



Sufism in History and its Relationship with Power

Author(s): TANVIR ANJUM

Source: *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer 2006), pp. 221-268

Published by: [Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20839016>

Accessed: 26/02/2014 03:51

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Islamic Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Sufism in History and its Relationship with Power

TANVIR ANJUM

Mysticism is a universal phenomenon which represents a streak or a current that runs through many great religious traditions of the world, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In Islam, this tradition is referred to as Sufism or *taṣawwuf*. Originating from certain Qur'ānic injunctions and the sayings and deeds of the Prophet (peace be on him), Sufism as a distinct movement acquired its specific contours at a relatively later stage. The popularity of the Sufi movement, which went hand in hand with the crystallization of a set of Sufi doctrines and practices, was far from being an abrupt development. On the contrary, the growth of Sufism into a fully-developed movement with institutionalized practices was the result of a protracted process stretching over centuries during which it proliferated over the length and breadth of the Muslim lands.¹ But from its very inception, Sufism had a problematic relationship with the Muslim establishment—with the custodians of both political and religious authorities. The ruling elite, which had a firm grip over political power, were generally suspicious of its disruptive and revolutionary potential, while the '*ulamā'* (the religious scholars, including the theologians and jurists), particularly those who served on official positions and had come to represent the religious authority, were even more apprehensive of the Sufis. Some of them sincerely contested the Sufi doctrines and practices, while others were prone to envy the public esteem which the Sufis enjoyed, since the latter were seen by the people as an alternative locus of religious authority.

The present paper attempts to explore the meaning, origin and evolution of Sufism and to delineate its cardinal doctrines and institutionalization of major Sufi practices. It also seeks to enquire the causes behind the rapid popularity of the Sufi movement among the Muslims. In addition, it

¹ The term 'Muslim lands' here refers to the areas inhabited by people predominantly or significantly Muslim by faith such as the Middle East including Arabia and Iraq, Persia and parts of Central Asia.

investigates the relationship of the Sufis with the various political authorities in the Muslim lands from the seventh to the early thirteenth century.

Before we embark on these explorations, it would be worthwhile to be clear as to what Sufism is.

What is Sufism?

Since there is a lack of a standard appellation for Sufism or *taṣawwuf*, especially in studies on it in non-oriental languages, a number of terms are in common currency for it. The terms Sufism and *taṣawwuf* are interchangeably used for other phrases such as mysticism or Islamic mysticism. However, there are conceptual problems with these appellations, particularly with the latter two. In fact the Western scholars of Sufism and the orientalists have usually tended to interpret Sufi doctrines and practices through the prism of Christian concepts, which might at times be quite misleading and confusing. This tendency is evident from the use of a terminology having Christian connotations for describing and explaining Sufi concepts.² For instance, terms such as saint and sainthood carry distinctive connotations in the Christian religious tradition, and one is liable to confuse them with the Christian concept of sainthood. According to the Christian concept of sainthood, the holiness of saints is recognized by the process of canonization instituted by the Roman Catholic Church. On the contrary, there is no such practice in Islam, as the Sufi *shaykhs* do not need any formal recognition of their spirituality from any institution. Similarly, the usage of sociological concepts such as Max Weber's concept of charisma (often mistakenly used as an English equivalent for *barakah*) for the spiritual powers of the Sufi *shaykhs* also seems to be reductive, and hence inadequate.

Before we look into other matters pertaining to Sufism, we shall briefly explore the meanings of the relevant terms in use.

The term 'mysticism' is used in a generic sense to refer to any of the mystical traditions in, or spiritual essentials common to, the great religions of the world like Hinduism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is considered to be the core of

² When a word is translated from one language into another, it is important that the translation must be faithful to the meaning of the word translated. Since all languages contain their specific worldviews, the task of translation becomes challenging. It becomes further complicated when concepts are to be translated, and particularly when these concepts are religious, since a small difference in meaning may create problems in explanation and analysis. For problems of translation from one language into another, see Joseph F. Graham, ed. *Difference in Translation* (New York and London: Ithaca, 1985).

all religions.³ Mysticism is generally believed to be associated with mysterious phenomena. The words ‘mystic’ and ‘mystery’ have common etymological roots, being derived from a Greek word *myein*, meaning “to close the eyes.”⁴ Mysticism has been defined as “the belief that knowledge of God and of real truth may be reached by directing one’s mind or through spiritual insight independently of reason and the senses.”⁵ In fact it refers to the esoteric aspects and the spiritual current going through many of the great religions. Broadly speaking, it underlies some basic principles common to all mystical traditions. These principles entail a direct consciousness of God by an individual, his or her comprehension of the Divine Truth, and the consequent development of his or her meditative and intuitive faculties.

Here it seems useful to briefly explore the meaning of the terms related to mysticism. One such term is mystic, used both as a noun and as an adjective. As a noun, a mystic is defined as a person who tries to become united with God and so reach truths beyond human understanding. As an adjective, it is defined as (i) having hidden meaning or spiritual power, (ii) of or based on mysticism, and (iii) causing a feeling of deep respect and wonder.⁶ Since the terms mysticism and spiritualism or spirituality are often used interchangeably, it is pertinent to look into their definitions as well. Spiritualism has been defined as “belief in the possibility of receiving messages from the spirits of the dead,” whereas spirituality has been defined as “the state or quality of being concerned with spiritual matters.”⁷ The Sufi adepts also focus on their spiritual development and self-purification, and in some instances, they are said to derive spiritual benefit from the spirits of the Sufi *shaykhs* of bygone ages.

The term ‘Sufism’ is of German coinage. In 1821, a Latin work by F. A. G. Tholuck, a German professor of Divinity, introduced the term.⁸ Used in

³ Keeping in view the dominant doctrinal trend in the mystical systems of various religions, Dupré has labelled Hindu mysticism as the Mysticism of the Self, that of Buddhism as the Mysticism of Emptiness, that of Eastern and early Western Christianity as the Mysticism of the Image, that of Islam and modern Christianity as the Mysticism of Love, and that of Judaism as Eschatological Mysticism. For a brief account of mysticism in various religious traditions, see Louis Dupré, “Mysticism” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 10: 245–61.

⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003 rpt., first published 1975), 3.

⁵ Jonathan Crowther, ed. *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 770.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1146.

⁸ Friedrich August Gottreu Tholuck, *Sufismus sive Theosophia Persarum Pantheisitica* (Berlin: Duemmleri, 1821).

common parlance, it is generally perceived to be an anglicized version of the word *taṣawwuf*. The postfix ‘ism’ refers to a system or a philosophy. The term Sufism was popularized by the British Orientalists,⁹ which has been spelled as Sufiism as well.¹⁰ Owing to its having gained common currency, the term Sufism has been used in this paper.

A word of Arabic origin,¹¹ *taṣawwuf* is the name given to the mystical tradition of Islam, or Islamic mysticism. It is generally considered to be a standard appellation in studies on Sufism in oriental and non-Western languages. In common parlance, an individual who becomes associated with Sufism or becomes a ‘seeker of divine truth’ is described as a Sufi or an initiate. William Stoddart makes an important clarification in this regard: “Strictly speaking, the Arabic word *sūfi*, like the Sanskrit word *yogī*, refers only to one who has attained the goal; nevertheless, it is often applied by extension to initiates who are still merely traveling towards it.”¹² So a Sufi does not have to be necessarily an adept; any individual committed to traversing the spiritual trajectories may also be termed as a Sufi.

Before we look into the definition and meaning of *taṣawwuf*, it seems befitting to explore the etymological derivation of *taṣawwuf* and Sufi.

Etymological Derivations of *Taṣawwuf* and Sufi

The Arabic word *taṣawwuf* is derived from the word Sufi [Sūfī]. Different theories have been put forth about the etymological derivations of the words *taṣawwuf* and Sufi. Medieval scholars of the tenth and eleventh centuries wrote treatises on the subject as well. For instance, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kalābādhī (d. 385/995), a fourth/tenth century scholar of Sufism, devotes an entire chapter to explain how the Sufis account for their being called Sufis. He cites various opinions regarding the etymological sources of the word Sufi, which have been summarized as such: *ṣafā* (purity), because of the purity of their hearts; *ṣaff* (rank) as they are in the first rank before God; *ṣuffah* (the platform) as the qualities of the Sufis resembled those of the *ashāb al-ṣuffah* (People of the Platform, a group of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him) who had devoted their lives to worship and learning); *ṣūf* (wool)

⁹ William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001 rpt., first published 2000), 2.

¹⁰ For instance see, ‘Alī ibn ‘Uthmān al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, Eng. trans. R. A. Nicholson (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1976 rpt., first published 1911), *passim*.

¹¹ Mawlāwī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Mawlānā Muḥammad Sa‘id, and Mawlāwī Muḥammad Munīr, *Lughāt-i Sa‘idī*, 3d ed. (Karachi: H. M. Sa‘id Co., 1957), 168.

¹² William Stoddart [‘Imrān Yahyā], *Sufism: The Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1999 rpt., first published 1981), 20–21.

because of their habit of wearing wool, and *safwah* (the chosen, the select) owing to their being the elite, or the chosen or selected ones.¹³

A fifth/eleventh century Sufi scholar, 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Hujwīrī (d. circa 464/1071), discusses the etymological roots of *taṣawwuf* at some length in his monumental work *Kashf al-Mahjūb* (The Unveiling of the Veiled). In addition to its etymological derivation from *ṣūf* or wool, he cites the opinions of well-known authorities in this regard. He mentions that some consider that the Sufis are so called because they are in the first rank (*saff-i awwal*). Others maintain that it is because the Sufis claim to belong to the *ashāb al-ṣuffah*, while still others contend that the title is derived from *safa'* (purity). Nonetheless, al-Hujwīrī accepts that these explanations of the true meaning of Sufism are far from satisfying the requirements of etymology, though each of them is supported by subtle arguments. He concludes by asserting that the word Sufi has, in fact, no etymology.¹⁴

In the introduction to the English translation of *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif* written by a seventh/thirteenth century Sufi-scholar Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar b. Muḥammad al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), Wilberforce Clarke states that the word Sufi has been derived from *ṣūf* (wool), *ṣūfiy* (wise or pious), *ṣūfi* (woollen), *safa'* (purity) and *sāfi* (pure).¹⁵ According to another view, the etymological origin of the term Sufi goes back to the Greek word *sophia*, meaning wisdom and wise. Titus Burckhardt, however, rejects this view.¹⁶

The above discussion indicates that there is no consensus regarding the etymological derivation of the words *taṣawwuf* or Sufi. Nonetheless, according to the generally accepted view by a majority of scholars of Sufism, Sufi has been derived from the Arabic word *ṣūf* meaning wool. Hence, *taṣawwuf* literally means 'wearing wool,' and Sufi is the 'one who wears wool.' According to Abū Naṣr 'Abd Allāh b. 'Alī al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), a fourth/tenth century Sufi scholar, in pre-Islamic times it was customary among the ascetics as well as the ancient prophets to wear coarse woollen

¹³ For a detailed discussion, see Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī, *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf li-Madhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, Eng. trans. A. J. Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978 rpt., first published 1935), 5–11.

¹⁴ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 30, 34.

¹⁵ See Wilberforce Clarke, "Introduction" in Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar ibn Muḥammad al-Suhrawardī, *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, Persian trans. from Arabic by Maḥmūd ibn 'Alī al-Kāshānī, Eng. trans. from Persian H. Wilberforce Clarke (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 2001 rpt., first published 1891), 1.

¹⁶ Titus Burckhardt [Ibrāhim 'Izz al-Dīn] argues that this is etymologically untenable because the Greek letter *sigma* normally becomes *sin* (س) in Arabic and not *ṣād* (ص). It may be, however, that there is here an intentional, symbolical assonance. Idem, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D. M. Matheson (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1996, rpt., first published 1976), 3, n. 1. See also Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam* (London: IBTauris, 1989), 3.

garments.¹⁷ This particular attire symbolized penitence as well as self-denial and rejection of worldly desires and material needs. In the Near East, woollen cloaks were also worn by Nestorian Christian monks, who had adopted poverty for reasons of piety, and later it came to be used by early Muslim Sufis as well.

Various views have been expressed about the first usage of the term *taṣawwuf* and the epithet Sufi. Al-Hujwīrī traces back the use of the word *taṣawwuf* to the Holy Prophet (peace be on him), as he cites his saying: "He who hears the voice of Sufis (*ahl al-taṣawwuf*) and does not say Amen to their prayers is inscribed before God among the heedless."¹⁸

As for the epithet Sufi or *ahl al-taṣawwuf*, al-Sarrāj states that the word Sufi was current in pre-Islamic days for people of excellence and virtue, but with specific connotation of *taṣawwuf*, it gained common currency during the times of *tābi‘in* (the Successors of the Companions of the Prophet) and *tabi‘tābi‘in* (the Successors of these Successors).¹⁹ According to Abū ’l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Hawzān al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), before the second/eighth century, the term *ahl al-taṣawwuf* was already being used for specific groups and individuals having proximity with God.²⁰ Abū Hāshim al-Kūfi (d. 159/776) is considered to be the first person who was labelled as a Sufi.²¹ In fact, many Companions of the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) did have what might be termed a Sufi bent of mind, and they fervently devoted themselves to prayers and worship, which is considered to be one of the characteristics of the Sufis. However, for these Companions, including *ahl al-suffah* (People of the Platform),²² the title or epithet of Sufi was never specifically used in its present connotation. Al-Qushayrī argues that *sahābah* (the Companions of the Prophet) were so called because no epithet could be more respectable for a person than being a *sahābī*.²³ This view has been corroborated by Nūr al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492) as well.²⁴ Therefore, the earliest Muslims

¹⁷ Abū Naṣr ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alī al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Luma‘ fi'l Taṣawwuf*, ed. R. A. Nicholson (London: Luzac and Co., 1914), 21.

¹⁸ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 30. [This is, obviously, an inauthentic *hadīth* for the term *ahl al-taṣawwuf* had not come into use during the life of the Prophet (peace be on him). Ed.].

¹⁹ Al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma‘*, 21–22.

²⁰ Abū ’l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Risālah-i Qushayriyyah*, Urdu trans. with Introduction and Notes, Pir Muḥammad Ḥasan (Islamabad: Idārah-i Tahqīqāt-i Islāmī, 1970), 21.

²¹ B. A. Dar, "Section A: Sufis Before al-Hallāj" in M. M. Sharif, ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2001 rpt., first published 1961), 1: 336.

²² For a list of this pietistic circle of early Sufis, see al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 81–82.

²³ Al-Qushayrī, *Risālah-i Qushayriyyah*, 21.

