

THE ROLE OF SUFICIAL IDEAS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Ulugov Jasur

Teacher at the Samarkand campus of the University of Economics and Pedagogy

Dostmuradova Humora

Student of the Samarkand Campus of the University of Economics and Pedagogy

Abstract

This article examines the concept of civil society and analyzes the role of spiritual and educational factors—particularly the teachings of Sufism—in its formation. It is substantiated that Sufi ideas serve as a significant factor in the development of a stable civil society by enhancing human spirituality and fostering virtues that ensure social harmony, such as tolerance, patience, and forgiveness. The article also explores the historical roots of Sufism, its influence on the moral and normative worldview of the Uzbek people, and its relevance in the moral upbringing of youth in the context of globalization. The author provides a scholarly and theoretical account of the role of religious and spiritual values—especially the constructive contribution of Sufi thought—in the establishment of a civil society.

Keywords: Sufism, civil society, spirituality, ethics, social stability, religious and educational values, tolerance, patience, youth education, globalization.

Introduction

In our country, the strategic priority has been defined as the establishment of a free, democratic state based on a market economy and the formation of a solid foundation for civil society. It is recognized that only such a society can ensure a decent standard of living for the people of Uzbekistan, guarantee their rights and freedoms, revive national traditions and spiritual values, and foster the moral and ethical development of the individual.

It is worth emphasizing that the principle of the separation of religion and state has historically been rooted in the advancement of free thought and secular reasoning. This fundamental issue has always held a significant place in the governance of the states that have existed in the Central Asian region. In this context, one can observe the steady growth of the influence of secular political forces in state and societal administration. At the same time, throughout history, the state has regulated its relationship with religion based on specific principles, striving to build a civil society.

Given that one of the key criteria for the formation of civil society is the creation of its spiritual foundation, it is essential to cultivate national self-awareness and to refer to the deep roots of history in this process. It must also be acknowledged that a significant portion of Central Asia's spiritual heritage is closely connected to the Islamic religion.

Islam is among the most widespread religions in the world and has left a profound spiritual legacy. It is not merely a system of belief, but a comprehensive doctrine that has played a crucial role throughout human history in promoting ethical conduct, moral values, constructive



interpersonal relations, an understanding of the universe, and the definition of humanity's place within it. Islam encourages the pursuit of elevated spirituality, divine reflection, and enlightenment. The concept of the perfect human being (*insān al-kāmil*) is articulated in Islam in a divine language with universal humanistic meaning.

The arrival of this great faith and culture, which holds a special place in the advancement of intellectual thought, in Central Asia—a region of notable historical significance—has enriched human civilization with invaluable treasures. Sufism, regarded as one of the core pillars of our national spirituality, also emerged from Islamic thought. It has gained recognition as a discipline that leads the human soul and spirit toward perfection.

At the same time, Sufism plays a significant role in fostering humane relationships among individuals. As noted by many scholars, "Sufis have long been deeply interested in the inner world of the human being, the internal conflicts, and the struggle between the soul and the body. They emphasize that within each person exists two primordial opposing forces—divine (Rahmanic) and satanic energies—and that as a servant of God, the individual must overcome the temptations of evil and embody divine virtues." From this perspective, human life and the principles of living collectively in society have also been interpreted.

In today's pursuit of a civil society, many ideas and theories of Sufism require philosophical analysis and scholarly investigation. This doctrine calls for a wise and respectful approach toward spiritually endowed beings—humans, as the most noble of all living creatures. In an era where social engagement is interpreted in various ways, and when ideological threats and foreign influences are increasingly infiltrating societal consciousness, the social teachings of Sufism serve as a kind of spiritual immunity against moral degradation and harmful ideologies. Indeed, Sufism emerged in times of intense social, political, spiritual, and religious conflict, and has withstood the test of history, having been selected and refined by time itself.

