



SUFISM AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Connecting Hearts, Crossing Boundaries

Edited by

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ABC International Group, Inc.

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Faghfoory, Mohammad H. and Golam Dastagir
Sufism and Social Integration: Connecting Hearts, Crossing Boundaries. 1st US ed.

Includes bibliographical notes and index.

1. Sufism. 2. Social Integration. I. Mohammad H. Faghfoory and Golam Dastagir.

II. Title.

ISBN 10: 1-56744-432-6

ISBN 13: 978-1-56744-432-2

Published by
ABC International Group, Inc.
Distributed by
KAZI Publications, Inc. (USA)
3023 W. Belmont Avenue
Chicago IL 60618
Tel: (773) 267-7001; FAX: (773) 267-7002

Humblly dedicated to
Shaykh al-Sayyid Husayn al-Sabbah

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Winters, John. 2007. "The American Revolution and the British Empire." *Journal of American Studies* 41(1): 1-22.

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CHAPTER IX

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF SUFISM IN IRAN WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO PHILOSOPHICAL SUFISM (*'IRFĀN-I NAẒARI*)

*Muḥammad U. Faruque**

Introduction

The purpose of the present study is to delineate various facets of Sufism in Iran. But before dealing with the nuances that have developed with regard to *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) and *'irfān* (lit. gnosis) in the context of Iranian history, it is appropriate to distinguish Sufism from *'irfān*. This essay then traces the roots of such a dichotomy to the Safavid period (1501–1739) when for the first time the word *taṣawwuf* began to develop negative connotations. In addition, this study surveys the situation of philosophical Sufism (*'irfān-i naẓari*) in present-day Iran and its key exponents by drawing upon the works of contemporary Iranian Sufis, which are mainly in Persian but occasionally also in Arabic. It also assesses the impact of Sufi thought and literature on secular-modernist and religious intellectuals such as 'Alī Shari'ati and Abdul Karim Soroush.

In order to understand Sufism and its various manifestations in Iran, unlike in other countries, one must first recognize the nuances that have developed with regard to such terms as *taṣawwuf*, *'irfān*, *'irfān-i Shi'i* and *'irfān-i naẓari*. The debate surrounding these terms

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goes back to the Safavid era, which will be briefly analyzed in section II. In addition, we will also touch upon the relationship between *'irfān-i nazari* and *al-Hikmah al-muta'āliyah* (the transcendent theosophy or meta-philosophy) of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), which plays a notable role on many levels of Iranian society.

Is Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) another name for *'irfān*, or do the two terms denote distinct phenomena? When conversing with people or listening to the sermons of religious scholars, one often gets the impression that *'irfān* is “good” and laudable, whereas *taṣawwuf* is “bad” and aberrant. However, as soon as one hears all the comforting attributes (e.g., asceticism, attainment of virtues, etc.) predicated upon *'irfān*, one may get the impression that *taṣawwuf* and *'irfān* are altogether different in meaning.

There is a range of views concerning the matter. On the one hand, there are exoteric scholars who believe that anything associated with Sufism or *taṣawwuf* or *'irfān* falls outside the pale of Shi'ite Islam since the key figures of *taṣawwuf* were non-Shi'ite. For these scholars the schism between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam is of decisive significance.¹ At the other end of the spectrum lie the views of the Sufi orders that believe *'irfān* and Sufism are “two words signifying the same thing, or they may be thought of as two sides of the same coin ...” (Pazouki, 2002:42). Midway between these views are those of the *'ulamā'* who can be categorized as philosopher-theologians, and who, unlike the first two groups, present a rather nuanced view. Ayatullah Murtaḏa Muṭahari (d. 1402/1982) was one such orthodox *'alim* (religious scholar) who became perhaps the most influential theologian in the post-revolutionary period and whose interpretation of Sufism is rather unconventional. In the

¹ See these websites for their views (accessed on 3/22/2014): <http://www.kherghe.blogfa.com/>; <http://www.zirekherghe.blogfa.com/>; and <http://www.kajkool.blogspot.com/>

beginning of his works, it seems he does not differentiate between Sufism and *'irfān*:

The *'urafā* and Sufis are not regarded as forming a separate sect in Islam, nor do they claim themselves to be such. They are to be found within every Islamic school and sect...(Muṭahhari 2005:205).²

But then he promptly shifts his perspective and identifies *taṣawwuf* with "the social and sectarian aspect of gnosis."³ A few pages later in his book, after delineating a brief history of the famous masters of Sufism, he goes on to note that up until the sixteenth century *'irfān* and *taṣawwuf* essentially denoted the same entity, and all the learned figures of *'irfān* were also called Sufis, but thenceforth Sufism became diffused through innovative acts (*bid'ah*) and began to invent ostentatious social codes, customs, and dress. At the same time thinkers who did not have affiliation with the Sufi orders such as Mullā Ṣadrā, Muḥsin Fayḍ Kashani (d. 1091/1680) and Qaḍi Sa'id Qumi (d. 1102/1691), began to display profound erudition in the philosophical Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi to the extent that the Poles (*aqṭāb*, sing. *quṭb*) of the ordinary Sufi orders could not match them.⁴ Thus, according to Muṭahhari, after the sixteenth century *taṣawwuf* and *'irfān* began to part ways, with the consequence that the former began to show deviant tendencies while the latter showed perfect harmony between spiritual wayfaring (*sayr wa sulūk*) and the rites of jurisprudence (*Sharī'ah*).⁵ However, there is a historical factor at work here that caused these two terms, *'irfān* and Sufism, to be differentiated from one another. This will be elaborated in detail in the next section when we trace the sources of such a dichotomy. It is evident that Muṭahhari did not account for *taṣawwuf* in other parts of the Islamic World where even after the

² *Kulliat-i ulūm-i islami*; p. 205 (translations are mine when not indicated)

³ *Ibid.*, p. 206

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243–44

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 243

sixteenth century it had produced formidable masters such as Muhibbullah Ilahabadi (d. 1058/1648: India), Shāh Wali Ullah (d. 1175/1762: India), 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazairi (d. 1300/1883: Algeria), 'Abd al-Ghani Nablusi (d. 1143/1730: Syria), and Shaykh al-'Alawī (d. 1353/1934: Algeria) to mention but a few. Notwithstanding, Muṭahari exhibits considerable admiration for Sufism and defends its key tenets, such as the novice traveler's "need for a spiritual guide." On the subject of traversing a Sufi path with all of its stages and stations and the role of a Sufi master in them he states,

...all these stages and stations must be passed under the guidance and supervision of a mature and perfect example of humanity who, having traveled this path, is aware of the manners and ways of each station. If not, and there is no perfect human being to guide him on his path, he is in danger of going astray.⁶

