



*Working Paper n°12*  
**The Influence of Sufism on Badakhshani Poetry of the 16-18th Centuries**  
**(on the basis of the BNF collection of Indian manuscripts)**

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Badakhshan is a mountainous area in Northeast Afghanistan and Southeast Tajikistan. Since ancient times, different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups have lived there together, with their own customs and cultural habits. Despite the geographical distance and a certain isolation from the major intellectual centres of the Muslim East, the spiritual development of Badakhshan was always inseparable from the processes taking place in the Muslim world. The region had active literary circles in close contact with other centres of the Persian literary world. A clear indication of those relations were the training and participation of many poets of Badakhshan in literary circles of Bukhara, Samarkand, Herat, Balkh, and the largest of cities of Iran and India. Hitherto there has been little research regarding the literature of Badakhshani intellectuals. Most of the sources disappeared in the course of 18-19th-centuries socio-political disorders, such as permanent conflicts between claimants to the throne, and regular wars with foreign rulers. Some manuscripts which may have survived have remained unknown until now.

One of the key books dealing with Badakhshani poetry is *Armaghan-i Badakhshan*, by Shah Abdullah Badakhshi.<sup>1</sup> It is a major source to explore Badakhshani poets. Abdullah Badakhshi based his work on all *tathkiras* [anthologies] of Badakhshani poets. It consists of 64 poets of various areas of Badakhshan: Fayzabad, Jirm, Yumgon, Baharistan, Darvaz and Shughnan from ancient times until the early twentieth century. The author deals with poets who belonged to the historical territory of Badakhshan, which was much broader than in its current boundaries. Abdullah Badakhshi wrote about poets who were born and lived in Badakhshan, but also about poets who created literary works in Badakhshan, regardless of their birthplace.

In the sixteenth century, Muslim Asia was divided along indefinite but still significant borders. Central Asia included lands North and South of the Oxus river and known as *Mawara an-nahr*. It extended westward to the Caspian Sea, northward to the Kazakh steppe around the town of Turkestan, eastward to Turfan, and it fluctuated across Badakhshan in the South-West of Northern India, called Hindustan in the sources. Some poets from Badakhshan who left it for political and social reasons and found refuge and gained fame and wealth at the courts of neighbouring countries are not mentioned in *Armaghan-i Badakhshan*. This is the case of poets who lived in India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> Edited with additional notes by Faridullah BEZHAN, 2007, *Armaghan-i Badakhshan* [Gift of Badakhshan], Tehran: Monash University.

The Mughal dynasty (932-1275/1526-1857) opened a new chapter in the cultural history of Badakhshan, with a blossom of culture, including Sufi literature in India. Due to geographical proximity and gradual growth of the Ismaili centres in India, intellectual ties between of Badakhshani and Indian poets were strengthened.<sup>2</sup> Many of those intellectuals were living in Bombay, Hyderabad, Multan, Kashmir, and Lahore for a long time and were participating in the activities of the literary circles of those places. According to Daftary, a specialist of Ismaili history:

By the fifteenth century, the Persian Ismailis had begun to adopt Sufi ways of life even externally. Thus, the Ismaili imams, who were still obliged to hide their true identity, now appeared as Sufi masters or *pirs*, while their followers adopted the typical Sufi guise of their disciples or *murids*.<sup>3</sup>

The continuous internal intrigues and external hostilities that weakened the relation with major centres of culture could not halt the development of indigenous cultural life in the region. There are limited evidences of this in terms of artefacts, but the cultural continuity is visible in the intellectual sphere, particularly in poetry. According to Abibov at the court of Badakhshan's ruler Sulayman (935-982/1529-75), there was a specific Badakhshani school of poetry, which included Sulayman himself, his son Mirza Ibrahim Wafa'i, the poets Wasili, Amani, Sabuni, Maulana Matla'i, Madhi, Saidi Badakhshani and others. During the sixteenth century, 17 out of the 40 best-known representatives of this school, and in the seventeenth century 30 out of 50 moved to India, where they became popular poets.<sup>4</sup> However, these intellectuals did not forget their motherland and kept in touch with literary circles in Badakhshan.

