

ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF SUFISM IN MODERN WORLD.

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Abstract.

Sufism is derived from the Arabic word “Suf” which means “wool”, refer to the garments worn by early Sufis. Some says it is derived from “Suffa” or “bench” referring to a group of poor Muslims living at the time with Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H), known as the people of bench.

There are different views about Sufism when it was came into existence, most scholars are of the opinion that the term Sufism was first coined by a Sufi known as Abu Hashim Kufi. Whether the theories are correct or not but the fact that Sufism is not something that can be separated from Islam, although the word may have used little later. After Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the imams and their sheikhs spread the knowledge of Sufism. During the sixth and seventh century of the Islamic era, the way Sufism reached the height of its popularity, and Sufis like Ibn Arabi and Rumi wrote important books about the mysteries of gnosis and the journey towards god.

My paper deal with how in modern world we are so busy that we can perceive and analyze are enough to be called truth. On the other side we forget to solve the mysteries of life which occur in our day to day life, as Sufism has provided guidance to mankind in all ages and shall continue to do so. Sufism teaches that it is possible for us to see the world beyond our imagination. One who devotes himself in Sufi training may finally find the state where one can see things as they truly are, or when we worship God as though you can see him. The aim of Sufi teaching is to make tried and tested methods of gaining enlightenment accessible to people who are living ordinary lives in the modern world.

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INTRODUCTION.

Sufism (tasawwuf) is the name given to mysticism in Islam. The term Sufism embraces the philosophy and practices which aim at direct communion between God and man, and those who practice Sufism are called Sufis. Scholars differ as to the derivation of the term Sufi, for it is not mentioned in the Qur'an or the books of hadith, nor does it figure in the standard Arab dictionaries that were compiled as late as the 8th century A.D. According to Qushayri (d. 465/1074), author of *al Risala*, the word Sufi was used as a generic term to describe individuals adopting a particular religious attitude based on austerity and spirituality, and came into usage only at the beginning of the 9th century. This he explains simply: 'After the Prophet Muhammad, sahabi (companion) was the only title given to the Muslims of that period.

This was the highest title for them, and they therefore required no other title for their piety and religiosity. The next generation that received religious education directly from the sahaba was called tabiin (followers of the companions), while the title *taba tabiin* (followers of the followers of the companions) was the title given to those who had received religious training from the tabiin. According to Rabia Basri - "The best thing that leads man to god is that he must not care for anything of this world or next other than god", Ibn al-jala "Sufism is a reality without a form".

Sufism is a divine knowledge bestowed by God upon a selected few for the benefit of humanity. Here are some key principles:

1. Attain god through your spiritual master as your master is God.
2. Constant remembrance of dhikr.
3. You must kill your animal spirit i.e. ego.
4. You may use devotional music to help strengthen your devotion.
5. Knowledge is not as important as direct spiritual experience.
6. Tremendous courage is needed to be a sufi.

The journey of Sufi usually consist of following stages

- **Fanna Fizzat.** This is the first stage were Sufi aspirant destroy every wishes and feel that I am the creator of myself. Removal of the "nafs" or the animal spirit so that our higher qualities come to the force.
- **Fanafil Sheikh.** At this stage one has to destroy himself and feels that if something exists in this world is only sheikh.

- Fana- fi- Rasool. If something exists in this world is Rasool.
- Fana Fillah. Whatever exists in this stage is God.
- Baqa Billah. This is the state where man comes back to his existence and God appoints him to guide the humans. This is the stage where the individual is the part of the world, unconcern about his or her reward or position.

Importance of Sufism in Modern World

In this modern world as everyone is so busy in his life and believes that money, possession, physical comfort and many more that happens are more important than spiritual value of life. We forget that what happens to us are not because of our ideas and plans but are our rewards as god blessings. Our egos make us imagine that we are the cause of action. We need to control our arrogance and vanity because what God gives us he can also take away in a flash. As Sufism teaches that it is possible for us to see beyond the veils of darkness which enclouthe our belief systems. One who sincerely devotes himself or herself to a program of Sufi training may eventually approach the state where one can “see things as they truly are”, when one can “worship God as as though you can see Him”, and when can truly realize that one is “in the world, but not of the world”.

For many people in the modern world it may seem that such teachings are alien to their culture or are a thing of the past – if indeed they ever existed! Others may instinctively recognize that their destiny lies in the unfolding of these teachings in their lives, but are faced with overwhelming difficulties in finding a trustworthy and authoritative teacher who can show them the way out of the darkness.