Literature Review and Research Methodology

A review of the history of Sufism reveals that early Sufis, originally adopting a *zāhid* (ascetic) position, initially distanced themselves from societal changes and imposed restrictions upon themselves. However, over time, they abandoned their initial stance of alienation and began to engage with societal transformations. Rather than opposing change, they approached it through a divine lens, seeking to serve as moral, spiritual, and—when necessary—intellectual guides to the community. In doing so, they took Islam as their foundation, recognizing it as a religion of conciliation and balance. As it has been noted, "Sufi masters emerged as the spiritual leaders and moral mentors of the people, resolute in their intent to continue the prophetic mission in both spirit and practice."

In interpreting Sufism, Ahmad Abdullayev articulates the following insights: "At its core, Sufism emphasizes goodness and unity, etiquette and morality, freedom and eternity, service to truth and to the people, the purification of the heart, loyalty and fidelity, commitment to honesty, liberation from the ego, the pursuit of knowledge, humility, and modest living. It calls for turning away from sin and devoting oneself solely to virtuous deeds, guided by pure intention and sincerity."

A broader conceptualization of Sufism is offered by Ibrohim Haqqul, who states: "Sufism is a complex and multifaceted doctrine that has taken root in the social, philosophical, and artistic



thought of various peoples around the world.” Notably, within Sufi teachings, material wealth holds little to no weight in defining one’s social or spiritual value. This clearly indicates that, in Sufism, material possessions are considered of marginal importance, and spiritual wealth is prioritized above all.

Wealth is a relative concept, and in some Sufi orders, it is not even mentioned explicitly. The idealization of material prosperity in daily life often exerts a negative influence on social relations. As one Sufi observation notes: “In such cases, a person may overstep the bounds of servanthood to God and begin to chart their own destiny. Without realizing it, they attempt to interfere with divine affairs, imagining that they can manipulate outcomes for personal gain. They come to believe that they themselves have established the laws of causality in this world, and that all causes must serve their ambitions, assuming that whatever plans they make should inevitably come to fruition.”

For this reason, the concept of materialism is neither promoted in the inner (bāṭinī) nor the outward (ẓāhirī) dimensions of Sufi knowledge. As role models, Sufi masters consistently demonstrated self-discipline over material wealth. Instead of accumulating possessions, they emphasized spiritual perfection and encouraged relationships among people to be grounded in genuine human character.

Worship of God, according to Sufism, is not limited to the mere performance of prescribed rituals—it is a continuous act of love from the heart. Sufis proclaimed that through the path of shari‘a and ṭarīqa, one can attain ma‘rifa (gnosis), ultimately leading to union with the Divine (ḥaqq). For them, prayer was not solely an act of fear or duty, but a state infused with love, longing, and a deep sense of loss in separation from the Beloved.

In this journey, the solidarity and unity of people, their communal lifestyle, and spiritual fellowship are seen as collective achievements. The Sufi path emphasizes that the true victory lies not in individual accumulation, but in shared spiritual elevation.

Analysis and Findings

The views of the Sufi thinkers were not merely based on emotional intuition; rather, they were deeply rooted in normative legal principles applicable specifically to human beings. Sufi scholars recognized the essential role of Islamic jurisprudence (sharī‘a) in ensuring the orderly functioning of society, and they not only advocated for its observance but also required strict adherence to it within their own spiritual communities.

For instance, any aspirant (sālik) wishing to enter the Sufi path (sulūk) was subjected to a rigorous examination of their commitment to sharī‘a. One foundational teaching instructs: “The sālik, upon encountering anything in this world, must perceive it as a manifestation of the Absolute Agent. That is, the world and all that exists within it are not self-created, but rather are the result of the craftsmanship of the eternal, omnipotent, and unique Creator. The sālik must firmly believe in and bear witness to this truth.”

The Sufi master further counsels the sālik to engage in sincere repentance for all major and minor sins, and to resolve any outstanding moral obligations to others, ensuring justice is served. The novice is instructed not to lie, to avoid conflict, and to perform the five daily prayers punctually and in congregation.

