1286), which was a popular exercise in exegesis at the time, as well as some exegeses on particular verses, such as his treatise *Uns al-Waḥīd fī tafsīr āyat al-ʿadl wa-l-tawḥīd* on Q. 3.18, *Tafsīr āyat al-ṣadr* on Q. 6.125, *al-Siḥāb al-muṭīr fī tafsīr āyat al-taṭhīr* on Q. 33.33 and a polemic on the 'cave verse' Q. 9.40 titled *Kašf al-ʿawār fī tafsīr āyat al-ġār*.[18] These works continued his approach and interest in polemics: the extensive gloss on Baiżāvī is a polemical response to an Aš'arī work already penned in Mashhad before moving to India, and his *Maǧmūʿ*, which was probably also collated in Mashhad and that collects various exegetical glosses, is primarily a polemical exchange across time with another major Aš'arī thinker, Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) on matters of law, legal theory and theology.[19] His interest in grammar is indicated by a codex that he copied of glosses on the famous grammar text of his time, *al-Fawāʾid al-Ḍiyāʾīya* of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ǧāmī (d. 898/1492), somewhat ironic given his antipathy to the famous poet.[20] In the area of devotional works, he contributed to the vernacularisation of the Shiʿi tradition with a translation and commentary on the morning supplication (*Duʿāʾ al-ṣabāḥ*) attributed to ʿAlī.[21] In an age of encyclopaedias and anthologies, he wrote a short work on the difficulties in ten disciplines such as grammar, rhetoric and law entitled *al-ʿAšara al-kāmila* in Arabic.[22] In the field of logic, he wrote a treatise on the five (Porphyryan) universal predicables (*al-kullīyāt al-ḫams*), a gloss on the popular school-text commentary on the *Šamsīya* of Qoṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 766/1365) and a gloss on the gloss of Ǧalāl al-Dīn al-Davānī on *Tahẕīb al-manṭiq* of Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1790).[23] In metaphysics, he penned a gloss on the *Šarḥ al-Hidāya* of Mīr Ḥosain Maibodī and a gloss on the *Šarḥ al-Išārāt* of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī. He even wrote a short treatise defending the legitimacy of studying metaphysics: *risāla fī radd šubhat fī taḥqīq al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*. He is also credited with a short treatise on the reality of being (*fī ḥaqīqat al-wuǧūd*).[24] In theology, he was very prolific but interestingly these

18 At least three copies of the gloss on al-Baiżāvī are extant: MS Madrasa-ye Moṭahharī (former Sepahsālār in Tehran) 2095 dated 1049/1639 with 528 folios (Catalogue I: 120–22); MS Ketābḫāna-ye Mellī (Tehran) 1473 dated 1200/1786 with 414 folios (Catalogue IX: 497); MS Marʿašī (Qom) 5969 with 250 folios dated Ẕo-l-Ḥeǧǧa 1214/May 1800. The *Ḥāšiya* on Baiżāvī is now published based on seven manuscripts discussed in Šūštarī 2019, I: 58 – 60. The *Ḥāšiya* is almost definitely inspired by, and a response to, the proximate Aš'arī one of the philosopher ʿIṣām al-Dīn al-Israfāyīnī (d. 943/1536). The first two short treatises are extant too in the same codex: MS Marʿašī (Qom) 8381, fols. 169v–182r and 182v–197v. The exegesis on the purity verse is also extant: MS Marʿašī 4222, fols. 11r–16v dated 1092/1681. The exegesis on the cave verse is extant: MS Marʿašī (Qom) 4222, fols. 1r–11r dated 1092/1681, and MS Marʿašī 6869, fols. 64v–87r dated 1084/1673 in Patna, and MS Marʿašī 7351, fols. 37v–44v, copied in 1264/1848 in Najaf. These particular exegetical treatises are now edited and published in volume 5 of Šuštarī 1398.

19 The *Maǧmūʿ* is also published—Šūštarī ([1399 Š] 2020)—and edited based on a unique manuscript dated 14 Rağab 1035/April 1626 (MS Central Library of the University of Tehran 3038).

20 This codex, copied in Mashhad before his move to India and probably still from his student days, is extant in MS Marʿašī (Qom) 3042; it bears the seal of Aurangzeb, dated Rağab 1089/August 1678, and was part of the Mughal royal library.

21 A copy is MS Marʿašī (Qom) 15506, fols. 206r–226v, dated Ẕo-l-Ḥeǧǧa 1096/November 1685, copied in Tehran.

22 Two copies are MS Marʿašī (Qom) 2783, fols. 34v–49r, dated Ramażān 1091/October 1680, and MS Marʿašī 6968, fols. 25v–35r, dated 1221/1806.

