

## Sufism as an Attempt to Replace the Extremism in the Contemporary World: A Socio-Political Analysis

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ahmed Qadri  
University of Karachi, Karachi Pakistan

Suwaibah Qadri  
Research Scholar, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan

Dr Lubna Ahsan  
Assistant Professor, Iqra University, Karachi, Pakistan

### Abstract:

This paper belongs to the category of Applied Political Science dealing with the contemporary and alive issue of terrorism, which has destroyed world peace and humanity. The paper is a practical effort to suggest some concrete solutions. Tasawwuf, or Sufism, is the ignored or overlooked factors by the local and international community. It must be brought back to its actual position in order to push back the artificial people who wrongly interpret Islam for their ulterior political motives. The paper also deals with psychological aspects of the people. It also suggests how to use communication skills for training the people to rescue the world with the help of Sufism.

**Keywords:** Tasawwuf, Sufism, Extremism, Fanatic Behavior, Peace and Tolerance.

### Introduction:

Tasawwuf means purification of the heart and mind. It is a link between an individual and God.

The term "Tasawwuf" or "Sufism" is derived from safa or soaf, which means purification. The term also refers to the Ashab-us-Suffa, or the purified people, who were Companions of the Holy Prophet PBUH and would sit in front of his (PBUH) door. They attained direct knowledge from the Prophet (PBUH) and learned about purification of self. Thus, a Sufi is one who purifies his soul from the impurities of this world; he is drowned in the Beloved, by becoming closer to and continually lost within the Divine Being, and is free from all things other than Allah. God Almighty has said:

"And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace"<sup>1</sup>

And the Apostle (PBUH) has said:

"He that hears the voice of Sufis (ahl-al-tasawwuf) and does not say Aameen to their prayer is inscribed before God among the heedless"<sup>2</sup>

The term "mysticism" has several synonyms in Islam:

- Ihsan: Good Behavior due to Strong Belief
- Qurb: to become close to God
- Tariqat: the path to God
- Suluk: modest behavior<sup>3</sup>

Sufism comes in different levels. The top most is the status of being a Sufi one who is dead to self and is simply living by the truth. The second level is the Mutasawwif one who is a seeker of reaching his rank in spirituality through self-modification and self-correction. Such correction is done under the guidance of his spiritual guide (Murshid) who knows about attaining the level of a Sufi. The lowest level is Suluk which is the beginning of Tasawwuf, in which a seeker or Mureed has the intention to join the circle of the purified people and to learn about the hidden world by participation through zikr.

The exercise which is done regularly, five times a day, is known as Zikr. The night is like a day in which a seeker (Salik, Mureed, or Spiritual Fellow) earns more than he could imagine through concentration and repetition of Allah's names and the concept of Murshid (Spiritual Guide) which is the beginning of fanaa (to reach the state of nonexistence). Tasawwuf is not only a School of Thought or conceptual debate, but in fact it is a spiritual and social practicing of knowledge which begins from the heart and purifies one's whole life and brings a positive change. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) trained the Companions of Suffah. This training was known as theory and practice. The Holy Quran and the Hadiths are witness to this reality that Allah has created human

<sup>1</sup> Holy Quran, Al- Furqan (25:63)

<sup>2</sup> Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilana, *Al Fatah-ur-Rabbani*, Kalam Publishers Karachi, 1971, p.66

<sup>3</sup> Allama Mohammad Sadiq Sialvi, *Tasawwuf Ka Matlab*, Maktaba Tasawwuf, Faisalabad, 1982, p.54

being on the best nature. The same reference has taken Imam Ghazali, a famous Muslim Sufi Scholar, because all his books like *Ahya-ul-Uloom* and *Keemya-e-Saadat*, describe the philosophy of the purification of heart and how such purification creates an impact upon the society. According to him, there is a constant conflict between heart and mind which can be removed through the Tasawwuf practice known as Zikr with heart.<sup>1</sup>