The brief information about 16th-century Badakhshani poets, that we found in *tathkiras* and *bayas* [almanacs], indicates that the literature of this century was abundant. The famous poets of this period, who moved to India were Qasimshah Mawji, Mir Mahmud Naqibkhan, Mudami Badakhshi, Mawlana Niyazi, Muzaffariddin, Mulla Hasani Sabuh, Qazi Nizam Badakhshi and others. Most of them belonged to the circle under the patronage of Mughal emperors Akbar and Humayan.

The mystic poet Mullashah Badakhshi lived and wrote at the end of the sixteenth – beginning of the seventeenth century. Born in Badakhshan, he moved to Kashmir and Lahore at the age of 26. One of the wide spread Sufi orders in that period was the Qadiriyya, whose members settled first in the Deccan in the late fifteenth century, and then in Uchh, North-East of Multan in the Southern Punjab, where they played an important role in the history of Sufism. The famous personalities of this order in seventeenth-century India were Dara Shukah, heir of the Mughal Empire and disciple of Mullashah. Jahan-Ara Begum, the elder sister of Dara Shukah, was also practicing Sufism.<sup>5</sup> *Quliyat* and *divan* of Mullashah Badakhshi are kept in different manuscript collections in the world, particularly in Tashkent, Saint Petersburg, London's

<sup>2</sup> Alexandre PAPAS, 2003, "Soufis du Badakhshân: un renouveau confrérique entre l'Inde et l'Asie centrale," *Cahiers d'Asie centrale*, n°11, pp. 87-102.

<sup>3</sup> Farhad DAFTARY, "Isma'ili Sufi Relation in Early Post-Alamut and Safavid Persia," in Leonard Lewisohn & David Morgan (eds.), *The Heritage of Sufism. Volume III. Late Classical Persianate Sufism (1501-1750)*, Oxford, p. 279.

<sup>4</sup> A. ABIBOV, 1991, *Ta'rikhi munosibathon adabii Hinduston va Badahson (16-18 asr)* [The History of Literary Relations of India and Badakhshan (16-18th cc.)], Dushanbe: Donish, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> The Sufism works of Shaikh 'Abdu'l-Haqq, Dara Shukah and poet Mullashah Badakhshi are discussed by Saiyid Athar Abbas RIZVI, 1978, *A History of Sufism in India*, vol. 2, New Delhi, pp. 116-125.

British Museum and Berlin. We found some verses of Mullashah's poetry in almanacs stored in the National Library of France (BNF).<sup>6</sup>

Another well-known Badakhshani poet of the seventeenth century who moved to India was Muhammad Jamili Ibn 'Abd al Torab Badakhshi. Like other poets of Badakhshan, he went to India in his youth for studying, and he was living there during the reign of Jahangir (1014-1605/1037-1628). A copy of one of his most famous works, *Muntakhab ul-aqaid*, is kept at BNF.<sup>7</sup> Beside these two poets, we should mention Qabuli Badakhshi, Noseh, Muhammadhoshim, Nadimi, Muhammad Tahiri Husaini, who moved to India and played a significant role in the development of Persian literature there.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the enthroning of Yarbek Samarkandi in Badakhshan offered favourable conditions for the revitalisation of Badakhshani literature. The descendants of the ruler paid great attention to the development of science and literature. This is particularly the case of Sultonshoh Kabir (1169-1184/1756-1770) who resumed successfully Badakhshan's literary circle. The famous poets of that period were Mirza Sangmuhammad, Mirza Andaleb, Mirza Abdurahman, Giyasiddini Giyas, Nazmi, Khanjari, 'Oshiq and others. Notwithstanding the improvement of the political environment, some poets continued to move to India. This was the case for example of Ghiyasi, Pardi, Sabit, Husein, Girami, Hashmat, Arif, Nazirbek, Sibit, Jawdat and others. Resettled in India, they were in contact with poets of Indian literary centres, who were influential figures of the Naqshbandi Sufi order.