From the above, it becomes clear that the first requirement for any murīd (disciple) was to fulfill



both the responsibilities of servitude to God and the duties owed to society. In this way, Sufism advocated for a holistic spirituality that integrated individual ethical conduct, social harmony, and adherence to divine law.

In Eastern societies, the principle of subordination has long been regarded as a foundational category of morality. This principle manifests itself in various hierarchical relationships: the child's obedience to parents, the younger sibling's respect for the elder, subordinates' deference to their superiors, the individual's duty to society, and the citizen's allegiance to the state. In each case, the one who is subordinate perceives this relationship as a moral obligation. A similar sense of duty applies to one's service to the homeland.

In such a worldview, a person's identity is not self-proclaimed but rather validated by both the Divine (Haq) and the community (xalq). One's position in society is reflected in how one treats elders and parents, restrains personal desires, upholds manners and ethics, and exercises sound judgment and understanding.

Sufi orders, too, are inseparable from these human qualities. A person living in society is expected to fulfill moral responsibilities such as: "not disrespecting the beliefs of other religions, valuing human beings and treating them with dignity, preserving historical, architectural, ethnographic, and archaeological monuments and artifacts, safeguarding literary, historical, and scientific heritage, and showing respect for the customs, honor, values, and spirituality of every nation."

This ethical and spiritual orientation is vividly articulated in the Naqshbandiyya order, founded by Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshband. He skillfully described the role of human beings in this world, emphasizing values such as mutual respect, compassion, and benevolence. Khwaja Bahauddin taught that all people are guests in this temporal world and denounced greed, exploitation, parasitism, and moral degradation.

The question of the perfect human has always remained a relevant and pressing issue in society. In our ancient history, Sufism has played a significant spiritual and moral educational role in the formation of the people and the nation. It is considered both a doctrine and practice concerning the theory of the perfect human, as well as the nurturing and maturation of such an ideal. Perfect humans serve as the living conscience of society. People look up to them with alertness, reflecting on the futility of the world, turning inward to their own hearts, contemplating their deeds, and engaging in repentance and humility. The virtuous deeds and actions of perfect individuals have brought strength to the hearts of others and light to their eyes.

The ideal of the perfect human and the aspiration to realize it constitute the core meaning of human civilization. Teachings on the perfect human envisage the comprehensive development of an individual — spiritually, morally, intellectually, and physically. In our country, great importance has always been attached to raising perfect humans. This group includes the wise and sagacious, the humble and noble, the truthful and devoted. Individuals possessing these virtues demonstrate a high capacity for contemplation and reflection. Their intellect is not confined to mere words and concepts but is embodied by qualities such as integrity, justice, faith, love, and compassion.

The pursuit of the perfect human and emulating such individuals have become societal demands alongside all fields of education in the process of social transformation. Producing cadres who meet the requirements of the times—who think critically, retain national identity, and are aware



of universal human values—is essential for the progress of the nation. The Sufi tradition can assist in nurturing the balanced spiritual state of youth. It is a matter of pride that such schools have existed in our land. The spirit of Islamic spirituality is ingrained in our blood. What remains is to research it through modern methodologies, to convey it to the consciousness of young people, to explain it clearly, and to introduce them to the spiritual heritage of their ancestors.

Conclusions

Regardless of one's profession, social class, religious beliefs, ethnicity, or nationality, individuals living in society engage in mutual relationships. Demonstrating high spirituality in these interactions nourishes not only oneself but also others on a moral and spiritual level. Every person has the right to live freely and prosperously. It is even more commendable when prosperity is reflected through one's spirituality and ethical conduct. From the moment a person begins to recognize their intellect, they strive for perfection in thought, morality, and enlightenment. The spirituality of a society and its development are the outcomes of a prolonged historical process of progress. As society gradually evolves, human spirituality also becomes increasingly refined in its structural composition. The oldest foundations of spirituality are constituted by moral, religious, and artistic perspectives.

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