²⁴ Nūr al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-Uṣūl min Ḥadārāt al-Quds*, ed., introduction and notes, Maḥmūd ‘Ābidi (Tehran: Intishārāt Itṭilā‘āt, 1370 Solar AH), 15.

in the time of the Prophet (peace be on him) with predilections peculiar to Sufis, were not designated as Sufis. Similarly, ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn (732–808/1332–1406) argues that in the first three generations of Islam, Sufism was too widely diffused to have a specific name. However, later when worldliness became common and materialism crept among Muslims, those who dedicated themselves to the worship of God were distinguished from the rest by the titles of *Sūfiyah* and *Mutashawwifah*.²⁵

Defining Sufism

While referring to various definitions of Sufism in Arabic and Persian works on the subject, Reynold Nicholson makes an interesting observation: that their chief importance lies in showing that Sufism is ‘undefinable’.²⁶ Nonetheless, modern scholars of Sufism have attempted to define it. What follows is a selection of a few definitions of Sufism or *taṣawwuf* by some eminent scholars of the subject.²⁷

Scholars have defined and explained the meaning and salient features of Sufism in various ways. According to Murray Titus, for instance, Sufism is “an attitude of mind and heart toward God and the problems of life.”²⁸ Spencer Trimingham defines mysticism as a specific method of approach to reality by making use of intuitive and emotional spiritual faculties. These faculties are generally dormant but they can be called into play through training under guidance.²⁹ Annemarie Schimmel defines the spiritual current in a wider sense and holds that it is the consciousness of the one reality that can be called Wisdom, Light, Love or nothing. Mysticism is the love of the Absolute—for the power that separates true mysticism from mere asceticism is love.³⁰ According to Burckhardt, *al-taṣawwuf* or Sufism is an expression of the inward or internal (*bātin*) and esoteric aspect of Islam, as distinguished from its outward or external (*zāhir*) and exoteric aspect. It designates the “whole of the contemplative ways founded on the sacred forms of Islam.”³¹ In the opinion of A. J. Arberry, Sufism is the mystical movement within Islam, whereas a Sufi,

²⁵ ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, Eng. trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1958), 3: 76.

²⁶ Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979 rpt.; first published 1914), 25.

²⁷ While outlining the views of scholars, no distinction has been made between mysticism or Sufism, as many scholars seem to use these terms interchangeably.

²⁸ Murray T. Titus, *Indian Islam: A Religious History of Islam in India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 111.

²⁹ J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 1.

³⁰ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 4.

³¹ Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, 3, 164.

the one who associates himself with this movement, is an individual who is devoted to an inner quest for mystical union with his Creator. It also involves a “personal trafficking with God.”³²

Frithjof Schuon divides the religion of Islam into three basic dimensions: *islām* (outward works of the religion), *īmān* (faith), and *ihsān* (virtue and perfection) according to the famous *hadīth* of Gabriel (see n. 36 below). According to Schuon, the third dimension of *ihsān*, which literally means embellishment, beautiful activity, right-acting or charitable activity, is essentially an esoteric notion, and it is “quintessential esoterism.” *Ihsān* is an operative virtue, which confers upon believing and doing the qualities that make them perfect, and intensify and deepen both faith and works.³³ In the words of Stoddart, mysticism is the “inward or supra-formal dimension”³⁴ as opposed to the outward and formal expression of a religion. Explaining the distinguishing features of the Sufis, Hardy opines that they “craved for a more emotional religion, one in which God appeared as a loving, succoring friend rather than as an abstract definition of undifferentiated unity, incomprehensible in His essence, inscrutable and arbitrary in His decrees.”³⁵ Like Schuon, William Chittick also divides Islam into the above-mentioned three dimensions, and identifies the third dimension of *ihsān* to be concerned with depth, or the inner attitudes that accompany activity and thought, with Sufism. He argues that the Qur’ānic usage of the word *ihsān* makes clear that it is not only an external and ethical good, but also an internal, moral, and spiritual good.³⁶

The underlying theme in all these definitions seems to be the idea of locating the latent divine sentiment in one’s heart or conscience. It is an attitude of mind, heart and soul that entails an individual’s direct relationship with God with a profound comprehension of the Real and Absolute Truth. The method involved in this quest for spiritual development is contemplative rather than scholastic. The core practices of Sufism lead to purification of the

³² See A. J. Arberry, “Introduction” in his *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya’* (Memorial of the Saints) by Farid al-Din Attar (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 1–2.

³³ Frithjof Schuon [Shaykh ‘Isā Nūr al-Dīn Ahmād], *Sufism: Veil and Quintessence*, Eng. trans. William Stoddart (Lahore: Suhaib Academy, 1985 rpt., first published 1979), 129–30.

³⁴ Stoddart, *Sufism: The Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam*, 19.

³⁵ Peter Hardy, “Islam in Medieval India,” in Ainslie T. Embree, ed. *Sources of Indian Tradition*, 2d rev. ed. (New Delhi: Viking, 1991), 1: 447.

³⁶ William C. Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth Century Sufi Texts* (Lahore: Suhaib Academy, 2000), 2–5, 10–12. According to Chittick, in the *hadīth* of Gabriel, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) defined *ihsān* as “serving [or worshipping] God as if you see Him, because if you do not see Him, He nonetheless sees you.” Chittick also adds that two Qur’ānic terms, *ikhlāṣ* (sincerity) and *taqwā* (God-wariness), are close to *ihsān* in meaning.

self which seek to regulate and direct the spiritual life of people. A Sufi aims at a bi-dimensional development of his self; first, the strengthening of his spiritual and personal connection with God, and second, perfecting his interpersonal relationships.

The Sufis generally believe in three corresponding and complementary spheres of Sufism: *shari'ah* (the revealed law), *tariqah* (the way or the method), and *haqiqah* (the ultimate truth). *Shari'ah* is the prescribed law in Islam for regulating the conduct of the individual and collective life. The *tariqah* is the way or the method which guides a seeker on the path of Sufism, while the *haqiqah*, the ultimate truth or the knowledge of and nearness to God, is the goal of a Sufi's life.

Origins of Sufism

Varied opinions have been expressed regarding the origins of Sufism: some suggest that the roots of Sufism lay in pre-Islamic religious traditions, while others argue that the Qur'ānic injunctions and the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) provided the bases of Sufi doctrines and practices. Late thirteenth/nineteenth and early fourteenth/twentieth century western orientalists generally corroborate the former view, while the later day historians and scholars of Sufism generally maintain the latter position.

According to E. H. Palmer, Sufism is "the development of the Primaeval religion of the Aryan race."³⁷ Nicholson points out to the external or non-Islamic influences on Sufism, which include Christianity, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, Buddhism, and Vedantism. However, he adds that the seeds of Sufism were inherent in Islam, and these internal forces within Islam cannot be isolated from the external factors. To quote him, "the great non-Islamic systems ... gave a stimulus to various tendencies within Islam which affected Sufism either positively or negatively."³⁸ John P. Brown alludes to the "deeply spiritual principles" which appear in the Qur'ān, and the "innumerable mystical...reasonings" of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him).³⁹ While critically reviewing the varied theories of the origins of Sufism, Edward G. Browne gives his verdict in favour of the theory that Sufism represents the

³⁷ E. H. Palmer, *Oriental Mysticism: A Treatise on Sufistic and Unitarian Theosophy of the Persians* (London: Luzac, 1969 rpt., first published 1867), as cited in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 9; for a detailed discussion, see 9–11.

³⁸ Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 20; for a detailed discussion, see 8–23.

³⁹ John P. Brown, *The Darvishes or Oriental Spiritualism*, ed. with Introduction and Notes, H. A. Rose (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1968 rpt., first published 1868), 71–72.

Esoteric Doctrine of the Prophet of Islam (peace be on him).⁴⁰

Commenting on the origins of Sufism, Duncan B. Macdonald suggests: "Like almost everything else in Islam the seeds were already in the mind of Muhammad."⁴¹ Louis Massignon, a renowned French scholar of Sufism, has altogether rejected the view that Sufism was alien to Islam. Instead, he has argued that "it is from the Koran, constantly recited, meditated upon, applied, that Islamic mysticism proceeds, in its origin and development."⁴² Among the better-known scholars, H. A. R. Gibb corroborates the views of Louis Massignon.⁴³ According to Philip K. Hitti, Sufism has its origin in the Qur'an and *Hadith*, though later on it absorbed elements from Christianity, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism and Buddhism.⁴⁴ G. E. von Grunebaum maintains that Sufism was "anchored firmly in the word of God, that source from whose multiplicity it extracted the challenge to interiorize relations with the Creator."⁴⁵ Trimingham considers Sufism a natural development within Islam, which owed little to non-Muslim sources. He, however, adds that it received "radiations from the ascetical-mystical life and thought of eastern Christianity."⁴⁶ Schimmel also argues that the view that Sufism was an Islamized form of Vedanta philosophy or *Yoga*, has now been discarded. In her opinion, "Sufism traces its origin back to the Prophet of Islam and takes inspiration from the divine word as revealed through him in the Koran."⁴⁷

Stoddart refutes the view that Sufism developed chiefly as a result of external influences. However, as he succinctly puts it: "Sufism has sometimes borrowed formulations deriving from Neo-Platonic and other spiritual doctrines which coincide with its own view of reality, but this has always been for convenience of expression, and does not constitute any syncretism."⁴⁸ Khalil Ahmad Nizami has also suggested that the origins of the Sufi ideas can be traced back to the Qur'anic and Prophetic traditions. He has rejected the

⁴⁰ Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia: From the Earliest Times until Firdawsi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977 rpt., first published 1902), 1: 418–19; for a detailed review of the various theories of the origin of Sufism, see 418–21.

⁴¹ Duncan Black Macdonald, *Aspects of Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 184.

⁴² Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique mystique musulmane* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1954), 104, as cited in Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 153.

⁴³ Hamilton A. R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism: A Historical Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 128.

⁴⁴ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 433.

⁴⁵ G. E. von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam: A History 600–1258*, Eng. trans. Katherine Watson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970, German ed. published from Berlin in 1963), 131.

⁴⁶ Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 2.

⁴⁷ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 345, 24.

⁴⁸ Stoddart, *Sufism: The Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam*, 43.

alternative views that Sufi doctrines owe their origins to the Greek, Vedantic or Buddhist philosophies.⁴⁹ Many scholars of Sufism, including its proponents, trace its origins back to the Qur'ān⁵⁰ and the practice of the Holy Prophet (peace be on him),⁵¹ and cite a number of Qur'ānic verses and *ahādīth* in support of their assertion.⁵²

While discussing the origins of Sufism, the similarities between the spiritual traditions, doctrines and mystical experiences of the adherents of faiths other than Islam and those of Sufism have been brought to the fore. First, one may find a certain degree of truth in the assertion that all mystical traditions associated with different religions of the world have something in common, but the similarities and commonalities do not necessarily mean that the latter were a borrowing from the former in terms of their doctrinal system, methods and practices. Secondly, there were stark differences among the mystical and spiritual traditions as well, as each of them stemmed from a particular religious tradition. Moreover, historical factors such as intellectual environment, socio-cultural conditions and political climate in which a mystical system took roots and flourished, cannot be overlooked in this regard. Lastly, like any other mystical tradition, Sufism did not develop in a void. When the Muslims came into contact with people of other races, cultures and intellectual traditions, a mutual exchange of ideas was inevitable. The Sufis too imbued ideas and concepts as well as practices from them, which helped develop the Sufi doctrines further.

Rise and Growth of Sufism: A Causal Explanation

Sufism is essentially a minority affair, demanding considerable intellectual sophistication from its adherents. Nevertheless, it has popular manifestations as well which are generally referred to as 'popular religion' or 'low culture.' Regarding popular religion, Jonathan Berkey makes an important clarification that it was not identical but closely associated with Sufism.⁵³ The early

⁴⁹ See details in Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Tārīkh-i Mashā'ikh-i Chisht* (Delhi: Idārah-i Adabiyyāt-i Dillī, 1980), 1: 45–49.

⁵⁰ See details in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The Quran as the Foundation of Islamic Spirituality" in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2000), 1: 3–10.

⁵¹ Frithjof Schuon, "The Spiritual Significance of the Substance of the Prophet" in ibid. 48–63.

⁵² For a brief discussion, see Yūsuf Salīm Chishtī, *Tārīkh-i Taṣawwuf: Hindi, Yūnānī, Islāmī* (Lahore: 'Ulamā' Academy, 1976), 104–22. For some Qur'ānic verses and *ahādīth* relating to Sufism, see Stoddart, *Sufism: The Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam*, 77–82.

⁵³ Berkey contends that the characteristic features of popular religion included the popularization of practices associated with Sufis, veneration of individuals, visitation of tombs, and the rise of syncretic trends and superstitions. Idem, *The Formation of Islam*, 248–57, esp. 249.

centuries of Islam witnessed the growing popularity of Sufism. The renowned Sufis who lived in the second/eighth, third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries included Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Mālik ibn Dīnār (d. 131/748), Abū Hāshim al-Kūfī, Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (d. 160/777), Sufyān b. Sa‘īd al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), Dāwūd b. Naṣīr al-Ṭā’ī (d. 165/781), ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mubārak (d. 181/797), Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyyah al-Baṣrī (d. 185/801), al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Ayād (d. 187/803), Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 194/810), Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī (d. 200/815), Bishr ibn al-Hārith (d. 227/841), Aḥmad ibn Ḥarb (d. 235/849), al-Hārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), Thawbān b. Ibrāhīm Dhū ’l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/861), Sarī b. al-Mughlas al-Saqatī (d. 253/867), Abū Yazīd Tayfūr b. Isā al-Bistāmī (d. 261/874), Sahl b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), Abū ’l-Ḥasan al-Nūrī (d. 295/908), Abū ’l-Qāsim Junayd b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Baghdaḍī (d. 298/910), Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Hallāj (d. 309/922), Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946) Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Niffārī (d. 354/965), and Abū Ṭālib Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Makkī (d. 386/996).

By the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries, Sufism had strongly made its presence felt in the Muslim lands. It earned approval and wide-ranging appeal among people. As Hodgson has observed, and possibly with an appreciable degree of plausibility, it transformed into a kind of “institutionalized mass religion”⁵⁴ owing to its popularity and institutionalization of its practices. By that time Sufism had integrated into the religious life of the Muslims, and had emerged as a dominant mode of Islamic piety. In fact, in the last quarter of the fifth/eleventh and the early years of the sixth/twelfth centuries, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī (450–505/1058–1111), tried to reconcile Sufism with the *Shari‘ah*, thus bridging the gulf between the two.⁵⁵ His younger contemporary, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 561/1166) further popularized Sufism. As the juristic and Sufi versions of Islam came closer to each other, more people including the jurists belonging to various schools of *fiqh* (Muslim jurisprudence) started entering the fold of Sufism. Lessons in jurisprudence were given in the *khānqāhs* while the *madrasahs* housed Sufis as well. As a result, the institutions of *madrasah* and *khānqāh* were later merged at the end of the ninth/fifteenth century.⁵⁶ The process of assimilation of the juristic and Sufi variants of Islam gave further impetus to the popularity of Sufism in Muslim societies.

⁵⁴ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2: 210–22.

⁵⁵ For a detailed study, see W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953).

⁵⁶ For a detailed study, see Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 47–50, 56–60.

A host of factors contributed to the rise and popularity of Sufism which can be explained in the backdrop of the political, intellectual, religious and socio-economic conditions of the then Muslim lands. It is in this context that causal explanations for the historical evolution of Sufism in Egypt, Iraq, Persia, Central and Western Asia, and Afghanistan have been explored briefly hereunder.

To begin with, socio-economic, religious, theological and intellectual factors considerably contributed to the rise and popularity of Sufism. Sufism or the Sufi trend in Islam asserted itself during the Umayyad rule (41–133/661–750) when God-conscious persons raised the voice that rulers were indulging more than they should in this-worldly activities, involving acquisition of material wealth and kingly ostentations, and not giving due heed to salvation in the Hereafter. Thus, Sufism can be interpreted as a reaction against the growing materialism which spread in Muslim societies as a result of prosperity in the wake of conquests and annexation of vast territories in Persia, Byzantium, Central and Western Asia, and Africa. Sufism thus began as an ascetic revolt against luxury and worldliness, and henceforth came to be identified with other-worldliness. As already pointed out, the Sufi doctrine of voluntary poverty stood in sharp contrast to the wealth of the royal household and the well-off urbanites. Its ideal of poverty represented a silent reaction against the growing materialism and covetousness among the Muslims.

