BEHIND THE VEIL: MUSLIM WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PARAPSYCHOLOGY

ANJUM KHILJI

Religious experiences are an intrinsic part of the major organized religions of Asia and Africa. By virtue of being intertwined with the indigenous religious traditions, they are highly venerated and respected in that part of the world. A strong case in point is that of Islam, a leading religion of Asia and Africa. *Tasawwuf*, or the Islamic mystical tradition, which developed out of the meditation on the *Quran* (i.e., *Koran*), is considered to be the source of such religious experiences and the resultant psychic phenomena. The majority of Muslim scholars regard *tasawwuf* as a branch of the transmitted sciences. According to the most accepted classification of the Islamic sciences, transmitted sciences or *al alum al nagliyyah*, comprise a body of knowledge that is inviolate and supreme. Transmitted sciences, like the *Quranic* commentary, the *Traditions of the prophet*, the sacred laws of Islam, and to some degree, religious experiences and their by-products, are to be conveyed and accepted without question and reservation. Unlike the intellectual sciences, such as mathematics or medicine, the principles of which are debated to achieve greater understanding, the transmitted sciences are unreservedly accepted as being authentic and valid by the majority of the Muslim theologians and scholars alike. The implication of this fact is that genuine religious experiences and their by-products are accepted unquestioningly and as a matter of course within Islamic religious culture.

Before I discuss the varied roles played by Muslim women in the development of *tasawwuf*, an explanation of the formation and institutionalization of Islamic mysticism is in order. *Tasawwuf* first attracted public attention in the eighth century. Its rise was triggered in part by the political situation of the time and in part as a reaction to the development of formal legal and theological institutions. *Tasawwuf* appeared as a complementary antithesis to these formal institutions. As *tasawwuf* gained in momentum, it evolved from its original moral and

ascetic character to an ideal of ecstatic communion with God, from a doctrine of external theology to a doctrine of esoteric knowledge.

The formative period of *tasawwuf* extended over the first three centuries of the Muslim era, and those who followed this path were called Sufis. The Sufis' primary goal was to attain union with God. During the early formative years, Sufis mostly employed individual and personal methodologies to achieve their objectives. However, by the 11th century, *tasawwuf* acquired some of the characteristics of a mass movement. Sufis organized themselves into various fraternities known as *silsilas*. Each *silsila* had its own assemblies, *murshids* (masters or guides responsible for initiation and training of disciples), and methods and techniques of initiation and training. All the *silsilas* shared common sufic themes of Union with God, Divine Love, and Beatific Vision; but nonetheless, they had their distinctive *tariqas*, or paths, for their initiates to follow in achieving the objective of "Union." Diverse exercises were prescribed to help the initiates progress through the various states and stages of *tasawwuf*. During this process religious experiences would ensue, and these religious experiences, in turn, were held responsible for the psychic phenomena that occurred.

The *barakas* or *karamats*, as these anomalous experiences were known, were considered the blessings of God, yet their significance was downplayed for two reasons. First, the *barakas* were regarded as by-products of another activity and were not perceived as central to human development. Second, the *murshids* feared that the *barakas*, when amplified, would distract the disciple from the primary goal of unification with God. However, this does not detract from the legitimacy of *barakas* within Islamic religious culture. It is a legitimacy, I might add, that was bolstered by their association with Islamic mysticism and because of their positive social implications, such as incidents of healing the sick and "multiplication" of food to feed the hungry. The most frequent types of *barakas* referred to in sufi treatises are those of precognition, clairvoyance, telepathy, bilocation, dreams and visions, healing, and multiplication of food. Although the *barakas* did not play a primary role when the disciples were undergoing training, their frequency and quality intensified as the initiates progressed through the various states and stages of *tasawwuf*, and thereby indirectly contributed to determining the initiate's position in the sufic hierarchy.

As institutional *tasawwuf* gained momentum, the religious experiences assumed a growing cultural and religious legitimacy. Because Muslim women played a vital role as religious educators and contributed conspicuously to the development and propagation of *tasawwuf*, they also figured prominently in the validation of *barakas*. These women can be classified under five distinct groups, each of which was instrumental in the transmission, propagation, and development of *tasawwuf* over the last 11 centuries. The first are the *sheikhat*, who were the female counterparts of the sufi *murshids*. They are credited with having achieved the highest states and stages of *tasawwuf* and with having introduced new methodologies to attain union with God. The *sheikhat* introduced concepts to Islamic mysticism that formed the fundamental principles of some *silsilas*; in addition, many of the better known and revered *barakas* or *karamats* of the formative period are also ascribed to the *sheikhat*.