23 A manuscript of the third text is extant: MS Āstān-e Qods-e Raẓavī (Mashhad) 28395, dated from the eleventh/seventeenth century with 36 folios. Arguably, his logical interventions followed the Shiʿi mode of Ḥillī—see Street (2016).

24 Both of these short texts are extant in the same codex: the Theology Faculty of the University of Tehran 51/8 and 51/12. They are also extant in the library of the shrine of Shāh-e čerāġ in Shiraz in a collection: 817/8 and 817/12.

texts are barely attested in the manuscript tradition; I have only managed to locate some copies in London. He wrote a number of works on the *Taǧrīd* cycle of texts: a gloss on Ḥosām al-Dīn Čelebī's (d. 926/1520) gloss on Ǧorǧānī's gloss on the *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd* of Šams al-Dīn Eṣfahānī (d. 749/1348), a gloss on the substance and accident section of the *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd* of ʿAlī al-Qūšǧī (d. 879/1474), a gloss on the substance section of *Kašf al-murād*, al-Ḥillī's commentary on the *Taǧrīd*, a gloss on the metaphysics section of *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd* of Qūšǧī, a gloss on the proof of the existence of God section of the *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd*, an extensive gloss on Davānī's 'old' gloss on the *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd,* with a separate treatise on the particular problem of the semantics of the modulation of being (*taškīk*), a gloss on the imamate section of the *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd* of Qūšǧī and a gloss on the afterlife section of the *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd* of Qūšǧī.[25] Alongside works from this cycle, he wrote a gloss on the *Šarḥ al-Mawāqif* of Ǧorǧānī, a gloss on al-Ḥillī's treatise on the divine decree and measurement (*al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar*), a gloss on the 'new' treatise establishing the existence of God (*Isbāt al-wāǧib al-ǧadīd*) of Davānī, a gloss on the treatise *Anmūẕaǧ al-ʿulūm* of Davānī, with a separate associated treatise glossing his discussion on the incipience of the cosmos (*ḥudūs al-ʿālam*) from the work (a popular topic at the time), a short treatise on divine knowledge that may have been extracted from a gloss on the *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd* and possibly a gloss on Davānī's gloss on Taftāzānī's *Šarḥ al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafīya*. What is clear from these works is the way in which his theological output is a response to Davānī, which is not surprising given his association with philosophers and theologians trained in Shiraz as well as the dominance of Davānī in the teaching of Islamic theology India. He specifically wrote a refutation on Davānī's position on the faith of Pharaoh (*īmān Firʿawn*). This playing against Davānī may further corroborate the notion that the Shiʿi tradition of philosophy in Shiraz starting with Ġīyās al-Dīn Manṣūr Daštakī and his students was an attempt to recover Shiʿi theology and appropriate Avicennism from Davānī.[26]

Šūštarī's Polemics

Saiyed Nūrollāh was known for the polemics that he wrote, most of which were penned in India. While some of his biographers refer to *Maǧāles al-moʾmenīn* as a polemical work, it was more a vindication of Shiʿi Islam through an appropriation of previous Sufis and a whole range of cultural, religious and intellectual figures as Shiʿi. The text was an attempt to demonstrate the primordiality and contribution of the Shiʿa to Islamic history and civilization and is indirectly polemical insofar as it is triumphalist. In the preface, Šūštarī explicitly says that the work sets aside *taqīya* and seeks, perhaps for the first time, to write a full history of the Shiʿa from the beginning to his time and name all the famous figures in that narrative (Šūštarī [1392 Š] 2014, I/8). Commenced in Iran in 990/1582, it was completed in Lahore in Ẕo l-Qaʿda 1010/May 1602. Yet according to the sources, it was its discovery that led to much consternation among the Sunni *ʿolamāʾ* at Ǧahāngīr's court. One needs to locate the polemics within a wider context of Shiʿi responses to Sunni accusations.[27] These [20]

25 I have consulted three of these texts: the gloss on the proof for the existence of God section from *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd* of Qūšǧī in Delhi Arabic (British Library) 846, the gloss on the ontology section of *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd* in Delhi Arabic (British Library) 848 and the gloss on the imamate section of the *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd* in India Office Islamic (British Library) 1258. He was familiar with Mīrzāǧān Šīrāzī's gloss on Dawānī's 'old gloss' on the *Šarḥ al-Taǧrīd* as evidenced by his autograph of this text in MS Khuda Bakhsh (Patna) 609, dated 982/1574, that is before he moved to India (Cat. X: 106–7).

