

Historical Of Sufism In Recent Centuries

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Abstract. *The emergence of research examining Islamic mysticism or Sufism in recent centuries, reaching its peak in the 20th century, indicates significant development of Sufism outside the Islamic world. This is evidenced by the presence of Muslim communities in the West who adhere to Sufi teachings. The aim of this article is to explore the development of Sufism in the West, focusing on two aspects: (1) Examining the theories and early studies on the introduction of Sufism to the West since the 17th century; (2) Investigating the models and patterns of Sufism that have emerged in the West, especially in the 20th century. This research employs a qualitative approach with methods of historical and philosophical analysis. The research findings include: (1) Western studies on Sufism began as early as the 17th century and reached their peak in the 19th/20th century, marked by numerous translations of Sufi texts. (2) In the 20th century, several models or patterns of understanding Sufism emerged in the Western world, namely hybrid, perennial, and transplant Sufism.*

Keywords: *Sufism; Western World; Hybrid Sufism; Perennial Sufism; Transplant Sufism.*

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of Sufism in the West over the past decade has garnered significant interest among scholars of Islamic mysticism. The growing presence of the Muslim community in this region, many of whom practice Sufism, has paralleled this increased attention. Sufism is often seen as a key factor in the conversion of Westerners to Islam. Its principles of tolerance and openness resonate well with Western values, making it an appealing entry point for non-Muslims to explore Islam more deeply.

The initial engagement of the Western world with Sufism coincided with the flourishing of Islamic philosophy in Spain, epitomized by the philosopher Ibn Rushd. His influence on Western thought undoubtedly facilitated the introduction of other Islamic disciplines, including Sufism. However, the decline of Islamic territories in the West, such as Spain, led to a diminished presence of Islamic sciences like philosophy and Sufism in the region. The revival of interest in Islamic scholarship, including Sufism, in the Western world began with the academic pursuits of Western scholars in the 17th century. These studies marked a renewed engagement with Sufism and Islamic spirituality, continuing the introduction that had begun in the 17th century.

Although the introduction of Sufism to the West dates back to the Middle Ages, the precise mechanisms through which Sufism established itself in the region remain unclear. Given the significant growth of Islam and Sufism in the West in recent decades, several questions arise: When did Sufism first enter the West? What were the networks through which it spread, and who were the key figures responsible for transmitting Sufism to the Western world? These questions are crucial, as the development of Sufism in the West differs greatly from its evolution in traditionally Islamic areas. Therefore, studying the historical development of Sufism in the West is of paramount importance. This article aims to explore the historical origins, the process of transmission, and the various models of Sufism that emerged in the West during the 20th century.

METHODS

This research is qualitative in nature, focusing specifically on the development of Sufism in the Western context. Unlike the well-documented studies of Sufism in the East, the study of Sufism in the West is relatively rare, making it a significant and intriguing area of inquiry. The research employs a content analysis method within a historical framework. Content analysis is a technique used to understand the subject matter by breaking down and distinguishing between different meanings to gain a clear understanding of the issue at hand. The research process involves collecting and inventorying data related to the development of Sufism in the West. The content analysis is conducted to clarify the relationships and meanings between different concepts, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Early Studies Of Sufism In The West

The development of studies and the introduction of Western (European) people to Sufism began to show seriousness in the 17th to 19th centuries AD, coinciding with Western expansion into the Muslim world. As noted by Edward Said and Carl W. Ernst, the initial interest of Western scholars in Sufism was driven by European colonialists' desire to gather information on the culture, socio-cultural aspects, and beliefs of the populations under their colonial rule. Although some Islamic Sufis, such as Rabī`ah al-`Adawiyah, Ibnu al-Farīd, and al-Sa`dī, were known to Europeans before the colonial era, Europeans and Americans generally did not take a serious interest in Sufism until the 19th century. This interest only emerged after colonial powers had solidified their control over colonized regions in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

An independent study of Sufism was undertaken by Lt. James William Graham, a staff member under William Jones. This effort was followed by Friedrich August Tholuck (d. 1877), who wrote an article titled "Sive Sufismus, Sive Theosophia Persarum Phanteistica" (Sufism or The Pantheistic Theosophy of the Persian). According to Carl W. Ernst, Tholuck's writings are considered the first European book to discuss Sufism.

