

The Course of Islamic Mysticism and Sufism and Its Positive Effect on Islamic Civilization

Mahdi Eftekhar

assistant professor, Department of Islamic Culture, Semnan University of Medical Sciences – 09177216195 – em45sh@yahoo.com

Abstract: Culture is to be known as an aspect of human life distinguishing human from animals, because it is human that develops a culture for oneself through environmental conditions, historical phenomena, absolute and relative ideals, his interpretation of the world, his position in history, and his efforts to coordinate fixed principles and varying events and he lives with this culture. Cultural phenomena may be categorized into three distinct domains: beliefs, tendencies, and behaviors. The characteristics of civilization may be summarized under following four titles: a) orderliness, b) dynamicity, c) universality, and d) cohesion. The reasons behind the blossoming of Islamic civilization may be divided into internal and external factors. The course of Sufism has affected both. 1- Internal factors: Rationality, comprehensiveness, instruction and propagation, placing importance on masses, promoting virtue and preventing vice, systematic activities, deducing facts from the Quran and hadith and dynamicity, generating thoughts and educating pious humans. 2- External factors: Accepting common points in other civilizations and aiming for peace instead of war.

[Mahdi Eftekhar. **The Course of Islamic Mysticism and Sufism and Its Positive Effect on Islamic Civilization.** *J Am Sci* 2013; 9(8s):26-34]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.jofamericanscience.org>. 6

Keywords: Islamic civilization, Sufism, Islam

Introduction

Mysticism is a path toward knowledge. Refinement of the soul and purification of the inside are the prerequisites for stepping on this road. There is no doubt about the fact that Islamic mysticism exists and its sources are original Islamic texts, i.e. the Quran and the Prophet's, Imam Ali's, and other Imams' and dignitaries' Sunnah (Motahhari, Morteza, Collection of Works, No. 23, P. 35-43). In view of history, it can be claimed that what we presently have as Islamic mysticism is formed among Sufis under the name of Sufism. The difference in terms of the verbal meaning between mysticism and Sufism lies in the fact that Sufism lays greater emphasis on practical, social, and fraternal methods and aspects of conduct, while mysticism underlines the theoretical aspects and the knowledge resulting from conduct (Ibid, P. 26). At least until ninth and tenth century of the Islamic calendar, Islamic mysticism emerged in society in form of Sufic methods and through their genealogy. Since tenth century on, mystics outside of Sufic dynasties and inattentive to them emerged (Motahhari, Morteza, Mutual Services of Iran and Islam, P. 664).

The history of Sufism and internal mystical methods undoubtedly constitute a considerable part of the history of Islam. They have seen numerous ups and downs in their historical course and various strong and weak points may be observed in them. Even though some of the teachings of Sufism may be considered as being opposed to the definition of

civilization, it cannot be absolutely deemed as an opponent of civilization and an obstacle for the development of Islamic civilization. In this paper, we aim at investigating aspects of Islamic mysticism and Sufism that have positively affected the components of Islamic civilization. Internal, theoretical, or practical examinations are not intended.

Definition of culture and civilization

1- Culture: Culture has several definitions. As late Mohammad Taghi Jafari believed, since the human's footprint may be observed in all cultural phenomena, culture should be considered as an aspect of human life distinguishing it from animals, because it is human that develops a culture for oneself through environmental conditions, historical phenomena, absolute and relative ideals, his interpretation of the world, his position in history, and his efforts to coordinate fixed principles and varying events and he lives with this culture. This clarifies that courtesy, wisdom, knowledge, education, learning, arts, industry, language, and other characteristics of human life all fall into the realm of culture; that is, the three following distinct domains: beliefs, tendencies, and behaviors (Kashefi, Mohammad-Reza, The History of Islamic Culture and Civilization, P. 2-27).

2- Civilization: The word civilization is derived from the Latin word *civitas* which is equivalent to the ancient Greek word *poieis*. Civilization is the noun for civiliser that means to make civilized. Although the apparent meaning of

civilization is the urban life and getting accustomed to it, each civilization has underlying parts that make up its basis, differentiating it from others.

The characteristics of civilization may be summarized under the following four titles:

a) Orderliness: Systematicity, unity, and order aiming at the specific goals of that civilization

b) Dynamicity: The ability to review new circumstances and requirements and harmonizing with them

c) Universality: Paying attention to other civilizations, exchanging information, qualitative development

d) Cohesion: Public participation against advancement obstacles

As a matter of fact, culture should be deemed as the mother of civilization, and civilization as the developer of culture. It is clear that the blossoming and flourishing of each civilization hinges on the four aforementioned factors.

Reasons behind blossoming of the Islamic civilization

Islam emerged fourteen centuries ago. As historians believe, the climax of the Islamic civilization flourishing was in the third and fourth centuries of the Islamic calendar, although it was not motionless and still in different aspects after that period. What matters greatly is that in Islam's viewpoint, the ultimate goal of the Islamic civilization is to educate pious well-learned humans, not only geographical, economic, military, or even scientific development. Islamic civilization has always educated well-learned humans. The ups and downs of the Islamic civilization and the effects of the schools of thought in it should be evaluated in view of its objective.