One can get the status of existence and nonexistence through Tasawwuf practices, and these are the special statuses. When one achieves this status, his prayer (dua) is never rejected or turned down because he becomes a friend of Allah. The Quran identifies such people as Auliya-Allah (the friends of Allah) who have no fear or sadness. These are the friends of Allah who promote and preach the message of Allah and His Messenger (PBUH) to humanity. Tasawwuf is a message of peace and love which negates superiority of language, color, custom, creed, and beliefs while accepting the respect for humanity. Uncountable Auliya are around us in the shape of alive personalities, as well as, those who are within their shrines. For example, Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (R.A.), Hazrat Sheikh Ali Hajwairi known as Data Ganj Bakhsh (R.A.), Hazrat Ahmed Kabir Arrifai (R.A.), Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti (R.A.), Hazrat Khwaja Soharward (R.A.), Hazrat Khwaja Naqshband (R.A.), Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya Multani (R.A.), Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (R.A.), Hazrat Shah Latif Bhitai (R.A.), Hazrat Sachchal Sarmast (R.A.), Hazrat Abdullah Shah Ghazi (R.A.), and Hazrat Baba Mangopir (R.A.), etc. These are only a few of the friends of Allah who enlightened the whole world with their character. Even non-Muslims respected them.<sup>2</sup> Why these Auliya were so important in the society was, of course, due to their character and non-materialistic approach. They never wanted any reward from the society for whatever they did.

In the contemporary world, Sufi persons have their circle of students who seek knowledge in Shariat and Tareekat. Such people create a social circle, but they do not need anything from society. Their social behavior is due to their special training, called selfless training, which they use to promote their social behavior and ethics. Such persons' life is very simple and a bit outdated because they prefer to sit alone and not participate in the social activities of this world because they believe that once they become attached to this world or spend time with people, then they will lose their connection with the spiritual world. This reflects their special training. Most of them are uninterested in the worldly resources, even regarding food, clothes, big homes, and other things. A very interesting point may be considered here, that they are still anxious to have connectivity with humanity due to their spiritual responsibility. They know about their job work and obviously they are posted in the society to serve humanity. Different kinds of powers have been delegated by the Divine Power. They are always connected with Allah and His creations, the human beings. They invite people by their soft behavior and words. They are the ones who create the code of conduct and teach the people about kind behavior and love for all. There are so many examples of Sufis who refused to get gifts or facilities from the ruling or elite class of the society. Hazrat Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya refused to accept gifts from the King. Similarly, Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya Multani (R.A.) and Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (R.A.) never wanted to disrespect the Kings, but they wanted to crush their self, which is called nafs.

Sufism promotes human relations and respect for the society. We can observe that the follower of Tasawwuf never discriminates among human beings. The chain of Qadriya, Chishtiya, Nakshbandiya, Soharwardiya, and Rafaiya give special training to their Murideen, or followers, to be nice to the seekers of Tasawwuf, to never disappoint those who come for dua, and to never show any kind of proud behavior. All these Sufi people promoted societal institutions through help and recognition and respect of other cultures and religions. That is why we see that non-Muslims, which include Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, and others, join these Sufis and do not mind being their admirers due to their nice behavior and strong character. Tolerance and Peace are the basic teachings for Sufism. Patience and forgiveness are the fundamental training procedures for such personalities. These four elements improve the quality of a Sufi's perception and keep him towards his actual spiritual destination.

In the contemporary world, we see the expansion of Extremism. Why? Because some of the conspirators in the Muslim world deliberately reduced the function, or importance, of Sufism in the world. These people deliberately rejected the benefits of Sufism in the society which used to be admitted for the promotion of civilization and strong community building. Gradually, the role of Sufi became limited and the society recognized some extremist groups as their representatives. This kind of shift of power took the Muslim community into the scenario of death or suicide. Today's dangerous events, in which thousands have people have been killed through suicide bombing, target killing, and sectarian attacks, are all taking place in the society and creating a negative impact of Islam on the world. The Bloc politics in the Muslim world has also destroyed the world peace and the concept of tolerance which used to be a great part of Islam. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) instructed the Muslim nation, during his (PBUH) Last Sermon, to follow the basic principles of tolerance, forgiveness, and respect for all. While we look at the contemporary Muslim world, we

<sup>1</sup> Allama Ghulam Jilani Qadri, *Tasawwuf Kay Usool*, Maktaba Ghausia, Lahore, 1979, p.77