Along with Muṭahari, another key figure who also became politically influential is Ayatullah Miṣbāh Yazdī, who studied Islamic philosophy and mysticism under such traditional masters as 'Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981) and Ayatullah Bahjat (d. 2009). Miṣbāh Yazdī wrote several books on philosophy, including a two-volume treatise on *Philosophical Instructions (Āmūzhes-i falsafi* 1986, trans. by M. Legenhausen). In addition, he has written commentaries on Mullā Ṣadrā's *al-Asfār al-arba'a* (Commentary on *The Four Journeys*, Vol. I, 1996) and Ibn Sīnā's *The Book of Healing (Kitāb al-Shifā*, Translation and Commentary on the "Demonstration" of *Shifā*, 1994) among others. Here, we are going to analyze briefly his views on *'irfān* and *taṣawwuf* on the basis of a treatise *Islamic Gnosis and Wisdom*, which was translated by Legenhausen.⁷

⁶ Ibid., 206–7

⁷ See *al-Tawḥīd Islamic Journal*, vol. 14 No. 3, Fall, 1997; also available at http://www.al-islam.org/al-tawḥīd/islamic_gnosis_wisdom/

In Mişbāh Yazdi's view, *'irfān* is identical to *ma'rifa*, signifying gnosis that can only be attained through inner witnessing (*shuhūd*) and unveiling (*kashf*) as opposed to knowledge attainable through the senses, experience, and ratiocination alone.⁸ He moreover characterizes *taṣawwuf* (after explaining its etymology) as a symbol for a hard life or asceticism (*zuhd*). Thus, *taṣawwuf* corresponds more appropriately to the practical aspect of gnosis or *'irfān-i 'amali* while *'irfān* for him implies *'irfān-i naẓari*. He further elaborates these manifold relations:⁹

One is the specific practical instructions, which are alleged to lead man to intuitive and interior gnosis and conscious knowledge by presence related to God, the Exalted, and the Most Beautiful Names and His sublime attributes and their manifestations. The second is the specific spiritual and psychic states and traits of character, and ultimately, the unveilings and witnessing achieved by the wayfarer. The third is the propositions and statements indicating these intuitive direct findings, and even for those who personally have not traveled the path of practical gnosis...

In the schema of Yazdi, we find *taṣawwuf* and *'irfān* to be complementary of each other, devoid of any antagonism, unlike the stance taken by Muṭahari, who considers that *taṣawwuf* in the present context exhibits certain deviant tendencies (as explained above). Mişbāh Yazdi has also dealt with the controversial thesis of *wahdat al-wujūd* (the transcendent unity of being) by arguing that not all interpretations of it are acceptable, for instance, the denial of existence of created things and the absolute denial of multiplicity. However, if the existence of creatures in relation to God is considered as a pure relation (*rabṭ-i mahd*)¹⁰ and dependence (a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ A technical philosophical term coined by Mullā Ṣadrā to describe the relation between God and creatures.

formulation conceived by Mullā Ṣadrā), that is, denying that creatures possess any independent existence, then the interpretation (*ta'wil*) of *wahdat al-wujūd* may become acceptable.¹¹ Considering the political position held by Yazdi and his place as a venerable professor of philosophy in seminaries, these views on Sufism and Sufi doctrines are revealing. Thus, it is inappropriate to assume or conclude that in the Islamic Republic the clerics all voice anti-Sufi sentiments. In fact, many fervent followers of *'irfān* (which they see as a form of theoretical learning only) hail from the *'ulamā'* class of society.

There are two issues that need to be explained here. The position that the *'ulamā'* take is heavily influenced by several factors including class, level of education, and the degree of distance or proximity to centers of political power. For example, while Miṣbāh Yazdi may approve of Sufism and *'irfān*, he also joins less-educated mullahs in condemning Sufism. Also, the attitude of the *'ulamā'* toward *'irfān qua 'irfān* must be differentiated from their position toward Sufis and Sufi orders in Iran because the latter have become embroiled in politics since the pre-revolutionary period (Bos, 2002a:145ff.).

A word must also be said about the relationship between *'irfān-i naẓari* and *ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah* since the *former* is inextricably intertwined with this particular school of philosophy that was founded by Mullā Ṣadrā. Few would dispute that in today's Iran the school of Mullā Ṣadrā known as *ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah* dominates the intellectual landscape even though certain other schools of thought such as the "school of segregation" (*maktab-i tafkīk*) and the Shaykhiyah (named after its founder Shaykh Ahmad Ahsai, d.1241/1826) seek to curb its impact. Several works have been published both in European languages and in Persian that have firmly established the influence of Sufism, and in particular Ibn

¹¹ Ibid.

'Arabi, upon Mullā Ṣadrā.¹² Some would even argue that Mullā Ṣadrā should be considered as another member in the school of Ibn 'Arabi, although this remains somewhat ambiguous. Thus, it is little wonder that so much attention has been paid to the mysticism of Ibn 'Arabi in Iran. However, technically speaking, the subject-matter of *ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah* is negatively-conditioned being (*wujūd-i bi-sharḥ-i la*) while that of *'irfān* (gnosis) is absolutely non-conditioned being (*wujūd-i la bi-sharḥ-i maqṣamī*; Āmuli, 1992). This being the case, there are subtle differences between the two, and the intellectual debate over the interpretation of being (*wujūd*) and its modalities continues to this day.

Finally, Sufism is to be discerned from *'irfān-i Shi'i* which is Shi'ism in its gnostic mode. According to some scholars, there are Shi'i mystics who receive direct guidance and inspirations from the Hidden Imam (*Imām-i Zamān*), or are Uwaysis by their circumstances (Nasr, 1991: 218; Amir-Moezzi, 2011:339 ff.). This group does not show the influence of Sufism; hence its treatment falls outside the scope of present study.

Historical Roots of Contemporary Iranian Sufism

So far we have delineated two slightly contrasting views on Sufism by the two leading philosopher-theologians, who also happen to bear mystical affiliations. In order to expand our understanding of contemporary Iranian Sufism with all its variants and *doxas* surrounding it, we would briefly describe the historical background dating back to the Safavid era (1500–1736) that has wrought such development. The origin of the Safavid dynasty traces back to Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn of Ardabil (d.734/1334), an influential Sufi master of the Safawiyyah Sufi order, who himself was a Sunni although the Shi'ites consider him a Shi'i (see Nasr in eds. Jackson and Lockhart, 1986:656). The word *Safavid* is the adjectival form of

¹² See *Ta'thirat-i Ibn 'Arabi bar Ḥikmat-i Muta'alia* (2007/1386 SH), especially chapter II; also Nasr (1978), chapters 1 and 2.