26 On this point, see Bdaiwi (2014).

27 There is still a dearth of serious academic literature on polemics. These are good starting points that are relevant for this study: Rizvi (1982), and Ǧaʿfarīyān ([1388 Š] 2009, I/11–124).

took the form of (at least) four cycles of texts. The first was the *Risāla ʿUṣmānīya* of al-Ǧāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), which was written around the year 240/854, to which a number of classical authors penned responses such as the Refutation (*Naqḍ*) of the famous theologian al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbaḫtī (d. c. 310/922) and especially *Bināʾ al-maqāla al-Fāṭimīya* of Saiyed Ǧamāl al-Dīn b. Ṭāwūs (d. 673/1274).[28] The second cycle of texts began with *Minhāǧ al-karāma* of ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 725/1325), probably written in 710/1311 for the Il-Khan Öljaytü (r. 703-16/1304-16), which was refuted by the *Minhāǧ al-sunna* of Ibn Taymīya (d. 728/1328) a few years later, not the only anti-Shiʿi polemic he wrote.[29] The third cycle, and a little-known one, started with *al-Risāla al-moʿāriḍa fī l-radd ʿalā l-rawāfiḍ* (Refutation of the Rejectors) of Yūsuf b. Maḫzūm al-Aʿwar al-Wāsiṭī in the ninth/fifteenth century, which led to a refutation in Hilla in 839/1435 by Naǧm al-Dīn Ḫiḍr al-Ḥabalrūdī titled *al-Tawāḍiḥ al-anwār bi-l-ḥuǧaǧ al-wārida li-dafʿ šubhat al-Aʿwar* (The Clarifying Lights through scriptural proofs warding off the objections of the One-Eyed).[30] The fourth, which is crucial for Saiyed Nūrollāh, began with *Ibṭāl nahǧ al-bāṭil* (Invalidity of the path of falsehood), written around 909/1503 by Faẓlollāh b. Rūzbehān al-Ḫonǧī (d. 927/1521), a prominent Timurid historian and theologian in refutation of *Nahǧ al-ḥaqq wa-kašf al-ṣidq* of ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī.[31] It was this text to which Nūrollāh responded with *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq* completed in Lahore in Rabīʿ I 1014/August 1605.[32]

The Ottoman-Safavid conflict was a critical backdrop with its literary production excoriating the other as well as the fatwas produced in the Ottoman realms against the Shiʿa (Ǧaʿfarīyān [1388 Š] 2009, I/44–51). Apart from fatwas, Ǧaʿfarīyān cites around nine Ottoman texts in the early Safavid period that anathemised the Shiʿa in a number of ways, either directly attacking Shi'i beliefs and practices or focusing on the Qezelbāš and their supposed allies in Ottoman-controlled Anatolia or the recounting of the Abū-Moslem-nāmas that were popular in Khorasan (Ǧaʿfarīyān [1388 Š] 2009, I/73–77). A further work of central importance for South Asia was the fatwa of the *ʿolamāʾ* of Central Asia in response to the question posed from Mashhad after the Safavid takeover. During the siege of Mashhad by ʿAbdollāh Ḫān Uzbek, the Shiʿi *ʿolamāʾ* of Mashhad requested a fatwa to protect their lives and properties in the event of an Uzbek takeover. The response of the Central Asian Sunni Ḥanafī jurists was not exactly comforting; while they accepted that the lives and properties of all those who professed to believe in God and the Prophet were sacrosanct at the same time, they warned that if those people also violated the norms of behaviour towards the way of the Sunnis and excoriated them then the original freedom was curtailed. This influenced the polemics of Šaiḫ Aḥmad Serhendī and demonstrated that the polemics in India were affected not just by the Ottoman-Safavid conflict but also by developments in Central Asia (and arguably the Uzbek- [21]

28 Al-Ḥasan al-Nawbaḫtī was a member of a famous family of theologians and court officials, on whom see Āšteyānī ([1345] 1966). He was the author of a famous work on heresiography *Firaq al-Šīʿa* (Al-Nawbaḫtī 2007) and also a commentary on Aristotle's *De generatione et corruptione*, al-Nawbaḫtī (2015); but the authorship of this latter text has been disputed—see Anṣārī ([1395] 2016). The original text of the later author is Ibn Ṭāwūs ([1411] 1991), and the classic study is Afsaruddin (1995).

