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Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/3075>

DOI : 10.4000/samaj.3075

ISSN : 1960-6060

Éditeur

Association pour la recherche sur l'Asie du Sud (ARAS)

Édition imprimée

ISBN : 1960-6060

Référence électronique

Laurent Gayer, « 'I Never Held Money with my Teeth': Constructions of Exemplarity in Abul Fazl Farooqi's *Nasheb-o-Faraz* », *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* [En ligne], 4 | 2010, mis en ligne le 17 décembre 2010, consulté le 04 mai 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/3075> ; DOI : 10.4000/samaj.3075

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'I Never Held Money with my Teeth': Constructions of Exemplarity in Abul Fazl Farooqi's Nasheb-o-Faraz

Laurent Gayer

Introduction

- 1 Over the centuries, biographical narratives have been a privileged site for the production of exemplarity in South Asia. Whether in prose or in poetry, the lives of eminent personalities were compiled and narrated for the edification of readers and listeners. Candidates to exemplarity rarely produced their own life-stories and this task was generally taken on by their most literate followers, in a 'necessary relation of non-identity' between the hero or the saint and his spokesperson (Kaviraj 2004: 87). Heroes and saints may have been too busy to tell their lives. But they were also constrained by 'rules of reticence' (Kaviraj 2004: 87), which requested modesty from the high and mighty. To the adepts thus eschewed the responsibility of compiling the most significant events in the life of their spiritual or worldly master and to inscribe him, through his words and deeds, in a prestigious genealogy.
- 2 However socially pervasive classical and early modern life-stories may have been, their contribution to 'character development' is open to question. These extraordinary lives invited persons of lesser merit to 'become firmer in their conception of their own roles and modes of meritorious conduct' (Kaviraj 2004: 87). But ordinary beings could not pretend to such moral perfection and, ultimately, the course of events narrated in these life-stories was beyond human control, which limited their pedagogical value (Arnold & Blackburn 2004: 7). With the diffusion of Islam in the Subcontinent, specific forms of biographical narratives (*tazkirat*) came into being but these other 'lives as lessons' (Metcalf 2004) did not fundamentally challenge earlier paradigms of exemplarity. It is only in the late 18th and early 19th century that this hagiographical tradition was

supplemented by 'a new form of biography, in which greater attention was given to complexity of character and personal motivation, to specific places and events, and to their role in shaping and explaining individual lives' (Arnold & Blackburn 2004: 8). These new life narratives never completely supplanted classical hagiographies though. Pre-modern features survived and were recast within 'proto-modern' narratives, as exemplified by David Shulman in his study of the life-story of Ananda Rag Pilai, a peculiar case of a 'biography [...] driven by an autobiographical impulse' (Shulman 2004).

- 3 Aforementioned 'rules of reticence' help to explain the paucity of autobiographical texts in pre-modern and early modern South Asia. Even when heroes *did* talk, they were not immune to these rules of humility. Thus, in the *Babur-nama*, one of the earliest and most celebrated autobiographies in South Asian history, the Mughal emperor Babur (1483-1530) claims that 'I do not want to aggrandize myself with what I have written. What I have written is the truth' (quoted by Dale 1996: 637). Significantly, a very similar assertion is made in a much latter autobiographical text produced by a 20th century Hyderabad Muslim woman, who claims that 'I know that self-praise is a defect, but allow me to say that: 'My purpose is simply to relate what actually happened / I don't consider it a credit to my character to talk about myself' (Ghouse in Vatuk 2004: 151). This reiteration of Babur's denial of any attempt at self-aggrandizement, by way of a quotation from a *qita'* by the most prominent Urdu poet of the 19th century, Ghalib (1797-1869),¹ may not have been intentional. Nonetheless, it points towards the enduring legacy of these classical 'rules of reticence' within contemporary South Asian autobiographies.
- 4 Although the earliest South Asian autobiographies date back to the late medieval period, the genre did not develop before the late nineteenth, early 20th century. This emerging genre was dominated by the grand narratives of India's nationalist leaders, which birthplace was often the colonial prison (Arnold 2004). Yet, from the early 20th century onwards, these canonical autobiographies coexisted with less widely circulated texts narrating, in their own words, the life trajectories of more ordinary characters (Kaviraj 2004, Kumar 2008). Up till now, these commoners'² attempts at narrating their own lives remain marked by a state of tension. On the one side, contemporary autobiographers are keen to project their life-trajectory as exemplary—at least in the statistical sense—but on the other side they remain constrained by the aforementioned 'rules of reticence', which still discourage any attempt at self-aggrandizement, particularly from commoners.
- 5 This tension is made explicit by Abul Fazl Farooqi (born ca. 1940), the Delhi-based real estate entrepreneur whose autobiography—initially published in Urdu in 2000 before being translated into English in 2006³—constitutes the focus of this article. In the opening lines of *Nasheb-o-Faraz*, Farooqi establishes an 'autobiographical pact' (Lejeune 1975) with his reader, spelling out the motives for writing his life-story:

Generally, great scholars and intellectuals think of writing a 'biography' [*savaneh hayat*]. Though a common individual [*'am fard*] may not cultivate such an idea, his life and character may be as respectable as those of others; he too has an awareness of the bitter and sweet events and experiences of life and he too is conversant with its realities. So if a common man pens down his biography or diary the future generation may particularly benefit from it (Farooqi 2000: 9).
- 6 As a 'common individual', Farooqi has no extraordinary accomplishment to his credit and, thus, may not be deemed eligible to bring the story of his life to the attention of the public. However, he swiftly overcomes conventional 'rules of reticence' by invoking public interest, as if his transgression was attenuated by the moralistic agenda informing it. Farooqi's attempt at resolving the tension inherent to his autobiographical enterprise

is not entirely successful, though, and all along the text he appears as an uneasy role model.

A moral achiever. Abul Fazl Farooqi's self-production of exemplarity

- 7 Abul Fazl Farooqi's autobiography is a relatively short text, two hundred thirty seven pages long, which was initially published in Urdu before being translated into English by Pharos Media, the editor of the English fortnightly *Milli Gazette*.⁴ Unlike conventional Urdu autobiographies,⁵ it offers a chronological narrative starting with a brief evocation of the author's formative years followed by a longer exposé of his professional career. This narrative is not merely descriptive and includes frequent personal considerations of a 'sociological' and moralistic nature. Frequent attacks on the moral outlook of India's Muslim population serve to reinforce the author's exemplarity and are revealing of his *Weltanschauung*: that of a pious bourgeois professing an ascetic ethic of capitalism.