“Safi,” referring to Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn himself. The groups of people whom the Ottomans called the *qizilbash* or red-heads were Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn’s staunch followers. So the Safavid order started as a Sunni Sufi order and until the time of Sultan Haydar remained Sunni. The full Shi‘itization of the order took place just before Shah Isma‘il ascended the throne. The movements of Sufism during the Safavid period have been studied well by a number of scholars such as Kathrine Babayan (1996:117–39); Amoretti (1986:610–55); Abd al-Husayn Zarinkub (1983:224–30); and notably by volume III of *The Heritage of Sufism* (Leonard Lewisohn and Morgan, 1999).

The Lewisohn contribution to the book entitled *Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān: Taṣawwuf and ‘Irfān in Late Safavid Iran* (pp. 63–134) is particularly illuminating in bringing out the complicated relationship that had developed between Sufism and ‘*irfān* and that influenced all the subsequent thought in this domain. He argues that in the intellectual orientation of the leading masters of the School of Iṣfahān, Baha al-Dīn Āmulī (d. 1621), Mullā Ṣadrā and his two sons-in-law, ‘Abd al-Razzaq Lāhiji (d. 1072/1662) and Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kashani (d. 1092/1682), *taṣawwuf* or Sufism remains the fundamental element. He has even gone so far as to claim that if we extract Sufism from ‘*irfān* (understood here as only a theoretical exercise) then the entire Persian intellectual tradition would be lacking in both wisdom (*ḥikma*) and philosophy (*falsafa*) (Lewisohn and Morgan, 1999:134). We would like to draw on some of the thoughts of the aforementioned figures in order to show how they shaped the contemporary perception of Iranian Sufism.

In Lāhiji’s scheme the Sufi must be accomplished in knowledge of philosophy (‘*ilm-i ḥikmat*) and ways of theoretical methods (*tariq-i nazar*) before laying claim to being a Sufi (Lāhiji, 1992: 38–9). Thus, we learn that it is not wrong to follow a Sufi path, but the initiate needs to become conversant in rational sciences such as *kalām* (theology) and *falsafa* (philosophy). Mullā Ṣadrā’s book *Kasr al-Aṣnām al-Jāhiliyya* shows his endorsement of the genuine

Sufis whom he calls *arbab al-taṣawwuf* (masters of Sufism); these latter need to be distinguished from the ignorant among the Sufis (*Ṣuḥfīyan-i nādān*) (cited in Lewisohn and Morgan, 1999:96). He also regards Sufi practices such as *dhikr* in high esteem, which according to him are integrally “Islamic.” But in the same work, he castigates the pseudo-Sufis and their innovative practices. In speaking of the pseudo-Sufis’ extravagant claims, Ṣadrā states:

They [pseudo-Sufis] claim, “Sharī‘ah is for someone who is [still] veiled, not for those who have attained union (*wiṣāl*).” And “Sharī‘ah is the husk and whilst [one] does not tear it apart, one will not reach the kernel”; and “so-and-so shaykh has spoken with God innumerable times” (translation mine: Ṣadrā 2003, *Kasr al-Aṣnām*, p. 26).

It is to be noted that Sufis themselves caution against the pseudo-Sufis, as can be seen in classical Sufi treatises and Sufi poetry. In his autobiographical work *Risalah she aṣl* (*The Three Principles*), Mullā Ṣadrā introduces himself as *khadim al-fuqarā*,¹³ which is a noticeable allusion to Sufis and an indication that he considers himself one of them. In summary, the Shi‘a philosophers of the School of Iṣfahān from Mir Damad to Mir Findiriski (d.1640) show disdain for popular Sufism but align themselves *in toto* with the quintessential aspect of Sufism which they call *irfān*. Theirs is the intellectual Sufism in which what is at stake is the attainment of *ma‘rifā*. But that is precisely the *summum bonum* of Sufism as Sufis read *li-ya‘budūn* to be *li-ya‘rifūn* in the verse “I have not created jinn and mankind except to serve/worship Me” (Qur‘ān 51:56) [Arberry trans. 1955; see also Qayṣarī 2002/1381Sh, p. 55], and the triad *makhāfa-maḥabba-ma‘rifā* (fear-love-knowledge) embodies the fundamental hierarchy in Sufism. In the words of a great Sufi master of the last century (Shaykh al-‘Alawī of Algeria):

The studies of the doctrine and meditation or intellectual contemplation are among the best and most effective

¹³ *She aṣl*, p. 5. On *khadim al-fuqarā* see *The Heritage* (Vol. III), *op.cit.* p. 97.

means (to attain to God). But they are not within the scope of everyone (Lings, 1981:27).

The Safavid era saw some of the major antagonists of Sufism, especially in the works of the Akhbarī School (which focuses exclusively on *Hadīth* literature), who were the Shi'i world's counterpart to the Salafīs of the modern world. In this regard, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisi's role (d. 1112/1700) is analogous to that of Ibn Taymiyya in the Sunni world. Both were the archenemies of Sufism, and paradoxically both seemed to exhibit certain Sufi affiliations. In his *Jawāhir al-'uqūl*, Majlisi declared the murder of one Sufi to be equivalent to the performance of a righteous deed (*'amal ṣāliḥ*).¹⁴ Thus, it is no wonder Ibn 'Arabi has this to say about the exoteric *'ulamā'*:

God created no one more onerous and troublesome for the Folk of Allāh than the exoteric scholars (*'ulamā' al-rusum*). In relation to the folk of Allāh the exoteric scholars are like the pharaohs in relation to God's messengers (*Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. I, p. 279; also cited in Chittick, 1989:247).

Yet it was Majlisi who wrote such a work as *Zad al-Ma'ad* and eulogized Mir Damad, who showed considerable mystical inclinations, just as Ibn Taymiyya, who, despite his virulent attack on Sufism, wrote a panegyric on 'Abd al-Qādir Jilāni (d. 561/1166). Besides Majlisi, a number of *'ulamā'* rose up against Sufism as can be seen from treatises such as *al-Fawa'id al-dhīnīyah fi-l-radd al-ḥukamā wa-l-Ṣufiyya* of Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumi (d. 1089/1678), and *Ḥadiqat al-Sh'ia* of Ahmad bin Muḥammad Muqaddas Ardabili (d. 981/1573). It should be noted that the Sufi orders themselves were not free of liability, as some of them became lax in their praxis of the *Sharī'ah* and began to pay more attention to outward aspects, such as dress and cultural customs (Nasr, 1970:240–41). According to Nasr, it was from this standpoint that

¹⁴ Cited in *ibid.* pp.133; also found in Majlisi's *Jawāhir al-'uqūl*, p. 9

'*irfān* began to supplant *taṣawwuf* in the outward sense of the term (inwardly they refer to the same reality):

..in religious circles Sufism henceforth changed its name to '*irfān* and to this day in the official Shi'ite religious circles and madrasahs one can openly study, teach and discuss '*irfān* but never *taṣawwuf* which is too often associated with the lax dervishes oblivious to the injunctions of the Sharia...(Nasr, 1970:241).

