

# Sufism, from Movement to Government

Iran Nasseris Sisakht

Ph.D. Student of Persian Language and Literature, Islamic Azad University Dehaghan Branch, Iran

**Abstract:** *This article, as it is obvious from its title, deals with Sufism and its relation with politics and government. At the beginning, meaning of words, different attitudes towards Sufism and Sufis, and then, the steps of their seizing power and the deterioration of their government have been analyzed. In this article it is tried to reason that, though some people deem mysticism and Sufism as the result of inactivity and indifference about political and social matters, indeed it has been a socio-political school and from the beginning, this trend has been noticeable in this school.*

**Keywords:** Mysticism, Politics, Sufis, social

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of writing this article was studying and searching about Sufism and politics and providing the response to this question: does mysticism have any relation with politics and government or not? In an early and simple confrontation, it might seem that there is no relation between mysticism and Sufism with politics, because it has been said that mysticism is rejecting material interests and political affairs mean involvement in worldly troubles and responsibilities that are the opposite of mysticism. But, actually, it is not as simple. Each social thought has been the result of political and social conditions in particular times. In this article the relation between Sufism and politics and the analysis of Sufism's movement-like characteristics are under observation and their socio-political importance is discussed. Besides, a consideration of Sufis and mystics' outlooks, their recommendations and positive and helpful interferences with governors and rulers are other materials that the author has covered.

## 2. The definition of Sufism the Meanings of the Word Sufi

There are different outlooks about the history and the root of the words "Sufism" and "Sufi". Some believe it has Arabic origin and is derived from Sufa, Souf, Soufiyyah, and... is related to Soffeh. Some of the opinions regarding Sufis are as following:

- 1) Abolqasem Qashirie about the name of Sufi believes: "the application of this name or this tribe is common and has no comparative and derivative basis in Arabic. Apparently, this word has been used like a title" [1].
- 2) Being related to "Soffeh" who were a group of Mohammad's followers and were living in part of the prophet's mosque [2].
- 3) It comes from the word Sufa (meaning, honesty), since Sufis achieve internal light and honesty as a result of abstinence and their heart's mirror, due to contemplation and observation, gets clear and pure.
- 4) Its origin from Souf (meaning, wool) is accepted and conformed by a majority of Sufis and researchers and, in comparison with other ideas and speculations, seems more sensible. Aboubakr Mohammad Kalabadie in his book, "Alta'rrof" says: "they were called Sufis because of their appearance and clothes, since they did not use clothes for comfort and decoration, but for covering their

body, and accordingly were satisfied with rough and tough clothes." And he adds: if we consider the root of Sufi as "souf" (wool), we should notice that according to Arabic grammar this would be a sound word" [3].

## 3. The origin of Sufism

Concerning the origin of Sufism and the source of inspiration for this thought-based worldview, there are various beliefs and ideas:

- **The first idea:** Some believe it is derived from the religion.
- **The second idea:** Some believe it is derived from Platonic philosophy.
- **The third idea:** Some believe Sufism in Islamic countries is not derived from external affairs but the socio-political changes have caused them.
- **The fourth idea** (the ideas of the Sufis themselves): All of the Sufis regard these ideas as unacceptable and state such ascriptions to Sufism are a bad sin since "Sufism means: the essence and the spirit of Koran and the prophet's speeches. There for, in Sufis' belief, human being's leader for achieving truth is religion [4].

## 4. The Beliefs of the Sufis

- 1) The timelessness of God: We and our existence are nothing you are the undying absolute existence [5].
- 2) Secret covering
- 3) The superiority of love
- 4) Avoiding egotism: You yourself are your obstacle, rise and go away since with your presence, no one can hear from me that I am.

## 5. Sufism and its Direction

The name of Sufi and the Sufis themselves emerged in the second century (lunar calendar) in Islamic countries and in that time Sufis were true believers and so ignorant to the worldly affairs. But gradually, they underwent some changes in a way that in the seventh- century, Ebneh Arabi gave a scientific and reasoning aspect to that.

In the ninth- century, Shiism gets closer to Sufism and the religious leaders look favorably at Sufis. "In this century

(the ninth), the high rank Sufis were also responsible for Shiite affairs. Social changes and the Mongols' attacking, and then Teymourian's, made people interested in Sufism and from this, the number of the Sufis and Darvishes increased but the truth and mysticism reduced" [4]. With looking at the history of mysticism and Sufism, we can observe that in the early centuries, mysticism was at the acme of its perfection and influence and closer to purity, but with the passage of the time and the divisions between religious leaders and different sects of Sufism, and their corruption and ignorance to religion caused its deterioration.

