

## Contribution

### Sufism in the Context of Modern Politics

Marietta Stepanyants

Political analysts err in concentrating all their attention on the burning, militant Islam in plain sight; other manifestations of Islam deserve to be more closely examined and better known to the public at large.

Mohammed Arkoun<sup>1</sup>

**I**T is really amazing that not only political analysts but even scholars for years ignored Sufism as a factor of political life in the Muslim world. It has been common to list as main trends in the modern Islamic political thought the orthodoxes (traditionalists), the modernists, the reformers, the fundamentalists (revivalists). The Sufis have not been taken into account, though the long history of Islamic mysticism proves that it often gave up its neutral role as a non-political, contemplative theology and actively joined political fights.

The involvement in politics was both on individual and collective levels. Mostly, the orders took a particular side: either against an established order, injustice and oppression, or, on the contrary, in support of a ruling power. Thus, for example, "The Suhrawardi shaykhs in general never accepted the idea of revolt against any king, no matter how unjust....In Ottoman lands the Mevlevi order in particular, and also the Bektashi to some extent, had close alliances with the ruling power...During the Mughal period, the Naqshbandi order, which had a strong tradition of association with kings in central Asia, became prominent in political affairs; Shaykh Sirhindi sought to change Mughal religious policies, Shah Wali Allah invited the Afghan king Ahmad Shah to invade India and fight the Marathas and later Sayyid Ahmad Shahid led militant activists against the Sikhs... In Hindustan, the Chishti order is best known for its consistent refusal to ask kings for financial support."<sup>22</sup> Sufi writers of the post-Mongol period inscribed treatises that glorified monarchy as equal to or even superior to prophecy. Najm al-Din Razi (d.

654/1256) claimed that a just king is a true vice-regent of God, and manifests the divine attributes of lordship. Likewise Husayn Wa'iz Kashifi (d. 910/1504–05) rated kingship as equal in some respects to prophethood.<sup>3</sup>

The heads of the orders could be indifferent to political power, but they, as well, could aspire it in revolt against established authority, and sometimes actually be successful in founding a dynasty. The most remarkable example of such a movement was that, which led to the foundation of the Safawi dynasty in Persia. The movement of Turkish self-assertion led to the foundation of the dynasty of the Qaramanoghlus in Qonya, which traced its origin back to a dervish named Nura Sufi.<sup>4</sup>

Why then there is an underestimation of the role played by Sufism in the modern politics? Partly, it is because of a factual decline of the influence of the orders in the XXth century due to their degradation. Muhammad Iqbal, a great Indo-Pakistan poet-philosopher and Muslim reformer, who was so much affected by Sufism that he called Djalal ad-Din Rumi as his preceptor and guide on the path to Truth, however, was to confess that medieval mysticism was a cause of social stagnation for the Muslims.” And in the Muslim East,—he stated,—it has, perhaps, done far greater havoc than anywhere else. Far from reintegrating the forces of the average man’s inner life, and preparing him for participation in the march of history, it has taught him a false renunciation and made him perfectly contented with his ignorance and spiritual thralldom.”<sup>5</sup> The orders have failed to respond adequately to the challenges of the new time, hence, it is hardly to be wondered that they are in decline everywhere.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, one should differentiate between an institutional Sufism presented by the orders and the Sufi teachings. “It is through the Sufi tradition primarily that the springs of spiritual vitality have flowed in recent centuries in the Islamic world and it is perhaps still in this tradition, with all of its accumulated corruptions, that they mainly flow. Certainly nothing has replaced it...Whether an intellectual Sufism can call forth the degree of commitment and provide the sense of social relevance necessary for a major spiritual revival is a question...”<sup>7</sup>

My answer to that question: everything is possible, it depends. There is no doubt that there is a worldwide reanimation of the interest in Sufism. It is sufficient to have a glance at the shelves in the bookstores so that to find out that this mystical trend of thought has returned to the international stage. The publishers and the authors would not choose that subject until there is a demand for it on behalf of a wide public. The latter is caused by a number of factors.

