

Understanding the Concept of Islamic Sufism

Shahida Bilqies

Research Scholar,

Shah-i-Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies

University of Kashmir, Srinagar-190006

Jammu and Kashmir, India.

Sufism, being the marrow of the bone or the inner dimension of the Islamic revelation, is the means par excellence whereby *Tawhid* is achieved. All Muslims believe in Unity as expressed in the most Universal sense possible by the *Shahadah*, *la ilaha ill'Allah*. The Sufi has realized the mysteries of *Tawhid*, who knows what this assertion means. It is only he who sees God everywhere.¹

Sufism can also be explained from the perspective of the three basic religious attitudes mentioned in the *Qur'an*. These are the attitudes of *Islam*, *Iman* and *Ihsan*. There is a *Hadith* of the Prophet (saw) which describes the three attitudes separately as components of *Din* (religion), while several other traditions in the *Kitab-ul-Iman* of *Sahih Bukhari* discuss *Islam* and *Iman* as distinct attitudes varying in religious significance. These are also mentioned as having various degrees of intensity and varieties in themselves. The attitude of *Islam*, which has given its name to the Islamic religion, means Submission to the Will of Allah. This is the minimum qualification for being a Muslim. Technically, it implies an acceptance, even if only formal, of the teachings contained in the *Qur'an* and the Traditions of the Prophet (saw). *Iman* is a more advanced stage in the field of religion than *Islam*. It designates a further penetration into the heart of religion and a firm faith in its teachings. *Ihsan*, the third quality, is the highest stage of spiritual advancement. At this stage the devotee has such a realization of the religious truths which amounts almost to their direct vision. This quality of *Ihsan*, which was later termed as *Mushahidah* (Direct seeing) by the Sufis, is described in the Tradition by the Prophet (saw) as:

“*Ihsan* is to adore Allah as though thou do see Him for even if thou do not see Him, He nonetheless sees thee.”

According to these three stages of religiosity, Sufism may be defined as the Spiritual Progress of a devotee from the initial stage of *Islam* to the final stage of *Ihsan*.²

Macdonald in his book, “*the Religious Attitude* p. 159, writes, ‘From the earliest times there was an element in the Muslim church which was repelled equally by traditional teaching and intellectual reasoning. It felt that the essence of religion lay elsewhere; that the seat and organ of religion was in the heart. In process of time, all Islam became permeated with this conception, in different degrees and various forms. More widely than ever with Christianity, Islam became and is a mystical faith.’³

Sufism in the sense of ‘mysticism’ and quietism’, was a natural development of the ascetic tendencies which manifested themselves within Islam during the Umayyad period.⁴

To understand Sufism, we must understand mysticism. The Greek root *myein*, “to close the eyes,” is also the root of “mystery”; the mystic’s goal is not to be reached by the intellect or by ordinary means. Fundamentally, mysticism is love of the Absolute, the One Reality, also called Truth, Love, or God. According to Sarraj’s classic definition of Sufism, “The Sufis are people who prefer God to everything and God prefers them to everything else.”⁵

Sufism is necessary because it is to Islam what the heart is to body.⁶

There is no Sufism without Islam because Sufism is the spirituality or Mysticism of the religion of Islam.⁷

It is said that science deals with the universe outside us, and spirituality with the universe inside us.⁸

Thus, Sufism can be said to be a movement which aims at making people good and better Muslims. It is a call to them to actualize truly and internally those teachings of Islam they have accepted only formally or intellectually as part of their inheritance.⁹

A Sufi relinquishes the worldly pleasures, the cheap sensations, the materialism and the corruptions, but not in the least withdraws from the worldly living. He earns his own bread and is never a parasite or a menace to the society.

He abides by the *Shari'at*, the cannon law of Islam, goes by *Tariqat*, the Spiritual Path, to achieve *Abudiat* i.e. The Unity with the Allah, his beloved.¹⁰

Etymology of the Word Sufi

On the origin of the word of Sufi, and its adoption, there are many different opinions among the learned. The following is a list of the various Arabic and other words which are supposed to be the origin of the word of *Sufi*:-

1. *Safaa*-which means cleanliness, particularly the purity of heart, soul and actions of a man.
2. *Ahle Suffa*-During the life time of Holy Prophet (saw) there were certain ascetics (*Zahids* and *Abids*) whose sole occupation in life was nothing but continuous study and recitation of the Holy Qur'an, meditation, prayers and absolute devotion to God in the Prophet's historical mosque at Medina.
3. *Suff*-means row [Those Muslims who always tried to offer their *Namaz* (prayers) in the coveted first row of the 'five daily' congregations during the Prophet's (saw) time].
4. *Soofa*-It is the name of an old Arab tribe who were dedicated to the service of Kaaba (*Mecca*).
5. *Safoot-ul-Qafa*-The hair that grows at the back of the neck.
6. *Siyu Soofia*-It is a Greek word which means Divine knowledge.
7. *Sufana*-A kind of Plant.
8. *Soof*-means Wool.

According to Imam-Al- Qushairi, "Those who had the good fortune of being in the company of the Holy Prophet (saw) in his lifetime and his descendants after the Prophet's (saw) death commanded special respect and status by virtue of this distinction which they enjoyed in the Islamic Society. They were therefore, distinguished as 1) *Sahaaba* 2) *Taabayeen* and 3) *Taba Taabayeen*. After their respective periods came the *Zahid* and *Abid* classes of pious persons and succeeding them, another particular class of ascetics came on the scene that were called *Sufis*. By the end of 200 A.H, the word of *Sufi*, had become the recognized title or badge of all Muslim mystics, According to Maulana Jami, the first person to assume the title of *Sufi* was Sheikh Abu Hasham Kufi (died 150 A.H.)¹¹

Many different opinions and interpretations have been offered concerning the derivation of the word *sufi*·

1. Abu Rayhan Biruni derived the word *sufi* from the Greek *sophia*, meaning wisdom, which also forms the root of the word "philosophy" (philo + sophia, "the love of wisdom"). Biruni maintained that Muslims who held views similar to those of the Greek sages were given this name.
2. The best-known opinion on the origin of the word is that it comes from *suf*, meaning "wool," and signifies "pertaining to wool," the term being used because Sufis wore woolen robes. From ancient times it was the custom of ascetics, the poor, and the pious to wear such garments.

As the Prophet (saw) of Islam said, "You should wear garments of wool that you may find in your hearts the sweetness of faith." (*Kashf al-mahjub*). Shehab ad-Din Sohravardi, in his classic of Sufism, the *'Avaref al-ma'aref*, cites the following tradition, attributed to Anas ebn Malek, "The Messenger of God would accept invitations even from slaves, ride upon donkeys, and wear (coarse) woolen clothes." Moreover, both Jesus and Moses, according to legend, also used to wear wool. Hasan of Basra has related that he met seventy of the Prophet's Companions, veterans of the Battle of *Badr*, and that all of them wore wool. Jalal al-Din Rumi also considered wool the appropriate dress for Sufis. The Sufis chose to wear wool to indicate their rejection of the luxuries of the world and to demonstrate to those who desired to enter the Spiritual Path that Sufism demanded ascetic practices.¹²

In short, a number of derivations have been proposed at different times for the term Sufi, but it is now quite certain that it is derived from the word *suf*, "wool," which view is confirmed by the equivalent *pashmina-push*, "wool-wearer," applied to these mystics in Persian.¹³

Definitions of Sufism

Sufism, the religious philosophy of Islam is described in the oldest extant definition as 'the apprehension of divine realities,' and Mohammedan mystics are fond of calling themselves *Ahl al- Haqq*, 'the followers of the Real.'¹⁴

The Gnostic view of Sufism has been very popular with modern scholars, both western and eastern. They render Sufism as Islamic or Muslim Mysticism, and understand by that term the attempt of the people believing in Islam to know the mysteries of life and the world.

Reynold Nicholson the most outstanding of all western Scholars of Sufism begins his discussion of Sufism by quoting the words of Ma'ruf 'l- kharki (d.200/815) which he translates as: 'Sufism is the apprehension of Divine Realities'. Titus Burckhardt, another eminent scholar, goes a step further when he makes doctrine, not only apprehension, the criterion of real Sufism, the basis as well as the goal of the Sufi *Tariqah*.¹⁵

Sufi masters have offered numerous and seemingly varied definitions of Sufism and the Sufi. These differences, however, arose only from the fact that each master was speaking from his own spiritual station to the station and level of understanding of his listeners. Thus, each definition uncovers a different aspect of Sufism, each correct in its proper context, and to grasp Sufism as a whole, one must consider as wide a range of definitions as possible. In order to clarify the nature of Sufism, therefore, the following definitions have been chosen and assembled, definitions that through study will lead to a more profound understanding of the two terms.¹⁶

- Maruf al Kharki defines it as "The apprehension of Divine Realities".
- Abul- Husayn an -Nuri defines it as "Abandonment of all the portion of the carnal soul".
- Abu Sahl Saluki defines it as "Obtaining from objections".
- Abu Muhammad af-Jarini defines it as "Building up of good habits and freeing of the heart from evil desires".
- Abu Ahij Qazwani defines it as "Nothing but pleasing manners".
- Al- Junayd defines it as "The purification of the heart from associating with created beings, separation from natural characteristics, suppression of human qualities, avoiding the temptations of the carnal soul, taking up the qualities of the spirit, attachment to the sciences of the reality, using what is more proper to the eternal, counseling all the community, being truly faithfully to God and following the Prophet (saw) according to the law".

