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The Foundation and Development of Sufism

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Abstract

Originating in the early days of Islam, Sufism also known as Islamic mysticism, developed as a unique movement that prioritizes spiritual development, self-purification and a direct encounter with the divine. The cornerstone of Sufism resides in the notion of Tawhid, or the oneness of God, which is important to Islamic theology. Sufis aim to achieve a higher degree of spiritual excellence through exercises like dhikr (remembering God) and total prayer immersion, which frequently results in ecstatic experiences. Sufism has had a significant influence on Islamic philosophy and culture, affecting music, art and literature both inside and outside of the Middle East. Its focus on spiritual development, love and compassion has also made it a powerful influence in interfaith understanding and discussion. All things considered, "The Foundation and Development of Sufism" offers a thorough summary of the religion's origins, tenets and customs while illuminating its ongoing relevance both inside and outside of Islam.

Keywords: Islam, Mysticism, Sufism, Tawhid, Dhikr etc.

Introduction

Mysticism in Islam is known as Sufism (tasawwuf). The name comes from the Arabic root 'suf' which meant 'wool'. ^[1] It is essentially identified those who chose a mystic lifestyle, wore a large pieces wool clothing (coarse) and condemned the outside world. The oldest Arabic book on Sufism still in existence, written by Abu Nasr al-Saraj, provides an explanation for this as well. He stated: "the woolen raiment is the habit of the prophets and the batch of the saints and elect". ^[2] In Islam, this commitment to a mystic life is known as "Sufism." According to Sufis, their name comes from the word 'safa' which means 'purity'. ^[3] People who follow the concept and practices that seek direct communication between God and humanity are known as Sufis.

Khaliq Ahmad Nizami ^[4] claims that following the tabii, people who dedicated their life to religious study and devotion were known as zahid or 'the pious' and abid or 'the servant (of Allah)'. The name Sufi is only used in reference to the subsequent generations. The first spiritualist to be referred to be a Sufi was Shaykh Abu Hashim Kufi (d.776), according to Abdur Rahman Jami ^[5] who cites previous sources ^[6].

Now let's look at the term Sufi's etymology and origin. It is composed of three Arabic letters: s, w and f, yet there is a lot of disagreement among scholars about it. According to one interpretation, the term 'Sufi' comes from the Arabic word

'saf' which means 'line' or 'row' and it refers to the early Muslim companions of the Prophet who arrived to the mosque far in advance and stood in the front row during prayer. According to others, the name comes from the word suffa, which refers to the verandah or porch of the Prophet's Madinah mosque. According to custom, some of the Prophet's companions who were homeless lived on this porch. They devoted their time to devotion, memorizing the Prophet's sayings and studying the Qur'anic texts by heart. They stopped doing things that were related to this world. Their necessities were met by the Prophet and his fellow Muslims. They were known as Ashaab-i-Suffa or 'People of the Porch' since the mosque's porch had essentially become their home.

Objectives of the Study

1. Primary Objectives

- i) To investigate Sufism's historical roots and underpinnings within Islamic tradition and theology.
- ii) To analyze Sufism's major phases of evolution, from its early ascetic origins to its classical and post-classical expressions.
- iii) To examine the core ideas, customs, and practices of Sufism, such as spiritual purification, dhikr and Tawhid.

2. Specific Objectives

- i) To talk about the rise and impact of well-known Sufi orders.
- ii) To investigate how Sufism interacts with other Islamic fields like philosophy, theology and jurisprudence.
- iii) To evaluate how Sufism has influenced Islamic music, art, literature and culture.
- iv) To assess Sufism's importance and relevance in relation to modern Islamic philosophy and interfaith discussion.

3. Methodological Objectives

- i) To use a multidisciplinary strategy that integrates anthropological, theological and historical viewpoints.
- ii) To make use of primary sources, such as hagiographies, biographies and Sufi literature.
- iii) To interact with current Sufism scholarship, addressing arguments and disputes in the area.

