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CONVERSION III. TO IMAMI SHIʿISM IN INDIA

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South Asians adopted Imami, or Twelver, Shiʿism in great numbers, mostly after the Safavid conquest of Persia in the first decade of the 16th century. Many Persians had emigrated to southern India during the Mongol period (13-14th centuries), and when Imami Shiʿism became the state religion of Persia in the 16th century they tended to adopt the new creed. Shiʿism was also spread by later Persian immigrants, including nobles, merchants, and *ʿolamāʾ*, and by indigenous *sayyed*s (those claiming descent from the Prophet Moḥammad) and Shiʿite Sufis. As the Persian immigrants tended to become bureaucrats and landholders, they were in a position to promote their beliefs through patronage. Shiʿites probably now constitute about 5 percent of Indian Muslims and about 17 percent of the population of Pakistan.

In three south-Indian kingdoms the state also promoted Twelver Shiʿism in the 16th century (see Rizvi). A Turkman soldier of fortune from Hamadān, Solṭān-qolī Qoṭb-al-Dīn, founded the long-lived Qoṭbšāhī dynasty (915-1098/1512-1687) at Golconda, near Hyderabad in the Deccan. The dynasty sponsored Shiʿite Friday prayers and mourning ceremonies for Imam Ḥosayn, as well as other Twelver institutions (Ferešta, tr. Briggs, III, pp. 321-35, 339-484;

Hollister, pp. 120-25). In nearby Bījāpūr the ʿĀdelšāhī dynasty (895-1097/1490-1686) also favored Shiʿism. These rulers proclaimed themselves vassals of the Safavids and employed large numbers of immigrant Persians in the military and the bureaucracy. They also hired 300 Persians to curse the Sunni caliphs and sided with the Shiʿites in the frequent outbreaks of Sunni--Shiʿite violence in their domain (Ferešta, tr. Briggs, III, pp. 3-188; Eaton, pp. 64-70, 114-24). North of Bījāpūr, in Ahmadnagar, Borhān Neẓāmšāh (914-61/1508-53) adopted Shiʿism as the state religion under the influence of the scholar and bureaucrat Shah Ṭāher Esmāʿīlī (fl. ca. 1500), a political refugee from Persia. Shiʿism remained influential among the elite of Ahmadnagar for most of the century (Šūštarī, II, pp. 234-40; Ferešta, tr. Briggs, III, pp. 189-320; Hollister, pp. 117-120). All these dynasties devoted considerable energy to spreading Twelver Shiʿism among their subjects but succeeded only in creating a class of Shiʿite notables and converting a few urban artisans. The rural masses remained Hindu, and most Muslim notables and artisans remained Sunni. The rulers also developed a Twelver culture, and the tradition of Urdu *marṯīa*s, threnodies for the martyred Imam Ḥosayn, began at their courts. All these kingdoms were eventually incorporated into the Sunni Mughal empire, however.

Also in the 16th century a Twelver dynasty, the Čāks, ruled briefly (969-98/1561-89) in Kashmir. The Nūrbaḵšīya Sufi order, which leaned toward Shiʿism, had spread to Kashmir in the late 15th century, and under the Čāks its members formally embraced Shiʿism. Sunni resistance provided an excuse for the Mughal Akbar I (963-1014/1556-1605) to depose the Čāks and annex Kashmir in 998/1589. The emperor settled political defectors from Safavid Persia in Kashmir, providing them with substantial emoluments (Ferešta, tr. Briggs, IV, pp. 444-50, 508-30; Manucci, II, p. 116; Hollister, pp. 141-50).

The Mughals, except for the universalist Akbar, tended to promote Sunni Islam in northern India. There were nevertheless some Twelver Shiʿites in their domains, including members of Persian families, especially those who had immigrated after the Safavid conquest. Families claiming Persian origins and Indian *sayyed* families were especially open to Shiʿite preaching after the Safavids came to power in Persia. These *sayyed*s apparently began to adopt Twelver Shiʿism in the 16th century, though some may actually have arrived as Shiʿites from the Middle East. The great landed *sayyed*s, including the Barha of Muzaffarnagar (near Delhi) and some of the *sayyed*s of Bilgram, wielded considerable cultural, economic, and political power and could thus encourage

the spread of Shiʿism among their retainers and villagers. Both the mentioned clans claimed descent from Sayyed Moḥammad Wāseṭī, a 13th-century Muslim soldier. The Barha *sayyed*s were incorporated into the Mughal elite and became kingmakers in the 18th century. The local influence of such families could be great. In the 19th century the Shiʿite *sayyed*s of Zaidpur (now in Uttar Pradesh) controlled ten mosques and seventeen *emāmbāra*s (buildings for mourning Imam Ḥosayn), and they permitted no Sunni mosques or Hindu temples in their town (Hāšem-ʿAlī; ʿĀbed Ḥosayn; *Gazetteer* I, pp. 14-17, 141, 179, 201, 324, II, pp. 82-83, 99-100; Cole, passim).

