

# The Shah Movement

Idries Shah and Omar Ali-Shah

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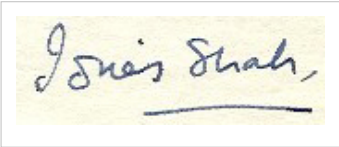
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# Idries Shah

Idries Shah	
	
<b>Born</b>	Simla, India
<b>Died</b>	23 November 1996London, UK
<b>Occupation</b>	Writer, publisher
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Afghan, Indian, Scottish
<b>Subjects</b>	Sufism, psychology
<b>Notable work(s)</b>	<p>The Sufis</p> <p>The Subtleties of the Inimitable Mulla Nasrudin</p> <p>The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin</p> <p>Thinkers of the East</p> <p>Learning How to Learn</p> <p>The Way of the Sufi</p> <p>Reflections</p> <p>Kara Kush</p>
<b>Notable award(s)</b>	<p>Outstanding Book of the Year (BBC "The Critics"), twice;</p> <p>six first prizes at the UNESCO World Book Year in 1973</p>
<b>Children</b>	Saira Shah, Tahir Shah, Safia Shah
<b>Signature</b>	
[1]	

**Idries Shah** (16 June, 1924 – 23 November, 1996) (Persian: هاش سی‌یردا), also known as **Idris Shah**, né **Sayed Idries el-Hashimi** (Arabic: سید ادریس هاشمی), was an author and teacher in the Sufi tradition who wrote over three dozen

critically acclaimed books on topics ranging from psychology and spirituality to travelogues and culture studies.

Born in India, the descendant of a family of Afghan nobles, Shah grew up mainly in England. His early writings centred on magic and witchcraft. In 1960 he established a publishing house, Octagon Press, producing translations of Sufi classics as well as titles of his own. His most seminal work was *The Sufis*, which appeared in 1964 and was well received internationally. In 1965, Shah founded the Institute for Cultural Research, a London-based educational charity devoted to the study of human behaviour and culture. A similar organisation, the Institute for the Study of Human Knowledge (ISHK), exists in the United States, under the directorship of Stanford University psychology professor Robert Ornstein, whom Shah appointed as his deputy in the U.S.

In his writings, Shah presented Sufism as a universal form of wisdom that predated Islam. Emphasizing that Sufism was not static but always adapted itself to the current time, place and people, he framed his teaching in Western psychological terms. Shah made extensive use of traditional teaching stories and parables, texts that contained multiple layers of meaning designed to trigger insight and self-reflection in the reader. He is perhaps best known for his collections of humorous Mulla Nasrudin stories.

Shah was at times criticised by orientalists who questioned his credentials and background. His role in the controversy surrounding a new translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, published by his friend Robert Graves and his older brother Omar Ali-Shah, came in for particular scrutiny. However, he also had many notable defenders, chief among them the novelist Doris Lessing. Shah came to be recognised as a spokesman for Sufism in the West and lectured as a visiting professor at a number of Western universities. His works have played a significant part in presenting Sufism as a secular, individualistic form of spiritual wisdom.

## Life

### Family and early years

Idries Shah was born in Simla, India, to an Afghan-Indian father, Sirdar Iqbal Ali Shah, a writer and diplomat, and a Scottish mother, Saira Elizabeth Luiza Shah. His family on the paternal side were Musavi Sayeds. Their ancestral home was near the Paghman Gardens of Kabul.<sup>[2]</sup> His paternal grandfather, Sayed Amjad Ali Shah, was the *nawab* of Sardhana in the North-Indian state of Uttar Pradesh,<sup>[3]</sup> an hereditary title the family had gained thanks to the services an earlier ancestor, Jan-Fishan Khan, had rendered to the British.<sup>[4] [5]</sup>

Shah mainly grew up in the vicinity of London.<sup>[6]</sup> After his family moved from London to Oxford in 1940 to escape German bombing, he spent two or three years at the City of Oxford High School.<sup>[5]</sup> In 1945, he accompanied his father to Uruguay as secretary to his father's *halal* meat mission.<sup>[5] [6]</sup> He returned to England in October 1946, following allegations of improper business dealings.<sup>[5] [6]</sup>

Shah published his first book *Oriental Magic* in 1956. He followed this in 1957 with *The Secret Lore of Magic: Book of the Sorcerers* and the travelogue *Destination Mecca*. Shah married Cynthia (Kashfi) Kabraji in 1958; they had a daughter, Saira, in 1964, followed by twins – a son, Tahir, and another daughter, Safia – in 1966.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Friendship with Gerald Gardner and Robert Graves

Towards the end of the 1950s, Shah established contact with Wiccan circles in London and then acted as a secretary and companion to Gerald Gardner, the founder of modern Wicca, for some time.<sup>[5] [8]</sup> In 1960, Shah founded his publishing house, Octagon Press; one of its first titles was Gardner's biography – titled *Gerald Gardner, Witch*, the book was attributed to one of Gardner's followers, Jack L. Bracelin, but had in fact been written by Shah.<sup>[8] [9]</sup>

In January 1961, while on a trip to Mallorca with Gardner, Shah met the English poet Robert Graves.<sup>[10]</sup> Shah wrote to Graves from his pension in Palma, requesting an opportunity of "saluting you one day before very long".<sup>[10]</sup> He added that he was currently researching ecstatic religions, and that this included experiments with hallucinogenic mushrooms, a topic that had been of interest to Graves for some time.<sup>[10]</sup> Graves and Shah soon became close friends and confidants.<sup>[10]</sup> Graves took a supportive interest in Shah's writing career and encouraged him to publish an authoritative treatment of Sufism for a Western readership, along with the practical means for its study; this was to become *The Sufis*.<sup>[10]</sup> Shah managed to obtain a substantial advance on the book, resolving temporary pecuniary difficulties.<sup>[10]</sup>

In 1964, *The Sufis* appeared,<sup>[6]</sup> published by Doubleday, with a long introduction by Robert Graves.<sup>[11]</sup> The book chronicles the impact of Sufism on the development of Western civilisation and traditions from the seventh century onward through the work of such figures as Roger Bacon, John of the Cross, Raymond Lully, Chaucer and others, and has become a classic.<sup>[12]</sup> Like Shah's other books on the topic, *The Sufis* was conspicuous for avoiding terminology that might have identified his interpretation of Sufism with traditional Islam.<sup>[13]</sup> The book also employed a deliberately "scattered" style; Shah wrote to Graves that its aim was to "decondition people, and prevent their reconditioning"; had it been otherwise, he might have used a more conventional form of exposition.<sup>[14]</sup> The book sold poorly at first, and Shah invested a considerable amount of his own money in advertising it.<sup>[14]</sup> Graves told him not to worry; even though he had some misgivings about the writing, and was hurt that Shah had not allowed him to proofread it before publication, he said he was "so proud in having assisted in its publication", and assured Shah that it was "a marvellous book, and will be recognized as such before long. Leave it to find its own readers who will hear your voice spreading, not those envisaged by Doubleday."<sup>[15]</sup>

Graves' introduction, written with Shah's help, described Shah as being "in the senior male line of descent from the prophet Mohammed" and as having inherited "secret mysteries from the Caliphs, his ancestors. He is, in fact, a Grand Sheikh of the Sufi *Tariqa* ..."<sup>[16]</sup> Privately, however, writing to a friend, Graves confessed that this was "misleading: he is one of us, not a Moslem personage."<sup>[10]</sup> The Edinburgh scholar L. P. Elwell-Sutton, in a 1975 article on Shah, opined that Graves had been trying to "upgrade" Shah's "rather undistinguished lineage", and that the reference to Mohammed's senior male line of descent was a "rather unfortunate gaffe", as Mohammed's sons had all died in infancy.<sup>[17] [18]</sup> The introduction was dropped from later editions.