Formative years

- 8 Abul Fazl Farooqi's life-story is that of a static personality in a fast changing world. In this regard, it conforms to the canons of the Indo-Persianate autobiographical tradition (Metcalf 1993, 2004). Whereas European autobiographies—at least in their Romantic, post-Rousseau avatars—are generally stories of personal transformation,⁶ South Asian Muslims' autobiographies tend to take personality as an independent variable: 'the focus is on a person whose essential character is a given and whose life story is best told by recounting episodes —anecdotes—which yield lessons for moral understanding' (Metcalf 2004: 120). In this perspective, there is no need to devote long developments to childhood, 'as autobiographers informed by Romantic individualism and subjectivism unfailingly do' (Metcalf 1993: 155). In conformity with this literary corpus, Abul Fazl Farooqi only briefly mentions his childhood years. More surprising is his swift evocation of his genealogical background, starting with his parents and omitting any prestigious ancestor—possibly the indication of humble origins, despite the family's claim to belong to the Ashraf social elite. As an introduction to his *khandan* (extended family), Farooqi simply informs the reader that his father, Janab Abul Barakat, 'was a police head constable' in his native village of Chandair Ballipur (tahsil Rasra of district Ballia, in Uttar Pradesh), where he was born 'around 1940'. In order to clarify his socio-economic origins, Farooqi adds that the family had 'some land under cultivation' and that it was 'well to do' (*khushhal*) (Farooqi 2000: 13).
- 9 Throughout the brief evocation of his childhood years, Farooqi insists on two interrelated themes: his devotion to his mother and his moral rectitude. In a chapter entitled 'Under my mother's shadow' (*aghush-i-madar ke saye mein*, a phrase derived from Persian, which literally translates as 'in the shadow of my mother's lap'), he claims that 'Since childhood, I was simple in my behaviour [*sada mizaj*] and obedient to my mother' (Farooqi 2000: 15). By the age of six, he had completed his first reading of the Quran and could distinguish between good and evil on the basis of Urdu and Persian texts provided by the 'Maulvi saheb' who taught him at home. In this opening part of the text, Farooqi thus projects himself as a precocious child with a strong sense of morality, something attested by the

fact that 'most of my friends were older than me' and that 'all teachers loved me' (Farooqi 2000: 24).

- 10 In 1954, the year of his father's demise, he moved to Gorakhpur after passing class VIII. He remained there for the next three years, until his XII class examination in 1959. The same year, he got admission at the Engineering Department of the Jamia Millia Islamia, in Delhi. There, he claims to have endured a true moral ordeal. The 'progressive' environment of Jamia Millia, which at the time was heavily influenced by communist students and lecturers, deeply disturbed the young man. Referring to this 'polluted' (*aludah*) atmosphere, he writes: 'as the number of free-thinkers [*azad khiyal log*] gradually increased at Jamia, the moral environment [*akhlaqi surat-i-hal*] was badly affected and the academic atmosphere could not remain unpolluted' (Farooqi 2000: 29). Farooqi was particularly shocked to see the influence of socialist ideas over a former religious scholar, Dr. Salamatullah, who at the time was the head of the Teachers College. If such a 'torch bearer of the faith' (*'alim-i-din*) could come under the devilish influence of the communists, 'how could the moral, religious and mental conditions of individuals in the *Umma* be secure?' (Farooqi 2000: 30). Despite this appalling environment, Abul Fazl Farooqi managed to obtain a diploma in Civil and Rural Engineering in 1965. With the help of the general manager of the Delhi Transport Undertaking (DTU, presently DTC), Khursheed Alam Khan, who was related to his family, he was offered a post of section officer at the DTC the same year. He remained with the DTC for thirteen years, until he took charge of the small company established in 1970 by his mother, Friends and Co, which was involved in the commercialization of plastic goods and stone crushing. In the meantime, Abul Fazl familiarized himself with the real estate business through his involvement in the Chandra Lok Housing Society of Ghaziabad, of which he was made the general secretary in 1975. Here starts Abul Fazl Farooqi's tale of his 'practical life' (*'amli zindagi*), which occupies more than two thirds of the book.

A narrative of moral achievement

- 11 All along this narrative, Farooqi projects himself as a moral achiever. This posture is epitomized in the following sentence, strategically placed at the beginning of his success story: 'I took to business, I crossed difficult ditches of business, earned a lot, but Allah is the witness that I never earned a single paisa illegitimately' (*Main ne karobar kiya. Karobar ki dushvar ghatiyon ko par kiya. Khub kamaya, lekin Allah gavah hai ki ek paisa bhi haram nahin kamaya*) (Farooqi 2000: 40). Later in the text, he uses a more idiomatic language to capture this exemplary business ethic: 'I never held money with my teeth' (*Kabhi main ne dolat ko dant se nahin pakra*) (Farooqi 2000: 114).
- 12 Farooqi tells us that if he mentions this business ethic, it is because entrepreneurs of his kind are often suspect of dishonesty. The following extract, which immediately follows the aforementioned statement of good morality, deserves to be quoted at length for it constitutes the longest and most explicit enunciation by Abul Fazl Farooqi of his own exemplarity:

Generally people do not have a good opinion about persons doing land business, called property dealers. It is rightly so. But there are exceptions in every matter. Anyway, my case is somewhat different from other property dealers at present. No doubt, a man is made of many mistakes. I might have spoken a lie at times, but I never dared to speak a lie intentionally. I never attempted to intentionally deceive anyone. Every aspect of my business would be open and transparent to me and to

my customers, irrespective of any consideration of profit or loss. Often after consideration, I have suffered a loss so as to avoid deceiving. Allah immediately benefited me in return (Farooqi 2000: 50).

- 13 Abul Fazl Farooqi here aims to launder his economic success in the Sunna. Renouncing exemplarity in the statistical sense and instead claiming some form of exceptionality, he works at dissociating from the crowd of real-estate developers in order to project himself as a moral entrepreneur walking in the footsteps of the Prophet: 'To be a trader is to be virtuous, but the 'trading mentality' is cursed. Doing trade according to the Sunna is a means of goodness and protection in matters of both faith and worldly affairs' (*Tajir hona sawab hai aur 'tajirana zahaniyat' b'ais 'azab. Sunnat ke mutabiq tijarat karna din aur duniya donon ke liye b'ais khair-o-salamati hai*) (Farooqi 2000: 38).