29 For a discussion, see al-Jamil (2010, 229–46); but see also the polemical Michot (2014, 104, 109–49).

30 On this cycle and attestations of some manuscripts in Najaf and Mashhad, see Ṭabāṭabāʾī ([1407] 1986, 32–96). This is generally a very scholarly consideration of the manuscripts in polemics and considers much that fed into the *ʿAbaqāt al-anwār* of Mīr Ḥāmed Ḥosain Mūsavī Kentūrī (d. 1306/1888).

31 The most recent Shiʿi work in this cycle is *Dalāʾil al-Ṣidq* of Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Muẓaffar (d. 1375/1955), which was first published in 1953 and more recently re-issued in an excellent six-volume edition by the shrine in Najaf in 2011.

32 Another possible cycle worth mentioning was initiated by Ibn Ḥaǧar al-Haysamī (d. 973/1565) and his *al-Ṣawāʾiq al-muḥriqa*, to which Saiyed Nūrollāh responded with *al-Ṣawārim al-muhriqa*.

Safavid conflict which, to an extent, became the Tūrānī-Īrānī division at the Mughal court; Ğaʿfarīyān [1388 Š] 2009, I/53–72).

[22] Šūštarī took the role of writing polemics very seriously. Not only did he see it as a way of demonstrating his learning and his ability to transmit and critically evaluate ideas, but also as an obligation to defend the faith and indeed to promote it in different contexts. In the introduction to his gloss on the imamate section of the *Šarḥ al-Tağrīd* of Qūšğī, he wrote that he prayed that God made him a lion championing the Emāmī cause so that he could vanquish his enemies, and he described the war of words and the polemical struggles with his opponents as 'the greatest jihad' of his time, one in which he deployed rational techniques of argumentation, in this case drawing upon the twin concepts of the rational discernment of good and evil and the principle of divine facilitating grace that was incumbent upon the divine to provide guidance in the form of the Imam.[33] While he is credited with more than a hundred works, it was his three voluminous polemics that became famous. The first was *Maṣāʾib al-nawāṣib,* written in India in Rağab 995/1587 in seventeen days in response to the Sunni Iranian exile at the Ottoman court Mīr Maḫdūm Šarīfī (d. 995/1587) and his text *al-Nawāqiḍ fī l-radd ʿalā al-rawāfiḍ* (Šūštarī [1392 Š] 2014, II/275).[34] Šarīfī, a descendent of the famous theologian Šarīf Ğorğānī, had dedicated his work in 987/1580 to Sultan Murād III (r. 982-1003/1574-1599). The vehemence of the polemic might result from the fact that the descendants of Ğorğānī had become Shiʿi—for Šūštarī, even Ğorğānī was Shiʿi (Šūštarī [1392 Š] 2014, IV/534–42).

[23] The text itself is divided into eight preliminaries (*muqaddemāt*) and six sections entitled *ğund* (the warlike language indicates the polemical intent) critiquing the use of the Qurʾanic verses, hadith and rational arguments adduced by Šarīfī on the legitimacy of the first three Sunni caliphs, on the confused nature of his ascription of doctrine to the Shiʿa and on the refutation of these false accusations against Shiʿi theologians; in the final one, he goes on the attack by accusing Sunnis of unbelief in a number of their legal and theological positions. The preliminaries cover important areas too: The first is on the biography of Šarīfī, the second on the distinction between *eslām* and *īmān*, the third on the nature of the 'saved sect' (*al-firqa al-nāğiya*), the fourth and fifth on a critique of the notion of the probity of all the 'companions' of the Prophet and a consideration of relevant hadith, the sixth on the proofs of the imamate of ʿAlī and the calumnies of his opponents, the seventh on the doctrine of the Shiʿa being identical to the doctrine of the family of the Prophet and the eighth on the permissibility of cursing those who deserve to be cursed. In the general introduction, he lays down the polemical nature of the text by describing it as a series of gifts for the Shiʿa and a set of accusations and trials for their opponents. He begins by praising and thanking God for being chosen as one of the 'saved sect' (*al-firqa al-nāğiya*) and for rejecting the false traditions of the Umayyads and the enemies of God and his prophet that spawned the false doctrine of the Ašāʿira and Muʿtazila (Šūštarī [1426] 2005, I/59). He also accuses Šarīfī of writing the work in the service of the Sultan to ingratiate himself, and of engaging in futile disputation

33 MS India Office Islamic (British Library, London) 1258, fols. 379v–380v. His other glosses on the 'new' *Šarḥ al-Tağrīd* on sections one and three are more engaged with the text and less polemical in their framing and content.