<sup>2</sup> Zun Noorain Hashmi, *The Chain of Auliya*, Ajmair Book Publications, Ajmair, India, 1988, p.171

see that respect is given to those who belong to their own sect, group, or socio-political school of thought. However, true Islam, which is called Tasawwuf based Islam, follows the norms of tolerance and peace which create a balance of power in the society, as well as, ensures the development of balanced personalities who offer their services for the benefits of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Sufism and the Extremism are the most known terminologies in the world but few of us know that Sufism is a mind science which keeps the Sufi and his followers away from extremist thought and negative activities in the society. The Science of Sufism is a name of patience and time taking lengthy procedure. The September 11 incident has opened many avenues and also created stereotypes in the world regarding the Muslim community. It is true that the extremist behavior is the most dangerous, even more than an atom bomb. The current situation has created a gulf between the Muslim world and non-Muslim world due to various reasons, especially the extremist groups' activities and bitter experiences of non-Muslim world. The Muslim world is also facing the challenges of extremist movements. The attacks on Schools, Colleges, Universities, Work places, and even Prayer places have become very common in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The situation may be very typical as there is no option for the Muslim Ummah (Muslim nation). Bloc politics in the Muslim world has divided the revolutionary spirit of Islam, and due to such division and hatred, the Muslim Scholars have also been divided. The printed literature mostly invests their strength toward showing the opponent inferior to them.

### **Sufism-Genuine vs. Fake**

This war of superiority has taken Muslims away from their actual culture and humble behavior. Tasawwuf or Sufism is also a critical topic and its usage. The strong criticism is regarding Sufi personalities. Sufi in the contemporary world has become a term of profession. Many people with special dresses and slogans appear as Sufis or they have launched their business over the internet, media, or in shopping centers. Real Tasawwuf, as a matter of fact, deals with the human problems and suggests solutions, but unfortunately the artificial or imitative Sufi have used their tactics to make money through psychological methods. It is noticeable that the genuine Sufi never thought of money making or connections with resourceful people. Today's Sufism has become a symbol of status if a Sufi has elite class in his circle. It does not mean that every Sufi follows the same way. There are few exceptions but mostly artificial Sufis use their professional talent to make money. It is also very interesting to know, that most of the females have interactions with both genuine, as well as, artificial Sufis. Since they do not have a sense of understanding regarding the good or bad Sufis they trust even the artificial ones, and in doing so, they lose everything. Most of the criminals make themselves appear on the outside as Sufis, but from the inside they are criminals, meaning that simple people end up being connected with criminals. Such interaction becomes more dangerous when the so called Sufi takes advantage of and uses the sincerity and love his people have for him, for the expansion of terrorism. Usually, simple or needy people go to get some relief through meditation and spiritual exercise, and these artificial Sufis know exactly how to deal with them and their psyche.<sup>2</sup> They are experts of human behavior and thought. Most men and women visit these artificial Sufis for the sake of mental peace and to get rid of their social problems. However, this becomes a turning point in their lives and, unknowingly, they start their journey to a dangerous and unknown destination. This was only one aspect of Sufism, while a positive aspect would be much broader than these negative and artificial Sufis.

The genuine Sufis have their special training in the special world. During their training, by their spiritual guide, they are asked to kill their ego. In Sufism, ego is the worst component of the personality which connects an individual with Satan. It is always considered, in the Sufi world, that there is a constant war between Khair (Good) and Sharr (Bad or Evil). Evil, or Satan, wants to take away the spiritual powers of a person who wants to go into the spiritual world. A few examples would be appropriate to mention here:

A famous spiritual personality, Imam Raazi, was on his deathbed and was taking his last breath when all of a sudden Satan appeared and asked him to prove there is God. Imam Raazi, who was a great Philosopher and man of logic, had made his arguments more than 100 times, but still Satan was arguing and refusing all answers. Imam Raazi then listened to a voice from the unseen direction, which said to him, "Raazi, Say I trust God without any proof and argument" and he responded with the same words to Satan. Satan Said, Raazi, your knowledge and belief saved you. Again, the same voice says, "Say Raazi, this is a blessing and guidance of my God which saved me." Then, Satan disappeared.<sup>3</sup>

The lesson out of this example is that Satan wanted to increase Imam Raazi's level of ego, which is one of the skills Satan uses to misguide people. A famous traditional Sufi, Imam Muhayyuddin Ibn-e-Arabi, suggested, to the seeker of Sufism, that he should be very careful about the increase of ego, super-ego and Id. According to him, once a Sufi is in the circle of these negative factors, he will lose his spiritual powers and