There is a general intellectual and spiritual atmosphere in the contemporary world marked by a crisis of rationality, and a certain degree of a dissolution with an institutionalized religion, which turns an attraction of some stratas of the society (intellectuals, youth, etc.) to mystical trends of thought in general, and Sufism, in particular.

However, it seems to be even more important that the course of the events in the Muslim world itself makes vital a search for responses to the challenges of the Islamic fundamentalism—a real peril to the future of the Muslims (by taking them back to an idealized past, and thus preventing from putting an end to backwardness), as well as to the world community in itself by greatly contributing to the scenario with a clash of civilizations. Consequently, Sufism is looked at as an alternative to fundamentalism.<sup>8</sup>

Let us consider in a more elaborate way whether Sufism can in fact “rescue” from **Islamic fundamentalism**?

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The very existence of Sufism implies criticism of  
and challenge to the orthodox theology.

Fazlur Rahman

It is well known that the history of the Muslim world presents a great number of examples of a traditionally tensed relations between the Sufis and the *ulema* with orthodox and fundamentalist views of the latter. Sometimes, that strain led to the extremes: the Sufis were prosecuted, punished and publicly martyred. The hostility was firmly set up both on theological differences and mundane considerations.

The *ulema* accounted a danger to their orthodox-traditionalist belief to be rooted in many aspects of Sufis teachings: in its ontology, epistemology, ethics and social views. On *ulema*'s estimations the speculative Sufism, at best represented by Ibn 'Arabi, was the “the single great enemy that threatened to destroy the very fabric of Islamic faith: *at-tauhid*.”<sup>9</sup>

The concept of *wahdat-al-wujud* was “different from the Muslim theological concept of Divine Unity derived from the Koran. By refusing to see a difference between the divine and human realms it did not only struck at the essentially transcendental character of the God of Muslim theology, it reduced the very question of Divine, Justice, Will, Reward, Punishment, and different religions to gross absurdities.”<sup>10</sup>

In the field of epistemology Sufis might be considered to be “the

brothers” (Ibn Sina) with the philosophers in the search of Truth. The speculative Sufis do not deny the validity of rational knowledge itself, though they comprehend its limited possibilities. As Rumi said: “Reason is excellent and desirable until it brings you to the door of the King. Once you have reached His door, divorce reason;...surrender yourself to Him; you have no use then for how and wherefore.”<sup>11</sup> To what the Sufis feel a real aversion is the rationality of the *ulema*. In Muhammad Iqbal’s words, Sufi revolted “against the verbal quibbles” of Muslim theologians and thus they could be qualified as “a form of free thought in a alliance with rationalism.”<sup>12</sup>

The Sufis regard skeptically any belief forced upon man externally. To the latter they counterpose the faith born in the internal, individual experience of a “loving heart.” Sufi *ma’rifa* denotes knowledge gained in **personal** experience, mystically revealed. The idea that “each does not know of God except that which he infers from himself”<sup>13</sup> is most clear and ample expression of the Sufi concept of knowledge.

While Muslim theologians’ epistemological skepticism signifies the senselessness of attempts at attaining the Truth and the necessity of compliance with the letters of Koran and with the legal prescriptions of the *ulema*, Sufi skepticism contains something quite different. For a mystic the impossibility of perfect realization of the Absolute means not submission to the dogma and blind acceptance of it but incessant striving to achieve maximum realization. Sufi notion about the incomprehensibility of the Absolute does not close the ways of cognition; on the contrary, it asserts the infinity of the process of cognition, the necessity of perpetual quest for Truth. “Anguish after the hidden” is a cryptical Sufi formula denoting constant seeking for Truth. That unquenchable thirst for knowledge, that anguish after the hidden, has been both an immense challenge to the stand of the *ulema* and a great attraction for floundering minds and souls.

The Sufis believe that perfect conduct transcends the boundaries of legalized religious doctrines, sometimes they even ignore or deny the latter. Observance of *Shari’a* injunctions is obligatory for the Sufis at the initial stage of the path to perfection. But mystics can not be satisfied with the legalistic code of behaviour since they strove to something greater than righteousness as admitted by orthodox canons. *Shari’a* for them is the law of the phenomenal world, of the visible, while so that to enter the ‘hidden world’ one has to pass along the more difficult path of *tariqa*.