## John G. Bennett and the Gurdjieff connection

In June 1962, a couple of years prior to the publication of *The Sufis*, Shah had also established contact with members of the movement that had formed around the mystical teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky.<sup>[17] [19]</sup> A press article had appeared,<sup>[20]</sup> describing the author's visit to a secret monastery in Central Asia, where methods strikingly similar to Gurdjieff's methods were apparently being taught.<sup>[19]</sup> The otherwise unattested monastery had, it was implied, a representative in England.<sup>[5]</sup> Shah was introduced to John G. Bennett, a noted Gurdjieff student and founder of an "Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences" located at Coombe Springs, a 7-acre (28000 m<sup>2</sup>) estate in Kingston upon Thames, Surrey. Shah gave Bennett a "Declaration of the People of the Tradition" and authorised him to share this with other Gurdjieffians.<sup>[19]</sup> The document announced that there was now an opportunity for the transmission of "a secret, hidden, special, superior form of knowledge"; combined with the personal impression Bennett formed of Shah, it convinced Bennett that Shah was a genuine emissary of the "Sarmoung Monastery" in Afghanistan, whose teachings had inspired Gurdjieff.<sup>[19] [21]</sup>



Whose Beard? Nasrudin dreamt that he had Satan's beard in his hand. Tugging the hair he cried: "The pain you feel is nothing compared to that which you inflict on the mortals you lead astray." And he gave the beard such a tug that he woke up yelling in agony. Only then did he realise that the beard he held in his hand was his own.— Idries Shah, Idries (2003). *The World of Nasrudin*. London: Octagon Press. p. 438. ISBN 0-863040-86-1.

Wishing to support Shah's work, Bennett decided in 1965, after agonising for a long time and discussing the matter with the council and members of his Institute, to give the Coombe Springs property to Shah, who had insisted that any such gift must be made with no strings attached.<sup>[5]</sup> <sup>[19]</sup> Once the property was transferred to Shah, he banned Bennett's associates from visiting, and made Bennett himself feel unwelcome.<sup>[19]</sup> After a few months, Shah sold the plot – worth more than £100,000 – to a developer and used the proceeds to establish himself at Langton House in Langton Green, near Tunbridge Wells.<sup>[5]</sup> Along with the property, Bennett also handed the care of his body of pupils to Shah, comprising some 300 people.<sup>[19]</sup> Shah promised he would integrate all those who were suitable; about half of their number found a place in Shah's work.<sup>[19]</sup>

Some twenty years later, the Gurdjieffian author James Moore suggested that Bennett had been duped by Shah.<sup>[5]</sup> Bennett gave an account of the matter himself in his autobiography (1974); he said that Shah's behaviour after the transfer of the property was "hard to bear", but also insisted that Shah was a "man of exquisite manners and delicate sensibilities" and considered that Shah might have adopted his behaviour

deliberately, "to make sure that all bonds with Coombe Springs were severed".<sup>[19]</sup> He added that Langton Green was a far more suitable place for Shah's work than Coombe Springs could have been and said he felt no sadness that Coombe Springs lost its identity; he concluded his account of the matter by stating that he had "gained freedom" through his contact with Shah, and had learned "to love people whom [he] could not understand".<sup>[23]</sup>

## Sufi studies

In 1965, Shah founded the Society for Understanding Fundamental Ideas (SUFU), later renamed the Institute for Cultural Research (ICR) – an educational charity aimed at stimulating "study, debate, education and research into all aspects of human thought, behaviour and culture".<sup>[11]</sup> <sup>[24]</sup> <sup>[25]</sup> <sup>[26]</sup> He also established the Society for Sufi Studies (SSS).<sup>[27]</sup> Over the following years, Shah developed Octagon Press as a means of publishing and distributing reprints of translations of numerous Sufi classics.<sup>[28]</sup> In addition, he collected, translated and wrote thousands of Sufi tales, making these available to a Western audience through his books and lectures.<sup>[27]</sup> Several of Shah's books feature the Mulla Nasrudin character, sometimes with illustrations provided by Richard Williams. In Shah's interpretation, the Mulla Nasrudin stories, previously considered a folkloric part of Muslim cultures, were presented as Sufi parables.<sup>[29]</sup>

## Omar Khayyam controversy

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Shah came under attack over a controversy surrounding the 1967 publication of a new translation of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat, by Robert Graves and Shah's older brother, Omar Ali-Shah.<sup>[11]</sup> <sup>[30]</sup> The translation, which presented the Rubaiyat as a Sufic poem, was based on an annotated "crib", supposedly derived from a manuscript that had been in the Shah family's possession for 800 years.<sup>[31]</sup> L. P. Elwell-Sutton, an orientalist at Edinburgh University, and others who reviewed the book expressed their conviction that the story of the ancient manuscript was false.<sup>[30]</sup> <sup>[31]</sup>

Shah's father, the Sirdar Iqbal Ali Shah, was expected by Graves to present the original manuscript to clear the matter up, but he died in a car accident in Tangier in November 1969.<sup>[32]</sup> A year later, Graves asked Idries Shah to produce the manuscript, but Shah replied in a letter that doing so would prove nothing – the manuscript's authenticity could still be contested.<sup>[32]</sup> It was time, Shah wrote, "that we realised that the hyenas who are making so much noise are intent only on opposition, destructiveness and carrying on a campaign when, let's face it, nobody is really listening."<sup>[32]</sup> He added that his father had been so infuriated by those casting these aspersions that he refused to engage with them, and he felt his father's response had been correct.<sup>[32]</sup> Graves, noting that he was now widely perceived as having fallen prey to the Shah brothers' gross deception, and that this affected income from sales of his other historical writings, insisted that producing the manuscript had become "a matter of family honour".<sup>[32]</sup> He pressed Shah again, reminding him of previous promises to produce the manuscript if it were necessary.<sup>[32]</sup>

