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TOPIC

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MYSTICISM IN ISLAM: A JOURNEY TO THE DIVINES

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Abstract

Islamic sufism, or mysticism, represents a multifaceted dimension and profound of Islamic civilization, characterized by their quest as spiritual closeness toward God. This paper examine the historical origins, influential figures, key principles, practices, and every broader impact about Sufism within and beyond every Islamic world. Originally emerging just as a reaction toward every materialism of the original Umayyad time, sufism developed toward a distinct divine path. Central toward this path do every concepts about Tawhid (oneness of God), devotion, love, and selflessness, deeply fixed in Quranic conduct and Hadith. The lesson highlights significant donation of Sufi celebrity such as Ibn Arabi, Rumi, and Al-Ghazali, which have profoundly changed Islamic philosophy, literature, and spirituality. The paper too delves into every rituals of Sufism and practices, counting Tariqa (every Sufi path), Dhikr (Divine remembrance), and Sama (spiritual ecstasy over music). These policies not only back spiritual extension and personal transformation although also devote significantly toward Islamic art, literature, and music. The influence about Sufism in advancing interfaith global spirituality and dialogue is repeat, demonstrating it is role in attaching different religious practice and fostering broad value of oneness, love, and compassion. Moreover, the study location the controversies surrounding Sufism and critiques, especially its relationship along orthodox Islam along with every challenges it look in contemporary company, such just as redicalization and commercialization. against these test, sufism's enduring estate as a global force in every realm of otherworldliness and your emphasis above universal human morals positions it just as a vital middle in every understanding about Islamic culture along with spirituality. This analysis of Sufism confess its significance now providing an extra comprehensive along with nuanced understanding about Islam, highlighting its act in personal development, cultural enhancement, and understanding beyond diverse communities.

Keywords: Mysticism, Islam, Tawheed, Rumi, Islamic Philosophy, Spiritual Transformation, Mystical Traditions, Orthodox Islam, Ecstasy in Worship.

Introduction:

Mysticism in Islam involves a lifelong process, guided by a spiritual mentor (shaykh or pir), aiming for union with God (Allah). Initiates must combat base impulses within the soul, surrender to their mentors, and engage in spiritual and

physical exercises (De Certeau, 1992). This exercises seeks to empty the self, replacing it with diving remembrance, preparing for union (Nicholson, 1914). While some practices include bodily mortification and deprivation, chastity is not a central value in Islamic mysticism. Studying Islamic mysticism is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it offers a deeper understanding of the diverse facets of Islam, going beyond the conventional rituals and doctrines—this knowledge fosters interfaith dialogue and promotes mutual respect and tolerance among people of different faiths. Additionally, Islamic mysticism provides insight into the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of the Islamic tradition, enriching our comprehension of the faith's inner workings (Cook, 2015). Moreover, it reveals the profound and transformative spiritual journey that mystics embark on, inspiring individuals in their quests for diving connection and personal growth. Ultimately, studying Islamic mysticism contributes to a more holistic and nuanced understanding of Islamic culture and spirituality (Underhill, 2022).

Thesis Statement: Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, is a lifelong journey toward union with God, guided by mentors, involving self-transformation through spiritual and physical practices, deepening our understanding of Islam and spirituality.

I. Historical Origins of Islamic Mysticism:

Sufism, another name for Islamic mysticism, has a long history intricately linked to the evolution of Islamic spirituality. Several critical angles can follow its development. In the Islamic world, the first manifestations of mysticism emerged as a response to the materialism and globalization of the early Umayyad period (661–749 CE) (Danner, 1976). This is often referred to as "ascetics," these early mystics aim to establish a close relationship with the diving. Their ascetic lifestyle and intense attention to Quranic verses regarding Doomsday made them identifiable. Known as "those who always weep" and viewing this world as "a hut of sorrows," these ascetics live a pious life marked by observance of Quranic precepts, deeds of kindness, and a propensity for night prayer. A solid dedication for the spiritual path characterised this early phase of Sufism. Sufism was not created in a vacuum; it absorbed elements of other cultures' mystic traditions and pre-Islamic mysticism. This integration was especially noticeable in the evolution of Sufi concepts and practices. One reason for the growth of the mystical trend in the Islamic world was a shift in ideas with Christian hermits (Knysh, 2010). The

cross-pollination of spiritual concepts and practices facilitated the development of asceticism into a mystical adoration of Allah (God). Rābi‘ah al-ʿAdawīyah, an early mystic, is credited with developing the idea of disinterested love for God, devoid of hopes for paradise or fears of hell. This concept formed the basis of Sufism's traditional mysticism (Rastgoo Far & Bozorgi, 2013).