For a mystic aspiring *fana’*, that is union with God, religious laws seem to be of no great importance or even useless at all. *Fana’* realized

through attention to religious do's and don'ts is considered deficient. It requires that consciousness must be lost so that man is unable to see anything other than the Real.<sup>14</sup>

Sell intelligence and buy bewilderment, intelligence is opinion, while bewilderment is (immediate) vision.<sup>15</sup>

Theological differences between the *ulema* and the Sufis have been so great that even in those places where *tassawuf* is not proclaimed as a heresy and the activity of the orders is not banned (as it is done in the Saudi Arabia, for example), still Sufi writings have been generally excluded from the system of education at the *madradas*. Yet, more than those theoretical differences, the challenge from the side of Sufism to the very authority and the power of the *ulema* (through their special role in society) have caused hostility of the latter towards the former.

The Sufis prescribe an adept who seek the Pass to choose a preceptor and follow him like his guide. That naturally undermines the position of traditional theologians and heightens the role of the *shaykhs*. The practice of the Sufi orders shows that *shaykhs* used to become masters of unquestioned authority; their disciples (*murids*), as a rule, absolutely obeyed them. Hence, the orders have been real rivals for the *ulema* both in spiritual and worldly affairs. (One of many proofs for that is that the French encouraged the Sufi orders in North Africa over orthodox Islam of the *ulema*, which they feared as their real enemies).

It is true that the orders are not any more so great in numbers as they used to be in the past. It is also evident that the capacity of the existing orders to impact on the political affairs has decreased significantly in most of the Muslim countries. Yet, they are still influential in a number of regions, in particularly where tribal and clan relations maintain (like in Africa or the North Caucasia). However, It is not the orders but speculative Sufism that could be looked for as an alternative to Islamic fundamentalism. *Tassawuf's* speculative doctrines may once again get their "corruptive" (from the point of view of the *ulema*) influence on popular psychology by their fascinatingly personal concept of God. They can succeed in undermining the authority of the *ulema* by capturing the minds of rank and file Muslims because they respond to human innate spiritual needs for religiosity rather than for formal attachment to any institutionalized and dogmatic religion.

The relevance of Sufism to modern politics is not limited by its traditional opposition to the orthodoxy. There are some other aspects of Sufism which make its teaching attractive to the contemporaries.

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By loving wisdom doth the soul know life.  
 What has it got to do with senseless strife of  
 Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Arab, Turk?<sup>16</sup>

Rumi

The purpose of this part of the paper is to stress upon the relevance of mystical teachings to **secularism**. Before going further in our reflections on the subject it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the notion 'a secular society.' The latter could be understood in a narrow sense: a society the ideology and the politics of which have no connections with any religious teaching. In a wider sense, a secular society may still respect the religious values; yet in contrast to a sacred type of a society, it elicits from its members the willingness and ability to respond to new cultural elements, it is accessible to contact with other societies, and its value system is permeable.<sup>17</sup>

It is then in a wider sense that secularism and Islamic mysticism could correlate as the allies. Let me point out some of the reasons for such assessment.

First, the emphasis that Sufism puts on the distinction of *zahir* and *batin* prompts an attitude of indifference to all that applies to the mundane world, to the politics in particular.

Second, Sufi concept of the unity of Being permits to make a conclusion that there is an essential unity of mankind. That accords with the opposition to the narrowness of any belief in the superiority of one community (either religious or ethnic) over the others.

Third, in contrast to the *ulema*, the Sufis do not really bother about *umma*, which is expected to unify **all** the Muslims in an Islamic state regulated by the Shari'a. "The orders and their *walis*, we might say, consecrated 'secular' institutions."<sup>18</sup> The brotherhoods were based essentially on **personal** attachments of their members to the saint who had founded their order or to the living head of the latter. In some other cases the orders were associated with craft and commercial guilds, each was under the protection of a certain saint. There have been also practice of founding orders so that to maintain and to strengthen clan or tribe relations, to defend common interests. While ethnic or national identity have not been of any great significance to the orders.

