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SUFISM AND MYSTICISM IN AHMAD YASSAWI'S SUFI DOCTRINE

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Abstract

The article scientifically analyzes the unique ways of achieving the perfection of Sufism in the Sufi teaching of Ahmed Yassawi. Sufism and its ideas, especially the idea of a perfect man, have interested people since the very beginning of Sufism. Many scientists have studied this teaching, expressed their opinions and contributed to its development. Especially in the development of this teaching contributed the Central Asian mystics: Yassawi, Najmuddin Kubro, Ghazali, Abdukholik Gijduvani, Aziziddin Nasafi and others.

Keywords: Sufism, perfect man, spiritual perfection, universal values, discoveries, teaching, spirituality, values.

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Introduction

We are living in an era of great historical transformations. The world has recognized us, and we have recognized the world; today, Uzbekistan has its own place and voice in the global community. Our opinions are taken into consideration, our experience is being studied, and our achievements attract attention. What is especially gratifying is that in New Uzbekistan a new generation is emerging—one that perceives the world in a new way, fights for its rights and freedoms, and sees its own destiny as inseparable from the destiny of its people and homeland. This generation is mastering the spiritual heritage of its ancestors alongside universal human values and intellectual discoveries.

The doctrine of Sufism and the ideas advanced within it—particularly the concept of the *perfect human* (insān-i kāmil)—have fascinated people from the moment Sufism emerged as a spiritual-philosophical movement. Many scholars have studied this doctrine, expressed their views, and contributed to its development. In particular, Central Asian Sufi thinkers such as Ahmad Yassawi, Najm ad-Din Kubra, al-Ghazali, Abdulkhaliq Ghijduvani, and Aziziddin Nasafi greatly enriched the evolution of Sufi thought.

State of Research

Today, numerous researchers have explored the ideas and principles of Sufism. Among them are Najmiddin Komilov with his works *"Tasavvuf"* and *"Tasavvuf yoki komil inson axloqi"* (1996), *"Najmiddin Kubro"* (1997); Nasafiy with *"Khoja Ahmad Yassaviy"* (1993); Sultonmurod Olim with *"Naqshbandiy va Navoiy"* (1996); I. Haqqulov with *"Tasavvuf saboqlari"* (Bukhara, 2000); X. Ergashev with *"Yusuf Hamadoniy va Abduholiq G'ijduvoniy – xojagon tariqati asoschilari"* (2003); and Hamidjon Homidiy with *"Tasavvuf allomalari,"* among many others. These works address various issues such as the essence of Sufism, its core ideas, the Sufi conception of the perfect human, and the lives and activities of prominent Sufi scholars. In addition, in Shaykh Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf's work *"Tasavvuf haqida tasavvur,"*

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the Islamic roots of Sufism, Sunni Sufi traditions, and the significance of spiritual education and worship within Sufism are thoroughly discussed. Overall, Sufism has been widely explored, and scientific studies continue to examine its unstudied dimensions, yielding new academic contributions.

Nasafiy, in his treatise *"Khoja Ahmad Yassaviy,"* notes that within Islam *"the Sufi order and dervishes originated already during the time of the Prophet"* [1, p.5].

There are eight different views regarding the origin of the term *"Sufi"*:

1. Some argue that it comes from the word *"saf"* (row), meaning those Muslims who stood in the first ranks of the divine path.
2. Others claim that it derives from *"suffa,"* referring to the pious ascetics who lived in the Prophet's time, with whom Sufis sought to identify themselves.
3. Another group suggests that *"Sufi"* comes from *"safo"* (purity), referring to the pure and radiant hearts of Sufi practitioners.
4. Some derive it from *"sufuh,"* meaning the essence or extract of something, implying that Sufis embody the refined essence of spiritual life.
5. According to certain scholars, it originates from *"sof"* (pure), referring to spiritual purity, sincerity, and inner refinement.
6. Others propose a Greek origin, from *"sofos"* (wisdom).
7. Some scholars link it to the Greek word *"suf,"* the latter part of the term *"philosophos"* (philosopher).
8. Most scholars and theologians, however, contend that the word *"Sufi"* comes from the Arabic word *"suf,"* meaning wool, since early ascetics traditionally wore coarse woolen garments as a sign of renunciation of worldly luxuries.