Shah never did produce the manuscript, leading Graves' nephew and biographer to muse that it was hard to believe – bearing in mind the Shah brothers' many obligations to Graves – that they would have withheld the manuscript if it had ever existed in the first place.<sup>[32]</sup> According to his widow writing many years later, Graves had "complete faith" in the authenticity of the manuscript because of his friendship with Shah, even though he never had a chance to view the text in person.<sup>[33]</sup> The scholarly consensus today is that the "Jan-Fishan Khan" manuscript was a hoax, and that the Graves/Shah translation was in fact based on a Victorian amateur scholar's analysis of the sources used by previous Rubaiyat translator Edward FitzGerald.<sup>[5] [30] [34] [35]</sup>

## Later years

Shah wrote around two dozen more books over the following decades, many of them drawing on classical Sufi sources.<sup>[5]</sup> Achieving a huge worldwide circulation,<sup>[24]</sup> his writings appealed primarily to an intellectually oriented Western audience.<sup>[13]</sup> By translating Sufi teachings into contemporary psychological language, he presented them in vernacular and hence accessible terms.<sup>[36]</sup> His folktales, illustrating Sufi wisdom through anecdote and example, proved particularly popular.<sup>[13] [24]</sup> Shah received and accepted invitations to lecture as a visiting professor at academic institutions including the University of California, the University of Geneva, the National University of La Plata and various English universities.<sup>[37] [38]</sup> Besides his literary and educational work, he found time to design an air ioniser and run a number of textile, ceramics and electronics companies.<sup>[39] [40]</sup> He also undertook several journeys to his ancestral Afghanistan and involved himself in setting up relief efforts there; he drew on these experiences later on in his novel *Kara Kush*.<sup>[11]</sup>

In late spring 1987, about a year after his final visit to Afghanistan, Shah suffered two successive and massive heart attacks.<sup>[26] [41]</sup> He was told that he had only eight per cent of his heart function left, and could not expect to survive.<sup>[26]</sup> Despite intermittent bouts of illness, he continued working and produced further books over the next nine years.<sup>[26] [41]</sup> Idries Shah died in London on November 23, 1996, at the age of 72. According to his obituary in *The Daily Telegraph*, Idries Shah was a collaborator with Mujahideen in the Afghan-Soviet war, a Director of Studies for the Institute for Cultural Research and a Governor of the Royal Humane Society and the Royal Hospital and Home for Incurables.<sup>[26]</sup> He was also a member of the Athenaeum Club.<sup>[5]</sup> At the time of his death, Shah's books had sold over 15 million copies in a dozen languages worldwide,<sup>[6]</sup> and had been reviewed in numerous international journals and newspapers.<sup>[42] [43]</sup>

## Teachings

### Sufism as a form of timeless wisdom

Shah presented Sufism as a form of timeless wisdom that predated Islam.<sup>[44]</sup> He emphasised that the nature of Sufism was alive, not static, and that it always adapted its visible manifestations to new times, places and people: "Sufi schools are like waves which break upon rocks: [they are] from the same sea, in different forms, for the same purpose," he wrote, quoting Ahmad al-Badawi.<sup>[27] [44]</sup> Shah was often dismissive of orientalist's descriptions of

Sufism, holding that academic or personal study of its historical forms and methods was not a sufficient basis for gaining a correct understanding of it.<sup>[44]</sup> In fact, an obsession with its traditional forms might actually become an obstacle: "Show a man too many camels' bones, or show them to him too often, and he will not be able to recognise a camel when he comes across a live one," is how he expressed this idea in one of his books.<sup>[44] [45]</sup>

Shah, like Inayat Khan, presented Sufism as a path that transcended individual religions, and adapted it to a Western audience.<sup>[28]</sup> Unlike Khan, however, he deemphasised religious or spiritual trappings and portrayed Sufism as a psychological technology, a method or science that could be used to achieve self-realisation.<sup>[28] [46]</sup> In doing so, his approach seemed to be especially addressed to followers of Gurdjieff, students of the Human Potential Movement, and intellectuals acquainted with modern psychology.<sup>[28]</sup> For example, he wrote, "Sufism ... states that man may become objective, and that objectivity enables the individual to grasp 'higher' facts. Man is therefore invited to push his evolution ahead towards what is sometimes called in Sufism 'real intellect'."<sup>[28]</sup> Shah taught that the human being could acquire new subtle sense organs in response to need:<sup>[27]</sup>

Sufis believe that, expressed in one way, humanity is evolving towards a certain destiny. We are all taking part in that evolution. Organs come into being as a result of the need for specific organs (Rumi). The human being's organism is producing a new complex of organs in response to such a need. In this age of transcending of time and space, the complex of organs is concerned with the transcending of time and space. What ordinary people regard as sporadic and occasional outbursts of telepathic or prophetic power are seen by the Sufi as nothing less than the first stirrings of these same organs. The difference between all evolution up to date and the present need for evolution is that for the past ten thousand years or so we have been given the possibility of a conscious evolution. So essential is this more rarefied evolution that our future depends upon it.

— Idries Shah, *The Sufis*<sup>[47]</sup>

Shah dismissed other Eastern and Western projections of Sufism as "watered down, generalised or partial"; he included in this not only Khan's version, but also the overtly Muslim forms of Sufism found in most Islamic countries.<sup>[28]</sup> The writings of Shah's associates implied that he was the "Grand Sheikh of the Sufis" – a position of authority undercut by the failure of any other Sufis to acknowledge its existence.<sup>[28]</sup>

Shah frequently characterised his own work as really only preliminary to actual Sufi study, in the same way that learning to read and write might be seen as preliminary to a study of literature: "Unless the psychology is correctly oriented, there is no spirituality, though there can be obsession and emotionality, often mistaken for it."<sup>[48] [49]</sup> "Anyone trying to graft spiritual practices upon an unregenerate personality," he argued, "will end up with an aberration."<sup>[48]</sup> For this reason, most of the work he produced from *The Sufis* onwards was psychological in nature, focused on attacking the *nafs-i-ammara*, the false self: "I have nothing to give you except the way to understand how to seek – but you think you can already do that."<sup>[48]</sup> Shah was frequently criticised for not mentioning God very much in his writings; his reply was that given man's present state, there would not be much point in talking about God.<sup>[48]</sup> He illustrated the problem in a parable in his book *Thinkers of the East*: "Finding I could speak the language of ants, I approached one and inquired, 'What is God like? Does he resemble the ant?' He answered, 'God! No indeed – we have only a single sting but God, He has *two!*'"<sup>[48] [50]</sup>

## Teaching stories

Shah used teaching stories and humour to great effect in his work.<sup>[44] [51]</sup> Shah emphasised the therapeutic function of surprising anecdotes, and the fresh perspectives these tales revealed.<sup>[52]</sup> The reading and discussion of such tales in a group setting became a significant part of the activities in which the members of Shah's study circles engaged.<sup>[29]</sup> The transformative way in which these puzzling or surprising tales could destabilise the student's normal (and unaware) mode of consciousness was studied by Stanford University psychology professor Robert Ornstein, who along with fellow psychologist Charles Tart<sup>[53]</sup> and eminent writers such as Poet Laureate Ted Hughes<sup>[54]</sup> and Nobel-Prize-winning novelist Doris Lessing<sup>[27] [55]</sup> was one of several notable thinkers profoundly influenced by Shah.<sup>[52] [56]</sup>