Fourth, Sufi concept of a human being and his/her ability for self-perfection. Muhammad Iqbal while being critical of both the representatives of the *kalam* and the *falsafa* for their failure to apprehend the real

meaning of the Koran's vision of a human being as a unique, free individual, pointed out that "devotional Sufism alone tried to understand the meaning of the unity of inner experience which the Koran declared to be one of the three sources of knowledge, the other two being History and Nature."<sup>19</sup> Iqbal asserted that the true interpretation of the mystic's experience is "not the drop slipping into the sea, but the realization and bold affirmation in an undying phrase of the reality and permanence of the human ego in a profound personality."<sup>20</sup>

The poet-philosopher was especially attracted by the Sufi idea of the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*). However, he added to main stages of perfection (belief in God, seeking God, and perception of God through learning the depth of one's own soul) "realization", which becomes possible thanks to "ceaseless devotion to justice and mercy." In Iqbal's mind, an individual is so independent from God that he may act even as His associate.

In Muhammad Iqbal's "Conversation of the Creator with Man" the latter says:

You made the night, and I the lamp,  
And you the clay and I the cup;  
You desert, mountains-peak, and vale;  
I—flower-bed, park, orchard; I  
Who grind a mirror out of stone  
Who brew from poison honey-drink.<sup>21</sup>

Iqbal underlined the significance of human efforts, their productive, creative nature. With Iqbal the individuality, the ego, strives to approach the Divine Ego. Yet this striving is not an abnegation of one's self, but self-assertion: "The ultimate aim of the ego is not to **see** something, but to **be** something...The end of the ego's quest is not emancipation from the limitations of individuality; it is, on the other hand, a more precise definition of it. The final act is not an intellectual act, but a vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego, and sharpens his will with the creative assurance that the world is not something to be merely seen or known through concepts, but something to be made and re-made by continuous action."<sup>22</sup>

Iqbal's theory of ego very much inspired by the Sufi teachings is relevant indeed to the modern political situation since it presents a strong opposition to any kind of religious fundamentalism, which makes efforts "on the one point of preserving a uniform social life for the people by jealous exclusion of all innovations in the law of *Shari'a* as expounded

by the early doctors of Islam.” As Iqbal points out “the ultimate fate of a people does not depend so much on organization as on the worth and power of individual men... The only effective power, therefore, that counteracts the forces of decay in a people is the rearing of self-concentrated individuals...The tendency to over-organization by a false reverence to the past is...contrary to the inner impulses of Islam.”<sup>23</sup>

It is not by chance that in this part of my paper I quote so extensively Muhammad Iqbal—a Muslim reformer who was born and brought up in India. It is in this country for centuries Sufism was looked at and used as a trend of Muslim spirituality capable to prevent from a division of peoples on religious grounds, and thus firing up hostility between them. In the course of Indian history Sufism not once exercised conciliatory and arbitrary role, it succeeded in putting ‘bridges’ between Hindus and Muslims.

It is quite significant that during the national liberation movement, when the tension between the two main religious communities reached its peak resulting in violence and killings of thousands of human beings, several leaders of that movement turned to Sufism in their hopes and efforts to end that merciless fight. Abul Kalam Azad was one of the most outstanding figures among those leaders.

Born and raised in a very religious family, Abul Kalam Azad early in his life became dissatisfied with the dogmatic religious approach. He expressed a deep interest and a great sympathy towards the Sufi teachings. The most explicit appearance of this is found in his writings about Sarmad Shaheed. The latter was a Sufi poet and a saint of the time when the Mughal emperors Shah Jehan and Aurangzeb ruled the country.<sup>24</sup>

The story of Sarmad and his poetry impressed Abul Kalam Azad so much that he made the translation of his *rubaiyat* into English. The introduction to this piece of Sufi poetry clearly shows that Azad was attracted by the aesthetic beauty of Sarmad’s poetry not less than by its ‘ideological’ orientation. In a number of places he points out the anti-dogmatic position taken by the Sufi. The free spirit of the mystic is greatly appreciated by the reformer, who by chance has adopted the pen-name, Azad (‘free’). Among the rubaiyats chosen by Abul Kalam for the translation several are explicitly of that spirit. Like the following one:

In prayer  
I will never dissemble,  
Never will I beg  
At any door save the door of Knowledge.

