‘Islam in India influenced by Sufism, Bhakti movement’

Diverse traditions prevented inroads of Wahabism: experts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

The puritanical Islamic doctrine of Wahhabism was incapable of taking roots in India because of diverse traditions in the Muslim community influenced by the country’s composite culture, experts on Muslim culture said on Sunday.

The panel of experts analysed multiple interpretative traditions among Muslims in India and elsewhere as well as modern challenges before them at a discussion on “Islam: Multiple Histories” at the Jaipur Literary Festival here.

Sufism and the Bhakti movement have had an impact on the beliefs and thoughts of Muslims since the medieval period, the experts said, adding that Islam practised in India was “vastly different” from that in West Asian countries.

Current dilemmas

The speakers also focused on the issues faced by Muslims living in secular societies, dilemmas created by technological advancements and the challenge of finding a unitary voice for the entire community.

Congress leader and former External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid, historian Rana Safvi and Canada-based anthropologist Zulfikar Hirji, who teaches at York University, Toronto, were in conversation with American journalist and author Max Rodenbeck, who is at present the South Asia Bureau Chief with The Economist.

Mr. Khurshid said though the basic belief of Muslims was the same everywhere, its understanding, interpretations and conceptions were quite different. “In that sense, Wahhabism, which is very different from Sufi Islam, cannot find a place in our country,” he said, and added that Indian Muslims had already repudiated the two-nation theory of Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

The Congress leader said the doors of Ijtihad (independent interpretation) were not closed forever in Islam and there was a “great need” for its application in contemporary society to interpret the religion in the light of modern challenges.

Democratic dialogue

“We should work on it in a democratic way. Both the spiritual and political leaders should join efforts and guide the community,” he said.

Ms. Safvi said Sufism had a special place in India’s history, as Sufi mystics such as Nizamuddin Auliya and Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti would sit and discuss Islam and understood it as a service to the people. In the secular domain, no one could stop non-Muslims from speaking up for Muslims’ rights, she said.

Prof. Hirji made references to the book, “Islam: An Illustrated Journey”, co-authored by him and Farhad Daftari, while stating that Islamic violence was a “total rejection of Islamic values”.