4. Expected Outcomes

- i) A thorough comprehension of the fundamental ideas and historical evolution of Sufism.
- ii) Knowledge of the various ways Sufism manifests itself in Islamic civilizations.
- iii) A recognition of the contributions Sufism has made to Islamic spirituality, culture and thought.
- iv) Knowledge of the applicability of Sufism in modern settings, such as interfaith discussion and spiritual pursuits.

These goals offer a precise framework for examining Sufism's intricate and varied character.

The Origins of Sufism

According to the Sufis, the Prophet of Islam is the source of Sufism or tasawwuf. According to their beliefs, the Prophet received revelations in two different ways: one, through the words of the Qur'an and the other, by the inspiration of God in his heart. The Sufis were said to possess 'the knowledge of the heart' while the religious scholars or Ulama (sing. Alim) were masters in the study of the Qur'an and hadith. The Sufis assert that, according to specific facts, the life of the Prophet and his companions served as the inspiration for tasawwuf. The life of the Prophet was quite simple. He refrained from indulging in any luxuries. Any valuable gifts he received were promptly given to charity. His only belongings were a simple mattress for sleeping and a pitcher for water, even when he was recognized as the most powerful in Arabia. He went without food for many months and only slept a little, choosing instead to spend most of the night in prayer^[7]. His life itself demonstrated his deep understanding and dedication to the principles of Islam, both in theory and in practice. The foundation of Islamic religion consists of three components that shape the faith and practices of Islam. These include: faith in the word of God as revealed; obedience to the Islamic creed and the act of practicing virtue and sincerity.

According to a legend attributed to Umar, the Prophet's companion and second Caliph, a guy with black hair and remarkably white clothing who never appeared to be traveling pays a visit to the Prophet of God. He sat opposite the Prophet although we had never seen him before. He asked the Prophet to define Islam's concept of submission to God. In response, the Prophet said: "Submitting entails five daily prayers, Ramadan fasting, zakat payment and if feasible, making the

pilgrimage to the Sacred Kaaba." "You have spoken truly," he remarked. We were surprised that the Prophet should confirm his statements after we had questioned him.

"Then he said: 'Tell me what faith (*iman*) is.' Then the Prophet said: 'It is that you should believe in God, in angels and the books, the prophets and the Last Day, and you should believe that no good or evil comes but by His providence.' 'You have spoken truly,' he said. Then he said, 'Tell me what excellence, *ihsan*, is.' The Prophet answered, 'It is that you should worship God as if you saw Him, or if you do not see Him, truly, He sees you.' Then the stranger went away. Umar Farooq, the Prophet's companion, says that he stayed there long after that person had gone, until the Prophet said to him, 'Oumar, do you know who the questioner was?' He said, 'God and His Prophet know best, but I do not know at all.' 'It was Gabriel,' said the Prophet. 'He came to teach you your religion^[8].'"

The Sufis placed a high value on *ihsan*. *Ihsan*, to put it simply, is the state of devotion in which a devotee becomes completely engaged in worshiping God. According to the Sufis, there are many degrees of excellence in the real practice of *ihsan*, and the goal of Sufi practice is to increase this degree of quality. For this reason, they say that achieving the degree of devotion where one starts to feel God's presence is authentic *ihsan*. In fact, the Qur'an states that the road of virtue is situated between fear and hope. It makes this point quite obvious when it states: "And pray to Him with fear and hope; His mercy is within reach of the righteous^[9]." The Sufi definition, however, states that awareness of the Lord's knowledge of our deepest thoughts and movements only relates to a lesser degree of prayer and devotion. One is forced to refrain from wicked deeds when they are aware of God's constant watchfulness. According to the Qur'an, prayer guards us against immorality and wickedness in this way^[10]. But the intended outcome can only be obtained via prayer that is motivated by genuine intent (*niyat*). Some people just want to live a devoted life in expectation of being saved in the future life. This is the first level of piety: God is watching us and, as a result, we desist from sin. Some aim at experiencing Him face to face in this life. This is the second level of piety according to the Sufis. Thus, when one whose heart is filled with love of God prostrates himself before Him and at that moment has the experience of seeing God face to face, this state of total absorption results in ecstasy.