I am the king of all I survey  
 I enjoy freedom from want—  
 Never will I eschew my love for the tavern.<sup>25</sup>

It looks like Abul Kalam maintained deep sympathy and respect for Sufism all through his life. He used to quote Sufi poets in his writings and speeches as the President of the Indian National Congress (1940–1946), Minister of Education and then Minister of Natural Resources and Scientific Research (1947–1958). It seems that for him the main attraction of Sufism has been its spirit of universality. While Muhammad Iqbal's interpretation of that universality has been reduced in his political stand to Pan-Islamism, Azad's vision has been in much broader frames. In fact, Azad's views changed from religious nationalism (he was a strong proponent of Pan-Islamism in the beginning of his political career) to a **secular** one and in the long run to the ideology of world citizenship.

On many occasions Azad warned his compatriots about the dangers of narrow-mindedness expressed in the form of nationalism: "There is no room for narrow-mindedness in this modern age. We shall find a secure place in the community of nations only if we are international minded and tolerant."<sup>26</sup>

It should be noted here that the authority of Abul Kalam Azad in India is very much alive these days as well. In recent years secularism in India has been strongly challenged by the revival of religious communalism. That made the advocates of a secular state to call the attention of their compatriots to an ability of Sufism to be an ally with secularism. One of the signs of the above said tendency is the international conference (scholars from seventeen countries contributed fifty papers) organized by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in 1991 on "Contemporary Relevance of Sufism." The volume of the Conference was brought out on the birthday of Abul Kalam Azad in 1993 who, as it was said in the message of the President of India on the occasion of its release, "exemplified the quintessence of Sufi thought and tradition." The notion of one God for adherents of all religions and the ensuing notion of the unity of humankind worshipping one Supreme Lord was the nucleus of Azad's religious-political system. He considered the main objective of religion to be in bringing people together. "The message which every prophet delivered,—he wrote,—was that mankind was in reality one people and one community, and that there was but one God for all of them, and that on that account they should serve Him together and live as members of but one family."<sup>27</sup>

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My heart is capable of every form,  
 A cloister for the monk, a form for idols,  
 A pasture for Gazelles, the pilgrim's  
 Ka'aba,  
 The Tables of the Torah, the Koran.  
 Love is the faith I hold: wherever turn,  
 His camels, still the one true faith is mine.  
 Ibn 'Arabi

Sufi preaching of **tolerance** between people of different beliefs is one more reason why *tasawwuf* is relevant to modern world where hostility between different confessions is still one of the major aspects of political life.

Among the frontiers established by people between themselves the most insurmountable and impregnable seem to be those which are build up in minds and hearts, which originate not so much from rational considerations as from a blind belief. The latter is most unshakable when it is a religious belief.

History has demonstrated that too often frontiers were established in order to segregate the adherents of different religious confessions. However, paradoxically that kind of division contradicts the very assignment of religion: to link man with God, and consequently, to combine people with each other. Pointing out to this very function of religion, in particular, of a monotheistic creed, an outstanding Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov affirmed: "The unity of God logically demands the unity of humanity."

As a matter of fact, the Holy Scriptures clearly presuppose the unity of humanity: is it not written "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?" (Mark, 11:17, also see Isa, 56:7). In the same spirit the Koran says: "It is He Who created you from a single person" (VII:189), and "Mankind was but one nation, but differed (later)" (X:19).

Nevertheless one might find in the Holy Scriptures a number of passages where it seems that intolerance, enmity and even violence towards the people outside one's own confession are justified.

How one can explain the existence of contradictory statements in the Holy Books? An atheist will easily respond to the question, considering religion to be created by man, and thus to be subjected to human passions, vile motives, rivalry and fight for power.

For a believer there is no way for the Lord to contradict Himself, since God is perfect, He is Absolute. Thus, what looks like contradictions in the Scriptures is explained to result from human misunderstanding of the true meaning of the Divine Word.