What actually happened during the Safavid epoch is that as the Sufi orders became more popular and developed certain deviant practices such as extravagant claims to sainthood as depicted in Mullā Ṣadrā's *Kaṣr al-aṣnām*, many religious scholars reacted against them by declaring them unorthodox or heretic. Henceforth, within the class of the '*ulamā*', it was no longer socially acceptable to belong openly to one of the well-known Sufi orders so that mystical teachings/practices were imparted without any outwardly declared Sufi organization. Thus, the word '*irfān* began to be employed instead of *taṣawwuf* even though it referred to the same reality in terms of what constitutes the essential doctrine and method of Sufism. Thus Qaḍi Sa'id Qumi, who became famous as the Ibn 'Arabi of Shi'ism, refers constantly to '*irfān*, but never claims to be a Sufi in the usual sense that is found within the Sufi orders, although he was without doubt a Sufi. Such was the case with genuine spiritual travelers such as Mullā Ṣadrā or Fayḍ Kashani. A thorough development of these tendencies can be found in original historical sources such as *Tarikh-i 'alam 'arā-yi 'Abbasi* (1955, Vol. 1, pp. 20ff., 533ff.) and *Rawḍat al-ṣafā*. Despite the suppression of Sufis by hardliners, Sufism began to resuscitate itself from 1750 onward. The eighteenth century saw the revival of Sufism through such eminent Ni'matullāhī Sufi masters as Sayyid Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh (d. 1184 /1770) and Nur 'Alī Shah (d. 1212 /1797). One could also mention Sayyid Muḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī "Bahr al-'Ulūm" (d. 1212/1797), who was the mentor of a number of renowned jurists (*fuqaha*) of Karbalā and Najaf and who eventually brought them

into the Ni'matullāhī Order (Pazouki, 2009:441). Nur 'Alī Shah composed an epic Sufi poem, *Jannat al-wiṣāl*, that attempts to treat all the major themes of Sufi doctrine, from ordinary issues of the *Shari'ah* to intricate issues of Akbarian ontology.

Sufi Orders and Sufi Thought in the Intellectual Circles

In the preceding analysis we have seen that the dichotomy between Sufism and *irfān* had developed during the Safavid era and thenceforth Sufism or *taṣawwuf* began to acquire negative undertones. However, it can be argued that the appeal of Persian Sufi literature (especially Sufi poetry) was powerful enough to prevent everybody from share the perspective of Majlisi and his followers. The literati saw in those verses the glory of Persian culture. Thus the centrality of Sufism in the medieval Perso-Islamic literary culture is well recognized by several scholars, both Western and Iranian (see e.g. Ḥikmat 1960; Furuzānfar 1972/1351SH; Afshār 1989; Yarshater 1955; Zarinkūb 1985/1364SH and 1978; Schimmel, 1978, 1988; Nasr, 1991). The fact that *littérateurs* of such magnitude as Iraj Afshār, Badi al-Zaman Furuzānfar and 'Abd al-Husayn Zarinkūb accept this thesis demonstrates that the destiny of Persian literature is inseparable from Sufism. Qasim Ghani's survey of the life of Ḥāfiz, *Baḥth dar Athār wa Afkār wa Aḥwal-i Ḥāfez* (*Studies in the Life, Works, and Thought of Ḥāfez* and subtitled *A History of Sufism from its Origin until the Age of Ḥāfez*, 1977) emphasizes the importance of Sufism to the formation of Persian poetry and civilization.

Before dealing with the traditional Sufi orders and their intellectual contribution to society, a word must be said about the "Shi'i-fication of *taṣawwuf*." All the present Sufi orders in Iran such as the Dhahabiyya (origin: Kubrawiyya Order), Ni'matullāhī, Naqshbandiyya and Qādiriyya trace back to Sunni origin in the sense that their founders all followed a Sunni *madhhab* (school of law). In a similar vein, all the great poets of Persia such as Rūmī,

Ḥāfīz, and ‘Aṭṭār were Sufis, but the life and teachings of these figures were internalized or Shi‘itized within the matrix of Shi‘ite Islam just as they were Sunni-cized (although they followed a Sunni *madhhab*, “esoterism” was their point of departure) in Sunni climates. Thus, for the vast majority of the followers of the first two of these traditional Sufi orders, all the great Sufis were also Shi‘as. Therefore, Rūmī is a Sunni Sufi in Turkey, while he is considered a Shi‘a Sufi in Iran. This crucial observation once again attests that Sufism as the inward (esoteric) dimension of Islam stands above denominational differences and cannot be reduced to a given theology, which Sufi masters such as Shāh Ni‘matullah Wali stress in their poems.¹⁵ It is not accidental that the first eight Shi‘a Imams are also the Poles (*aqṭāb*) in Sufism and are viewed differently in different climates. A recent book edited by S. G. Safavi (2008) entitled *Rūmī’s Spiritual Shi‘ism* features essays by prominent scholars such as S. H. Nasr, W. Chittick and S. Pazouki, whose main contention is that Rūmī was a spiritual Shi‘a and by virtue of being a spiritual Shi‘a, he was also a true Shi‘a. This recalls the famous utterance by Seyyed Hayder Āmuli (d.1385), an influential Shi‘a theologian-mystic, that “a true Sufi is a Shi‘a and a true Shi‘a is a Sufi.” According to a contemporary Shi‘a Sufi master in Iran:

Every poet, writer and Sufi is a Shi‘a who believes in the *walāya/wilāya* of ‘Alī (the first Shi‘a Imam and fourth Sunni Caliph)...taking this into consideration Sa‘dī, Ḥāfīz and Rūmī and in general, all the great Sufis were Shi‘ites (Tabandah, 2000:11–23).

Similarly, one of the leading seminarians of Qum, Ḥasanzadah Āmuli, devotes 20 pages in his *Commentary on Dāwūd Qaysarī’s Prolegomenon to the Fuṣūṣ* to proving that Ibn ‘Arabi is a Shi‘a, while Michel Chodkiewicz (a leading Ibn ‘Arabi scholar) has demonstrated convincingly that he is a Sunni (Ḥasanzadah Āmuli, 2011:34ff). Chodkiewicz seems to disagree with any Shi‘i

¹⁵ See *Celebrating a Sufi Master* (2003, pp. 71, 82); also *Diwan-i Shah Ni‘matullah Wali*, pp. 689 and 755

interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi insofar as such interpretations would categorize him to be a Shi'a. The cause for alarm is justifiable, since it would be, in Chodkiewicz's own words, difficult to "uncover a clandestine Shi'a in the writings of a self-confessed Sunni" (Chodkiewicz, 1993:5).

