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THE INFLUENCE OF SUFISM ON ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Sufism is the name of a devotional and philosophical approach to Islam that, historically speaking, represents a form of mysticism within the Islamic tradition. Sufism began relatively early in the history of Islam, influenced by certain Arabic ascetics among subsequent generations. The first generation to tread this path were Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Zunnun al-Edhem, al-Hasan al-Basri and Ibrahim ibn Adham Balkhi. In the following years, it quickly spread and became popular. By the 5th/11th centuries it took a more organized form. These early ascetics in the classical Islamic tradition were alchemists- in a spiritual sense- for turning base human nature (nufs) into pure metal, that is, for humans to rid themselves of material wishes, sensory urge and sexual desire. The masters and followers of this line of Sufism are called "Darwishes" over the centuries. The heart of the Sufism is "Suf" which means clean like in the Turkish or Persian and "sufya" in Arabic that means wool, where the famous dervish cloths made from wool use to be worn.

Keywords: Sufism, Islamic Philosophy, Culture, Material Wishes

Introduction

Along with showcasing the rich historical development of Sufism, this analysis delves deeply into the profound Turkish Sufi influences and their significant impact on Turkish culture. Sufism is not just a mere spiritual path, but a mystical movement within the broader spectrum of Islam that seeks to uncover the profound truths of divine love and sacred knowledge through a direct and personal experience of God. This path of spiritual exploration encourages individuals to engage intimately with the divine, fostering an environment of profound love and connection. With its adaptable spiritual practices and its emphasis on leading a disciplined and morally upright life, Sufism has successfully transcended various cultural boundaries, uniting people across different

communities and religions. In doing so, it has undeniably evolved into a global phenomenon in contemporary society. Sufism has inspired many remarkable literary works throughout history, including the iconic *Mesnevi* of Rumi, the enchanting *Mantiku't-Tayr* authored by Fariduddin Attar, the significant *Kutub-u Sitte*, the profound *Fususul-Hikem* by Muhyiddin ibn Arabi, and the heartfelt *Divan* of Yunus Emre, to mention just a few. By thoroughly examining the intricate spiritual and mystical roots that underpin the Turkish cultural landscape, this study adds valuable insights to the recent literature surrounding Sufism, enhancing our understanding of its considerable influence on cultural identity and spiritual heritage (Hassanova et al.2024).

The historical background of Sufism provides a significant light on the intricate and profound consideration of the role of Sufi thought alongside the complexities of Turkish culture in contemporary times. In the lengthy formation process of its deeply spiritual and mystical practices, Sufism has been profoundly influenced by a variety of traditions, including those of Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu monks, which have all contributed influences that shape its ethos. In the foundational and pivotal period of Islamic philosophy and theology, the emergence of certain schools, particularly the *Mu'tazila*, sparked a vibrant and dynamic debate over various philosophical and theological issues that would resonate throughout generations. The substantial influence of this unique cultural condition facilitates *al Sufiyya* in their capacity to convert and integrate new metaphysical, philosophical, and theological elements seamlessly into their varied spiritual and mystical practices, enriching the tradition further. (Munji & Muhammad, 2021).

Historical Development of Sufism

In order to reach a complete understanding of the influence of Sufism on Islamic philosophy and culture, it is necessary to first provide a background of Sufism as it existed within Islamic history. This section aims to discuss the origins of Sufism and its evolution over time. It will illustrate the ways in which Sufism has existed and been practiced in conjunction with the historical Islam that is more commonly studied, as well as model the development of Sufism and its integration into various Muslim societies over time. This approach seeks to demonstrate Sufism's rich tapestry of existence, subtly revealing the deep networks of both Islamic belief and spiritual insights that have characterized the movement since before it adopted the name Sufism. It is from this historical context that the subsequent analysis examines the philosophical ideas developed by Sufis, which have similarly manifested in a variety of ways over the centuries, while also having a profound impact on either the philosophical or broader intellectual development of the societies they influenced (Hamilton, 2017).