For centuries those very ‘contradictions’ of the Holy Scriptures have been used for moral justification of hostility and even aggression towards heterodoxies. Intolerance to those behind the frontiers, who are segregated as ‘the others’, is in particularly dangerous when it is sanctified by the Divine authority. Then aggression and violence are presented as actions approved by God being aimed to bring the victory of the Good over the Evil. Thus St. Augustinian warnings are ignored: “Do not fight evil as if it were something that arose totally outside of yourself”.

Is peaceful coexistence between people of different religious creeds possible at all? I believe the answer could be positive if there is a wish and a will to give up confrontation and to start dialogue.

At what religious dialogue should be aimed? What one could expect from it? Sometimes dialogue is carried on in anticipation of a synthesis. However the latter is rarely achieved. A certain kind of syncretism might take place only in result of long coexistence and interaction of traditions when they function on the same or at least neighboring territories. (That is, for example, how Sikh Religion emerged in India).

In other cases the purpose of the dialogue is to join all the religious creeds in a new world faith. That is how synthesis is conceived by the adherents of the Baha’s faith established by Baha’u’llah (1817–1892).

The Bahai community counts about 3 millions inhabiting in all the continents and represents 2100 ethnic groups. The Baha’s faith is for sure cosmopolitan. Its leaders, like Shogi Effendi, consider the process of the formation of sovereign national states has come to the end. The mature word should give up the fetish of national sovereignty and accept the unity of the humanity by establishing the new world order: “The Earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” Bahai preaching appeal to those who wish to overcome race, ethnic, class, religious hostility. However it is not clear how that New World Order could be achieved. The Bahai orientation to establish the New Order once and forever, to maintain it by the World State, etc. is fraught with the threat of totality.

There is also another approach to religious dialogue—a mystical one. In this case, the unity of all the religions is searched on the way of discovery of the perennial core. It is considered that the differences in beliefs, rituals, institutional forms which seem to be important in everyday experience fade away when we see and affirm the timeless and infi-

nite reality that is no longer broken or differentiated into various forms. In the perennial philosophy infinite reality is compared with light: when light passes through a prism, one can see the various shades of blue, yellow, green, and red, however, no one of these colors, which are like the different cultural forms of religion, is light itself.

As there are different levels of reality (terrestrial, intermediate-psychic, celestial and infinite) there are four levels of selfhood: body, mind, soul, and spirit. The developing, ever changing religious traditions have a common core. The differences of ethical claims and the different evaluations of the life expressed in the physical world, psychic experiences, and theological expressions disappear and become one in a limitless, wholly transcendent pure consciousness, or infinite self. The purpose of the dialogue is to bring forth a deeper apprehension of the spirit, the inner identity of all religions.

Mystical approach is characteristic to the advocates of “the perennial philosophy” like Seyid Hossein Nasr, Frithjof Schuon, Huston Smith. To those who do not share their views, still it would be difficult not to acknowledge that mystical approach could be helpful in carrying on dialogue, in reducing confrontations based on the differences concerning theological, ethical, etc. problems. That might be an explanation why mystical approach is rejected strongly by fanatic fundamentalists, while it is referred to by those who would like to put the end to the communal fights and tension.

Summing up, I would like to point out one more reason why mysticism could be considered to be relevant to a dialogue of cultures by referring again to the authority of Ibn ‘Arabi. As the Great Shaykh said:

“The believer praises the Divinity which conforms to his own belief and connects himself to it in this way; but, all acts return to their author, so that the believer praises himself, as the work praises its artist, all perfection and all lack that it manifests falling back on its author. In the same way, the Divinity (as such, which) conforms to the belief is created by he who concentrates on It, and It is his own work. In praising that which he believes, the believer praises his own soul, it is because of that he condemns other beliefs than his own; if he was just, he would not do it ... If

he understood the sense of the word of Djunayd:  
 ‘The color of water is the color of its  
 receptacle’, **he would admit the validity of all  
 the beliefs, and he would recognize God in  
 every form and every object of faith.**”<sup>28</sup>

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While recognizing a potency of Sufism to be an alternative to Islamic fundamentalism, I would like at the same time to confess that to my mind it is not the best option. There are two reasons for my claim.