Thus, the essence of Sufism lies in the purification of the senses and the will, the building up of inner and outer life and the attainment of eternal felicity and blessedness by apprehending the Divine Realities.¹⁷

Various Sayings on Sufism

1. Jonayd, asked to define Sufism, replied, "It is that one should be with God, without any attachment (to other than Him)." (*al-Loma'*)
2. Hojviri has quoted Jonayd as also saying, "Sufism is based on eight qualities: generosity, contentment, patience, allusion, exile, the wearing of wool, travel and poverty. Generosity is symbolized by Abraham, contentment by Isaac, patience by Job, allusion by Zacharias, exile by John, the wearing of wool by Moses, travel by Jesus, and poverty by Mohammad (saw). God bless them all and give them peace!"
3. Jonayd further said: "Sufism is that God makes you die to yourself and live in Him." (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*)
4. Jonayd has also said, "Sufism is election; the Sufi is chosen (by God) from amongst all those things that are 'other than Him'".
5. On another occasion, when asked about Sufism, Jonayd responded, "It is the purification of the heart from all conformity with creatures, the separation of oneself from the moral attitudes of the natural world, and the stamping out of all the attributes of human nature. It is to shun everything to which the ego (*nafs*) beckons you, to keep company with the qualities of spiritual men, to hold fast to the sciences of the Truth, to be always busy with what is appropriate (to a *Sufi*), to give sincere admonition to all Moslems, to keep faith with God, and to follow the Prophet in the *Shari'at*. (*Asrar al-Tawhid*).
6. Jonayd also said, "Sufism is a quality; the servant takes up residence within it." He was then asked, "A quality of God or of the individual?"
7. "In essence," he replied, "A quality of God, but outwardly of the Sufi himself. That is, it's being demands the annihilation (*fana*) of the servant's attributes, which in turn implies the subsistence (*baqa*) of God's Attributes. So, Sufism is a quality of God, even though outwardly it demands constant striving on the Sufi's part, which is an attribute of the servant." (*Kashf al-Mahjub*).
8. Asked about the essence of Sufism, Jonayd replied, "You must accept its outward aspect and ask nothing of its essence, for that would be to commit an injustice against it." (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya*)
9. Abu 'Ali Rudbari has said, "Sufism is the gift of God's free men." (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya*).
10. Rudbari also said, "Sufism is to weep at the Beloved door, even if He spurns you." (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*).

11. Sari Saqati: "Sufism is a word that signifies three characteristics: The Sufi's light of Gnosis never extinguishes the candle of his piety; he does not speak of esoteric knowledge which contradicts the exoteric meaning of the Koran and traditions; and he never allows his own miraculous deeds to unveil the secrets of saints or sinners." (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya*).
12. Ma'ruf Karkhi: "Sufism is to grasp the realities, speak of the subtleties, and despair of everything else in creation." (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya*).
13. Abu Bakr Shebli: "Sufism is to sit without cares with God." (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*).
14. Shebli: "Sufism is to control the faculties and observe the breaths." (Ibid)
15. Ja'far Kholdi: "Sufism is to throw the ego (*nafs*) into slavery, emerge from human nature, and gaze wholly upon God." (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya*).
16. Abol-Hasan Sirvani: "Sufism is one-pointed concentration and solitude (with God)." (*Tara'eq al-haqa'eq*).
17. Abol-Hassan Hosri: "Sufism is the purification of the heart from the turbidity of oppositions." (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya*).
18. Abol-Hosayn Nuri: "Sufism is neither formal practice nor science, but rather moral qualities and virtues." The author of the *Kashf al-Mahjub* comments, "If Sufism were formal practice, it could be acquired through effort; if it were science, it could be learned through study. But Sufism is virtues; seek within yourself for their properties and apply them correctly within yourself; pay from yourself their just price, or you will never acquire Sufism."

"The difference between formal practice and virtue is that the former is an activity inspired by personal motives and affectations such that the inner and the outer man are in conflict; such action lacks spiritual significance. Virtues are also actions, but praise-worthy, devoid of all affectation and dubious motives.' The outward harmonizes with the inward; all pretension vanishes."

19. Abu Mohammad Morta'esh, upon being asked to define Sufism, replied, "Obscurity, complication and concealment." (*Nafahat al-ons*).
20. Morta'esh: "Sufism is beauty of character." (*Kashf al-Mahjub*)
21. Dinavari: "Sufism is to make a show of wealth; thereby choosing anonymity in that people will not recognize you (as a *darvish*) and to disdain all that cannot be used (on the Path)." (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya*)
22. 'Ali ebn Sahl Esfahani: "Sufism is to wash one's hands of 'other-than-God' and to be empty of all but Him." (*Nafahat al-Ons*)
23. Abu Mohammad Jorayri: "Sufism is to watch closely (*Moraqabah*) one's states and to maintain *Adab* (the correct manners of the Path)." (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*)
24. Jorayri also said that Sufism is "To assume all exalted virtues, leaving all lowly dispositions behind." (*al-Loma'*)
25. Abu 'Amr Demashqi: "Sufism is to contemplate created existence as a fault, or rather to ignore all imperfections by gazing upon that which transcends them." (*Nafahat al-ons*)
26. Hojviri quotes this saying as, "Sufism is to gaze upon created existence as imperfection, or rather to disregard it altogether!" He explains, "If one is still gazing at imperfection, one's human attributes after all still survive; if one disregards imperfection, these attributes have been annihilated, for the "gaze" itself belongs to created existence. When no such existence survives, no gazing is possible. This disregard is a God-given insight; he who no longer sees through himself sees through God." (*Kashf al-Mahjub*)
27. Abu Bakr Kattani: "Sufism is noble character; if anyone outranks you in that, he outranks you in purity as well." (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*) (The author of the *Kashf al-Mahjub* ascribes this saying to Mohammad ebn'Ali al-Husayn ebn 'Ali ebn Abi Taleb, a great-grandson of 'Ali, but in place of the word "purity" he uses "Sufism.")
28. Abol-Hasan Mozayyen: "Sufism is to be led by God." (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*)
29. Asked to define the "Science of Sufism," Qaysari replied that it was "the science of God's Names and Attributes and the loci in which they manifest themselves; the states of the Beginning and End (that is, creation and resurrection); the world's realities and their return to a single Reality, the One Essence; and knowledge of the path of spiritual travail and warfare, waged that the soul might be freed from the bonds of individuality, returned to its origin, and qualified by the attributes of non delimitation and universality." (*Sharh al-Ta'yyeh*)

30. Shaykh-e Baha'i: "The science of Sufism deals with the One Essence and with Its Names and Attributes in as much as they link the loci of their outward manifestation, together with all related phenomena, to the Divine Essence. Thus, the subject of this science is the One Essence and its beginning less and eternal Attributes. The questions it investigates include: (1) the emanation of multiplicity from the One Essence and its return thence, (2) the loci of manifestation as reflections of the Divine Names and Attributes, (3) the return of God's people to Him, (4) their wayfaring, spiritual warfare and ascetic practices, and (5) the fruits of each work and remembrance and their actual results in both this world and the next. Finally, the principles of this science are the knowledge of its definition and aim, and the technical terminology of the Sufis."
31. It has been said that Sufism is purification of the heart from conformity with the habits of creatures; separation from those moral qualities belonging to 'nature' (the imprints and impressions of the lower world) by transforming them, purging them of deviations, and basing them upon a 'golden mean' without either exaggeration or neglect; wiping out all human attributes through spiritual warfare, ascetic practice, and involvement with spiritual attributes; emulating the angels in constant, obedience and eschewing all rebellion; learning the sciences of Reality, those which do not vanish with the world's passing away (i.e., the science of God and His Words); following the Prophet (saw) in the *Shari'at*, and 'Ali, the saint and heir of the Prophet (saw), in the *Tariqat*, which is for the Sufi the anchor of all welfare." (*Tara'eq al-Haqa'eq*)
32. "It has been said that Sufism consists of moral qualities approved (by God), such that in every state the Sufi is content with God's good pleasure." (*Kashf al-Mahjub*)
33. Sohrawardi: "A great sage was asked about Sufism and replied, 'Its beginning is God, but it has no end!'" (*Majmu'e-ye Athar-e Farsi*)
34. "Sufism in the beginning is knowledge and in the middle, practice of heart and body. Its end is the gift of, gnostic sciences and verities." (*Tara'eq al-Haqa'eq*)
35. "Sufism is to walk towards God on God's feet."
36. Again, "Sufism is to abandon one's own opinion and submit to God's will."
37. And finally, "Sufism is to know One, desire One, see One, and become One."¹⁸