The first and the most prominent of the *sheikhat* was Rabia al-Adawiya (718 A.D.-801 A.D.). She is otherwise known as Taj al-Rejal, or the Crown of the Men. Rabia hailed from Basra, which was the center for Sufis in the formative years of *tasawwuf*. Though she received no formal training in *tasawwuf* from either a sheikh or a *murshid*, she became a leading sufi authority and fundamentally influenced the sufi perception of the love of God. She introduced and popularized the concept that God should be loved for his eternal beauty rather than out of a desire to avoid hell and attain heaven. Heaven and hell, in her view, were mere veils that separated humans from the Creator. Rabia established some of the core principles of *tasawwuf*, and she is greatly revered by Sufis. Sufi scholars (e.g., Sakkakini, 1976) invariably refer to Rabia's teachings and quote her as an authority. One of the foremost Sufis of his time, Faridad-Din-Attar (1990/1338), said of her: "She is a phenomenon because she achieved what men could not achieve. She was a forerunner of them all. She had a spiritual belief that was unusual. She developed it from the sufistic basis of knowledge of her time" (p. 37).

It is also said that Rabia was renowned for her religious experiences and psychic abilities. Reputedly, she was able to pierce physical veils and see with total clarity within herself and those around her vibrant and strange things not seen by other people in all their lives.

There are innumerable accounts of *barakas* ascribed to Rabia. An amusing legend tells of Hasan of Basra, the great sufi master and her

contemporary, who tried to exploit Rabia's *karamats* and *barakas* for his own glory (Faridad-Din-Attar, 1338, p. 41). One day, upon seeing Rabia by the riverside, Hasan cast his prayer mat upon the water and cried to her, "O Rabia, come and let us pray two rakas [a rakas is a unit of prayer] together." Evidently Hasan was counting on Rabia's power to keep both of them afloat. Recognizing the ploy, Rabia replied, "O Hasan, was it necessary to offer yourself in the bazaar of this world?" (p. 41). [Was it important to impress people by a spiritual gift?] In other words, she chided Hasan for attempting to impress people with his purported spiritual gifts. Upon saying the words, Rabia threw her prayer mat in the air, flew up onto it, and asked Hasan to join her as they prayed. Unable to match Rabia's powers, Hasan remained still. Rabia then said to him, "O Hasan, what you did a fish can do, and what I did a fly can do. The real work for God's friends lies beyond both of these and it is necessary to occupy ourselves with the real work." There are numerous other instances of telepathic and clairvoyant prowess exhibited by Rabia.

Another prominent *sheikha* whose impact over the various systems of knowledge is felt to this day is Fatima bint Ibn al Muthamma of Cardova (Spain). She trained the great sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi (1786), whose monumental works serve as point of reference for philosophy as well as *tasawwuf*. According to Ibn Arabi:

> In her spiritual activities and communications she was one of the greatest. She usually concealed her spiritual state and revealed it to only those who were in the same state. She was endowed with many graces and was a master in the sphere of intuition. She also had the power to voice the thoughts of others. Her revelations were true and I saw her perform many wonders. (p. 85)

He recounts many of her anomalous experiences in his treatise, *Al futuhat al makkiya*.

Another teacher about whom Ibn Arabi (1786, p. 86) writes at length is the *sheikha* Yasminah, also known as the Shams of Marchena (Spain). Like Fatima of Cardova, Sheikha Yasminah possessed great spiritual prowess and guided Ibn Arabi in his religious quest.

Among the most controversial of the *sheikhat* was Zarin Taj (Iran, 1814-1852), otherwise known as Qurat-ul Ain Tahira. She was endowed with great intelligence and was well versed in religious sciences. She

became famous for her revolutionary esoteric teaching and held large assemblies. Zarin Taj was charged with introducing dissent into religion. Many of her statements were taken as heretical, especially her view of "irradiation," which was seen to support the concept of transmigration and reincarnation by the uninitiated. She wrote extensively about her "experiences" (Bayat, 1982). In addition to the above, innumerable other *sheikhat* contributed to the transmission and development of *tasawwuf*. Ibn Batuta (n.d.), a famous North African voyager, in his book *Thufa al nizam*, speaks of a number of *sheikhat* who helped him understand the intricacies of *tasawwuf*.