Subsequent research and studies on Sufism were conducted by several scholars, including British orientalist Edward H. Palmer and Dutch scholar Reinhart Dozy (d. 1883), who wrote an essay published in 1897 titled "Essai sur l'histoire de l'Islamisme." These early studies often concluded that Sufism was not purely derived from Islamic teachings. Another notable figure, Ernst Renan (d. 1892), offered an interpretation of Islam using race theory and linguistics. He argued that the Sufi tradition, which developed artistically through poetry and metaphysical expressions, was influenced by the Aryan race rather than the Semitic race. Renan's views were later criticized and rejected for being demeaning.

In the early 20th century, several Muslim countries, except for Persia, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Turkey, were under foreign (Christian European) control. This colonization process, which had begun earlier, involved dominating Muslim-majority countries. In several regions within Muslim territories, local institutions and Sufi groups became centers of resistance against the colonizers. The militancy and solidarity within Sufi groups posed a threat to the colonial powers' efforts to control these areas. The coalition between governments and Sufi orders can be observed in the Safavid kingdom in Iran, which ruled from 1501 to 1732 AD.

The power of Sufi groups garnered the attention of colonial authorities, who feared that these groups could resist and impede the colonization process. In various regions, Sufi orders and *ṭarīqahs* became centers of resistance against colonial forces. For instance, in West Sudan and Libya, the Sanusiyyah order led resistance efforts against French and Italian colonizers. The leader of this order, Shaykh Idris, was exiled to Egypt but later became the king of Libya in 1951. In the 20th century, the study of Islamic mysticism and sociology continued to gain traction. Besides Louis Massignon, another prominent figure was A.J. Arberry, who published numerous works on Sufism in the West. His book, "History of Sufism," explores Sufism as a facet of Islamic mysticism. Arberry's other notable works include "The Manifestation of Islamic Civilization and its Portrayal in the Origins of the Texts," "Fifty Poems of Hafiz," "Discourses of Rumi Sermons," "Poems of al-Mutanabbi: A Selection with Introduction, Translations & Notes," "Revelation and Reason in Islam," and "Religion in the Middle East."

Another Western scholar who significantly contributed to the study of Islamic sciences was Henry Corbin, a philosopher, theologian, and Iraniologist. As a professor of Islamic Studies at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris, Corbin's important work focused on the philosopher Suhrawardi. His works, such as "Avicenna and The Visionary Recital," "Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi," "Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth," and "The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism" (introduced by Zia Inayat Khan), aimed to introduce Islamic philosophy and Sufism to a Western audience. Another notable work by Corbin is "En Islam Iranien; Aspects Spirituels et Philosophiques." His book "History of Islamic Philosophy" delves into the intricacies of Islamic philosophy and mysticism.

Corbin played a crucial role in introducing the Sufi thoughts of Ibn al-'Arabī to the West through his work "Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi," which paved the way for further Western studies on philosophical Sufism. According to Mona Abaza in her notes on Henry Corbin and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Corbin and Nasr were instrumental in bringing Iranian philosophical thought to both Eastern and Western audiences in the modern era. Corbin, in particular, is noted for his efforts to introduce the philosophical ideas of Mulla Sadra and the mysticism of Ibn al-'Arabī. Corbin's close relationship with Seyyed Hossein Nasr further contributed to the development of philosophical thought, especially within the realm of Iranian Islamic philosophy.

Another prominent observer and activist among the orientalist in the field of Sufism is Annemarie Schimmel. She is recognized for her deep empathy towards Islam, as evidenced by her works "Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam" and "And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety." Additionally, she critiqued Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses." Schimmel's dedication to Sufism is particularly notable in her extensive research on Rumi's Sufism, which spanned nearly 40 years. Schimmel emphasized the complexity of understanding Islamic mysticism, arguing that it cannot be comprehended from a single perspective. She believed that mysticism transcends intellectual analysis and must be approached from its foundational roots with an open mind. Schimmel also highlighted that mysticism is a universal phenomenon present in all religions.