The traditional Sufi orders that are prevalent in Iran are the Ni'matullāhī, Dhahabiyya, Naqshbandiyya, Qādiriyya, Khāksār, Kawthariyya, and the controversial Ahl al-Ḥaqq.¹⁶ The Ni'matullāhī is further branched into Sultan 'Alī Shāh or Gunabadiya; Ṣafī 'Alī Shāh and Dhu'l-riyāsayn. The Qādiriyya and Naqshbandiyya are found in Kurdistan in western Iran and are somewhat removed from the high culture. Shiraz used to be the center of the Dhahabiyya Order until the twentieth century with small branches in other cities. However, today the Dhahabiyya order is found in all the major Iranian cities. The person responsible for the resuscitation of the Dhahabi order was Quṭb al-Dīn Nayrizi (d. 1172/1759), who was the author of several poetical works and prose treatises in Persian and Arabic, including *Risāla-yi fāṣl al-khitāb*, *Shams al-ḥikma*, *Kanz al-ḥikma*, *Anwar al-wilāyah*, *Nūr al-hidāya* and *Risāla-yi 'ishqiyya*. In *Fāṣl al-kitāb* he explicates the tenets of Ibn 'Arabi's theosophy and details his mystical experiences (Lewisohn, 1999:36). He also refutes Mir Damad's *ad hominem* attack on Rūmī's *Mathnawī* by composing equally forceful satirical poems. Abū al-Hamid Ganjaviyan, who was a professor of dermatology at the University of Tabrīz and who passed away recently, was the master of the Dhahabiyya Order. He obtained his M.D. from the University of Tehran, then continued post-graduate studies in the 1950-60's in Europe and the United States, and was the author of numerous articles. The Dhahabis are very intellectually active, as evidenced by Muḥammad Khājawī, who edited and translated into Persian more than 20 works of Mullā Ṣadrā, including a nine-

¹⁶ For further information in this regard see Lewisohn (1998, 1999).

volume translation of Ṣadrā's magnum opus, *Asfār*, an 18-volume translation of Ibn 'Arabi's *Futūḥāt*, and also several key treatises of the followers of Ibn 'Arabi such as Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) and Mullā Shams al-Dīn Fanārī (d. 834/1431).

Of the three Ni'matullāhī orders, the largest is the Sultan 'Alī Shāh Gunabadi (d.1327/1909) branch named after its inaugurator. Sultan 'Alī Shāh composed several works on *tafsīr* and *'irfān* that enjoy wide popularity, for example *Sa'ādat-nāmā*, *Majma'-i sa'ādat* and *Bayān al-sa'ādat*, which is a four-volume Sufi-Shi'a commentary on the Qur'ān. The present master/*quṭb* of the order is Dr. Nūr 'Alī Tābanda, who insists that his followers should uphold the tenets of the *Sharī'ah*—for instance, the female disciples should maintain the Islamic *ḥijāb* (Lewisohn, 1998:453). Dr. Tābanda was trained in the affairs of Sufism under the tutelage of his father and brother who were themselves *shaykhs* of the order. He was educated in law at Sorbonne University (Paris) and became a professor of law at Tehran University. He also served as a judge and was granted permission (*ijāzah*) to decree *fatwas* (legal opinions). While in Paris he attended the lectures of Henry Corbin, and the latter insisted that he write in French about the Ghunābādī Order and the school of thought that it has established (Tābanda, 1998:v).

Professor Shahram Pazouki, a scholar of Western Philosophy and Sufism, is a member of this particular branch and is well-known even outside Iran. He has published numerous books and articles and translated several key Western philosophical works into Persian. Among his numerous books mention must be made of *The Philosophy of Art and Beauty in Islam*, which is an original contribution to the subject. His vast erudition ranges from Sufi epistemology and comparative studies to art and poetry. He is also the editor of the journal *Rūmī Studies*, which is published by the Iranian Institute of Philosophy.

The Ṣafī 'Alī Shahī branch of the Ni'matullāhī Order was influential in the political realm and within the upper classes of

Iranian society. It was influential in the Constitutional Movement of 1905 and other political events, but after the revolution was forced to change many of its political agendas. It has a 12-man committee to select its *quṭb*. The third branch of the Ni‘matullāhī Order is the Dhu‘l-riyāsateyn branch, which is well-known in the West through its celebrated master, Dr. Javad Nūrbakhsh (d. 1429/2008). Dr. Nūrbakhsh was responsible for the spread of this order throughout Iran in the 1970’s. By 1978 the number of *khāniqāhs* established by him reached 60. In the late 1950’s, Javad Nūrbakhsh and his disciples established the Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Ni‘matullāhī in Tehran in order to publish books on Sufism. From the early 1960’s to 1978, some 80 books were published in this series, including Nūrbakhsh’s own prose and poetical works (Lewisohn, 1998:459–60). To date, several of his books have been translated into various European languages. He was one of the most prolific Sufi writers of the last century. Some of the titles of his books are as follows: *Sufi Symbolism* (15 volumes, devoted to the symbolic and theosophical vocabulary in Sufi poetry), *In the Tavern of Ruin: Seven Essays on Sufism*, and *In the Paradise of the Sufis* (the last two of these were translated into several languages). The Ni‘matullāhī Order emphasizes contemplative disciplines. Its main practices are *dhikr-i-khafī* (silent invocation), *fikr* (reflection), *murāqabah* (meditation), *wird* (litany), and *muḥāsabah* (self-assessment) (Nasr, 1991:158).

Sufi Thought in the Intellectual Circles

As happened elsewhere in the Islamic world, with the rise of modernity and modernization and the decline of Islamic civilization, many began to reassess the traditional account of life, religion, and reality. In their zeal to understand “what went wrong,” many intellectuals in the Islamic world have found a scapegoat in Sufism. Aḥmad Kasravi (d. 1365/1946) was one such rationalist who laid all the blame for the backwardness of the nation upon people’s affiliation with Sufism or their love of Sufi literature. He was an

advocate of “pure reason” who saw little meaning in the symbolism of Rūmī’s or Ḥāfiz’s poetry that deals with Divine love, realities of paradise, and the meaning of creation, among other topics. Thus, he excoriated Sufism and attempted to deconstruct the entire edifice of Persian Sufi literature, as can be seen from his books such as *Şufigari* (“Sufism”) and *Ḥāfez Cheh Migūyad* (“What Does Ḥāfiz Say?”). It was evident from his works that he was working towards pre-determined conclusions and his familiarity with the historical circumstances of Sufism or Persian poetry was rather limited.¹⁷ Although Kasravi was able to create some commotion in intellectual circles, he was, like other modernists, unsuccessful, primarily because Iranian society as a whole still had faith in the traditional forms of life permeated by Sufi poetry and religious piety.