The second group of Muslim women who contributed significantly to the evolution of *tasawwuf* were the *buzurghat*, which literally means wise or venerated. Some of the *buzurghat* were members of different *silsilas*, whereas others participated in the evolutionary process using their own methodologies. They were famous and well known because of their piety and *barakas*. They neither wrote extensive sufi texts nor introduced any revolutionary guiding principles, but they are significant nonetheless because of their anomalous experiences and their valuable implications. Nunah Fatimah (Spain), a *buzurgha* of renown, was reputedly able to wield great powers at her discretion. She became known for positively influencing people's minds at the psychic level and helping them to make advantageous and beneficial decisions. Another well-known ability that she possessed was the power to turn water into oil. It is said that when she would run out of lamp oil during her nightly vigils, Nunah Fatimah would put her hand into water and change it into oil to burn in her lamp (Ibn Arabi, 1786, p. 93).

Syeda Nafisa (165-208 A.D., Egypt) was famous for her fasting, prayers, and knowledge, and she possessed many *karamats* indicative of her high status among the Sufis. Healing *barakas* were ascribed to her, and there are innumerable sufi texts that mention the efficacy of her prayers. Shahuda bint Nasr (1101-1178 A.D., Persia), the famous calligrapher, and Zaynab bin Qasim (1130-1218 A.D., Nishapur) were also highly venerated for their *barakas*. The *barakas* of these two women had positive implications, and both were also considered religious scholars.

Another famous *buzurgha* was Ishi Nili of Nishapur, who was a great devout and healer. She was reputed to have great success in curing ailments of the eye. People used to flock to her door in order to benefit

from her blessings (Nurbakhsh, 1983). It is interesting to note that the *barakas* ascribed to women Sufis were always nurturing and holistic or *Jamali* (loving and integrative) in nature, and they had positive social implications. In contrast, the *barakas* of male Sufis at times tended to be more competitive and hierarchical or *Jalali* (aggressive and forceful) in nature.

Leila Mimouna (Morocco), Maryam of Basra (Iraq), and Bibi Fatima Hajrani (India) were all respected greatly because of their different *barakas*. Mai Sapuran (1675-1732 A.D., Pakistan) was reputed to have the ability to successfully treat deadly snake, scorpion, and rabid dog bites (Schimmel, 1978). Two other subgroups of *buzurghat* from Pakistan whose psi experiences are much written about are the Haft Afifa and the Mukadarat al Daliyya. Their prowess was in averting calamities, curing diseases, procuring children for the childless, and improving the circumstances of the poor and needy.

The *alimat* or "learned," comprise the third group of women who were significant in the development of *tasawwuf*. Most of the time they would belong to a *silsila* and were devout Sufis. Although they possessed *barakas*, their fame was based primarily on their literary contribution to the sufi movement. Zarin Taj, because of her mystical writings, can be included in this category also. She wrote volumes of esoteric poetry and prose discussing various sufi theories and their implications. Sidqi Shams, another *alima* (1650-1703, Turkey), actively participated in the evolutionary process of *tasawwuf* in the reign of Sultan Muhammad IV. Her two collections of mystical poems, entitled *The treasury of light* and *The collection of information*, had a great impact on the sufi movement in Turkey.

In South Asia, the fountainhead of sufi literature was a member of the royal Mughal family. Jahan Ara Begum, daughter of Shah Jahan and sister of Aurangzeb, wrote two memorable and priceless treatises on *tasawwuf* in the mid-17th century. Her first manuscript, *Munis al Arwan*, is in part about her initiation into *tasawwuf* and in part a biography of her *murshid* Khawaja Muin-ud Din, a great sufi saint of South Asia belonging to the *Chistiya Silsila*, who was Khawja's disciple for 20 years, and she carried out all the sufi practices devoutly. During one of Jahan Ara Begum's travels to Kashmir, she became better acquainted with the *Qadiria Silsila*. She felt more in harmony with the *Qadiria Silsila* because of her spiritual attention to a *Qadiri murshid* at

that time, and also because her brother Dara Shikoh was a *Qadiri*. After her many petitions and requests to Shiekh Mullah Shah, she was accepted into the *silsila*. Her second manuscript, entitled *Risala-e-Sahabiya*, is the account of her second initiation by Mulla Shah into the *Qadiria Silsila*. Mullah Shah, her second shiekh, was so impressed with her visionary power and the degree of her mystical knowledge that he let her act as his *khalifa* (deputy) on many occasions (Dara Shikoh, 1986/1643). Another member of the Mughal family, Zeb-un-Nisa, who was a follower of the *Chistia Silsila*, also wrote mystical poems under the pen name of "Makhfi." However, Jahan Ara's manuscripts far surpass the writings of Zeb-un-Nisa and are unanimously regarded as monumental works on *tasawwuf* in South Asia.