Shah and Ornstein met in the 1960s.<sup>[56]</sup> Realising that Ornstein could be an ideal partner in propagating his teachings, translating them into the idiom of psychotherapy, Shah made him his deputy (*khalifa*) in the United States.<sup>[52]</sup> <sup>[56]</sup> Ornstein's *The Psychology of Consciousness* (1972) was enthusiastically received by the academic psychology community, as it coincided with new interests in the field, such as the study of biofeedback and other techniques designed to achieve shifts in mood and awareness.<sup>[56]</sup> Ornstein has published more books in the field over the years.<sup>[56]</sup>

In their original historical and cultural setting, Sufi teaching stories of the kind popularised by Shah – first told orally, and later written down for the purpose of transmitting Sufi faith and practice to successive generations – were considered suitable for people of all ages, including children, as they contained multiple layers of meaning.<sup>[27]</sup> Shah likened the Sufi story to a peach: "A person may be emotionally stirred by the exterior as if the peach were lent to you. You can eat the peach and taste a further delight ... You can throw away the stone – or crack it and find a delicious kernel within. This is the hidden depth."<sup>[27]</sup> It was in this manner that Shah invited his audience to receive the Sufi story.<sup>[27]</sup> By failing to uncover the kernel, and regarding the story as merely amusing or superficial, a person would accomplish nothing more than looking at the peach, while others internalised the tale and allowed themselves to be touched by it.<sup>[27]</sup>

Olav Hammer, in *Sufism in Europe and North America* (2004), cites an example of such a story.<sup>[6]</sup> It tells of a man who is looking for his key on the ground.<sup>[6]</sup> When a passing neighbour asks the man whether this is in fact the place where he lost the key, the man replies, "No, I lost it at home, but there is more light here than in my own house."<sup>[6]</sup>

Peter Wilson, writing in *New Trends and Developments in the World of Islam* (1998), quotes another such story, featuring a dervish who is asked to describe the qualities of his teacher, Alim.<sup>[57]</sup> The dervish explains that Alim wrote beautiful poetry, and inspired him with his self-sacrifice and his service to his fellow man.<sup>[57]</sup> His questioner readily approves of these qualities, only to find the dervish rebuking him: "Those are the qualities which would have recommended Alim to you."<sup>[57]</sup> <sup>[58]</sup> Then he proceeds to list the qualities which actually enabled Alim to be an effective teacher: "Hazrat Alim Azimi made me irritated, which caused me to examine my irritation, to trace its source. Alim Azimi made me angry, so that I could feel and transform my anger."<sup>[58]</sup> He explains that Alim Azimi followed the path of blame, intentionally provoking vicious attacks upon himself, in order to bring the failings of both his students and critics to light, allowing them to be seen for what they really were: "He showed us the strange, so that the strange became commonplace and we could realise what it really is."<sup>[57]</sup> <sup>[58]</sup>

## Views on culture and practical life

Shah's concern was to reveal essentials underlying all cultures, and the hidden factors determining individual behaviour.<sup>[24]</sup> He discounted the Western focus on appearances and superficialities, which often reflected mere fashion and habit, and drew attention to the origins of culture and the unconscious and mixed motivations of people and the groups formed by them.<sup>[24]</sup> He also pointed out how both on the individual and group levels, short-term disasters often turn into blessings – and vice versa – and yet the knowledge of this has done little to affect the way people respond to events as they occur.<sup>[24]</sup>

Shah did not advocate the abandonment of worldly duties; instead, he argued that the treasure sought by the would-be disciple should derive from one's struggles in everyday living.<sup>[27]</sup> He considered practical work the means through which a seeker could do self-work, in line with the traditional adoption by Sufis of ordinary professions, through which they earned their livelihoods and "worked" on themselves.<sup>[27]</sup> Shah's status as a teacher remained indefinable; disclaiming both the guru identity and any desire to found a cult or sect, he also rejected the academic hat.<sup>[24]</sup> Michael Rubinstein, writing in *Makers of Modern Culture*, concluded that "he is perhaps best seen as an embodiment of the tradition in which the contemplative and intuitive aspects of the mind are regarded as being most productive when working together."<sup>[24]</sup>

## Reception

Idries Shah's books on Sufism achieved considerable critical acclaim. He was the subject of a BBC documentary ("One Pair of Eyes") in 1969,<sup>[59]</sup> and two of his works (*The Way of the Sufi* and *Reflections*) were chosen as "Outstanding Book of the Year" by the BBC's "The Critics" programme.<sup>[30]</sup> Among other honours, Shah won six first prizes at the UNESCO World Book Year in 1973,<sup>[59]</sup> and the Islamic scholar James Kritzeck, commenting on Shah's *Tales of the Dervishes*, said that it was "beautifully translated".<sup>[30]</sup>

The reception of Shah's movement was also marked by much controversy.<sup>[27]</sup> Some orientalists were hostile, in part because Shah presented classical Sufi writings as tools for self-development to be used by contemporary people, rather than as objects of historical study.<sup>[11]</sup> L. P. Elwell-Sutton from Edinburgh University, Shah's fiercest critic, described his books as "trivial", replete with errors of fact, slovenly and inaccurate translations and even misspellings of Oriental names and words – "a muddle of platitudes, irrelevancies and plain mumbo-jumbo", adding for good measure that Shah had "a remarkable opinion of his own importance".<sup>[60]</sup> Expressing amusement and amazement at the "sycophantic manner" of Shah's interlocutors in a BBC radio interview, Elwell-Sutton concluded that some Western intellectuals were "so desperate to find answers to the questions that baffle them, that, confronted with wisdom from 'the mysterious East,' they abandon their critical faculties and submit to brainwashing of the crudest kind".<sup>[30]</sup> To Elwell-Sutton, Shah's Sufism belonged to the realm of "Pseudo-Sufism", "centred not on God but on man."<sup>[27]</sup> <sup>[61]</sup>

### "Shah-school" writings

Another hostile critic was James Moore, a Gurdjieffian who disagreed with Shah's assertion that Gurdjieff's teaching was essentially sufic in nature and took exception to the publication of a chronologically impossible, pseudonymous book on the matter (*The Teachers of Gurdjieff* by Rafael Lefort) that was linked to Shah.<sup>[5]</sup> In a 1986 article in *Religion Today* (now the *Journal of Contemporary Religion*), Moore covered the Bennett and Graves controversies and noted that Shah was surrounded by a "nimbus of exorbitant adulation: an adulation he himself has fanned".<sup>[5]</sup> He described Shah as supported by a "coterie of serviceable journalists, editors, critics, animators, broadcasters, and travel writers, which gamely choruses Shah's praise".<sup>[5]</sup> Moore questioned Shah's purported Sufi heritage and upbringing and deplored the body of pseudonymous "Shah-school" writings from such authors as "Omar Michael Burke Ph. D." and "Hadrat B. M. Dervish", who from 1960 heaped intemperate praise – ostensibly from disinterested parties – on Shah, referring to him as the "Tariqa Grand Sheikh Idries Shah Saheb", "Prince Idries Shah", "King Enoch", "The Presence", "The Studious King", the "Incarnation of Ali", and even the Qutb or "Axis" – all in support of Shah's incipient efforts to market Sufism to a Western audience.<sup>[5]</sup>