Among these, the view of Ibn Khaldun is considered the closest to the truth. In his *"Muqaddima,"* he states that Sufism likely derives from *"suf"*—meaning wool or a woolen cloak—because early ascetics commonly wore woolen garments to distinguish themselves from worldly, elegantly dressed people, thereby manifesting their detachment from material life.

In 1927, the Uzbek writer and scholar Abdurauf Abdurahim ("Fitrat") published an article dedicated to the works of Ahmad Yassawi in the Uzbek journal *"Maorif va maktabchi"* ("Education and Teacher"). In 1991, this article was republished in the *"San'at"* journal (Issue 8, Tashkent) with an introductory commentary by the modern Uzbek critic Sirojiddin Ahmad [3, pp. 19–20; 102]. In his work, Fitrat discusses Yassawi's biography, the historical situation in Central Asia during that time, and the influence of Khoja Ahmad on later generations of Sufi poets and mystics. The author's reflections on the literary significance of Yassawi's "hikmats" are particularly noteworthy.

Until recently, certain interpretations of Sufism presented in the literature remained prevalent—views characteristic of earlier research traditions which considered Muslim mysticism as a form of oppositional movement sharply expressed against the ideology of "Arab colonizers," or as an "Aryan reaction" to Islamization. Such conclusions have now been recognized as outdated and incorrect. In reality, Sufism was not a reactionary movement against Islam; rather, it was a product of the internal development of Islam itself and originally evolved within the Arab religious environment [Sh., p. 317]. Attempts to determine Ahmad Yassawi's "degree of Sufism" or, in other words, "his level within Sufi hierarchy," appear rather simplistic when they are

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defined in terms of "opposition" [102, p. 24]. Fitrat wrote his article during a period of socialist state-building in Uzbekistan, cultural revolution, and active struggle against "Islamic remnants." Despite a number of serious shortcomings, Fitrat's work continues to attract scholarly attention today.

Main Part

The terms *Sufism* and *Sufi* began to circulate from the time of Abu Hashim al-Sufi, who lived in the early 9th century. Before that period, words such as *zuhd* (asceticism), *taqwa* (piety), and *parhezkorlik* (abstinence) were used to refer to similar concepts.

Thus, Sufis commonly wore woolen cloaks, coarse woolen garments, or jackets made of wool. For this reason, people began referring to them as "those who wear wool," that is, *Sufis*.

Some mistakenly assume that *Sufism* and *so'fiylik* (the Sufi way of life) are identical. It should be noted that the two terms refer to different concepts. If *so'fiylik* refers to a particular path or branch—a spiritual order chosen by a Sufi and called *tariqa* or *suluk*—then *tasavvuf* refers to the theoretical and philosophical worldview underlying Sufism.

Those who practice and embody Sufi teachings are called *mutasavvuflar* (Sufi adherents). Scholars, writers, poets, or thinkers who accepted the philosophical principles, ethical norms, and worldview of Sufism in their work but did not follow any practical Sufi order or spiritual discipline were not considered Sufis; they were regarded as *people of Sufism* (*mutasavvuf*) rather than practicing Sufi followers.

Unfortunately, some contemporary publications do not distinguish between these two and present them as identical. In reality, the mystical discipline—*suluk* or *tariqa*—is a system of spiritual practices, while *tasavvuf* is the theoretical framework that Sufis implement in practice.

A Sufi or dervish enters a particular *tariqa* or *suluk*, setting the attainment of spiritual truth as their primary goal. Under the guidance of a spiritual master—*pir*, *murshid*, *shaykh*, or *eshon*—the Sufi begins to learn the laws, principles, and spiritual training of the Sufi path.

Sufism can also be viewed as a form of free-thinking, since it interprets Islamic theological concepts from an ethical and educational perspective through deep and comprehensive analysis. Sufi thinkers offer subtle and profound philosophical reflections on various religious doctrines and life matters.

In his article *"The Roots of the Sufi Doctrine"* [2, pp. 31–32], Abulhakim Shar'i Juzjoni explains that the word *tasavvuf* denotes *"to wear wool (suf), to become a Sufi, to follow the righteous path, and the way of the dervishes."* He adds that, according to the beliefs of its adherents, *"as a person purifies the nafs (inner self), the radiance of truth begins to shine within the human heart"* [2, p. 32].

