



ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (AJORAD)

VOL. 9. No. 1

**Conference Edition
Sept., 2018**

**ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
(AJORAD)**

VOLUME 6, NO 1, 2018 – Conference Edition

ISSN: 1597-7978

**A PUBLICATION OF ASSOCIATION OF ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF
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NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
(NERDC) BRANCH, SHEDA ABUJA**

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- Authors notification of paper acceptance for Conference Edition: **30th September, 2018 each year.**
- Authors notification of paper acceptance for Regular Edition: **30th November, 2018 each year.**
- Issue publication notice: **31st July and December, 2018 each year**

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07038897363

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The Concept of Sufism and Its Significance in a Society

LAWAL, Musibau Adebayo & LAARO-Musa, AbdurRahman

Abstract

The Sufism is a term that is very comprehensive to define due to its wide scope and complexity. There are different opinions on the derivatives meaning of the word Sufism. Some say that the sufist were only named because of the purity and cleanliness of their heart (sufa). Hence, it means that a sufist is somebody whose heart is clear and sincere in act of worship to Allah, somebody who purifies his conduct towards Allah and recognise Allah's beyond literal interpretation. The purpose of this study is to give a succinct explanation on what Sufism is all about, its significance and general doctrine of Sufism, rites on Sufism etc. This research is historical and descriptive in nature because it describes and explains what Sufism really entails and misconception about it. Some say that Sufi were named because they were in the first rank before Allah by their desire towards him, the turning of their heart unto Him and the preservation of their secrete parts from sins in obedience to Him. (safful-Ula). Some say, that they are sufist because of their quality which resemble that of the people of the bench (As-habus-sufa) who lived in the time of the prophet. That is, those who neither possess nor were they possessed. Some say they were called sufist because they wore woolen cloth. They distinguished themselves among their fellow by wearing woolen cloth at the times when other people wore very beautiful cloth of different fashion. This paper therefore, examined the "Sufism" together with its doctrines, rites and significance. Conclusions are drawn that it is true sufism that one attains purification of soul, nearness and re-union with Allah while recommendations are drawn that only trained sufist lecturer should be allowed to handle the subject and government should also make effort to employ qualified and competent sufist lecturers at our tertiary institutions for effective teaching and learning sufism in schools.

Key- words: Sufism, Sufi and Significance.

Introduction

The essence of Sufism in any society is to make individual to be dedicated sincerely to the services of Allah with a whole of one's life in order to attain nearness to Him. Abdulkabir (1976) quoted Junayd to have described Sufism as an act of being with Allah without attachment to other else. This is to say one's devotion to Allah is not for any other purpose since the object of humans' creation is to worship Allah. A sufist is unconcerned and disinterested in either the fear of hell or the urge for Paradise. This supposes that the sufist worship God (Allah) with unswerving hearts, as all their devotion are dedicated to God (Allah) alone.

Al- Sharif (2011) reported the view of Tustari that Sufism is to eat little and to seek peace in God (Allah). Hujwiri (n.d) also reported the view of Husayni Nuri that a sufist is he that has nothing in his possession but is himself possessed by anything. He also reported the view of Ash- Shibli to have described Sufism as a way of rising above the perception of the world.

Ibn Ata-Allah (2005) opined that Sufism means being at ease with God (Allah). Ansari (1986) also reported the view of Ahmad Shirhindi to have characterized Sufism as the code of the heart, or the purification of the soul (tazkiyatu-nafs) which require a person being a Muslim after that, one must have mission to become a Muhmin (A true believer) and Mujahid (Jihadist). A believers' knowledge of Islam may be somewhat limited or perhaps

unable to attain those height of submission and purification that you desire or others expect of you. The ability of a believer not allow these feelings to undermine him to practice Islam is require. Islam is a state of becoming and not a state of being. Each day, a Muslim must try to improve and better him or herself to improve teskiyah. Therefore, teskiyah is a process that unfolds itself step by step. One cannot expect to change all at once. This is against the law of nature. Furthermore, teskiyah connotes the feeling of Allah's presence (Al-Ihsan). Zurruc (2003) reported the view of Al- Janayri that Sufism is to inculcate high quality of sublime character and to eschew from very deed of debased nature.