Peter Wilson similarly commented on the "very poor quality" of much that had been written in Shah's support, noting an "unfortunately fulsome style", claims that Shah possessed various paranormal abilities, "a tone of superiority; an attitude, sometimes smug, condescending, or pitying, towards those 'on the outside', and the apparent absence of any motivation to substantiate claims which might be thought to merit such treatment".<sup>[62]</sup> In his view, there was a "marked difference in quality between Shah's own writings" and the quality of this secondary literature.<sup>[62]</sup> Both Moore and Wilson, however, also noted similarities in style, and considered the possibility that much of this pseudonymous work, frequently published by Octagon Press, Shah's own publishing house, might have been written by Shah himself.<sup>[62]</sup>

Arguing for an alternative interpretation of this literature, the religious scholar Andrew Rawlinson proposed that rather than a "transparently self-serving [...] deception", it may have been a "masquerade – something that by definition has to be seen through".<sup>[63]</sup> Stating that "a critique of entrenched positions cannot itself be fixed and doctrinal", and noting that Shah's intent had always been to undermine false certainties, he argued that the "Shah myth" created by these writings may have been a teaching tool, rather than a tool of concealment; something "made to be deconstructed – that is *supposed* to dissolve when you touch it".<sup>[63]</sup> Rawlinson concluded that Shah "cannot be taken at face value. His own axioms preclude the very possibility."<sup>[63]</sup>

## Assessment

Doris Lessing, one of Shah's greatest defenders,<sup>[5]</sup> stated in a 1981 interview: "I found Sufism as taught by Idries Shah, which claims to be the reintroduction of an ancient teaching, suitable for this time and this place. It is not some regurgitated stuff from the East or watered-down Islam or anything like that."<sup>[27]</sup> In 1996, commenting on Shah's death in *The Daily Telegraph*, she stated that she met Shah because of *The Sufis*, which was to her the most surprising book she had read, and a book that changed her life.<sup>[64]</sup> Describing Shah's oeuvre as a "phenomenon like nothing else in our time", she characterised him as a many-sided man, the wittiest person she ever expected to meet, kind, generous, modest ("Don't look so much at my face, but take what is in my hand", she quotes him as saying), and her good friend and teacher for 30-odd years.<sup>[64]</sup>



Nobel-prize winner Doris Lessing was profoundly influenced by Shah.

Arthur J. Deikman, a professor of psychiatry and long-time researcher in the area of meditation and change of consciousness who began his study of Sufi teaching stories in the early seventies, expressed the view that Western psychotherapists could benefit from the perspective provided by Sufism and its universal essence, provided suitable materials were studied in the correct manner and sequence.<sup>[46]</sup> Given that Shah's writings and translations of Sufi teaching stories were designed with that purpose in mind, he recommended them to those interested in assessing the matter for themselves, and noted that many authorities had accepted Shah's position as a spokesman for contemporary Sufism.<sup>[46]</sup> The psychologist and consciousness researcher Charles Tart commented that Shah's writings had "produced a more profound appreciation in [him] of what psychology is about than anything else ever written".<sup>[65]</sup>

The Indian philosopher and mystic Osho, commenting on Shah's work, described *The Sufis* as "just a diamond. The value of what he has done in *The Sufis* is immeasurable". He added that Shah was "the man who introduced Mulla Nasrudin to the West, and he has done an incredible service. He cannot be repaid. [...] Idries Shah has made just the small anecdotes of Nasrudin even more beautiful ... [he] not only has the capacity to exactly translate the parables, but even to beautify them, to make them more poignant, sharper."<sup>[66]</sup>

Richard Smoley and Jay Kinney, writing in *Hidden Wisdom: A Guide to the Western Inner Traditions* (2006), pronounced Shah's *The Sufis* an "extremely readable and wide-ranging introduction to Sufism", adding that "Shah's own slant is evident throughout, and some historical assertions are debatable (none are footnoted), but no other book is as successful as this one in provoking interest in Sufism for the general reader."<sup>[67]</sup> They described *Learning How to Learn*, a collection of interviews, talks and short writings, as one of Shah's best works, providing a solid orientation to his "psychological" approach to Sufi work, noting that at his best, "Shah provides insights that inoculate students against much of the nonsense in the spiritual marketplace."<sup>[67]</sup>

Olav Hammer notes that during Shah's last years, when the generosity of admirers had made him truly wealthy, and he had become a respected figure among the higher echelons of British society, controversies arose due to discrepancies between autobiographical data – mentioning kinship with the prophet Muhammad, affiliations with a secret Sufi order in Central Asia, or the tradition in which Gurdjieff was taught – and recoverable historical facts.<sup>[6]</sup> While there may have been a link of kinship with the prophet Muhammad, the number of people sharing such a link today, 1300 years later, would be at least one million.<sup>[6]</sup> Other elements of Shah's autobiography appeared to have been pure fiction.<sup>[6]</sup> Even so, Hammer noted that Shah's books have remained in public demand, and that he has played "a significant role in representing the essence of Sufism as a non-confessional, individualistic and life-affirming distillation of spiritual wisdom."<sup>[6]</sup>

Peter Wilson wrote that if Shah had been a swindler, he had been an "extremely gifted one", because unlike merely commercial writers, he had taken the time to produce an elaborate and internally consistent system that attracted a "whole range of more or less eminent people", and had "provoked and stimulated thought in many diverse quarters".<sup>[65]</sup> Moore acknowledged that Shah had made a contribution of sorts in popularising a humanistic Sufism, and had "brought energy and resource to his self-aggrandisement", but ended with the damning conclusion that Shah's was "a 'Sufism' without self-sacrifice, without self-transcendence, without the aspiration of gnosis, without tradition, without the Prophet, without the Qur'an, without Islam, and without God. Merely that."<sup>[5]</sup> <sup>[44]</sup>

## Legacy

Idries Shah considered his books his legacy; in themselves, they would fulfil the function he had fulfilled when he could no longer be there.<sup>[68]</sup> Promoting and distributing their teacher's publications has been an important activity or "work" for Shah's students, both for fund-raising purposes and for transforming public awareness.<sup>[29]</sup> The ICR continues to host lectures and seminars on topics related to aspects of human nature, while the SSS has ceased its activities. The ISHK (Institute for the Study of Human Knowledge), headed by Ornstein,<sup>[69]</sup> is active in the United States; after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, for example, it sent out a brochure advertising Afghanistan-related books authored by Shah and his circle to members of the Middle East Studies Association, thus linking these publications to the need for improved cross-cultural understanding.<sup>[29]</sup>