- 14 Farooqi's attempt at moralizing his business ventures and projecting himself as a role model in the process is not limited to an invocation of the Prophet's own commercial endeavours, though. Echoing contemporary thinkers of 'Islamic economics', this pious bourgeois understands Islam as a moral code which purpose is to 'introduce restraints on the hedonistic individual' (Tripp 2006: 124). Hence, Farooqi's evocation of his economic success, and more generally of the sanctity of commerce, is counterbalanced by a virulent critique of materialism and hedonism, which he associates with 'Western culture' (*maghribi tahzib*), presented as the last horizon of 'Hindu culture':

In many matters they [the 'standard-bearers of Hindu culture'] are looking for their own culture in that of the West. They regard the music and dances of Western culture as a reflection of their own culture. So, on the basis of some give and take, they are trying to present their ancient culture and civilisation on the Western pattern (Farooqi 2000: 150).⁷

- 15 This dual critique of 'Hindu' and 'Western' cultures culminates in Farooqi's rabid attack against the practice of dowry, which from his point of view epitomizes the materialistic spirit of the Western-Hindu cultural conglomerate threatening Muslims' moral integrity. In order to suggest how pervasive this materialism would be in contemporary Indian society, Farooqi confesses that he himself was not immune to the satanic lures of the dowry system. Although his own wedding was characterised by its 'simplicity' (*sadagi*), this was not the case for two of his daughters:

I got my two daughters married. I regret that they were both married according to this custom [*rasm-o-rivaj*]. I had never thought of doing it in that way. I disliked that sort of marriage, still I had to do what society accepted as a matter of practice [*dastur*]. I have always preferred simplicity, but society is the victim of a malady which has affected the learned and the illiterate alike (Farooqi 2000: 164).

- 16 This critique of materialism and more generally of 'Western' culture and economic models of development echoes that of the poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938), one of the earliest promoters of the concept of 'Islamic economics' (Kuran 1997), whose poetry Farooqi quotes extensively throughout his autobiography—carefully omitting that Iqbal showed some inclinations towards socialism in the later part of his life.⁸ Farooqi is also aware of a famous hadith which attributes to the Prophet the following saying: 'Wealth is the test of my community'.⁹ In other words, material success would be the greatest challenge to individual and collective 'moral fortitude' (Tripp 2006: 65). Unfortunately, from Farooqi's point of view, most Muslim entrepreneurs have failed this morality test: 'The conflict of wealth [*fitna-i-mal*] has overwhelmed a large number of people within the *Umma* in such a way that they make profits from bank interest, and consider the payment of *zakat* as a burden' (Farooqi 2000: 133). Unlike these Muslim

entrepreneurs gone astray, Farooqi professes a strong attachment to *zakat*: 'I have said that I am a businessman, but I am a Muslim first. So I have never been reluctant to pay *zakat*. I calculate every paisa and generally give away *zakat* in the month of Ramzan' (Farooqi 2000: 133). For Farooqi, the collection of *zakat* is intimately linked to the promotion of the public good (*al-khair*)¹⁰ within the *Umma*, and he pronounces himself in favour of a collective system of *zakat* collection, however difficult this may be practically (Farooqi 2000: 134).

- 17 This religious 'tradition',¹¹ or more exactly its understanding by reformist Indo-Muslim intellectuals of the early 20th century such as Iqbal,¹² constitutes Abul Fazl Farooqi's 'moral compass' (Tripp 2006: 194). His ascetic business ethic is also consonant with earlier conceptions of the economy associated with Jain or Hindu merchant castes, whose family firms were 'embedded in moral relations' (Roy 2010: 98). Within these 'moral communities', the valorisation of social expenditure has generally been concomitant with 'minimalist lifestyles' (Roy 2010: 100). And this self-denial of conspicuous consumption has often been framed in the idiom of asceticism, although of a worldly type, which does not preclude the research of wealth and well-being as shown by James Laidlaw in his ethnography of Jaipur's Jains (1995).
- 18 Despite its Indian genealogies, which can be traced back to the family firms of the modern Indian world and to later Muslim reformists, Abul Fazl Farooqi's work ethic resonates with the Protestant spirit of capitalism. As such, it deserves to be 'put into conversation' with it, to use the terms of Anand Pandian and Daud Ali in their introduction to a collective volume confronting the conceptions of 'ethical life' in South Asia and in the West (Pandian & Ali 2010: 2). This similitude is all the more surprising, at least from an orthodox Weberian perspective, that Weber himself denied the existence of such a 'spirit' in India and in the Muslim world at large.¹³ To be more specific, Abul Fazl Farooqi's autobiography often echoes that of Benjamin Franklin, although nothing in the former's text suggests that he ever came across the latter's *Autobiography*, abundantly commented upon by Weber. Against the latter, Farooqi's text confirms that a distinctive Islamic spirit of capitalism, building on a rich ethical and religious corpus, is alive and kicking among the contemporary pious bourgeoisies of the Muslim world (Feillard 2004, Haenni 2005). As we shall see, Farooqi may not be as accomplished an ethic capitalist as current Muslim proponents of the 'theology of prosperity' (Feillard 2004: 113, Haenni 2005: 10), since he remains hesitant, even if rhetorically, about the sake of capitalist accumulation and its value in the Hereafter. Nevertheless, his business ethic shows striking affinities with the Protestant 'spirit of capitalism' in that it relies upon a similar moral code advocating hard work, asceticism and the systematic organization of one's life in the service of God. Another affinity between Abul Fazl Farooqi and early Calvinist promoters of capitalism is not so much ideological as sociological and lies in his status of parvenu. As Weber suggests, the most vocal advocates of the capitalist spirit, in the infancy of the capitalist economy, were not old commercial elites but individuals of humble origins who were going through a process of rapid upward social mobility (Weber 2005: 28). Indeed, parvenus are prone to experiment a feeling of discrepancy between their newly acquired wealth and the values of frugality they were socialized in. This may result in a state of moral tension alien to older economic elites.¹⁴