Figure 1: Sufism as product of collective imagination (Source: VoiceOnCentralAsia, 2020)

The development of Islamic mysticism, or Sufism, is deeply rooted in the traditions of the Quran and Hadith. The Hadith and teachings of the Quran greatly influenced the early Sufis, who used them to mould their spiritual experiences. This mystic found inspiration and guidance in several verses from the Quran. For examples, the concept of "tawakkul," or complete faith in God, was impacted by verses in the Quran that emphasized the significance of dependence on Allah. One such verse is Surah Al-Imran (3:159), which talks of God's assistance in the Battle of Uhud (Marami et al., 2021). Early Sufis believed this confidence was essential to their path towards God.

Moreover, the lessons in the Quran about moral righteousness and purity are critical in the formation of early Sufi thought. Verses such as those found in Surah Al-Baqara (2:197) regarding self-purification and pursuing God's glory led Sufis in their quest for spiritual purity (Ali, 1975). Islamic mysticism also drew heavily from hadith traditions, the recorded sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad. While Hadith does not specifically address mysticism, Sufis often invoke it to validate their beliefs and customs. The Hadith, which states, "He who knows God becomes silent," highlighted the life-changing experiences that mystics sought out when travelling. On the other hand, the Hadith that says, "He who knows God talks much," encouraged the Sufis to share their wisdom. The Hadith traditions

provided the Sufis a framework for understanding the significance of inner spiritual experiences and the need to share and convey them (Knysh, 2019).

II. Key Principles of Sufism:

The mystical and spiritual branch of Islam known as Sufism is found on fundamental ideas that encourage followers to have a closer contact with God. These ideas are supported by the Quran and Hadith, which emphasises their importance in the larger Islamic tradition.

1. Tawhid (the concept of oneness with God):

The Tawhid faith, which emphasised the oneness and unity of God, is the main tenet of Sufism. This essential idea is described as follows in the Quran: "Say, 'He is Allah, [Who is] One, Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither creates nor is born, nor does He have any counterparts.'" Surah Al-Ikhlās, Quran, 112:1-4 This passage makes it clear that there is only one God (Allah) and that nothing can ever be like Him (Bhat, 2018). Sufism holds that this idea transcends logical understanding and is based on personal experiences, in which the Sufi seeks to unite their consciousness with divinity and recognises only the existence of God (Al-Faruqi, 1992).

2. Love, Devotion, and Selflessness:

Sufism has deep origins in Islamic culture and is centred on love and devotion to God. Believing people should love and obey God with all of their heart, according to the Quran, which says, "If you follow me, then Allah will love you and forgive your sins." Surah Al-Imran, 3:31 in the Quran This verse demonstrates the connection between following the Prophet's example and loving God (Angha, 1994). Sufis emphasised that in order to enable a deeper spiritual relationship with God, pure love should lead to selflessness and the surrender of worldly cravings (Ballaster, 2016).

3. Sufi concepts of Divine Union (Wahdat al-Wujud) and Divine Love (Ishq)

Though the phrases "Wahdat al-Wujud" (Unity of Being) and "Ishq" (Divine Love) may not appear explicitly in the Quran or Hadith, the concepts they represents are consistent with more general Islamic teachings. The Quran emphasized how important it is to seeks God's presence and acknowledge His omnipresence: "And We are nearer to him than [his] jugular vein." (Quran, Surah

Qaf, 50:16). This verse affirms God's immanence, a central theme of Wahdat al-Wujud, and implies that God is closer to people than they are. The Sufi demand for diving union entails acknowledging God's presence in energy facet of existence (Elias, 1998). The Quran and Hadith frequently discuss the significance of loving God and the Prophet Muhammad about Divine Love (Ishq). A cornerstone of Sufi spirituality is this love. For example: "Say, [O Muhammad], 'If you should love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you and forgive you your sins.'" (Quran, Surah Al-Imran, 3:31). This verse reiterates the relationship between loving God and keeping the prophecy. Sufis see this as an appeal to developed a passionate love for God that will ultimately result in a diving union (Lings, 1975). Moreover, Hadith traditions emphasized the importance of love in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "None of you has faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." (Sahih al-Bukhari) This Hadith emphasized the value of selfless love, a core Sufi principle that demands compassion and love for all living things (Sedgwick, 2003).

III. Influential Sufi Figures:

Several influential figures have made lasting contributions to philosophy and spirituality in Islamic mysticism or Sufism. This luminary includes Rumi, Ibn Arabi, and Al-Ghazali each with their unique perspectives and contributions to the rich tapestry of Sufi thought.

