

Book Review:

SANUSIYAH: A STUDY OF A REVIVALIST MOVEMENT IN ISLAM

By: Nicola A. Ziadeh. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958. Pages.
148.

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Islamic civilization is comprised of multidimensional geo-political, cultural and intellectual features. Its diversification is based on the acceptance of different elements of other contemporary cultures. The Islamic rule of unity of dogma and foundational principles and diversity in practical applications gives cohesion to Muslim society. The rule of *ijtihad* (personal reasoning) provides sustainable and theoretical basis to incorporate the intellectual and cultural elements of different civilizations. The fertility of Islamic civilization is based on this central point: acceptance of good and refutation of bad and evil. In the early history of Islam, Arab's encounter with Iranian, Greco Roman, Indian and North African civilizations produced a beautiful synthesis of diversity within unity. This interaction gave the rise to excellence, harmony and cohesion in all spheres of life. Thus, a productive civilization generated by the Islam in the early centuries of Arabian rule. In thirteenth century, Baghdad was sacked by Mongols but paradoxically it boosted the Islamic

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civilization and its different aspects because the collapse of Baghdad and domination of Mongols compelled the Muslim scholars to evaluate their values and ethics and to rethink about their weakness and flaws. This interaction was also a great blessing for Islamic civilization in the broader perspectives.

The Muslim civilization recently encountered with the European civilization after the industrial revolution in Europe and European domination on the Muslim lands. This is very complex phenomenon because of its multidimensional and pluralistic nature. Colonialism deprived Muslims from their three great empires: Ottoman, Safvid and Mughals. Moreover, the western domination was not a simple change of rule, but it replaced the whole institutional structure from education to government. Muslim scholars encountered with the new western concepts of democracy, nationalism, positivism etc. The effects and impacts of this interaction are of paramount importance. All things are in state of flux a complete shift of paradigm. From the time of colonialism to the date, Muslim scholars are busy to reconstruct their own distinctive alternatives. Many movements emerged for the reinterpretation of Islamic thought integrating them with the Quranic message and making them harmonious with the contemporary western world. The Pan-Islamism, the Wahhabism, the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, the Jammāt Islāmī of Pakistan and the Sanusiyyah in Libya and Sudan endeavoured to preserve their own identity and civilization. Their interpretations are different but all are based on the reaction and reinterpretation of

Islamic concepts with juxtaposition of modern western concepts .

The Sanusiyyah movement is considered one of the most influential movements in Cyrenaica who responded actively the challenges of his time. The Grand Sanusi Muhammad bin'Ali was an expert of Islamic sciences and religious leader of nineteenth-century North Africa. He formulated a reform programme to address contemporary issues. His message was a combination of divergent elements of Islamic sciences. Emphasizing on the need of *ijtihad*, he established a revival movement on the foundation of Islamic Shari'ah integrating it with other branches of Islamic sciences. Contrary to the Wahhabism, Grand Sannusi and his predecessors accommodated Sufism and tried to fuse Sufi piety and passion into the exoteric Islamic law. They endeavoured to safeguard Islamic values and tradition from the western ideas and their imitation without understanding their spirit. The Sanusiyyah focused their attention on the education of Bedouins and nomadic tribes of Cyrenaica what today is Libya. They observed the decadence of Islamic teaching and understanding in the nomadic society of Sahara and Cyrenaica. Therefore, they initially conducted a very vigorous campaign to educate them the traditional Islamic education and to win them back to the teaching of classical Islam based on Quran and Sunnah.

The Sanusiyyah played an important role in the resistance of the French in the Sahara and the Italian in Cyrenaica. This Order was considered by the colonialists as a grave opponent to their

domination and a great hindrance to way of progress and reason. However, the movement remained very popular among the masses. The adherents of this movement took over the governing authority after Ottoman withdrawal from the region. After the colonial domination, the Sanusiyyah established Libyan Federal State under the grandson of the Grand Sanusi, King Idris. This was the climax of Sanusiyyah episode. King Idris could not maintain his rule and was overthrown by the Muammar Qaddafi in 1969.