The fourth category of women were called *aminat*, or the guardians. These women were the patronesses and benefactresses of the sufi movement and were vitally important to its growth and transmission. These women often belonged to the ruling or affluent families. They provided financial, moral, physical, and even political support to safeguard and propagate positive attitudes towards *tasawwuf*. Many of the *aminat* built and funded monasteries known as *takiya* or *zazoya* for Sufis. Some of the *aminat* even had religious schools, called *madarasat*, *khanqah*, and *takiya*, which were built exclusively for women.

As there were hundreds of *aminat* over the span of nearly 12 centuries, I will restrict my discussion to the most prominent of these women. Many women from the Banu Athas dynasty and the Banu Abbas dynasty were great patronesses of the movement. Among the early *aminat* were Meisun (Banu Ummaya, 736 A.D.) and Um Jafar (Banu Abbas, 814 A.D.), who were well known for their dedication to the cause of *tasawwuf*.

From the next generation, Kheziran (Banu Abbas, 160 A.D.), her daughter Yacuta and daughter-in-law Zubaida were the most prominent of the benefactoresses. But the woman who most supported *tasawwuf* was Shagab. She was Turkish by birth and mother of Al Muqtadar, who was the Abbasi Caliph for 24 years. Shagab lived in Baghdad, the sufi center of the time. In the beginning, she attended the assemblies of various sheikhs, but later she was attracted to Mansur Hallaj's *barakas* and became his disciple. Hussein ibn Mansur al Hallaj is the most controversial figure in the history of Islam generally, and *tasawwuf* in particular. Some scholars regard him as the greatest of the saints,

whereas others consider him as the foremost heretic. Al Hallaj was charged and tried for heresy twice. Shagab was instrumental in his acquittal the first time, but on the second occasion, despite her best efforts, al Hallaj was mercilessly gibbeted and crucified. Shagab was a great believer and propagator of Hallaj's *barakas* and supported his cause and standpoint in every possible way.

Some of the sufi institutions that benefited from the contributions of the *aminat* were Zawia al Durrani (Mecca, 89 A.H.), Al Khatun (Mecca, 577 A.H.), Madrasa Bint al Tajr (Al Drabiya, 619 A.H.), Zavia Um Anuk (Cairo, 749 A.H.), and Takiya bib Nazan (Kalat, 791 A.H.). *Aminat* were also quite active from 968 to 1418 during the Moorish period of Spanish history; most prominent among these *aminat* were Rabia bint Daud and Fatima Um Abdullah. Meanwhile, from the South Asian ruling class, Sultana Begum (*Khiliis*), Razia Sultana (*Slaves*), and Gulbadan Begum and Noor Jehan (*Mughals*) provided generous support to Sufis from 13th century to the 16th century.

The fifth and last group of women who contributed to the evolution of *tasawwuf* and validation of anomalous experiences were the *sadiqat*, or the "friends." These women were the mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters of the shiekhs. They trained and supported the men of their families in the sufi quest. The saintly mothers of Sheikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis, Khawia Baqi Billah, Baba Farid Ad-Din, Nizam ad-Din, and Mian Mir played an important role in making their sons great Sufis. Mian Mir's mother, Fatima, was a Sufi of the *Madhawi Silsila*. She guarded his nightly vigils and prayers and taught him meditation exercises. Baqi Billah's mother, Qarsoom Bibi, was a Naqshbandi Sufi and the guiding light for her son (she accompanied him on his sufi missions from Kabul to Kashmir, to Transoxiana and Delhi). She prayed for his mystical illumination and coached him in his mystical searches. The mother of Baba Fareed Ganj Shakar and the mother of Shiekh Abdul Qadir Gilant both contributed to the spiritual formation of these great shiekhs. Many other Sufis admitted that they received not only their first religious instructions but also their preliminary training in the mystical paths from their mothers. Some of the *sadiqat* reached stages of illumination higher than those of their sons.

In addition to having worthy mothers, some of the sheikhs also had highly illuminated wives. Jalal-ud-Din Rumi's wife, Khira Khatoon, was endowed with unusual spiritual faculties and was a tremendous help to

her husband. Along with her daughter and daughter-in-law, she is responsible for spreading Rumi's ideas and the esoteric philosophy propagated by the *Mevlevi Silsila*.