It will become increasingly apparent that Sufism has had an outsized influence on the trajectory of Islamic history in a way that retains incredible significance within the modern contemporary moment, even as it has often been marginalized within traditional historical narratives of Islam. The manner in which this profound movement has not only survived but also thrived amidst the incredible shifts and changing rules of various Islamic empires over the centuries signifies that even today, a wide variety of Sufi orders continue to evidence their enduring relevance, whether through their deep-rooted beliefs, distinctive practices, or influential roles within society at large. To overlook this broader context when delving into the philosophical ideas of Sufis would obscure the very ways in which these beliefs were carefully formulated, meaningfully shared, and comprehensively understood both in the past and in today's contemporary landscape alike. Such an oversight may lead to a skewed understanding of Sufism's true impact on Islamic thought and cultural development throughout history, highlighting the importance of recognizing Sufism's ongoing contributions to spiritual and social discourse.

Key Concepts and Practices of Sufism

Sufism represents the inner or mystical dimension of Islamic thought, philosophy, and culture, rich with diverse meanings and profound implications. It is not merely a belief system but rather a centuries-old, esoteric art that encourages its devoted followers to experience and intimately know the divine in a distinct and personal way. Over the centuries, Sufism has been adopted, transformed, and adapted across various heterogeneous regional cultures and mystical traditions, finding unique expressions in social settings across the globe. Its teachings have transcended borders and have been embraced throughout the vast expanse of the Muslim world, evolving within pluralistic societies such as the United States. Here, Sufis often make it a point to tailor their teachings to accommodate the diverse beliefs and specific needs of both inquirers and adherents, reshaping notions of identity and spirituality as they engage with the modern image of "the American" and invoke the presence of "American saints." Within the heart of Sufi practice lies the belief in divine love, a force so powerful and compelling that it has the capacity to tame God's justice and exert control over His very existence (Abbasi et al., 2024).

This profound love and the experience of the divine are believed to come to the pious mystics, enriching not only sacred locations but also bringing contentment to individuals. The concept of *Ishq*, or divine love, significantly permeates Sufi philosophy and teachings. The aesthetic landscapes encompassing tomb architecture, pilgrimage routes, and the intricate design of individual *pokharas* centers dedicated to Sufi cultus are informed and inspired by the idealized love story between a mortal woman, named Moomal, and her divine lover, the revered Hindu deity Qadhor. This love story is

beautifully paralleled with love motifs found within Sufi romance poetry, which extols the mystical union of the created soul with the divine beloved. The methodological approach proposed allows for a mirroring of intertextuality and facilitated religious discourse across different communities, opening avenues for dialogue and understanding. Furthermore, Sufism presents complex eschatological visions that are deeply grounded in the numerical and calendrical artifice that defines many spiritual traditions. A prime example can be seen in Vietnamese caudaom, which emerges as a complex, syncretic religious tradition, intricately weaving its eschatological visions based on a cyclical understanding of history. Text divination, along with a vast and rich literature, profoundly shapes the community's understanding of time. Within this perspective, history is recognized as a cyclical phenomenon, revealing itself as a repeating tale of profound calamities, while the unfolding order of events is meticulously regulated by divine will and the intercessory influence of saintly figures. (Hamilton, 2017)

Sufism and Islamic Mystical Philosophy

Sufism, the mystical tradition of Islam, is as ancient and profound as the philosophy of the Islamic world, and the two are intimately connected. On the one hand, Islamic philosophy reciprocally benefits from the insights of Sufi thinkers into the deepest mysteries of metaphysics and ethics, and on the other, Sufism has always employed the language of philosophic logic and dialectic to explain the way of the seeker on the path toward God. Sufi philosophers are the most subtle and transcendent interpreters of the divine reality and the human condition, as well as the most detailed writers on the mystical practices and experiences by which God can be known directly. These mystics dynamically influence the way closer to the unity of God, understanding the real state and purpose of the human soul, and express through their poetry and prose that understanding of the mystical path and its endpoint.