According to Victor Danner, during the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries the original synthetic vision of things expounded in the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace be on him), wherein the exoteric and the esoteric dimensions were complementary even if different, was gradually replaced by a separation between the esoteric and exoteric domains. In other words, the message of Islam was gradually reduced to its exoteric aspect, which provoked, by way of reaction, the rise of esotericism or Sufism in these centuries.⁵⁷ Actually during these early centuries, the territorial stretch of the Muslim Empire had considerably expanded and had brought millions into the fold of Islam. This necessitated the codification of *Hadīth* literature, *fiqh*, history, biography, and many other branches of learning. With the emergence of various schools of jurisprudence, the *Shari'ah* or the exoteric aspect of Islam was crystallized. Consequently, not only due attention was not paid to the esoteric aspect of Islam, but rigidity and formalism also crept in the practices of the various schools of *fiqh*. The Sufis, who had by now come to represent the esoteric aspect of Islam, were critical of the cold rigidity and formalism of

⁵⁷ Victor Danner, "The Early Development of Sufism" in S. H. Nasr, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, 1: 239, 252.

these schools. They showed antipathy towards ceremonialism in religious observances with exclusive stress on ritualistic expressions, often devoid of inner meaning or essence, which was prevalent among the people at large. More emphasis was laid on the outward dimension of varied acts of worship, often in disregard of their inward significance or purpose.⁵⁸ Under the influence of these so-called 'externalist' theologians, jurists and '*ulamā'*,⁵⁹ who were more concerned with the outward forms of Islamic observances, the people generally tended to reduce Islam to rituals and ceremonies. In these circumstances, Sufism stood as a symbol of reaction against the prevalence of "dogmatic piety"⁶⁰ and formalism, and thus represented non-conformism to religious conservatism. In the words of Titus, Sufism was a "natural revolt of the human heart against the cold formalism of a ritualistic religion."⁶¹ The Sufis were also perturbed by hair-splitting theological quibbles and bitter controversies among the proponents and adherents of various schools of *fiqh*, which occasionally led to riots in urban centres such as Baghdad.

During the 'Abbāsid period, the God-conscious people came to face, along with the challenge of materialist and this-worldly trends, another challenge, that posed by Greek thought and the Mu'tazilah. While this development contributed to the intellectual growth of the Muslims in a positive manner, it had its excesses too. The most basic form of the challenge was that, judged on the basis of reason alone, nothing could happen without a cause. The implication was that since everything was happening according to fixed laws, God now stood inactive, without any active role in the functioning of the universe. In fact, the translation of Greek philosophical texts into Arabic had encouraged a rational enquiry into the tenets of the Muslim faith. For the Muslim philosophers and rationalists associated with the Mu'tazilite school of thought, the main criterion for every reality was reason. In other words, as Danner has aptly put it, knowledge was reduced to "abstract, mental categories, bereft of direct, spiritual vision of the Real..."⁶² The Muslim '*ulamā'* presented their answer to the challenge under a new branch of knowledge

⁵⁸ For a brief discussion on the outer and inner meanings of Qur'ānic verses and *ahādīth*, see Martin Lings [Abū Bakr Sirāj-ud-Dīn], *What is Sufism?* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 1983 rpt., first published 1975), 28–32; Syed Ali Ashraf, "The Inner Meaning of the Islamic Rites: Prayer, Pilgrimage, Fasting, Jihad" in Nasr, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, 1: 111–30.

⁵⁹ Hodgson has used the term 'Shari'ah-minded' '*ulamā'* for the externalist '*ulamā'*. Idem, *The Venture of Islam: The Classical Age of Islam*, vol. 1, passim.

⁶⁰ Grunbaum, *Classical Islam*, 131.

⁶¹ Titus, *Indian Islam*, 111.

⁶² Danner, "The Early Development of Sufism" in Nasr, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, 1: 254.

called *'Ilm al-Kalām*. The Sufis presented their own answer, which emphasized immersion in search of nearness to God. According to Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1357/1938), the germs of scepticism latent in rationalism ultimately necessitated an appeal to a super-intellectual source of knowledge.⁶³ Sheer rationalism and pursuit of religious truths using dialectical methods, largely borrowed from the Greek intellectual tradition, drove introverted people like the Sufis to search the Ultimate Truth by emotional means involving the intuitive faculties of human beings. The Sufis aspired for a kind of freethinking in their pursuit of the ultimate knowledge of God and the universe. They sought a direct and personal method of comprehending the Absolute Truth or the Supreme Being. It was believed that the search or quest for God, out of God's own blessings, was to result in making a person's heart filled with knowledge: a person could thus have *ma'rifah* or intuitive knowledge, and ultimately *haqiqah*, the knowledge of and nearness to God.

This approach was distinct not only from the conventional mode of thinking prevalent among the majority of conformist '*ulamā'*, theologians and jurists, but also from the rationalist approach of the Mu'tazilites. The fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries are considered to be the apogee of Mu'tazilite thought, after which it witnessed a constant decline, after it was countered by al-Ghazzālī, who was a philosopher-cum-theologian turned Sufi.⁶⁴ Thus, Islamic philosophical and intellectual movements such as Mu'tazilism in a way also provided a stimulus to the Sufi tendencies within Islam.

Apart from these, there were political factors as well which played a crucial role in the rise and popularity of Sufism. A brief description of these factors seems quite appropriate here.

The more the social decay and political instability, the greater was the impetus for the spread of Sufism. The discontent within the Muslim community in its early days resulted in disturbances and turbulence which culminated in the assassination of the third and the fourth Rightly Guided Caliphs, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (d. 35/656) and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib (d. 40/661). The Rightly Guided Caliphate was followed by the Umayyads, and later on by the 'Abbāsids, who turned the state into a hereditary monarchy, notwithstanding their claims to the Caliphate. In fact, since the demise of the Prophet (peace be on him), and more particularly since the assassination of the Caliph 'Alī, the question of political authority and transfer of power was never quite resolved. Husayn (d. 61/680), the son of the Caliph 'Alī, led the

⁶³ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbāl, 1959 rpt., first published 1954), 79.

⁶⁴ See n. 55 above.

famous rebellion against the Umayyad rule. The rebellion ended in disaster at Karbalā' in Iraq in 61/680, and consequently, the family of Caliph 'Alī was almost exterminated. The tragic events at Karbalā' rocked the Muslim community, and spurred a movement of pious penitence among a section of its members for having failed to come to the support of Husayn against the Umayyads.

Under the Umayyads, the Arabs, who constituted the ruling elite, came to have a major share in the political, military, administrative, social and economic power, whereas the non-Arabs, barring a few exceptions, were generally denied any noticeable share in the government. The dissatisfaction of the people, particularly of the non-Arabs, with the rulers' scant attention to the requirements of socio-economic justice found political, religious, philosophical, social, cultural and literary expressions.

The grievances of the Khārijites and Shī'ites found political expression in the outbreak of various revolts during the Umayyad rule. The *mawālī* movement represented the resentment of the non-Arab subjects who, despite their acceptance of Islam, were placed below the Arabs in social and political hierarchies. They were at times even subjected to taxes, which were theoretically supposed to be imposed on the non-Muslims.⁶⁵ These and many other discriminatory measures drove many of them to revolts. Iraq and Khurāsān were the provinces that were threatened most by revolts and other disturbances. Since these centres of discontent had witnessed Umayyad persecution, it is perhaps not insignificant that it is these very areas that saw the growth of Sufism. In a hostile environment of political persecution, the people of Iraq, especially of Kūfah and Baṣrah — the strongholds of opposition against the Umayyads — found solace in the fold of religion, and more notably in Sufism.

Under the 'Abbāsids, on the intellectual plane the Mu'tazilites rejected the Ash'arī model of theology⁶⁶ since, in their view, the model served the interests of the ruling elite. The model is, in fact, perceived by some as an instrument of unquestioning subservience to the political authority. One scholar, for instance, asserts that the reasons for the rise of both the

⁶⁵ Bertold Spuler, *The Muslim World: A Historical Survey, The Age of the Caliphs*, Eng. trans. from German F. R. C. Bagley (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 1: 39–40, 44; Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Being the second edition of *The Sociology of Islam*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, rpt.; first published 1957), 58.

⁶⁶ Ash'arism is a philosophico-religious school of thought associated with Abū 'l-Hasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'il al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936). For al-Ash'arī's life and works, Ash'arite theology and its fundamental principles, and Ash'arite metaphysics, see M. Abdul Hye, "Ash'arism" in M.M. Sharif, ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 1: 220–43.

Mu'tazilites and the Sufis were "more political rather than religious or academic in nature."⁶⁷ Though the assertion seems reductive as Sufism was more than a political response to the then prevailing conditions, it cannot be denied that there were political reasons, in addition to other more fundamental reasons, behind the rise and growth of Sufism. Since both the Mu'tazilites and the Sufis had attempted to redefine the basic concepts of Muslim theology, they were branded as "heterodox," in order to curb their freedom of speech and freedom of action. In the same way, the *zindiqs* or freethinkers were persecuted by the state in the later half of the second/eighth century. It was, in fact, the political and economic dissatisfaction under the guise of religion which led to the rebellions of many Persian leaders in Khurāsān like Sunbadh [Sunbādh], the Magian (137/755),⁶⁸ and Ustādhsīs [Ustādhsīs] (150-1/767-8),⁶⁹ and many more. The movement of a Mazdakite named Bābak (201-223/816-838) in the days of the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198-218/813-833) was also a political expression of the growing economic discontent. Bābak's heresy acquired the dimensions of a peasant revolt since the followers of the Mazdakī sect belonged to the peasant communities of northern Persia. Bābak stood for the break-up of large feudal estates and distribution of land among landless peasants.⁷⁰ Similarly, during the 'Abbāsid rule, the grievances of the subject races, particularly the Persians, found a literary expression in the form of the Shu'ubiyyah movement. It claimed superiority for non-Arabs in poetry and literature.⁷¹

It was against the backdrop of these religio-theological and intellectual as well as political and socio-economic conditions that the rise and popularity of Sufism can best be understood. In short, Sufism signified not only a protest against the growing materialism among the Muslims, an excessive insistence on the exoteric aspect of Islam and the intensifying formalism of the '*ulamā'* and Mu'tazilism, but also a subtle and guised protest against the high-handedness of the rulers and other political abuses of the age.

⁶⁷ See Manzoor Ahmad, "Introduction" in Mohammad Kamal, *Heterodoxy in Islam* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1993), vi.

⁶⁸ See, for a brief discussion, W. Madelung, "Sunbādh" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 9: 874-75.

⁶⁹ See, for a brief discussion, W. Madelung, "Ustādhsīs" in *ibid.*, 10: 926-27.

⁷⁰ For the doctrines of Mazdakism, see M. Guidi [M. Morony], "Mazdak" in *ibid.*, 6: 949-52, esp. 950.

⁷¹ Spuler, *The Muslim World: A Historical Survey*, *The Age of the Caliphs*, 1: 55. For a brief analysis of the social significance of the Shu'ubiyyah movement, see Hamilton A. R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, eds. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 62-73.

Development and Institutionalization of Sufi Practices

The doctrines and practices associated with Sufism grew and developed in stages. The gradual institutionalization of Sufi practices took place three centuries after the 'Abbāsid Revolution in 129/749. Having passed through its formative phase in the second/eighth, third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, Sufism acquired the contours of a vibrant movement with relatively systematic doctrines and institutions during the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries. Scholars of Sufism have attempted to theorize about the historical evolution of Sufism by dividing it into different stages or phases. Such attempts have been made by scholars of Sufism such as Nizami, Trimingham, Fritz Meier and Arthur Buehler.

According to Nizami, there can be discerned three distinct stages in the development and growth of the Sufi movement in Islam. These are: (i) the period of the quietists; (ii) the period of the mystic philosophers; and (iii) the period of the *silsilabs*.⁷² The designation of the first phase has been borrowed by Nizami from Nicholson.⁷³ According to them, the Sufis of the early era represented a reaction against the political conditions of the Umayyad Empire. There was a silent and subtle protest against the materialistic tendencies among the rulers by the profoundly God-conscious persons or the early Sufis. The prominent Sufis of the era include Ḥasan al-Basrī, Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, Abū Hāshim 'Uthmān and Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah al-Baṣrī. The Sufis of this phase focused on their self-purification. Literature on Sufi thought began to appear in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, and it is only in the fifth/eleventh century that the Sufis began to be organized in groups. Here one may argue that the designation of this era seems somewhat inappropriate, as it does not adequately convey the characteristic features of Sufism in the said period. Moreover, it makes one assume that these early Sufis, being quietists, had cut themselves off from the world and retired into seclusion. On the contrary, some of the Sufis of this era even participated in military campaigns against the Byzantine Empire. These included, among others, celebrated Sufis like Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak, Shaqīq al-Balkhī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥarb. So the epithet "quietists" seems somewhat inapt. The second phase was characterized by the development of a well-knit system of Sufi thought by such Sufi philosophers as Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzalī, Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar b. Muḥammad al-

⁷² Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, "Mysticism" in *Islam*, Guru Nanak Quincentenary Celebration Series (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1969), 55–66.

⁷³ Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 4. For an entirely different meaning of quietism, see Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 266.

Suhrawardī, Muhyī 'l-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Alī Ibn al-'Arabī (560–638/1165–1240), popularly known as *al-Shaykh al-Akbar* (The Greatest Master), and Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Rūmī (d. 672/1273). The last and the most important stage was characterized by the rise of Sufi *silsilahs* (chains of transmission of spiritual authority) in the sixth/twelfth century.

Trimingham's three-phase theory of the historical evolution of Sufism has been summarized below.⁷⁴ The first phase, i.e. the *khānqāh* stage, was marked by tremendous creativity of thought and simplicity of the Sufis' social organization. Initially, there were no formal bonds between the master and his pupils, but later, *khānqāhs* or Sufi dwellings were established all over the Muslim world. The second stage—*tariqah*—saw the doctrinal evolution and social organization of Sufism in the form of Sufi schools, along with the formation of spiritual lineages or *silsilahs*. The practice of formal initiation was also introduced, and in this stage Sufism became institutionalized. In the third and final stage, called *tā'ifah*, it acquired the form of Sufi cults with exaggerated veneration and even excessive adoration of Sufis, who then came to be designated as *pīrs*. These Sufi cults were centred on the spiritual power or blessing (*barakah*) of a single individual. The headship of *tā'ifahs* became hereditary. Tombs of great Sufis, called *dargāhs*, generally to a large extent replaced *khānqāhs*. This phase also witnessed the introduction of astrology and magic among Sufi circles.

Trimingham's theory is, however, no longer being used in recent works on Sufism. One even discerns certain inconsistencies in it. First, it is difficult to demarcate the first and the second stages chronologically. Secondly, the nomenclature of the third phase may cause some confusion, as *tā'ifahs* came to represent the multiple branches of the main *tariqahs*, in the sense used by Trimingham for the last phase, which he dates from the ninth/fifteenth century. The word, in fact, acquired this new meaning later on, as from the third/ninth century, the Sufi groups were referred to as *tā'ifahs*, meaning the groups of men of God. The famous third/ninth century Sufi, Junayd al-Baghdādī, was known as *Sayyid al-Tā'ifah* (the Master of the men of God). Moreover, the Sufis continued to view themselves as a *tā'ifah*, that is, a distinct group of men of God, and be referred to as *tā'ifah* later on as well.⁷⁵ Thus, the designation of the third and the last phase, which corresponds to a development that took place much earlier, may create confusion for the readers. Lastly, Trimingham's categories do not highlight the striking change in the role of the Sufi *shaykhs* in the entire system of spiritual guidance and development in particular, and in the society in general.

⁷⁴ See details in Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, chaps. 1–3: 1–104.

⁷⁵ E. Geoffroy, "Tā'ifa" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn., 10: 116–17.

Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence observe that Trimingham's work is marred by a theory of classicism and decline, as the above-mentioned first two phases of Sufism, according to Trimingham, were marked by the rise and growth of Sufism, while the third, and final phase was marked by decline in Sufism.⁷⁶

Meier periodizes Sufism in four historical phases: pre-classical Sufism, classical Sufism, post-classical Sufism, and neo-classical Sufism. According to him, the second/eighth century constituted the pre-classical phase of Sufism when the woollen garment was widely adopted by the Sufis, and the practices of *sama'* (devotional music concert) and *dhikr* (remembrance of God, or recollection of God's presence) were developed. During the third/ninth, fourth/tenth and the early part of the fifth/eleventh centuries, which constituted the classical era of Sufism, Sufi ideas found a perceptible degree of public approval, and Sufism emerged as a religious movement. The great Sufi masters lived in this era, which also witnessed the composition of Sufi texts and the establishment of purpose-specific residential schools of the Sufis. In the post-classical age of Sufism, corresponding to the end of the fifth/eleventh century, and the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, a higher value was placed upon visionary and occult experiences. The era was also characterized by the veneration of the Sufi *shaykhs*, the emergence of Sufi orders, and the 'formularization', i.e. composition of Sufi prayers and litanies. The neo-classical stage of Sufism, stretching from the seventh/thirteenth to the eighth/fourteenth centuries, was distinguished by a revival of the more restrained practices of the classical era of Sufism, and a return to the fundamental principles of Islam. In this era, the reformers of Sufism, who included the Sufis as well as the theologians critical of Sufi practices, tried to curtail the excesses of Sufism. Unlike the earlier phases of Sufism, membership in more than one Sufi order became prevalent in this era.⁷⁷

The scheme of periodization suggested by Meier covers only the period stretching from the second/eighth to the eighth/fourteenth centuries, and does not include the subsequent centuries. Like the periodization scheme suggested by Trimingham, Meier's scheme also presumes a theory of classicism, privileging one stage of Sufism, i.e. the classical age, over the rest of the ages, i.e. the pre- and post-classical eras. Moreover, it also implies

⁷⁶ Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 11. Ernst and Lawrence also maintain that Trimingham's observations "contain a modern and strongly Protestant attitude." Ibid., 10. Moreover, he sees decline in Sufism as inevitable. Ibid.

⁷⁷ Fritz Meier, "The Mystic Path" in Bernard Lewis, ed. *The World of Islam* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980 rpt., first published 1976), 117–25.

borrowing of terms and vision from European history.

Buehler has also attempted to mark some stages in the evolution of Sufism. These are characterized by (i) the teaching *shaykhs*, (ii) the directing-*shaykhs*, and (iii) the mediating *shaykhs*.⁷⁸ Buehler's periodization, being overtly '*shaykh*-centric', assumes the institution of the Sufi *shaykh* as the centre of gravity in Sufism from its very inception. The Sufi *shaykh* gradually acquired a central role in the development and growth of Sufism. In the early centuries of the development of Sufism, all Sufis were not necessarily associated with teaching or instruction in a formal or informal sense. In addition, Buehler has discussed the mediational function of the Sufis from various dimensions, viz., between God and humans, between individuals, and between factions,⁷⁹ but he has not discussed the mediational function of the Sufis between the state and the people.

The phenomenon of Sufism is said to have existed during the times of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him),⁸⁰ as many of his Companions (*sahābah*) attended to their spiritual development by receiving spiritual guidance directly from the Prophet (peace be on him) himself. The markedly spiritual orientation of many of his Companions which makes them appear as the precursors of the Sufis is evident from different episodes of their lives. These include, among others, the four caliphs, viz., Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13/634), ‘Umar al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān and ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, as well as those belonging to the House of the Prophet (peace be on him) such as Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī (d. 49/669), Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, and ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī (Zayn al-‘Ābidīn) (d. 94/713), etc.⁸¹ *Aṣḥāb al-Suffah* (People of the Platform) are considered to be the first collective expression of the Sufi tradition in Islam. These included, among others, Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him) such as Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 32/653)⁸², Salmān al-Fārsī (d. 36/656), and Bilāl ibn Rabāh al-Habashī (d. 20/641), etc.⁸³ Another 'Companion of the Prophet' named Uways al-Qarānī (d. 37/657), who in fact

⁷⁸ Arthur F. Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya, and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi shaykh* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998).

⁷⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁰ It has been argued that the Traditions of the Prophet abound in Sufi precepts, which show that the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) was in fact, as the Sufis insist, the first Sufi *shaykh* in all but name. Lings, *What is Sufism?*, 101.

⁸¹ See details in al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 70–80.

⁸² For a detailed study, see A. J. Cameron, *Abu Dharr al-Ghifari: An Examination of His Image in the Hagiography of Islam* (Lahore: Universal Books, 1978).

⁸³ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 81–82. The Sufis of the later times, including the *tābi‘ūn* (the Successors of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him)), *tab‘ tābi‘īn* (the Successors of these Successors) and those who came after them, have also been dealt with by al-Hujwīrī. See *ibid.*, chaps. 10 and 11, 83–160.

had never met the Prophet (peace be on him), is also counted among the early Sufis.⁸⁴

The Sufis of the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries either lived as isolated individuals or formed loose groups. Later, from the third/ninth century onwards the Sufi groups came to be called *tā'ifah*. Sufis of the early era included the wandering mendicants, travelling from one place to another in groups or individually, and those leading sedentary lives. The three major centres of Sufism which emerged in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries were Iraq, especially the metropolitan cities of Baṣrah, Kūfah and Baghdad, the politically turbulent province of Khurasān, especially the city of Balkh, and Egypt. Other early centres of Sufism included Damascus, and the desert wastes of Arabia and Sinai. What follows is a brief description of the development and growth of Sufism in its various phases. However, it is important to note that the evolution of these phases of Sufism followed different timetables in different regions of the Muslim lands.

Appearance of Sufi Dwellings or *Khānqāhs*

The second/eighth and third/ninth centuries were the times when the Sufi practices began to be crystallised. While discussing the evolution of Sufism, Gibb states that the collective organization of the Sufis began to appear in the second/eighth century in the form of small groups, and then appeared their dwellings.⁸⁵ These Sufi dwellings were variously known as *ribāṭs*, *zāwiyahs*, *jamā'atkhānahs* and *khānqāhs* in different geographical regions, but the variation in their nomenclature also depended on their specific functions and role. In contemporary literature, these Sufi dwellings are often mistakenly referred to as hospices, convents or monasteries, but these latter terms carry their own distinctive meaning in the context of Christianity. Moreover, these terms do not capture the complexity of the Sufi institutions.

Regarding the distinctive meaning attached to each type of the above-mentioned Sufi dwelling, Trimingham is of the opinion that:

the *ribāṭ* was an Arab type of hostel or training-centre; the *khānqāh* was the Persian non-training hostel type introduced into the cities of the Arab world; *zāwīya* was the term applied to smaller establishments where one shaikh dwelt with his pupils; whilst a *khalwa* designated the ‘retreat’ of a single dervish,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 83–84.

⁸⁵ Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, 132. According to a more recent work, the first *khānqāhs* or the Sufi dwellings were built around the beginning of the third/ninth century. For a detailed discussion on the development of *khānqāhs*, see Muhsin Kiyānī, *Tārikh-i Khānqāh dar Īrān* (Tehran: Kitābkhānah-i Ṭahūrī, 1990), 137–84, and Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet*, 44–54.

frequently a cell situated around a mosque square. A more isolated ‘hermitage’ was sometimes called a *rābita*.⁸⁶

According to J. Chabbi, the term *ribāṭ* has a host of meanings attached to it, such as a look-out post, small fort, fortified city, caravanserai, staging-post and an urban establishment of the Sufis.⁸⁷ Many of its meanings are associated with warfare. In fact, there were *ribāṭs* or Sufi dwellings on the marches with Byzantium, and in North Africa. The term *zāwiyah* was used for smaller Sufi dwellings where the Sufis lived and prayed, but unlike the *khānqāhs*, these dwellings were not meant to serve as places where their resident Sufis could receive others, and thus make contact with the world outside. Such dwellings were generally prevalent in the West or al-Maghrib. However, the term was systematically employed in this sense from the seventh/thirteenth century onwards.⁸⁸ In addition, there emerged small Sufi retreats or small cells known as *khalwahs* associated with a single Sufi master. Sometimes the small cells constructed inside a large Sufi dwelling for individual Sufis were also known as *khalwahs*.⁸⁹ The term *jamā'atkhānah* (literally meaning a place of communal living) is generally employed for Sufi dwellings constructed by the Chishtis in India, which consisted of a large hall, where all the inmates of the *khānqāh* used to live together under one roof.⁹⁰

As for the provenance of the Sufi dwellings called *khānqāhs*, they seem to have been adopted from the Karrāmīs. In the third/ninth and fourth/tenth century eastern Persia, the adherents of the Karrāmiyyah sect in Khurāsān and the eastern provinces had established their centres of worship and instruction all over Khurāsān, known as *khānqāhs*. These centres were modelled on similar institutions run by Manicheans in Khurāsān and Transoxiana.⁹¹ Ibn Karrām (d. 283/896), the founder of the sect, was an ascetic of Sijistān who had constructed his *khānqāh* in Jerusalem.⁹² The sect, known after its founder, was considered heretical by the Sunnis. However, the sect disappeared later, but its

⁸⁶ Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 17–18.

⁸⁷ For details see J. Chabbi, “Ribāṭ” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn., 8: 493–506.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 504.

⁸⁹ Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 169.

⁹⁰ In addition, the Sufi dwellings, also referred to as *dā'irah* (literally meaning circle), came into existence later in the eleventh/seventeenth and twelfth/eighteenth centuries. Their primary aim was to provide place for spiritual meditation to people. For a brief discussion on the various types of Sufi dwellings, see, Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Some Aspects of the Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (Aligarh: Department of History, Muslim University, 1961), 175, n. 1.

⁹¹ J. Chabbi, “Khānqāh” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn., 4: 1025–26.

⁹² W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 289.

legacy still continues in the form of Sufi dwellings. Etymologically, *khānqāh* is a composite word: *khān* is derived from the Persian word *khānah* meaning a house, while the Arabic word *qāh* means a practice or an act of worship. Therefore, a *khānqāh* literally means a place of worship.⁹³ In studies on Sufism, the term is used for all types of Sufi dwellings in a generic sense, without any distinction; and hence, it has been used in that sense in the ensuing discussion as well.

The foundations of the Sufi dwellings or *khānqāhs* were laid in the third/ninth, fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries, though these developed fully later on. There are different assertions as to where and when the first *khānqāh* was built. According to some, the first *khānqāh* was constructed in Ramalah in the then Syria,⁹⁴ whereas according to others, an early *ribāṭ* was founded on Abadān Island on the Persian Gulf by an second/eighth century Sufi, 'Abd al-Wāhid ibn Zayd (d. 177/793).⁹⁵ Later on, these Sufi dwellings mushroomed in large numbers in urban centres as well as in rural settings all over the Muslim lands.

The *khānqāhs* mark the collective organization of the Sufis. With their emergence, the collective and communal aspect of the Sufi lifestyle became a requirement for the disciples and all those who aspired to tread the path of Sufism. At the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century, Abū Ishāq al-Kazarūnī (d. 424/1033) required that his disciples live a communal life in *khānqāhs* which he had founded.⁹⁶ Similarly, a Khurāsānian Sufi, Abū Sa'īd ibn Abī 'l-Khayr (d. 441/1049) maintained a personal *khānqāh* in his native town Mayhana, near Sarakhs. He outlined the rules and regulations guiding the behaviour of the disciples living collectively, and required from them that they perform their prayers in common and also carry out other acts of worship together.⁹⁷ Thus, by the fifth/eleventh century, these Sufi dwellings had become an essential feature of Sufism.

These *khānqāhs* or Sufi dwellings were constructed either by a sultan, a noble, some wealthy individual, or by some prominent Sufi. They were

⁹³ Nithār Ahmād Fārūqī, *Chishtī T'alimāt aur 'Aṣr-i Ḥādir mēn un kī Ma'nawiyat* (New Delhi: Islam and the Modern Age Society, 1981), 80.

⁹⁴ Dar, "Early Sufis (Continued)" in M. M. Sharif, ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 1: 336.

⁹⁵ Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 5, and Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 31. For a brief life sketch of 'Abd al-Wāhid ibn Zayd, see P. Nwyia, "'Abd al-Vahid ibn Zayd" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 1: 167-68; and Idārah-'i Taṣnīf-o Tālīf, *Anwār-i Aṣfiyā'* (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, n.d.), 38-40.

⁹⁶ Wilfred Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran* (Albany, NY: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 48-49.

⁹⁷ R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980 rpt., first published 1921), 46.

supported by endowments (*awqāf*) which their founders (kings, nobles, or the Sufis themselves) had set aside for the purpose of their maintenance and upkeep. But despite the financial support from *waqf* funds, they enjoyed much autonomy and independence. Hodgson contends:

The worship at the mosque never ceased to be associated in some degree with political authority; it was a state function. The *khāniqāhs* were eminently private from the very beginning. Even when endowed by an amīr, they retained this air. When the *khāniqāhs* became the foci of the more private, personal side of worship, they reinforced the fragmentation of Muslim societies in apolitical social forms (and at the same time...gave these forms legitimacy and spiritual support).⁹⁸

In fact, the fifth/eleventh century marked the triumph of Sunnī traditionalism, and the overthrow of political Shī'ism in the wake of the Seljūqs' wresting control of the 'Abbāsid heartlands from the Shī'ite Buwayhids. It gave rise to a new institution in the Muslim society—the *madrasah* (college of learning), particularly founded and patronized by the Seljūq rulers, who were staunch Sunnis. They tried to reassert their political authority as well as that of Sunnī Islam. These political developments considerably contributed to the stabilization of Sufi institutional structures. Historians have pointed out the parallel institutional development of *madrasahs* and *khāniqāhs* in that period. As many Sufis became associated with these *madrasahs* for teaching and lecturing, there remained little distinction between a mosque or a *madrasah* and a Sufi *khāniqāh*.⁹⁹ Like the *madrasahs*, the Seljūqs and Ayyūbids also encouraged the foundation of *khāniqāhs* which, like the *madrasahs*, were managed, endowed and supervised by the state. Nonetheless, an adverse impact of the state's support to the *khāniqāhs* was that they became state-run institutions controlled by the state, as their directors came to be officially appointed. These appointments were often political in nature, as the directors appointed there were often not necessarily Sufis. By the sixth/twelfth century, the *khāniqāhs* had become rich and flourishing establishments.

Introduction of *Silsilahs* or *Tariqahs*

Another important development in Sufism was the emergence of the *silsilah* (pl. *salāsil*) or the *tariqah* (pl. *turuq*).¹⁰⁰ *Tariqah* literally means a path or way,

⁹⁸ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods*, 2: 213–14.

⁹⁹ Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, 44–94.

¹⁰⁰ For a brief survey, see E. Geoffroy, "Tariqa" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn., 10: 243–

and a practical method, whereas *silsilah* literally means a connection, a link or a chain. They can be defined as spiritual lineage or pedigree, or initiatic genealogy. Every *silsilah* traced its spiritual lineage or genealogy to some revered Sufi *shaykh*, considered to be the founder of the *silsilah*, and through him it was linked to his spiritual preceptor, and this vertical chain of authority was invariably traced back to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him). In this way, the succeeding Sufis, including the founder of the *silsilah*, recognized themselves as the spiritual heirs of the Prophet (peace be on him). The first pedigree of Sufi teachers was prepared by Abū Muḥammad Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Khuldī (d. 348/959), after which this practice became customary among the Sufis of the later generations.¹⁰¹ A *silsilah* as a chain of genealogical authority serves as a source of identity and legitimacy for the succeeding generations of Sufis.