The ups and downs of Abul Fazl Farooqi's business life

- 19 What did this moral entrepreneur exactly achieve? This is the object of the largest part of the book, detailing the 'ups and downs' (*nasheb-o-faraz*, the very title of the book) of Farooqi's business life. This narrative starts with Abul Fazl Farooqi's most notable endeavour: the development of a Muslim locality of South Delhi named after him, Abul Fazl Enclave (AFE). Due to space constraints, I will not go into the details of this project, which I have already dealt with elsewhere (Gayer 2011). Suffice it to say, for the purpose of this article, that the development of AFE was resonant with Farooqi's constitution as a moral Muslim entrepreneur serving his own interests as well as those of his community. From the beginning, he conceptualized AFE as a *Muslim* locality, where his coreligionists 'could establish their social and family life according to their own culture [*tahzib-o-kalchar*]' (Farooqi 2000: 64). The development of this area, adjacent to the Jamia Millia Islamia, started in 1978, after Farooqi acquired land from local (largely Hindu) landlords. But although some of Farooqi's friends had initially showed interest for acquiring land in the area, many of them backtracked later on and, at the beginning of the 1980s, Farooqi faced the risk of bankruptcy. If he managed to avoid this fate, it is only due to the intervention of India's prime Islamist organisation, the Jama'at-i-Islami Hind (JiH), whose cadres acquired a hundred plots from Abul Fazl Farooqi before the headquarters of the JiH was shifted from Old Delhi to AFE in 1991. For Farooqi, this timely intervention of the JiH was the sign of a heavenly blessing on his project: 'I felt as if my agreement with the Jama'at was favoured by Allah' (*mahsus hua ki markaz jama'at se m'uahidah kaliyatan man Allah tha*) (Farooqi 2000: 70). More prosaically, Farooqi's economic partnership with the JiH was a rare opportunity to find a solvable and reliable business partner. In any case, this is how it is perceived by some residents of the neighbourhood, who believe that Farooqi benefited economically rather than morally from his agreement with the JiH. Thus, for a local Urdu journalist, Farooqi found practical advantages, and not merely ethical contentment, in doing business with an organization of such high moral standards: 'You know, the land business is very corrupt, it involves a lot of cheating. The people of Jama'at, on the contrary, they are clean. So Abul Fazl Farooqi enjoyed working with them'.¹⁵ Although the practical advantages of working with the Jama'at are denied by Abul Fazl Farooqi's brother and business partner, Faznullah,¹⁶ they cannot be entirely eluded, at least as far as social perceptions of the Farooqis' business ventures are concerned.
- 20 If the development of AFE was undoubtedly Abul Fazl Farooqi's most significant business venture, it was not the last. In 1981, he acquired land in Noida (U.P.) and developed a new colony known as Kasturi Farm Land, which attracted both Hindu and Muslim elites of Delhi (successful entrepreneurs, military officers, IAS officers, ministers...). This project proved highly profitable for Farooqi but also for his customers, many of whom later on sold their plots to the Noida Authority for three or four times their initial value (Farooqi 2000: 86). Around the same time, Abul Fazl Farooqi developed another Muslim enclave within the larger Vasundhara Enclave (Delhi). Built under the Abul Fazl Housing Cooperative Society, the Abul Fazl Apartments catered to the needs of upper middle class Muslims and intended to provide them with a safe and morally sound environment. Special arrangements were made to ensure the cleanliness and 'purity' (*paki*) of these residences, in order to contribute to the moral uplifting of Muslim upper classes while contradicting common clichés about Muslims' low hygienic standards (Farooqi 2000: 95).

The last of Abul Fazl Farooqi's major projects also partook in this agenda of moral reform and social uplifting. Established in 2000 in Noida, the M.A.F. [Mohammad Abul Fazl Farooqi] Academy is a co-educational English-medium school which had approximately 110 students in 2003. Unlike most of Farooqi's projects, this educational institution is not religiously tainted and aims to attract Hindu as well as Muslim students, in order to prepare them 'for construction and reformation' (*duniya ki t'amir aur islah ke liye*) (Farooqi 2000: 199).

An uneasy role model: the inner tensions of *Nasheb-o-Faraz*

- 21 Abul Fazl Farooqi's narrative is not merely that of a success story. It is also, and more originally, an attempt at moralising this economic success and projecting it as an act of piety. This conformity to a supposedly 'traditional' Islamic moral economy of capitalism does not only help Farooqi sanctify his worldly activities. From his point of view, it is also a major reason for his worldly success, which he projects as an example for other Indian Muslims but cannot help to be uneasy with—or at least to claim so.

Abul Fazl Farooqi and the issue of predestination

- 22 The Calvinist theory of predestination, so central to Weber's appraisal of the distinctive Protestant spirit of capitalism, developed in a plural world where Calvinists competed with rival reformed movements (such as the Zwinglians, Mennonites and Anabaptists) but also among themselves (particularly within the Church of England). Calvin himself did not put predestination at the centre of his preoccupations and that stress came later (Higman 1996: 98). It was an outcome of the aforementioned competitive interactions and came to singularize 'orthodox' Calvinists by way of a doctrine of worldly success-cum-spiritual achievement which became their trademark—and which remains contested to this day by rival Protestant sects, particularly in the US where the issue of predestination has remained a bone of contention and an agent of religious change since the 18th century (Thuesen 1999). For a successful Sunni Muslim entrepreneur of late 20th century India such as Abul Fazl Farooqi, the issue of predestination resonates very differently than for the 'godly merchants' of 16th century Europe (Grell 1996: 254). Nonetheless, it remains a matter of concern. On the one side, the issue of fate (*qadr*) is generally considered to be 'solved' by Sunnis—at least from a theological point of view—since the defeat of the Jabriyya and the Qadariyya at the beginning of the 10th century. But on the other side, Abul Fazl Farooqi lived in a country demographically, as well as economically and politically, dominated by Hindus, whose commonality across caste and sectarian divides largely relies on a highly formalised theory of predestination. As we shall see, this has been a source of anxiety for Abul Fazl Farooqi, as well as an opportunity to wrap his worldly success into an 'orthodox' Islamic idiom.
- 23 In order to fully appreciate Farooqi's stand on this issue, it is necessary to recall, even if briefly, the nature and outcome of the debate between the Jabriyya, the Qadariyya and those who would emerge as the 'orthodox' Sunnis. The Jabriyya and the Qadariyya (whose positions on this matter were adopted by the Mutazilis) professed opposite but equally extreme conceptions of fate (as 'compulsionists', the former denied free will in the face of God's decrees, whereas the latter considered that God had granted absolute freedom to

mankind, therefore making it the sole culprit for the existence of evil). The 'orthodox' Sunni position which emerged victorious from these early theological debates was a middle-ground one. Formalized by personalities such as Ibn Umar, son of the second Caliph Umar (ca. 614-693), it claimed that man was granted freedom of will but that God is omniscient and has knowledge of every human action without any time restriction. This 'orthodox' Sunni view on the issue of fate, with its denial of predestination, is shared by Abul Fazl Farooqi. But in his case, this theological stand is less related to coreligionists (even to lay Muslims, more inclined to fatalism than theologians) than to the majority community of the Hindus. This point deserves further investigation as Farooqi's perceptions of Hindus and the recollections of his personal and professional interactions with them constitutes a substantial part of the book, with an entire chapter being devoted to 'Hindu-Muslim unity'. In fact, far from promoting inter-communal amity, this chapter consists in a long litany of recriminations against the 'community of idol worshippers' (*but parast qawm*), suggesting that the very few qualities that Hindus may have are all of Muslim-import:

I am sure that even today Muslims are much ahead of Hindus in gentleness [*sharafat*], culture [*tahzib*] and civilised behaviour [*saqafat*], for Muslims have been custodians of these virtues. If Hindus have these qualities these days, they should be indebted to Muslims for these (Farooqi 2000: 106).