In his book *"Sufis and Paradise,"* Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh emphasizes—based on the sayings of great Sufi masters—that Sufism cannot be defined merely through words. *"Whatever can be explained in words is not Sufism,"* he states. According to him, the definitions provided by great Sufi figures describe only certain aspects of the path. A more complete definition would be: *"Sufism is the nourishment of divine love and the path that leads to truth by directing all attention toward the Beloved. The goal of Sufism is to know the Truth—not through logical reasoning or philosophical speculation like the philosophers, but through spiritual unveiling and inner vision."* Therefore, Sufism is a path that must be walked and experienced; it cannot be learned

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simply by listening [3, p. 11].

Sufism emerged mainly in the 8th–9th centuries and spread across the states of the Arab Caliphate, including the Near and Middle East, Central Asia, Northern India, as well as Indonesia and Northwestern China.

In the doctrine of Sufism, the central aspiration is to attain the vision of God. A person who possesses the feeling of *faqr* (spiritual poverty) is neither a slave to anyone nor a master over anyone; he is a servant of God alone and feels his dependence on God alone. Renouncing worldly attachments, ultimately abandoning one's ego—this is the essence of Sufism.

Sufism, while studying the human being, primarily relies on the heart and the inner world of a person. It aims to cultivate and purify the heart, to nurture a person of spiritual insight, for God manifests only in a pure and enlightened heart. In Sufi thought, all forms of selfishness, vices, and inclinations toward baseness arise from the physical desires of the body and the cravings of the *nafs*. To become a *perfect human* (insān-i kāmil), one must first overcome the desires and temptations of the body and the ego. The only path to saving a person from moral decline, from the abyss of spiritual downfall, and elevating them to purity is to conquer the impulses of the *nafs*. For this, one must abandon excessive love for the material world and attach one's heart to the love of God. In Sufism, this is regarded as the path toward understanding the essence of the world and one's own self. A person who understands himself realizes that the world and its riches are transient. As Khoja Bahouddin said, *"To recognize the evil of one's own ego is to know oneself."* [4, p. 25].

Sufism is a doctrine that calls people to honesty, purity, equality, and the preservation of human dignity. It advocates that all Muslims are equal, that each person should live by the earnings of their own honest labor, avoid exploiting the strength of others, and observe principles of social justice. Its adherents maintained that such a goal is attainable not only by building a just society and having a righteous ruler, but also through devoting oneself fully to God and striving to attain His pleasure [5, p. 48].

At the core of Sufi teachings lies human action and human perfection. These ideas emphasize that a person must maintain consciousness and awareness with every breath, pay attention to each step he takes, dedicate himself to the love of the homeland, and remain connected with the people and live among them [6, p. 80]. When considering the creation of these ideas as a whole, one finds the underlying belief: *"If God created man in His own likeness, and if the primary purpose of creating the world was the human being, then man must express gratitude to God for this divine favor by devoting himself entirely to Him. To do so, he must purify himself, attain spiritual perfection, and become worthy of God."* Those who called themselves to such a lofty purpose, who forgot their bodily desires and elevated and purified their souls to reach God, freeing themselves from all human vices arising from physical needs—such individuals were regarded as the *perfect human*.

According to Sufi ideology, the perfect human ultimately becomes spiritually close to God and attains the honor of divine union. Different Sufi orders promoted various ideas throughout different historical periods. The Yasawiyya order, which emerged in Mawarannahr in the 12th century, is reflected in Ahmad Yassawi's work *"Hikmat."* According to him, *"There can be no tariqa without sharia, no ma'rifat without tariqa, and no truth (haqiqat) without ma'rifat."* [7, p. 76].

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At the foundation of the Yassawiyya path lies the idea that spiritual perfection can be attained through seclusion (*uzlat*) and renunciation of worldly life. Only those who are able to abandon the comforts and pleasures of this transient world, endure hardship in solitude, and devote themselves to continuous worship and strenuous spiritual discipline can reach this level. Another prominent figure in Sufi teachings is Najm al-Din Kubra (1145–1221) of Khwarazm, who founded the *Kubraviyya* order [7, pp. 21–23].

This doctrine, however, rejects complete withdrawal from the world. It promotes the idea that during the arduous spiritual journey toward perfection, it is permissible to enjoy the lawful blessings of this world. As a result, love for the homeland becomes an important component. Najm al-Din Kubra was killed in 1221 during the battle against Chinggis Khan.