Before entering the discussion on the positive effects of mysticism and Sufism in the formation and development of the Islamic civilization, the reasons behind the blossoming of the Islamic civilization should be specified. Given the fourfold characteristics of civilization, certain features may be found in Islamic Sufism each of which effective in providing at least one of the above-mentioned characteristics.

These factors should be divided into internal and external factors.

1- Internal factors:

1-1 Rationality

1-2 Simpleness (tolerance and laxness)

1-3 Comprehensiveness and richness

1-4 Placing importance on instruction and propagation

1-5 Placing importance on masses

1-6 Promoting virtue and preventing vice

1-7 Placing importance on systematic activities

1-8 Deducing facts from the Quran and hadith and dynamicity

1-9 Generating thoughts and science

1-10 Educating committed efficient human force

2- External factors

2-1 Accepting and confirming the positive points of other civilizations and placing importance on interacting with other cultures and civilizations

2-2 Highlighting common points and peace, not war

1-1 Rationality: Even though Sufism considers certain limitations for reason, it should be noted that the denial of Sufism pertains to pure philosophical reason and partial reason. The former relies on what it sees and perceives and the latter is mixed with velleity. Reason has been similarly criticized by other traditionalist and religious schools of thought. However, weakening of reason for Sufism basically occurs when it is opposed by spiritual intuition. This type of intuition is known as divine reason and reason confirming insight and inside luminousness. Not only is it not rejected, but also it is confirmed. The same reason about which Rumi says:

Partial reason was infamous/Mundane pleasures caused human to fail

Partial reason is a tool for illusion and suspicion/For the one who resided in the darkness

(Rumi, Mathnavi, Nicholson's revision, chapter five, verses 463, 464)

There are two types of reason, acquisitive reason/that you learn in school

The other type of reason is God's bestowal/Its source is within the spirit

Except for human's reason and spirit/There is another type of reason, but it is transitory (Ibid., verses 1960-1962)

Even the type of love that Sufis mention against reason is a type of love that only materializes in wise humans, not in rude impudent humans, as Sa'di puts it: "You should give your wise heart to a beloved"

Thus, reason is not denied in mysticism; rather, it is complemented by love. What mystics say is that when human reaches the pinnacle of reason and becomes wise, he should use it as a springboard for flying toward love and not stop in that position. This is what great jihad means." (Javadi Amoli, Abdollah, Human to Human Interpretation, P. 298)

1-2 Simpleness: Sufism is based on innate needs and desires and inside intuitive perception. On the other hand, it accepts that every human, with and

religion or way of thinking has a particular relationship with his own God:

A unique connection without any obligation/is what God has with humans' spirits (Ibid., chapter four, verse 925).

Since humans are different in talents and Ayaan-e Sabete in the viewpoint of mystics, they have especial ways. Thus, mysticism becomes more widespread and can attract more audience and be influential and practical.

1-3 Comprehensiveness: In this regard, Sufism has a plethora of theoretical and practical knowledge that has influenced all branches of Islamic sciences, because many religious scholars and even hadith narrators and clerics tended to Sufism and inside teachings since early centuries, or they became Sufis in the following centuries and wrote a great number of books. The effect of Sufism on different religious teachings may be summarized as follows:

1-3-1 In hadith and religious jurisprudence: Ghovvat Al-Gholoub by Abutaleb Makki (died in 386 Islamic calendar) which is composed in the fourth century is available. It is an encyclopedia of hadith serving ethics and religious jurisprudence deservedly. So far, it is one of the primary sources of hadith with a mystical taste. Al-Lama by Abounasr Seraj (died in 378 Islamic calendar) is another book that not only expresses internal thoughts, but also strives to explain the Prophet's Sunnah and defend it.

1-3-2 In history: Tabaghat Al-Soufiyeh by Abu Abd Al-Rahman Salmi (died in 412 Islamic calendar) and Helliyat Al-Olia by Hafez Abi Naim Esfahani (died in 430 Islamic calendar), an encyclopedia of sufic history and teachings in ten volumes are noticeable works. Other books in this domain are Tazkarat Al-Olia by Attar Neishabouri and Nafahat Al-Ons by Jaami.

1-3-3 In philosophy: Figures like Sheikh Shahab Al-Din Sohrevardi (sheikh of illumination), Seyyed Heydar Amoli, Mirdamad, Sheikh Bahai, and Sadr Al-Mote'allehin Shirazi and many other Islamic sages are influenced by Islamic mysticism and great mystics. The philosophical thoughts of Esmailiyeh and Ekhvan Al-Safa are also rooted in Islamic mysticism. Sohrevardi considers intuitive knowledge to be an inseparable part of complete wisdom. On the crest of his philosophy, Sadr Al-Mote'allehin proves unity of argument using the claims of mystics (see Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, mystical philosophy in Islam).