In the formative period of *tasawwuf*, the most impressive figure among the sufi spouses was no doubt Ahmed Khidriya's wife. She consorted with the great sheikhs of her time and seemed to have guided her husband in religious and esoteric methods. A similar service of coaching and training was performed by Maryam for her husband Ibn Arabi, who referred to his spouse as "my saintly wife" in his *Futuhat al makkiya* (Ibn Arabi, 1786). Both Rabia, the Syrian wife of sheikh Hawari, and the wife of Al-Qushayri were noted for their constantly progressive mystical states, piety, and learnedness. They were often consulted by their husbands on various controversial issues in *tasawwuf*.

Bibi Jamal Khatoon, the younger sister of Mian Mir, was called the Rabia of her time. She led a devoted life to prayer, meditation, and difficult ascetic exercises. Mian Mir frequently referred to Bibi Jamal's exercises when teaching his disciples. Khawja Khawand's sister also reputedly provided guidance to her brother. They are, of course, just a few of the many women who were instrumental in cultivating *tasawwuf* and validating the *barakas*.

All five groups are representative of the constructive roles women played in the formation and subsequent growth of *tasawwuf* from its early formative stages in the eighth century to its fully evolved institutional *silsilas* in the 19th century. By virtue of being diversely and distinctively active in the transmission and propagation of *tasawwuf*, these women energetically nurtured and nourished the related *barakas* and *karamats*. This definitely supported and helped in determining and establishing the continued sociocultural legitimacy and validity of *barakas* in the Muslim world.

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DISCUSSION

ZINGRONE: I have not done a lot of reading in the history of Western religion, but there are also these categories of women--visionaries, patronesses, and so on. When general histories of specific religious belief systems, like Catholicism, Methodism, or whatever are written, women are typically left out of the narrative. There is no attempt to integrate them into the general history. And I was wondering if that is not the case in the history of Sufism?

KHILJI: This is a very interesting point, because all of the books that I have quoted are written by male historians and philosophers, such as Ibn Arabi, Bayat, and Faridad-Din-Attar. The tradition seems to be different. Since the advent of Islam, women have played a main role as educators, and the main body of text that we get and that we regard as transmitted science is passed on by Aisha, who is the wife of Mohammed, and she is the only source for that text.

BLACKMORE: I get the impression in Western mysticism, and I wonder if it's so here as well, that the kinds of psychic experiences that women and men have are the same and are treated as the same. This, in view of what we have been talking about, seems rather odd if they think and work in different ways. Is that so? I'm not just asking the question whether it is the same in Sufism, that they would be having exactly the same kinds of psychic experiences and the same progression of experiences. You talked about the levels of mystical states that are achieved. Is it meant to be the same progression that women go through?

KHILJI: Certainly. In the *tasawwuf*, they have to go through similar progressions. Training can vary from one sufi order to another, but it would be the same for all the initiates. Except, as I mentioned, that all the *barakas* that have been ascribed to women are more loving and integrative (*Jamali*) in nature--more holistic; whereas some of the *barakas* that were ascribed to men were more aggressive (*Jiladi*)--or more competitive. But the training discipline was always the same. The results may be different.

BLACKMORE: Do you think that could at all be because the women are meant to be supporting the men, and that is really the important thing? Do you think naturally there is any difference and it's all glossed over by the way it's treated, in the way women are rather supportive of their sons and fathers and so on? Or do you think it is because once you get that far along the path, the differences in gender simply fall away and one is tapping something that is the same?

KHILJI: The genders, once a certain stage is reached, stop existing. I want to emphasize once more that the *tasawwuf* originates from the *Koran*, and in the *Koran* there is no gender difference for piety. In all the verses, men and women are treated equally regarding *Koranic* injunctions. So, following in the same tradition, you really don't get gender differences in *tasawwuf*.

BLACKMORE: Thank you.

LUKE: I was just curious to know, you have to forgive my pronunciation, if the *sheikhat* participated in the normal sort of social roles of women at that time in Islam? Or if they were sort of liberated from that as mediums were in early Western culture?

KHILJI: It was all very individualistic. Later on we characterized them as *sheikhat*, or grouped them based on their contribution, but the roles were all very individualistic. Some had social roles, whereas others decided not to participate in the social world. But indirectly a lot of social implications were related to their activities that somehow contributed to the society.

LUKE: I meant sort of specifically like marriage and child bearing.

KHILJI: That's what I'm saying: Some were married and had children, whereas others decided not to. So there were no hard and fast rules, as such, for them.

ALVARADO: I am interested in the contrast between the tradition you were describing and the Western Catholic tradition. It seems to me

in the Catholic tradition we have this idea that even within the religion itself, the church, these things have to be investigated and validated. You see this in the process of beatification and canonization. Is it right to say that in the tradition you are describing this does not happen? That the transmitted sciences by their very nature do not do research as we understand it? You do not try to validate it? And how would you relate that in terms of gender categories?

