

STAGES OF THE SPREAD OF SUFISM IN THE WEST

Abdurakhmonova Dildorakhon Rakhmatillo qizi

*Student of the Faculty of Islamic studies,
International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan*

ABSTRACT: *This article states that Sufism is a mystical and philosophical trend in Islam aimed at achieving spiritual perfection through personal experience and direct connection with the Divine. The term has various origins, possibly linked to purity, wool, or early ascetics of Islam. Emerging in the 9th century, Sufism influenced European thought through poetry, mystics, and scholarly studies. In the modern West, it gained popularity via literature, music, and spiritual societies, often leading to conversions to Islam. Though sometimes criticized for straying from orthodoxy, Sufism continues to attract people with its ideals of divine love and inner purification.*

KEY WORDS: *Sufism, mysticism, Islam, spiritual experience, West, poetry, conversion, purification.*

The word "Sufism" was often ascribed by many Muslim mystics to the Arabic word *safa* (from the root f-f-c), the main meaning of which is "purity"; or to the phrase *ahl as-suffa* ("people of the bench"), which denoted the pious but poor companions of the Prophet who lived in his mosque; or to *ahya as-saffah* — those who occupied the "[first] row/position" [in the mosque or in front of God]. So, Sufism is a special mystical, religious and philosophical worldview within the framework of Islam, whose representatives consider it possible through personal psychological experience to have direct spiritual communication (contemplation or union) of a person with a deity. It is achieved through ecstasy or inner illumination, sent down to a person walking on the Path to God with love for him in his heart.

Such currents were not uncommon in the Middle Ages, and mysticism occupied a significant place in all major religious systems (Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity) created by mankind. However, according to the most common, though less romantic version, the etymology of this term goes back to the Arabic word for "wool" (*suf*). The Arabic verb *tasawwafa*, which comes from this word, means "to put on a woolen garment." Hence the Arabic verbal pronunciation *tasawwuf* - "the custom/habit of wearing a woolen garment."

The most likely theory seems to be that the term *tasawwuf* was widely used not earlier than the first half of the 3rd-9th centuries. In fact, there are a lot of meanings about what Sufism is and more than a thousand terms are calculated, but the most common was what was discussed above¹.

Next, we will consider the opinions of other European scholars on Sufism. According to Schimmel, "Europe's first contact with Sufi ideas can be traced back to the Middle Ages. The writings of the Catalan mystic and scholar Ramon Lull show remarkable signs of the influence of Sufi literature." For example, his "Les Cent Noms de Dieu" show he was inspired by Muhiy al-Din Ibn Arabi. Lull, who learned Arabic and Islam from his Muslim

¹ Henry A. Pochmann, *New England Transcendentalism and St. Louis Hegelianism: Phases on the History of American Idealism* (Philadelphia: Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1948), – P 69.

Slave, seemed eager to convert the Muslim world to Christianity. Some scholars, such as Palacios (1919), Guenon and Massignon, claim that Dante Allighieri (1265-1321) was also inspired by Muhyal Din Ibn Arabi².

However, the first notable Sufi figure to enter European literature was Rabida al-Adawiya (d.185/801), a famous eighth-century holy woman. Later, in the XVI and XVII centuries, travelers visiting the Near and Central Asian East brought to Europe information about the rituals of the dervishes, especially about the whirling (Mavlavi) and howling (Rifadi) dervishes. In 1638, the poem by the great Egyptian Mystic ibn Farid (died 1235) was first edited and translated by Fabricius from the University of Rostock.

However, most of the information about Eastern spirituality was obtained from translations of Persian classical poetry. The most important are the poems of Saddih (d.692/1292) and Hafiz (d.792/1390). In the nineteenth century, historical sources and important Sufi texts became available in print in both the Middle East and Europe, and several theories about the origins of Sufism were proposed, as well as many studies of Sufis and Sufi classics³.

Unrelated to these academic studies, Sufism has become popular in the West and conversion to Islam is an important example of this popularity. It is no secret that throughout history Sufism has been and continues to be the main means of attracting non-Muslims to Islam. Many modern Muslims find it very exciting that a significant proportion of converts to Islam did so under the influence of Sufism.

For example, in the UK, intellectuals who converted to Islam most often chose its Sufi form. In addition to converting to Islam through Sufism, there are other examples of the popularity and prominence of Sufism in Europe and the United States.

These include the poetry of the famous medieval Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (d.672/1273), speeches by circling dervishes and a number of conferences on Sufism, which indicate the growing interest of Western scholars in analyzing the broader consequences of these events (Malik, 2006:1). Sufi music, for example, the centuries old ecstatic Qawwali music of Pakistan has found a solid niche in the West⁴.

Western Shadhilia and Chistia they paved the way or formed the prerequisites for later Sufi movements and contributed to their popularity in the West through their publications and conferences. The general assessment of almost all researchers is that Western Sufism shows signs of serious deviation from orthodox Islamic teaching and practice. At the same time, both Islam and Sufism somehow had to compromise with Western modernity, defined by some researchers such as Westerlund as "the contextualization of Sufism. In fact, throughout the history of Sufism, many Sufis have complained that "Sufism" itself was lacking in the lives of people who outwardly claimed to be involved in Sufism.

² Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), – P 110 – 11.

³ Patrick D. Bowen, A History of Conversion to Islam in the United States, Volume 1: White American Muslims before 1975 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), – P 215–16.

⁴ Peter L. Berger, The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1979), – P 50.

Also starting in the 9th century and continuing throughout the 10th century, al-Andalus was home to fairly strict Orthodox beliefs and customs. Quranic studies and jurisprudence (Fiqh) were recognized and promoted types of science that shaped the beliefs and customs of the region. The early Fuchs in Spain were somewhat skeptical of philosophical thought, as well as Sufism. In later centuries, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth, Sufism became more accepted and somewhat assimilated with Andalusian Islam. Scientists have generally seen this later flourish in two different ways. For some, this reflects the influence of the mystical tradition of Cordoba attributed to Ibn Masarra. Others attach exceptional importance to the influence of Eastern mystics, most often including the thoughts and teachings of al-Ghazali.

One person in particular is often considered one of the first representatives of Sufism in Spain. Ibn Masarra. He lived from 883 to 931 and was born outside of Cordoba. Many believe that he founded the first Sufi school in the province; however, his teachings went beyond the so-called "mainstream" Sufism, which was more widespread in the East during his lifetime. Under Ibn Masarra, there was a "brief flourishing" of Sufism in Spain, and later the Spanish Sufis reflected its influence on them. After Ibn Masarra's death in 940, his followers were severely persecuted by lawyers who destroyed Ibn Masarra's writings and also forced his followers to recant. The effects of his thought and that of his disciples would reappear in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in later Sufis such as Ibn Arabi.

Andalusian Sufism was at its peak at that time. Also at this time, Eastern Sufism developed more as a communal movement, whereas Western (including in Al-Andalus) he remained basically an individual aspiration.

A group of Sufi masters who defended these works. Theosophists such as Ghazali and al-Kushayri began to appear in the late eleventh and early to mid-twelfth centuries. Abu'l-Abbas ibn al-Arif (1088-1141) was one of the most prominent Sufis in Spain and one of the first Sufis during the heyday of Sufism on the peninsula. He belonged to what the Spanish scholar of Islam Miguel Asin Palacios called the "Almeria School", so named because of its geographical location. Ibn al-Arif was one of the first to interpret Ghazali in the West, and also founded a method of spiritual education called tariqa. Ibn al-Arif's disciple Ibn Qasi created a group of religious followers in Portugal and built a monastery in Silves. He is the author of the book Khal al-Na'len, a commentary on which Ibn Arabi would later write.⁵

Ibn Barrajan (d. 1141), a disciple and friend of Ibn al-Arif, lived and taught in Seville, but originally from North Africa, he was called the Ghazali of the West. Ibn Barrajan and Ibn al-Arif were convicted of heresy because their views contradicted those of the Almoravids in power; however, Ibn Barrajan seems to have used Sufism more actively as a means of opposing Qur'an scholars and jurists.

Shortly after Ibn Arabi's death, al-Andalus experienced "spiritual aridity" in the middle of the fourteenth century. The only exception to this trend was Ibn Abbad al-Rundi (1332-1390), a member of the Shadhiliyya order who was born in Ronda and whose scholarship combined mystical and legal paths. His work helped Sufism become more popular in Islamic sciences,

⁵ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), – P 2– 3

although Sufism was no longer directly a part of Andalusí life after the Catholic monarchs expelled Muslims from Spain, in the Spanish Christian mystics of the sixteenth century, for example, San Juan de la Cruz and Teresa of Avila, many saw the lasting influence of Sufism in Spain.

It can be noted that Sufism is a special mystical, religious and philosophical trend within Islam, the purpose of which is to achieve spiritual perfection through personal psychological experience and direct communication with the divine. The origins of the term "Sufism" can be associated with various Arabic words, but it was not widely used until the first half of the 9th century. Sufism has had a significant impact on European literature and thought, attracting the attention of scholars and travelers. Today, Sufism remains an important element in attracting non-Muslims to Islam, and its popularity continues to grow not only in the East, but also in the West, where many converts to Islam choose the Sufi form of this religion.

The spread of Sufism in the West took place through several main stages, including the following:

1. Early contacts and study: Sufism began to attract the attention of Western scientists and researchers back in the 19th century. These early contacts were mostly academic in nature, with academic research and translations of Sufi texts.

2. Western Sufi Societies: In the middle of the 20th century, the first Sufi societies in the West began to form, which began to attract local residents seeking spiritual development and practice. Examples include societies based in the United States, Great Britain, and other European countries.

3. Popularization through literature and music: At the end of the 20th century, Sufism began to gain greater recognition due to the popularity of books, articles and music recordings related to Sufi teachings. The works of authors such as Idris Shah, whose books on Sufism have been translated into many languages, have become especially famous.

4. Sufi practices in modern culture: Nowadays, Sufism has become a part of many Western spiritual and cultural movements. Many people are interested in Sufi meditation, musical traditions (for example, Sufi qawali), and the ideas of love and unity that Sufism preaches.

These stages show how Sufism, from the first academic studies to the modern influence on Western culture, continues to develop and attract interest among people outside the traditional Islamic communities.

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