1. Jalaluddin Rumi

Rumi was a Persian poet, jurist, Islamic theologian, and Sufi mystic who lived in the 13th century. He was also known by the name Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273). Poetry by him is highly acclaimed, particularly "Mathnawi" and "Diwan-e Shams-Tabarizi," which delve deeply into the themes of spiritual adventure and swimming passion (Ali, 2021). Rumi is one of the most read poets in the world because of his poetry, which transcends religious and cultural barriers. His visions reveal the concept of the Divine's profound spiritual connection, which is frequently portrayed as a lover seeking oneness with their beloved. The transformational power of love and the significance of its spiritual essence are highlighted by Rumi's tremendous influence on Sufism (Elias, 2019): many

people have studied his writings, and they have encouraged many others on their spiritual journeys.



Figure 2: Jalaluddin Rumi (Source: Medium, 2016)

2. Ibn Arabi:

Ibn Arabi, also called "The Great Master" or Shaykh al-Akbar, lived from 1165 until 1240 CE. His writings had a significant impact on Islamic philosophy and mysticism. He was a brilliant philosopher, poet, and Sufi mystic. Ibn Arabi's development of the "Unity of Being" (wahdat al-wujud) doctrine was his most important contribution. According to this doctrine, everything in the universe is an expression of the ultimate reality, and all existence is anchored in the One, the Absolute (Arif, 2002). His comprehensive metaphysical writings, including "The Wisdom Tree" and "Futuh al-Makkiyah" (The Makkan Stories), offer a comprehensive understanding of reality that integrates gnostic and Sufi concepts. The philosophy of Ibn Arabi placed a strong emphasis on the value of realising oneself and becoming one with God via acknowledging the Divine in everything. Philosophers, mystics, and theologians from many faiths are still motivated by his profound understanding of the nature of existence and divinity (Abrahamov, 2014).

3. Al-Ghazali:

Al-Ghazali, commonly referred to as Imam Ghazali (1058–1111 CE), was a well-known Islamic mystic, philosopher, and theologian who was instrumental in bringing mysticism and orthodox Islam together. Islamic spirituality and ethics were explored in depth in his most well-known work, "The Revival of Religious

Sciences" (*Ihya' Ulum al-Din*) (Ceylan, 1995). Al-Ghazali's transition from a well-known expert in Islamic law to his spiritual crisis and eventual conversion to Sufism is indicative of his ability to reconcile mysticism and traditional theology. While seeking direct experiences of God through mysticism, he contended that Sufis must stay rooted in Islamic legal and theological frameworks (Arikewuyo, 2020). Al-Ghazali asserted the priority of inner spiritual experiences in his works, such as "The Alchemy of Happiness" and "The Incoherence of the Philosophers," while critically engaging with the philosophical currents of his day (GARDENER, 1917). His works remain a bridge between mainstream Islamic thought and Islamic mysticism.

IV. Sufi Practices and Rituals:

Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, encompasses a rich tapestry of practices and rituals that allow adherents to draw closer to the Divine, among these practices, Dhikr, Tariqa, and Sama are of profound significance.

Dhikr: The Divine Remembrance

Dhikr, which means "the remembrance of God," is a fundamental Sufi practice. It goes beyond mere ritual worship and involves constantly remembering and mentioning Allah in every aspect of life. This continuous connection with the Divine serves as a bridge that links human existence to the service of Allah. The importance of Dhikr is highlighted in the Quran, where Allah calls upon believers to remember Him, promising that He will remember them in return (TENDK & GÖKTAŞ). The Prophet Muhammad reinforced this message, stating that when a person remembers Allah, they are in His company. Their lips moving in His praise signify His presence. Dhikr extends to all facets of daily life, from reciting the Quran to supplicating before engaging in various activities like eating or entering different places. Prescribed supplications for these occasions ensure that even the most routine actions are imbued with the remembrance of Allah (Applebaum, 2023). The practice of Dhikr is not confined to solitary moments—communal gatherings where people remember Allah are highly encouraged. The Prophet Muhammad taught that when people come together to remember Allah, angels surround them, and Allah mentions them favourably among those present.