34 For a detailed discussion, see Ğaʿfarīyān ([1388 Š] 2009, I/85–99). On Šarīfī, see Rosemary Johnston (1994, 123–33); Golsorkhi (1994, 477–88). Codices of this text include: MS Marʿašī (Qom) 4222, fols. 16v–201r dated 1092/1681; MS Marʿašī 10078 with 158 folios dated Ğomādā I 1080/October 1669 in the hand of Mollā Šamsā Gīlānī Kašmīrī (not the famous student of Mīr Dāmād); MS Marʿašī 15202, fols. 1r–77v dated 1297/1880; MS Marʿašī 16446, fols. 1v–122v dated around the time of the author's death so perhaps the oldest copy.

and polemics, while by implication his own work offers wise counsel (Šūštarī [1426] 2005, I/60–62). On Šarīfī's biography, he points out that he is a grandson of al-Ǧorǧānī and that the Shiʿism of his grandfather is undeniable (Šūštarī [1426] 2005, I/66). Consistent with his line in *Maǧāles al-moʾmenīn*, he holds that all the great scholars of the past, including Ġazālī, only feigned adherence to the Sunni faith but secretly were Shiʿi (Šūštarī [1426] 2005, I/68). Given the pure intentions and faith of his ancestors, it is thus a wonder that Šarīfī went so wrong and seized the opportunity to propagate the Sunni faith (and hide the true faith) when the country was weakened by Esmāʿīl II (r. 984–985/1576–1577), who himself was in an opiate stupor (Šūštarī [1426] 2005, I/71). The point being made is to present an *ad hominem* argument against Šarīfī to discredit his work. Another common polemical strategy that he uses is to discredit Šarīfī's scholarly credentials by juxtaposing his use of Qurʾanic verses with the exegetical positions of Zamaḫšarī and Baiżāvī, and by implication demonstrating that Šūštarī's knowledge of the Sunni tradition is better than Šarīfī.

The second was *al-Ṣawārim al-muhriqa* in response to Ibn Ḥaǧar al-Haytamī's (d. 973/1565) [24]
scriptural refutation of Shiʿi Islam, entitled *al-Ṣawāriq al-muḥriqa ʿalā ahl al-rafḍ wa-l-zandiqa*; like the other polemics it was popular in India and written later in his life, after *Maṣāʾib* and possibly *Maǧāles* but before *Iḥqāq*.[35] It again shows Šūštarī engaging with the polemics of his time, as Ibn Ḥaǧar was an old contemporary. It engages with Ibn Ḥaǧar's use of hadith and, in particular, those that pit the authority of the companions against that of the Imams. One sees again the polemical strategy of discrediting the scholarly credentials of the opponent by showing that Šūštarī's command of the Sunni tradition is more sound by citing hadith authorities as well as theological ones like Taftāzānī.

The third, completed late in 1014/1605 in Lahore—which was certainly the cause of much [25]
grumbling at court—was *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq wa-izhāq al-bāṭil*.[36] His works were well known but the *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq* and *Maǧāles al-moʾmenīn* were not so—and it was the latter that came to the attention of the Sunni ʿolamāʾ and led to them bringing a case before Ǧahāngīr. A number of other polemical works are attributed to him: a refutation of Ibn Ḥaǧar (which may be the same as *al-Ṣawārim*), *al-Radd ʿalā šobahāt al-šaiṭān* in Persian, on seven positions of Sunnis, *Baḥr al-ġadīr fī iṯbāt tavātur ḥadīṯ al-Ġadīr* responding to early Sunni critiques of this key proof text for the imamate of ʿAlī, *Dalāʾil al-Šīʿa fī l-imāma*, a treatise on the nature of impeccability (*ʿiṣma*) of prophets, and a refutation of Sunnis on their denial of the impeccability of the prophets.[37]

What changed later in the reign of Akbar for Saiyed Nūrollāh was the loss of the support [26]
of his influential friends dying one after another: Fatḥollāh Šīrāzī in 997/1589, the Gīlānīs and Abo-l-Faẓl in 1111/1602.[38] From a position of prominence at court and as chief judge of Lahore, a major Mughal city for sure, he seemed to be slowly sidelined.[39] By the time he completed *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq* in 1014/1605, he was already complaining of the loss of patronage. Two years before that he had lamented to Šaiḫ Bahāʾ al-Dīn al-ʿĀmelī:

35 The text was edited by Saiyed Hāšem Ormavī and published in the 1950s – a recent printing is Ormavī 1385. There are some extant codices: MS Marʿašī (Qom) 5194 with 180 folios dated Rağab 1102/April 1691, MS Marʿašī 8381, fols. 1v–168r dated 1069/1659, MS Marʿašī 12961, fols. 1v–152r dated 1307/1889.