The Sufis aspire to and attest to the experience of firsthand encounters with God, whom they refer to as their Beloved One. There have been cases of Sufis losing their minds due to the rapture of intense love. The Sufis claim that the root of tasawwuf is the Prophet and a few of his companions' entire devotion to prayer, which they demonstrated each time they prayed. The Sufis claim that *dhikr* is a means of achieving this greater degree of devotion perfection, which has the potential to result in ecstasy. According to the Qur'an, "Remember God always so that you may prosper."^[11] "Believers, be ever mindful of God: praise Him morning and evening,"^[12] it states in another place. By placing more value on *dhikr*'s popular connotation than its Qur'anic meaning, the Sufis gave it a formal, well-defined structure. In order to do this, they came up with a variety of methods for yelling the name of God, including loud, quiet, and even drumming or music. The Sufis placing such a high value on just reciting or singing the verses of the Qur'an was criticized by the Ulama, who represented the orthodox viewpoint. They maintained that the attitude of prayer, the devotion to God, and the readiness to submit one's will to His will by seeking and considering the

meaning of the holy words are more significant for comprehending the Islamic message than the repetition of the words. And that the words of the Qur'an can provide the intended spiritual benefit when the spirit is completely observed.

Sufi Connections to Orthodoxy

Like all other Muslims, Sufis believe that the Prophet Muhammad is the ideal representation of their principles, and they trace the origins of Sufism back to his life. The life of the Prophet of Islam does, in fact, offer a Sufi the ideal model to emulate. A life of poverty, honesty, obedience to God's will, profound devotion, introspection, nightly prayers and vigils, closeness to God, heavenly inspiration, and other earthly visions are all described in the traditions. The Sufis do not view this hadith as very important, despite other traditions that claim the Prophet chastised people for not being interested in worldly pursuits and forbade them from devoting all of their time to ceremonial prayer. They would rather identify with the Prophet's companions who lived on the porch of the Madinah mosque, who were more focused on complete devotion than on worldly pursuits. They also like to remember that the Prophet and his companions provided for them and made sure they had access to the necessities of life. This demonstrates that the Prophet did not object to their regular participation in religious activities. Purification or *safa* [13] was always emphasized by the Sufis. The Qur'an states that "he who purifies himself shall be successful" [14] and "he who purifies his soul will be successful, and he who corrupts his soul will fail." [15] The Qur'an tells us that God created the human soul flawlessly and gave it the capacity to know right from wrong. [16] However, because human existence is a challenge, it is fraught with difficulties and the soul becomes corrupted while on this planet. Purification is necessary to restore it to its original state. God is particularly pleased with this action because it demonstrates a willingness to go back to and follow the path that He has established. Therefore, obtaining heavenly favor requires soul cleaning. Giving one's life for God is the only way to gain God's favor and align oneself with his will; anybody who wishes to do so must first undergo the purifying procedure. This is what the Sufis refer to as a spiritual path, chosen by "those who would give their lives in order to find favor with God." God shows His slaves compassion. [17]

The Tariqa or Sufi Path

Thus, the road (sing. *tariqa*, pl. *uruq*; [18] this phrase went on to designate to a Sufi order) and spiritual journey (*suluk*) are two aspects of Sufism. [19] Anybody who travels down this path is referred to as a *salik*, or traveler. Theoretically, everyone can follow the magical path. Anybody can achieve the higher types of religious knowledge, according to the Sufis, but in order to do so the Sufi method, one has to be guided by a *shaykh*, also known as a *murshid* or *pir*.

The chain of transmission of spiritual power (*barakah*) reaches back to the Prophet himself, with the *salik* receiving the ceremony of initiation from his *shaykh* or *murshid*, who in turn got it from his *shaykh*, and so on. According to the Sufis, the Prophet only granted this privilege to a select group of his associates, specifically the caliphs Abu Bakr and Ali, who then passed it on to their adherents. In this manner, this privilege has been continuously transferred till the present. This line of succession, which is a living tradition that is passed down directly from master to pupil, is called *silsila* in Arabic. [20] Therefore, the first role of a disciple is that of a