## 6. Sufism and Politics

Some of the common people have interpreted mysticism as isolation, abstinence, and rejection of the world and expect the mystics to do miracle without eating or drinking anything, and to have nothing to do with people and social affairs. But in fact, mysticism and Sufism is a thought-based school that has always had solutions for better managing the society, country, and government. All of the mystics and Sufis have always been trying to relate themselves and their sect to holy Imams and particularly to Imam Ali, and indirectly, to the holy prophet, since those holy people were both a perfect paradigm of true mysticism and were always trying to improve people's social and religious matters, and were forming government and leading the people. In mysticism and Sufism, there are both open-minded and liberal people and narrow-minded and dogmatic ones. There are people among them who are strongly against hypocrisy and religious showing off, and another group who show off a few praying and fasting and regard paradise as their monopoly. There are some who have sacrificed their life for fighting against despotism and autocracy, and some others who maintain they should do nothing against the autocratic cruelties.

If a huge rock falls down from a mountain cannot be called a mystic, if he avoids its confrontation [6]. This means that it is not mysticism if you escape hardship. So there are both "holy and hope-giving countenance of Molavie and dark, austere, and disappointing one of Sheykh Najmaddin Dayeh among them; both God-loving, and smiling Sheykh Abusaid Abolkheyr and terryfing, promiscuous, and gluttonous Sheykh Ahmad Jam and so on can be observed among them" [7].

There for the early mysticism and Sufism was divided into two branches. Some were looking for self-correction and its perfecting in the grounds of social difficulties and their mystic learning gave them the spirit of freedom, resistance against injustice and hardships, and sacrificing for the sake of serving the people; and some were looking for self-improvement in rejecting worldly affairs and avoiding people and demands of society. Each school certainly spends a lot of costs to achieve its goals and consequently to realize its wishes, for example, it loses some of its human resources, and for the establishment of the school, sacrifices martyrs to the society, and the school of Sufism has not been much different from this rule. A group of early mystics were deprived members of the society that enthusiastically joined the movement of Islam and whole heartedly fought for the advance of Islam. In succeeding periods also some of the

Sufis were pioneers in fighting against the cruel people and even sacrificed their life. As an instance, the action of "Hossein Ebneh Mansour Hallaj" was more prominent than other mystic protest movements that resulted in his martyrdom in the support of his belief.

The protest of some of the mystics against the kings and governments indicates that the mystics and Sufis (the first group), did not separate themselves from politics and were always thinking of reforming people's social affairs and would like to seize the government. The mystic and Sufi's positive and useful interference in politics and reacting against the rulers, and despots in all the periods indicate that most of them were against isolation and mere worshiping of God.

### Two cases of Sufi's interference with politics:

- 1) The socio-political life of Imam Ali is a good paradigm for everybody. A mystic who had rejected the world and its pleasures throughout his life and had tried to observe justice based on a government that relied upon the Islamic basis. In his opinion, it is the duty of everybody who is the head of politics and government to fight with injustice and corruption and to serve people.
- 2) Hossein Mansour Hallaj was the well-known martyr of this school that the explosion of his words disrupted the minds of the courtiers. "Hallaj's movement, like that of Siavash, Jesus Christ, and Socrates had political aspects and was a protest against the power centers of the time who had taken refuge in religion and government" [8].  
Your ashes /that early winds /where ever took /grew a man out of soil /in Neyshabour's garden-allies /the drunks of the night /with murmur /once more your red songs /whispered like a refrain /your name is still on the tongues [9].

## 7. Organizing Sufism's movements in Iran:

The occurrence of social conflicts and severe class struggles and religious and oral fighting in the early Islam caused the spread of the Iranians' intellectual readiness for the acceptance of Sufism. "The main cause of the emergence or expansion of Sufism in Iran was the Sufis' protesting against the ruling system. But the important point was the lack of political opportunity's structure, in a way that the early Moslem movements (Iranians and Arabs) against the ruling system was severely suppressed but the outcome of this suppression was not the end of Sufi's social movement but adopting hidden and secret tactic on their part" [4&6]. The third, fourth, and fifth centuries were the time for Sufism's organization and systematization. Zaarinkoub shows that: "Although the basis of Sufism's actions is individual struggle but gradually, for fighting back the cruelty, they formed brotherhood groups and sects and began organizing their members in their secret places." Accordingly, the fourth and fifth century are considered the time of stability, systematization, and the spread of the movement. But, in the sixth century, in the time of Tatar and Mongol, due to the increase of the divisions and revolutions, it reached its height again. In the seventh and eighth centuries, alongside with the attacks of Tatar and Mongol, people moved to the Sufis and "the political activities increase inside Iran and

Sufism permeates among the social classes and the populous” [3&4].