Al- Kawlakhi (1952) also, reported the view of shaykh Ahmed Tijani that Sufism is a compliance with God's (Allah) command and avoidance of His prohibitions, externally and internally with regard to what pleases Him, not what pleases the *salik* (student). Wright (2011) reported the view of shaykh Ibrahim Niyass Al-Kawlahkhi that Sufism is an aspect of Islamic studies which focus is to develop relationship with Allah in the religion of Islam, relationship of the spirit to the body and Allah because it represents spiritual excellence (Ihsan). Al- Ilory (n.d) interprets Sufism as an adoption of good moral values and righteous behavior as one's ornaments and to abandon all forms of vices or to behave in the behavior of sincerity and purity. Ibn Khaldun (n.d) opined that Sufism is to engage oneself constantly in the worship of and concentration towards God (Allah) and keeping aloof from every tinge of sensual mundane pleasures in which some people engage in, mostly consisting of avarice of wealth, worldly status and extricating from the creation in order to engage in seclusion for the worship of Allah. He further said that Sufism was in general, the general pattern of life of the companions of the prophet and devoted righteous person who succeeded them.

Sufism could therefore be said to be an act of the dedicating sincerely the whole of one's life to the services of Allah with the aim of attaining nearness to Him and as well achieving His bliss. It is a way of bidding people to do what is right and forbidding the doing of what is wrong. It is a way by which one refers all his cases to God (Allah) by accepting His judgment on everything, serving Him with what He loves most, being the creator and owner of everything. Therefore, Sufism of every individual depends on the extent of the sincerity of his dedication of his service to Almighty God (Allah).

From societal experience on morals, Sufism is meant to reinforce or contribute to good citizenship. For example, Sufism, if well practiced as it is may minimize to the barest minimum, negative behaviors, such as religious bigotry, system of adultery or fornication, cultism, sexual infidelity, moral decadence, examination malpractices, selfishness, alcoholism, bribery and corruption, indecent dressing, thuggeries, and hooliganism, indolence and dishonesty.

Sufism is an Islamic movement whose followers seek to find divine truth and love through direct encounters with God (Allah). It arose from within Islam as an ascetic movement. The movement consists of fraternal orders in which leaders train and assist disciples in the mastery of Sufism philosophical principles and ritual practices. Such rituals and practices includes writing and reciting poetry and hymns; some of the most famous and beautiful literature of the Islamic world has been written by sufists. Sufists engages in variety of ritual practices intended to help them realize union with God (Allah), such as distinct form of ritual prayer (dhikr, remembrance) including the recitation of God's name, as well as bodily rituals, such as those practices by the so-called "whirling Dervishes, a Turkish Sufi order that practices meditation and contemplation of God through spinning.

Sufism has been part of the school educational process. The Nationally University

Commission (NUC) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) have included sufism in the curriculum of their institutions. Its teaching has witness gradual development over the years. Initially, preachers and some religious leaders or the followers read the scriptures (Hadith/Qur'an), while the listeners and the followers read after them without understanding the real depth meaning of some verses. The derivative meaning of each word of Qur'an and circumstances surrounding the revelation of some verse were then made to understand through the knowledge of sufism. Sufism is then tailored along the cultural and religious background of everything, simply because the content of morality in sufism are love, truth and virtues. These three contents of mortality gave birth to the aims and objectives of Sufi order throughout the world. The noble objectives of sufism are as follows:

- a. To train the followers so as to understand the real depth and derivative meaning of each word of the Qur'anic verses and the circumstances surrounding each revelation.
- b. To train the followers/ disciples in the mastery of Sufism's philosophical principles and ritual practices.
- c. To enable the followers to understand and perform their duties to the Creator in particular and their fellow human being in general.
- d. To create in the followers, consciousness and awareness about the existence of a true and supernatural being called God (Allah). This will make the followers to be God fearing and pious.
- e. To encourage the followers as well as the leaders the spirit of research into the natural phenomena and exploration of the environment. This spirit brings about scientific and technological advancement.
- f. To develop in the followers, moral principles and values such as humility, respect, love, kindness, justice and Fair play, spirit of forgiveness, obedience, devotion to duty, orderly behavior and selfless services to humanity which are capable of bringing about tranquility and over all development in the society.
- g. To enable the followers apply or use its teaching, events, stories, experiences as well as approaches to solve personal problems, meet the challenges ahead or adapt to any new or strange situation.
- h. To develop the followers both spiritually and physically in religious duties, especially through fasting which is highly recommended. This fasting according to the physicians is useful to the body and makes its healthier and stronger. Diseases cause by gluttonous action or indigestion in the stomach are controlled by fast. Also, spiritual development is hastened through the knowledge of sufism.
- I. To foster peaceful coexistence among the members of the society. Every citizen is taught to tolerant others and coexists with them peacefully.
- j. To foster unity among the adherents if sufism and other Muslims in general irrespective of their tribes. All the various tribes are united or brought together under worship with the notion that all creatures are from the same supernatural being called God (Allah).
- k. To develop in the followers good leadership and followers hip.

It should be noted that those who practice Sufism do not call themselves sufist, rather they prefer to be called "faqir" or "Miskin" (one who never own anything nor engage himself in anything and he who owns something not sufficient for his need respectively). In actual fact, many of this sufist control material resources yet they want to be called faqir. One of the examples is that of Shaykh Abdullahi bn Fadi, a political head of Gwandu part of Sokoto caliphate who called himself Al-faqir Ila llahi (the poor to God) in his book "Tazyinul-waraqah". The scholar infers that his appellation adopted could be to enable believers to comply with expectations of Islam on the conduct of Muslim and humanity.

Allah says:

"The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the best in conduct (the pious). (Q49:13).

The scholars therefore give different meaning to the word faqir (poor), among which are:

1. One who renounced the world though riches that comes to him.
2. One who does not have wealth but prefer to be above want than to live in want.
3. One who love wealth but does not make serious efforts on it.

General Doctrine of Sufism

Doctrine in Sufism refers to ideas, beliefs and knowledge of reality, taught by sufism which should also be possessed by all sufists. The following is a succinct account of the doctrine of the sufists:

1. God only exist, He is in all things and all things are in Him.
2. All visible and invisible being are emanation from Him and are not really distinct from Him.
3. Religious are matters of indifference: they however serve as leading to realities. Some for this purpose is more advantageous than others, among which is Al- Islam, of which Sufism is the true philosophy.
4. Any difference between good and evil does not really exist therein, for all is reduced to unity, and God is the real Author of the acts of mankind.
5. It is God who fixes the will of man: man therefore is not free in his actions.
6. The soul existed between the bodies and is confined within the latter as in a cage. Death therefore should be the object of the wishes of the sufist, for it is then that he returns to the bosom of divinity.
7. It is by this metempsychosis that souls which have not fulfilled their destination here below are purified and become worthy of reunion with God.

Rites in Sufism

Rite in Sufism refers to the things to be done by the sufists at special time to seek for

attainment of the nearness to God. It is the religious spiritual experiences and activities by which sufists are exposed to both externally and internally in order to attain nearness to God as well to achieve His bliss. The rite of Sufism constitutes a course which is a rope to purify one's minor heart or soul order to attain union with God. The rites consist of intentions (Niyyah), recitation of Suratul- Fatiha, Istighfar (seeking for forgiveness), a formula Assalat (invoking blessing on the prophet Muhammed) and Dhikr (remembrance of God's name).