The gist of them all is beautifully expressed in a definition formulated by *shaykh -al- Islam* Zakariyah Ansari, which is as follows:

"Sufism teaches how to purify one's self, improve one's morals, and build up one's inner and outer life in order to attain perpetual bliss. Its subject matter is the purification of the soul and its end or aim is the attainment of eternal felicity and blessedness."¹⁹

Words of the Masters Concerning the Term *Sufi*

1. Abu 'Ali Rudbari: "The Sufi wears wool (*suf*) upon purity (*safa*) and forces his ego (*nafs*) to taste the cruelty (of being ignored); he leaves the world behind and travels the way of Mohammad (saw)." (*Sharh-e Ta'arof*)"
2. Dhon-Nun Mesri: "The Sufi is one who never tires in striving nor becomes disturbed by being deprived." (*Al-Loma'*)
3. Jonayd was asked, "Who are the Sufis?", and replied, "They are God's chosen creatures; He conceals them or reveals them as He desires." (*al-Loma'*)
4. On another occasion, Jonayd answered the same question by saying, "The Sufis are members of one family into which no one else enters." (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*)
5. Jonayd: "The Sufi's heart, like Abraham's, is secure from the world, obeying God's commands; his submission is that of Ishmael; his grief that of David; his poverty that of Jesus, his patience that of Job; his yearning (for God) that of Moses when he called upon God; and his sincerity that of Mohammad (saw)." (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya'*)
6. Jonayd: "The word Sufi derives from 'wool' (*suf*) which has three letters: s, u and f. 'S' stands for *sabr* (patience), *sedq* (truthfulness), and *safa'* (purity); 'V' for *vadd* (love), *werd* (litany), and *wafa'* (faithfulness); 'F' stands for *fard* (detachment), *faqr* (poverty) and *fana* (annihilation in God)." (*Tara'eq al-Haqa'eq*)
7. Abol-Hasan Hosri: "The Sufi's ecstatic consciousness is his very being; his attributes are but a veil; As the Prophet (saw) said 'Whosoever knows himself knows his Lord.'" (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya'*)

8. Sarraj: "I asked Hosri, 'Who, in your opinion, is the Sufi?' He replied, 'The one whom earth does not carry nor the heavens overshadow.' By this, Hosri meant that although the Sufi may walk upon earth and under heaven, it is neither earth that upholds him nor the sky that shades him, but rather God." (*Al-Loma'*)
9. Kattani: "The Sufi is one who sees his very obedience to God as a sin for which he must beg forgiveness (for his obedience arises from himself, not from God)." (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya'*)
10. Nuri: "The Sufi is at rest with non-existence and generous with existence." (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*)
11. Nuri: "The tribe of the Sufis has been freed from the darkness of human nature, purified from the ego's poison and delivered from self-will; the Sufis are at rest with God in the front rank and loftiest degree and have fled from all but Him; they neither own nor are owned." (*Ibid*)
12. Shaykh Abu Sa'id: "The Sufi does what he does for God's pleasure, that everything God does may please him." (*Asrar al-Tawhid*)
13. Tostari: "The Sufi is one who will let his blood be shed with impunity and who considers his property up for grabs." (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*)
14. Abol-Hasan Kharraqani: "Patched cloak and prayer carpet do not make a Sufi, nor practice and custom; the Sufi is he who is not." (*Nafahat al-Ons*)
15. Shebli was asked, "Why are these folk called 'Sufis'?" He answered, "Because something of themselves remains; if this were not so, it would be impossible to name them!" (*al-Loma'*)
16. Shebli: "The Sufis are children in God's lap." (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*)
17. Shebli: "Sufis are cut off from creatures, connected to God. In His words to Moses, 'I have chosen thee for Myself (Koran, XX: 41), God cut him off from every 'other' and then said to him; 'Thou shalt not see Me!' (Koran, VII: 139)" (*Resalat al-Qoshayri*)
18. Abu Mohammad Rasebi: "The Sufi is not a Sufi till the earth refuses to carry him, the sky to shade him, and the creatures to accept him, so that in every state his refuge is God." (*Nafahit al-Ons*)
19. Morta'esh: "The aspiration of the Sufi does not out reach his stride." In other words, according to the *Kashf al-Mahjub*, "The Sufi's awareness extends even to his feet; his heart is present with his body, even as his body with his heart. This is a sign of presence without absence. Some say, 'The Sufi is absent from himself but present with God: but no! In truth, he is present both with himself and God alike. This is 'concentration within concentration.' If you still perceive the self, you cannot be truly absent from the self but ", then all perception vanishes, there is presence without absence." (*Kashf al-Mahjub*)
20. Abu Torab Nakhshabi: "Nothing besmirches the Sufi; rather, all things are purified through him." (*Resilat al-Qoshayri*)
21. Abu Sa'id Kharraz: "The Sufi has been purified by his Lord and fully illuminated; as a result of his remembrance, he is the very essence of joy." (*Tadhkerat al-Awliya'*)
22. Qoshayri: "The Sufi is like someone suffering from fever. At first he raves deliriously, but at the end he falls silent, for when you reach the station of 'consolidation' you are struck dumb." (*Kashf-ul- Majub*)²⁰

Tasawwuf in the light of Qur'an and Hadith

The thematic aspects of Qur'anic spirituality are:- attentiveness, intention, inner discipline, gratitude, generosity, personal responsibility and the struggle for justice-represent only a small sample of the important issues the scripture offers for consideration. Many similar themes, presented in a different form, lie at the heart of Islam's second documentary well spring, *Hadith*. The three principal developments in *Hadith* literature are the massive collection known as prophetic (saw) *Hadith*, The smaller body of *Hadith* attributed to the *shi'a* imams, and the little treasury of gems called sacred *Hadith*.²¹

All Sufis obey the Holy Qur'an implicitly and also follow the prophet's traditions (*Hadith*) rigidly. According to them, Tasawwuf means "unbounded love of God and selfless service of His creation under *Shariat*," because there is a clear indication in the Holy Qur'an that "God loveth those who love Him." When a Sufi reaches the pinnacle of his career, he is above all worldly things. He then enters the domain of the "Spiritual World" the existence of which is as certain as this material world, *Ma'arifat*- Thus when the lover and the 'Beloved' are in divine harmony and unity, there is nothing else but a serene happiness-a rare type of happiness which no pen or human intellect can describe on paper. It is this reciprocal link of divine love between God and man which is called *Ma'arifat* in Sufi parlance. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, in his *Tarjumaan-ul-Qur'an*, clarifies this point nicely. He says: "Again and again the Qur'an has revealed the fact that the relation of God with man is nothing but a relation of their 'mutual love'.

In appreciation of man's own wonderful creation, God gracious expects nothing but his love and devotion only". A true devotee of God thus becomes His true lover. And, at this stage, the devotee is very near to God. Having attained the position of God's "beloved", he soars high in the spiritual World or the so-called "other-worldiness". And this is the ultimate goal of a Sufi-the true meaning of all his devotion and *Mujaheds* (strivings). The Qur'an gives a central place to its religious principles in order to guide the conduct of man in his life, and that is why all Sufis follow it scrupulously to develop their love of God and win His pleasure and blessings. God says: "O Mohammed (saw), we have given you the Book as well as the secrets of our *Hikmat* (Divine knowledge) and we shall tell u those things which you never knew." As promised, the Prophet (saw) did receive this divine wisdom or the secret knowledge and in turn, imparted and passed it on to some of his very near associates, especially to Hazrat Ali, who were indeed "the source of Light" or the guiding stars of *Tasawwuf* for the succeeding generations of a particular class of Muslim ascetics who played such a glorious role in the service of mankind at various critical junctures of Islamic History.²²

Sources of Sufism

Sufism is one branch of Muslim Philosophy. Like other branches its main source is the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* but the Western Scholars have tried to trace Sufism from other sources. Van Kremer and Dozy have traced Sufism from Indian Vedantism; Merse and Nicholson ascribed it to Neoplatonism and Christianity: Brown regards it as an Aryan reaction against an emotional Semitic religion.

1. Qur'an as a source: Ibn Khaldun comments in his *Muqaddamah* that Sufism was one of the religious sciences which was born in Islam. The way of the living of Sufis has been appreciated by the companions of the Prophet (Pbuh), the Successors and the Successors of the Successors. The fundamental principles of Sufism are found in the companions and the Muslims of old time. The following fundamental Principles of Sufism are found in Islam.

- i. *Kashf* is a source of knowledge.
- ii. God is unique, eternal and all-pervading.
- iii. The world is transitory.
- iv. God is near to His creatures.

The following Quotation from the Holy Qur'an substantiates the claim that Sufism is reflected in the Qur'an.

