

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUFISM IN PROMOTING ENLIGHTENED ISLAM

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Abstract

This article examines the significance of Sufism in promoting an enlightened and socially engaged understanding of Islam, with particular reference to the intellectual and spiritual heritage of Mawarannahr. It analyzes the historical development and doctrinal formation of the Kubrawiyya, Yasawiyya, and Naqshbandiyya orders, emphasizing their contribution to Islamic intellectual tradition and cultural life. The study highlights Sufism as a harmonious synthesis of faith, Sharia, philosophy, and ethics, grounded in the transformative ideal of spiritual purification through divine love.

Special attention is devoted to the Naqshbandiyya principle of active social engagement and the distinctive Mawarannahr maxims “Dil ba yar, dast ba kar” (Heart with the Beloved, hands at work) and “Mindfulness in action,” which demonstrate the integration of spiritual devotion with everyday responsibility. The article further explores the historical mission of Ahmad Yasawi in elevating Turkic language and literature to a vehicle of mystical expression, thereby shaping the development of Turkic Sufi poetry.

By examining classical Sufi sources in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic, as well as the lives and teachings of prominent Sufi masters, the study underscores the inseparable unity of theory and practice within Sufism. It argues that Sufi ideals such as al-Insan al-Kamil (the Perfect Human Being) foster moral responsibility, social harmony, and patriotism among the younger generation. Ultimately, the article concludes that Sufism remains a vital intellectual and ethical resource for sustaining balanced religious and secular values and for promoting the long-term moral development of society.

Keywords

Sufism; Enlightened Islam; Mawarannahr; Naqshbandiya; Yasawiya; Kubrawiya; Ahmad Yasawi; al-Insan al-Kamil; Islamic intellectual tradition; spiritual and moral education.

Today, extensive scholarly research is being conducted to demonstrate the historical significance and formative processes of the Kubrawiya, Yasawiya, and Naqshbandiya orders, which constitute an essential part of our spiritual heritage. In particular, Sufi literature is being examined through objective academic methodologies, and the ways in which Sufism harmonized with humanistic ideals to inspire world-renowned poetic masterpieces are being analyzed on a broad scale. Indeed, Sufism is regarded as one of the most significant branches of Islamic intellectual tradition.

For centuries, Sufi teachings have enriched the spiritual life of our people. An examination of the essence of Sufism reveals a harmonious synthesis of philosophy, religion, Sharia, faith, and ethics. The central objective of this doctrine is the spiritual and moral purification of the individual through the transformative power of divine love. Sufism encompasses reflections on the cognition of the world, everyday existence, and human perceptions of the universe time and space, temporality and eternity, appearance and essence. Therefore, Sufism cannot be separated from the broader development of science and enlightenment.

One of the primary tasks facing contemporary Orientalists and Islamic scholars is the study and rediscovery of works that articulate the principles of the Naqshbandiya order, which promotes active social engagement rather than withdrawal into ascetic isolation. The scholars of Mawarannahr played an unparalleled role in transforming Sufi thought into a coherent doctrinal system, disseminating it throughout the Islamic world, and integrating it into the lived experience of society.

In this regard, it is of particular importance to examine the intellectual and spiritual heritage formed under the guiding principles “Heart with the Beloved, hands at work” (Dil ba yar, dast ba kar) and “Mindfulness in action,” which distinguish the Sufi tradition of Mawarannahr from other regional expressions. This issue is especially relevant today, when national and spiritual traditions are being reassessed and revitalized. The ability of Mawarannahr Sufi teachings to harmonize religious and secular values and to embed high spiritual ideals into daily life ensured their long-term vitality and development.

Among the Sufi orders of the region, the Yasawiya occupies a distinctive place in our historical memory. Ahmad Yasawi fulfilled a profound historical mission not only as the founder of a Sufi order but also as a pioneering figure in Turkic Sufi

poetry. By elevating his native language to the status of a vehicle for mystical expression, he demonstrated its vast spiritual and artistic potential, thereby laying the foundation for subsequent masterpieces in Turkic literature.

Sufi thought constitutes an integral component of universal human culture. At the height of its development, Sufism spread throughout the Islamic world; khanqahs were established in major urban centers, while ribats and zawiyas were built along important trade routes. In these institutions, spiritual masters guided numerous disciples on the path toward moral and spiritual perfection. In this way, Sufism profoundly shaped the socio-spiritual life of Muslim societies and exerted a lasting influence on the advancement of science, culture, and literature.

In addition to examining the historical evolution and theoretical foundations of Sufism, it is essential to study the lives and intellectual legacies of prominent sheikhs and saints. Theoretical principles gain clarity and coherence when analyzed through the teachings, writings, counsel, memoirs, and biographical narratives associated with these figures.

A defining characteristic of Sufism is its inseparable unity of theory and practice. Emerging from the early Zuhd movement, Sufism initially emphasized ascetic discipline and spiritual exercise. Theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of Sufi teachings; rather, through spiritual struggle and disciplined training, the heart attains the purity necessary to perceive higher truths.

Sufism developed both practically and intellectually, tariqats gradually emerged to structure and institutionalize the Sufi way of life. What began as a personal spiritual path evolved into a broader socio-communal phenomenon. Renowned ascetics and scholars gathered circles of disciples, who adopted their guidance in both spiritual and everyday matters. Thus, during the ninth and tenth centuries, distinct Sufi orders crystallized around charismatic masters. Similar to the formation of schools of jurisprudence and theology, these orders emerged organically, even though their founders did not initially intend to establish formal institutions.

Throughout human history, numerous myths, idealized heroes, theories, and philosophical doctrines have emerged. Many of these intellectual currents found new expression within Sufism. Consequently, Sufism represents a dynamic sphere in which diverse perspectives intersect, interact, and are reinterpreted. It may be described as a spiritually experiential and intellectually reflective tradition shaped by the synthesis of religious faith, philosophical wisdom, and artistic creativity.

Interest in Sufism continues to expand globally. This phenomenon is not confined to the East; individuals across different continents who seek spiritual

depth are increasingly drawn to its teachings. The growing number of translations of Sufi texts and the sustained international attention devoted to major Sufi poets attest to this enduring relevance.

Scholarly research into Arabic, Persian, and Turkic sources that articulate the principles of religiosity and balanced secular engagement within Mawarannahr Sufi doctrines plays an important role in preserving the equilibrium between religious and secular values, especially in light of certain contemporary distortions of Sufi teachings.

If the younger generation internalizes the spiritual and ethical ideals emphasized in Sufism such as the concepts of the Perfect Human Being (al-Insan al-Kamil) and Chivalric Virtue they will distance themselves from ignorance and moral decline. Such internalization fosters patriotism, social responsibility, solidarity, and devotion to the common good. Ultimately, enlightened individuals do not harm one another, nor do they betray their society or homeland for fleeting worldly interests. In this sense, Sufism contributes directly to the sustainable moral progress of society.

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