When Elizabeth Hall interviewed Shah for *Psychology Today* in July 1975, she asked him: "For the sake of humanity, what would you like to see happen?" Shah replied: "What I would really want, in case anybody is listening, is for the products of the last 50 years of psychological research to be studied by the public, by everybody, so that the findings become part of their way of thinking (...) they have this great body of psychological information and refuse to use it."<sup>[70]</sup>

Shah's brother, Omar Ali-Shah (1922–2005), was also a writer and teacher of Sufism; the brothers taught students together for a while in the 1960s, but in 1977 "agreed to disagree" and went their separate ways.<sup>[71]</sup> Following Idries Shah's death in 1996, a fair number of his students became affiliated with Omar Ali-Shah's movement.<sup>[72]</sup>

One of Idries Shah's daughters, Saira Shah, became notable in 2001 for reporting on women's rights in Afghanistan in her documentary *Beneath the Veil*.<sup>[7]</sup> His son Tahir Shah is a noted travel writer, journalist and adventurer.

## Works

- Magic:
  - *Oriental Magic* ISBN 0-86304-017-9
  - *The Secret Lore of Magic* ISBN 0-80650-004-2
- Sufism/Philosophy:
  - *The Sufis* ISBN 0-385-07966-4
  - *Caravan of Dreams* ISBN 0-863040-43-8
  - *The Commanding Self* ISBN 0-86304-066-7
  - *Tales of the Dervishes* ISBN 0-900860-47-2
  - *Reflections* ISBN 0-900860-07-3
  - *Observations* ISBN 0-863040-13-6
  - *Learning How to Learn: Psychology and Spirituality in the Sufi Way* ISBN 0-900860-59-6
  - *The Dermis Probe* ISBN 0-863040-45-4
  - *Thinkers of the East – Studies in Experientialism* ISBN 0-900860-46-4
  - *A Perfumed Scorpion* ISBN 0-900860-62-6
  - *Seeker After Truth* ISBN 0-900860-91-X
  - *The Hundred Tales of Wisdom* ISBN 0-863040-49-7

- *Neglected Aspects of Sufi Study* ISBN 0-900860-56-1
  - *Special Illumination: The Sufi Use of Humour* ISBN 0-900860-57-X
  - *A Veiled Gazelle – Seeing How to See* ISBN 0-900860-58-8
  - *The Elephant in the Dark – Christianity, Islam and The Sufis* ISBN 0-900860-36-7
  - *Wisdom of the Idiots* ISBN 0-863040-46-2
  - *The Magic Monastery* ISBN 0-863040-58-6
  - *The Book of the Book* ISBN 0-900860-12-X
  - *The Way of the Sufi* ISBN 0-900860-80-4
  - *Knowing How to Know* ISBN 0-86304-072-1
  - *Sufi Thought and Action* ISBN 0-86304-051-9
  - Collections of Mulla Nasrudin Stories:
    - *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin* ISBN 0-863040-22-5
    - *The Subtleties of the Inimitable Mulla Nasrudin* ISBN 0-863040-21-7
    - *The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mullah Nasrudin* ISBN 0-863040-23-3
    - *The World of Nasrudin* ISBN 0-863040-86-1
  - Studies of the English:
    - *Darkest England* ISBN 0-863040-39-X
    - *The Natives are Restless* ISBN 0-863040-44-6
    - *The Englishman's Handbook* ISBN 0-863040-77-2
  - Travel:
    - *Destination Mecca* ISBN 0-900860-03-0
  - Fiction:
    - *Kara Kush*, London: William Collins Sons and Co., Ltd., 1986. ISBN 0685557871
  - Folklore:
    - *World Tales* ISBN 0-863040-36-5
  - For children:
    - *The Lion Who Saw Himself in the Water* ISBN 1883536251
    - *Neem the Half-Boy* ISBN 1883536103
    - *The Silly Chicken* ISBN 1883536502
    - *The Farmer's Wife* ISBN 1883536073
    - *The Boy Without A Name* ISBN 1883536200
    - *The Man With Bad Manners* ISBN 1883536308
    - *The Clever Boy and the Terrible Dangerous Animal* ISBN 1883536510
    - *The Magic Horse* ISBN 188353626X
    - *The Old Woman and The Eagle* ISBN 1883536278
    - *Fatima the Spinner and the Tent* ISBN 1883536421
    - *The Man and the Fox* ISBN 188353643X
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## External links

- Official site (<http://www.idriesshah.com/>)
  - New official 'Shah family' web pages ([http://web.me.com/tahirshah/Tahir\\_Shahs\\_Site/Shah\\_Family.html](http://web.me.com/tahirshah/Tahir_Shahs_Site/Shah_Family.html))
  - *One Pair of Eyes: Dreamwalkers* (<http://uk.youtube.com/user/idriesshah999>) television documentary on YouTube
  - Octagon Press (<http://www.octagonpress.com/>)
  - Institute for Cultural Research (<http://www.i-c-r.org.uk/>)
  - The Institute for the Study of Human Knowledge -- ISHK (<http://www.ishk.net>)
  - Sufi Studies Today (<http://ishk.net/sufis/index.html>)
  - List of works by Idries Shah or with his participation (<http://www.idriesshah.info/Shah/IdriesShah.htm>)
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# Omar Ali-Shah

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<b>Omar Ali-Shah</b>	
<b>Born</b>	1922
<b>Died</b>	September 7, 2005Jerez, Spain
<b>Occupation</b>	Sufi teacher, writer
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Anglo-Afghan
<b>Subjects</b>	Sufism
<b>Notable work(s)</b>	The Course of the Seeker Sufism for Today The Rules or Secrets of the Naqshbandi Order
<b>Spouse(s)</b>	Anna Maria Ali-Shah
<b>Children</b>	Arif Ali-Shah & Amina Ali-Shah
<b>Relative(s)</b>	Shah family

**Omar Ali-Shah** (1922–2005) was a prominent exponent of modern Naqshbandi Sufism. He wrote a number of books on the subject, and was head of a large number of sufi groups, particularly in Latin America, Europe and Canada.

## Life and work

Omar Ali-Shah was born in 1922 into a family that traces itself back to the year 122 BC through the Prophet Mohammed and to the Sassanian Emperors of Persia. He was the son of Sirdar Ikbal Ali Shah of Sardhana and the older brother of Idries Shah, another writer and teacher of Sufism.