First of all, there is no guaranty that Sufi alternative will result in saving from the faults of fundamentalism and not eventuate in some other not affirmative consequences. We are to keep in mind that Sufism has never been one-dimensioned phenomena, it has been always at least ‘double-faced’ or, using the wording of Fazlur Rahman, there is “positive” as well as “negative” Sufism.<sup>29</sup> Islamic mysticism has been both a product of elite consciousness and a popular religion. It has been a form of social protest against political systems as well as the legalized religious doctrine that warranted and sanctioned the system of social injustice and despotism. Yet Sufism has also been used to quell, to pacify, and to repress social activity. Sufism counterpoised irrationalism to rational thinking while also stood forth as a variety of religious free-thought not infrequently contiguous with philosophic theorizing. It persuaded seekers of the Path to renounce mundane cares and bodily appetites, to practice ascetic self-discipline, and at the same time it gave inspiration to Hafiz, Jami, Khayam, Rumi, and many other poets who rapturously extolled love in life. The members of orders could get rid of the dictates of official religion as explicated by legal theologians, but they as well could find themselves dependent upon *shaykhs*, who as the history of Sufism evidences frequently played the negative roles of ‘preceptors’, acted as ‘prophets of decadence’ and directed people a side from a genuine morality.

There is another reason which makes me feel cautious about Sufism. The latter is unable to render real ethical motivations for radical social transformations of Islamic societies in conformity with the challenges of our days. In other words, Islamic mysticism can not bring that rethinking of Islam which can not only defeat fundamentalism, but, what is more essential, will lead the Muslims away from social degradation or backwardness.

The transformation of the traditional society (with a heavy burden of

outdated Medieval passed) in the Muslim countries and joining to post-modern world seems feasible only through a radical change of the social role assigned to Islam and, therefore, through a reappraisal of the entire set of dogmatic tenets. Mystical trend may play an essential role in the transition to look for reformation-reconstruction of Islam.

It is worth to remember “personal” life experiences of a number of Muslim reformers of the XXth century (Djamal al-Din Afghani, Muhammad ‘Abduh, Muhammad Iqbal, etc.) who, being dissatisfied with orthodox Islam, turned to Sufism so that, as Muhammad ‘Abduh confessed, to pass “from the prison of ignorance into the open spaces of knowledge, and from the bonds of blind acceptance of authoritative belief (*taqlid*) in to the liberty of the Mystic union with God.”<sup>30</sup>

The first Muslim reformers did not succeed in bringing genuine changes. For the last few decades “revivalism,” or “fundamentalism” took a head over reformative tendencies. The upsurge of fundamentalism (the “Muslim Brothers” movement, Jamaat-i-Islami, Khomeinism, etc.) is not indicative of an unreversibal failure of reformist efforts. On the contrary, the expansion of revivalism might be a sign of the beginning of a new round in the search of the ways to reforms, this time not as an elitist undertaking (as it has been so far) but as a large-scale movement for bringing radical transformation of traditional society. The fruitless experiments aimed at “overtaking capitalism” or oriented toward “installed socialism” revealed that any model of society, no matter how ideal it may be, would be distorted and prove lifeless if transplanted onto unprepared and all the more vulnerable soil. To make reforms workable it is necessary to identify the **internal** impulses of a certain culture and to set them into action.

A new generation of Muslim reformers turns to Sufism as to one of those needed internal impulses, or potencies. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in India, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in Malaysia, Abdulkarim Soroush in Iran are a few names of those who, using the wording of another Iranian reformer Ali Shari’ati (d. 1977), have launched “the war of religion against religion”, that is a fight carried by Islam “rethought” against Islamic fundamentalism—“the religion of deceit, superfaction and justification of the status quo.”<sup>31</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Mohammed Arkoun*. Rethinking Islam. Common Questions, Uncommon Answers. Trans. by Robert D.Lee. Westview Press: Boulder-San Francisco-Oxford, 1994, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *Carl W. Ernst*. Eternal Garden. Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center. SUNY Press: Albany, 1992, pp. 15–16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.60.