- 24 In his indictment of Hindu culture, ethics and faith, Farooqi does not spare the karmic theory of predestination and in one of the rare anecdotes of the text he clarifies his stand on the issue of fate, hereby presenting to the reader a preliminary Islamic assessment of his worldly success. This anecdote consists in a narrative of an encounter with a 'Panditji' during a visit to Bhopal. While Farooqi and his wife are walking around the city, where they have come to get photographed in a local studio, this unsolicited 'Panditji' rushes towards them and informs them that they will soon give birth to a male heir and make a profit of 100,000 rupees. When both predictions turn out to be true, Farooqi is deeply disturbed, but he concludes that his meeting with the 'Panditji' was a 'test' (*azmaish*) and that 'Maybe the devil himself came to us in the garb of Panditji.' In conformity to the Sunni 'orthodox' view on fate summarized above, Farooqi adds that he and his wife 'believed that the incident occurred as Allah wanted it to' (Farooqi 2000: 51). Rather than suggesting a belief in predestination, this episode is on the contrary a critique of such beliefs: the Panditji, who epitomises the belief in karmic laws, is an agent of the devil if not the devil himself and the whole incident attests of the moral autonomy of God's creatures. Farooqi and his wife had the choice to believe in the divine inspiration of the Panditji, and thus in predestination. If they did not, it is only due to their strict adherence to Islamic 'orthodoxy'. Thus, when Farooqi later claims that 'Allah blessed me with great abundance in my business' (*Mere karobar mein Allah t'ala ne bari barakat 'ata farmai hai*) (Farooqi 2000: 100), he does not refer to a form of divine 'grace' in the Calvinist sense but rather to a 'blessing' (*barakat*) sanctioning a righteous course of action.¹⁷

Abul Fazl Farooqi's moral utilitarianism

- 25 Although Abul Fazl Farooqi remains evasive on his sectarian affiliation, the chapter which he devotes to his 'academic and religious inclinations' (*'ilmi-o-dini rujhan*) attests of his Deobandi leanings, and more specifically of his sympathy for the Tablighi Jama'at and the Jama'at-i-Islami (or at least for some of their leaders, such as 'Maulana Obaidullah'¹⁸ and Abdul Azim Khan, respectively). Thus, Farooqi's claims that 'these days the original face

of Islam has been disfigured' (*islam ki asli shakal maskh kar di gai hai*) and that 'it has become a [mere] collection of rituals' (*rasumat ka majmu'a ban kar rah gaya hai*) (Farooqi 2000: 115)¹⁹ are consonant with the worldviews of Deobandi reformists and more specifically with those of Tablighi proselytes and Jama'ati Islamists, who are equally committed to re-Islamizing the *Umma*, even if they diverge in their methods and political orientations.

- 26 This claim to Sunni 'orthodoxy', through the practice of a 'pure' and self-conscious Islam, devoid of ritualism and Hindu influences, is reiterated by Abul Fazl Farooqi all along the text. According to him, this quality results from his primary socialization, under the moral guidance of his pious mother: 'As a result of the efforts and blessings [*du'a*, literally prayers] of my mother, all aspects of my upbringing were deeply ingrained in my heart and mind' (Farooqi 2000: 41). In a more agentic mode, Farooqi also looks at his economic success as a triumph of his own free will, claiming that 'Thank God, I am not a dreaming person [*khwab ka insan*]; I am a man of action [*'amli insan*]. From the very beginning, I have been believing in 'building life with action' [*'amal se zindagi banti hai*]' (Farooqi 2000: 40). In another part of the text, he points at the combined effects of his primary socialization and free will all along his life course: 'It is not that opportunities for becoming a king overnight were not available in the market, but it was my conscious resolve to stick to honesty [*imandari par qaim rahun*], for the high principles of Islam taught by my mother were ever fresh in my mind' (Farooqi 2000: 100). This inherited morality coexisting with a powerful subjectivity is continuously reinvigorated through an unmediated relation with God. Here lies the third, and probably the most important of Farooqi's own explanations to his economic success, which takes the form of a moral utilitarianism: worldly success is a god-sent reward to the moral entrepreneur, the outcome of a process of action/reaction under the prescient gaze of the almighty, which makes moral enterprise a rational choice in this world as well as in the next (although in a more ambivalent way, as we shall see later). It is probably here that Abul Fazl Farooqi's work ethic presents the closest affinities with the Protestant ethos of capitalism as conceptualized by Weber.²⁰ In his narrative, economic success appears as the result of a contractual relation between the moral entrepreneur and his creator. In this framework, even actions seemingly irrational from an economic point of view—such as suffering a financial loss 'so as to avoid deceiving'—are ultimately profitable as Allah 'immediately' compensates economic loss by opening new business opportunities. What this line of argument suggests is that, on the long run, morality pays. But what does really constitute a moral subject?

Abul Fazl Farooqi's crisis of subjectivation

- 27 Abul Fazl Farooqi's narrative is an attempt by a God-fearing capitalist to constitute himself as a moral subject in a dual and not mutually exclusive movement of subjection (to the power of God) and subjectivism (through a claim of personal authorship over his life trajectory). In other words, this autobiography is a story of subjectivation,²¹ questioning the conditions of recognition of oneself as a moral 'subject', in the two senses of the term. This 'hermeneutic of the Self' (Foucault 1984a: 13), consonant with and possibly informed by Iqbal's theory of *khudi*, is characterized by a state of tension. Farooqi's subjectivist impulses confront the moral economy of conventional Indo-Persianate autobiographies, with its emphasis on humility and its disqualification of

literary hubris (Metcalf 2004). Following Foucault, we can see in Farooqi's attempt at overcoming this dilemma a response to a 'crisis of subjectivation' deriving from 'a difficulty for the individual to constitute himself as a moral subject of his conducts' (Foucault 1984b: 131). Farooqi's moral utilitarianism is an idiosyncratic answer to this dilemma, although not an isolated one in the contemporary Muslim world.²² His 'Islamic calculus', which 'retains the utilitarian idea of the calculation of pain and pleasure as the basis for moral action, but extends it beyond this world to the next' (Tripp 2006: 123), is not exempt of contradictions though. While endorsing a resolutely utilitarian worldview, including in his relationship to God himself, Farooqi blames Hindus for their own utilitarianism: 'Every act of theirs is prompted by some interest [*mufad*]' (Farooqi 2000: 97). More significantly, if Farooqi projects his material success as an example for other Indian Muslims, he is also adamant to denounce the ravages of materialism (*madah parasti*). At some point, his ascetic business ethic even leads him to question his success:

Today I think that I have lost sixty years of my life. I have everything according to the present standard of living but still I feel I do not possess anything. My wealth cannot do away with my twenty-year old diabetes. I think that had I indulged in thinking about the Hereafter and had no wealth I would have been more fortunate [*khush nasib*] (Farooqi 2000: 126).