- When my servants ask thee concerning Me. I am indeed close (to them). I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me. (*Surah al-Baqarah-186*)
- His throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth. (*Surah al-Baqarah - 255*)
- Soon will God produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him. (*Surah al-Maidah - 54*)
- So, they found one of our servants on whom we had bestowed mercy from ourselves and whom we had taught knowledge from our own presence. (*Surah al-Kahf - 65*)
- God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp, the lamp enclosed in Glass. (*Surah al-Nur - 35*)
- There is no God but He Everything (that exists) will perish - except His own Face. (*Surah Qasas - 88*)
- What dark suggestions his soul makes to him; for we are nearer to him than his jugular vein. (*Surah Qaf - 16*)
- All that is on earth will perish but will abide (forever) the Face of thy Lord, full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour. Then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? Of Him seeks (its need) every creature in the heavens and on earth. Every day in (new) splendour doth He shine? (*Surah Rahman - 26 - 29*)
- He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Immanent. (*Surah al-Hadith - 3*)

2. Hadith as a source: The second source of doctrine of Sufism is *Hadith* are reported from the Prophet (PBUH).

- God said: "My servant continues to draw near to me through works of suprogation until I love him. And when I love him I am his ear so that he hears by Me and his eyes so that he sees by me and his hands so that he takes by Me.
- God said: "My earth and My heaven contain Me not but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me".
- God said: "I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known, I created the creation in order that I might be known".
- "Consult thy heart and thou will hear the secret ordinances of God proclaimed by the heart's inward knowledge, which is my faith and divinity".
- "Whosoever knows himself knows his Lord".

3. Internal Circumstances: There is no difficulty in finding that speculative Sufism was an indigenous growth in Islam. By the end of the 2nd Century A.H. when Sufism began to develop, the internal circumstances of the Muslim world were: political unrest, skeptical tendencies of Islamic Rationalism, unconditional piety of the various orthodox schools of Islam and the gradual softening of religious fervency. All these led to the religious man to seek shelter under emotional piety.

4. Christianity: The influence of Christianity cannot be denied. Von Kremer points out the influence of Christianity on pre-Islamic culture and thought. Christian monasticism was known to the Arabs in the country bordering the Syrian Desert and in the desert of Sinai. It is seen in the pre-Islamic poetry also. The woolen dress among the early Sufis was also taken from Christian monks. M.Saeed Sheikh reports in his book. Islamic Philosophy that Farqad Sabaki (168 A.H.) who used to dress in woolen garb was reproached by Himad ibn Salam thus: put off this emblem of Christianity (There are instances of Christian monks of giving instructions and advices to the wandering Muslim saints. The great Sufis have quoted the Gospel-texts and saying of Jesus Christ in their biographies. But these similarities are not the proof that Sufism originated from Christian influence. The sources of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* were sufficient enough for its origin. The hermit-life of Christian monks was against the spirit of Islam and Sufis knew about it. Thus the acculturation may be possible but not the origin.

5. Neoplatonism: Christianity had great influence upon its monks from Neoplatonists. Thus influence on Sufis might come through Christian monks. It also cannot be denied that Plotinus and Porphyry were known to Muslim thinkers because their names are mentioned in the writings of Nadim (385 A.H.) and Shahrestani (469 A.H.). It cannot be denied that some of the Sufis might have borrowed some material from neo-Platonism but it cannot be said that Sufism, in all its speculative and theosophical aspects, borrowed material from Hellenistic Philosophy.

6. Persian Influence: Browne and others regard that Sufism was introduced by Persians. These were due to the reaction of the Aryans against the semetic mind. According to them, ascetic tome, political frustration and innate sublimation of the Persian mind helped the development of mystical notion. But Nicholson disagrees with the view in Mystics of Islam because leading pioneers of Sufism were natives of Syria and Egypt and Arabs by race and there was drop of Persian blood in their veins.

7. Indian Influence: The teachings of Buddha exerted considerable influence in Eastern Persia and Transoxania in the 11th century A.D. There were Buddhist monasteries in Balkh, a famous city for the Sufis. Goldizher writes that Sufi Ibrahim bin Adham who abandoned his throne and became a wandering *Dervish* was nothing but the story of Gautam Buddha. Nicholson is also of the opinion that the practice of holding the breath was learnt by Sufi's from Buddhist monks. The ethical self-culture, ascetic discipline and mental abstraction of Sufism have something in common with Buddhism. But the major difference in Buddhism and Islam does not justify finding of origin of Sufism in Indian influence. For example, the concept of *Nirvana* is negative while *fana* is completely positive and accompanied with *Baqa*.²³

Nature and Purpose of Sufism

- The goal of Sufism is not to acquire an intuitive knowledge of reality, but to be a servant of God. There is no stage higher than the stage of servanthood (*abdiyat*), and there is no truth beyond the *Shari'ah*.
- The object of Sufi *Tariqah* is nothing but to produce conviction in the beliefs of the *Shari'ah* and to facilitate the observance of its rules.
- The experience of *fana* and *baqa* is the essence of *walayyat*; its purpose is to produce conviction.
- Visions and auditions are not the end of the Sufism; they are mere shadows, and God transcends them absolutely.
- *Walis* are of two kinds: those who remain absorbed in God, and those who are returned to the world. The latter are superior to the former.²⁴

Sufi Philosophy

According to Sufi philosophy, Reality is the universal will, the true knowledge, eternal light and supreme beauty, whose nature is self-manifestation, reflected in the mirror of the universe; The world in comparison with the reality is a mere illusion, or non-reality or not-being. Among Sufis, as well as in the Indian schools of philosophy, some believed in the oneness of the existence. To them, multiplicity indicated a mode of unity. The phenomenal world is an outward manifestation of the one-real. The Real's essence is above human knowledge.

From the point of view of its attributes, it is a substance with two accidents, one as creator and the other as creature; one visible and the other invisible. In its essence, it is attribute less, nameless, indescribable, incomprehensible, but when covered with *Avidya* or descent from it absoluteness, names and attributes are formed. The sum of these names and attributes is the phenomenal world, which represents reality under the form of externality. The *dvaitist* Sufi considers that the world is not a mere illusion or ignorance but exists as the self-revelation or the other self of the reality.

Man is the microcosm in whom divine attributes are manifested in most imperfect diminutive form. God is eternal beauty and the nature of beauty is self-manifestation and desire to be loved. Thus, the Sufis base their doctrine on the principles of love and prefer the Course of love or the Indian *Bhakti* to other means of reaching God. They consider love to be the essence of all religions and the cause of creation and its Continuation. God is unknowable, but may be thought through some concrete comparison. Phenomenal diversity is the reflection of the supreme beauty. The attributes are identical with him in fact, though distinct in our thought. In His absolute beauty, He is called *Jamal* and in His phenomenal *Husn*.

Man possesses three natures, viz., sensual, which corresponds to the Indian *Tamas*; intellectual, somewhat like the Indian *rajās*; and spiritual or the Indian *sat*. He becomes virtuous or wicked according to the predominance of one of the three said qualities. His mind must receive gradual training for which a guide is absolutely necessary. The selection and following of a spiritual guide is the most important duty of a Sufi. A bad or imperfect guide may lead him to evil or leave him imperfect and bewildered. He must use all his intellectual ability and human endeavor to find out the true guide and once obtained, he must obey his direction.²⁵

In all brevity, the essence of Sufi thought is that the life is full of miseries and that man can get salvation from the miseries only by renouncing the worldly possessions. Different doctrines were propounded at different times to achieve renunciation. In the early period, the emphasis was on the views like that man's original abode is with God, that the world is inimical to God and that God hates the world. From the middle of the eighth century AD 'denial of will' to man" became dominant. The practicant was to conform his character to the will of God, and thus to reconcile with the adversaries and misfortunes of life. Man was to merge his will into that of God. In the ninth century began the permeation of foreign philosophies and the movement fell victim to the careerists of the field of religion. Abu Yazid declared the mergence of the essence of self into that of God as the aim of life. Now the love of God became the religious duty of the man in order that he might successfully practice detachment from the world of nuisance. Though the miseries of life did drive some men to the mystic life, the miseries ceased to be the principal motivating factor from the ninth century onward. The Sufis principally acknowledged that the love of God is the end of man. Ibn Arabi believed that God and his existence are one: According to him, the apparent separation is due to ignorance. Thus there is considerable variety in their conceptions of knowledge, God, self and the world. However, each sect of the Sufis declared their respective system and their doctrines to be the true knowledge and they claimed that the realization of their knowledge leads to the goal.

The system has two aspects: (1) Knowledge and (2) Practice.

1. According to the Sufis, the object of man's creation is the acquisition of the knowledge of God. Knowledge of God includes the knowledge of the Creator and the creation comprising the universe and the individuals and so on. The knowledge of the soul and the things of the world is an essential step towards the knowledge of God.