Being healthy does not imply to show happiness. Happiness can be defined as a state of mind free from anger, sorrow, fear, that wealth cannot purchase. For example in this materialistic world man money and time also to spend the time according to his choice. At one side he may enjoy what he wants in his life as he spend money according to his choice but on the other side if he passes through some kind of tension , at this particular stage he will face total failure even if he spend a lot of money. At this particular stage we become more spiritually mature and desire for god increases.

At this stage I want to add that god has one aim that is to help us on the spiritual path to return back to him. Everything in this world is immaterial and is only a spiritual illusion. God teaches us through the opposites i.e. pain /pleasure, happiness/ sorrow.

As Rumi says:

“God turns you from one feeling to another and teaches by means of opposites, so that you will have two wings to fly not one”.

Our achievements, positions are spiritual illusions which are designed to distract us from the path. If you want something from god than first shed your ego and beg for it. If one genuinely changed than god will forgive you and grant you your wish.

The importance of Sufism can also be seen if we look what happens after 9/11 attack. For most of us it is easy to give a particular name to a religion without having a deep knowledge about that. Politician started to make the mind of general peoples against Islam and want them to think that Islam is a terrorist. I think that the knowledge of Sufism will guide them to know what Islam is all about; when someone starts to move on the path of Sufi life he will understand and know the answers of his question. As we know a Sufi is one who follows the Sunnah and live life like that of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.).

Sufism provides guidance to mankind in all ages and shall continue to do so in future. Every religion has some basic tenets while there are numerous principles that are secondary in nature. Basic tenet of Islam is belief in the God and the Prophet. Today’s man is becoming ignorant of those eternal yet hidden tenets of Islam as well as other religion. Today humanity has lost tract of the brotherhood and human relations. Neither there is adherence to the principles of religions, not there is any following of the lifestyle of the prophet. Neither there is love, affection, and justice; what remains manipulation, exploitation, dishonesty, greed. Sufism offers a remedy to these evils in the modern world. Today’s modern world sufism offers support to the individual by training him in the needed values such as respect for relations and living, appreciation for love.

- Sufism teaches and sticks to the life and values held by Prophet Muhammad.
- Sufism teaches respect and reverence for others and equal treatment for all.

- Sufism teaches love for human being, animals, flowers, fruits, leaves and trees. Day and night and all creation of god.
- Sufism teaches polite speech so no one is hurt because love is the religion of Sufi.
- Sufism teaches purity of sight so as to ensure purity of soul.
- Sufism teaches us to avoid the forbidden.
- Sufism teaches us not to use hands in any wrong doings

Value of Sufism in present world

Sufism (tasawwuf) ought to be just as important today as it has ever been throughout its long history. Being a way of purifying the soul a necessity for each new generation – its role should never diminish with changing times and circumstances. Yet, paradoxically, although it still has millions of adherents, as a form of religion, it is definitely in a state of decline.

This is because the traditional form of tasawwuf, which has been shaped by many historical accretions, has no great appeal for the modern educated mind. For instance, tasawwuf, as we now know it, is embroidered by tales of miracles and mysticism, and to find support for its ideology, it relies upon doubtful analogies. But the scientific mind is skeptical of analogies and is impatient with mysticism.

There is also the question of Sufism being heart-based, the heart in ancient times being regarded as the seat of thought and emotion. But now modern science has shown the heart to be nothing but an organ which controls the circulation of the blood and it has been conceded that it is the mind which is the centre of both thought and emotion. This being so, tasawwuf should now be developed as a mind-based philosophy. It will thus have a much stronger attraction for educated minds.

The need of the hour, therefore, is to modernize Sufism, couching it in the contemporary idiom, and explaining its ideology in a way that should address the present-day individual, whose major concern is as much with intellectual development as it is with purification of the soul. That is why tasawwuf should necessarily be linked with real events and its objectives expressed in a scientific manner. Its attraction will thus reach far beyond the poor, the distressed, the under-educated and the downtrodden who at present make up the bulk of its following. Even in a modern country like Egypt, the adherents of Sufism largely