- 28 At the twilight of his life, Abul Fazl Farooqi seems hesitant about his true realisations and about the kind of example he ambitions to set. On the one side, his material success seems to validate his probity: if God has showered him with so many blessings, it can only be that he was his true servant. Although Farooqi is at odds with the idea of predestination, he echoes here the Calvinist 'worldly ascetics', who saw in their economic success a confirmation of their 'grace' and a success of God himself, acting through them (Weber 1996: 202). But on the other side, Farooqi poses as a contemplative Sufi, lamenting the vanity of worldly possessions. In his eyes (or at least in those of his projected self), worldly accomplishments do not only seem illusory at the footsteps of death: they threaten to become liabilities in the preparation to the Hereafter, the ultimate horizon of Farooqi's narrative. At its breaking point, this narrative turns against itself, becoming the battlefield of two opposing conceptions of asceticism: one which embraces the world and one which refuses it. When the author's 'Islamic calculus' is extended to the Hereafter, his worldly success appears as deceitful as a trick of the Devil, while the hubris displayed in its literary evocation takes all the appearances of a capital sin. If we consider that this uneasiness with economic success is not merely rhetorical—or that rhetoric is reality (Metcalf 2004)—Abul Fazl Farooqi clearly stands out from the adepts of 'capitalist Islam' (*l'islam de marché*), who are less apologetic about accumulating wealth in this world and less sceptical about the dividends of their economic success in the next (Feillard 2004, Haenni 2005). For all his doubts, which he does not hesitate to put forward in his narrative, Farooqi seems closer to the 'worldly dervishes' talked of by Weber, who may engage in worldly activities but who look for methods of salvation outside of the professional realm. Such methods of salvation, Weber tells us, may have an impact on professional careers, such as for 'the pious Persian who sees his commerce prosper because of his strict commitment to truth' (Weber 1996: 212). But whereas early Calvinists and contemporary advocates of the Islamic 'theology of prosperity' have found the *certitudo salutis* in the accumulation of wealth, 'worldly dervishes' have been doubtful that salvation could be found in worldly accomplishments. Farooqi may be professing a rather 'light' or even 'lip-service' form of Sufism (although he is keen to emphasise his morality and simplicity, he shows much less concern for spirituality and does not show any

inclination towards mysticism). Nonetheless, his apparently oxymoronic statement—suggesting that he would have been more fortunate if only he had been poorer—should not be summarily discarded. Nowhere does this pious bourgeois reveal more explicitly, even if rhetorically, his uneasiness at constituting himself as a role model, not only for matters of literary and social convenience, but more importantly for the feelings of religious anxiety which he claims to be subject to at the end of his worldly journey and which his economic success, however moral it may have been, seems unable to extinguish.

The *haji* and the parvenu: preliminary remarks on the reception of *Nasheb-o-Faraz*

- 29 A word should be said, before concluding, on this text's reception. Although it was published by regular editors, Abul Fazl Farooqi's autobiography does not seem to have been commercialized. Most copies were distributed by the author himself to his close circle of friends and relatives. By chance, I was able to access one of the copies of the Urdu version of the text after it was consulted and commented upon by some members of this familial audience. This copy was handed over to me by one of Abul Fazl Farooqi's grandsons, presently working with the publisher of the English translation of the text. When I consulted this copy of the text, I was struck by the fact that its readers seemed to have focused on a single section: that where Abul Fazl Farooqi mentions his repeated pilgrimages to Mecca. A small piece of paper had even been clipped to the page in question, listing the dates of Farooqi's successive travels to Saudi Arabia for *Haj* and *Umra*. Indeed, the number of these visits is truly impressive: Farooqi completed *Haj* in 1970, 1982 and 2000, whereas he performed *Umra* in 1997, 1999 and 2003. This was, apparently, a source of great pride for his extended family, possibly more than any of his business achievements. On the contrary, Farooqi's moralistic agenda does not seem to have found many takers within his own family. According to the grandson who handed me a copy of *Nasheb-o-Faraz*, the main reason for Farooqi's moralistic diatribes against the 'new generation' was his having an 'ill mannered' (*bad tamiz*) daughter.²³ In fact, the daughter in question is mentally challenged and, as such, occasionally behaves in a way that disrupts social conventions, a curse that Farooqi evokes at length, rather poignantly, in his narrative. Far from equating the mental condition of his daughter with immorality, Farooqi himself sees her as 'very simple and innocent' (*woh intehai sadi aur uski ada m'asum hai*) (Farooqi 2000: 56). Nevertheless, from the point of view of his grandson, Farooqi's moralistic discourse would be a cover-up, compensating his shame at having a daughter of 'bad character.' So much for the exemplary entrepreneur and the ascetic role model: within his own household, Farooqi seems to have been denied the exemplarity he claims, however ambivalently, in his autobiography.
- 30 Other reactions I have started gathering beyond Farooqi's family circle also suggest that his claim to exemplarity was rarely taken at face value. Thus, for a young journalist of the local Urdu press who took the time to read *Nasheb-o-Faraz*, Abul Fazl Farooqi is a parvenu who lacks the social capital of the upper classes which he aims to emulate. His narrative would be a testimony to this, an act of hubris devoid of any literary value:

Abul Fazl came from the lower stratus of society. Luckily, he became rich. He lives in a big house and made millions in the country. [...] His autobiography is an

emotional act. Many came from the lower level and reached the status of *crorepati* [millionaire], yet they did not feel the urge to write [their autobiography].²⁴

- 31 What this critique suggests is that, through his autobiographical endeavour, Farooqi tried to elevate himself to the level of the Ashraf literati, without the necessary social capital. And this attempt at upward social mobility through literature would be an utter failure, bringing ridicule rather than social esteem to an amateur litterateur. Zafarul Islam Khan, the publisher of the English version of the text, is not as harsh in his perception of the text and its author, but he is equally reluctant to consider Abul Fazl Farooqi as a 'role model'. He admits that Abul Fazl Farooqi himself financed the publication of this translation, while suggesting that the primary value of the text resides in its narrative of 'a kind of success story':

People tend to embellish their role. He [Farooqi] was a businessman, making money. He is a business model, because Muslims don't know how to do business. In North India at least, Muslims have been *zamindars* or artisans, not traders. [...] I found this text interesting because it is a kind of success story. But I would not call him a role model.²⁵

- 32 This critical assessment of Farooqi's text by his own publisher points towards a conflict of qualification. By denying Abu Fazl Farooqi the label of 'role model', Zafarul Islam Khan denies him 'civic greatness' (i.e. public virtue transcending personal interests) and finds it more appropriate to express his exemplarity (or 'greatness', to use Boltanski and Thévenot's terms [1991]) in terms of a 'mercantile greatness.' This operation amounts to a form of *disqualification*, as Zafarul Islam Khan considers the civic world and its normative principles 'greater' than the pursuit of private ends, which he equates the mercantile world with. Abul Fazl Farooqi's grandson and the aforementioned local Urdu journalist, for their part, deny him 'domestic greatness', the former by questioning his moral authority within his *khandan* and the later by insisting upon his relatively low social extraction. These reactions to Abul Fazl Farooqi's text thus point towards the difficulties inherent to such self-constructions of exemplarity in the context of contemporary India, where several common worlds coexist and collide,²⁶ and where claims to greatness are no longer taken at face value - supposing they ever were - and are systematically put under trial, by being confronted to distinct and sometimes opposite conceptions of the common good.