Sufi metaphysics consists of a series of "explanations," as the early Sufis expressed it, the sum of which is the Unity of Being. This contention, a direct result of mystical experience, rapidly developed into a rational metaphysical system with philosophical underpinnings, a mode of interpreting the phenomena contingent upon the ecstasy and illumination of Sufi gnosis. This system is partly based on earlier Sufi writings but is uniquely elevated by the Sufi philosophers from the 11th century onward, often running in opposition to the "official" theological stance of the Islamic religion with its anthropomorphic distinctions, createdness and temporality, and theodical attitudes of reward and punishment within time. Sufi ideas have been simultaneously engaged in urbane currents of falsafa, cultivating an unexpected affinity between these two seemingly incompatible enterprises of rational wisdom and spiritual gnosis. Additionally, they have been more or less successful in integrating the perennial Sufi

insights into a wide array of broader philosophical traditions, sometimes itinerant, bringing out silenced aspects of the respective spiritual philosophy. Thus, with its rich exegetical legacy, Sufism may properly be described as a mystical key or presupposition for understanding the depth of the world's longer continuous philosophical traditions in a manner that eludes scholastic rational theology (Arifka, 2024).

Sufi Orders and Their Impact

Islam is a profoundly diverse faith, enriched by a wealth of cultural and philosophical expressions. The sacred beliefs of Muslims as found in the Qur'an and Sunnah are both simple and complex offering a quick appreciation to some and deeper study to many. This variety stems not only from the original Revelation, but also from the diversity of linguistic, ethnic historical experiences of Muslim peoples. Among the factors shaping Muslim religious life has been Sufism, a quest within Islam for an intimate, personal, experiential knowledge of the divine. As with any tradition, there are significant aspects that go unchallenged over the years and the centuries, and others that undergo change. There are five principle dimensions that one can explore in order to appreciate the impact of Sufism on Islamic composite culture: the Sufi Orders, Sufi Authors & Literature, the Sufi Poetic Canon, Sufi Practices, and the Influence of Sufism on broader Islamic culture.

Sufism within Islam is not doctrinally arranged faith. Rather, Sufism is generally defined by practitioners not according to elaborate creeds, and confessions, but as a set of general attitudes, requests and practices signifying a deepening of theological or philosophical knowledge of the divine. Such attitudes, requests, and practice are often formed into individual groupings as mystical orders (Tariqas), founded by a charismatic shaykh, whose teachings, leadership style and ritual practices shape the corporate expression of the order. Sufi orders first began to emerge in the 12th Century and were far more fully formed by the 15th Century. Each Sufi order reflects a distinctive pathway(s) to mystical attainment (Hamilton, 2017). There are over seventy different orders within Islam. The orders are found in varying densities across the Islamic world forming cohesive spiritual communities and what Boundary term "epistemic cultures" of care, practice, knowledge and power. Meanwhile, local tariqas have shaped the contours of a sacred landscape too, rendering holy different sites, act, and tribes, and in turn helping to create local traditions and communal identities.

Consider, for instance, the development of shared attitudes towards dress, recitation or marriage within Sufi communities over the centuries. Boundaries between local Sufi practices and mainstream Islamic norms and vice versa have been imagined and reimagined over the centuries, ebbing between tension and cooperation. The result is a broad intertwining of Sufism with different, often political, movements contesting

notions of true Islam and orthodoxy. Sufism and Sufi orders have played a significant role not only in the everyday lives of Muslims, but also in the development of such a composite Islamic culture by exerting a formative influence in the Ulema, Social Justice, colonial religious life, conversion and missionary activity Muslim-Christian and Islamic thought (Hill, 2021).

Sufism in Art and Architecture

One of the ways in which the profound spiritual ideals of Sufism have inspired human creativity lies in the realm of the arts. Sufism represents not just a mystical tradition, but also a deeply felt civilization – a mode of living and being in the world that has found expression in both the most delicate arts, such as Persian miniature painting, and the most grandiose architecture, such as the domes of the Ottoman mosques. The power and beauty of Sufi themes are revealed in their multifarious forms in calligraphy, garden design, in the poetry that has reached such great heights in the works of Rumi and Hafiz, in the holy books of the Sufis, and in the music of the whirling dervishes. The universality of Sufi themes has allowed for the creative exploration of rapture and transcendence within a variety of cultural settings from Senegal to the Balkans, from East Java to Morocco (Keshteli et al., 2021).