1-3-4 In literature: Sufis and mystics are way ahead of the followers of all other schools of thought. Without mystical literature, nothing considerable remains in literature. As late Zarrinkoub commented in the book The Importance of Sufic Legacy: "Sufic

literature in Persian and Arabic is of great importance in terms of variety and richness. It consists of poem and prose, philosophy and ethics, history and interpretation, prayer and psalm, hadith and rhythm." A great part of Sufic poem and prose is research and sermon, the contents of most which is disapproving and belittling the world. The world in Sufi's view is a residence on the way to the world hereafter, but it is replete with pests. Starting to like this world is the first step. Its wrongdoing and pleasures creates veils that distracts human from God. Beyond this, it is all about love for God and a desire to reach Him which is the ultimate goal of the mystic and paints Sufi's poems with colors of love, a love full of pain and despair. Sufis have added especial aspects to Persian poetry and upon criticizing their poems, they emphasized taste and interpretation more than tropes. They took odes out of the swamp of lies and flattery to the highest degree and sonnets from lustful love to spiritual affection. They used masnavi as a means for teaching mysticism and ethics and turned quatrain into a format for expressing passing moods and pains. Apart from that, they granted prose especial depth and simplicity. They presented anecdotes and stories in form of meanings and wisdom and contemplated in carnal moods the way some surrealist authors do. They introduced new topics in philosophy and preferred discovery and illumination to reason and arguments. They went beyond the realm of apparent causes and wove their way to the limits of destroying causes. They have considered the multiplicity of the world to end in unity and based their philosophy of unity in existence on it. They moved beyond the superficial in ethics and instruction. They viewed sensual desires more than trying to control them. Upon understanding the Quran, they usually avoided paying attention to the appearance and found the interpretation of the inside to be more noteworthy than getting stuck in the appearance. They learned more lessons from the stories of religious scholars than history. They spoke about awe-inspiring words such as "... in the documents of the followers of Khergheh and relied directly on heartfelt inspiration. They often considered music and Sufic dance (Sama) to be a mount for the spirit and polisher of the soul. They knew psalms and day and night prayers as the source of life for their spirit. Upon praying to God, they painted heartfelt prayers with love and fear both. All of this is illustrated in their literature and works, giving particular credit to their works in terms of extent, variety, depth, and influence.

This extensive diverse literature sometimes deals with the realm of taste and spirit, sometimes with reason and thought. All that involves readers' reason and thought is Sufic mysticism and

philosophy. Sufic sermons and instructions, lifestyles of religious scholars and their words and interpretation of the Quran and hadith and Sufic words are also about the same topic. But what involves taste and spirit is Sufi's poem and sonnet and self-praise and even prayers and psalms. The realm of Sufic philosophy, mysticism, lifestyle, and interpretation does not only belong to prose. Poems are also sometimes a means for conveying these meanings, such as Hadigheh by Sanai, Golshan-e Raaz, and Mesbah Al-Arvah and many other poems. As critics say, they have instructional aspects. But sometimes Sufic poem mixes these two realms and destroys the boundaries of reason and taste and by combining them, works like passionate poems of Attar or Rumi's Mathnavi and Taiyeh by Ebn-e Farez are created. They neither belong to pure reason and thought, nor to a pure artistic world of taste. Sufi's pure abstract taste and art emerges in his mystic sonnets and separates the sonnets of Eraghi, Sanai, Rumi, and to some extent Hafiz from all verbal apparent constraints and purifies it like the spirit. Stories and parables are sometimes used in this respect as a secret code for the story of human's spiritual conduct and the moods of the soul. Rumi's pipe story and the story of the birds in Mantegh Al-Teyr and suchlike stories are presented as a kind of mysterious spiritual itinerary. The Syriac work called "The Garment of Glory" is one of the oldest examples.

Just like Sufic poems, Sufic prose does not belong to a certain realm either. Sometimes this prose turns into a poem replete with passion, attraction, taste, and mysticism. There are a number of Sufic works in prose in the Persian language which may be called as prose poems. Psalms of Pir-e Ansari, Tamhidat by Eyn Al-Ghaza, Savaneh by Ahmad Ghazzali, Lamat by Eraghi, and Lavayeh by Jaami are mystical poems expressed in form of prose. Ma'aref by Baha Valad reminds one of surrealistic literature style in. It looks as if the author loses apparent understanding and surrenders to forgiveness and gives the reign of hand and tongue to the heart so that it can say all that it experiences. But this work does not only deal with taste. It also engages reason and thought. Hence, it is something at the limits of courtesy and philosophy and a mixture of both. Lamat by Eraghi and Lavayeh by Jaami are also of the same color. Abd Al-Jabbar Nafari's tasteful passionate Mavaghef (450 Islamic calendar) and Fotouhat-e Makkiyeh by Ebn-e Arabi are of the same spiritual family. Nonetheless, Sufic prose is not always like that. There are numerous books of sermons and courtesy and lifestyle in Persian and Arabic that play a fundamental role in understanding

Sufic words, teachings, and ways and perceiving their purposes and subjects. Mastering over the entire Sufic spiritual legacy is impossible without allowing for the above-mentioned (Zarrinkoub, Value of Sufic Legacy, P. 128-137).