Characteristics Of Sufism In The Modern West

In examining the history of Sufism's development, we can generally categorize its teachings into two primary types: Sunnī Sufism and philosophical Sufism. These two categories have formed the foundation for most Sufism practitioners' approaches within Islam. Sunnī Sufism is seen as adhering strictly to the Qur'an and Sunnah, avoiding deviations that might lead to errors. This type of Sufism is also referred to as *ahklaki* or *'amali*

Sufism. It reached its zenith with al-Ghāzālī, who successfully harmonized Sufism with Shari'a or Islamic orthodoxy. Al-Junaid, a significant figure in the Baghdad school of Sufism, greatly influenced subsequent Sufis with his monotheistic doctrine. However, Sufism's teachings are not solely focused on moral fortification as emphasized in Sunnī Sufism. Besides Sunnī Sufism, another model known as philosophical Sufism emerged. Philosophical Sufism, which peaked with Ibn al-'Arabī, is often contrasted with Sunnī Sufism. There is a tendency to stigmatize and judge Sunnī Sufism as the "true" form of Sufism, while philosophical Sufism is viewed as straying from the Qur'an and Sunnah. This misunderstanding and confusion regarding philosophical Sufism largely stem from a lack of comprehension of its teachings. Rejection of philosophical Sufism is more prevalent in the Sunnī world, whereas it finds greater acceptance in the Shi'i world.

When Sufism spread to the West, these two traditional models Sunnī and philosophical underwent transformations due to cultural assimilation, which influenced the understanding and practice of Sufism. In the West, Sufism developed into three distinct models: hybrid Sufism, perennial Sufism, and transplant Sufism. Hybrid Sufism is characterized by its adherence to the original sources of Islam while incorporating early Islamic doctrines (orthodoxy) and the practices of the founding teachers. This model of Sufism maintains a consistent commitment to the core texts of Islamic teachings, namely the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet.. Another characteristic of this Sufism school is that there are efforts to transform and contextualize Sufism in socio-cultural life. West.⁵⁹ This type still shows the close relationship between Sufism and the sources of Islamic teachings and is involved in social life.

Referring to the principles of Sufism, it can be argued that the teachings of Sufism resemble the principles of neo-Sufism. Neo-Sufism is understood as an attempt to merge Sufistic values with worldly life. The practice of neo- Sufism, especially in modern life, wants the emergence of proactive Muslim behavior toward worldly issues and regenerates a positive world view. Followers of this flow mostly consist of immigrants and people who were born in a new area and have socialized in their new environment.

Neo-Sufism represents an effort to strengthen the appreciation of the esoteric dimension while remaining under the guidance of Islamic law. For instance, in Indonesia, Hamka is seen as a figure who successfully balanced the demands of modernity with Sufism, popularizing the idea of modernized Sufism. Hamka's approach to Sufism is rooted in the revival of moral values. He emphasized that humans are ethical beings capable of distinguishing between good and bad, possessing the freedom to act as they wish. However,

this freedom must be guided by revelation, leveraging strong intellectual abilities. In Hamka's view, living with morality is fundamental to the Islamic religious system, where monotheism, morality, and sharia are inseparably linked.

Perennial Sufism, as interpreted by the prominent Western Sufi Martin Lings, integrates three fundamental principles: primordialism, universalism, and essentialism. Among these, universalism is the cornerstone of perennial teachings. Perennial Sufism posits that every religion and its mysticism share a common goal and universal values, advocating for mutual respect and appreciation of diversity and differences. Martin Lings illustrates perennial Sufism by comparing various buildings, each differing in shape and size. Despite their differences, these buildings serve the same purpose universally: providing protection and aesthetic pleasure. Similarly, Lings argues that the ultimate goal of different religions, especially divine ones, is to know and draw closer to God. While religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam originate from the same source, their forms differ, making them distinct and incapable of unification into a single entity.