The Sufi groups or *ṭā'ifahs* of the early era later developed into *silsilahs*. They have been incorrectly translated as Sufi orders, Sufi fraternities or brotherhoods. Having their origin in Christianity, these terms have distinctive meanings and connotations of their own, and do not adequately explain the true nature and characteristics, or convey the complexity of Sufi *silsilahs*. It was the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries which witnessed the mushroom growth of these *silsilahs* all over the Muslim lands, though al-Hujwīrī, writing in the fifth/eleventh century, mentions twelve schools of Sufis, condemning the practices and beliefs of two, while approving the rest of the ten schools.¹⁰² Trimingham, however, contends that these schools had not developed into *silsilah-tariqah* at that time.¹⁰³ Some of the important *silsilahs* that emerged later on are outlined hereunder along with the names of their founders:

- ***Silsilah Qādiriyyah*** was named after Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, who is buried in Baghdad.
- ***Silsilah Chishtiyyah*** was founded by Khwājah Abū Ishaq Shāmī (d. 238/940). It originated from Chisht, a small village near Herat in Khurāsān in the then Persia. Nowadays it is situated in Afghanistan. The *silsilah* was popularized in India by Shaykh Mu'in al-Dīn Chishtī of Ajmēr (d. 633/1236).
- ***Silsilah Rifa'iyyah*** was derived from Shaykh Ahmad ibn al-Rifa'i (d. 578/1182).

46.

¹⁰¹ Meier, "The Mystic Path" in Lewis, ed. *The World of Islam*, 119.

¹⁰² The former ten schools include the Muḥāsibis, the Qaṣṣāris, the Ṭayfūris, the Junaydis, the Nūris, the Sahlis, the Hākimis, the Kharrāzīs, the Khaffīfīs, and the Sayyārīs, whereas the rest of the two are the Hulūlīs and the Ḥallājīs (including the Ibāḥatīs as well as the Fārisīs). Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, 130–31; for their details, see chap. 14: 176–266.

¹⁰³ Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 12.

- *Silsilah Yasaviyyah* was associated with Shaykh Ahmad al-Yasavī (d. 561/1166).
- *Silsilah Shādhiliyyah* originated from Shaykh Abū Maydān Shū‘ayb (d. 593/1197) but attributed to Shaykh Abū ’l-Hasan ‘Alī al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), who popularized it.
- *Silsilah Badawiyyah* of Shaykh Ahmad al-Badawī (d. 675/1276) was centred in Egypt.
- *Silsilah Suhrawardiyyah* was founded by Shaykh Najib al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Qāhir (d. 563/circa 1167), also known as Ḏiyā’ al-Dīn Abū Najib al-Suhrawardī. Suhraward was a town situated in north-eastern Persia. The real founder of the *silsilah* is considered to be his nephew named Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar b. Muhammad al-Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234), the author of a famous Sufi text *‘Awārif al-Ma‘ārif*.
- *Silsilah Kubrawiyyah* was originated from Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221).
- *Silsilah Naqshbandiyyah* is initially attributed to Shaykh Yūsuf al-Hamadānī (d. 534/1140) and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Khāliq al-Ghujdawānī (d. 575/1179). Later, it came to be identified with Shaykh Muḥammad Baha’ al-Dīn Naqshbandī (d. 791/1389). The town of Naqshband was situated near Bukhārā in Central Asia. The *silsilah* was introduced in India by Khwājah Bāqī Bi’llāh in the ninth/fifteenth century. The *Silsilah* is also referred to as *Silsilah-i Khwājagān* as well.
- *Silsilah Mevleviyyah* was founded by Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī who was buried in Konya (Turkey). He was the author of famous *Mathnawī Ma‘nawī*, a classical Persian work of Sufi poetry. The *silsilah* is confined to Anatolia, and the whirling *darvēshes* are identified with it.

From the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century, the *silsilahs* assumed the role of schools of Sufism, with one centre attached to one Sufi Shaykh, which perpetuated his name, his particular teaching, method, and spiritual practices. These *silsilahs* were quite diverse in their nature and characteristics. They betrayed the diversification of religious and spiritual experience as the methods adopted for the spiritual training and growth of the aspirants or disciples were quite different and diverse, such as the modes of *dhikr* or remembrance of God, *samā‘* or Sufi music concert, and *raqs* (devotional ecstatic dance). In fact, the goal of all the Sufis and Sufi *silsilahs* was one, but they pursued different paths to reach their goal. It is important to clarify that the crystallization of *silsilahs* did not imply that the adherents of one were separated or isolated from all other *silsilahs*. The Sufi initiates could get initiated in multiple *silsilahs* in order to receive spiritual benefit from them. However, the practice of multiple initiation was developed fully at a later stage, and it is reported that the Egyptian Sufi of Shādhilī *Silsilah*, Shaykh

Sha'rānī (d. 973/1565) was formally initiated in twenty-five *silsilahs* other than his own.¹⁰⁴

Centrality of the Sufi Master or *Shaykh* in Sufism

Another simultaneous development was that with the rise of the *silsilahs*, the Sufi masters or *shaykhs* emerged as a centre of gravity of the Sufi establishment. Here it seems appropriate to briefly discuss the categories of Sufis and the alternative expressions used for them. Al-Hujwīrī distinguishes between a complete Sufi, a genuine seeker of the Sufi path, and the imposter or charlatan. A Sufi is one who has reached the goal, who has annihilated his self into the Absolute Truth, whereas *mutasawwif* means “he who strives to be a Sufi” or the Sufi aspirant. As for the *mustaswif*, he is an imposter or a charlatan pretending to be a Sufi for some personal gain.¹⁰⁵

There is a nomenclatural variety in the epithets used for the Sufis. A host of Arabic and Persian terms like *marābut*, *darvēsh*, *faqīr*, *pīr*, *walī*, *mursid*, *shaykh*, *majdbūb* and *qalandar* are found in common usage. Nonetheless, they have distinctive meanings attached to them, though some of them are often used interchangeably. These terms having slightly different meanings need to be clarified here, as some of them denote the varied categories of Sufis as well.

The Arabic term *walī* is understood in Sufi literature as someone who is close to God or is considered to be a friend or protégé of God, whereas the Persian epithet *pīr* generally refers to a healer or problem solver. Some scholars have employed the term *pīr* in a general sense as well. For instance, Desiderio Pinto defines *pīr* in a generic sense as a guide, helper, teacher who takes people to God, he is closely associated with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him), has a close and intimate relationship with God, and acts as a mediator between God and man.¹⁰⁶

The Arabic word *shaykh* has a variety of meanings, but it is a more general term employed for both *pīr* and the Arabic word *mursid*, meaning a spiritual mentor or guide. The term *faqīr* literally means a poor, derived from the Arabic word *faqr* ([voluntary] poverty), which is one of the celebrated virtues of Muslim Sufis and non-Muslim ascetics alike. Its Persian equivalent is *darvēsh*, derived from *dar* (door) and *vēsh* (to beg) meaning poor or beggar

¹⁰⁴ Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1982), 90, as cited in Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, 239.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 34–35.

¹⁰⁶ See details in Desiderio Pinto, *Piri-Muridi Relationship: A Study of the Nizamuddin Dargah* (Delhi: Manohar, 1995), 125–40; see characteristics of *pīrs*, 141–47, duties of *pīrs*, 147–52, *adab* (etiquettes for veneration) of *pīrs*, 152–59, and their powers, 159–77.

who goes from door to door. *Darvēsh* is the one who has given up all his worldly possessions, and either lives in a *khānqāh* or is a wandering mendicant.¹⁰⁷ In addition, there are other categories as well which include the following: the Persian epithet *majdhūb* refers to the one absorbed in, or enraptured with, the love of God, generally having lost sanity and self-control; while *qalandar* is generally understood to be a libertine mendicant having antinomian and non-conformist tendencies.¹⁰⁸ However, it must be remembered that some of these terms were not current in the early days of Sufism, and became popular later on.

Let us now return to the original point, centrality of the position of the Sufi *shaykh*. With the development of the *silsilahs*, the Sufi *shaykhs* assumed a central position not only in a *silsilah* or a *khānqāh*, but in the entire process of spiritual development and training of a disciple.¹⁰⁹ The Sufi doctrine and concept of *suḥbah* (literally meaning companionship) explains it well. According to it, the company of a Sufi *shaykh* is considered to be a source of spiritual development of a disciple, and is preferred to seclusion.¹¹⁰ With the passage of time elaborate rules of *suḥbah* were developed, and there also appeared texts and literature on the subject as well. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī’s (d. 412/1021) *Kitāb Ādāb al-Suḥbah* is one such example in point. Thus, the institution of a directing *shaykh* or preceptor, being indispensable for the spiritual development and training of a *murīd*, emerged as a centre of gravity in the entire system of spiritual guidance. The term *murīd* literally meant an aspirant, or he who has made up his will, i.e. to enter the path. It was used as a designation for the disciples or initiates. The disciples can broadly be classified into two types depending on their motives in getting initiated: those getting initiated or becoming *murīd* for the purpose of seeking the blessings of a Sufi *shaykh*, and those performing *bay’at* for embarking on the spiritual trajectory. Only a few disciples could become the *khulafā’* (pl. of

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *The Darvishes or Oriental Spiritualism*, 49. Also see Duncan Black Macdonald, *The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam* (Beirut: Khayats, 1965 rpt., first published 1909), 162.

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed discussion, see P. M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-din Chishtī of Ajmer* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1–8; A. C. Mayer, “Pir and Murshid: An Aspect of Religious Leadership in W. Pakistan,” *Middle Eastern Studies* (1966–67), 3: 161–64, and Jurgen Wasim Frembgen, “The Majzub Mama Ji Sarkar: A Friend of God moves from one house to another” in Pnina Werbner and Helena Basu, eds. *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults* (London: Routledge, 1998), 144–46.

¹⁰⁹ For a critical analysis of the doctrine of salvation through the *Silsilah* and the *Shaykh*, and adoration of the *Shaykh*, see Muhammad Salim, “Conception of Shaikh in Early Sufism” in *The Proceedings of the All Pakistan History Conference (First session) Held at Karachi, April 1951*, comp. S. Moinul Haq (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, n.d.), 89–95.

¹¹⁰ See for details Khaliq Ahmad Nizami “Suḥbah” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 14: 123–24; and Stuart W. Smithers, “Spiritual Guide” in *ibid.*, 14: 29–37, esp. 32–33.

khalifah) or spiritual successors of a *shaykh*, who were authorized by him to teach, guide and instruct the disciples.¹¹¹ Generally, one among them was designated as his principal *khalifah*.

Another development was the inception of the practice of disciples performing *bay'at* (literally meaning a pledge or oath-taking) at the hands of a Sufi *shaykh*. *Bay'at* has been defined as formal initiation, whereby an aspirant gets initiated in a *silsilah*, which is tantamount to admitting a seeker in the fold of Sufism. The term *murīdī* is used for discipleship. The *pir-murid* relationship was characterized by an intensely personal bond between the two. Elaborate rules and regulations guiding the conduct of the disciples were also laid down.¹¹² For instance, a sixth/twelfth century Sufi, Shaykh Abū 'l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī, wrote a treatise *Ādāb al-Murūdīn* for the guidance of the disciples. Another practice among the Sufis was the bestowal of a *khirqah*, a worn and patched cloak, to a disciple by a *shaykh*, which symbolized the recognition of the Sufi training received by the former. The *khirqah* was a source of spiritual *barakah* (blessing) as well as symbolic of the trainee's rejection of wealth and material things in favour of spiritual riches. The origin of the practice of granting *khirqahs* goes back to the second/eighth century,¹¹³ but the practice was still in its rudimentary stage at that time. In the ensuing centuries, the practice became more common and was eventually institutionalized.

Fundamental Doctrines of Sufism

The doctrinal development of Sufism stretched over centuries. The articulation of the Sufi doctrines began as early as the second/eighth century, but there are no records of contemporaneous texts containing the historical evolution of these doctrines. One of the chief characteristics of the initial phase of Sufism was its doctrinal simplicity. This was the phase when the adherents of Sufism focused more on its experiential aspects as compared to theorizing of the Sufi practices. The third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries

¹¹¹ In fact, from the fifth/eleventh century onwards the term *khalifah* came to be used in the context of Sufism for the successors of the Sufi *Shaykhs*. For a brief survey, see F. De Jong, "Khalifa," part III "In Islamic Mysticism" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn., 4: 950–52.

¹¹² For a detailed survey see Bikram N. Nanda and Mohammad Talib, "Soul of the Soulless: An Analysis of Pir-Murid Relationships in Sufi Discourse" in Christian W. Troll, ed. *Muslim Shrines in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 125–44.

¹¹³ The practice of granting ceremonial garment or *khirqah* to a disciple by a Sufi *shaykh* is mentioned as early as the eighth century by Ahmad ibn Ḥarb and al-Muḥāsibī. See Jean-Louis Michon, in "Khirkā" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn., 5: 17. According to Meier, the practice dates from the time of Shaykh Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn al-Khafif (d. 370/981), a Sufi who lived in Shīrāz (Persia). Idem, "The Mystic Path" in Lewis, ed. *The World of Islam*, 121.

witnessed the further doctrinal growth of Sufism as well as the theorization of Sufi practices. A detailed history of the doctrinal evolution of Sufism lies beyond the scope of the present paper. Nonetheless, we are essaying below a very brief account of the fundamental Sufi doctrines. However, the ensuing discussion is focused less on doctrines concerning the attributes of God and the nature of gnosis, and more on the doctrines affecting the social attitudes and behaviour of the Sufis including their ethical ideals and moral values as well as ideas regarding their personal conduct. It seems necessary, though, to point out that it is difficult to draw a line of demarcation between the two, as the doctrines of the former kind may have social implications.

While studying Islamic ethics, Donaldson takes note of the fact that when the principles and purposes of conduct are taken into consideration, the fundamentally mystical character of Muslim ethical thinking is soon evident.¹¹⁴ The ethical principles of the Sufis seem to be distinct from those of the so-called 'externalist' '*ulamā'*, jurists and theologians, who were more concerned with the legal and juristic aspects of Islam. What follows is a brief description of the fundamental doctrines of Sufism:

The concept of gnosis or intuitive knowledge (*ma'arifah* or *bikmāh*) as a means of comprehending God was first articulated by Dhū 'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī. It comprises intuitive or esoteric knowledge as opposed to knowledge acquired through the five senses and reason ('ilm or exoteric knowledge), which leads to a comprehension of the Absolute. In other words, it is super-intellectual knowledge of God.¹¹⁵ As the concept of *ma'arifah* or intuitive knowledge came very close to revelation to the Prophet (peace be on him), the '*ulamā'* possessing knowledge of Islamic law or *Shārī'ah*, became highly critical of the Sufis. During the fourth/tenth century some important Sufis even had to give their lives on charges related to the claim of intuitive knowledge. Conflict between Sufis of various hues and the '*ulamā'* has, in one or the other form, continued ever since.

The concept of *fana'* (the annihilation of the mortal self, or absorption into the Godhead) was central to the thinking of the Persian Sufi Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī. In spiritual annihilation in God, the dichotomy and distinction between I and thou ceases to exist. *Fanā'* signifies the death of self-will and self-consciousness. A parallel idea is found in Hinduism and Buddhism as well. Another associated doctrine is that of subsistence or permanence (*baqā*). Love

¹¹⁴ Dwight M. Donaldson, *Studies in Muslim Ethics* (London: S. P. C. K., 1953), 110.