Tariqa: The Sufi Path and Orders

Tariqa, the "Sufi path" or "way," represents the journey toward direct knowledge of God or Reality. Initially, it denoted the individual mystical path of Sufis. Over time, it evolved to encompass the entire spiritual system established by Sufi sheikhs (Laffan, 2010). This system includes rituals, initiations, and disciplines and is followed by the community or mystic order associated with the sheikh. Each Sufi order claims a spiritual lineage tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad and prescribes specific initiation procedures and practices for its members. These practices guide individuals on their spiritual journey, leading them toward unity with the Divine. Sufi orders establish monasteries and centers where both members and non-members are welcome to engage in spiritual practices, receive guidance, and participate in the order's rituals. These orders have played a vital role in shaping the religious life of Muslim communities in various regions.

Sama: Music and Ecstasy in Sufism

Sama, or listening to music to alter one's state of consciousness, is a distinctive Sufi practice. It involves experiencing divine ecstasy through music and often leads to public displays of intense emotions. However, Sama has been a source of controversy within the Sufi tradition (Guilhon, 2017).



Figure 3: Sama, Ecstasy in Sufism (Source: Wikipedia, 2008)

Sama has inspired three primary approaches within Sufism:

- **Total Exclusion:** Some Sufis rejected Sama entirely, considering it inconsistent with Islamic teachings.
- **Penultimate Stage:** For others, Sama served as a penultimate stage on the path to spiritual enlightenment. Music was viewed as a tool to help the seeker attain ecstasy and draw closer to the Divine.
- **Ultimate Mystical Experience:** A third approach regarded Sama as integral to Islamic mysticism, allowing individuals to immerse themselves fully in the diving presence. In this view, music and poetry in Sama absorbed the listener, leaving only the song.

Sama, often associated with Qawwali, gained prominence as a form of Sufi expression in South Asia. Congregational gatherings featured verses chanted in the presence of a like-minded community that gathered to experience the beautiful voice of qawwali performers. In the modern era, technology has made Sufi music and Sama more accessible to a global audience. Renowned artists like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan have popularized this mystical practice (Gribetz, 1991). Yet, traditionalists question whether uninitiated listeners can fully grasp the depth of the mystical experiences that Sama offers (Aquil, 2012).

V. The Impact of Islamic Mysticism:

Islamic mysticism, sometimes known as Sufism, has left an indissolubly lasting impact on the globe in a variety of ways, influencing everything from global spirituality to art, music, literature, and interfaith dialogue to personal change and spiritual development. Islam's mystical dimension offers a special way to connect with the Divine and, in doing so, transforms people's lives and the larger society.

Individual Transformation and Spiritual Growth:

Islamic mysticism is fundamentally a deeply individualised process of spiritual development and metamorphosis. Sufism encourages followers to explore the inner dimensions of faith and look past the outward manifestations of religion. It teaches that the ultimate aim is to become close to the Divine and that the only ways to do this are by cultivating one's inner spirituality, self-purification, and introspection. Sufis pursue a path that results in a significant metamorphosis of their inner selves (Narang, 1989). This involves attempting to establish a close, intimate relationship with Allah—often referred to as a "Communion with the Divine." The emphasis is on shedding one's ego, purifying one's heart and spirit,

and embracing traits like humility, love, and compassion (ur Rahman, 2010). It has a significant effect on individuals. Sufism fosters a strong sense of morality, heightens one's sense of purpose, and assists people in discovering inner peace. Sufism's transforming power has the ability to elevate a common person to a deeply spiritual and compassionate being, more equipped to navigate life's challenges with grace and wisdom (Eftekhar Khansari, 2013).

The Role of Sufism in Islamic Art, Music, and Literature:

Sufism has had a significant impact on Islamic literature, music, and art. The rich tapestry of Islamic culture and the expression of spirituality via diverse creative forms are the best examples of this impact:

- **Islamic Art** Sufi themes and motifs are frequently included into Islamic art, particularly in the elaborate calligraphy and designs found in mosques and religious texts (Milani, 2012). In addition to showcasing the beauty of Islamic mysticism, these artistic interpretations provide inspiration to people who come upon them.
- **Sufi Music:** Sufi music, including Qawwali, has mesmerising tones that are deeply ingrained in the spiritual heritage. Sufis and their adherents use these musical performances as a way to engage in ecstatic spiritual experiences. Sufi music and poetry express themes of profound love and longing for the Divine (Khan, 2022).
- **Sufi Literature:** Additionally, Sufism has been central to Islamic literature. Sufi poets like Rumi, Hafez, and Attar have left a lasting impact on mystical poetry. Across cultural and theological divides, their works are highly regarded throughout the Muslim world and resonate with seekers of truth everywhere.