In a somewhat different manner, the person of ‘Alī Shari‘ati (d. 1397/1977), whose thinking was grounded in the Marxist-socialist worldview, also displays the influence of Sufism in his thought. His leftist outlook was shaped by Frans Fanon and third-worldism, which was quite prevalent among Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian intellectuals at that time. His affinity for *irfān* dated back to his childhood, when once and for all some enigmatic occurrences changed his life and instilled a deep love for *taşawwuf* in his soul.¹⁸ He composed a book, inspired by Rūmī’s *Mathnawī*, that is comparable to the Sufis’ ecstatic sayings (*shathiyyāt*), as one commentator has remarked. This work, known as *Kavīr* (literally, “desert”), is different from his other works and contains stories that are of a symbolic nature. In *Kavīr*, he often refers to the famous twelfth-century mystic ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, who was brutally murdered, and calls him his brother. He also shows high regard for Mansūr al-Ḥallāj.¹⁹ However, he was critical of Ibn ‘Arabi, for he thought the

¹⁷ For an excellent investigation of Kasravi’s criticism of Sufism see Ridgeon (2006). My conclusions are largely based on his analysis.

¹⁸ *Zindeghi nameh-i siyasi-i Ali Shari‘ati*, pp. 211–12

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 219

latter made Sufism too theoretical and gave the impression that Sufism can be taught theoretically whilst reckoning that Sufism cannot be learned from books. It is probable that Massignon's (1982) idiosyncratic interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysical doctrines, which Sharī'ati finds too abstruse, might have exerted an influence on him, especially if we remember the fact that Sharī'ati lived and studied in France for some time. In addition, he has also expressed disapproval of *khāniqāh*-based Sufism and the Sufi concept of *qutb*.²⁰

Unlike Sharī'ati, Abdul Karim Soroush is an egalitarian thinker who exhibits eclectic taste in his scholarship and thinking. That is to say, although he shows considerable influence of Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī and Sufism in general, his is a project that picks up "good" things, from Popper to Rūmī to Shāh Wali Ullah, to some obscure Chinese thinker. His is a system that leads to everywhere and consequently "nowhere." Numerous DVDs can be found in which Soroush produced his own commentary on *Mathnawī*, and his approbation of Rūmī is apparent from his extensive references to him throughout his opus. In Soroush's epistemology, religion, and mysticism, along with philosophy and science are the four legitimate modes of attaining knowledge. However, sometimes he shows an ambivalent attitude towards Sufism, as he has disparaged Sufi ethics in one place in his writings and argued that Rūmī was not a Sufi but an *'arif* (Bos, 2002:234–37). This may be due to the negative connotation that the word *taṣawwuf* has gained in the Iranian parlance. Above all, the linchpin of Soroush's thinking is relativism rather than Sufism; and this is recognizable from his unorthodox interpretation of the Qur'ān and the Prophet and the fact that he does not have any known affiliation with a Sufi master or order.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 220

Reflecting the general opinion in some Muslim countries, a group of religious scholars in Iran including Grand Ayatullah Naṣīr Makārim-Shīrāzī opines that Sufism is an aberration that has no legitimacy in Islam (Bos, 2007:66). Another Grand Ayatullah, Mar'ashi Najafī, regards Sufism as a great calamity for Islam and as grossly un-Islamic. In his opinion, the disease of Sufism spread from Christian monks to Sunnis such as Ḥasan al-Baṣri, Shibli (Nu'mānī), and the like, and thence it spread to the Shi'a world as well (*Samat*, 13: 199–200).

Philosophical Sufism and Its Key Exponents

In this section we shall expound the nature of activities that are taking place with regard to theoretical gnosis or doctrinal Sufism, or simply philosophical Sufism. I shall argue that the tradition of *'irfān-i nazārī* is a living one in Iran and it is by no means intellectually inert. To understand the rapid development of philosophical Sufism (associated with the school of Ibn 'Arabi) in Iran, it is necessary to explore Ayatullah Khomeini's relationship with it, for it was he who patronized it despite opposition from certain quarters. Khomeini studied *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and other seminal texts of the school of Ibn 'Arabi for years with a renowned master of traditional wisdom, Muḥammad 'Alī Shāhābādī (d. 1370/1951). His deep admiration for Ibn 'Arabi can be gauged from his open letter to Mikhail Gorbachev for a civilizational dialogue in which along with that of Mullā Ṣadrā, he mentioned the name of Ibn 'Arabi.²¹ He also wrote two important works (*Miṣbāh al-hidāya ila al-khilāfa wa al-wilāya* and *Ta'līqā bar fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*) in the tradition of the school of Ibn 'Arabi that show his intimate knowledge of it. He expressed disagreement with Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350) over the relation between the Divine Essence (*al-dhāt*) and the level of unity of Names and Qualities of God.

²¹ For the English and the Persian text of the letter, see *Iran Times*, January 13, 1989; also cited in Knysh (1992).

Khomeini also composed several Sufi poems in which, like other Sufis, he evokes Sufi themes, for instance, asking the Sufi to annihilate his ego.²²

Before turning to some of the key exponents of *'irfān-i nazari*, we would like to provide a synopsis of the tremendous academic activity currently taking place in the field of philosophical Sufism. There are altogether 126 academic journals for *'irfān*, Islamic philosophy, and theology and among these, 10 to 12 journals are solely devoted to *'irfān*.²³ The key themes and the numbers of their circulation in journals are as follows: Universal Man (41076), unity of being (33767), Ḥāfiz (32533), general notion of sanctity/*walāyah* (23763), Ibn 'Arabi (23599), imaginal world (19405), Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī (10970), love (*'ishq*) (7391), intellect (6734), soul (6621), annihilation (*fanā*) (6452), al-Ghazzālī (6085), and spiritual journey (5926).

The numbers of circulation above show the academic enthusiasm for Sufism in Iran. The most frequently discussed topics are Universal Man (*insān al-kāmil*), *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Ibn 'Arabi, Rūmī, Ḥāfiz, imaginal world, and *walāyah*. The total number of articles published in the last 20 years would surpass that of all the European languages several hundred times. Although the quality of many of these journals and articles is often below the required academic standard, the sheer number shows how Ibn 'Arabi and his ideas have infiltrated various strata of society. The *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (and several other books) of Ibn 'Arabi has been translated into Persian along with important texts of the school of Ibn 'Arabi such as those by Qūnawi, Qayṣarī, and Kashani. In addition, several multi-volume commentaries on *Mathnawī* have seen the light of the day. The Iranian Institute of Philosophy through

²² See *Ta'liqah bar fuṣūṣ*, pp. 39–44; for his poem see *Rah-i 'Ishq*, 1368/1989, p. 25.