There are three specific time of adhkhar in Sufi order, especially in Tijaniyyah Sufi order. The way and time of each shall be discussed as follows:

Lazim: this is the type of wiridi (special prayer) which is done individually and silently by a sufist in the morning before and after Subh prayer (Assalat) and in the evening after Asri prayer. This is derived from the word of God in the Glorious Qur'an 7:205. Allah says:

"And remember with praise your Lord morning and evening, deep in your heart humility and fear, and also in a low voice with your tongue, and do not be of those who are heedless". (Q7:205).

Wazifah: this is another type of wiridi (special prayer) which is done in congregation with a loud voice either in the morning after Subh prayer of afternoon or in the evening before or after Maghrib (sunset) prayer. It is allowed at any convenient time. This is also derived from the word of God in the Glorious Qur'an 24:36; Allah says:

"(The light is found) in houses (which) God has enjoined that His Name should be raised and glorifying Him therein in the morning and the evening". (Qur'an 24:36).

Haylalah/ Dhikrul-Jumah/Kubra: this is another type of wiridi (special prayer) which is also done in congregation in a loud voice but on Fridays only. Its starts after the Asri prayer till sunset, without specific number of dhikr to be recited, except if the observers intend to observe it alone, which should not exceed one thousand six hundred (1600). The type of wiridi is also derived from the word of God in the Glorious Qur'an. Q63:10; Allah says:

"But when the (Jummah) prayer is ended, disperse in the land and seek God's bounty, and remember God frequently that you may prosper" (Q63:10).

In the Hadith related by Abu Dawud, is reported that: the messenger of God (P.B.U.H) said: "(for me) to sit with a group (of people) who are chanting the name of Allah, the Great, from evening prayer till sunrise (is what) I love most to setting free of four slaves, among the children of Ismail: " and (for me) to sit with a group (of people) who are vaunting the Name of God from Asri prayer till sunset (is what) I preferred to settling free of four slaves" (Abu Dawud related it).

Based on this tradition, the sufist fixed their Wazifah to be either after subh prayer or between the Maghrib and Isha'i, and then fixed no deity except Allah (Haylalah) if Friday to be after Asri prayer till sunset. Conclusively, familiarity with all the aforementioned types of wiridi (special prayers) makes one achieve the following significances:

1. It helps one to purify one's inner and outer life in order to attain perpetual bliss.
2. It withdraws one's soul away from world inclination.

3. It helps in keeping constantly to God (Allah).
4. It denies the soul its carnal pleasure.
5. It makes one to attain unification with God.
6. It develops a unique and strong relationship between the creator and the created.
7. It helps to develop oneself to such a high level of consciousness so that it may resemble the character and essence of God (Allah).

Conclusions

The principal occupation of the sufist (Murid), which is in body is meditation on the unity of God (Wahdaniyyah), the chanting of God's name (dhikr) and progressive advancement in the path or journey of life, so as to attain nearness to Allah. It is by the metempsychosis (transmigration of the soul) that souls which have not fulfilled their destination here below are purified and become worthy of reunion with God (Allah).

Therefore, it should be noted that it is only through the grace of God which the sufists can "fadhillahi," that one can attain to the spiritual union, besides it is also believed that it can be obtained by fervently asking for it. Allah says:

"And for those who strive in our path, we shall surely guide them to our way. Allah is with those who do good". (Q29:69).

Recommendations

Since the discussion has revealed the importance of Sufism in a society, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. In every Islamic studies department, only trained sufist lecturer that is objective should be allowed to handle the subject and not somebody who is not just a mere religion teacher who do not understand Sufism to avoid criticism.
2. The authority should also intensify efforts to employ qualified and competent sufist lecturer at our tertiary institutions for effective teaching and learning Sufism in schools.
3. Instruction should also be given to the lecturers handling the subject to speak to the students according to their mental capability so as not to fall into error.
4. The public preachers should always preach on the importance of Sufism through emphasizing the position of Sufism in Islam and its relevance.

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