In the West, perennial Sufism is present in several organizations, such as The Sufi Order International, founded by Pir Vilayat Khan and his son Zia Inayat Khan. Other groups include the Society for the Order of Sufi Studies, founded by Idries Shah, and The Tradition, established by Idries Shah's brother, Omar Ali Shah. Inayat Khan (1882–1927), an Indian His approach, based on perennial thinking, aimed to offer a universal Sufism paradigm that resonated with Western audiences.

The Sufi order brought by Inayat Khan became an established Sufism movement in the West, especially in North America and Europe, between 1910 and 1926. This order was even brought to Australia so that during the 20th century, this order had branches in almost all continents. Inayat Khan teaches Sufism in English and does not apply any rules of conversion to Islam before studying his tariqa. This method is one of the factors that makes Sufism widely accessible to Westerners. Nearly 50 years of Inayat Khan's teachings have been the only ones well-known to Westerners.

Sufism enthusiasts in the West quickly embraced the universal approach developed by Inayat Khan. Inayat Khan's perennial method seeks to identify commonalities among various religions, asserting that while religions may differ, their core truth is singular. He likened religions to different forms of water, which acquire different names as they flow into rivers, seas, or lakes, though all originate from the same essence. Similarly, he believed that while the outward aspects of religions differ, their essential truth remains the same. According to Inayat Khan, Sufis do not question one's religion or beliefs, focusing instead on the universal essence of spirituality.

The proponents of perennial Sufism drew heavily from the teachings of Ibn al-'Arabī and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. These medieval Sufi thinkers significantly shaped Western perspectives on Sufism. As noted by William C. Chittick, the interest in Ibn al-'Arabī's Sufism has grown in the West, particularly due to the influential works of Henry Corbin and Toshihiko Izutsu. Izutsu's comparative study "Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts" and his analysis of Ibn al-'Arabī's "Fushush al-Hikam" are regarded as profound examinations of Ibn al-'Arabī's ideas.

Henry Corbin referred to Ibn al-'Arabī and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī as "Fedeli d'amore," which corresponds to terms like 'Asiqun, Muhibbun, and Arbab al-Hawa'—all describing those who love Allah. Ibn al-'Arabī has notably gained considerable recognition in the West, often compared to eminent figures in Western philosophy such as St. Thomas Aquinas. Western scholars have portrayed Ibn al-'Arabī as a versatile thinker connected to various disciplines, including quantum mechanics, Taoism, Swedenborg, New Age mysticism, Kant, and chaos theory. Rumi's Sufism has also played a significant role in the development of Sufism in the West. His work, the Mathnawi, is highly popular in the West because it conveys ideas and principles centered on human peace and security. The Mathnawi encourages self-control and balance, advising against haste and emphasizing proof and deliberation. These messages of peace inherent in Sufism resonate well with a pluralistic Western society. As illustrated above, Sufism with perennial characteristics tends to be more easily adapted and accepted in the Western world. This acceptance is rooted in the values of tolerance, openness, and universality that are central to Sufi teachings. The diversity of Western society presents a challenge for Islamic scholarship; however, the perennial approach, which emphasizes finding commonalities over differences, is more readily embraced by diverse communities..

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, two main conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, regarding the history of Sufism's introduction and development in the Western world, it becomes evident that while Western engagement with Sufism dates back to the Middle Ages, systematic academic studies of Sufism in the West only commenced in the early 17th century AD, coinciding with Western colonial activities in Islamic territories. Colonial endeavors aimed to introduce Islamic culture and scholarship, including Sufism, to Western audiences. This scholarly exploration reached its zenith in the 20th century, marked by numerous works and studies by orientalist on Sufism, which subsequently influenced Western communities.

Secondly, the evolving model of Sufism in the West has departed from traditional Sunnī Sufism and philosophical approaches, giving rise to three distinct models: hybrid Sufism, transplant Sufism, and perennial Sufism. Perennial Sufism, in particular, has gained traction in Western society due to its emphasis on universal values, openness, and tolerance among humanity. This model resonates well with the pluralistic ethos of the Western world, making it more easily absorbed and accepted by diverse communities.

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