Given late Zarrinkoub's explanation, the value of Sufis' works in enriching Islamic literature, language, culture, and civilization becomes clear. Moreover, since language and literature is the direct link between civilizations, Sufic rich literature may be known as one of the most significant reasons behind the development of Islamic civilization.

1-3-5 In ethics: Sufism has its own style and some have even defined Sufism together with courtesy and morality. Baab-e Moamelat is the ethical part of books conduct. Kimiaye Sa'adat by Abu Hamed Ghazzali, Mava'ez by Sa'di, Maghalat Al-Eshraf by Khaje Nasir Al-Din Tousi and many other books are completely influenced by Islamic mystical thoughts. Other than these, there are what Sufis have composed on their own practical methods such as Orad Al-Ahbab and Fosous Al-Adab by Seif Al-Din Bakhezri and the like.

1-3-6 In art: In mystics' view, this world is a creation and God is its Creator. What is meant by creation is what we call art. This whole world is a work of art made by an artist who is nobody but God Almighty. Creation of the world is strong, firm, consistent, harmonic and beautiful to the highest degree. The Symbol of beauty, God Almighty, has painted the world with divine colors.

Nasrollah Hekmat considers the meaning of the sentence "... " to be "Right has emerged in the world of being through art." He knows mystics as a creator of a work in the philosophy of art that comprises of components such as hiding the essence of right, code and sign, love, beauty, power, will, promise, creation, manifestation, emergence and knowledge. God is a skillful painter who creates the most beautiful faces from nothing (see Nasrollah Hekmat, Art in Ebn-e Arabi's Mysticism, P. 200-219). Iranian mystical music is famous worldwide and it has been used in Sufi dance (Sama) ceremonies. As Sufis believe, in case of appropriate use and under particular conditions mentioned in the traditions of Sama, it can lead to the opening up of the doors of heart.

The pipe talks about the path full of blood/It narrates the stories of passionate love

The pipe is the friend of anyone who separated from a beloved/Its music tore apart all of our veils (Ibid., chapter one, verse 13)

Innovative artistic rhythms and systems present in Shams Tabrizi's poems and the especial architecture of convents and miniature paintings,

particularly in the works of the master of painting Farshchian and the like are the proofs for this part.

1-4 Placing importance on instruction and propagation

The fact is that although convents were built for refinement and hermitage, there were daily meetings of sermons in there as Ala Al-Doleh Semnani reports. There have been instructions on theoretical mysticism by Mohi Al-Din Arabi and the like to specific students such as Sadr Al-Din Ghounavi. Propagation of religion and public sermons were also parts of Sufi programs. Abu Taleb Makki had a sermon chair in Basra and Kufa. Majales-e Sab'eh by Rumi is a result of such meetings. His Mathnavi, which is a huge work of moral mystical advices, has been used so far in all sermon meetings. Late Zarrinkoub comments in this regard:

This group definitely influenced the balancing of the feelings of sects and religions, prevention of common extremities in the past, and especially propagation of liberty and freedom of thought. In a period when the conquests of Islam had come to an end, and wars and Jihad was not successful in propagating Islam owing to the weakness of the caliphs and kings, Sufis endeavored to propagate Islam, as the effect of Chashtiyeh, Shatariyeh, and Naghshbandiyeh in propagating and expanding Islam among Hindus and Malaysian tribes was far greater than that of previous warriors and mujahids. Some of the Sufis in Egypt and Syria also tried hard to fight Christians; some made great efforts in preventing vice. Naghshbandiyeh contributed greatly to propagating Islam among Tatar and Uzbek tribes. Ghaderiyeh and Tijaniyeh played an important role in propagating Islam in Africa, especially in the vicinity of Sudan, Senegal, and Nigeria.

Razavi Athar comments in this respect: Among missionaries, Muslim Sufis and mystics along with winners of wars, military forces, and Muslim merchants could make numerous Indians convert to Islam via their conduct. They had such great influence and credit in faraway places such as northern India particularly after the Ghaznavi period that kings and emirs had to respect them. For instance, Multan town was a center for Muslims in the peninsula at the time of Sheikh Baha Al-Din Zakaria (Abbas Razavi Athar, History of Sufism in India, v. 1, p. 135)

Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati makes the following comments about the four famous Sufi dynasties in India:

Sohrevardiyeh: As the name shows, it is attributed to Sheikh Shahab Al-Din Sohrevari. Sheikh Baha Al-Din Zakaria Multani expanded this

dynasty in the peninsula (666 Islamic calendar), especially in Bengal region where he was greatly influential. Among the famous figures in the family history of this dynasty in India, Fakhr Al-Din Eraghi, renowned Iranian poet may be mentioned who the Sheikh Zakaria's son-in-law.

Ghaderiyeh: It was founded by Abdolghader Gilani (561 Islamic calendar). The first caliph in this dynasty in India was Safi Al-Din Sufi Gilani. The important caliph was the eight caliph, Abu Abdollah Mahmoud Ghos Gilani, who passed away in Lahore in 923 Islamic calendar at the time of Zahir Al-Din Baber.