The absorption of the Sufi message by the different peoples that have accepted Islam, and its harmonization with their traditional beliefs, has been a key factor in the conversion to Sufi orders of the majority of the Islamic world. Sufi orders, inconsistent with the achievement of material wealth, are upheld to embody a more spiritual, and consequently purer, form of Islam. It is believed that cultural factors could also play a role here – the fact that Sufism is often inextricable from a culture's traditional arts, such as spiritual music, and traditional dance. Consequently, Sufism manages to appeal both to the soul and the senses, allowing it a greater variety of non-verbal channels of communication with more illiterate areas of the world (Hamilton, 2017).

Sufism and Gender

The issue of gender occupies a shaky ground in any religious ethos. Islam has, without doubt, been influential in promoting the rights of women as enjoined by the Qur'ān. On the other hand, certain groups and individuals, who have claimed for themselves the custodianship of the faith, have resorted to its name to deny the rights of women. This contradictory form of behaviour with momentous social outcomes can be appreciated more when viewed in the wider plane of religionism. Throughout human civilisation, the role of women in religious circles has always been a topic of discussion leading to various forms of discrimination against them. Women are often forbidden to approach the sacred, take part in religious services, or enter the temple or the sacrificial site. But they have also been able to create their own system of beliefs and practices which often fly in the face of the official religious culture. Religion was a

serious training ground for docility and obedience for many women, as well as for the formation of the belief that female sexuality is something evil and sinful. It is in the light of these demerits that the intricate relationship between Sufism and gender is to be viewed. How far do Sufi thought and practices intersect with the prevailing gender issues?

Historically, the role of women in the Sufi tradition, like other religions, has been neglected and unreflectively targeted. This has often been deliberate and calculated. But as history has shown, women have also left a quiet but significant legacy in the domain of the Sufi ethos. There have been occurrences of women cast as authority figures, saints and critics, who had assumed roles in the Sufi arena. Notable figures amongst them were: Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, Mahsati Ganjavi, Lālaqā Fatimah al-Nissa Sassanid, Rabi'a Khatun, Zeb-un-Nisa, Fātimah Al-Kubrā. More recently, an English woman, Gemima O'Gorman, founded the Dervish Society of America in 1917, and Lucy Goodenough, renamed herself as Hazrat Khadijah Anwar, directed the Sufi Order International in 1910 after the death of Inayat Khan. In the United States, the Jerrahi Muslim Order is led by a woman, Shikha Fariha Fatima al-Jerrahi, who dwells in the permeation of the mystic with the music. With the divergence of societal norms, Sufi teachings have also responded in diverse ways to the gender questions. In some instances their teachings apparently clash whereas on occasions they accord (Ha, 2022).

Thus, the rights of women, the views of sexual intimacy and homosexuality, the gender specific definitions of God, the identifications of the spiritual concept with woman, the concern with the psycho-somatic divide, the questions of motherhood as metaphor, the discussions on the androgynous soul are some of the areas where these discrepancies and accordances can be located. The pivotal point in this dialogue has been the realm and domain. Various Sufi schools have had the locus of the gender debate very focal to its teachings whereas others have laid scant stress on it. The much maligned Sufi order of the 'whirling dervishes' viewed woman as the representative of the perfect beauty, and hence her symbolisation of a synthesis of Divine Names. On the contrary, the followers of Ahmad Sirhindi had viewed the woman as the seed of the devil. More importantly, Sufism provided a new vision and a new platform for the exploration of spiritual experience in ways not usually associated with the orthodox formulations of human experience and spiritual ideal. Thus, the rich literature of Sufi hagiographies has often been as the site of the acknowledgement of an alternative, subversive means of being, transgressing traditional gender roles. Such examples can be located in biographical, autobiographical or letter-writing genres. In an opposing reading of the canonical literature, some contemporary writers view the above as the site of the re/creation of elite discourses (Haryanto & Muslih, 2024).