It should be noted that, according to primary and secondary sources that we have found, not all Sufi Badakhshani poets of that period were labelled as Ismaili. According to Abibov, the authors of anthologies did not mention the Ismaili affiliation of the poets, because of the sectarian detestation of the two religious groups.<sup>8</sup> Ismailis have been called heretics by the Sunnites. For example, Ghiyasi, Nazmi, Khanjari, Rubabi were famous poets of the period, but the authors of anthologies neglected them because of their Ismaili faith.

Some researchers highlight the fact that Ismaili poetical works were dedicated not to the rulers but to issues of spirituality. Many samples of Ghiyasi poetry are known as *mado* [ritual songs], and are still sung today amongst the people of Badakhshan.<sup>9</sup> One of the most successful achievements of my stay in France is the finding of two new Badakhshani poets: Shams Badakhshani and Badakhshi Badakhshani. Their verses were not fixed in *bayas* collections that I have consulted so far. I found them in the *bayas* collection kept at BNF. Their *takhallus* helped to confirm their belonging to this area.

It is not possible here to give a detailed survey of the Badakhshani poetry produced in India during the period under consideration. It has attracted very little scholarly attention though there is an abundance of *tadhkiras* and poetic collections lying in libraries throughout the sub-continent and in different libraries of the worlds. A few have been published, but most exist only in manuscripts form. The specific political and intellectual circumstances of the post-

<sup>6</sup> Francis RICHARD, 2013, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans. Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Tome II. Le supplément persan. Première partie*, Roma, p. 1081.

<sup>7</sup> E. BLOCHET, 1905, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, t. 1, Paris, pp. 39-40. A comparative analysis of this copy with the one kept at the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan, will be the object of a separate paper.

<sup>8</sup> A. ABIBOV, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>9</sup> Gabrielle VAN DEN BERG, 1997, *Minstrel Poetry from the Pamir Mountains. A Study of the Songs and Poems of the Ismailis of Tajik Badakhshan*, University of Leiden, pp. 134-135.

Alamut period have led to the establishment of very close connections between Persian-speaking Ismailis and Sufis. It is common approach to some of the greatest mystic poets of Persia as Ismaili co-religionists, such as Farid al-Din ‘Attar and Jalal al-Din Rumi; their *divans* are preserved in the private Ismaili libraries of Badakhshan and are considered as belonging to their Ismaili poetical tradition.

In this perspective the so-called Seventh book of *Mathnawi ma’nawi*, popular in Badakhshan Ismaili environment, is of particular interest. The best evidence of its popularity is the number of copies. In the late nineteenth century, a lithograph was brought by a local resident from Bombay. Later, in the beginning of the twentieth century, a couple of handwritten copies were produced out of it. These manuscripts are kept in the library of the Ismaili Tariqa and Religious Education Department in Khorog, capital of the autonomous region of High-Badakhshan in Tajikistan. A copy of Rumi’s *Mathnawi*, with a seventh volume added by the famous Ottoman commentator Isma’il Anqarawi (d.1040/1631), is stored in the National Library of France.<sup>10</sup>

To conclude I should mention that my stay in France has allowed me to discover new collections of manuscripts at BNF but also at the Library of the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilisations (BULAC), that will be useful for my further research. My work in France has broaden the horizon of my understanding of literature links between Badakhshani and Indian poets, Ismaili and Sufi intellectual circles in the 16-18th centuries.

**Keywords:** Badakhshan, Sufism, Mughal, India, National Library of France

**Mots clés :** Badakhchan, soufisme, Moghols, Inde, BNF

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<sup>10</sup> Francis RICHARD, *op. cit.*, pp. 878-879. In my future work, I propose to compare the BNF copy with the Badakhshani ones.