Among artisans Shiʿite patronage encouraged adoption of Twelver Shiʿism. Bards and storytellers (*naqqāl*s), for example, tended to be Sunni under Sunni rulers but Shiʿite in the post-Mughal Twelver kingdom of Avadh (q.v.; Oudh). The dyer caste was also divided into Sunni and Shiʿite groups, who refused to intermarry. Servants and peasants of Shiʿite gentry families frequently accepted the religion of their masters. Women of the *ṭawāʾef*, or courtesan caste, in northern cities like Lahore and Lucknow frequently also adopted Shiʿism, either through the influence of patrons or because Twelver acceptance of temporary marriage (*moṭʿa*) lent some legitimacy to their occupation (Crooke, I, pp. 256-59, IV, pp. 229-32, 364-71; Ẓafaryāb, pp. 468-69; Tandon, pp. 188-89; Cole, chap. 3).

Popular Sufism also often helped to spread Shiʿism among ordinary folk. The Madārīya order, with an astounding 150,000 holy men in the United Provinces in the late 19th century, particularly revered the Prophet Moḥammad, the imams ʿAlī and Ḥosayn, and Ḥasan Baṣrī. The Jalālī Sohravardī order, professing an explicitly Shiʿite ideology, had several thousand adherents in the same region in the 19th century and was even more widespread and powerful in the Punjab (Crooke, III, pp. 397-40; Zayn-al-ʿĀbedīn, pp. 122-23).

Hyderabad, Avadh, and the western Punjab were the important Shiʿite centers in the 19th century. Since the days of the Qoṭbšāhī dynasty at Golconda, and despite the introduction of Sunni rule in the 18th century, a number of important Twelver nobles and notables had used patronage to strengthen their version of Islam in the region.

At Avadh there were both a Twelver Shiʿite ruling class and a hierocracy of Twelver *ʿolamāʾ*. Although 86 percent of the population was Hindu and most of the Muslims were Sunnis, the ruling Imami elite succeeded in establishing a pervasive Shiʿite religious culture. The popularity of intercommunal

Moḥarram rituals there suggests that the processions and mourning sessions for the martyred Imam Ḥosayn helped to attract converts to Shiʿism (Cole, chap. 5). From the late 18th century anecdotal evidence suggests increased adoption of Shiʿism by Sunni families. In Delhi the Naqšbandī leader Shah ʿAbd-al-ʿAzīz complained bitterly that in most Sunni households there were one or two members who had adopted Shiʿism. A Shiʿite Sufi from Persia reported in 1219/1804 that during his years in India he had noticed important Sunni families embracing Shiʿite ways in their prayers, weddings, burials, and division of inheritance. He specifically noted that Shiʿite inheritance laws were particularly attractive to some of these families, presumably those with only daughters as heirs, as Shiʿite law grants more rights to female heirs (Dehlavī, p. 2; Sayyed Deldār-ʿAlī Naṣīrābādī, fols. 5b-6a). The Twelver *ʿolamāʾ* in Avadh administered huge sums of *zakāt* (alms tax) and other religious donations, which they distributed only to the Shiʿite poor, thus explaining the claim in one source that in the 1840s hundreds of Sunnis and thousands of Hindus embraced Shiʿism in Avadh (Kašmīrī, I, p. 267).

Like Hyderabad the Punjab was not ruled by Shiʿites, but there were many local Twelver nobles and notables, most of them *sayyed*s or descended from the Qezelbāš (a group of supporters of the Safavids, primarily Turkmen), and they still hold great landed wealth. The *sayyed*s most often claim descent from medieval immigrants, holy men, or conquerors; for example, the Gardezī *sayyed*s of Multan insist that the family arrived in the 12th century (Research Society, II, pp. 26-37). A few of the Qezelbāš families may have immigrated to the Punjab in Safavid times, but many appear to have come with Nāder Shah during his invasion in 1152/1739 (Research Society, I, pp. 335-36, 451). Some Rajput families who converted to Islam later claimed Central Asian origins, and some may have affected Qezelbāš identity, with its attendant Shiʿism. Prominent Qezelbāš clans have had great influence in such provincial centers as Bhakkar and cities like Lahore. Some Shiʿite *sayyed*s in the Punjab gained greater religious authority as leaders of Sufi orders. Particularly important were the Boḵārī *pīr*s, descendants of Sayyed Jalāl-al-Dīn Boḵārī of Uč, the eponymous founder of the Jalālīya branch of the Sohravardīya order (Ḡolām Sarvar, pp. 725-88). Another significant group was the Šamsī *pīr*s, also of the Sohravardīya order, descendants of a Mūsawī *sayyed* named Shaikh Šams-al-Dīn Tabrīzī, whose tomb is in Multan (Ibbetson et al., I, p. 546). The Boḵārī *pīr*s are found throughout rural Punjab as landholders, and their followers (*morīd*s) often adopted Shiʿism. Other ethnic groups in what is now Pakistan also accepted Shiʿism, including Bangaš Pashtuns of Kurram (Ibbetson et al., I,

p. 574ff.) and the Baluchi Talpūr clan (formerly *nawwāb*s) of Sind (Thornton, s.v. Sinde). Another important Shiʿite region, related to Kashmir for most of its history, lies in the Pakistani Himalayas, in Gilgit, Hunza, and Skardu, where adoption of Twelver Shiʿism occurred in the 16th century, under the influence of the Nūrbaḵšīya and the Čāk and other martial Shiʿite clans.

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