Conclusion

- 33 The subject of *Nasheb-o-Faraz* is not so much a passive 'servant of God' ('*abd*') as a self-conscious 'individual' (*fard*) who is acted upon by external forces, both human and divine, but who also claims authorship of his own life. This dual movement of subjectivation echoes that of many contemporary Muslim intellectuals, for whom 'Re-connection with the self, imagined as a repository of identifiably Muslim virtues, and through the self to a specific understanding of God's command, becomes the principal undertaking' (Tripp 2006: 200). In the Indo-Muslim world, this reflexive movement has historical precedents which Abul Fazl Farooqi seems to have been familiar with. Thus, one of the major contributions of Farooqi's favourite author, the poet-philosopher Allama Mohammad Iqbal, consisted in a reassessment of the notion of *khudi* (self), redefined as 'individual self-affirmation [...], leading to purposeful collective action' (Jalal 2001: 178). Nevertheless, this exploration of the self is at odds with conventional Urdu life-stories, with their 'dominant characteristic of passivity' (Metcalf 2004: 138). More generally,

Nasheb-o-Faraz singularizes itself from the majority of Indian autobiographies, which tend to display a complete indifference 'towards the private, interior lives of their protagonists' (Kumar 2008: 419). On the contrary, Abul Fazl Farooqi aims to deliver a highly personal account, as suggested by these concluding remarks: 'Whatever I have narrated in my autobiography is my heart's voice and I believe myself to be the first listener' (Farooqi 2000: 172).

- 34 Throughout this story of subjectivation, Farooqi constitutes himself as a moral achiever, claiming exemplarity by a conjunction of moral rectitude and worldly achievements. But these two poles of Abul Fazl Farooqi's self-professed exemplarity are not easy to reconcile. Farooqi aims to retrieve the moral from the economic, in order to restore what he perceives as the Islamic moral economy of capitalism. This leads him to articulate a virulent critique of materialism and hedonism, a critique which presents itself as a 'traditionalist' response to the perverse effects of modernity. But while pointing towards the 'lack of fit in the inhabitation of modernity by its subjects' (Kumar 2004: 442), this narrative also shows how pervasive modern forms of subjectivity can be, even insinuating in the narratives of their most uncompromising opponents.
- 35 From what I could gather so far, the reception of this text did not meet Abul Fazl Farooqi's expectations. His readers as well as his publisher have been denying him the civic greatness he makes a claim to through his self-professed high moral standards, which are much more than statements of proper economic behaviour. As Boltanski and Thévenot suggest, the mercantile *cit* relies upon the 'moral capacities' of its inhabitants, who 'must be able to transcend their singularities so as to agree on external goods [...]' (1991: 42). But the morality Abul Fazl Farooqi makes a claim to is of a whole other nature and is closer to the public virtue associated with the civic *cit*, i.e. an ability to overcome personal interests for the greater good (*l'intrt gnral*) (Boltanski & Thvenot 1991: 145). The autobiographical pact which he establishes in the opening lines of the text is unequivocal on this point: Farooqi aims to 'benefit' the 'future generation' through his narrative of moral achievement. What puts him at odds with the model of the civic *cit*, however, is his restrictive definition of the 'common world' he claims to have benefited. To the exception of the MAF School, all his business ventures are presented as contributions to the greater good of Indian *Muslims* exclusively. Moreover, the high moral standards Farooqi makes a claim to are not reducible to statements of public virtue. They also serve his inscription into the worldly and otherworldly city of God, or to use Boltanski's and Thvenot's terms into the '*cit* of inspiration'. And it is in the confrontation of Farooqi's accomplishments to this model of competence that originate most of the inner tensions of his narrative. The system of allocation of greatness associated with the *cit* of inspiration relies upon notions which we have encountered all along the text, such as grace (the ultimate measure of greatness in this specific *cit*) and self-denial (the cardinal virtue of the 'inspired'—be they mystics, renouncers, artists or political avant-gardes). And as Boltanski and Thvenot suggest, 'the inspired *cit* [...] is the place of a permanent tension with the greatness of opinion. Indeed, withdrawing from the world, so as to let inspiration flourish, implies the deployment of more or less radical ascetic procedures. But when the ascetic accomplishes extraordinary tasks, he draws crowds and must run away to escape his own fame' (Boltanski & Thvenot 1991: 115). In the case of Abul Fazl Farooqi, though, this tension was not the outcome of ascetic virtuosity. As he himself makes it clear in the justifications which establish his autobiographical pact, this tension lies in the very nature of his literary project. The self-

proclamation of ascetic exemplarity and divine inspiration is oxymoronic in nature. Worse, it suggests madness on the part of the arrogant fool claiming greatness beyond his reach.

- 36 As far as his audience is concerned, the only 'greatness' that Farooqi seems to have been allotted is of a mercantile nature. This is the sense of the distinction made by Zafarul Islam Khan between 'role model' and 'business model', with Farooqi falling into the second category according to his publisher. These disqualifications point towards the difficulties encountered by economic achievers in contemporary India, once they make a claim to public virtues other than economic. Their justifications are not necessarily taken at face value by the public and may not be sufficient to establish their greatness in the civic *cit*, which has become the highest normative order of India's highly stratified but increasingly democratic society.²⁷
- 37 Finally, it should be emphasised that Abul Fazl Farooqi's dual register of subjectivation is not an isolated and anachronistic attempt to reconcile submission to God and worldly accomplishments. As far as Indian Muslims are concerned, my ongoing ethnographic fieldwork in Abul Fazl Enclave²⁸ confirms the appeal of pious capitalism over middle-class Muslim residents of the neighbourhood. This seems particularly true for the highly educated youths who could constitute the vanguard of India's 'new' Muslim middle class²⁹ and who are adamant to succeed economically while clinging to their religious values. The desire manifested by these youths to live in a 'religious environment' (*dini* environment) while participating to the fullest to India's new economy informs a lifestyle similar to that of the 'modernists' gathered around Syed Ahmed Khan in the 19th century, with their ambition to remain strict Muslims while making the best of the economic opportunities offered by the *Raj*. What remains to be seen is whether this 'new' ethic of capitalism will retain an ascetic outlook or evolve into a fully blown 'theology of prosperity' which could constitute a morally sound answer to such 'dilemmas of subjectivity' (Bertrand 2004: 76) as that experienced by Abul Fazl Farooqi.

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NOTES

1. The two verses quoted here by Dr. Zakira Ghouse were taken from the poem *Bayan-i-Musannif* (about the author).
2. I will not use the term 'subaltern' here, as many of these autobiographers remained part of the economic or cultural elite.
3. In the excerpts reproduced here, I have generally followed Rizwanullah's translation for the English edition of the text (Farooqi 2006), except when otherwise indicated. The pagination is that of the Urdu version (Farooqi 2000). For matters of clarity and since this text does not only target specialists of South Asian Muslims or Urdu literature, I have followed a simplified system of transliteration which omits to signal long vowels (ā, ī, ū) as well as retroflex consonants (ṭ, ḍ,

etc.). The letter *xe* (خ) was transcribed as 'kh', the letter *ğain* (غ) as 'gh', the letter 'šīn' (ش) as 'sh' and the letter 'ain' (ع) as '. Diacritical marks (*hamza*) are omitted and *izāfa* are transliterated as '-i'-.