In these centuries, Sarbedaran movement can be considered among the first organizations that with relying on the power and Sufism's beliefs, was formed to fight with cruelty and injustice and for the realization of the justice. Although because of the divisions among the leaders of the riot it did not last for long, the method used by Sarbedaran and with the help of a group of Sufis and Juriyyeh for supporting Shiism and fighting with injustice, later lead to the emergence of governments of Shiite Sufis in Azarbayjan. In the tenth century, a group of Sufis tried to add ostensible ruling to their spiritual ruling. “As a result of their efforts, Safavit government was formed and the king himself used to be called mentor, and Sufi the great” [11]. The Safavit government can be definitely regarded as the first ideological government that based his government on the Sufi beliefs and, by so doing, achieved a lot of advantages. “The early leaders of the Safavit movement, and to a lesser degree, succeeding kings, had high spiritual value among their followers. As a perfect mentor, they had created a spiritual, God-like image that caused their followers have unquestioned devotion to them. Safavit's early kings tied advance their advertizing and military causes through great organization that had been formed based on Sufi's beliefs in their places. At the head of this great organization was the spiritual rank of “the great Caliph” and this rank faced various ups and downs during Safavit's long rule, in a way that at the beginning it was so significant and decisive, but the more we move to the end of this period, the less gets the value of this rank. In spite of the decrease in the value and the reputation of Sufis in the reign of the last Safavit king, they had still kept their holy place in the eyes of common people, in a way that sometimes people, even the high rank officials, for the pardoning of their sins, used to go to the “Caliph the great”. In this way, Safavit government gradually abandoned Sufism and, though was born out of it, destroyed it and the key posts were abdicated from Sufis. For this reason, some of them taught and educated in their places and some were demoted to far lesser occupations.

Nafisie believes: “in the end of Teymourie period, Sufis were dispatched by the Safavit and their several organizations were demolished” [10]. In this way, the movement that had begun by Sufis, because of different reasons such as deviation from religion, the political leaders' power seeking, inability in organizing and systematizing, etc. got involved in radicalism and lead to the people's avoiding this movement and its destruction. Today, Sufism possesses especial centers, economic independence, leadership, place, organization, religion, etc. and faces the ruling power with its ups and downs.

## 8. Conclusion and Findings

Although it is possible that in some era's politics and mysticism have moved in divergent directions, Sufism has always been a school of managing the society and has always offered different solutions for governing society, country, and the government. This school of thought, sometimes with recommendation and religious and mystic teachings, and other times with forming army, interfered

with political and governmental affairs and enticed people against injustice and despotic governments. As an instance, “Najmaddin Kabarie” who encouraged people to fight with Mongols and himself also fought and got martyr. In general, it can be claimed that politics and mysticism have never been separate from each other, in the same way that religion and politics have always been the same.

## References

- [1] Qashiri A, 1376. *Resaleh Qashiriteh*. Nashrehney Publication, Tehran.
- [2] Homayie J, 1379. *Sufism in Iran*. Shokouh Publication, Tehran.
- [3] Kalabadie M, 1380. *Alta'arraf*. Andisheh Publication, Tehran.
- [4] Zarrinkoub A, 1379. *Searching in Iran's Sufism*. Amirkabir Publication, Tehran.
- [5] Molavie J, 1369. *Masnavie Manavie*. Zavareh Publication, Tehran.
- [6] Sa'adie M, 1380. *Boustan*. Eqbal Publication, Tehran.
- [7] Ravandie A, 1369. *Mystic Literature and Mystic Poets*. Setareh Publication, Tehran.
- [8] Eslamie Nadoushan M, 1371. *Political Worship and Literary Mysticism*. Pouria Publication, Tehran.
- [9] Shafii Kadkanie M, 1380. *Collected Poems*. Cheshmeh Publication, Tehran.
- [10] Nafisie S, 1385. *The Beginning of Sufism in Iran*. Frouqi Publication, Tehran.
- [11] Moin, M, 1371. *The Dictionary of Persian Words*. Sepehr Publication, Tehran.