Omar Ali-Shah gained notoriety in 1967, when he published, together with Robert Graves, a new translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.<sup>[1] [2] [3]</sup> This translation quickly became controversial; Graves was attacked for trying to break the spell of famed passages in Edward FitzGerald's Victorian translation, and L. P. Elwell-Sutton, an Orientalist at Edinburgh University, maintained that the manuscript used by Ali-Shah and Graves – which Ali-Shah claimed had been in his family for 800 years – was a "clumsy forgery".<sup>[3]</sup> The manuscript was never produced for examination by critics; the scholarly consensus today is that the "Jan-Fishan Khan manuscript" was a hoax, and that the actual source of Omar Ali-Shah's version was a study by Edward Heron-Allen, a Victorian amateur scholar.<sup>[4] [5] [6]</sup>

The two brothers, Idries Shah and Omar Ali-Shah, worked and taught together for some time in the 1960s, but later agreed to go their separate ways.<sup>[7]</sup> Their respective movements – Idries Shah's "Society for Sufi Studies" and Omar Ali-Shah's "Tradition" – were similar, giving some prominence to psychology in their teachings.<sup>[8] [9]</sup> Omar Ali-Shah's teachings had some distinctive features, however.<sup>[8]</sup> He had many more followers in South America, and his movement attracted a younger following than his brother's.<sup>[8]</sup> There were also more references to Islam in his teachings, and unlike his brother, Omar Ali-Shah's movement embraced some Islamic practices.<sup>[8]</sup>

Omar Ali-Shah's followers sometimes undertook organised trips to exotic locations, which he described as having a developmental, or cleansing, purpose: "One of the functions performed in the Tradition is making, keeping and deepening contacts with people, places and things, such as making trips similar to the ones we have made to Turkey and elsewhere."<sup>[10]</sup> Sufi travel was seen as a pilgrimage to sites that could both energise and purify the visitor.<sup>[10]</sup>

Following the death of Idries Shah in 1996, a fair number of his students became affiliated with Omar Ali-Shah.<sup>[8]</sup>

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Omar Ali-Shah – called "Agha" by his students – gave lectures which have been recorded for distribution in printed format.<sup>[11]</sup> He died on September 7, 2005 in a hospital in Jerez, Spain.

The Sufi student and deputy, Professor Leonard Lewin (University of Colorado), led study groups under the guidance of Idries Shah, Omar Ali Shah and his son, Arif Ali-Shah.<sup>[12]</sup>

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## External links

- List of publications by Omar Ali-Shah and his family members (works by Idries Shah not included) (<http://www.idriesshah.info/Family.htm>)
- Contemporary activities with a Naqshbandi Sufi teacher (<http://www.realsufism.com/>) Arif Ali-Shah, son of Omar Ali-Shah

# Institute for the Study of Human Knowledge

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<b>Institute for the Study of Human Knowledge</b>	
 Official logo	
<b>Formation</b>	1969
<b>Type</b>	NGO, educational charity, publisher
<b>Purpose/focus</b>	Health and human nature information
<b>Headquarters</b>	Los Altos, California, US
<b>Chairman</b>	Robert E. Ornstein
<b>Website</b>	Official website <sup>[1]</sup>

The **Institute for the Study of Human Knowledge** (ISHK) is a non-profit educational charity<sup>[2]</sup> and publisher established in 1969 by the noted and award-winning psychologist and writer Robert E. Ornstein and based in Los Altos, California, in the USA.<sup>[3]</sup> Its watchword is "public education: health and human nature information."

## Founder

Psychologist, writer and professor at Stanford University, Robert Ornstein, who founded and chairs ISHK, has published over 25 books on the mind and won over a dozen awards from organizations over the years, including the American Psychological Association and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). His work has been featured in a 1974 *Time* magazine article entitled *Hemispheric Thinker*.<sup>[4]</sup>

Ornstein is best known for his research on the hemispheric specialization of the brain and the advancement of understanding into how we think.<sup>[5]</sup> He has also contributed to the London-based Institute for Cultural Research set up by his associate, the writer and Sufi teacher, Idries Shah.<sup>[5]</sup>

Ornstein's *The Psychology of Consciousness* (1972) was enthusiastically received by the academic psychology community.<sup>[6]</sup> <sup>[7]</sup> More recent works include *The Right Mind* (1997), described as "a cutting edge picture of how the two sides of the brain work".<sup>[8]</sup> <sup>[9]</sup> <sup>[10]</sup>

## Aims and activities

ISHK's primary aim is public education, by providing new information on health and human nature through its book service, through its children's imprint Hoopoe Books and adult imprint Malor Books, which includes the works of Robert Ornstein. Hoopoe Books focuses on publishing traditional children's stories from Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Middle East, including works by Idries Shah,<sup>[11]</sup> <sup>[12]</sup> such as *The Lion Who Saw Himself in the Water*.<sup>[13]</sup>

The Institute also operates philanthropic projects, for example Share Literacy, which provides books for children; support for caregivers; training and support for teachers, and independent program evaluation. Through its Share Literacy Program, Hoopoe Books has partnered with other organizations to give books away to children in low-income areas.<sup>[14]</sup> It also provides books free of charge to lending libraries.<sup>[15]</sup>

ISHK has worked with organizations such as the Institute for Cross-cultural Exchange to provide children in Afghanistan with desperately needed books for distribution to schools, orphanages and libraries throughout the country, in order to address the literacy crisis.<sup>[16]</sup>

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Events organized by ISHK include a symposium in 2006 on "The Core of Early Christian Spirituality: Its Relevance to the World Today" which featured presentations by Elaine Pagels, well known for her studies and writing on the Gnostic Gospels (*Beyond Belief: A Different View of Christianity*); New Testament scholar Bart D. Ehrman (*Jesus and the Apocalyptic Vision*), and scholar of religion and Professor, Marvin Meyer (*Magdalene in the Gnostic Gospels: From the Gospel of Mary to the DaVinci Code, Mary Magdelene in History and Culture*).<sup>[17]</sup> In 1976, Robert Ornstein and Idries Shah presented a seminar, *Traditional Esoteric Psychologies in Contemporary Life*, in cooperation with The New School, New York City.<sup>[18]</sup>

In 2010, ISHK set up a web site for a project entitled *The Human Journey*. It aims to "follow humanity from our origins in Eastern Africa and the Middle East to the present day, with an eye to what comes next."<sup>[19]</sup>

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## **External links**

- Institute for the Study of Human Knowledge (ISHK) web site (<http://ishkbooks.com/>)
- Institute for the Study of Human Knowledge: The Human Journey (<http://www.humanjourney.us/index.html>)
- Share Literacy (<http://www.shareliteracy.org/>)

# The Institute for Cultural Research

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<b>The Institute for Cultural Research</b>	
 Official logo	
<b>Formation</b>	1965
<b>Type</b>	NGO, educational charity, publisher
<b>Purpose/focus</b>	Thought, behaviour and culture
<b>Headquarters</b>	London, UK
<b>Director of Studies</b>	Originally Idries Shah
<b>Website</b>	Official website <sup>[1]</sup>

**The Institute for Cultural Research** (ICR) is a London-based, UK-registered educational charity,<sup>[2] [3] [4]</sup> events organizer and publisher which aims to stimulate study, debate, education and research into all aspects of human thought, behaviour and culture.<sup>[5]</sup> It has brought together many distinguished speakers, writers and Fellows over the years.