Naghshbandiyeh: It was founded by Khajeh Baha Al-Din Naghshband (718-791 Islamic calendar). In India, it was established by Khajeh Mohammad Baghi Abdollah (1012 Islamic calendar) at the time of Baber. Ahmad Sar Hendi was one of the most caliphs of this dynasty in Herat, known as the second aleph.

Chashtiyeh: It is the oldest dynasty of Sufis. The reason behind the name is the attribution of Khajeh Moin Al-Din, the founder of the dynasty in India, to Chasht village. Khajeh Hassan Basari, Fazil Ayyaz, Ebrahim Adham, and Abu Al-Eshagh Shami may be pointed out among the most important caliphs of this dynasty.

Khajeh Moin Al-Din was born in 537 Islamic calendar. He studied sciences and thereby he got acquainted with the religious scholars of Chashtiyeh dynasty. Once he received the caliph's cloak, he visited Najm Al-Din Kobra in Baghdad. He got to know Ghotb Al-Din Bakhtiar Kaki in Isfahan who became his disciple and traveled with him to India. Later on Ghotb Al-Din became a famous mystic.

Khajeh Moin Al-Din resided in Lahore. Khajeh Moin Al-Din, Ghotb Al-Din Bakhtiar, Hamid Al-Din Naguri, Sheikh Salim Chashti, Nezam Al-Din Olia, and Amir Khosro Dehlavi were among well-known caliphs of this dynasty.

Sufis were respected so greatly the the Baberian regime and had such a high rank with them that Akbar used walk on foot to the tomb of Khajeh Moin Al-Din. He named his child Salim, who later on was known as Jahangir. He granted numerous gifts to his pilgrims due to his respect for Khajeh. Khajeh Nezam Al-Din Olia was one of the most famous caliphs of Khajeh Moin Al-Din. He was born in Bedivan town. The words of sheikh were gathered in a book named Al-Foad through his disciple's efforts, Hassan Dehlavi. He passed away in 663 Islamic calendar. People came to Delhi from all around India for pilgrimage and paying respect to him. Ali Ebn-e Osman Hajviri is one of other famous mystics of India and Islam, known as the treasure granting

teacher. Hajviri was attributed to Hajvir, one of the regions of Ghazaneh. He wrote the first Persian mystical book about doctrine and mysticism called *Kashf Al-Mahjoub*. He probably passed away in the period 450-465 and was buried in Lahore. The most famous person of the Sufi dynasty was Amir Khosro Dehlavi, capable Indian poet. He was a perfect mystic in addition a poet. In poetry, he was the student of Shahab Al-Din Mahmoud Bedivani and he mastered Turkish, Persian, and Indian languages, also a maestro. In writing masnavis, he followed Nezami, and in sonnets, Sa'di was his role model. He was indeed the greatest Persian speaking poet of the Indian peninsula. His works include: 1. Complete poetical works; 2. *Khamseh*, consisting of *Matla Al-Navar*, *Shirin* and *Khosro*, *Majnoun* and *Leili*, *Mirror of Alexander*, *Eight Heavens*; 3. Historical epics such as *Gheran Al-Sadeyn*, and *Fattah Al-Fotouh*.

It should be added to this section that the propagation of Shia and its acknowledgement in great parts of the Islamic society are indebted to Sufis. The first Shiite regimes in Iran and Egypt such as *Sarbedaran* in Khorasan and *Sadat Marashi's* regime in northern Iran and *Fatemian* in Egypt and the *Safavid* dynasty were all Sufi-oriented.

1-5 Placing importance on masses and being with people

Since the foundation of Sufism is humbleness and dervish-like lifestyle and poverty for the sake of God, the characteristic of popularity may be observed in all branches of Sufism. In this regard, Zarrinkoub comments:

Despite the conflict between religious jurists and hadith narrators on the one hand, and speakers and philosophers on the other hand, and while the discussions among scholars caused fears and surprise among the seekers of truth, Sufism emerged from among simple masses, and was propagated among them. Even though it distanced itself from scholars and their ballyhoo, it became so popular that it was sought by scholars as well... Sufis were compassionate with people in general disasters. They were even sometimes sacrificial. When *Mamshad Dinvari's* homeland was raided by *Alan Ghazvini*, *Mardavij Ziari's* blood-thirsty commander, and a great number of his fellow citizens were slaughtered by swords, he took a Quran in his hand, got out of town, and discouraged the commander from blood shedding. He even lost his life trying to do so. In order to drive away the disaster of the *Kharazmis* from Baghdad and *Naser the Caliph*, *Sheikh Shahab Al-Din Sohrevari* went to visit *Kharazmshah* and dissuaded him from attacking the caliph and he himself was greatly disrespected and oppressed. In *Kharazm* massacre by *Mongols*, it is

said that *Sheikh Najm Al-Din Kobra* was recommended to leave the town so that he would not be murdered. He refused and said, I have spent a lifetime with *Kharazmian*, it is unfair to leave them alone at this moment. He was found among the dead in the battle zone... Propagating the fraternity spirit among Muslims and resorting to real brotherhood and observing equality and sacrifice are also among factors which have played important roles in the instruction of Sufis and the establishment of their dynasties and convents. It has oftentimes been narrated about Sufis that they preferred their friends to gaining assets (Zarrinkoub, *ibid.*, p. 164-165).