¹¹⁵ See details in al-Kalābādhī, *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 46–51, al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 267–77, and al-Suhrawardī, 'Awārif al-Mā'ārif, 98–101. See also the views of al-Muḥāsibī on gnosis in Margaret Smith, *al-Muḥāsibī: An Early Mystic of Baghdad* (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1980 rpt., first published 1935), 298–304.

for God in the Sufis' life holds the hope that beyond personal annihilation there will be divine restoration or permanence. According to al-Hujwīrī, Abū Sa‘īd Kharrāz was the first to explain the states of *fanā'* and *baqā'*. As for the doctrine of *baqā'*, it signifies actual permanence in the Real; it represents the stage when a person loses his status in the attributes of the Real and achieves a vision of God Himself.¹¹⁶ According to the doctrine of unity (*tawhīd*), God is the only reality and He is unique in His timelessness. He is incomparable, and nothing is like Him. It signifies the negation of God's temporality, and the affirmation that God is eternal.¹¹⁷

The early Sufis such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī believed in and propagated the concept of fear (*khawf*),¹¹⁸ signifying the fear of God's wrath, of the Day of Judgment and that of punishment of hell fire. Love for God (*mahabbah*), however, emerged as a central idea in a Sufi's life, which requires exertion, discipline and patience, but it is Sufi belief that he may be blessed with love inspired by God, love satisfied with nothing less than God Himself. The notion of disinterested love of God was clearly articulated perhaps for the first time with overpowering force by Rābi‘ah al-Baṣrī. Because of her advocacy for disinterested love of God, she became the model of selfless love among the Sufi circles. She urged the worship of God out of love, instead of owing to fear of hell or desire for paradise. She taught that a Sufi must love God for His Own sake.¹¹⁹ Other Sufis like Dhū 'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī, Sarī al-Saqatī and Junayd al-Baghdādī further articulated the idea.

Junayd al-Baghdādī advocated the principle of sobriety (*sabr*) in Sufi practices and behaviour. His apparent behaviour, actions, and utterances were in consonance with the *Shari‘ah* (the Islamic law), and for this reason his Sufi doctrines and practices were generally approved by his contemporary theologians, jurists and *‘ulamā’*. The principle opposed to *sabr* is that of ecstatic intoxication or 'drunkenness' (*sukr*), characterized by loss of self-control because of an excess of longing and extreme love.¹²⁰ It was propagated by the early Sufis such as Abū Yazid al-Bistāmī and al-Hallāj.

¹¹⁶ For details see al-Kalābādhī, *Kitāb al-Ta‘arruf*, 120–33; al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 242–46; al-Suhrawardi, ‘Awārif al-Ma‘ārif, 195–98; and M. Hamiduddin, “Early Sufis: Doctrines” in Sharif, ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 1: 332–34.

¹¹⁷ For an elaborate discussion, see al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 278–85; and Hamiduddin, “Early Sufis: Doctrines” in Sharif, ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 1: 320–21.

¹¹⁸ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 30. See details in al-Kalābādhī, *Kitāb al-Ta‘arruf*, 88–89.

¹¹⁹ Margaret Smith, *Rābi‘a The Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984 rpt., first published 1928), 96–110.

¹²⁰ For various explanations of the doctrine of sobriety, see al-Kalābādhī, *Kitāb al-Ta‘arruf*, 110–12. For a discourse on sobriety and intoxication, see al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 184–88.

Historians and scholars of Sufism have pointed out that the ascetic impulse, based on otherworldliness and utter renunciation of worldly pleasures, was a part of the Sufi tradition from the very beginning.¹²¹ One of the foremost Sufi doctrines was the doctrine of [voluntary] poverty (*fāqr*), which was characterized by a denial of material needs. The lifestyles of Sufis exhibited indifference to wealth, and that was why they came to be referred to as *fāqīr* (poor or destitute). The manifestations of poverty included extreme simplicity of living, lack of worldly possessions, wearing of coarse clothes, having very simple food such as herbs, and even continual fasting. The early Sufi texts are full of exaltation of poverty, since it was treated as a celebrated virtue practiced by the Prophet (peace be on him) himself. One of the earliest Sufis, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, cherished the values of hunger and poverty, while branding wealth as an evil which distracts people from their righteous goal.¹²² Nonetheless, one also comes across a few exceptions such as Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, who preferred wealth (*ghinā'*) to poverty.¹²³

The Sufi ideal of poverty stood in sharp contrast to the wealth of the royal household, the ruling elite and the well-off urbanites. The Sufi ideal of poverty symbolized a silent protest against the growing and widespread materialism which found its way to the Muslim community in the wake of conquest and annexation of vast territories in Persia, Byzantium, Central and Western Asia, and Africa, bringing prosperity and affluence.

The Sufis believe that hearing the recitation of the Qur'ān, chanting of poetry or music may induce ecstasy in an individual. For this reason, devotional music or *samā'* is considered by a large number of Sufis to be a source of ecstasy and a method of spiritual realization, and hence, permissible.¹²⁴ Devotional music and ecstatic dance were meant to arouse spiritual ecstasy and rapture, and many Sufis are said to have died from the heightened emotions caused by it. The formal practice of *samā'* was supplemented by ritualistic ecstatic dance or *raqṣ*, which was intended to plunge the dancer into a state of concentration on Allah. Those who approved *samā'* and wrote about it can be classified into two groups: Muslim philosophers (*salāsifah*) such as Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī (d. 260/873), Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (d. 320/932), Abū

¹²¹ Christopher Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E.," *Studia Islamica*, vol. 83 (1996), 51–70.

¹²² See Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's letter to Umayyad Caliph, 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, in A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 2003 rpt., first published 1950), 33–35.

¹²³ Dar, "Early Sufis (Continued)" in Sharif, ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, 1: 339.

¹²⁴ For a brief survey, see J. During, "Samā'," part I, "In Music and Mysticism" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn., 8: 1018–19.

Naṣr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ṭarakhān al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Abū ‘Alī Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), Abū Bakr Ibn Bājjah (d. 533/1138), and Ṣafī ’l-Dīn (d. 692/1293) as well as the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ (third/tenth century); and Sufi scholars such as al-Hujwīrī, Imām al-Ghazzālī, and Aḥmad al-Ghazzālī (d. 520/1126).¹²⁵ The practices of *samā'* and *raqṣ* became especially popular in the Middle Period with the Sufis in Persia, India and Anatolia. The practice of *samā'* found its highest expression among the Sufis associated with the Mawlvīyyah *Silsilah*, whose founder, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī of Konya, the famous Persian Sufi poet, practiced it along with his disciples and associates.

Devotional music and ecstatic dancing among the Sufis evoked much criticism and objection from the 'externalist' '*ulamā'*, jurists and theologians, who were more concerned with the outward conformity to the law or the *Shari‘ah*. Criticism of this practice came not only from the juristic circles, more particularly from the Ḥanbalīs, but also from the more sober Sufi circles. Its important critics included Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Abī ’l-Dunyā (d. 281/894), Abū ’l-Faraj ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Alī Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) and Taqī ’l-Dīn Abū ’l-‘Abbas Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328).¹²⁶ Many Sufi scholars have also expressed reservations about it, and have approved of it with some conditions for the listeners. Al-Hujwīrī is, for instance, among those who have approved it with some conditions. He has devoted an entire section to it in *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, and has dealt in detail with its various principles, functions, conditions of performance, and aspects such as dancing and rending of garments.¹²⁷ Similarly, Imām al-Ghazzālī, who approved of it in principle, required certain conditions to be met before listening to it.¹²⁸

Another important Sufi doctrine is that of companionship (*subbah*), which specifically refers to a Sufi's return from seclusion, as well as the company of the Sufi master for the disciple (*murīd*).¹²⁹ Another related doctrine is that of retirement (*khalwah*).¹³⁰ Adherence to the Sufi way of life did not necessarily involve continuous seclusion or solitude, severing ties with the people at large, though the Sufis used to retreat from the worldly life for

¹²⁵ Jean-Louis Michon, "Sacred Music and Dance in Islam" in Nasr, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, 2: 472–78.

¹²⁶ Ibn Abī ’l-Dunyā wrote *Dhamm al-Malāḥī* (Censure of Instruments of Diversion), while Ibn al-Jawzī wrote *Talbīs Iblīs* (The Dissimulation of the Satan) in condemnation of *samā'*. Ibid., 471–72. Similarly, Ibn Taymiyyah wrote a treatise in condemnation of *samā'*.

¹²⁷ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 393–420.

¹²⁸ See a detailed discussion in Imām Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā ’Ulūm-id-Dīn*, Eng. trans. Fazal-ul-Karim (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1981), chap. IX in Book II, 203–24.

¹²⁹ For a detailed study, see al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 334–66.

¹³⁰ Al-Suhrawardī, 'Awārif al-Ma’ārif, 70–73.

some period of time for spiritual gains. This is known as *khalwah*. The early Sufis, while practicing it, retired to forests, deserts or wilderness. In some cases it lasted for months, while in others it stretched over years and even decades. Nevertheless, it should not lead one into thinking that the Sufis generally led quietistic and secluded lives. It is essential to bear in mind that the practice of *khalwah* was a temporary phase after which the Sufis used to resume living among the people. It is important to note that all Sufis stressed the principle of service to humanity, which was, of course, not possible while in retirement.

Other important doctrines include the concept of sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*),¹³¹ which required that only God be sought in every act of obedience to Him, and also implied sincerity in every thought and action; the concept of repentance or penitence (*tawbah*),¹³² which includes repentance from sin as well as from forgetfulness and distraction from God; and the concept of heightened or concentrated piety¹³³ (*zuhd*, often mistakenly translated as asceticism) that signifies the avoidance of even the permitted pleasures of worldly life, and eventually giving up of everything that distracts the heart and mind from God. The concept of trust in, or reliance on, God — *tawakkul*¹³⁴ — was developed by Shaqīq al-Balkhī, a pupil of Ibrāhīm ibn Adham. Later on, it was further developed by Dhū 'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī and Junayd al-Baghdādī. The doctrine of self-examination (*muḥāsabah*) was attributed to Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī,¹³⁵ which earned him his epithet as well.

An essential Sufi value is that of tolerance in social behaviour and universalism in approach. The Sufis had an inclusive approach towards people belonging to different sects, juristic schools (*madhbāhib*, pl. of *madhab*), racial or ethnic groups, and even religions. They displayed more tolerance towards all, including non-Muslims, as compared to the upholders of juristic Islam or theologians. In fact, Sufism served as a junction for the mystically-inclined adherents of different religious traditions. Since the society under the vast Muslim Empires of the Umayyads and 'Abbāsids had a pluralistic environment — racially, ethnically, culturally and religiously — it provided greater opportunities of interaction with people belonging to varied racial, ethnic, cultural backgrounds as well as religious traditions. The Sufis held discourses with Christian priests, Jewish rabbis, and Buddhist and Zoroastrian sages. Moreover, Muslim society was also beset by strong sectarian cleavages,

¹³¹ For details, see al-Kalābādhī, *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 90–91.

¹³² Ibid., 81–82, and al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 294–99.

¹³³ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 110.

¹³⁴ Al-Kalābādhī, *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf*, 92–93.

¹³⁵ Smith, *Al-Muḥāsibī: An Early Mystic of Baghdad*, 53; for details see 168–77. See also, Şahin Filiz, "The Founder of the *Muḥāsabah* School of Sufism: Al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī," *Islamic Studies*, 45: 1 (2006), 59–81.

and there existed friction among the adherents of various *madhbābib*. Sufism left an indelible mark on the life of the Muslims, as the Sufis often rose above sectarian affiliations, despite the fact that most of them were Sunnis by orientation.¹³⁶ In addition, though many of the Sufis taught *fiqh* in various *madrasahs* (religious seminaries), they discouraged these juristic differences to become bones of contention.

Two complementary Sufi doctrines deserve special mention, since these have significant political linkages: the doctrine of *wilāyat* or *wilāyah* (spiritual territory or domain) and the doctrine of hierarchy of Sufis. According to the doctrine of *wilāyat*, various geographical territories are considered to be under the spiritual jurisdiction of different Sufi *shaykhs*.¹³⁷ In other words, the entire world is considered to be divided into various geographical regions like different units of administration, each one of which is believed to be spiritually ruled by a Sufi *shaykh*. The heads of various *silsilahs* used to dispatch their *khulafā'* (deputies) to these *wilāyats*, and these *khulafā'* in turn used to appoint their subordinate *khulafā'* for towns and small cities. In this way, one main Sufi centre used to control a whole network of *khānqāhs* in various regions.¹³⁸ As for the doctrine of hierarchy of Sufis, it was clearly articulated by Shaykh Ibn al-'Arabī for the first time. He argued that there are different hierarchies among the Sufis. On the top of it is *qutb*, the spiritual ruler of the entire world, who is coexistent with the temporal sultan or the king.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: The Classical Age of Islam*, 1: 393.

¹³⁷ However, the doctrine of *wilāyat* or *wilāyah* is not to be confused with the concept of *walāyat* or *walāyah*, literally meaning to be near, or to be close to, and refers to closeness or love of God, saintship or sainthood. Moreover, the words *wilāyah* and *walāyah* are Arabic in origin, whereas *wilāyat* and *walāyat* are Persian words. The concept of *wilāyah* or *wilāyat* also refers to authority, power, and ability to act. See discussion on *wilāya* and *walāya* in Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), see Introduction, xvii–xxi. See also Bernd Radtke, "The Concept of *Wilāya* in Early Sufism" in Leonard Lewisohn, ed. *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi* (London: Khānqāh Ni'matullāhī Publications, 1994), 483–96; Simon Digby, "The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Medieval India" in Marc Gaborieau, ed. *Islam et Société en Asie du Sud* (Paris: L'Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1986), 62–63; and Simon Digby, "The Sufi *Shaykh* and the Sultan: A Conflict of Claims to Authority in Medieval India," *Irān*, vol. 28 (1990), 71–75.

¹³⁸ In the words of Werbner and Basu, the Sufi notion of *wilāyat* refers to "spiritual dominions controlled by famous saints, but these also have an organized temporal, spatial and social realization. Shrines thus represent important landmarks in the sacred geography of Islam in South Asia. Symbolically, their spatial ordering often mirrors the sacred pilgrimage centres of Islam in Mecca and Madina." Pnina Werbner and Helena Basu, "The Embodiment of Charisma" in Werbner and Basu, ed. *Embodying Charisma*, 12.

¹³⁹ The *qutb* is assisted by two *imāms*, under whom work four *awtāds*, and seven *abdāls*. See

Relationship of Early Sufis with the State and Political Authorities

Bearing in mind these doctrinal and institutional developments in Sufism, we shall now embark on a brief discussion and analysis of the relationship between the Sufis of the early era with political authorities. However, the discussion does not intend to be an exhaustive narration of all cases of the Sufis' interaction with the state; rather, its purpose is to merely highlight the critical issues in this regard.

While studying the patterns of the Sufi behaviour vis-à-vis the state, one may raise a number of questions: did the Sufis of the early era represent a homogenous group in terms of their beliefs and practices, particularly as far as their relationship with the political authorities was concerned? What was the doctrinal position of the Sufis regarding questions of political power and authority? How far was the Sufis' response to political authority rooted in their doctrines?