KHILJI: O.K. Let me state the sufi belief is that transmitted sciences cannot be validated by intellectual sciences. So that really puts an end to using any prevalent scientific methodology to ascertain the validity. But on the same hand, the *murshid* who has initiated one into a certain *silsila* is an authority on those *barakas* and is supposed to validate or invalidate that particular *baraka* or authenticate it for you. Likewise, *murshids* may conduct all the tests at the time of initiation. It is a long process when you take the road to becoming a Sufi. The first five years you may be asked just to boil white rice, and that really does not make sense to many people at this time. But that is to get you focused and concentrated in a special act and to protect you from outside noises or whatever. So they have their own techniques and practices to authenticate the phenomenon that is occurring. It is a much more complicated process than what I have presented here. *Tasawwuf* is very complicated, and to understand at what stage you are at, Sufis use their own terminology; and only the initiated ones can understand that terminology. If you are outside that order, you are totally lost. It happened with Hallaj as well as Qurat-ul Ain Tahira, a *sheikhat*. Both were crucified because they used certain terminology in public; they were charged with heresy, and were thus crucified.

ALVARADO: Another point is closely related to what Susan was saying about the differences between male and female. In Western tradition, I'm not sure if the phenomena themselves are different, but the social norms are different for male and female mystics in the sense of how much access, how much interaction they have with society. For example, in Spain we can take the case of Teresa de Jesus. When you compare her with Pedro de Alcantara, Pedro traveled all through Spain and had the opportunity to reach thousands of people, to preach, to be in the public domain. Teresa was always in the convent. She only went out for specific medical reasons, whatever. She was an administrator there. She was very much constrained, as was the female world in Spain at that

time. So, I think their social goals are really very different because of the constraints of the time. Can you find something similar in the reading you have done?

KHILJI: Not in the case of the *sheikhat* because, to take Rabia as an example, she was born in Iran and ended up in Baghdad. She traveled some without chaperones. Nafisa was born in Persia; she traveled extensively, lecturing and touring; and she died in Egypt. Sufi women were more liberated in that sense. *Sheikhat* traveled around and propagated what they really believed in.

BISCHOF: I would like to know a bit more about the function of the *barakas*, of the psychic experiences. You say the miracles are considered to be by-products of religious development like the *siddhis* in India. And I would like to know a bit more about the question of the "utility" of psychic phenomena.

KHILJI: Psychic phenomena have their social implications for the society. They are a by-product in the sense that they are not central to human development or the path that is traversed at that time. Psychic phenomena are not at all relevant to the unification with God. But while you are in that state of mind, many veils are taken away or are parted from you and you get an insight into the process that other people do not get. That is what the psychic powers are, and you may use the powers. Now, how you use them is important. For Sufis that is why it is really important to have a *murshid*, for *murshids* are the ones who provide the guidelines. *Barakas* appear in the initial stages; psychic powers are not to be stressed at all, and you are to divert your attention from them. Otherwise, you will get more habituated to them and will become more commercialized, and you will use them for your own fame. Rather than doing that, you have to use them only for the good and for the benefit of the community and the society. The Powers had been used, as I mentioned earlier, in the multiplication of food. In certain communities where they were hungry, they would multiply bread loaves and make 20 loaves out of 2. I don't know how they did it, but it provided food for that community; or there were healing instances, which are more common. They were able to perform those functions; they have positive social implications for the society. These *barakas* later on were used for spreading Islam in South Asia. In contrast to what everyone believes, Islam did not come by the sword to South Asia; what happened was that

a large population of South Asia was converted to Islam through Sufis and the benefits and positive effects of their *barakas*.

BISCHOF: But these faculties were never developed in order to have some utility, I suppose, like here in the West, some people strive to acquire them, to be able to do this or that?

KHILJI: No, they are not for themselves. They are by-products of another process, and the goal is unification with God. So they themselves are not developed for the purpose of their utility, as such. They don't have that central role.

BISCHOF: Thank you.

SCHLITZ: Have there been any attempts to document some of these more remarkable aspects of the experience, like the multiplication of bread?

KHILJI: You find them in all the sufi treatises. These instances are mentioned again and again and are referred to by all the Sufis. The originals in Persian or Arabic manuscripts have documented most of these cases. Thanks to the Parapsychology Foundation, which has opened another venue for me, right after this conference, I am going to the British Museum Library to look into a couple of manuscripts that document the *barakas* to look into the details.

SCHLITZ: How about in the contemporary period?