1-6 Promoting virtue and preventing vice

As it was mentioned in the discussion about propagation, Sufis considered promoting virtue and preventing vice to be their duties. Kennedy talks about a group of Sufis that started to fight the caliph in Alexandria as preventing from vice in 200 Islamic calendar (Cook, Michael, *Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice in Islamic Thought*, v. 2, p. 723-724). *Sahl Tastari* knows one of the duties of religious leaders to be preventing from vice. *Abolhossein Nouri Baghdadi* (died in 295 Islamic calendar) broke apart caliph's casks of wine. *Hares Mohasebi* (died in 243 Islamic calendar) considered the essence of the path toward knowledge of God to be the honest expansion of preventing from vice (*Ibid*, p. 273). Zarrinkoub comments in this respect: In promoting virtue and preventing vice, Sufis were sometimes so diligent that they often jeopardized their position in conflicts with powerful masters. That is why the internal devotees appeared as Sufis, so that they do not cause suspicion. *Khajeh Nezam Al-Molk* and his son *Fakhr Al-Molk* were murdered by devotees in Sufis' disguise. This indicates the fact that Sufis were strong in promoting virtue and strived hard in this regard (Zarrinkoub, *ibid.*, p. 146).

In recent centuries, fights against tyrant kings and foreigners by Sufis have been frequently observed. In the advice by *Ghotb Al-Din Neyrizi* to *Sultan Hossein Safavi* and his analysis of the *Sfavid* dynasty's downfall which is recorded in history, one of the reasons is considered to be quitting promoting virtue and preventing vice by scholars (see *Jafarian, Rasoul, Reasons of the Safavid Dynasty's Collpase*, p. 20). Zarrinkoub states: If Sufism has appeared as indolence, slothfulness, and hypocrisy to some people and sects, the entire members of Sufi sects and groups are not like that. Many Sufis are used to making efforts and taking actions. Some have even been the pride and glory of their tribes and communities. Even the colonial regimes viewed the *Ekhvan Sufic* community in northern Africa with

suspicion and were afraid of and despised them (Zarrinkoub, *ibid.*, p. 176-177).

1-7 Systematic activities

Contrary to what many believe that Sufism is all about seeking isolation and running away from people and society, Esmailiyeh was one of the most systematic Muslim sects and their dynasty and network of motives are well known (see Esmailiyeh, *History and Beliefs*, Farhad Daftari, p. 35-110). Sufis have a hierarchy including ghotb, caliph, master etc. Saints are also believed to have a hierarchy: 300 akhyar and 40 adbal, seven pious, four otad, two leaders and one ghotb (Zarrinkoub, *ibid.*, p.92). Ekhvan Al-Safa brigade is a clear example of systematic activities of this group. The members of this society are categorized into four groups: beginners, philanthropic brothers, learned merciful brothers, and the sage. Any member could pass through these stages. They had secret meetings and lessons and were completely political; in a way that political science was one of the five categories of divine sciences in their viewpoint. Politics broke down to five branches: prophetic, kingly, general, specific, and essence politics (Large Islamic Encyclopedia, v. 7, under Ekhvan Al-Safa (Sharaf Al-Din Khorasani)). Even the brigades of generosity, manliness, and chivalry were completely in relation with Sufism and aside from Iran, they were established in all Islamic countries such as Syria and Egypt. Henry Corbin hold that knighthood in Europe, which contributed greatly to ethical reforms in Europe and especially France, is an imitation of this Islamic tradition of manliness and chivalry (see Velayati, Ali Akbar, *Islamic Culture and Civilization*, p. 89, and Golpinarli, Abd Al-Baghi, *Sufism*, p. 137-145). On Persian traditional sports and their brigade, Zarrinkoub comments:

The influence of Sufism is also apparent in Persian traditional sports and its brigade. Not only do some of the expressions used by athletes such as elderly mentor, cleanliness, permission, garb, torment, respect for loincloth, and pleasantness of steps have shades of Sufism, but also the influence of Sufism is obvious in certain etiquette of Persian traditional sports. Some ancient athletes such as Pouriaye Vali, who is more famous as Ghatali Kharazmi, were Sufis and the influences of the chivalrous and the generous may be found in the Persian traditional sport brigade (Zarrinkoub, *ibid.*, p. 177 and also see Velayati, *ibid.*, p. 88-89).

1-8 Deducing facts from the Quran and hadith and dynamicity

The dynamicity of Sufism is primarily indebted to quitting prejudice, vanity, enmity, and the pluralism specific to Sufism (which is out of the

scope of this text). These prevent Sufis from avoiding the masters of other religions. Attar quotes from Kharaghani, when he talked about his house: "Whoever enters this house, give him bread and do not ask about his religion."

On the other hand, their restlessness and various spiritual moods and internal fluidity that considers constraints equivalent to atheism is another factor for the dynamicity of their mind and spirit.

Whatever you are shown in here/If you do not like, you will be given something better

(More explanations will be provided in this respect in the external factors section.)