2. The Object of man's creation, according to Sufism, is the acquisition of knowledge of God. The Sufis believe that the true knowledge of God can be gained only in intuition. The Sufis believe that the heart of man is a mirror in which he can see the vision of God. But the heart mirror is polluted with the dust of worldly desires. To see the vision of Reality it is essential that it should be cleansed of completely. The worldly desires are identified with *nafs*. It is not easy to kill the *nafs* even for a moment. The theorists of the system have evolved a method of practice to kill it and to lead the novice to the realization of knowledge of God. The practice is two fold: firstly, to practice detachment from the worldliness and secondly to develop love of God through *Muraqaba* (Meditation) and *Muhasaba* (Self-examination) etc. The practice is metaphorically called *Safr* (Journey) to God and the stages of spiritual attainment on it are described as *Muqamat* (Stations). The *Salik* (Practicant) realizes spiritual moods called *Hal* (States) at some of the stations and at the end.²⁶

Theories

The beginnings of Sufism may certainly be placed at the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries of our era. The views which have been advanced as to the nature, origin, and source of the Sufi doctrine are as divergent as the etymologies by which it is proposed to explain its name. Briefly, they may be described as follows:-

1) The Theory that it really represents the Esoteric Doctrine of the Prophet (saw) (The "Esoteric Islam" Theory):-

This is the prevalent view of the Sufis themselves and of those Muhammadans who are more or less in sympathy with them; and though it can hardly commend itself to European scholars, it is by no means so absurd or untenable a hypothesis as is often assumed in Europe. Without insisting too much on the (probably spurious) traditions constantly cited by the Sufis as the basis of their doctrine, such as God's alleged declaration, "I was a Hidden treasure and I desired to be known, therefore I created Creation that I might be known;" or, "God was, and there was naught beside Him;" or, "Whosoever knoweth himself knoweth his Lord;" there are in the Qur'an itself a few texts which lend themselves to a mystical interpretation, as, for instance, the words addressed to the Prophet (saw) concerning his victory over the heathen at the battle of *Badr* (Qur'an, viii, 17): "Thou didst not shoot when thou didst shoot, but God shot," This on the face of it means no more than that God strengthened the arms of the Muslims against their foes; but it involves no great straining of the words to deduce from that God is the Absolute Agent (*fa'al-i-mutlaq*) and man but "as the pen between the fingers of the scribe, who turns it as he will." However little a critical examination of the oldest and most authentic records of the Prophet's (saw) life and teachings would warrant us in regarding him as a mystic or ascribing to him an esoteric doctrine, it must be avowed without reserve that such is the view taken by the more moderate Sufis, and even of such philosophically minded theologians as al-Ghazali (A.D. 1111-2).

(2) The Theory that it must be regarded as the Reaction of the Aryan mind against a Semitic religion imposed upon it by force (The Aryan Reaction Theory):-

This theory has two forms, which may be briefly described as the Indian and the Persian. The former, taking note of certain obvious resemblances which exist between the Sufi doctrines in their more advanced forms and some of the Indian systems, notably the Vedanta Sara, assumes that this similarity (which has been exaggerated, and is rather superficial than fundamental) shows that these systems have a common origin, which must be sought in India. The strongest objection to this view is the historical fact that though in Sasanian times, notably in the sixth century of our era, during the reign of Nushirwan, a certain exchange of ideas took place between Persia and India, no influence can be shown to have been exerted by the latter country on the former (still less on other of the lands of Islam) during Muhammadan times till after the full development of the Sufi system, which was practically completed when al-Biruni, one of the first Muslims who studied the Sanskrit language and the geography, history, literature, and thoughts of India, wrote his famous Memoir on these subjects. In much later times it is likely enough, as shown by von Kremer, that considerable influence was exerted by Indian ideas on the development of Sufism. The other, or Persian, form of the "Aryan Reaction theory" would regard Sufism as an essentially Persian product. Our comparative ignorance of the undercurrents of thought in Sasanian times makes it very difficult to test this theory by the only safe method, the historical; but, as we have already seen, by no means all the early Sufis were of Persian nationality, and some of the most notable and influential mystics of later times, such as Shaykh Muhyiyu'd-Din ibnu'l 'Arabi (A.D. 1240-1), and Ibnu'l Farid (A.D. 1234-5), were men of Arabic speech in whose veins there was not a drop of Persian blood. Yet the first of these exerted an enormous influence over many of the most typical Persian Sufis, such as 'Iraqi (A.D. 1287) whose *Lama'at* was wholly inspired by his writings, Awhadu'd-Din Kirmani (A.D. 1297-8), and indirectly on the much later Jami (A.D. 1492-3), while even at the present day his works (especially the *Fususul Hikam*) are widely read and diligently studied by Persian mystics.

(3) The Theory of Neo-Platonist Influence (Theory of Neo-Platonist Origin):-

So far as Sufism, was not an independent manifestation of that mysticism which, because it meets the requirements and satisfies the cravings of a certain class of minds existing in all ages and in most civilized communities, must be regarded as a spontaneous phenomenon, recurring in many similar but unconnected forms. Wherever the human mind continues to concern itself with the problems of the Wherefore, the Whence, and the Whither of the Spirit, it is probable that it has been more indebted to Neo-Platonism than to any other system.

(4) The Theory of Independent Origin.

There remains the possibility that the Sufi mysticism may be an entirely independent and spontaneous growth. "The identity of two beliefs," as Mr. Nicholson well remarks does not prove that one is generated by the other; they may be results of a like cause.", Vaughan's *Hours with the Mystics*, will easily recall to mind some of the many striking resemblances, both in substance and form, in the utterances of mystics of the most various creeds, countries, and epochs, between whom it is practically certain that no external relation whatever can have existed; and it can be ventured to assert that many of the utterances of Eckart, Tauler or Santa Teresa would, if translated into Persian, easily pass current as the words of Sufi Shaykhs.²⁷

The Foundation of Sufism

Islam, the Arabic word for "Submission to God's will," is the religious tradition taught by the prophet Muhammad (saw). The goal of Islam is to be in harmony with God, to attune the individual's will to God's will. The initial revelation of the Koran occurred in the year A.D. 610. The Islamic era dates from A.D. 622, the year Muhammad (saw) fled from Mecca to the city of Medina, persecuted by the city's leaders, who opposed the monotheistic and democratic teachings of Islam. Islam is described in the Koran as a continuation of the great monotheistic tradition revealed in constant succession to such prophets as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. According to one of the sayings of the prophet Muhammad,(saw)"I have not brought you a new religion. I have brought you the religion, in an unchanged, unhampered way."Islam stresses honesty, charity, service, and other virtues that form a solid foundation for the spiritual practices of Sufism. A moral, ethical, and disciplined life-style is like a solid container that can hold the Sufi's mystical experience without its leaking or dissipating. In the words of Sufi teacher, Muzaffer Ozak, "Sufism without Islam is like a candle burning in the open without a lantern. There are winds which may blow that candle out. But if you have a lantern with glass protecting the flame, the candle will continue to burn safely." Most Sufis believe that the great religions and mystical traditions of the world share the same essential Truth. The various prophets and spiritual teachers are like the light bulbs that illuminate a room. The bulbs are different, but the current comes from one source, which is God It is the same light; each of the individual bulbs receives electricity from a single source.

The quality of the light is always basically the same, and so is the original source. Because all the great prophets have received their inspiration from the same Source and brought the same light, the same basic truths, to humanity, the Sufis believe that to deny even one of the prophets is to deny their universal message and common Source. When bulbs are arranged in series so that electricity passes through one bulb to get to the next, if one bulb goes out, all the lights go out. Sufism proposes that all the great religious and spiritual teachers were sent by one God. They were all true teachers, and what they taught was true. Their teachings originated from the same Divine Source. There is no fundamental difference among all the spiritual teachers and what they have brought; however, just as some bulbs give more light, some teachers have illuminated more of humanity than others. The Sufis love and accept them all, because the Sufis believe there is one God and one message and many prophets. The differences among religions are of human origin, but the truth of all religions is the same and comes from God. The saints are those men and women who interpret the teachings of religion and live by the truth of their religion. The writings and poetry in this book are from some of the great Sufi saints. Though it may be very difficult to recognize who is a saint, one of the signs is that a saint inspires and increases the seeker's devotion to God. The principal characteristic of the saints is that they are loved by God and they love only God. Also, because of their proximity to God, when saints pray for something, it often happens. Many saints are hidden. That is, their outer lives do not look any different from the lives of their neighbours, although their inner lives are radiant with the Divine Presence. It is said that God hides the saints and lovers of God so that people will think that everyone else might be a saint and will therefore love and care for one another. The writings of the saints may inspire you deeply, but to become a mystic, you have to go to a mystical school. In Sufism, this generally means to study with a teacher and a group of Sufi seekers who follow in the traditions of one of the Sufi orders. Sufi groups generally meet several times a week for prayer, meditation, Sufi discourses, and other spiritual practices. You cannot teach yourself Sufism or develop spiritually by yourself any more than you can become a doctor or an engineer by yourself.²⁸

Principal Teachings of Sufism

1. Absolute Being (God) is also Absolute Beauty.
2. Since beauty tends towards manifestation, Absolute Being developed the phenomenal world.
3. Man should practice virtues like poverty, austerity, humility, fortitude and discipline. He should devote himself to the ways of inwardness like withdrawal, silence, solitariness, and self-examination. He should also keep in mind a constant awareness of God with faith, awe and desire. These virtues, inwardness and awareness will bring a sense of direct communication with God.
4. It would be better if such slogans are raised which work as reminders of the mystic belief and aim and as aids to concentration on the quest for unification.
5. Man should follow these directions with sufficient perseverance as they will advance through the standard mystic stages of concentration, apprehension of everything, sudden and unpredictable illumination, blissful ecstasy, sense of union with the deity, sense of nothingness and sense of the nothingness beyond nothingness.²⁹

The Four Stages of Sufism

There are four stages, of practice and understanding in Sufism, *Shariah* (religious Law), *Tariqah* (the mystical path), *Haqiqah* (Truth), and *Marifah* (Gnosis). Each is built upon the stages that go before.

