

# THE WORLD CONGRESS ON SADR AL-DIN SHIRAZI (MULLA SADRA)

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The World Congress on Mulla Sadra was held May 22-27, 1999 in Tehran, Iran. Sponsored by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Congress drew more than three hundred local and international speakers who presented papers on various aspects of the philosophy of Āadr al-Dān Shār«zā (d. 1640), commonly known as Mulla Sadra. The scope of the Congress, however, was not confined to the philosophy of Mulla Sadra, as papers with other points of interest and focus were also presented. The Congress can be described as consisting of three concentric circles: the first, focusing exclusively on Sadrean studies; the second, ranging from Islamic philosophy to Sufism and kalām; and the third, extending to subjects as diverse as Muslims in China and Western philosophy. In addition to Islamic thought, there was also a separate section on Western philosophy, primarily focusing on analytic philosophy, in which many Western scholars and philosophers participated.

The Congress began with the reading of the message of Ayatollah Khamanei, the supreme leader of Iran. After the brief welcome speech of the director of the Congress, Ayatollah Muhammad Khamanei, the keynote address was delivered by the Iranian president Muhammad Khatami who talked about the importance of Islamic philosophy in general and Sadra's thought in particular for the future of Islamic world. The President Khatami's inspiring talk was the last speech to conclude the first opening day.

For the remainder of the Congress, each day, four simultaneous sessions were conducted in the Conference Hall of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). The Islamic philosophy section which was the main body of the Congress was divided into four major subdivisions: Transcendent Philosophy of Mulla Sadra, Comparative Philosophy, Islamic Philosophy, and Gnosis and Sufism. In this part of the Congress, the speakers focused on various aspects of the philosophy of Mulla Sadra ranging from his ontology and epistemology to his eschatology and commentaries on some Qur'anic verses. Mulla Sadra who is considered to be one of the most important figures of the post-Avicennan Islamic philosophy was both an original

thinker and a first-rate historian of philosophy. With his notion of the primacy of being (aĀklat al-wujöd) and his celebrated idea of substantial movement (al-Āarakat al-jawhariyyah), Sadra continues to draw the attention of scholars and philosophers from fields as diverse as theology and psychology. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the late Fazlur Rahman was the second person to write about Mulla Sadra after Seyyed Hossein Nasr had introduced him for the first time to the English speaking world -- two Muslim thinkers of the century with irreducibly different points of view on various issues from the Qur'an and the hadith to Sadra's philosophy. The papers presented on Sadra's thought thus proved to be a rare opportunity to analyze and discuss Sadra's philosophical ideas as well as to exchange various points of views on the meaning and relevance of Islamic philosophy for many current issues.

There were also a number of comparative studies that analyzed Sadra's thought in relation to some Eastern and Western philosophers. It is to be remarked that the scholars of Islamic and Western philosophy made really interesting comparisons between Sadra's thought and that of Benedict Spinoza, Saint Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Hediegger, Alfred N. Whitehead, and even Sigmund Freud and Jean Piaget. Not surprisingly, a number of studies were devoted to the comparison of Sadra with such Islamic thinkers as Ibn Sān«, Ibn al-ĀArabâ, Ibn Rushd, Ibn B«jjah, and Āamza Fansērâ. Since Sadra's philosophical work is a bold attempt to synthesize the earlier schools of Islamic thought, namely mashsh«â philosophy, the school of ishr«q and the school of Ibn al-ĀArabâ, these comparative studies provided a stimulating framework of discussion in which one can witness the continuity of Islamic philosophy. Accordingly, this was a unique opportunity to observe and appreciate the internal dynamics of Islamic thought that, as these comparative studies show, is richer than it is ordinarily thought to be.

Although Mulla Sadra and his philosophy was the main focus of these four sessions, there were other papers that covered various facets of Islamic intellectual tradition. These included a number of exclusive studies on Ibn Sān«, Ibn B«jjah, B«b« Afīal, atomism in early kal«m, and many other subjects. Also to be mentioned are the papers that would fall within the domain of Islamic culture and civilization such as Islamic arts and Muslims in China. Even though this wide range of topics might be criticized as a

divergence from the main agenda of the Congress, it provided the participants with a chance of coming to face with different aspects of Islamic thought and culture that they would not otherwise pay a particular attention to.

The Western philosophy section was divided into three parts: Issues in Western Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, and Logic, Language and Philosophy of Mind. Covering a wide area of Western philosophy as the titles suggest, these sessions were also held simultaneously in different conference rooms. As in the sections on Islamic philosophy, the speakers were composed of score of Western scholars and philosophers from different countries and nationalities of the world. In addition to presenting their work, many Western scholars had also a unique chance of exchanging ideas and points of view with Muslim scholars and scholars of Islamic studies.

Due to the considerable diversity of papers presented, the participants and the listeners were able to choose sessions that addressed their special interests and fields of concentration. In this sense, the name 'world congress' seems to be a well-chosen one considering the fact that nearly all the major scholars of Islamic studies were present in the Congress. Another important aspect of the Congress to be mentioned was precisely this, e.g., the ample chance of meeting scholars from different fields. During as well as outside the official program, scholars of diverse interests and nationalities were able to meet on various occasions such as the visit to the city of Shiraz, the hometown of Mulla Sadra. In this visit, the invitees were taken to the world-famous b«gh-i iram, Persapolis (takht-i jamshâd), madrasa-yi khan where Sadra taught, and the tombs of Sa'dâ and Â«fü, two of the greatest names of Persian-Islamic literature. Besides seeing the marvels of Islamic art and architecture in Shiraz, the invitees were also given several receptions one of which was in Tehran by Mrs. Mustafawi, the daughter of late Ayatollah Khomayni, whose warm welcome to the participants is to be remembered.

It is an undeniable fact that there is an opposite relationship between quality and quantity. When one goes up, the other goes down. This holds true for the otherwise quite successful Congress. The size of the Congress was seen by some, I think rightly, as too big to allow concentration and focus. And it is true that this congress was the largest conference ever held in the Islamic world on Islamic philosophy. As the participants presented their works with extremely diverse subjects and points of view, it was very hard to

pinpoint a common agenda or even a theme for the sessions held simultaneously. One could say that the disharmony of the papers that was an inevitable result of the huge size of the conference was the only major flaw of the Congress.

By way of conclusion, it would be, I think, a sober way of expressing the common feeling of every participant to say that the organization of the Congress was exceptionally satisfactory given the huge magnitude of the event. Although Dr. Ghulam Reza A'wânâ, the director of the Anjuman-i Aikmat wa Falsafa, is to be congratulated for his indefatigable effort and refreshing smile, all of those, both men and women, who managed the organization from translation and hotel arrangements to transportation and food deserve a warm welcome for their competence and dedication with which they handled this memorable conference.

NB: We were informed by the organization committee that the proceedings of the World Congress of Mulla Sadra will be published in the near future. This will certainly be an important contribution to the study of both Mulla Sadra and Islamic philosophy as these volumes reach the scholars throughout the world. Lastly, there is a quarterly journal, Kheradnameh-e Sadra, published by Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute (SIPRI) which was also responsible for the organization of the Congress. The journal is published in Persian with English summaries, and open to scholars working in the field of Islamic philosophy. For further information on the journal, the following address may be contacted:

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