Sufism's Influence on Interfaith Dialogue and Global Spirituality:

Beyond the boundaries of a single religion, Sufism functions as a bridge between other faiths and a unifying force in the field of world spirituality. Because of its emphasis on the universal ideals of love, compassion, and oneness, its teachings are a great fit for fostering interfaith dialogue and advancing spirituality on a worldwide scale

Interfaith Dialogue: Sufism is a potent stimulant for interfaith dialogue because of its emphasis on the similarities between various religious traditions. Sufi

leaders frequently interact with leaders of other religions in order to promote tolerance, understanding, and peace (Mandour, 2010). In addition to assisting in the resolution of religious disputes, this dialogue forges bridges of harmony across various religious communities.

Global Spirituality: The principles of sufism have struck a chord with people of many different religious backgrounds. The unifying themes of love, compassion, and oneness have facilitated a broader understanding of global spirituality. Sufi teachings and practises appeal to anyone seeking a closer relationship with God and a deeper understanding of their purpose in life. (Lawrence, 2002).

VI. Critiques and Controversies in Islamic Mysticism (Sufism):

A wide range of historical and contemporary criticisms and disputes have been sparked by the mystical branch of Islam known as Sufism. The tension between Sufism and orthodox Islam and the difficulties that remain in the practise of Islamic mysticism are the two main areas of contention.

Tension Between Sufism and Orthodox Islam:

Regarding the connection between sufism and orthodox Islam, there have been discussions and even moments of tension throughout Islamic history. Among the criticisms and disputes are:

- **Orthodox Interpretation:** Numerous orthodox academics and theologians have questioned whether some Sufi practises and beliefs are consistent with conventional Islamic teachings (Khan, 1989). Tension frequently results from differing perspectives on matters such as the essence of the soul, the character of God, and the significance of Islamic rites.
- **Pantheism and Monotheism:** The concept of *Vahdat al-Vudjud*, or pantheism, practised by some Sufis, raises concerns among orthodox Muslims. Orthodox believers view pantheism as undermining the monotheistic concept of Islam since it proposes a unity between God, humanity, and the material universe.
- **Spiritual Emphasis:** Sufism's emphasis on inner journeys and spiritual experiences occasionally gives rise to charges that it downplays or ignores the significance of abiding by Shariah, or Islamic law. The question of whether the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment can coexist

with strict adherence to religious requirements lies at the centre of this contradiction (Oglu, 1988).

- **Divergent Practices:** Some Sufis choose to concentrate on alternative forms of devotion, such as "zikr" or chanting, rather than adhering to traditional Islamic practises like prayer and fasting. This practice challenges traditional religious observance and is viewed as unconventional by orthodox Muslims.

Contemporary Issues and Challenges in Sufism:

A dynamic and ever-evolving facet of Islam, Sufism poses a set of contemporary challenges.

- **Commercialization:** Sufism is now a commercialised or commodified component of Islam in several regions of the world. This commercialization frequently involves using Sufism's mystical and spiritual aspects for one's benefit, which goes against the religion's initial goal of promoting spiritual development.
- **Radicalization:** Although Sufism has historically been linked to peace, tolerance, and spirituality, some contemporary problems include extreme or extremist groups coopting Sufi leaders (Francesconi, 2009). This perversion of the peaceful teachings of Sufism for violent ends might give rise to controversy.
- **Interfaith Conversation:** Sufism has contributed much to interfaith dialogue and understanding because of its emphasis on universal spirituality and love (Green, 2012). On the other hand, modern challenges include upholding the inclusive principles of Sufism in a world that is becoming more and more divided.

VII. Conclusion:

Finally, Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, is a deep and multifaceted aspect of the Islamic culture. Its historical roots, which are deeply ingrained in the pursuit of spiritual closeness to God, have expanded over centuries to encompass a diverse range of ideas, customs, and significant personalities. Sufism's basic tenets, including Tawhid—the idea of being one with God—and the concepts of selflessness, love and devotion offer a special route for spiritual development and personal transformation. Prominent Sufi leaders such as Rumi, Ibn Arabi, and Al-Ghazali have left an indelible impression on spirituality, philosophy, and

literature. Sufi practises such as Dhikr, Tariqa, and Sama provide a way to experience great spiritual awakening and establish a connection with the Divine. Sufism's influence, however, goes beyond personal development; it also influences literature, music, and the arts, promotes interfaith dialogue, and advances spirituality on a worldwide scale. Sufism has faced historical and contemporary controversy, yet despite this, its enduring legacy as a bridge between other faiths and its emphasis on universal values make it a powerful force in fostering tolerance, understanding, and unity among individuals from various backgrounds. Seekers of wisdom and truth are still drawn to Sufism, which advances a more complex and comprehensive knowledge of Islamic spirituality and culture.

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