This argument rests on the assertion that hagiographic material was composed in the specific literary, socio-political context where stories of charisma, visions, theophanies were expected and produced in a formulaic favorite fashion. In this line the hagiographies were read in a unidirectional way where the performances were bombarded with the qualities of the saints, pre-empting engagements with devotional practices, or in the best scenario workers of popular imaginative beliefs. Not regarded in the same soteriological light as other forms of Sufi texts, much of this literature was also not available in vernacular translation to Muslim women. This position contends that Qur'ānic and ḥadīth commentaries, devotional literature, even treatises on how to pray or fast, represented the academy of women's Sufi learning.

However, as some feminist scholars have pointed out, Sufism wove into its teachings certain gender inclusive practices. In the Qadiri and most Naqshbandi contexts, the zikr practices were gender inclusive. This was made possible by the choice of collective 'silent' zikr performed at high speeds. Inclusion of the Prophet in this zikr meditative silence granted women the spiritual ascension that other gender segregated contexts were denied. It was the case of women attending other sorts of Sufi zikrs, Sama ceremony, and more importantly legal sermons, which legitimated physical and social gender discrimination. In the latter discourses, the esoteric teachings regarding the swift nature of the divine was used to explain the overwhelming arousal in listeners of the opposite sex (Karımı, 2024). As a result, it was argued that with the presence of women, the angelic vision could not be received by the Shaykh, the women, who were lower in their stations to men, releasing coarse light in the proximity of Sufi men.

Women on the other hand were deemed more prone to being bewitched or possessed by the Jinn. Due to the dangers posed by women, Sufi authors and preachers recommended Sufi students to abstain from looking directly into women's eyes, to observe them in a relaxed attitude, not to engage in light talk, not to travel or sit with them. In the tafsīr sira of the Qushayri, women of the "public" and "prostitute" category are accused of causing the corruption of the society. In contemporary Sufi settings, especially Turkey, Egypt and Bangladesh, the effects of the global feminist movement and the increasing theological dialogue on gender is felt in newly created Sufi women consciousness. As a result, some imams have undertaken to include women in the main mosque preaching, and to address on the mainstream Sufi gathering questions of genderology. The acceleration of these debates and the globalization of ideas force the Sufi organizers to be more sensitive to the question of women and to break down the exclusive practices previously maintained.

Sufism and Interfaith Dialogue

One of the key roles of Sufism in current global Islamic cultures is its potential role in an increasingly critical need for a peaceful and more spiritual engagement among

different religious communities. Sufis frequently emphasize the universality of their faith, compassionate view, and do not necessarily force or try to convince the philosophical basis of their faith to people from different religious beliefs, but present the universal aspect of compassion and spiritual searching. Especially, in many countries through the historical examples of Sufi figures who have intensive dialogue or peaceful co-existence with different religious representatives, Sufism can be utilized as the very potential bridging entity between different faiths.

Since the establishment of the Sufi orders in the 12th century, Sufis have traditionally emphasized direct devotion to God, and peace, harmony and beauty in achieving divine love. Over the centuries, Sufism has become a well-accepted way of expression of Islam, so that those without formal affiliations or initiation in Sufi order can also adopt a kind of informal or popular Sufism. In the modern situation, Sufis who are equally educated in both Islamic and Western education systems can act as an intermediary and a bridge between Islamic culture and Western culture, or in a broader sense, between Islamic culture and any other cultures. In many countries, some Sufis are actively participating in dialogue among religious believers, encouraging harmony, understanding and collaboration (Al-Farisi & Syauqii, 2025). Consideration of tolerance and inclusive characteristic of Islamic philosophy and theology, as well as Sufi teachings, is urgently needed for maintaining peaceful and respectful co-existence among different religious communities, and for the elevation of conflicts and misunderstandings among different cultures. However, some misunderstandings and challenges in case of interfaith dialogue with Sufi representatives are considered as well. In addition, the commitment of Sufism and Sufi orders to constructing inclusive communities and maintaining a peaceful and respectful engagement with other religions are examined as the very potential valuable mediators between diverse religious groups in a modern globalized environment.