The relationship of the Sufis with political authorities is doubtlessly a complex phenomenon. Its complexity lies in the diverse responses of the Sufis to politically engage the state or to refrain from it. There were different approaches to this among the Sufis of various regions and *silsilahs*. Many Sufis avoided any contact with the kings and nobles, and discouraged any association with the political authorities among their fellow Sufis. On the contrary, many Sufis saw their engagement with the political authority as a means of positively affecting the behaviour of the king and nobility, as well as the state policies. This shows that the response of the Sufis to the political authorities was not homogenous, as were the actions and behaviour of the Sufis quite diverse in this regard. Similarly, some of the rulers sought counsel of the Sufis for their personal conduct as well as in state affairs, some thought it better to keep their hands off the Sufis and leave them and their *khāqāhs* undisturbed, whereas some rulers tried to regulate and control the Sufis as well.

The Sufis' relationship with the state has generally been treated under two broad themes, namely, the conflictual or oppositional relationship, and cordial or friendly relationship. But these two categories typify two extremes, which obviously blur the richness and complexity of the variegated phenomenon. Moreover, the fact that in Islam the political authority remained closely associated with the religious authority epitomized by the '*ulamā'*, jurists and theologians, further adds to the complexity of the issue.

details in Muhyī 'l-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, Urdu trans. 'Allāmah Ṣā'īm Chishtī (Faisalabad: Ali Brothers, 1986), 56–57. For details of the Sufi hierarchy, see also al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 147, 214, 229; and Jāmī, *Nafāḥāt al-Una min Hadarāt al-Quds*, 15.

To begin with the role of the custodians of religious authority, it is misleading to assume the ‘*ulamā*’¹⁴⁰ of the early Islamic era as a fairly distinct group, as they were loosely defined and were also unstructured.¹⁴¹ Like the Sufis, the ‘*ulamā*’, jurists and theologians were also heterogeneous in terms of their beliefs and doctrines, legal preferences, and approaches to the state, rulers and political authorities. Those who were closely allied with the state naturally influenced the rulers as well as the official policies. Therefore, the relationship between the ‘*ulamā*’, jurists and theologians, and the Sufis was quite crucial in shaping the official policies regarding the Sufis.

Historically, the relationship between the Sufis and the ‘externalist’ ‘*ulamā*’, jurists and theologians was, on the whole, hardly cordial. The latter were the traditional custodians of religious authority, and were in most cases allied with the state.¹⁴² Their insistence on, and preoccupation with, the outward forms and exoteric aspect of religion stood in sharp contrast to the Sufi doctrines emphasizing the internal and esoteric dimensions of the same. Some of the views of the Sufis were considered to be blasphemous by the ‘*ulamā*’, and it was this reason that the former often had recourse to poetry, which not only made it easier to express complicated Sufi beliefs, but also helped conceal some of the Sufi ideas.¹⁴³ Similarly, the approach of the ‘*ulamā*’ and the Sufis towards the issues pertaining to morality was also radically different from each other.¹⁴⁴ It was for this reason that the latter perceived the

¹⁴⁰ As a general term, the word ‘*ulamā*’ (plural of Arabic word ‘*ālim*, derived from ‘ilm or knowledge, which literally means a knowledgeable person) came to refer to the learned Muslims or religious scholars during the early Islamic era, which included, more specifically, the *muhaddithūn* (traditionalists; experts of *Hadith*), *fūqahā*’ (jurists, or experts of Islamic law), *muftīs* (expounders of Islamic law) and *qādīs* (judges).

¹⁴¹ According to Roy Mottahedeh, in the early Islamic era, the ‘*ulamā*’ formed a vaguely defined category, having a least restrictive meaning as it overlapped with a number of other categories. Moreover, it was not a distinct group, but the ‘*ulamā*’ were a category with a self-conscious identity. *Idem, Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 137, 140, 142–43.

¹⁴² See Introduction in Nikki R. Keddie, ed. *Scholars, Saints and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 3.

¹⁴³ E. A. Bertels, *Sufism i Sufiyskaiia Literatura* (Moscow: 1965), 60–61, as cited in E. A. Poliakova, “Some Problems of Sufi Studies,” *Islamic Culture*, Lahore, vol. LXI, no. 3 (July, 1987), 74.

¹⁴⁴ In this regard, the approach of the ‘*ulamā*’ has been termed as teleological, as they generally determine the rightness or wrongness of an action solely by its consequences — in this world and in the life hereafter. On the contrary, the Sufis’ approach may be termed as deontological as they tried to assess human actions morally by the motives and intentions of the people. Tanvir Anjum, “Moral Training by the Mystics: Strategies and Methodologies,” *Historicus*, Quarterly Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi, vol. XLVI, no. 1 (Jan-Mar 1998), 77.

former as those “concerned more with the husks than with the kernel of truth.”¹⁴⁵

In addition to the crystallization of schools of *fiqh*, the increasing formalism in matters of *Shari‘ah*, and a more or less exclusive emphasis on the exoteric aspects of Islam had increased the importance and prestige of the ‘*ulamā*’ in the Muslim society. Moreover, the ‘Abbāsid regime had employed ‘*ulamā*’ on the administrative, juridical and even executive positions of the state. These developments led to the conclusion that the ‘*ulamā*’ were the sole interpreters of the revealed message of Islam and had the exclusive monopoly of the interpretation of the *Shari‘ah*. “Had they been allowed,” according to Danner, “to go along in such a fashion, with no opposition to their claims, Islam would have seen something similar to what took place in early Christianity, when the official church stamped out all spiritual esoterism that claimed an independent existence for itself.”¹⁴⁶ In these circumstances, the Sufis asserted themselves, and claimed that they represented the esoteric aspect of Islam.

As the Sufi doctrines and practices started getting clearly articulated, misgivings and doubts regarding them appeared in the circles of the ‘externalist’ ‘*ulamā*’, jurists and theologians. Though most of the Sufis were respectful to the *Shari‘ah*, and their personal conduct was in conformity with it, some of the Sufi groups indulged in flagrant violation of the norms of the society and the injunctions of the *Shari‘ah*. They were generally referred to as *malāmatīs* (literally meaning disposed to self-blame). They deliberately lived, or made a show of living, blameworthy lives in order to conceal their spiritual achievements from others. Not only the ‘*ulamā*’, jurists and theologians, but the more sober Sufi circles too did not extend to them their approval. Al-Hujwīrī’s assertion of disapproval of two such Sufi groups has already been mentioned.¹⁴⁷

The institutionalization of the *silsilahs* gave Sufism a wide-ranging appeal. The *silsilahs* made the Shaykhs or the Sufi masters the locus of religious authority for the people in general, and for their disciples in particular, which further undermined the traditional authority of the juristic leaders, theologians and ‘*ulamā*’ in the realm of religion. In a sense, the Sufis emerged as a parallel locus of religious authority, as the exclusive monopoly of the ‘*ulamā*’ over religious authority was challenged by the Sufis, who were regarded by their disciples as the sole authority in all matters.

¹⁴⁵ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: The Classical Age of Islam*, 1: 403.

¹⁴⁶ Danner, “The Early Development of Sufism” in Nasr, ed. *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, 1: 255.

¹⁴⁷ See n. 102 above.

The historical events regarding the relationship of the Sufis and the political authorities can hardly be generalized owing to the diversity of their responses to each other. On the one hand, we come across evidence of the state extending patronage to the Sufi establishment, and the Sufis acting as allies of the sultans and accepting official titles and designations, but on the other, we have legendary figures among the Sufis such as al-Hallāj, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Abū ’l-Ma‘ālī ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Hamadānī (d. 525/1131) and Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā b. Ḥabsh al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), who were executed by the political authorities which earned them the epithet of ‘martyrs.’ Given below is a brief overview of the Sufis’ relationship with political authorities.

As pointed out earlier, the fifth/eleventh century marks the triumph of Sunnī traditionalism in the wake of the Shī‘ite Buwayhids’ ouster from power, and the Sunnī Seljūqids’ assumption of political authority in the ‘Abbāsid Empire. The Seljūqids were in dire need of support from the varied segments of society in order to assert and firmly establish their political authority. Moreover, being staunch Sunnīs themselves, they tried to reassert the authority of the Sunnī version of Islam. The institutions of *madrasahs* and *khānqāhs* played a crucial role in this regard, as they were patronized and supported by the Seljūqid rulers and the ruling elite. In addition to the Seljūqids, the Zingid and the Ayyūbid rulers, as well as their lieutenants and successors, not only constructed *khānqāhs*, but supported the Sufi establishment as well. In this way, not only did these regimes strengthen their hold on power, but this official patronage, in the opinion of Trimingham, made Sufi establishment more ‘respectable’ in the eyes of the people.¹⁴⁸

On this basis, one may discern and infer that the Sufi-state relationship was two-way traffic, and in addition to the Sufis being a source of legitimacy for the political authorities, the state patronage could also extend legitimacy to Sufism, and help the Sufis win social approval and acclaim. The sultans and *amīrs*, particularly the Seljūqid rulers, supported the existing *khānqāhs* and granted them endowments, which opened the way for the direct interference of the state in their affairs.

In fact many Sufis tactfully used their association with the political authorities as a means of influencing the behaviour of the Caliphs or kings and the *umarā'*, as well as their state policies in a positive and constructive way. On the other hand, the political authorities benefited from the social acclaim of the Sufis in order to overcome political problems. An outstanding example in this regard is that of the founder of the Suhrawardiyyah *Silsilah*, Shaykh Najīb al-Dīn Abū ’l-Qāhir al-Suhrawardī, who had close and very cordial

¹⁴⁸ Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 9.

relations with the Caliphs of Baghdād. He enjoyed such prestige and honour that if anybody sought shelter in his *ribāt* (Sufi dwelling) he could not be forcibly taken away even by a Caliph or a Sultan.¹⁴⁹ His nephew, Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar b. Muḥammad al-Suhrawardī, who is considered to be the real founder of the Suhrawardī *Silsilah*, served as the envoy of, and chief religious adviser to, the ‘Abbāsid Caliph al-Nāṣir (r. 575–622/1180–1225). According to al-Suhrawardī, the authority of the Caliph over his subjects and as a mediator between his people and God was conceived in terms parallel to that of the authority of a Sufi *shaykh* over his disciples.¹⁵⁰ The Caliph not only founded *khānqāhs* in Baghdād, but also appointed the *shaykh* as the director of many *khānqāhs*. Together they initiated a programme of political and religious, or more accurately, spiritual reform in the state. Apart from other efforts, a systematic reformation of Sufi *silsilahs* was also initiated. Caliph al-Nāṣir himself founded at least six *khānqāhs* in Baghdād, and appointed al-Suhrawardī as the director of several other *khānqāhs* established by others,¹⁵¹ which symbolized the subordination of the Sufis to the political authorities. The Caliph also controlled the appointment of director to other *khānqāhs*. The Shaykh also helped the ‘Abbāsid Caliphs in their hour of need. For instance, when Khwārizm Shāh, Muḥammad II, invaded Baghdād in 614/1217–18, it was the Shaykh who dissuaded him from attacking the city.¹⁵²

In the sixth/twelfth century, another pattern of State-Sufi relationship is found in the Mamlūk State in Egypt, a semi-autonomous kingdom and an appendage of the ‘Abbāsids. On the one hand, the Mamlūk sultans were in dire need of legitimacy for their rule, and so they sought the help of the Sufis for consolidation of their political authority. On the other hand, fearful of the growing influence of the Sufis in Egypt, they also tried to control and regulate them. Under the Mamlūks in Egypt, the *shaykhs* of *khānqāhs* were given appointments by the state. The Mamlūk sultans used to confer the title of *Shaykh al-Shuyūkh* (literally meaning master of the masters) to the heads of various *khānqāhs*. The *Shaykh al-Shuyūkh* also exercised authority over other Sufi establishments in the Mamlūk State. Like the official title of *Shaykh al-Islām* in India, it was more of an honorific nature, and did not imply any specific role and responsibilities.¹⁵³ In addition, there existed *khānqāhs* in various parts of the Muslim world, including Egypt and Syria, which were

¹⁴⁹ Nizami, *Some Aspects of the Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, 252.

¹⁵⁰ Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, 241. See some details of Caliph al-Nāṣir's theory of the Caliphate, Angelika Hartmann, “Al-Nāṣir Li-Din Allāh” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn., 7: 996–1003.

¹⁵¹ Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, 241–42.

¹⁵² Hartmann, “Al-Nāṣir Li-Din Allāh” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn., 7: 996–997.

¹⁵³ Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 18.

officially supported. Since they were constructed or managed by the state, the government used to appoint their directors as well. As a result, the people who were made the directors of these *khāngāhs*, were often not necessarily Sufis. Even Ibn Khaldūn was appointed the director of *Khāngāh* Baybars in 794/1392. The buildings were, in fact, *awqāf* endowments, and some of the former *wazīrs* were made in-charge of *khāngāhs* as well.¹⁵⁴

Owing to these developments, the interference of the state in the lives and *khāngāhs* of the Sufis increased manifold. It had an adverse impact on the development of Sufism, as in such circumstances not only many Sufi imposters made fortunes and the autonomy of the *khāngāhs* was compromised, but the Sufis were also drawn into political affairs. Moreover, this symbiotic relationship between the Sufis and the rulers implied the subordination of the Sufis to the political authorities.

Having briefly surveyed the symbiotic relationship between the Sufis and the rulers, it is useful to turn to the other side of the coin. Contrary to the Sufis who enjoyed cordial relations with the rulers, there were many Sufis whose relationship with the political authorities was not comfortable or smooth. Their responses to the rulers ranged from the Sufis' indifference to political affairs to conflict with the political authorities leading to the execution of some of the Sufis.

To begin with the early Sufis, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī did not enjoy a smooth relationship with the political authorities. According to Farīd al-Dīn al-‘Aṭṭār (d. 617/1220), once he was delivering a sermon, and Hajjāj ibn Yūsuf (d. 95/714), the Umayyad Governor of Iraq, came there with his troops. Ḥasan continued his sermon without paying any attention or showing any particular respect to Hajjāj.¹⁵⁵ Since he used to boldly criticize the repressive policies of Hajjāj, consequently he was forced to go into hiding till Hajjāj's death as the governor had ordered his arrest.¹⁵⁶ During the reign of the Umayyad Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Azīz (r. 99–101/717–719), Ḥasan reportedly wrote a letter to the Caliph warning him against the false hopes and expectations of the world. This is understandable since Ḥasan cherished the values of hunger and voluntary poverty, and branded wealth as an evil.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ For details, see *ibid.*, 19–20.

¹⁵⁵ Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, ed. Mirzā Muḥammad Khān Qazvīnī, Introduction by Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Qazvīnī, 2 vols in one (N. P.: Kitābkhānah-i Markazī, 1344 Solar AH), 1: 37–38.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 88–89. ‘Aṭṭār also mentions that once Hajjāj's men came searching for him, and he sought refuge in Habib ‘Ajami's cell. Idem, *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, 1: 59.