²³ I have gathered all this information from an Iranian data-bank, www.noormags.com, that contains a list of journals as well as a search engine.

Intishārat-i Muassisa-yi Pazhūhishi-yi Hikmat wa Falsafī-yi in Iran has published several volumes on Rūmī, of which Pari Riyahi's *Intellect in the Thought of Rūmī* (Iran: 2006) and G. R. Avani's edited six-volumes collection of articles on various dimensions of Rūmī's thought need mention (ed. Maqālāt-i Mawlānā Pazhūhi, Iran: 2008). Furthermore, books written on Sufism by prominent Western scholars of Sufism such as A. Schimmel, S. H. Nasr, H. Corbin, W. Chittick, and C. Ernst have been translated. At present there are three institutes for Sufi studies: the Iranian Institute of Philosophy, the Soroush Mawlānā Cultural Institute, and the Iranian Institute of Culture and Mysticism. These institutes, along with some other cultural centers (such as the Centre for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia), regularly organize international and local conferences on Sufism.

Scholars such as Nasr (2007) have shown that the tradition of *'irfān-i nazari* in Persia has continued since the Qajar period. However, if we consider the period of the last 20 years and the number of books and articles published and translated during this time, as well as the key personalities who gained prominence as masters of *'irfān-i nazari*, then it can be convincingly argued that this tradition is burgeoning, which deserves particular attention. Among the intellectuals who have received a traditional *madrassa* education, none is more famous than the two Āmulis: 'Abdullah Javādī Āmuli and Ḥasan Ḥasanzadah Āmuli. Both went through rigorous training in their study of philosophy and mysticism for several years under such authorities as 'Allama Ṭabāṭabā'ī, who is well known in the West through the translation of a number of his works.²⁴ Each of these Āmulis has written over a hundred books

²⁴ Several of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's books have been translated into English: *Shi'ite Islam* with an introduction by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), *A Shi'ite Anthology*, ed. and trans. William C. Chittick (London, 1980), *Islamic Teachings: An Overview* (trans. R. Campbell, New York, 1989), *The Qur'ān in Islam: Its Impact and Influence on the Life of Muslims*, trans. Assadullah Yate (London, 1987), *The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics*

ranging from jurisprudence, theology, traditional cosmology, and philosophy to *'irfān*. Javādī Āmuli also has written books explaining the relationship between Islam and Modern Science and on such timely issues as Islam and the environment. Javādī Āmuli has written over 20 books on *'irfān*, but it is his three-volume recension of *Tamhid al-Qawā'id* of Ibn Turkah Iṣfahānī (d. 835/1432) that should be considered his main work on philosophical Sufism. This work reveals his erudition in Sufi metaphysics. He clarifies in great detail such thorny issues as the hypostases of being, the difference between the absolutely non-conditioned being and the relatively non-conditioned being, and the negatively unconditioned being and being conditioned by something.²⁵ In contrast to the view of the philosophers, he argues that the stage of the negatively unconditioned Being (*wujūd bi-shart-i-la*) corresponds to the first self-determination of the Divine Essence.²⁶ He also defends Ibn 'Arabi's *waḥdat al-wujūd* against the proponents of *waḥdat al-shūhud* (unity of witness), arguing that the former takes precedence over the latter.²⁷ He offers lucid explanations comprehensible to contemporary readers of the ultimate stage of Sufi experience, *fanā'*, and its threefold divisions—annihilation in God's Act, Names, and Qualities, and finally in the Essence, each of which corresponds to *Tawḥīd al-af'al*, *Tawḥīd al-ṣifāt*, and *Tawḥīd al-dhāt* respectively (Āmuli, 2006:283–86). His exposition of the concept of “self-recognition” (*shinakht-i nafs*) shows his deep existential knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of Sufi epistemology, in which he states that at the end of the soul's journey it comes to realize that its essence is

(London: ICAS Press, 2003), *Risalah al-Wilāyah—A treatise on Islamic Mysticism and Spiritual Wayfaring*, an excellent compilation (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2014) and *Kernel of the Kernel*, which has been cited in this article. For notes on his life and works see Algar, H (2006), “‘Allamah Sayyid Muḥammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī: Philosopher, Exegete, and Gnostic,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*: pp. 1–26.

²⁵ *Tahrir-i tamhid al-qawa'id*, p. 52–53.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.39

but an “existential poverty” (*faqr*) that should not be confused with its being in need of an “attribute of poverty” (Āmuli 2006, p. 281). His writings are rich in technical, philosophical, and Sufi terminologies and represent a synthesis of both *ḥikmah al-muta‘āliyah* and the school of Ibn ‘Arabi. However, Javādī Āmuli is best known for his nine-volume commentary on Mullā Ṣadrā’s *Asfār*, which is the most comprehensive and meticulous commentary written since the time of Sabzawari (d.1877) or perhaps ever since Mullā Ṣadrā himself (see e.g., Rizvi, 2007:97). It demonstrates his accomplishment as one of the most outstanding philosophers (certainly among the very best in his own generation) to have appeared in recent decades. In addition, he composed a philosophical treatise, *Proofs of Divine Existence*, which in a sense summarizes fourteen hundred years of philosophical, theological, and Sufi discussions of proofs of God in the Islamic tradition. Despite all these achievements, Āmuli’s scholarship is tainted by his inability to render the traditional philosophy that he advocates relevant to the larger body of the intelligentsia. As is often the case with seminarians, Āmuli does not display much enthusiasm for an engagement with modern philosophy or the scientific worldview that dominates the intellectual landscape of most educated Iranians. Hence, his writings hardly generate interest among Western-educated Iranians who ignore him as a “mullah-oriented” philosopher.

Ayatullah Ḥasan Ḥasanzadah Āmuli is even more prolific in Sufi metaphysics. Besides his seven-volume commentary on Ibn Sīnā’s *Ishārāt*, a two-volume commentary on Mullā Ṣadrā’s *Asfār*, and a recension of metaphysics and psychology in *al-Shifā*, he has produced multi-volume works on philosophical Sufism of which mention must be made of an inclusion of a new chapter, *Fass al-Fatimiyya*, in his commentary on *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. In addition, he has published a two-volume commentary on Qayṣarī’s *Introduction to Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, Lessons on Self-knowledge; Qur’ān, ‘irfān, and Demonstration Are Inseparable from Each Other; Union of the*