Modern Interpretations and Relevance of Sufism

Within the changing circumstances of global society and individual expectations, there is new space for interpretations of the substance of Sufism. A sensitive attitude to the complexity of this phenomenon may contribute to better understanding of the various sometimes contradictory aspects of Sufi thought and practice (Hamilton, 2017). Such an orientation may prove insightful for receptivity and a more widespread regard for Sufism in cultures and traditions other than the Islamic. It is also a challenge and a request to rediscover in this world the wisdom of every tradition and to find within it the common values that would help people build the brotherhood of humanity and protect creation. Modernity forces ancient communities of Sufis to translate their spiritual language into the categories of today's exoteric societies. This dialogue between tradition and modernity is most vivid in those parts of the world where there

is constant contact between 'the world of Islam' and 'the world of Christianity.' This tendency to evaluate Sufism within the capacity of common, rational knowledge and logic is often used as a pretext to reject it as a significant intellectual attitude one relied on by Muslim intellectual cultures (Ibrahim2024).

In the context of the entire Islamic movement, Sufism though maintaining considerable independence is closely connected with other elements of Islamic culture. Often, the mystical is considered primary; at other times, the outside perspective is favored. There are both expressions of ethnocentrism and signs of the spiritual quest common to the history of the religious psyche. Sufi piety evokes powerful emotional experiences and a great curiosity among those experiencing it for the first time. Appropriately, what follows is not an interpretation, but rather the exposition of basic threads developed within Sufi science and some pious practices remarkable in their deep, existential appeal. While they may sometimes appear on the edge of rational understanding, this very experience may become an inducement to deeper reflection, spiritual effort, and transformation of the worldview commonly used in the nineteenth illustrations of mystics and dissidents in Islam. The worldview of traditional Sufi poetry is built, most of all, upon contrast. Yet, Sufi contemplation tends to go beyond that rift, emphasizing either the unity of existence or reflecting Farabi's teaching the 'edge of the divine' reflected in all that exists. On the other hand, the entire goal of the mystical search is to look for a trace of eternity in it. One of the chief objectives of the sufites is the flight from the exigencies to the life of ascetism. Sufi poetry sharply watches the shallowness of the world and the brief nature of human life. At the same time, it draws attention to the existence of a more subtle, subtle, transient harmony of divine creation.

Conclusion

Sufism is the name of a devotional and philosophical approach to Islam that, historically speaking, represents a form of mysticism within the Islamic tradition. Sufism began relatively early in the history of Islam, influenced by certain Arabic ascetics among subsequent generations. The first generation to tread this path were Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Zunnun al-Edhem, al-Hasan al-Basri and Ibrahim ibn Adham Balkhi. In the following years, it quickly spread and became popular. By the 5th/11th centuries it took a more organized form. These early ascetics in the classical Islamic tradition were alchemists- in a spiritual sense- for turning base human nature (nufs) into pure metal, that is, for humans to rid themselves of material wishes, sensory urge and sexual desire. The masters and followers of this line of Sufism are called "Darwishes" over the centuries. The heart of the Sufism is "Suf" which means clean like in the Turkish or Persian and "sufya" in Arabic that means wool, where the famous dervish cloths made from wool use to be worn.

Sufism transmitted several concepts to Muslim philosophy, such as perfect and optimum beauty, eternity of attributes of God, God is the only source and the other beings is transient. It was boosted with the thought of Al- Gazzali. It has affected the Muslim society deeply, enabling the people to: comprehending the mysterious and unknown that can't been seen by the eye but could be felt, to the arts of philosophy, illustration, miniature, music, poetry and literature, and finally living. The Muslim culture and mystical deep has acquired a new characteristic in that it has been transferred to the art field. Sufism who has integrated the deeper meaning of the knowledge and love of God, takeaway the human's worldly desires and passions thus bringing consolation and contentment, has also been an impulsion to function the metaphysical experiences to the practice and conceptualise to the theory. The early Sufism, which has promoted the highest moral values, inner purification and spiritual blending, has been gradually redefined and further undermined towards the much more metaphysical and highly philosophical foundations. Manifestated from science to art and thought, Sufism, have noticed and created painters, ceramists, founders, jewellers and scribes about the Islamic tenet that brought up cultural values and arts such as minyatür, illumination, mealc, calligraphy to an art.

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