¹⁵⁷ Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, 33–34. ‘Aṭṭār also refers to the correspondence between the two, in which Ḥasan gave good counsel to the Caliph. Idem,

Similarly, on another occasion, Hasan is reported to have warned the governor of Baṣrah Ibn al-Hubayrah to fear God more than the Caliph, since God could protect him against the Caliph, but the Caliph could not protect him against God.¹⁵⁸ An episode from the life of Mālik ibn Dīnār informs that he was not afraid to restrain his licentious neighbour, who had himself declared that no one had the power to check him as he was the Sultan's favourite.¹⁵⁹ Mālik ibn Dīnār's actions displayed disregard and fearlessness of political authorities. Another celebrated early Sufi was Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, who was initially a prince of Balkh, but had abandoned royal grandeur to choose the austere Sufi way of life. He refused to accept a lavish cash offering from a wealthy person, and preferred poverty to riches.¹⁶⁰

The second 'Abbāsid Caliph, Abū Ja'far al-Mansūr (r. 137–158/754–75), is said to have selected the names of four eminent Sufis and scholars, from whom one was to be selected for appointment as the *qādī* of Baghdād. These included Sufyān al-Thawrī, Mis'ar ibn Kidām (d. 152/769) and the famous jurist Abū Ḥanifah Nu'mān ibn Thābit (d. 150/767). Sufyān fled away and went into hiding to escape persecution by the Caliph, Mis'ar pretended to be mad before the Caliph, while Abū Ḥanifah refused to accept the offer.¹⁶¹

The 'Abbāsid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/786–809) sought counsel from the eminent Sufis of his time. In Caliph Hārūn's conversation with Fuḍayl ibn 'Ayād, as recorded by Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār in *Tadhkīrat al-Awliyā'*, not only Fuḍayl refused to accept the offer of a thousand *dīnārs* (gold coins) from the Caliph, but also had the courage to severely reprimand the Caliph regarding his abuse of power. Fuḍayl also exhorted Hārūn to dispense justice, consider his high office to be a trial, fear God, and be wary of the flattery of advisors and associates.¹⁶² In a similar vein, Hārūn's meeting with Shaqīq al-Balkhī has also been recorded by 'Aṭṭār. The Caliph was advised to display truthfulness like that of Abū Bakr, discrimination between truth and falsehood like that of 'Umar, modesty and nobility like that of 'Uthmān, and knowledge and justice like that of 'Alī.¹⁶³ Similarly, 'Aṭṭār mentions the meeting of Hārūn and Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm Abū Yūsuf al-Qādī (d. 182/798) with Dāwūd b. Naṣīr al-Ṭā'i (d. 165/781), when on the Caliph's demand Dāwūd admonished him, whereupon the Caliph wept copiously. Dāwūd al-Ṭā'i also

Tadhkīrat al-Awliyā', 1: 39–40.

¹⁵⁸ Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 79; for some details of Hasan al-Baṣrī's political attitude, see *ibid.*, 77–81.

¹⁵⁹ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkīrat al-Awliyā'*, 1: 50.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁶¹ See details in al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 93–94.

¹⁶² For details of their meeting, see 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkīrat al-Awliyā'*, 1: 80–82.

¹⁶³ For details see *ibid.*, 182–83.

refused to accept offerings from the Caliph.¹⁶⁴ Imām Ghazzālī had taken an oath at the tomb of the Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be on him) that he would never visit a royal court, nor accept any grant from a king.¹⁶⁵ In this way, the generality of the early Sufis refused to be beneficiaries of the state, and thus avoided any identification with the political authorities. In the words of Hodgson:

The refusal of some Sufis to permit any association with the amir's court served to underline the alternative social outlook. It was as if the court were carefully quarantined so as to minimize its influence. Thus Sufism supplemented the Shari'ah as a principle of unity and order, offering the Muslims a sense of spiritual unity which came to be stronger than that provided by the remnant of the caliphate.¹⁶⁶

Sufism was perceived as a threat or challenge to the power and authority of the '*ulamā'* and jurists, and that was why one comes across tensions between Sufism and juristic Islam in the medieval period. Many Sufis were accused of heresy, and some were even awarded punishments by the political authorities. 'Aṭṭār has dealt with Sufyān al-Thawrī's troubled relationship with the Caliph who had ordered his execution, but it was preempted by the accidental death of the Caliph.¹⁶⁷

Dhū 'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī was arrested on charge of heresy, taken to Baghdād, and thrown in prison. Later he was brought before the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/847–861), where he answered all the charges levelled against him. Upon hearing him, the Caliph burst into tears, became his disciple ordered his release and allowed him to return to Cairo.¹⁶⁸ In 260/874 another Sufi, Sahl al-Tustarī, was compelled by the political authorities to seek refuge in Baṣrah.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, Ghulām Khalil (d. 275/888), a staunch Hanbalite confidant of an 'Abbāsid Caliph, was hostile to the Sufis and accused them of heresy. He approached the Caliph and urged him to order the arrest of Abū Ḥamzah, Raqqam, Abū Bakr al-Shiblī, Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Nūrī and Junayd al-Baghdādī. After they were arrested, the Caliph ordered them to be slain. However, their beliefs were later scrutinized by a *qādī* (judge), who acquitted

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 204.

¹⁶⁵ Muhammad Shiblī Nu'mānī, *al-Ghazzālī: Imām Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ghazzālī kī Sawāniḥ 'Umri* (Lahore: Maktabah-'i Dīn-o Dunyā, 1959), 46–47.

¹⁶⁶ Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods*, 2: 221.

¹⁶⁷ For details of the incident, see 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkīrat al-Awliyā'*, 1: 174–75.

¹⁶⁸ See details in *ibid.*, 117–18.

¹⁶⁹ See Arberry's introductory note to extracts from Sahl's life and teachings, Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkīrat al-Awliyā*', 153, 157.

them. Eventually, the Caliph dismissed them with honour.¹⁷⁰

The Sufi Martyrs

Some of the eminent Sufis were executed by the political authorities, and for this reason they earned the title of ‘martyrs.’ Apparently, they were executed for their bold doctrinal expressions for they were accused of undermining the fundamental beliefs of the Muslim faith.¹⁷¹ This only partially corresponds to reality as the political considerations behind their execution figured quite prominently. In addition to the charges of polytheism or *shirk* and holding unconventional views, they were accused of professing Ismā‘ilism or having sympathies for Ismā‘ilīs. In fact, in those days Ismā‘ilism posed a political threat to the ‘Abbāsid political authorities in the form of the rival Fātimid Caliphate or the Assassins of Iran and Syria. Given below is a brief account of three eminent Sufis, who were executed by the political authorities:

Husayn ibn Mansūr al-Hallāj, literally meaning a cotton carder (243–309/857–922), has emerged as a legendary figure among the Sufis. He was kept in prison for eight years before he was executed in 309/922 for having uttered the apparently blasphemous words *anā l-Haqq*: “I am the Truth” (*al-Haqq* being one of the names of God). This apparently self-divinizing cry, tantamount to *shirk* (polytheism) in the eyes of the ‘externalist’ *‘ulamā’*, jurists and theologians, was in fact a proclamation of his identity with God. Nonetheless, it would be grossly incorrect to assume that merely the words uttered in a state of spiritual ecstasy by al-Hallāj led to his execution during the reign of ‘Abbāsid Caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 295–320/908–932).¹⁷² The critics of al-Hallāj at the court of Baghdad also accused him of sectarian affiliation with the Qarāmatīs, as some of al-Hallāj’s ideas bore some resemblance with those of the Ismā‘ilīs, but as a matter of fact it was his alleged political association with the Qarāmatīs for which he was punished. The Qarāmatīs had established their independent state in Bahrayn in the early fourth/tenth century,¹⁷³ which

¹⁷⁰ ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkira al-Awliyā'*, 2: 41.

¹⁷¹ It has been argued that a Sufi may be said to have two centres of consciousness: one human and one Divine. He may speak now from one and now from the other, which accounts for certain apparent contradictions in Sufi utterances. Lings, *What is Sufism?*, 14.

¹⁷² For a detailed study, see Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, Eng. trans. Herbert Mason 4 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). 4 vols. For a brief summary of the criticism aimed at al-Hallāj’s doctrines, see Louis Massignon, “The Juridical Consequences of the Doctrines of Al-Hallaj,” Eng. trans. Herbert Mason, in Merlin L. Swartz, ed. *Studies on Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 148–54. See also, M. Abdul Haq Ansari, “Husayn ibn Mansūr al-Hallāj: Ideas of an Ecstatic,” *Islamic Studies*, 39: 2 (2000), 291–320.

¹⁷³ For a brief history, see Wilferd Madelung, “The Fatimids and the Qarmatis of Bahrayn” in

naturally threatened the ‘Abbāsid political authority.

‘Ayn al-Qudāt Abu’l-Ma‘ālī ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Hamadānī (491–525/1098–1131), an early sixth/twelfth century Sufi-scholar, had received training in Sufism as well as philosophy. He was executed for his unconventional beliefs, as propounded in his works, regarding prophethood, life hereafter, such as his denial of the physical hell and paradise, saying that they were merely parables coined for common people, and other charges accusing him of pantheism. He was put in prison for a few months, released and then later executed in 525/1131 at the age of 33.¹⁷⁴ Apart from his controversial theological views, the political authorities were suspicious of his ideas which bore similarity with those of the Ismā‘ilis, and were considered a political threat.

Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā b. Ḥabsh al-Suhrawardī al-Maqṭūl (548–587/1153–1191), another sixth/ twelfth century Sufi scholar, was executed in 587/1191 at the age of 38. His epithet *al-Maqṭūl*, meaning ‘the killed’ is used to distinguish him from other Sufis of the same *silsilah*. He was also known as *Shaykh al-Ishrāq*, the master of illumination. He taught at the court of the Seljūqid Sultan Qılıj Arsalan II (r. 1155–1192) and his son. Having mastery in both philosophy and Sufism, he wrote many theosophical works, which spurred vehement criticism and made him a controversial figure among the jurists as well as some of the Sufi circles. He used to express his esoteric ideas in an outspoken manner. Moreover, his relationship with Prince Malik al-Zāhir (d. 615/1218), the governor of Aleppo, also excited the jealousy of the contemporary *‘ulamā’* and jurists associated with the court at Aleppo.

Yahyā b. Ḥabsh al-Suhrawardī’s philosophy of illumination, which drew heavily on neo-Platonic speculation and Zoroastrian imagery, had considerable influence on later Twelver Shī‘ism. At the instigation of the *‘ulamā’* of Aleppo, he was tried and executed, by the Prince Malik al-Zāhir on the orders of his father, the Ayyūbid Sultan Salāh al-Dīn (Salādīn) (d. 589/1193). The Prince initially evaded the orders of his father, however, later he conceded to the demand to avoid his removal from the governorship of Aleppo.¹⁷⁵ In fact, the later was more concerned about the political threat which he perceived in

Farhad Daftary, ed. *Mediaeval Isma‘ili History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21–73.

¹⁷⁴ See Hamadānī’s own *apologia* written in prison titled “Complaint of a Stranger Exiled from Home” in A. J. Arberry, *A Sufi Martyr: The Apologia of ‘Ain al-Qudāt al-Hamadhanī*, [sic] Eng. trans. with Introduction and Notes (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969). See also Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985), 110–15.

¹⁷⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds. *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 459, n. 13.

the teachings of *Yahyā b. Ḥabsh al-Suhrawardī*, which bore some similarity with *Ismā‘ilī* doctrines. Moreover, after recapturing Syria from the Crusaders, *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn* needed the support of the jurists and ‘*ulamā’* in order to maintain his political authority, and so he acceded to their demands, and *al-Suhrawardī* was put to death.¹⁷⁶ Thus, the reasons for his imprisonment and subsequent death were not merely theological in nature, but were political as well.

In addition to the historical data cited above, there are very few instances when the Sufis had a violent clash with the political authorities. For instance, during the reign of the last Seljūqid ruler, Sultan *Ghiyāth al-Dīn* (r. 633–657/1236–1259), a Sufi named *Bābā Iliyās al-Khurāsānī* of Amasia is said to have instigated a *darvēsh* revolt. The revolt was suppressed, and the *Bābā* was killed in a general massacre of the Sufis.¹⁷⁷ Such occasions were relatively rare in the early centuries as compared to the later times, when many Sufis and Sufi groups clashed with the colonial states in Asia and Africa during the twelfth/eighteenth and thirteenth/nineteenth centuries.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Subrawardi, Ibn ‘Arabi* (Lahore: Suhaib Academy, 1988), 52–82. Hossein Ziai claims that “Recent studies have demonstrated that *al-Serhrawardī*’s execution was directly linked to his involvement in politics, whereby he sought to implement the “Illuminationist political doctrine” which he had taught to several late 6th/12th century rulers, among them the prince ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Kay Kūbād; the *Saldjūk* Sulaymān Shāh, who commissioned the *Partaw nāma*; the ruler of *Kharput*, Malik ‘Imād al-Dīn Artuk, who commissioned *Alwāh-i Imādi*; and, lastly, to the Ayyūbid *Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn*’s young son, the prince al-Malik al-Zāhir Ghāzī, governor of Aleppo.” See Idem, *The Source and Nature of Authority: A study of Subrawardī’s Illuminationist Political Doctrine*, in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. C. Butterworth (Cambridge, MA: 1992), 304–344, cited in Idem, “*Al-Suhrawardī*” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn., 9: 782–784.

¹⁷⁷ See Rose, “Introduction” in Brown, *The Darvishes or Oriental Spiritualism*, xx.

¹⁷⁸ For instance, Ernest Gellner highlights the role of Ahansal Sufis, who resisted the first colonial advance of the French in Africa, and even defeated the French-aided troops of local rulers in 1922. Idem, *Saints of the Atlas.*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969). Dale F. Eickelman discusses the activities of *darvēshes*, who played key religious, political and economic roles in North African society, particularly in Morocco from the eighth/fourteenth to the eleventh/seventeenth centuries. Idem, *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Centre* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1976). Alexandre Bennigen and S. Enders Wimbush have discussed the political and social activity of the Sufi *silsilahs* in Soviet Union, particularly of the Naqashbandi Sufis, who headed the resistance to the Buddhist (Oirots and Kalmuks) and Russian invaders in the eleventh/seventeenth, twelfth/eighteenth and thirteenth/nineteenth centuries. Idem, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985). Similarly, Serif Mardin focuses on the political role of Bādī’ al-Zamān Sa‘id Nūrsī (d. 1960), the founder of Nūrsī Movement in Turkey, which posed a political threat first to the Ottoman rulers and then to the Turkish authorities. Idem, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). However, this is not to deny the fact that many Sufis collaborated with the colonial governments to help consolidate their rule in colonized regions by acting as intermediaries. See, for instance, Sarah F. D. Ansari, who

It can be inferred from the above discussion that there were varied patterns of interaction between the Sufis and the state. On the one hand, there were diverse patterns of Sufi responses to the state and political authorities, ranging from alliance and collaboration with the intent to reform the polity to criticism on the personal and political conduct of the rulers and violent clash and conflict with the political authorities. On the other hand, the policy of the rulers and political authorities was also not consistent; rather it exhibited quite diverse patterns. Some rulers enjoyed quite friendly and cordial relations with the Sufis, and also extended them official patronage, offered official positions and grants to them as well as support for their *khānqāhs*. However, many of them perceived the Sufis as a threat to their political authority, and thus tried to control and contain them, and make them subordinate to the state. Some of them even coerced the Sufis into accepting the official theological doctrines.



discusses the role of the Sufi *pirs* of Sindh during the colonial era, and informs how they played the role of 'intermediaries' between the colonial rulers and the populace, and helped the British consolidate their power in Sindh. Since the British system of political control was based on patronage and public distribution of honour, these *pirs* benefited from the system. Moreover, the work also sheds light on the resistance offered to the colonial regime by the *pirs* and their followers during the 1890s and later during the *Khilāfat* Movement between 1919 and 1924, which posed the "first real collective challenge issued to the British rule by Sind's religious leadership." Idem, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 8. Similarly, Claudia Liebeskind focuses on three Sufi shrines of Awadh in northern India, viz., *Takiyah Sharīf* (Kākōri), *Khānqāh Karīmiyyah* (Salōn), and the shrine of Hājī Wārith Shāh (Dēvā), and analyzes their survival in the colonial era. The work identifies the responses of the Sufis of the three spiritual centres to the colonial state, which had introduced certain changes that brought about tensions between these Sufis and the State, and examines how these Sufis coped with the changes and subsequent tensions. Idem, *Piety on its Knees: Three Sufi Traditions in South Asia in Modern Times* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).