If Sufism is a doctrine that describes the human being's journey toward God through attaining the state of the *perfect human* (insān-i kāmil), then *tariqa* is the straight path that leads toward this perfection—an established method of moral and spiritual purification. According to scholars, the "signs of the Tariqa" are three:

1. **Dam (breath):** refraining from speaking about matters that should not be spoken of;
2. **Qadam (step):** avoiding actions that are forbidden;
3. **Karam (generosity / righteous action):** engaging in the right and necessary actions, and while doing so, not neglecting the worship of the heart [8, p. 29].

In Central Asia, the founders and propagators of such spiritual paths—each with their own distinct *tariqa*—were our great ancestors: Ahmad Yassawi, Najm al-Din Kubra, and Bahauddin Naqshband.

In the philosophy of Sufism, ideas that support human spiritual, moral, and ethical perfection hold a central place. By cultivating and nurturing the human soul, a person can be shaped into a virtuous being with noble character and refined behavior.

Sufism describes four stages on the path of attaining divine mercy and spiritual perfection. These are: **Sharia**, **Tariqa**, **Ma'rifa**, and **Haqiqa** [4, p. 76].

After the rise of Islam, Sufi doctrines based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith gradually developed. By the 10th–11th centuries, the earliest Sufi orders emerged in Central Asia.

Ahmad Yassawi (d. approx. 1166–1167), known as the "Sultan of Sufi Knowledge," expressed his deep love and devotion to God in his poetry collection *"Divan-i Hikmat."* According to him, *"Those without divine love possess neither soul nor faith"* [1, p. 47]. In his reflections, he emphasizes that those who do not believe in God fail to understand the beauty of life or the essence of this world. Yassawi addressed those deprived of divine love with the following call:

O heedless one, do not speak of the people of love,
Seek pain, for the pain of love is the cure.
If you wish to be a lover, do not look for signs among the ascetics,
For on this path, a true lover owes no price [1, p. 8].

Here, Yassawi calls those who show no interest in knowledge to seek learning and urges them to follow the righteous path. The profound, meaningful, and aesthetically rich world of Yassawi's *hikmats* demonstrates the greatness of his personality. In his poems, Yassawi invites people to love God, to recognize His power, and to follow the right path. He expresses these ideas in the following lines:

True lovers are said to live forever,

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Though their souls descend beneath the earth,
Ascetics and worshippers have understood this meaning,
True lovers become the Khidr of the people [1, p. 13].

This quatrain clearly shows that a person's ability to truly know God, his honor and esteem among people, and his purity, sincerity, humility, and noble qualities are manifestations of the Creator's power. Those who love God are always blessed.

The expression of divine love in Sufism is closely connected with Yassawi's aesthetic worldview. For Yassawi, love (*ishq*) is the path to union with God and delight in His beauty. He emphasizes that true divine love and the attainment of its perfection can only be the aim of a lover's heart. Yassawi writes:

Do not be an ascetic, do not be a mere worshipper—be a lover,
Endure hardship and remain faithful on the path of love,
Restrain your ego and be humble in His presence,
Those without love have neither soul nor faith [1, p. 9].

Through these verses, Yassawi calls people to become lovers of God and to yearn for His divine presence. In Yassawi's view, the true lover marvels at the beauty of creation and the power of God, living life with the desire to be worthy of becoming the Beloved's devotee. For him, the love of God unites people and guides them toward the righteous path.

Conclusion

Ahmad Yassawi's moral and aesthetic ideas retain great significance even today, serving as an essential source for educating the younger generation in an aesthetic and ethical spirit. Information about the life of Yassawi's disciple, Sulaymon Baqirg'oniy (d. 1186), is intertwined with many legends and stories. He was also known as "Hakim Ata." Among his works is the *"Book of Bibi Maryam."*

Sufi teachings hold an important place in the development of philosophical thought in Central Asia. Sufism is the science of the human being—the science of purifying the heart. It strengthened human morality, bringing together the most important ethical values of Islam into a unified system. In this way, Sufism developed both the theory and practice of the Perfect Human (*insān-i kāmil*).

Tariqa is the path that shows how one may attain spiritual perfection. Each founder of a Sufi order developed and promoted his own path of spiritual discipline and gathered followers who sought to walk that path.

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