Intellect and the Object of Intellection; and *Insān al-Kāmil According to Nahj al-balaghah*, among many others. In his commentary on the *Fusūs* he explains why he felt obliged to include a chapter on Lady Fatima. He states that he often wondered why the *Fusūs* did not contain any female *insān al-kāmil* despite the frequent mention of Mary in the Qur'ān and a chapter therein being named after her. Then one day while he was teaching the *Fusūs*, one of his disciples, who was in fact a spiritual traveler (*ṣālik*), spontaneously uttered the name of Lady Fatima through inspiration (*ilhām*), and after that he conceived the plan to write a *fass* on her.²⁸ Like the rest of the *Fusūs* this *fass* was meant to be esoteric. Thus, it deals with the cosmic symbolism of marriage (*nikāh*), numerology, and many novel interpretations of *insān al-kāmil* that are predicated upon women and femininity. In his super-commentary on al-Qayṣarī's *Muqaddima*, Ḥasanzadah Āmulī demonstrates his deep engagement with the school of Ibn 'Arabi. In addition, the former explicitly identifies the Sufīs with the "divinely inspired scholars" (*aliman-i rabbāni*), and he does not hesitate to use the term "Sufī" or *taṣawwuf*, which for him bears the same connotation as it does for other Sufīs.²⁹

It should be remembered that these figures belonged to an informal Sufi chain (popularly known as the *Silsila-i Qadi*, see Faghfoory 2003:xvii), received initiation, and became masters themselves. Certain scholars (see e.g., Lewisohn 2009) argue that the *'irfān* of these *'ulamā'* is not Sufism, because it is too abstract and philosophical and a world apart from the *khāniqāh*-centered Sufism of the traditional orders that revolves around the themes of love, poetry, and *samā'*. But this is a misleading argument, one that does not account for the primary and secondary components of

²⁸ *Mumidd al-himam*, pp. 643-44

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 664, 666 and 679. For his views on "Sufis" see his website ("sufi kist"), <http://www.all-hassanzade.blogfa.com/category/45>.

Sufism. When one skims through the aforementioned gnostics' works, one is struck by their frequent quotations of Rūmī or Ḥāfīz (even in the midst of a philosophical discussion) and the mystical poetry they themselves have composed. As for *samā'*, it may be asked whether it is an integral component of Sufism and whether all great Sufis in history participated in it. To recapitulate, although seminarians such as the Āmulis have kept the teaching of Islamic philosophy and philosophical Sufism alive, they have failed to engage the larger intellectual society in dialogue because of their lack of knowledge of modern philosophies and European languages.

Space will not allow us to thoroughly document the contributions of other great figures in this tradition such as Jalāl ad-Dīn Ashtiyani, who wrote such important works as *Being from the Viewpoint of Philosophy and Mysticism* (*'irfān*) and *A Critique on al-Ghazzālī's Incoherence of the Philosophers*, besides his numerous recensions of and lengthy introductions to Sufi metaphysical texts, including the one on Qayṣarī's *Prolegomenon to the Fuṣūṣ*. Some other personalities worthy of mention in this tradition are Muḥammad Riḍa Qumsha'i (d. 1305–6/1888–9), Mirza Hashim Ashkiwari Rashti (d. 1332/1914), Mirza Mahdi Āshtiyani (d. 1372/1953), Mirza Aḥmad Āshtiyani (d. 1359/1940), and Abūl-Ḥasan Rafi'i Qazwini (d. 1394/1974). Riḍa Qumsha'i was famous as an Ibn 'Arabi of his time and wrote many important glosses upon key gnostic texts such as *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* and *Tamhid al-qawā'id*. His student Mirza Hashim Ashkiwari Rashti in turn wrote a commentary on Fanārī's *Miṣbāh al-uns* and was the teacher of the two Āshtiyanis mentioned above, who were themselves notable masters of *'irfān*.

Finally, if there is anyone outside the circle of the traditional *'ulamā'* who can be compared to the aforementioned *ḥakīms*, it is Gholamreza Avani, who combines in his person, on the one hand, in-depth knowledge of the Western philosophical traditions (both ancient and modern) and on the other, vast erudition in both Sufi

metaphysics and Islamic philosophy. Possessing a command of English, French, Persian, and Arabic (and a substantial knowledge of Greek and German) and being an internationally acclaimed scholar, Avani appears to be one of the few scholars who is competent in dealing with such diverse subjects as philosophical Sufism and the rationalistic philosophy of Kant. He is one of the few scholars in Iran who is able to teach the *Fuṣūṣ* of Ibn 'Arabi whilst the *presential* dimension (*ḥuḍūri*) of his knowledge becomes palpable when he elucidates the text. Considering what we have delineated here, it is no wonder that Iran became the hub for the making of twentieth century's well-known scholars of Sufism such as H. Corbin, T. Izutsu, S. H. Nasr, W. Chittick, W. J. Morris and S. Murata, amongst several others.

Conclusion

This essay attempted to analyze major trends of Sufism in Iran. It demonstrated that in the context of Iran, several categories of spirituality can be observed, namely the traditional Shi'ite Sufi orders, *'irfān-i Shi*, and the informal orders, which by the intrinsic definition of Sufism fall within its purview. It also dealt at length with the nuances of such terms as *taṣawwuf*, *'irfān*, and *'irfān-i naẓari* and discussed the views of contemporary philosopher-theologians regarding these terms. Complementary to all this, section IV demonstrated that, based on our brief survey, philosophical Sufism (as a living tradition of Sufism) is flowering in contemporary Iran.

The general characteristics of spiritual life are centered upon the cultivation of inwardness. Spiritual life is an attempt to live from the center (that is, the Divine Spark, which is the subjective pole of Ultimate Reality). Spiritual aspirants make use of various forms of *dhikr* (invocation) and *fikr* (meditation) to achieve that end. To deliver the Divine theophany (*tajalli*) that is latent within *dhikr* in the inner sanctum of the soul, Sufi orders require their adherents to inculcate intrinsic virtues, because the unicity of the Divine object

demands the totality of the human subject. The challenge of Sufism in Iran lies in striking a balance between the spiritual culture that is cultivated within Sufi orders and their political involvement. Many members of the political elite favor the activities of the Sufi orders, while others are suspicious of them. In addition, many religious scholars (owing to various historic-religious reasons) are hostile to Sufism because they see in it deviation from orthodox Islam and also perhaps an alternative to the Shi'ite notion of *wilāyah* (spiritual guardianship). They confuse the devotion that Sufi seekers have for their masters with the latter's devotion for the Shi'ite Imams. If Sufi orders in Iran took heed of the history of Sufism in the Safavid era, then they would be even more careful with some of the social aspects of Sufism that might seem ostentatious to the *'ulamā'*. By so doing, they would be able to fare better in contemporary Iran.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to Professor Mohammad H. Faghfoory for reading an earlier draft of this article, and making perceptive comments and constructive criticism. His comments and rewriting of parts of this paper contributed immensely to the improvement of this article. I also wish to thank professors Golam Dastagir, Shahram Pazouki, and Mohammed Rustom, as well as Nicholas Boylston, Arjun Nair, and Zachary Markwith for their numerous corrections and recommendations.

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