First is the *Shariah*, which is the basic foundation for the next three stages. The *Shariah* consists of teachings of Islam, basically the morality and ethics found in all religions. It provides guidance to us for living properly in this world. Trying to follow Sufism without following the *Shariah* is like trying to build a house on a foundation of sand. Without an ordered life built on solid moral and ethical principles, Mysticism cannot flourish. In Arabic, *Shariah* means "road;" it is a clear track, a well-traveled route that anyone can follow.

Second is the *Tariqah*, which refers to the practice of Sufism.

Tariqah literally means the path in the desert that the Bedouin would follow to travel from oasis to oasis. This path is not clearly marked like a highway; it is not even a visible road. To find your way in the trackless desert, you need to know the area intimately, or you need a guide who knows the destination and is familiar with the local landmarks. Just as the *Shariah* refers to the external dimension of religion, the *Tariqah* refers to the inner practices of Sufism. The guide you need in order to find your way is the Sheikh, or Sufi Teacher. The *Shariah* makes the outer day-to-day life clean and attractive. The *Tariqah* is designed to make the inner life clean and pure. Each of these supports the other.

Third is *Haqiqah*, or Truth, *Haqiqah* refers to the inner meaning of the practices and guidance found in the *Shariah* and *Tariqah*. It is the direct experience of the mystical states of Sufism, direct experience of the presence of God within. Without this experience, seekers follow blindly, attempting to imitate those who know, those who have attained the station of *Haqiqah*. The attainment of *Haqiqah* confirms and solidifies the practice of the first two stages. Before *Haqiqah* all practice is imitation. Without the deep inner understanding that comes from experience, one follows mechanically the teachings and practices of others.

Fourth is *Marifah*, or Gnosis. Gnosis is superior wisdom or knowledge of Spiritual Truth. This is a deep level of inner knowing, beyond *Haqiqah*. More than momentary Spiritual experience, *Marifah* refers to an ongoing state of attunement with God and with Truth. It is the knowledge of Reality, attained by a very few. This is the station of the Messengers, the prophets, and the great sages and saints.

The great Sufi sage Ibn 'Arabi explained these four levels as follows: At the level of the law (*Shariah*) there is "yours and mine." That is, the law guarantees individual rights and ethical relations between people. At the level of the Sufi path (*Tariqah*), "mine is yours and yours is mine." The dervishes are expected to treat one another as brothers and sisters-to open their homes, their hearts, and their purses to one another. At the level of Truth (*Haqiqah*), there is "no mine and no yours." The advanced Sufis at this level realize that all things are from God, that they are really only caretakers and that they "possess" nothing. Those who realize Truth have gone beyond attachment to possessions and beyond attachment to externals in general, including fame and position. At the level of Gnosis (*Marifah*), there is "no me and no you," At this final level, the individual has realized that all is God, that nothing and no one is separate from God.

What is lawful at one level may not be lawful at another level of understanding. For example, the outer practice of fasting is required by religious law, but according to the Sufi path, one of the essential reasons for fasting is to develop self-discipline and to control the insatiable ego. If a person is proud of fasting, the fast is still technically lawful, but in terms of the Sufi path, the fast is a failure.

Another example comes from the famous story of Mansur, al-Hallaj, who was killed far publicly saying, *Ana al Haq*, "I am Truth."

One of the ninety-nine Attributes of God is Truth, and, according to the law, it is absolutely forbidden to call oneself God. The traditional punishment for this extreme heresy was death. However, from the point of view of Truth, the Divine is within each person; it dwells in one's heart of hearts. The innermost heart does have Divine qualities, and each person should be honored as a temple of God. As the Sufi Saint Junaid replied when he was asked about Mansur, "What should he have said, 'I am Falsehood'?"³⁰

The Sufis also prescribe these four stages for the aspirants to attain communion with God as under;

(1) The first stage is called *Shari'at* wherein a devotee has to follow strictly the rules of religion. At this stage of learns how to annihilate himself. This is also called *Fana fi al-Dhat*. This happens in the natural state of every human being living in the world, technically called "*Alam-i-Nasut*". But the Sufi *Fana* means self-mortification before actual death.

(2) The second stage is called *Tariqat* wherein a devotee has to follow blindly the commands of his mentor which is termed as *Fana fi al-Shaikh*. Herein the aspirant starts traversing the path of spiritual journey leading to the world of angels, technically called '*Alam-e Malakut*.'

(3) The third stage is called *Ma'rifat* wherein a devotee follows rigidly the teaching of the holy Prophet. In the language of the Sufis it is called *Fana fi al-Rasul*. Here the devotee attains some power; divine knowledge dawns on him; his soul is strengthened enabling him to take strides further toward the "world of pre-destination," called *Alam-i Jabarut*.

(4) The fourth and the final state is called *Haqiqat*, wherein the difference between the devotee and God is little. He becomes part and parcel of God by self-annihilation. In Sufi terminology it is called *Fana fi Allah*. The goal of the journey is reached and the aspirant unites with Truth. This state of the world is called *Alam-e Lahut*. It may also be noted that *Haqiqat* is also named as *wasl*.³¹

Main Stages of Sufism

Islam has prescribed certain practices for Muslims for attaining perfection in life. These practices are *Kalimah*, *Salat*, *Sawm*, *Haj* and *Zakat*. In addition to these, there are certain duties for a disciplined life. The ritual practices in Islam are endless. The rituals of *Sha'riyat* are not difficult to follow. But there is another method which is called *Ma'rifat*. It is called the path of Sufis. *Ma'rifat* is concerned mainly with immediate experience. This path is described as a journey by Sufis. It has seven stages which are called *Maqamat*. The path is known as "Path" of *Tariqat*. There are differences in Sufis in regard to "Stages" but the main stages are as follows:-

- (i) Repentance (*Tawbah*)
- (ii) Abstinence (*Wisir*)
- (iii) Renunciation (*Zuhd*)
- (iv) Poverty (*Faqr*)
- (v) Patience (*Sabr*)
- (vi) Trust (*Tawakkul*)
- (vii) Satisfaction (*Ridza*)

These stages constitute the ascetic and ethical discipline of Sufi. These stages are by one's own efforts. Each of the stages is the result of the stage preceding it. The path of Sufi is not finished until he travels all the stages. In each stage he is to make himself perfect before advancing to the next. After completing all the stages the seeker becomes Gnostic, *A'rif*.

(i) Repentance: It means, the sins are abandoned and it is resolved never to return to them. A novice should think of his sins with deep regret. Others should repent for forgetting God. They should forget their sins because the thought of the sins comes between them and God. (ii) Abstinence: It means one should refrain himself from indulgence. In Sufi sense, it may be of three types: (a) Abstaining from acts which are doubtful (b) Abstaining from whatever one's consciousness does not allow (c) Abstaining from anything which diverts attention from God.

(iii) **Renunciation**: It means that one should give up voluntarily those things which give physical enjoyment. It has itself three stages.

(a) Renouncing something which may bring name and fame (b) Investigating what to be given up and what not to be given up. (c) Not possessing nor wishing to possess any worldly thing.

(iv) **Poverty**: It means to be stripped of every wish that can turn one's thought from God. It may be of three types:

(a) Neither to possess nor seek anything (b) Not to possess anything but not to decline if offered (c) Not to possess anything but to seek the help of friends in extreme need.

(v) **Patience**: It means to keep mental equilibrium in adversity in distress and in trials from God. It may be of three types. (a) Patience in God. (b) Patience in and for God. (c) Patience in, for and with God.

The first type is of one who can endure distress at one time but loses patience at another time. The second type is of one who is not moved and who does not complain of his bad circumstances, the third type is of one whose equilibrium of mind is not lost in any adversity.

(vi) **Trust in God**: It means complete dependence on God in all affairs. It is of two types:

(a) Renunciation of every personal initiative such as seeking food, taking medicine, etc.