## History

The Institute was founded in 1965 by the well-known writer, thinker and Sufi teacher Idries Shah<sup>[6] [7] [8]</sup> to facilitate the dissemination of ideas, information and understanding between cultures.<sup>[3] [9]</sup> Its Objects and Regulations were officially first adopted on 21 January, 1966.<sup>[10]</sup> For some time based at Tunbridge Wells in Kent, it is presently based in London.<sup>[11]</sup> Shah acted as the Institute's Director of Studies whilst still alive.<sup>[11] [12] [13] [14]</sup> Nobel Prize-winning novelist Doris Lessing, who was influenced by Idries Shah,<sup>[15]</sup> has also contributed to the Institute.<sup>[16] [17]</sup>

## Aims and remit

The Institute's stated aim is "to stimulate study, debate, education and research into all aspects of human thought, behaviour and culture" and to make the results of its members' academic work accessible to society and also to academics working in different fields.<sup>[3] [9]</sup>

The body, which has a number of distinguished Fellows, has published several dozen academic monographs and some books over the years<sup>[3] [9]</sup> and holds regular events.<sup>[3] [18]</sup> These events usually include a series of six lectures by specialists per year, and a two-day seminar which is usually held in the Autumn. The aim of these is "to connect ideas across disciplines, across cultures, and even through history" and to bring about a broader, more holistic understanding by looking at issues from several different perspectives, with particular interest in human thought and behaviour and issues neglected by contemporary culture.<sup>[18] [19]</sup>

In addition, the Institute supports projects in areas where freedom of access to facts is threatened,<sup>[3]</sup> for example in the case of Afghanistan where assistance has been given to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)'s female educational projects.<sup>[9]</sup>

All the Institute for Cultural Research's activities are open to the general public.<sup>[3]</sup>

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## Notable contributors

The Institute has published so many monographs and hosted so many lectures and seminars that only a small sample of notable contributors are listed here.<sup>[20]</sup>

**Lecturers** include:

- psychologist Michael Eysenck (*Lost in Time, Making Sense of Amnesia*)
- neuroscientist Professor Chris Frith (how the brain creates our mental and social worlds)
- British social anthropologist Professor Tim Ingold (the mismatch between the "environment" of immediate experience and the "Environment" of scientific and policy discourse)
- writer and documentary filmmaker Tahir Shah (the scientific legacies of the Arab Caliphates and their Golden Age)
- writer and filmmaker Iain Sinclair (*Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire*)
- poet, writer and adventurer Robert Twigger (*Polymaths in a monopathic world?*)
- anthropologist Piers Vitebsky (*Global religious change and the death of the shaman*)
- novelist, short story writer, historian and mythographer Marina Warner (*Talismans and Charms: Spellbinding in Stories from The 1001 Nights*)
- writer Ramsay Wood (*The Kalila and Dimna Story*)

**Monograph writers** include:

- science writer Philip Ball (*Collective Behaviour and the Physics of Society*<sup>[21]</sup>)
- professor of psychiatry Arthur J. Deikman (*Evaluating Spiritual and Utopian Groups*<sup>[22]</sup>)<sup>[16]</sup>
- psychologist and noted skeptic Chris French (*Paranormal Perception? A Critical Evaluation*<sup>[23]</sup>)
- co-founder of the Club of Rome in 1968, Dr. Alexander King (*Science, Technology and the Quality of Life*<sup>[24]</sup> and *An Eye to the Future*<sup>[25]</sup>)<sup>[26]</sup>
- Nobel Prize-winning novelist Doris Lessing (*Problems, Myths and Stories*<sup>[27]</sup>)
- professor of archaeology Steven Mithen (*Problem-solving and the Evolution of Human Culture*<sup>[28]</sup>)
- writer and psychologist Robert E. Ornstein (*Physiological Studies of Consciousness*<sup>[29]</sup>)
- biochemist, plant physiologist and parapsychologist Rupert Sheldrake (*Fields of the Mind*<sup>[30]</sup>)

**Books published** by the ICR include *Cultural Research*<sup>[31]</sup> <sup>[32]</sup> edited by the writer Tahir Shah, and *Cultural Encounters: Essays on the interactions of diverse cultures now and in the past*,<sup>[33]</sup> <sup>[34]</sup> edited by Robert Cecil and David Wade.

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## External links

- The Institute for Cultural Research web site (<http://www.i-c-r.org.uk/>)

# Saira Shah

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Saira Shah	
<b>Born</b>	October 5, 1964London, UK
<b>Occupation</b>	Author, reporter and documentary filmmaker
<b>Parents</b>	Idries Shah, Cynthia (Kashfi) Kabraji
<b>Relatives</b>	Shah family

**Saira Shah** (born 5 October 1964) is an author, reporter and documentary filmmaker. She produces, writes and narrates current affairs films.

## Life and work

Shah was born in London and raised in Kent, England. She was educated at Bryanston School and read Arabic and Persian at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, graduating in 1986. Her father was the late Idries Shah, an Afghan writer of books on Sufism. Part of his family was originally from Paghman, Afghanistan. Her mother is half-Parsee and half-English. The author Tahir Shah is her brother.<sup>[1]</sup> and she also has a sister, Tahir's twin, Safia Shah.

Her first trip to Afghanistan was when she was 21 years old. She worked for 3 years in Peshawar as a reporter covering the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. She has also worked as a journalist for Channel 4 News, which she left in 2001.

She married and divorced (after 5 years) a Swiss reporter, whom she met in Peshawar.

Shah worked with James Miller (filmmaker) on several projects including the films *Beneath the Veil* (2001), *Unholy War* (2001), both Channel 4 Dispatches films for the UK documentary company Hardcash Productions, and *Death in Gaza* (2004), for their own TV company Frostbite Films. She won a Current Affairs BAFTA for *Death in Gaza*. She also appeared on the television programme *Breakfast with Frost* on 10 August 2003.

She currently lives between London and France.

## Films

- *Beneath the Veil*<sup>[2]</sup>
- *Death in Gaza*<sup>[3]</sup>
- *Unholy War*<sup>[4]</sup>

## Books

- Shah, Saira (2003), *The Storyteller's Daughter*, New York, NY: Anchor Books, ISBN 1-4000-3147-8

## Companies

- Frostbite Productions
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- [4] *Unholy War* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0301975/>) at the Internet Movie Database

## External links

- Saira Shah (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1050514/>) at the Internet Movie Database
- Interview with CNN (<http://www.cnn.com/2001/COMMUNITY/08/24/shah/>)
- List of publications by Saira Shah and her family members (works by Idries Shah not included) (<http://www.idriesshah.info/Family.htm>)
- Saira Shah's page (<http://www.convilleandwalsh.com/index.php/authors/author/saira-shah/>), Conville and Walsh literary agency

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