



The Subtleties of the Inimitable Mulla Nasrudin

Idries Shah

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Today we find him in a high-level physics report, illustrating phenomena that can't be described in ordinary technical terms. He appears in psychology textbooks, illuminating the workings of the mind in a way no straightforward explanation can.

In three definitive volumes (The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin, The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin and The Subtleties of the Inimitable Mulla Nasrudin) Idries Shah takes us to the very heart of this mysterious mentor, the Mulla Nasrudin. Skillful contemporary retellings of hundreds of collected stories and sayings bring the unmistakable - often backhanded - wisdom, wit and charm of the timeless jokester to life.

The Mulla and his stories appear in literature and oral traditions from the Middle East to Greece, Russia, France - even China. Many nations claim Nasrudin as a native son, but nobody really knows who he was or where he came from.

According to a legend dating from at least the 13th century, Nasrudin was snatched as a schoolboy from the clutches of the "Old Villain" - the crude system of thought that ensnares man - to carry through the ages the message of how to escape. He was chosen because he could make people laugh, and humor has a way of slipping through the cracks of the most rigid thinking habits.

Acclaimed as humorous masterpieces, as collections of the finest jokes, as priceless gift books, and for hundreds "enchanted tales", this folklore figure's antics have also been divined as "mirroring the antics of the mind". The jokes are, as Idries Shah notes, "perfectly designed models for isolating and holding distortions of the mind which so often pass for reasonable behavior". Therefore they have a double use: when the jokes have been enjoyed, their psychological significance starts to sink in.

In fact, for many centuries they have been studied in Sufi circles for their hidden wisdom. They are used as teaching exercises, in part to momentarily "freeze" situations in which states of mind can be recognized. The key to the philosophic significance of the Nasrudin jokes is given in Idries Shah's book "The Sufis" and a complete system of mystical training based upon them was described in the Hibbert Journal.

In these delightful volumes, Shah not only gives the Mulla a proper vehicle for our times, he proves that the centuries-old stories and quips of Nasrudin are still some of the funniest jokes in the world.

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