<sup>4</sup> *I.Spencer Trimingham*. The Sufi Orders in Islam. Oxford University Press: London–Oxford–New York, 1973, p. 239.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>7</sup> *William Shepard*. The Faith of a Modern Muslim Intellectual. The Religious Aspects and Implications of the Writings of Ahmad Amin. Vikas Publishing House: Ghaziabad, 1982, p. 203.

<sup>8</sup> One of the first to take that stand of thought soon after anti-Shah revolution in Iran was *T.O. Ling*, professor of comparative religion in the University of Manchester. See his: Islam’s Alternative to Fundamentalism—Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, Vol. 64, No. 1, Autumn 1981, pp. 165–190.

<sup>9</sup> *Mohammad Umar Memon*. Ibn Taimiya’s Struggle against Popular Religion. Mouton: The Hague-Paris, 1976, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Discourses of Rumi. Translated, introduction, and notes by A.J. Arberry. Samuel Weiser: New York, 1977, pp. 122–23.

<sup>12</sup> *Allama Muhammad Iqbal*. The Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam. Iqbal Academy Pakistan & Institute of Islamic Culture: Lahore, 1989, p. 119.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibn ‘Arabi*. Wisdom of the Prophets (Fusus al-Hikam). Beshara Publications: Aldsworth Gloucestershire, 1975, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Mohammad Umar Memon*. Op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> *Jalaluddin Rumi*. The Mathnawi. 4:350 (Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson. 8 vols. Gibb Memorial Series, n.s. 4. London, 1925–40)

<sup>16</sup> Quoted from *B.N. Pande*. The Vedanta and Sufism: A Comparative Study. “Contemporary Relevance of Sufism”. Ed. by S.S. Hameed. Indian Council for Cultural Relations: New Delhi, 1993, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> See: Encyclopaedia Britannica. Micropaedia, 15th edition, vol. IX, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> *I.Spencer Trimingham*. Op. cit., p. 234.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *V.G.Kiernan*. Poems from Iqbal. London, 1955, p. 94.

<sup>22</sup> *M.Iqbal*. The Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam, p. 156.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>24</sup> Shah Jehan’s successor Dara Shikoh, was a great devotee of Sarmad Shaheed. While the second, who ascended the throne after a period of unrest and bloodshed, in 1659, became Sarmad’s enemy and later his executor. As often happens, religion was used to camouflage political designs. In Alamgir’s eyes, the greatest crime of Sarmad was his proximity to Dara Shikoh. Aurangzeb needed an excuse for ordering the poet’s execution, and the mullahs found those excuses. The following Sarmad’s rubayat was declared as the denial of Miraj:

He who understood the mystery of Reality became vaster than the vast heaven;

Mullah says that Muhammad ascended the Heavens.

Sarmad says that the Heavens descended to Mohammad.

(The Rubaiyat of Sarmad. Indian Council for Cultural Relations: New Delhi, 1993, p. 32)

The chief Qazi mullah Qawi was going to announce a *fatwa* concerning Sarmad and make a *kufr* sentence. Aurangzeb was shrewd enough to realize the weakness of the Mullah’s sentence. Hence he preferred to make the execution pending the fabrication of

a better excuse. Finally, the *ulema* gave their verdict declaring Sarmad a *kufir* because he refused to recite more than the first two words of the *Kalima* “La Ilah” (It is said that Sarmad always adhered to this practice). To *ulema*’s howl of protest Sarmad said: “I am still at the stage of “No”, I have not yet reached the “Yes”. If I say “Illalah”, it will be a lie. How can I say what does not rise from within? The next day he was taken to the scaffold and executed. That was in 1672.

<sup>25</sup> The Rubaiyat of Sarmad, p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> Speeches of Maulana Azad 1947–1955. Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India: Delhi, 1956, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> A.K. Azad. The Tarjuman al-Quran. vol. I. Asia Publishing House: Bombay, 1965, p. 168.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibn ‘Arabi*. Wisdom of the Prophets, p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> *Fazlur Rahman*. Islam & Modernity. Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London, 1982, p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> See: *Ch. Adams*. Islam and Modernism in Egypt. New York: Russel and Russel, 1968, p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> *Ali Shari’ati*. On the Sociology of Islam. Trans. by Hamid Algar. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1979, p. 102.