(b) Admission of some personal initiative such as working for the purpose of subsistence etc.

(vii) **Satisfaction**: In this stage the Sufi does everything to please God.

The end of the Sufi path is *Fana* followed by *Baqa*. *Fana* means passing away of the individual self. *Fana* is a state of losing or forgetting self- consciousness in a state of ecstasy. In the highest stage of *Fana*, even the consciousness of attaining *Fana* disappears. This stage is known as *Fana al-Fana* which makes the beginning of the final stage. *Baqa* means passing from the phenomenal self to the real self.³²

Categories of Sufis

According to Sheikh Ali Hijwari, there are three categories of Sufis, as under:-

1. The First category is called, Sufi' because the aspirants forgets himself and all worldly attractions in the devotion of God to those will he resigns and ultimately merges his identity into *Haqiqat* or Divine Truth.
2. The second category is called *Mutasoof* i. e. those who acquire the rank of a Sufi by very hard strivings or *Mujahedas*, step by step, in the course of a regular training under the guidance of a *Pir-o-Murshid* (ments).
3. The third category is called *Mustasoof* i.e. those who wear the garb of a Sufi in imitation only to betray and deceive the world with a view to acquire and enjoy the worldly comforts as imposters.

Thus, a Sufi seeks by renunciation nearness to and Ultimate unity with God; a *Mutasoof* disciplines himself by mastering all the principles of Sufism through regular and hard training under the guidance of a *Pir*, while the *Mustasoof* is only a worthless imitator or imposter -a Satan in the garb of a Sufi to mislead the world.³³

Three Dimensions of Sufism

Sufi teachings can be divided into three broad categories. The first two categories may be referred to as "wisdom" and "method," or in terms more commonly used in the context of Islam, "knowledge" (*ilm*) and "works" (*amal*), i.e., "theory and practice." According to the Prophet (saw), "Knowledge without works is like a tree without fruit. "Here of Course, knowledge" is the same thing the Prophet (saw) has referred to in many other sayings, such as, "The search for knowledge is incumbent upon every Moslem"; "Seek knowledge, even unto China"; "Knowledge is a light which God causes to descend into the heart of whomsoever He will" It is the knowledge of God Himself and of man's ultimate end. For Moslems, it is the knowledge revealed by the Koran, in such a perspective "works" means the application of this knowledge to one's everyday life. For Moslems it is the practice of Islam.

Within the context of this Islamic conception of knowledge and works, the Sufis emphasize a third element that is not set down so explicitly in the Koran and the Hadith: spiritual realization, or the ascending stages of human perfection resulting in proximity to God, Again the Sufis cite a saying of the Prophet (saw): "The Law is my words, the Way is my works, and the Truth is my inward states." Here the Sufis understand "Law" or *Shariah* in its widest sense, as embracing "knowledge" and all the theoretical teachings of Islam. The "Way" or *Tariqah* is then the method of putting the Law into practice. And the Reality or *Haqiqah* is the inward states and stations attained by the traveler in his journey to God and in God.

The Law is like a lamp: It shows the way. Without a lamp, you will not be able to go forward. When you enter the path, your going is the Way. And when you reach the goal that is the Truth. The Law may be compared to learning the theory of medicine. The way involves avoiding certain foods and consuming certain remedies on the basis of this theory. Then the Truth is to find everlasting health and to have no more need for theory and practice.

When man dies to the life of this world, the Law and the Way will be cut off from him, and only the Truth will remain. The Law is knowledge, the Way is works and the Truth is attainment to God. These then are the three dimensions of Sufi teaching: the Law, the Way, and the Truth; or knowledge, works, and attainment to God; or theory, practice, and Spiritual realization.³⁴

Characteristics of a Sufi

The sign of the sincere Sufi is that he feels poor when he has wealth, is humble when he has power, and is hidden when he has fame. The sign of the false Sufi is that he acts rich towards the world when he is poor, acts powerful when he is humble, and is famous among his followers. The foulest of all foul things is a greedy Sufi.³⁵

Hazrat Ali Hujwari supports what Hazrat Junaid Baghdadi says about these qualities. Hazrat Junaid attributes the following 8 exemplary qualities of a Sufi:-

"A true Sufi possesses (1) the courage and magnanimity of Prophet Ibrahim, (2) the obedience of Prophet Ismail, (3) the patience and forbearance of prophet Ayub, (4) the signs of Prophet Zakaria, (5) the poverty of Prophet Yahya, (6) the travelling nature of Prophet Isa, Christ (7) the simplicity of dress of Prophet Musa (Moses) and (8) the *Fuqr* (contentment and renunciation) of Prophet Mohammed"(saw).

Sufism is "Something" divine - Hazrat Sheikh Ali Hujwari adds:

"Sufism is not the name of any *Uloom* (plural of *ilm* - knowledge) or *rasoom* (customs or traditions). It is the name of a special religious conduct based upon Divine Knowledge and guidance". He argues: "If it were *Uloom* then it should have been acquired by common knowledge and if it were *rasoom* then it should have been acquired by mere *Mujahedas* (practice and strivings). But it is neither acquired by '*Ilm*' nor by *Mujahedas* alone. It is something divine bestowed upon a selected few by the grace of God who renounce this material world and devote themselves exclusively to the worship of God and service of his creatures."

The Sheikh further lays down four important characteristics of a Sufi.viz.

(1) implicit faith in and obedience to God by giving up all other worldly hopes and hypocrisy, (2) honoring of the elders and welcoming of the younger ones with all due equanimity, love and respect, (3) desiring neither rewards nor any other kind of appreciation from any quarter whatever except God, and (4) over-powering all sensuous desires of the devil of Nafs.³⁶

The history of mysticism is the history of the demonstration of this law upon the plane of reality.

- 1) Mysticism is practical, nor theoretical
- 2) Mysticism is an entire Spiritual Activity
- 3) The business and method of Mysticism is love
- 4) Mysticism entails a definite psychological Experience.³⁷

Sufi Ethics

Among the cardinal tenets of Sufism, may be mentioned the following:-

(1) Submission or Resignation: A Sun novice must treat his spiritual teacher with great respect and obey him like the corpse in the hands of corpse-bearers. In the same manner and more completely, he must submit himself to the will of God and live in perfect harmony with the Divine Will.

(2) Ikhlās, or Sincerity and Devotion: This indicates the effort of moving towards the Divine Being and keeping this ideal of movement above all other desires. It is opposite to *riya*, which means hypocrisy or pretended love without the putting forth of any effort to gain the beloved. *Ikhlās* demands self sacrifice and indifference to all other ideas. When *Ikhlās* becomes perfect, self-consciousness also is lost.

(3) Tauba, or Repentance: This indicates the return or conversion from the world to God. It is not only renunciation of the evil but a change from a tendency towards the world to a tendency towards God. The human soul being pure in its essence, when polluted, becomes restless and asserts its true nature by feeling repentance for its unnatural tendency.

(4) The Fear of God is repeatedly praised in the Qur'an.

For example, in one place, it declares: - "And those who give what they give (find) in alms and their hearts, are full of fear that to their Lord that must return. These hasten to virtues and they are foremost in attaining them." (Chap. XXIII-60, 61.) The fear of God is the deep consciousness of His sublimity and grandeur- a man in the presence of a king may not fear him, but the feeling of respect is so deep that the balance of mind is lost.

(5) Broad-Mindedness: A Sindhi Sufi, named Latif, says: "When the truth is one and the beloved is the same, why should men fight over the means?"

When one of his disciples asked him what religion he followed, he replied: "Between the two" by which he meant, all or none.

(6) Tavakkul, or Trust: A Sufi must trust in God. Some extremists went to the extent of neither working, nor even begging, and of expecting that their daily necessities would reach them without laboring to obtain them. The idea led to quietism and degenerated into laziness and inertia.

(7) Music: As a Sufi must train his mind to appreciate beauty and by some means to stir up his inner spiritual feeling and music is considered to be beauty and harmony in sound, a large number of Sufi leaders, particularly *Chishtis* and *Moulvīs*, approve of the hearing of songs and the playing on musical instruments on condition that the purpose must be to stimulate spiritual emotion. There is a common saying among Sufis that earthly beauty, with its appreciation, is a bridge to the universal beauty. Music is called *Sama*, or spiritual concerts, in which, one or several singers, with or without musical instrument, sing and play. The verses are erotic, and interpreted in an allegorical sense. While *Qavval*, or the musician, sings a verse and plays on that instrument, the hearers sit in silence and listen with great attention. Each man interprets the verse according to the standard of his learning and taste, till one or some are affected deeply with its meaning. They repeat those verses that appeal to them or ask the singer to sing them over again, and feel pressure; while some show signs of appreciation, others who get more affected, weep, dance and even become unconscious. The musicians finding a hearer appreciating their songs repeat again and again addressing the admirer. Some Sufi sages and poets were themselves good singers and masters in music. Shah Latif of Sindh was gifted with a melodious voice and used to play on the Tambura, and Amir Khusro, the great poet who lived during the reign of the Khilji and Tughlaq dynasties of North India, was likewise a great musician. Sufis believe that the state ecstasy may be attained through music. Music which stirs animal passion is prohibited.