4. This English fortnightly exclusively deals with Muslim-related issues, whether in India or abroad. For its detractors, it is the voice of the most conservative elements of India's Muslim population and it sustains a siege mentality within this population, by focusing on conspiracies (of the West or of the 'Hindutva brigade') against Muslims; cf. http://www.twocircles.net/2010feb02/milli_gazette_ten_years_community_newspaper.html

5. Chronological story-telling is a rare occurrence in Urdu biographies and autobiographies, which usually consist in a collection of temporally disjoint personal anecdotes and recollections of exemplary personalities (Metcalf 2004).

6. This is not to say that European or North American autobiographers ignored the anti-heroic posture of their South Asian counterparts; see for instance Samuel Johnson's praise for the autobiographer versus the biographer, where he claims that the latter 'endeavours to hide the man that he may produce a hero' (Johnson 1963: 262 in Folkenflick 1993: 7). Yet, as this quotation suggests, modern Western autobiographies generally aim to reveal the 'true' subjectivity of an individual, something alien to conventional South Asian autobiographies.

7. My translation.

8. This omission may not be intentional on Farooqi's part, as many Indian Muslims are unaware of Iqbal's socialist influences and perceive him, on the contrary, as a contradictor of Marx—whom he described in one of his latest texts as 'Moses without an epiphany, Jesus without a cross' (quoted from *Armaghan-i-Hijaz [The Gift of the Hijaz, 1938]* by Mir 2006: 60).

9. Farooqi quotes this *hadith* in its Urdu translation: '*Meri ummat ka fitna-i-mal hai*' (wealth is the [source of] conflict of my community) (Farooqi 2000: 133).

10. This Quranic term, which Farooqi uses extensively, refers to righteous individuals and communities. Charity (*sadqa*) is an integral part of the moral economy conveyed by this term. Thus, for Farooqi, '*al-khair* is like taking care of a sick person who needs medicine, good food and care, making all necessary provisions for him so that he gradually regains health' (Farooqi 2000: 131).

11. As Timur Kuran (2004: x) shows, this religiously sanctioned economic 'tradition' was in fact invented in the mid-20th century: 'until that time the economic content of discourses grounded in Islam's traditional sources lacked systematization'.

12. There are no references in the text to other poets/philosophers.

13. In particular since, from Weber's (1996: 212) point of view, there exists no religious ethic of the profession as vocation (*Berufsethik*) in Islam.

14. This is not systematic though: in his study of Indian Dalits who experienced a rapid process of upward social mobility, Jules Naudet (2008) shows that such feelings of guilt are hard to detect from personal narratives, even though these individuals are keen to 'pay back to society' for their success.

15. Interview by author, Abul Fazl Enclave (AFE), May 2010.

16. According to Faznullah, doing business with the JiH was not a sinecure, since the organization had very severe rules of functioning which slowed down its decision process (interview, Abul Fazl Enclave, November 2009).

17. Yet, as pointed out by one of the anonymous referees, this attitude echoes that of Jains or Hindu *baniyas* considering their worldly success as the outcome of their good deeds in their past lives.

18. Possibly the Delhi-based Tablighi leader Muhammad Obaidullah Baliyavi.

19. My translation.

20. See for instance Weber's (2005: 17) remarks on Benjamin Franklin's autobiography, where he suggests that 'all Franklin's moral attitudes are coloured with utilitarianism'.

21. Following Foucault and Deleuze, subjectivation is here understood as covering the techniques and procedures through which individuals or collectivities are constituted as moral subjects—both in the sense of active agents, authors of their own life, and in the sense of participants to a regime of subjection; what matters, here, is not so much the identity of the Subject as his techniques of constitution and ‘recognition’ (Bayart 2004: 222).
22. Although it is doubtful that Farooqi was aware of this literature, some thinkers of Islamic economics, such as the Egyptian Yusuf Kamal, have placed the individual and his search for profit at the centre of their theoretical constructions (Tripp 2006: 123).
23. Conversation, AFE, November 2009.
24. Interview by author, AFE, May 2010.
25. Interview by author, AFE, October 2010.
26. Boltanski and Thevenot (1991: 97) themselves would probably argue that India does not fit in their model, as India remains a hierarchical society at odds with the principle of ‘common humanity’ which constitutes the cornerstone of these authors’ analytical model. Nevertheless, I would argue that the democratization of India and its current ‘silent revolution’, marked by the social and political emergence of Dalits and OBCs, has transformed the lowest sections of the society from ‘sub-human’ to ‘commoners’ or simply ‘the poor’, who remain stigmatized but who can be accommodated into a model of a common, even if hierarchical, humanity.
27. I am referring to Christophe Jaffrelot’s (2003) contribution on the current democratization of India’s democracy, following the recent political affirmation of the country’s lower castes.
28. I started visiting regularly this neighborhood in October 2008. In October–November 2009, I stayed with a local Muslim family and conducted an ethnography of AFE’s ‘Islamist class’ (Ahmad 2009), before conducting a series of interviews with residents of different sectarian and professional backgrounds. The preliminary results of this fieldwork will be presented in Gayer (2011).
29. At this stage, it remains difficult to substantiate this hypothesis of a ‘new’ Muslim middle class, although recent studies tend to suggest that, along traditional elites belonging to the Ashrafiyya, a new blend of Muslim entrepreneur is presently emerging in India (Khalidi 2006).

RÉSUMÉS

Although life-stories have been playing a central role in the construction of exemplarity in South Asia for centuries, the autobiographical genre was a latecomer on the region’s literary scene. It only developed in the late nineteenth, early 20th century and was constrained by conventional ‘rules of reticence’, which discouraged narratives of self-aggrandizement. *Nasheb-o-Faraz* (Ups and Downs), the autobiography of the Delhi-based real estate entrepreneur Mohammad Abul Fazl Farooqi (born ca. 1940), which constitutes the focus of this paper, is not immune to such ‘rules of reticence.’ Nevertheless, Farooqi takes some liberty with these moral and literary codes, and his narrative is a deeply subjective one, through which he aims to project himself as a role model, and more specifically as a moral achiever. This endeavour is not free of internal tensions and, all along the text, Farooqi seems hesitant about the example he ambitions to set. The reception of the text, within his family and beyond, also points to the limits of self-constructions of exemplarity in contemporary India, where the economy of greatness is undergoing major changes in a context of economic liberalization and political democratization.

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Keywords : autobiography, economic entrepreneurs, ethics of capitalism, Indian Muslims, politics of exemplarity