1-9 Generating thoughts

The achievement of mysticism and Sufism as a particular practical method to obtain knowledge with conduct and purification and a specific method in understanding religious texts, which is internal interpretation of texts, is a plethora of knowledge whose thought productions are as much as those of all Islamic speakers and philosophers. There have been various new comments on religious jurisprudence and minutiae aside from principles, knowledge, ethics, and scientific methods (They were pointed out in the section of influence of Sufism over Islamic sciences).

It should be added here that abundant delicate subject matters mystics have left behind regarding the knowledge of the soul, psychology and description of internal aspects and feelings and moods deserve great attention. They have influenced other civilizations in such a way that year 2007 was called the global year of Rumi and the translation of his *Mathnavi* was the best seller in the United States.

1-10 Educating pious humans

As pointed out before, the progress and flourishing of each civilization is measured against the degree of its success in achieving its goals. Since the ultimate goal of the Islamic civilization is educating pious well-learned humans, a great deal of the Islamic civilization's success in this respect could be attributed to the course of mysticism and Sufism. The reason is that Sufism is the most extensive social movement in terms of quantity and quality in all Islamic nations and schools of thought claiming to possess spiritual purification and instruction to which Islamic dignitaries and spiritual role models primarily belong. Even among hadith narrators and religious jurists, those who are known as more spiritual are somehow linked to Sufism. People like the First Martyr who wrote his first book *La'me* following a request from Sarbedaran, Allameh Helli who has defended Sufism in his *Sharh-e Tajrid*, Bayazid Bastami and Marouf Karakhi who were students of Imam Sadegh (pbuh) and Imam Reza (pbuh),

respectively (Allameh Helli, *Sharh-e Tajrid Al-Eteghad*, p.313), and Sheikh Bahai are abundant in the history of Islam.

2- External factors

The second group of the reasons behind blossoming of civilizations is external factors. What is meant by external factors is positive the effects that the Islamic civilization has received from other ones and has played a role in its blossoming. Indeed, this category of factors is rooted in the contexts and capabilities of Islamic culture. Two of these factors, which are specifically related to Islamic Sufism and mysticism, are pointed out here.

2-1 Accepting the common points with other civilizations

Among Islamic schools of thought, there were some such as Khavarej and the followers of Ebn-e Teymiyeh who were highly totalitarian. They considered most of other Muslims as atheists who will go to the netherworld, let alone non-Muslims! But since Sufism considers itself as the protector of God's message of friendship to all humanity and knows all people as God's creatures most of whom have are guided genetically and religiously, it looks for common points when facing other religions and civilizations. By understanding the common intrinsic language common among people, it has a better perception of other religions. Not only do Sufis place emphasis on the unity of revelation, but also they consider themselves as the guardians of Islam and all other divine traditions. Abd Al-Karim Jeili says:

"There is nothing the world, but those that praise the Lord with their words, moods, deeds, nature, and characteristics. All creatures in the world take orders from God Almighty, although acts of worship are different because of God's different names and attributes." (Jeili, Abd Al-Karim, *Al-Ensan Al-Kamel*, part two, p. 76-77)

Somewhere else, he comments: "Mystics desire God Almighty and the Lord has created the world through them. They are the center of the world and God's focus of attention in this world. They are even the manifestation of God's expression in the whole world. God has established religions on the basis of their mysticism." (Jeili, *ibid.*, p. 83)

Late Zarrinkoub states in this regard:

Upon expressing divine unity and monotheism, the Sufi's way of expression is more understandable and acceptable than that of philosophers. Therefore, their books and words had a great influence over the refinement of ethics and instruction of facts. In this manner, Sufis' instructions opened up the visual horizons of Muslims and focused their attention on tolerance and laxness and quitting prejudice, vanity, and enmity. As a matter of

fact, it was Sufism that considered quitting useless quarrels and attention to honesty and purity as requisites for reaching personal and social bliss (Zarrinkoub, *ibid.*, p.165)

Regarding the bestowal of conduct to the believers, Ala Al-Doleh Semnani says since each of divine religions can only push aside 70000 veils between God and human, I accept believers for conduct until they themselves realize that their religion is inadequate and thus, they accept Islam (Semnani, Ala Al-Doleh, *Forty Ceremonies (Chehel Majles)*, p. 115-116).

About the extensiveness of mystics' disposition, Dr. Hossein Nasr comments:

Throughout the history of Islam, Sufism has lived while aware of the universality of the philosophy for the achievement of which they own the tools both theoretically and practically. But some of them had particular claims and made efforts to talk directly about this, although other groups were silent. Jalal Al-Din Mohammad Molavi, who even had a number of Christian and Jewish disciples and his book *Mathnavi* is replete with literature conforming the generality and universality of tradition. In his book *Fih Ma Fih*, he comments as follows, while directly pointing at other traditions:

"Once we were talking in a crowd in which there were a number of pagans. During the talk, they cried, showed passion, and were moved greatly. Someone asked what they perceived of it all. What did they understand that made them cry? He said: It is not necessary for them to understand the words themselves; they understand the essence of this talk. Everybody admits that there is only one God, and He is the Creator and the Sustainer and conquers the whole being. The return is to Him and forgiveness is His. Hence, everyone has agitation and passion, because this talk reeks of their beloved. If paths are different, but goals are the same. Do you not see that there are many ways to Kaaba? Some paths come from Rome, some from Syria, some from China and some from the sea from India and Yemen. If you look at the ways, there are huge differences and infinite contrasts. But as soon as you catch a glimpse of the purpose, all are the same and there are connections and loves from everyone to Kaaba, wher there is no difference. That belonging is neither infidelity, nor faith. That is, that belonging is not polluted by those different paths. When they got there, that discussion and conflict they had over the paths, when someone told the other that you are a pagan and the other told the same thing to the first one, it was over, since they arrived at Kaaba and it became clear that they had the same goal." (Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Sufis' Instructions*, p. 233-234)

That is why the common language of the dialog of civilizations is Sufism nowadays. In the past and present, mystics, with their powerful eloquent literature and expression, were proper mediums for cultural interactions between Islam and other civilizations.

2-2 Highlighting common points and peace, not war

We know that the world as a single homeland and the integration of divine religions are among fundamental goals of Islam and Islamic civilization. On the other hand, the religion of the dervish is based on humbleness, tolerance, bearing people's harassment, breaking apart individual constraints, and individuations. Protecting individual and ethnic barriers and aiming at uncommon points are what sectarian and group individuations entail. A great deal of conflicts, hostilities, and oppositions of cultures and civilizations is based on preserving these personal and group individuations. Despite the fact that extravagance in breaking the barriers can be harmful to preserving the identity of a civilization, it is assumed that Islam seeks the truth, not only creating a civilizational identity. On the other hand, Islam can embrace all other civilizations and respond the needs of this world and hereafter. The domain of its barriers is so vast that all other barriers are situated inside it.

Nonetheless, among all Islamic schools of thought, Islamic Sufism or in better words, mystical approach to Islam has the greatest capacity for averting wars and ethnic and tribal prejudice and accepting common points of other civilizations.

Conclusion

Given the discussions presented and the role mysticism and Sufism play in each of civilization-generating factors, it can be concluded that the correctness or incorrectness of the beliefs and methods and historical evolutions of mystical schools of thought notwithstanding, Sufism and mysticism have considerably contributed to the flourishing and progress of what is known today as Islamic civilization. They have also been successful in its expansion and influencing other civilizations and receiving positive points of other civilizations. Furthermore, since the goal of mysticism is educating pious humans and the Islamic civilization has a similar objective, a distinguished role should be considered for mysticism and Sufism in Islamic civilization construction.

Mahdi Eftekhari, assistant professor, Department of Islamic Culture, Semnan University of Medical Sciences 09177216195 – em45sh@yahoo.com

References

- 1- Motahhari, Morteza, Collection of Works, (2004), Tehran, Sadra Publication.
- 2- Dr. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, (2006), Sufis' Instructions, Tehran, Ghasideh Publication.
- 3- Dr. Zarrinkoub, Abdolhossein, (2006), Value of Sufis' Legacy, Tehran Amirkabir Publication.
- 4- Jeili, Abdolkarim, (1981), Al-Ensan Al-Kamel, Cairo, School of Mostafa Al-Babi.
- 5- Cook, Michael, (2007), Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice in Islamic Thought, Fourth Edition, Translated by Ahmad Namai, Mashhad: Astan-e Ghods-e Razavi Research Foundation Publication.
- 6- Razavi Athar, Abbas, (2001), Sufism History in India, Translated by Mansour Motamedi, Tehran, Center for Academic Publication.
- 7- Daftari, Farhad, (1996), Esmailiyeh, History and Beliefs, Translated by Fereydoun Badrei, Tehran: Forouzan Publication.
- 8- Kashefi, Mohammad Reza, (2005), Islamic History, Culture, and Civilization, First Edition, Ghom, Global Center for Islamic Sciences.
- 9- Golpinarli, Abd Al-Baghi, 101 Questions and Answers about Sufism, (2001), Translated by Dr. Tofiq Vah Sobhani, Tehran: Ehya Ketab Publication.
- 10- Semnani, Ala Al-Doleh, Forty Ceremonies (Chehel Majles), (2000), First Edition, by Abdorafi Haghghat, Tehran, Asatir Publication.
- 11- Dr. Velayati, Ali Akbar, (2005), Islamic Culture and Civilization, Third Edition, Ghom, Knowledge Propagation Office.
- 12- Allameh Helli, Ali Ebn-e Motahhar, Kashf Al-Morad Fi Sharh-e Tajrid Al-Eteghad, Ghom, Mostafavi School.
- 13- Molavi Balkhi Rumi, Jalal Al-Din Mohammad, (2000), Mathnavi Manavi, corrected by Nicholson, Tehran, Amir Kabir Publication.
- 14- Hekmat, Nasrollah, (2007), Art in Ebn-e Arabi's Mysticism, Second Edition, Academy of Art Publication.
- 15- Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Mystical Philosophy in Islam.