KHILJI: In the contemporary period they are doing some work on it, and we will get to the contemporary scenario in the position paper.

SCHLITZ: Oh, O.K., we'll wait then.

MICHELS: Using the example of the amount of multiplication of bread, according to classical Catholic religion, only Jesus could do that. I don't think he could, but nevertheless it is a belief. Is this multiplication of bread, in these cases, the same as in the Catholic religion? Is it only something you have to believe? Or is there any proof of some replication in modern times of corresponding feats?

KHILJI: I have personally not looked into it. I believe multiplication of food may not be happening at this point. Now there is a more condensed list of *barakas*. The belief, I don't know how you would define belief, but for Sufis faith (*iman*) is the way of living. It is their philosophy of life, so it is not apart and separate from; it is within; it is ingrained in the system, which could be the reason why it was never challenged, as such. Believers do not develop skeptical attitudes. Even

now, there is no movement looking at transmitted sciences through the intellectual sciences.

MICHELS: Thank you.

SCHLITZ: I just find that fascinating, because it is a total inversion of our process, and so there's the dominance of the transmitted science over the intellectual. Given the culture change that is happening globally where Western society is permeating all aspects of the globe, is there any power change taking place with the intellectual becoming more dominant, or challenging transmitted knowledge?

KHILJI: No, not really. Not really. Not with the categories as I have defined them in the introductory paragraph.

HEINZE: Can you please put the activities of the Sufi into the context of the larger Muslim society? Or, in other words, what is the attitude of political authorities towards sufi activities?

KHILJI: It has been mixed in different time periods and regimes. But in general, because of their piety, they are looked upon as valuable members of the community who can impart esoteric knowledge of the discipline. So they always play an important role in Muslim society.

HEINZE: So the government doesn't feel politically threatened by these activities?

KHILJI: No, not really.

HEINZE: To be concrete, we have the Sunnites and the Shiites in Islam, and the Sufi are outside of both these schools.

KHILJI: In fact, there are Sunnite Sufis as well as Shiite Sufis.

HEINZE: Really?

KHILJI: Yes.

HEINZE: If we take the situation in Iran, for example, aren't some Sufis persecuted in Iran?

KHILJI: I have not heard of Sufis in particular, not really.

HEINZE: I read it in the papers ...

KHILJI: Not really; I have not, except for the Hallaj Suharwardu Maqtod's case. I haven't come across many. Especially, I haven't come across any lately. It could be because Sufis in general don't go around using the title of Sufi. They would be within the community and you would not really know them as Sufis, and they would not claim the title of Sufis. But people would call them Sufis because of their contributions or their adherence to a certain order.

HEINZE: I heard that some ayatollahs were not too happy about sufi activities because they claim to be in direct contact with God.

KHILJI: If that ever was and is the case (and I haven't come across any documented cases), then that would be a "conservative view," or a tunnel perception of Islam, you could say. In general, there was no movement against Sufism. There's no segregation between church and state in Islam. Therefore the people who are elected are always careful of being labeled as heretics or fundamentalists (narrow definition) in making any controversial statements.

BLACKMORE: From the point of view of parapsychology, there are important claims being made here, as there are in very many religions of things that are ostensibly paranormal, and I don't know what attitude to take and how to set about research on this kind of thing. There are at least two possible ways of looking at it. One, that as people progress along this path, there are changes that take place in them that genuinely bring about paranormal phenomena, and the only reason we don't have access to them is because we don't have these kinds of people around or we have not trained ourselves. The other possibility is, among many others, that actually what is happening is that the changes that take place along that path lead to different ways of seeing the world. Experiences are then described in ways that sound paranormal but actually, in a physical sense—in the sense of our Western science—they are not really paranormal at all. I think in Buddhism that interpretation is quite possible. All of the *siddhis*, things like levitation, becoming invisible, and such things can be interpreted in terms of inner change rather than anything externally observable. I don't know whether this is so in the sufi case. I would like to know. But in the context of our discussions here, I wonder whether we learned anything or got any new ideas about methods to approach this? It seems to me that what we have been calling the male stereotypical view would be to go in there, as indeed the early meditation researchers did, and say, "Wow, there are these gurus sitting in their caves, put on the EEG, stick their feet in boiling water, cold water, ice water, measure their habituation response to loud noises in their ears." Or are we able to say something more about an alternative way of going about it that might be to try from the outside to understand the path that people take and what is done to them or to take it ourselves from the inside and to use our own training as part of the inspiration for the research that we do?

KHILJI: It's strictly up to you really, what methodology you would like to employ if you want to do any research. But my stand is that I wanted to present another perspective about how things are in other parts of the world and how they are perceived in other cultures, an entirely different attitude.