seeker (*talib*), [21] followed by a traveler (*salik*), and, if God so desires, a *gnostic* (*arif*). However, without the initiation, advice, and direction of the *shaykh*, or spiritual teacher, spiritual enlightenment is impossible. To be initiated into a spiritual lineage, or *silsila*, those who choose to pursue the Sufi path go to a *shaykh*. Since the Prophet is the ancestor of all families, all orders (*silsilas*) may be traced back to one or more of the companions that the Prophet personally initiated. Although there were many notable Sufi gurus and their disciples in the early years of Sufism, the movement was not formalized. Only in the eleventh and twelfth centuries AD did formal orders start to take shape, and *Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani* formed the first significant Sufi organization, known as the *Qadri order* or *tariqa* (1071-1166). The *Naqshbandi order* of *Khwaja Baha' ud din Naqshbandi* (1318-1389) and the *Suhrawardi order* of *Abu'l Najib Suhrawardi* (1098-1168) came after this. Another prominent order, the *Chishti order*, has its roots in *Chisht*, which is close to *Herat*. *Khwaja Abu Ishaq Shami* (d. 940), the organization's spiritual founder, lived there. However, the *silsila* was introduced to India by *Muinuddin Chishti* (d. 1236), who also established a thriving center in *Ajmer*, laying the groundwork for its future. A Sufi's *shaykh* is the center of both his physical and spiritual lives, and he provides his disciples with any direction they may need, ranging from the demands of daily living to spiritual instruction that tries to lose oneself in God. Such instruction is individualized, catered to the disciple's unique requirements and abilities, and progressively exposes him to methods that will successfully help him achieve the spiritual objective. The most common of these methods are those related to *dhikr* or remembering God.

Dhikr

"Remembering" [22] God is the literal meaning of *Dhikr*. The Qur'an places the highest value on remembering God by calling upon His name. "Remember your Lord and give Him your whole attention." (73:8). [23] "Hearts do indeed find rest in remembering God." (13:28) [24] "I will remember you if you remember me." (2:152). [25] "Remember God always, so that you may prosper," the Qur'an adds. "Believers, be ever mindful of God: praise Him morning and evening," is a warning found in (62:10). [26] (33:41) [27] says: "Prayer keeps evil and lewdness at bay." But remembering God is your first responsibility (29:45). [28] The Sufis believe that the true *dhikr* was performed during the time of the Prophet and his companions, when the obligatory prayers were performed with complete focus and in full remembrance of God; the practices of subsequent generations were only a faint echo of this earlier practice. The Sufis placed a great deal of importance on the practice of *dhikr*, even more so than the canonical prayers, in an attempt to replicate that earlier spirituality and devotion. They used *dhikr* as a powerful instrument to improve their *ihsan*, sharpen the quality of their worship, and have a closer look at God. *Dhikr* therefore became the focal point of Sufi practice. It is practiced both in public and in private during a spiritual retreat (*khalwah*), and it is initiated and refined under the supervision of a spiritual master. [29] In addition to the scheduled events listed above, *dhikr* should always be performed in silence, even when one is busy with other tasks. *Dhikr* can be facilitated by the usage of a rosary, or *tasbeeh*.

A Change in Perspective

There are 99 names of God mentioned in the Qur'an. Every name alludes to a different quality of God. Since the Qur'an