fall into the category of the underprivileged. One constituent of present-day Sufism which may appeal to the modern mind is the practice of meditation. But it should be borne in mind that meditation, which began to be favoured by the Sufis under the influence of local yogic practices, should be discounted, for the simple reason that it fails to awaken the human mind. In any case, meditation is practiced more to relieve stress and promote relaxation than to attain great spiritual heights. Likewise, the practice of inducing a state of ecstasy by means of special exercises is not a part of authentic Sufism, because it has nothing to do with that spiritual development which is the actual aim of Sufism. Formerly, people used to go to Sufis in order to learn the spiritual aspects of their religion and to be trained in spirituality. But now the situation has changed. One reason for this is that at present there are very few genuine Sufis in the Khanqahs. This has led to tasawwuf existing today in a degenerated form. For example, nowadays people do visit dargahs, supposedly to satisfy their spiritual feelings. But, in actuality, all that they accomplish is to meet Sufi pirs in order to ask for their blessings and then go and prostrate themselves at Sufi graves. All this represents Sufism in a diluted if not distorted form. In ancient times a Sufi was revered on account of his great spiritual achievements. But, now Gaddis (seats) have been formed in the name of past Sufis and anyone who acquires such a seat, mostly as a matter of heredity, is acknowledged as a Sufi. These Sufis who have acquired gaddis in this way carry out no new research and produce no new books, for no rethinking or soul-searching is allowed. How then can Tasawwuf develop and face other disciplines of the modern age? Whereas in ancient times tasawwuf was a living discipline, now it is largely ritual-based and as such has become stagnant. This, more than anything else, has led to the erosion of true tasawwuf

However, we do find some reform and development in certain Sufi organizations which, to a great extent, eliminate miracles and ecstasy as parts of Sufism and which look with disfavour upon “shrine worship.” Fazlur Rahman in his well known book, *Islam*, has called this orientation towards reform “neo-Sufism”. Reform in Sufism has actually been long overdue, for it had adopted so many indigenous rituals and practices that it had lost its original character altogether. For example, in the Indian context, it had adopted various yogic practices, including the inducement of ecstasy through loud music and song. All this went against the spirit of Islam. This ecstasy element has taken another form in Turkey where its practitioners are called “whirling dervishes”. They go on dancing in circular movements until they enter a trance-like state. According

to Islam we have come into this world for the purpose of God-realization, not for self-realization. Since the basis of Aryan religions was self-realization, what they held for man was a part (ansh) of God. This concept crept into Sufi thought. The Sufis started different kinds of yoga practices in the form of exercises which were believed to aid selfrealization. This, according to them, amounted to God realization. In this way a number of Sufi orders had diverged a long way from the path of the Shariah. Ultimately, there arose a strong movement in different parts of the world to bring Sufism closer to the Shariah, the Naqshbandiyas being foremost among its promoters.

These new orders were also more organized than their predecessors. One reason for the revival of these Sufi orders in the twentieth century was colonialism, under which the Muslims suffered from an identity crisis. For the majority of Muslims, interaction with the West during the colonial period was too great a culture shock to bear. Political power, their greatest support, had gone. Now they needed something to pin their hopes on. In this state of helplessness, the Khanqahs, Zawiyas (shrines) came to their rescue. In the hope of finding solace in spirituality, they thronged to these shrines and Sufi pirs. The pirs gave them incantations to recite on a rosary; and this was supposed to solve all of their problems.

Doubtless, not all of these Sufis were genuine, but they gave Muslims some hope of getting out of the morass they were floundering in after losing political power. This trading on false hopes worked and Sufism was again revived in a new garb. Some of the shrines have now amassed so much wealth that they are running their own TV channels, one of these being Q TV from Pakistan, where Sufi shrines abound. People believed that they would bring about a spiritual revolution, but no such thing happened. No such revolution can be brought about by just reviving certain rituals. Spiritual revival can be effected only through a reawakening of the spirit by means of intellectual development.

One reason for attaching importance to these Sufi orders was that the people associated with them engaged in missionary activities and they also played a role in bringing about puritanical reforms or spiritual revival, albeit more in form than in spirit. Their organizations served as a base for reformers to make efforts to purify religious practices in order to revive the faith. Most revivalists have Sufi affiliations. To cite one example, the great jihad at the beginning of the 19th century in northern Nigeria was led by Usman dan Fodio, who was a

Qadri. In many other areas, Sufi orders were associated with reform movements and jihad campaigns against colonialists.

In the 19th and the 20th centuries, a number of Sufi traditions were directly or indirectly involved in shaping Muslim responses to the west. Thus they provided the organizational framework and the intellectual inspiration for Muslim responses to modern challenges to Islam. In most cases they provided support to the movements of resistance to foreign rule, especially in the 19th century. Many major wars against expanding European powers were fought by Muslim organizations that had Sufi origins.

Conclusion.

In conclusion I will bind up my paper saying that Sufism plays a very important role in modern world to know the world beyond our imagination which we cannot perceive. A true Sufi is one who holds the purity of soul; and keeps above arrogance, greed and other undue inhuman ambitions.

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