

## **Sufism: History and Practices**

Tasawwuf or the Sufism is generally believed to be the esoteric, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam. It relates to seeking the nearness of God or the spiritual journey towards Allah. This journey is called Tariqah (the path).

Sufis -- the practitioners of Sufism -- assert that every one will appear before Allah after death but the best amends for the life is to voluntarily take journey towards Allah which is the very purpose of the creation. As it is mentioned in a Hadith Qudsi in which Allah states: "I was a hidden treasure and I loved that I be known, so I created the creation in order to be known."

However, seeking the nearness of Allah or moving on His Path is not an easy task as every human being has his clear and present enemy Shaitan (Satan) with him who is well-equipped to distract him from his objective. The major tool of Shaitan or his bondage is 'Nafs' (self or ego) of the human. So in another definition, the Sufism is one's struggle against 'Nafs'. It can be said that if one is not recognising or experiencing Allah's nearness or presence, the responsibility for this condition lies with one's own self.

Prof. Alan Godlas of the Georgia University, USA, opines: "Some of the gross effects of the dominance of the 'Nafs' are that one may become overwhelmed by the need to gratify desires such as anger, lust, and the many addictions that afflict us. Other gross effects are that one may become dominated by states of consciousness such as anxiety, boredom, regret, depression, and self-pity -- so that one feels like a powerless victim or prisoner tortured within one's own mind." Hence, one of the emphases of Sufism is upon the struggle to overcome the dominance that one's 'Nafs' has over one.

Usually this struggle comprises two dimensions: negation (of all creations except Allah) and affirmation (of Allah only). This is the first obligation of Islam as the Testification of Faith , La Ilaha (There is no deity) and Illa Allah (except for Allah).

The struggle against 'Nafs' has been called by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the greater struggle or greater 'Jihad' (Al-Jihad Al-Akbar) compared with the lesser struggle (Al-Jihad Al-Asghar), means crusade for the cause of Islam.

Sufism originated in the days of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when some of his companions adopted a completely withdrawn life and started living in seclusion in courtyard (Sufa) of the Holy Mosque of the Prophet (Masjid-un-Nabvi). During 9th century, Sufism developed into a mystical doctrine, with direct communion or even ecstatic union with the Creator as its ideal. This aspiration to mystical union with Allah violated hegemony of the orthodox clergy, and in 922 Hussain bin Hallaj, commonly known as Mansoor, was executed in Baghdad for allegedly asserting his identity with Allah. Prominent Sufis subsequently attempted to explain Sufism.

In the 12th century Sufism ceased to be the pursuit of educated elite and developed into a popular movement. The Sufi emphasis on intuitive knowledge and the love of Allah

increased the appeal of Islam to the masses and largely made possible its extension beyond the Middle East into Africa and East Asia. Sufi brotherhoods multiplied rapidly from the Atlantic to Indonesia; some spanned the entire Islamic world; others were regional or local. The tremendous success of these fraternities was due primarily to the abilities and humanitarianism of their founders and leaders, who not only ministered to the spiritual needs of their followers but also helped the poor of all faiths and frequently served as intermediaries between the people and the government.

Dr. Hotchand Moolchand Gurbakhshani in his book in Sindhi on the saints of Luari Sharif, entitled 'Luari Ja Lal' traced the origin of Sufism. Discussing the etymology of the word Sufi, he voraciously traced to the Greek word 'Sophos' meaning determinant, and 'Ahl-e-Sufa' -- a group of pious companions of the Prophet (PBUH), and Sa'af meaning purity of soul. Dr. Gurbakhshani puts forward the view that the word is derived from the Arabic word 'Soof' -- coarse wool -- which the early Sufis used to put on. Ibn-e-Khaldun described Tasawwuf as a religious discipline coming down from the early days of Islam. Sufism, said Dr. Gurbakhshani, is not wedded to cold reasoning, which was the creed of the Mutazilites. It does not indulge in intellectual gymnastic, unprofitable hair-splitting or metaphysical speculation. It rather lays stress on spiritual exercises, regulation of conduct through religious observance, elimination of worldly desires and severance of contact with the humdrum life. As Shaikh Suharwardi (R) had said Sufism is nor pure 'Faqr' (freedom from desires) neither pure Zuhd (abstinence). But a combination of both plus an element, which is peculiar to itself. However, according to Shaikh Suharwardi (R) 'Faqr' is the stepping-stone of Tasawwuf and essential for attainment of spiritual elevation. Hazrat Ibrahim bin Adham, Shafiq Balkhi, Fazeel bin Ayaz are mentioned among the prominent early Sufis, all of whom, as also Hazrat Rabia Basri, died between 726 and 815 AD.