(8) Kashf, or Unveiling of the Spiritual Mysteries. This is classified into: - (a) *Mahazerah*, in which intellect is the means of reaching to a conclusion; and (b) *Mushaheda*, in which personal knowledge is a proof of ecstasy (*wajd*) and the condition attained (*hal*). By ecstasy, Sufis mean the true state of yearning or momentary absorption in the Divine Beloved. The state of ecstasy is higher than prayer when the Divine Will is revealed. A constant state of ecstasy leads to complete submission to the Divine Will.

(9) Spiritual knowledge: This is of three kinds: (a) Normal (*Ilmul-yaqin*), reaching to a proof by intellectual reasoning; (b) Abnormal (*Ainual-yaqin*), loss of worldly consciousness in a state of ecstasy, or knowing a spiritual secret by perceiving it; and (c) Super-normal (*Haqul-yaqin*), union with the truth or seeing and feeling the quality of a thing. These three stages of knowledge are illustrated by saying that a fruit may be known by its correct description, and better known by seeing it and perfectly known by seeing and tasting it.

(10) *Hal*, or condition is a mental state gifted momentarily by divine grace. In this state, one is either in the form of *Bast*, or expansion of heart, or by *Qabz*, or depression of the same. The Qur'an says: "Allah contracts and expands the (Spiritual) food." When it is gifted continuously, it is called milk, or possession, and when it becomes permanent, it is named *Maqam*, or Station.

(11) Renunciation is of two kinds- External and Internal.

It stands for detachment from worldly pleasures. A Sufi must minimize his worldly needs and thus become harmless to other creature. Next, he should try to free the soul from attachment to sensible objects. A Sufi values this life as a source of training himself for a true life.

(12) Evil is imperfection and the objects which led towards evil are the causes of making the soul imperfect. Good is perfect and Perfection proceeds from God. Evil, in other words, is a limitation of human nature.

(13) *Zikr, or Recitation, Muraqeba, or Meditation*: Each order has its own method of reciting a sacred word or formula. In a general sense, it is divided into: - (i) *Jali*, or loud muttering, adopted by the *Chishti* and *Qaderi* orders; and (ii) *Khafi*, or mental muttering, preferred by the *Naqshbandi* order. Both are based on texts of the Qur'an.

There are different methods of performing *Zikr* and *Muraqeba*. For instance, (i) Some sit and repeat the word Allah by inhaling breath from left side; (ii) Others fold the legs and repeat the word mentally from right and then from left; (iii) Some inhale, meditating on *la* (not) from navel and draw the breath up to the left shoulder, then think on Allah (God) in memory (brain) and exhale saying *il-la-lah* "but God" from the left side; (iv) Some close the eye and the lips and mentally repeat Allah, the hearer Allah, the seer, Allah, the knower; (v) First, from the navel to the breast, then upward; then imagine it in an abstract sense beyond the body, (vi) Allah, from the right side, then from the left; (vii) *La ilaha*, exhaling, and *Il-lal-lah* inhaling:

and (viii) By counting a number of times on a rosary, while meditating or repeating a sacred word. The attention must be fixed on that word till it is so much impressed on the mind that all other thoughts and sensible images disappear. Among the words selected for recitation is *la ilaha il-lal-lah*. God but Allah, and *hu-he*.

Each order observes a particular formula for *Zikr* and keeps a particular posture or corresponding to Sanskrit Asana or peculiar inclination of the body and limbs. Among some Sufi orders while meditating on the sacred words, the tongue is made to touch the roof of the throat. Others close the teeth, each row against the other. The Egyptian Sufis sit on a mat in a circle. Next, they stand and recite verses incessantly. Their Sheikh sits at one end. The musicians with flutes sit behind. The ceremony is started by reciting the opening chapter of the Qur'an and by slowly chanting the sacred formula. Then they stand and recite incessantly, till one or more are overpowered by emotion and become unconscious. Musicians join them. In India, the word *Om* is adopted by a certain class of Sufis in Sindh, for example, the followers of Shah Latif.

(14) *Fana* (annihilation) and *Baqa* (affirmation) are the two highest stages of Spiritual development. By *Fana* or annihilation the Sufi means self-negation of earthly tendency; and *Baqa*, retention of spiritual existence, or extraction of evil qualities and retention of virtue or permanency of mind from sensible objects to spiritual reality, the extinction of material desires and the loss of selfish consciousness. *Fana of fana* is the highest stage when individual consciousness gives place to universal contemplation and the Sufi's heart becomes a passive medium for the divine will. He lives, acts and does everything as a second person without selfish interest. According to Farabi, God cannot be realized unless a man passes from multiplicity to oneness.³⁸

End Notes

1. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Living Sufism*, Suhail Academy Lahore, Pakistan, 2000.
2. Schimmel, Annemarie, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1975, p.9.
3. Arberry, Arthur J., *An Introduction to the History of Sufism: The Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy lectures for 1942*, Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi, 1992.
4. Ibid.p.44.
5. *Essential Sufism: Selections from the Saints and Sages*, ed. James Fadiman and Robert Frager, Suhail Academy Lahore, Pakistan, 2004.
6. Lings, Martin, *What is Sufism?*, Gulshan Books, Kashmir 2011.
7. Stoddart, William and Nicholson, R.A., *Sufism: The Mystical Doctrines and Idea of Personality*, Adam Publishers and Distributors Delhi, 1998.
8. Sopsy, S.K., *Glimpses of Kashmir*, A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1976.
9. Faruqi, I. H. Azad, *Sufism and Bhakti: Maulana- Rum and Sri Rama Krishna*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1984.
10. Peeran, S.L., *The Essence of Islam, Sufism and its Impact on India*, East -West Books, New Delhi, 1998.
11. Begg, Mirza Wahiduddin, *The Big Five Sufis of India-Pakistan*, Millat Book Centre, New Delhi, 1972.
12. Nurbaksh, Dr. Javad, *Sufism: Meaning Knowledge and Unity*, Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, New York, 1981.
13. Browne, Edward. G. *A Literary History of Persia*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1997.
14. Nicholson, Reynold A., *The Mystics of Islam*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.
15. Ansari, Dr. Muhammad Abdul Haq, *Sufism and Shariah: A Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's Effort to Reform Sufism*, Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers, New Delhi, 2004.
16. Nurbaksh, Dr. Javad, op.cit., p. 16.
17. Khan, Mohammad Sharief and Saleem, Mohammad Anwar, *Muslim Philosophy and Philosophers*, Ashish Publishing House, Delhi, 1994.
18. Nurbaksh, Dr. Javad, op.cit., pp.16-33.
19. Valiuddin, Mir, *The Qur'anic Sufism*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi 1959.
20. Nurbaksh, Dr. Javad, op.cit., pp. 33-41.
21. Renard, John, *Seven Doors to Islam: Spirituality and the Religious Life of Muslims*, University of California Press, London, 1944.
22. Begg, Mirza Wahiduddin, op.cit., pp.46-47.

23. Khan, Mohammad Sharief, op.cit., pp. 43-46.
24. Ansari, Dr.Mohammad Abdul Haq, op.cit.,pp. 173-180.
25. Shustery ,Prof. A.M.A.,*Early Sufis and their Sufism*, Adam Publishers and Distributors, Delhi, 1999.
26. Sharda, S.R., *Sufi Thought: Its Development in Panjab and its Impact on Panjabi Literature from Baba Farid to A.D 1850*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1998.
27. Browne, Edward G., *A Literary History of Persia, Vol. 1*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt, Ltd.,1997.
28. *Essential Sufism: Selections from the Saints and Sages*, ed. James Fadiman and Robert Frager, Suhail Academy Lahore, Pakistan, 2004.
29. Khan,Mohammad Sharief and Saleem,Mohammad Anwar, op.cit., pp. 42-45.
30. Fadiman, James and Frager, Robert, op.cit.,pp. 12-14.
31. *Sufism, Evolution and Practice*, ed. Mohamed Taher, Anmol Publications Pvt.Ltd, New Delhi, 1997.
32. Khan,Mohammad Sharief and Saleem,Mohammad Anwar, op.cit.,pp. 46-48.
33. *Early Islamic Mysticism; Sufi, Qur'an, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological writing*, tr., ed., Michael A. Sells, Gulshan Books, Srinagar, 2009.
34. Begg ,Mirza Wahiduddin, op.cit.,pp. 42-43.
35. Ernst, Carl W., *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, Shambhala Publications, London, 1997.
36. Begg ,Mirza Wahiduddin, op.cit.,pp. 47-48.
37. Underhill, Evelyn ,*Mysticism:The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, One World Oxford, 1993.
38. Shushtery, Prof. A.M.A., op.cit.,pp. 22-27.