



MUSLIM Institute
Mission of Unity, Stability &
Leadership In Muslims

Special Lecture

Sufism and the West

Organized by

MUSLIM Institute

MUSLIM Institute organized a special lecture "Sufism and the West" on Tuesday, July 18, 2017 at National Library of Pakistan, Islamabad. Professor Marcia K. Hermansen from Loyola University, Chicago, USA delivered the special lecture and President of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Sardar Masood Khan was the Chief Guest on the occasion. Chairman MUSLIM Institute, Sahibzada Sultan Ahmad Ali opened the house. Director Scientific and Medical Affairs Chicago, Dr Saira Alvi moderated the session. Foreign delegates, students and professors of universities, researchers, analysts, social activists and a large number of people from different walks of life attended the lecture.



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SPECIAL LECTURE

Sufism and the West

July 18, 2017, Islamabad

Brief remarks of the speakers observed as under:



Opening Remarks

Sahibzada Sultan Ahmad Ali

Chairman, MUSLIM Institute

I am grateful to Professor Marcia K. Hermansen for her coming all the way from the United States of America to join us. Mevlana Rumi is one of the best-selling poets in the west who made immense contribution in the dissemination of love, peace and harmony like Ibn-e-Arabi, Sultan Bahoo and other Sufis. Sufi teachings are not limited to one society but they appeal all civilizations while addressing humanity irrespective of linguistic, racial and ethnic differences. In

the wake of prevailing extreme tendencies among societies across the globe, Sufi teachings can lead us towards harmony and brotherhood. Sufism is the actual narrative of Islam. Many books on this subject written by Western academicians have been translated in Urdu language and there is a great appreciation of the works of scholars like Prof. Annemarie Schimmel, Prof Marcia K. Hermansen and Prof William C. Chittick in Pakistan.



Special Lecture

Professor Marcia K. Hermansen

Loyola University, Chicago, USA

I am going to shed light over the history of Sufism in America and how it interacted with American culture along with global developments and Muslim community in the United States. Sufi movements in the west have changed and developed over time. These movements have been able to introduce some elements of Sufism into the attitude of Muslim community in America especially among new generation.



Let me briefly introduce the history and types of Sufi movements in America. Scholars differ on how to best categorize the differences and distinctions among them. I have in the past suggested a garden metaphor of “perennials”, “hybrids” and “transplants” in an attempt to capture their distinctive approaches to Islamic identity. The “perennials” of the Sufi garden are those movements in which the specifically Islamic identification and content of the movement have been de-emphasized in favor of a “perennialist”,

“universalist” or “traditionalist” outlook. I am using the term “perennialist” in its broadest sense to refer to the idea that there is a universal, eternal truth that underlies all religions. The term “hybrids” designates those American Sufi movements that identify more closely with an Islamic source and content, yet also adapt to features of the American context and recruit significant numbers of American followers. In America these hybrid Sufi groups generally were founded and led by immigrant Muslims who were born and raised in Muslim societies. Within those parameters, there are a wide range of responses and adaptations to the hybrid context in which they operate, for example, in the membership of the movements, incorporation of ethnic elements, integration of females, etc. Transplants in the American Sufi garden are groups of immigrant Sufis, generally co-ethnics, who practice and affiliate based on patterns in their native societies. One prominent example might be Senegalese Muridun (mystic pupil) in New York City, smaller groups of Afghans or Indian immigrants are found in a number of large American cities, and so on.



Traditionalists over recent decades have continued to be a leading force in the west but they have started to give more influence to “Fiqh” following “Madhab” (Islamic principles) and having traditional knowledge as basis of Sufism. Authenticity Sufism focuses revival of Islam through return to traditional knowledge which should be directly learned from shaykh (spiritual mentor). Immigrants waving from the Middle East and South Asia began to take interest in “authentic” Islam, as opposed to “movement” or political Islam. For this audience Sufi teacher who could speak in an American idiom while presenting Islamic credentials had the greatest appeal. National mainstream Muslim organizations had emerged from the influence and outlook of the global Islamic movement, rejected forms of Sufi practice such as mawlid and tariqa (order of Sufism) allegiance. However, they increasingly embraced forms of discourse and teachers who projected Islamic spiritual cultivation using Qur’anic concepts such as Ehsan (righteousness) or purification of the Nafs (soul). Groups like Zaytuna, led by American convert, Hamza Yusuf Hanson, projected traditional Islamic knowledge as the basis of Muslim identity, and were able to appeal to mainstream American Muslims as well as those more Sufi-inclined individuals who yearned for “authentic” Islamic spirituality.

Overall, the character of Sufism in the United States after the 1990s became more formally Islamic with the greater number of younger affiliates being drawn first to programs deepening traditional knowledge, including a strong influence of fiqh and conventional practice, which in some cases might lead to their affiliating with Sufi teachers and orders. A “bridge” generation of American Sufi converts to Islam who formulated an intellectually cogent and culturally appealing and sophisticated presentation of Sufism, was instrumental in this transition. Unlike some of the earlier Sufi movements brought to America by immigrant Muslim shaykhs, Islamic “authenticity” Sufism does not inculcate specific cultural forms of dress or behaviors associated with specific Muslim cultures. It does, however, exhort and privilege broad and non-

culture specific embodied Islamic disciplinary practices of gender segregation, modesty, and tastes in consumption and sources of information. In some cases attempts have been made to develop “American” forms of embodied Islam such as an American form of female hijab.

We can see Sufism in west especially in America is changing overtime from the early perennials seeking enlightenment to the shaykhs coming from the Middle East and founding Islamic identity, tareeqa based movements to the search for traditional Islam and the emphasis on fiqh to where we are today now, post tareeqa Sufism. Now it’s not that much particular that one should belong to a specific tareeqa but you have a general Sufi affinity.



Chief Guest Remarks

Sardar Masood Khan

President of Azad Jammu & Kashmir

Dr Hermansen’s lecture was intellectual in essence as well as a source of spiritual guidance. Rumi’s verses not only resonate in Sufis but also in the hearts of common people. Sultan Bahoo have also enlightened us over the centuries. Sufis over the centuries have guided millions of people towards truth. They were the kind of spiritual healers when people were disturbed spiritually. A perception that only Sufis are good Muslims and rest are bad is not a good policy. I think all Muslims are good Muslims because those who preach violence cease to be Muslims themselves. Today, there is much strife between the East and the West; therefore, aspiring for harmony is a spiritual deed. I request to the spiritual orders to not only pray for the miseries of Indian occupied Kashmiris but also support them practically. It does not matter what we know but what we are doing?



Interactive Session



Brief summary of interactive session is as follow:

It is believed that some of the orientalists thought that Sufis were not of Muslim origin but if you study the works of Prof. Schimmel's and Prof. Carl W. Ernst on Sufism then it becomes evident that people who projected Sufism as non-Islamic were not even orientalists but were colonial administrators. In America, Sufi ideas have certain impacts on Muslims, these Muslims are gentler. Sufis believe in Hadees Qudsi wherein Allah Almighty says that I am as you think me to be, so everyone of us InshAllah will experience Allah Almighty in his own way. In Sufism, there are different tareeqa'a but they are not like sects as no Sufi 'order' is against other 'order' but they have slight differences in their practices. A Murshid (sufi saint) can send his mureed (pupil) to other Sufi order so this is kind of diversity which is not bad.