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Dr. Manzooruddin Ahmed, Tasawwuf Speech, Islamic Educational and Cultural Research Center, California, USA, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Rais Ahmed Mirza, *Jurm Aur Haqeeqat*, Sacchai Publication, Lahore, 1970, p.101

<sup>3</sup> Allama Abdul Ghani Qadri, *Auliya Kay Waqiat*, Auliya Academy, Lahore, 1998, p.171

become an ordinary person. Another great Scholar of Sufism, Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani mentioned that Sufism or Tasawwuf is a top secret of God. The status of Tasawwuf cannot be known by one's self or without a spiritual guide. According to him, at every stage the hidden powers increases or decreases depending the behavior or actions of the Mureed. To reach a higher stage he is instructed to be more involved in the practice of Hijab (Lonely practices). He mentions that Sirr (Secret) is the beginning of spiritual relations with God, which remains within the heart and feelings. This relation becomes like a perfume of flower. Imam Qushairi, another renowned Sufi personality, in his famous book *Risala Qushairia*, says that a Sufi cannot be recognized by the general people. He never claims that he has connections with hidden powers or that he has an approach to God through his dua or special love.<sup>1</sup> One important aspect of Sufism cannot be ignored: Sufis never claims themselves as such pious people and close to Allah and His Rasool (PBUH). The genuine signs of the Sufi is simplicity, submission, negation of ego (Self), follower of Sharia (Cosmic Law of Islam), respect for humanity, no discrimination, no love for worldly resources, avoidance of public gatherings except for preaching of Islam, powerful approach to the hidden world through Miracles, but take no claim, no dua returned without acceptance from Allah, but he would never claim (Mustab-ud- Dawaat).<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore such a Sufi, or friend of Allah, would be shown many things by the blessings of Allah, but because he is the caretaker of Sirr (Secret bearer), he would never discuss these things with anyone except his spiritual guide. The genuine Sufi has the power, by the blessings of Allah as a gift, to talk to a person who rests in the grave. There are many examples when the genuine Sufis pointed out plain land as a grave. Genuine Sufis have command over the hidden powers like Jinn, Genies (Female Jinn), Moakkil (Angeles), Spirits, and other powers. The hidden, or unseen, world of power is controlled by Ghous (Helper), Qutub (Delegated power authority for making dua for rain, success of business, recovery from sickness, etc), Autaad (The focal point of the world of Tasawwuf), a spiritual power which authorizes his subordinates, (just to clarify, the term of subordinates has been used here, but otherwise it is negated as it is against the code of conduct of Sufism). In the world of Tasawwuf, another category of Sufis is called, Rijaal-ul-Ghaib (The powerful unseen people), Hazrat Khizr is considered by some Sufia to be included in this category. These Rijaal-ul-Ghaib appear before anyone who recites some specific words for help.<sup>3</sup> These people help out a seeker or a needy person who wants to do Istakhara (Seeking advice from God regarding any decision).

The Scholars of Sufism always believe that a Sufi prefers to hide himself from the society. He would love to practice specific Wazaif (Spiritual Training) outside the population, which is why the genuine Sufis never remain inside the city, except those who were posted to serve humanity by spiritual healing and guidance of the people towards Islam. Sufis hate to lie or misinterpret things as per their convenience. Day and night, they are busy with the Zikr (Remembrance of Allah); to them, Zikr is like food which they cannot survive without. The Sufi does not prefer to become involved in the social activities of the community, but if such a situation arises, he would not mind to be a part of that activity, since it is not against the Sharia Law. For example, in a situation in which people like to enjoy their wine or alcohol, a genuine Sufi would slowly approach such persons to make their mind leave this habit. The way of Tableegh (Preaching) is different of the Sufi people because they would never show aggressive behavior because Allah, by His blessings, has taken away such negative aspects of personality from their lives.

### **Tasawwuf in the Contemporary World:**

The term of Tasawwuf, which has already been discussed in the previous lines, refers to a very important world. Correlating the term of Tasawwuf to the contemporary general socio-political problems, especially to the threat of Terrorism, makes it seem very appropriate to use it as a technique. The genuine Sufi people throughout the world have their grip over the society. The genuine Sufi, due to his balanced personality, can include some basic instructions for his Mureedeen (Spiritual Students) to ensure that they do not have social relations with those who are fanatic or extremist. Sufism is the best option to be developed, supported, and followed to get spiritual benefits, new horizons of experiences, interaction with hidden powers, and knowledge about the secrets of God through observational methodology. The writer of these lines has already presented the models of genuine and artificial Sufis. One should not be a part of such a circle which is just based on artificial intelligence.<sup>4</sup> The genuine status of Tasawwuf may be explored by using your own intelligence, and even more important than this is Istakahara, which is the best option to proceed with in this world. The Sufi persons must be contacted to open their spiritual schools for the needy people and guide and orient the community to work as volunteers for such a great cause.

