

## Quadrant V - Notes

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Module Name: Religious Developments: the Origin of Sufism

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### **Religious developments: Sufism**

#### **Meaning:**

Sufism derives from the Arabic word Suf, meaning wool. One view is that the word 'Sufi' is derived from the word 'Safa' which means pure. Another view is that the word 'Sufi' is taken from the Greek word 'Sophia' whose meaning is knowledge.

#### **Origin of Sufism:**

The exact origin of Sufism is disputed. Some sources state that Sufism is the inner dimensions of the teachings of Muhammad. Whereas others say that it emerged during the Islamic "Golden Age." According to Ibn Khaldun Sufism was already practiced by the Sahaba, but with the spread of material tendencies, the term Sufi was just applied to those who emphasize the spiritual practice of Islam. Sufism existed as an individual inner Practice of Muslims since early Islamic History. Sufism originated after the death of Muhammad in 632, but did not develop in to orders until the 12<sup>th</sup> Century.

#### **Sufism:**

Sufism is also known as Tasawwuf. Sufism may be best described as Islamic mysticism or asceticism, which through belief and practice helped Muslims attain nearness to Allah by way of direct personal experience of God. Sufism is more prominent among Sunnis, but there are also Shiite Sufi orders or “tariqa.” The followers of Sufism believe they can become closer to Allah through inner purification and introspection.

### **Sufi Orders:**

There are dozens of Sufi orders and offshoots. The orders were formed around spiritual founders, who gained saint status and shrines built in their names. The Chishti Order was founded by Khwaja Abdul Chishti, it was brought to India by Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti. Suhrawardi Order was founded by Shaikh Shihab-ud-din Suharwardi, he sent disciples to India. Qadiri Order was founded by Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani of Baghdad. Shadhili/Shadhiliya Order was founded by Abdul Hasan Ali ash-Shadhili in Alexandria. Naqshbandiya Order was named after Bahauddin Naqband.

### **Development in Sufism:**

The focus of Sufism changed over the centuries as Islam grew and expanded. Initially moved by the fear of God, Sufis eventually adapted affirming doctrine of love, and later the concept of the spiritual journey of the individual towards God. New practices such as singing, dancing, and the worship of saints were introduced into the faith. By the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Sufi mysticism started to burgeon. Sufi mystics and Ulama travelled extensively throughout Arab lands and beyond in search of knowledge and to help spread the faith. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Sufism, which had previously been a less “codified” trend in Islam piety, began to be “ordered and crystallized” into orders which have continued until the present day. Between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Sufism produced a flourishing intellectual culture throughout the Islamic world.

The shift from asceticism to divine love captured the attention of the masses and elites, and soon Sufism began to flourish in Baghdad spreading then to Persia, India, North Africa, and Muslim Spain.

Sufism spread throughout the Muslim world, becoming central component of many peoples' religious practice from Indonesia and South Asia to the Balkans. As it spread, it often adapted to and incorporated local beliefs and customs that made it popular. One major figure and catalyst in its growth was the female mystic Rabiah al-Adaawiyah, who emphasized the absolute love for Allah above everything else.

### **“Golden Age” of Sufism:**

From 1200-1500 C.E, Sufism experienced an era of increased activity in various parts of the Islamic world. This period (especially the thirteenth century) is considered to be the “Golden Age” of Sufism. At this time, many of the major figures in the history of Sufism were alive and writing their monumental classics of Sufi literature and poetry.

### **Practices of Sufism:**

The followers of Sufism practice

Zikar – to remember God all time.

Fikar – to think meditate, or being in the state of awareness and wondering.

Sahar – to awaken – awakening of soul and body.

Jui – to hunger – having exterior hunger (mind) and interior hunger (heart) to obtain the truth and to persist the search.

Somt – to observe silence ceasing to think and talk about worthless things.

Saom – to fast – fasting of body from food, mind from attachments and soul from desires.

Khalvat – to observe solitude – praying in solitude, externally and internally.

Khidmat – to serve – dissolving in the truth of the master and dissolving in the truth of exercise, God.

**Goals of Sufism:**

- Acquire attributes of God.
- Die before your death.
- To acquire nearness of God.
- To achieve contented self (Nafs-ul-Mutmainna).
- To cultivate God awareness (Taqwa).
- To transform self (Tazkiya-e-Nafs).

**Conclusion:**

Sufism is the science by which one knows the method travelling towards the King of kings. It is also the means to the purification of the inward from defects and its adornment with all virtues. Sufism focuses on the enunciation of worldly things, purification of the soul and the mystical contemplation of God's nature. Followers try to get closer to God by seeking spiritual learning known as Tariqa. Sufism helped in spread of Islam to various places. As Sufism spread it adapted elements of local culture and beliefs, making it a popular practice. Sufis were usually organised into "brotherhoods", which did much to convert outlying areas such as Africa and India to Islam. Throughout the Islamic world Sufis provided a channel for the most intense religious impulses.