states that "You may call on God or you may call on the Merciful: by whatever name you call on Him, His are the most gracious names," all of the names are acceptable for practicing dhikr. ^[30] All types of prayers other than required prayers were considered nawafil (sing. nafl), or acts of supererogation, by the Prophet's companions and the Companions of the Companions. This phrase did not directly relate to prayer in early Islam; rather, it was used to describe performing "good" in addition to fulfilling one's compulsory obligations. In Islam, Muslims are required to fulfill a set of minimal mandatory obligations known as faraiz ^[31] (sing. farz=duty). Everyone who joins the Islamic faith must fulfill these basic obligations, but if they go above and above, they get God's twofold favor. We call this nafl (extra). Supererogatory prayers, like the midnight prayers, were formerly offered by the Prophet himself. However, he and his friends used the term "nafl" quite broadly, understanding it to refer to all good deeds (not only prayer) carried out above and above one's obligations. The early ascetics did the same. The term "nafl" was limited by the later Sufis to the specific meaning of offering prayers beyond the required ones. Similar to this, the Sufis limited the definition of the term "remembrance of God" to the act of repeating the names of God, rather than all acts that, due to their goodness and obedience to God's precepts, had previously fallen under this category. Imperceptibly, this shift occurred and the public quickly began to accept these new ideas as the standard. First and foremost, the early Sufis emphasized the need of giving up earthly pleasures. They also underlined the need of focusing one's thoughts on the idea that one would be judged on the Day of Judgement based on both good and bad conduct, as well as the dread of God and Judgement Day. As a result, there are well-known early Sufis like Hasan al-Basri (642-728), Abu Darda (a companion of the Prophet), and others who used to frequently think about God, pray to Him, and weep for His forgiveness. When questioned about why they did so, they would respond that they could have made an inadvertent error even if they had not committed any deliberate transgressions that called for repentance. They used nafl prayer, recited the Qur'anic verses, remembered God, and lived in fear of Him in order to ask God for forgiveness. The goal for non-involvement in worldly affairs was the most distinctive feature of early Sufi practice. This was the beginning of the spirituality of the Prophet's companions, as we see that the Prophet and his companions remembered God while carrying out all of their earthly responsibilities. They felt that their prize would be twice if they kept remembering God while carrying out all the required everyday tasks. They would get one reward for fulfilling their obligations and another for remembering God outside of formal worship. The austere lifestyle of the early Sufis was well-known. Their ideal state was poverty. They believed that their focus was diverted from God by the world. Therefore, if people abstained from acquiring material possessions, they would avoid distractions, be able to focus well, and consequently, their prayers would acquire a remarkable character.

Conclusion

The origins and growth of Sufism have been examined in this article, which charts its progression from early Islamic asceticism to a complex and varied mystical tradition. This study has shown that Sufism is an essential part of Islamic thought and culture, influencing the intellectual, artistic and spiritual landscape of the Muslim world through a critical analysis of primary materials and existing scholarship.

The results of this study highlight the importance of Tawhid, love and spiritual purification-three fundamental Sufi concepts-in cultivating a strong feeling of devotion, empathy and self-awareness. In addition to diversifying Sufi expression, the rise of well-known Sufi orders and the contributions of significant mystics have made it easier for Sufi to spread throughout the world.

To sum up, this research has shown that Sufism is a dynamic, diverse tradition that has had a significant influence on Islamic philosophy and society. Sufism is a vibrant and timeless manifestation of Islamic spirituality that never fails to uplift those who are interested in learning, finding love and developing spiritually. Its legacy is a potent reminder of the transformational power of self-awareness, compassion and faith.

Scholars and spiritual seekers alike can promote a more nuanced understanding of Islamic spirituality and its lasting contributions to human knowledge and experience by embracing the depths and complexity of Sufism.

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5. See Abdur Rahman Jami, *Nafahatu'l Uns*, Teheran, Abdur Rahman Jami was a prominent Sufi of the Naqshbandi order (see the chapter on the Naqshbandi order in his book), 1337-1918-19, 31-32.
6. See Rizvi SAA, A History of Sufism in India, Vol. I, Delhi. 1975; I:31 and Dar, B.A., Early Sufis, in Sharif, M.M., A History of Muslim Philosophy, Delhi, 1961, 336.
7. 73:20
8. Muslim, 8.
9. Qur'an 7:55
10. Qur'an 29:45.
11. 62:10
12. 33:41-42
13. Indeed, some scholars tried mistakenly to link the term *Sufi* with the word *safa*, or purity.
14. Qur'an 87:14
15. 91:9-10
16. 91:7-8
17. Qur'an 2:207
18. Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam: Cyril Glasse, London, 1989, p. 397.
19. Ibid p. 381.
20. Ibid p. 371.
21. From the Arabic root, t-l-b, to seek.
22. Concise Encyclopedia of Islam. Page 97.
23. Qur'an 73:8
24. 13:24
25. 2:152
26. 62:10
27. 33:41
28. 29:45
29. Pg. 221 (Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam).
30. Quran 17:11
31. Obligatory duties in Islam.