36 This is a huge work and has been published with the glosses of his kinsman Saiyed Šehāb al-Dīn Marʿašī (d. 1990)—see Šūštarī ([1362 Š] 1983).

37 The refutation of the Satanic objections is extant in MS Marʿašī (Qom) 15254, fols. 124v–136v.

38 On the Gīlānīs in India, see Āzmūda ([1394] 2015).

39 One cannot be too prescriptive about the Mughal court's presence in a 'capital city', but Lahore throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth century was probably as much the capital as were Agra and Fatehpur Sikri—see Richards (1993, 49–52).

> For some time, luck has deprived me of its favours. The mean and wretched India has caused me unbearable pain and shock. Not only has the Sultan ended his patronage and benevolence towards me, but he has closed the doors of my departure to Khurasan and Iraq. When the tyranny and oppressions against me began to mount and the sufferings and anguish stepped up, I began to imagine India (Hend) was the same Hend (bint ʿOtba) who ate the liver of my great uncle Ḥamza (b. Muṭṭalib).[40] [27]

Saiyed Nūrollāh's final supporter at court—by this time of Ǧahāngīr—Ḥakīm ʿAlī Gīlānī died in 1018/1609 (Rizvi 1986, I/377). The context had turn against him, and the time was not so favourable for a courageous polemicist. [28]

Conclusion

The case study of Šūštarī sheds light upon a certain type of cultural and intellectual exchange between Iran and India that focuses on polemic and contestation – and indeed the war of words. There is also a sense of Šūštarī feeling the weight of expectation as an eminent Saiyed from a scholarly family who had to address the need to defend the Shi'I faith wherever necessary. Suffice it to say he was not a nationalist, and we should be careful about projecting modern nationalist projects of Iran and India onto the early modern empires. Theological and philosophical learning could be deployed wherever needed and Šūštarī used the genre of polemics to demonstrate his learning and skill. [29]

While he may have moved to India in search of patronage and to flee the Uzbeks and the political turmoil in Safavid Iran, he and those writing about it saw in the move a desire to propagate the faith and defend it. There are a number of reasons for thinking so, including the polemics against the Ašāʿira and Mātorīdīya, who did not really pose any challenge in Iran, and any move to the Ottoman lands or Central Asia would not have been conducive. India was ripe for proselytism and polemics. India presented material and intellectual opportunities not least for an intellectual with his skills in a courtly setting that did not necessarily favour one confession over another. But the way in which he exploited that opportunity was unlike Širāzī and other Persian intellectuals at court who had preferred to bolster imperial (messianic) ideology and the facilitation of ecumenical courtly exchange of ideas. While Šūštarī's language had the elegance of courtly discourse, he did not compromise on his beliefs. [30]

Further, one might consider whether that proselytism was the main desire or just the simple need to find a free space to write and teach. Was India open to a Shiʿi political theology? Did Šūštarī consider Akbar to be philo-Shiʿi and see in the 'millennial sovereign' model, of which Azfar Moin has made much in recent years, a Shiʿi political theology whereby he could win the court for the Shiʿi cause—much in the same way as Portuguese missionaries may have seen it? Did he see himself as ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī at the court of Öljaitü Ḫān? As a rational theologian carrying the mainstream Shiʿi rational theological tradition (established by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī) to India, a tradition that was founded upon the principle of the ability of humans to rationally discern good and evil independent of revelation (*al-ḥosn wa-l-qubḥ ʿaqlīyān*), he saw the embrace of reason by Akbar as an inducement. [31]

But the example of Šūštarī demonstrates foremost the vagaries of Mughal patronage and [32]

40 *Bayāz* of ʿEnāyat Ḫān Rāseḫ, MS Aligarh Habib Ganj Collection 50/335 (Fārsī), fols. 97r–97r, translated by Rizvi (1986, I/370).

support – such that the attractive land of opportunity became a devourer for him, ending with his own demise. Theological treatises of a polemical mode were not just a means for attracting attention and raising awareness of theological concerns; they were also a possible means for testing boundaries and negotiating positions within a courtly, intellectual milieu. Šūštarī exemplifies the fluctuating fortunes within the negotiation of ideas and power politics.

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