BLACKMORE: But you are in a position not necessarily to take on the Western approach, but actually to start doing something different. I wondered what that might be or whether this meeting has given you any ideas?

HEINZE: Can I answer?

KHILJI: Please.

HEINZE: I lived in Asia a couple of years and tried to tackle this problem. The first insight I got is that our Western techniques are very coarse, almost barbaric. It took these mystics years, centuries maybe, to develop the sensitivities to perform these feats. If we want to develop similar techniques it may take us a similar amount of time.

KHILJI: Sensitivity.

HEINZE: Yes, the sensitivity for what actually is going on. This is a dimension I started to talk about yesterday. We have to add dimensions to our techniques. With EEG and whatever, lie detector tests, skin resistance, you don't get very far. These tools are extremely coarse. I will leave it at that and will come back to it later in my paper. We have to develop the techniques first; we do not have them yet.

BLACKMORE: I wanted to take up your point where you said "perform these feats." I think someone who has trained for 20, 30, 40 years is not going to sit around and perform feats at all, are they? But this is what I wonder, the conflict between the idea of there being feats to perform. And in what I see as the mystical path, you don't actually care about performing feats at all.

HEINZE: Yes certainly, and I tell you how I went about it. I lived with these people at least for a couple of months, preferably some years, before I even mentioned that I would like to write a book about them. They certainly would not perform like a circus horse in front of me. So I waited until the occasion arose, where they would perform these feats naturally. I asked them for permission to be present, and they had to ask whatever spirits or divinities there were, within the framework of Taoism and Buddhism. I could put my tape recorder on the altar because the spirit had given me permission to tape record. I recorded the voice of

the spirit that came through the mouth of the medium and then her natural voice, I gave the tape to the Linguistics Department of the University of California in Berkeley and asked "What can you do with it?" You can draw a certain voice profile. Of course, the sounds were produced by the same throat, by the same vocal cords. They could not say it was a distinctly different voice. But if you have impersonators, like Rich Little in America, who is impersonating personalities, speaking with different voices, the profile of his voice would still be his own. What the man who ran this voice profile test told me was that there were two different voice profiles. An impersonator cannot be so consistent. The two voices of the spirit voice and the natural voice of the medium were consistent in themselves over a long period of time. It was definitely a different presence, a spirit voice maybe; this is what I am talking about. These things you can prove. I, for example, saw some *barakas*. I don't know if you are familiar with them. They are practicing physical exercises like Tai Chi. With it they perform extraordinary feats, jumping very high in the air and also drawing an invisible line through the room. They would send some person out and draw an invisible line. The other person is called back and cannot cross the invisible line. These mental powers are developed to a very high perfection. Only through prolonged observation can you establish records of when they were performed and under which conditions. It requires a high mental discipline. For example, in Buddhism, the *Abhidhamma* lists 108 different states of consciousness, with distinguishable qualities. If you use our Western techniques, you cannot possibly measure these subtle but clearly different qualities. You only can describe a property as you perceive it. We have to develop new techniques.

KHILJI: Thank you.

BISCHOF: Could you say something about if and how what you said applies to Sufism in the Soviet Union?

KHILJI: I must, at this point, admit my ignorance to some extent in that area. I have no information about the current scenario. One of the reasons is that most of the manuscripts that are coming out are in old Tajik, and we don't have many people who can read and translate them. But, Samarkand and Bukhara were two sufi centers in the past, and Jalal ad-Din Rumi and all the other sheikhs had gone there for training. So all we get to know or all the information that we have is through the

secondary sources in Arabic or Persian, but we don't have any information in the original language, which does constitute a problem.

BISCHOF: I know that these parts were centers of Sufis in earlier times, but I would be most interested in the situation today because you said that these faculties were not challenged in Islam. But in the Soviet Union, the situation might be different because of the clash between Islamic attitudes and attitudes of Marxism and Leninism.

KHILJI: Then we are talking about two different things. I mean, one is government policy and one is within Islamic culture.

BISCHOF: I mean, how does the Islamic culture react ...

KHILJI: The Islamic culture in those areas still validates those phenomena. This is second-hand information about the centers in these areas. But how they are treated at the government level is an entirely different issue.

HEINZE: They were persecuted by the Marxist government, especially during the 30s. There were periods of freedom, but persecutions set in again, so they went underground. They are alive. They are very much alive. I was in Russia this year where they are just surfacing. The majority is coming up at a surprisingly fast pace. They had to go underground for quite a while, because they were officially persecuted.