Several valuable researches have been conducted by the eminent scholars on the significance of this movement, its contribution and role. The Sanusi of Cyrenica (Oxford: 1949) by the renowned anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard, is considered the most impotent work in this subject. However most of its parts are devoted to political and anti-colonial aspects of the movement. There was a great need to preserve and elaborate the intellectual legacy of the movement. The above mentioned book of Dr. Nicola A. Ziadeh endeavours to fulfil this vacuum. Dr. Ziadeh was a professor of history in University of Beirut. He spent a period of time in the early fifties in Cyrenaica as an employer in the Department of Education. Therefore, he got a chance to observe the impact of this movement and collect the elementary and basic data for his research. He consulted almost all important basic western sources of the subject as he indicated in the bibliography at the end of the book.

This book is divided into four chapters with an introduction and an epilogue. First chapter describes geo-political and

religious conditions of Libya in the nineteenth century. The author elaborated upon the relation of the Wilaya of Tripoli and its relation with the Ottomans Empire in historical perspective. The remaining three chapters are focused on the core subject matter of the book. The second chapter consists of the introduction of the Sanusi leaders. The author briefly described the family background of Grand Sanusi Muhammad Ibn'Ali (1787-1859) his early education, his travelling from Fez to Makka al-Mukarramah for learning, and his activities during his life. After his death, Sayyad al-Mahdi succeeded his father and worked as a head of organization from 1859 till 1902. Ziadeh described the achievements and activities of Sayyed Mahdi. He illustrated that Sayyad Sharif organised this movement after the death of al-Mahdi in 1902. He also the nature of their relation with the Ottoman rulers and Turkish society. Ziadeh briefly described the personality of the king of Libya Sayyad Muhammad Idris, son of Sayyad Sharif.

Ziadeh described in third chapter the philosophy of Sanusi thinkers. He elaborated upon the basic ideas of Grand al-Sanusi in the light of his books and how skilfully al-Sanusi integrated different approaches into one synthesis. Ziadeh asserted that Grand Sanusi amalgamated Sufi approach and anti-Sufi approach of renowned theologian Ibn Taymiyyah. Ziadeh threw the light on the Sanusi's concept of Ijtihad in the light of his book Iqaz. He also explained the process of carrying out this message by his successors. The forth chapter deals with the organisation of

Sanusi movement. He explained the significance of Zawiyah (Sufi training lodge) and its role with the reference of Sanusiyyah. The author claims that this movement grew in a political and administrative vacuum and Sanusi tried to fill this gap by spreading the awareness in the structure of nomadic tribes but this movement could not fill the gap completely. The author writes: "Thus it did not come into a complete vacuum".p. 121)

The arrangement of this book is very interesting and the author consulted the basic sources for the subject matter but he did not carefully consult the available literature produced by the religious thinkers of this movement. The use of this material may increase the value and worth of this book. Thematically, this book would be considered more important if the author paid more attention on the analysis of rise and fall of Sanusiyyah Order and how Arab nationalism effected the movement and way latter leaders of this movement could not respond the challenges of contemporary modern world. This is the weak point of this book which can be improved by the addition of critical analysis of this movement. However, overall this research is a good attempt to understand the Sanusiyyah movement and its philosophy and contribution in the late nineteenth and first half of twentieth centuries in Libya. The weakness of Ziadeh's book was covered by Vikor's *Sufi and Scholar on the Desert Edge*. Vikor describes the writings of al-Sanusi, showing the link between them in historical context (London: C. Hurst Co. Ltd, 1995) pp. 218-240) Furthermore, Vikor goes even deeper by juxtaposing the opposing

ideas of the time towards the jihad as well(p. 241).(Within this argument, he makes a statement that the Sufis have changed throughout time, bringing an example of al-Sanusi and al-Tijai, and interpreting it as a change in Sanusi movement(p. 241) Vikor's other book, Sources for Sanusi Studies speaks for itselfthe work is a presentation of research and great amount of historical and biographical detail, which is why it is intended to be used as a necessary companion to the previous historical work(p. v) The value of Vikor's work on Sanusi is great. However, the importance of Ziadeh's work cannot be neglected because of his pre-eminence in the field.