The Iranian saint, Maruf Balkhi, who was a contemporary of Hazrat Shafiq Balkhi, Hazrat Abu Salman Dharani (d. 830 AD) is a well-known Sufi who introduced the concept of Ma'rifat (gnosis) in Sufism. Hazrat Zunnun Misri (the Egyptian) (d. 860 A.D.) also preached some new ideas in Sufism. Maulana Jami has described him as the leader of the Caravan of Sufism. Hazrat Zunnun Misri supported Hazrat Salman's concept of Ma'rifat. He also speaks of 'Vajd' (ecstasy) as a spiritual state in which the soul reaches close to "the Truth". Vajd cannot be attained without negation of self.

The three schools described above, according to Dr. Gurbakhshani, were of the monist idea of 'Hamma Ost' (All is Allah). It was regularly adopted as an article of belief by Hazrat Bayazzid Bustami. Hazrat Junaid Baghdadi also held similar belief. This was the travelling of a great distance away from the definition of Sufism given by Shaikh Suharwardi, which laid equal stress on righteous conduct along with 'Faqr' or avoiding worldly wants. Sufis of moderate views, like Hazrat Suhail bin Abdullah, insisted on six cardinal principles:

- \* Adherence to the words of God (Qur'an);
- \* Sincere following of the prophet's traditions (Sunnah);

- \* Earning livelihood by chaste means;
- \* Avoiding to causing harm to anyone;
- \* Keeping away from what is forbidden; and,
- \* Fulfillment of promise.

Mansoor Hallaj nurtured with his blood the plant of 'Hamma Ost' sown by Bayazzid, Hazrat Abu Saeed Abu Khair, who flourished in the 11th century AD, adorned in with poetic grace and beauty, while Imam Ghazali gave it a philosophical turn. Some other well-known Sufi poets of Iran like Attar, Sanaee, Rumi, gave poetic lustre and philosophical depths to Sufism and enriched Sufi literature with allegorical parables.

The oldest extant treatise on Sufism is the 'Quwwatul Qulub', written by Abu Talib Makki in 994 AD. Diverse schools of Sufism (Turiqah) then emerged during the course of the past centuries. Nearly all of them trace their ultimate origin from Hazrat Ali. The main schools are as follows:

Qadiriya Order -- branches of which are found throughout the Muslim world -- was named after Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166 AD). His tomb is in Baghdad. A later Punjabi Qadiri Sufi Poet was Bulleh Shah. One branch of the Qadiriya in Senegal utilises drums in their gatherings. One branch of the Qadiriya, active in Turkey and the United States is the Qadiri-Rifai Tariqa headed by Shaikh Taner Ansari.

Rifa'i Order -- Shaikh Ahmad al-Rifa'i (d. 1182 AD) is the Shaikh from whom the Rifa'i Order is derived. In some cases, such as that of Shaikh Taner, the Rifa'i and Qadiri orders have united.

Chistia Order -- Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti was the founder of the Chistia Order, which is prominent in India and Pakistan and has spread (in various forms) to the West. Nizamuddin Aulia (d. 725/1325), was a Sufi Shaikh of the Chishtia Order who is buried in New Delhi, India. One of disciples of Nizamuddin Aulia was the great Sufi poet Amir Khusro (d. 725/1325), who was buried at the feet of his master.

Suharwardia Order -- The order is named after Shaikh Shahabuddin Suharwardi and had strong following in the Indian Subcontinent. One of the caliphs of Shaikh Shahabuddin Suharwardi was Shaikh Bahaul Haq Zikkaria, whose tomb is in Multan.

The Naqshbandia order -- named after Bahauddin Naqshband, is the Tariqah that is widely active throughout the world today. It is to that school that Hazrat Sultan-ul-Aulia (Q) founder of Dargah Luari Sharif belonged.

Hazrat Khwaja Muhammad Bahauddin is called Naqshband for he used to write the name of 'Allah' and placed it before his illiterate disciples and asked them to concentrate on it for their spiritual purification. His sayings are preserved in his well-known work

Rashhat Ainul Hayat. The Naqshbandi creed combines Sharia with Tariqa. It is traced back to Hazrat Abu Bakr Sidiq through Hazrat Imam Jafar Sadiq. The main concentration of Naqshbandi is in Central Asia, but it has the large following in many eastern countries, particularly, Turkey, China, Java and also in India and Pakistan. It was brought to the Subcontinent by Hazrat Mujjaddid Alf-e-Thani. His son, Khwaja Muhammad Saeed was his successor and strove for the propagation of the Tariqa. He was succeeded by Khwaja Abdul Ahad, and so on, until Sultan-ul-Aulia Khwaja Muhammad Zamman (Qudus Sirahu) graced the Seat of Naqshbandia Order.