In Arabia, the Sub-Continent, South East Asia, China, and North America we see the shrines of Sufis

<sup>1</sup> Imam Qushairi, *Risala Qushairia*, Noor Mahel Publications, Karachi, 1966, p.192

<sup>2</sup> Qazi Abdul Haseeb, *Qudrat Kay Raaz*, Ehsas Kitaab Ghar, Sukkur, 1971, p.19

<sup>3</sup> Hazrat Ghaus Gawalyari, *Jawahir-e-Khamsa*, Al-Ilm Books, New Delhi, 1961, p.88

<sup>4</sup> Ghulam Rasool Mustafavi, *Azeem Duniya*, Karachi Book House, 1971, p.14

where the people of spirituality go for spiritual benefits. Obviously the custodians of such shrines are still alive and they are considered to be Sufis. They should be given opportunities by the resourceful people or by the government to promote their message of peace and tolerance. The government must contact such Sufi personalities to come forward and play a vital role in the society to remove the challenges of extremism or terrorism from the community. Since terrorism has become a threat to humanity the international donors, experts on foreign policy, homeland security decision makers, and the nonprofit organizations must consider this important influential category, which can make a visible difference in the society. The Shrines like Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (R.A.), Hazrat Ali Hajwari Data Ganj Bakhsh ( R.A.), Hazrat Baba Farid (R.A.), Hazrat Bahauddin Zakarya Multani ( R.A.), Hazrat Khuwaja Moinuddin Chishti ( R.A.), Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalander (R.A.), Hazrat Shah Abdul Lateed Bhitai (R.A.), and Hazrat Sachchal Sar Mast (R.A.) are visited by millions of people. The teachings of tolerance must be promoted by the custodians of these and other Mazaar (Shrines); they must be contacted to promote brotherhood among humanity. We are wasting our resources which can be used to promote a balanced society and curtail the challenge of extremism because due to the lack of communication and knowledge, or misunderstanding about Sufism, we totally ignore this factor which will surely help us bring back peacefulness into our societies. The contemporary society is under pressure and the visible increase in anxiety and depressions can be felt. A basic question arises here: Why does such a bad condition most commonly exist around us? To this, there is a very simple answer: we have closed the doors of spirituality and we never thought about the fact that spiritual practices, like Zikr, Meditation, and Soothing Music like Qawwali (Sufi Music) is now being used for professional purposes, whereas such Sufi music was once used by the Sufis for the treatment of ailments and other spiritual purposes. The example of such usage may be quoted from, Mathnavi Molana Rumi, a great Sufi poet and renowned Muslim Aalim.<sup>1</sup>The other example can be mentioned by the chain of Chishtiya: Hazrat Khuwaja Moinuddin Chishti (R.A.), a great Sufi poet and scholar, introduced Sufi Music or Qawwali (the term means repetition of words) as the best way of Tableegh (preaching) of that time to attract and heal the people of the Sub-Continent. It was obvious that this Qawwali methodology worked. In short, it can be said that Sufism is the best method to utilize because their effective public approach will beat the challenges of terrorism in today's times.

### Conclusion

Our previous discussion proves that the increasing level of Terrorism has become a great challenge for the humanity. The terrorists do not differentiate between Muslims or non-Muslims; they are simply targeting humanity. The transnational relations require a very strong communication network, and this must be done without any delay. There must be a very strong network of Sufi Movement and its supporters. The speeches, workshops, national, and international conferences must be organized, and the regular follow up meetings must be scheduled to ensure the evaluation of progress. The network must have an exchange of information system. Radio and TV programmes should be on air by the influential community members to convince the minds of the community people against the challenge of terrorism.

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13. In Qunia, Turkey the dance of Sufi, even today, can be experienced with Music. The same Sufi Music can be heard at the Shrines of the Chishti Chain in the Sub-Continent.

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