Chapter VI

INTRODUCTION TO SUFISM

Sufism is the Islamic mysticism. It has been defined and studied and practiced variously by the people of different aptitudes. In spite of its various proponents it hints at the same single transcendental reality. There had been various Sufi teachers who got access to the reality according to their individual spiritual abilities. They experienced the reality in their own way. The reality is the same but it has different paths leading to it. Every wayfarer’s soul passes through different mystical stages. So apparently the Sufi orders seem to differ but inherently they lead to the same reality. Some reach there in intoxication and they advocate intoxication, the others reach there in sobriety and they, then, defends sobriety. Outwardly they may appear antagonistic but when seen from the viewpoint of reality, both are right and both are equal. Can we prefer Shaikh Bistami who advocated intoxication (Sukr) more to Shaikh Junaid who advocated sobriety (Sahv)? No, not at all. Both the Shaikhs have great status in Sufism. They differ only in approach not in rank. Similarly about the other Sufi orders.

A lot of introductory and historical research on Sufism has been done. There had been many great scholars who have produced magnificent researches regarding the historical origins of Sufism and its basic tenets. Some of these scholars are Syyed Nafisi, Zareenkub, Syyed Hossein Nasr, Iqbal Ali Shah Idris Shah, Abdul Haqq Muhaddas Dehlvi, Shah Wali Ullah, and many others. Among European scholars of Sufism are Nicholson, Brown, Schuon, Burckhardt, Lings, Arberry, Corbin etc. These are only tip of the iceberg. There are many more. But there are available few works that studies Sufism.
in the context of modern thoughts. They can be counted on finger tips. Two of them are Dr. Raza Arasteh, and Dr. Javed Nurbaksh, both psychiatrists from Iran. The present study is very much inspired with their works. Both of them present Sufism in the light of modern theories of psychological sciences. The present study is also an attempt to follow their footsteps.

Nevertheless, we shall try to say in brief what Sufism is so that while going through the following chapters we should be equipped enough to make our points clear. Let’s begin with Hujwiri’s views on Sufism.

Many people have defined Sufis as those who wear the Suf (a woolen garment). But Hujwiri does not agree with them. He writes in ‘Kashif al Mahjub’.

‘Some assert that the Sufi is so called because he wears a woolen garment (Jama-i-suf), others say that he is so called because he is in the first rank (saff-i-awwal), others say it is because the Sufis claim to belong to the Ashab-i-Suffa, with whom may God be well-pleased! Others, again, declare that the name is derived from safa (purity). These explanations of the true meaning of Sufism are far from satisfying the requirements of etymology, although each of them is supported by many subtle arguments.’

According to him, ‘To Sufis the meaning of Sufism is clearer than the sun and does not need any explanation or indication.’

Nevertheless he defines Sufism as follows:

a) The Sufi is he that is dead to self and living by the Truth.

b) The Sufi is he whose language, when he speaks is the reality of his state.

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1 Kashf al Mahjub. Taj Company. 1931, p.30
2 Ibid. p.34
3 Ibid. p.35
4 Ibid. p.36
c) The Sufis are they whose spirits have been freed from the pollution of humanity, purified from carnal taint, and released from concupiscence, so that they have found rest with God in the first rank and the highest degree, and have fled from all save Him.¹

d) Hujwiri quoted Ibn al-Jalla or Jallabi’s saying – “Sufism is an essence without form”, because the form belongs to mankind in respect to their conduct, while the essence thereof is peculiar to God. Since Sufism consists in turning away from mankind, it is necessity without form.²

e) According to Dimashqi – Sufism is to see the imperfection of the phenomenal world (and this shows that human attributes are still existent), nay, to shut the eye to the phenomenal world” (and this shows that human attributes are annihilated).³

f) According to Abi Talib – Sufism is goodness of disposition: he that has the better disposition is the better Sufi.⁴

g) According to Husri – The Sufi is he whose existence is without non-existence and his non-existence without existence.⁵

h) According to Ali b. Bundar al Sayrafi of Nishapur – Sufism is this, that the Sufi should not regard his own exterior and interior but should regard all as belonging to God.⁶

¹ Ibid, p. 37
² Ibid, p.38
³ Ibid, p.38
⁴ Ibid, p.39
⁵ Ibid, p. 40
⁶ Ibid, p 41
i) Muhammad b. Ahmad at Muqri says – Sufism is the maintenance of right states with God.¹

j) Murtaish says. Sufism is good nature.²

k) Abu Ali Qarmini says – Sufism is good morals.³

These above were a few quotations from Kashful – Mahjub. Let us now consider the views of certain other authors, too.

According to Muzaffaruddin Nadvi (1983):

“Sufism chiefly consists in puritanical abstinence from luxury and enjoyment and aims at attaining spiritual perfection with a view to find absorption in God. Sufism is nothing external to Islam, it is a part and parcel of it. It is really the evolution of spiritual and mystical elements inherent in that great religion. Islam has two sides – esoteric and exoteric or internal and external, and the two sides are interdependent. Neither can be developed without the assistance of the other.”³⁴

Dr. Mir Valiuddin⁵ has culled various definitions of Sufism from the different authentic sources. We quote a few of them as follows –

Shaykh-al-Islam Zakariyah Ansari says:

“Sufism teaches how to purify one’s self, improve one’s morals, and build up one’s inner and outer life in order to attain perpetual bliss. Its subject matter is the purification of the soul and its end or aim is the attainment of eternal felicity and blessedness.”⁶

¹ Ibid, p 41
² Ibid, p 42
³ Ibid, p 43
⁵ The Quranic Sufism. Motilal Banarsi Das. 1981 pages 1-16
⁶ Ibid, p 3
Imam Ghazali writes in his book ‘Deliverance from the Error’:

“When after acquiring proficiency in these sciences, I turned my attention to the methods of the Sufis, I came to know that their method attains perfection by means of theory and practice. The gist of their knowledge is to mortify the self and acquire freedom from baser passions and evil attributes so that the heart may get rid of the thought of anything save God and to embellish it with Divine remembrance.”

In praise of Sufism Abul Hasan Nuri says:

“Sufism is the renunciation of all selfish pleasures.”

Sufis follow the following verse of the Quran:

“And follow not the lusts (of they heart), for they will mislead thee from the path of God.”

Then Dr. Valiuddin quotes a few sayings of the great Sufis on what they mean by the inner life.

Junayd has defined a Sufi as “dead to his self and alive in God.”

Husayn b. Mansur Hallaj says that “a Sufi is Singular in his being, he neither accepts anybody nor does anybody accept him.”

Supporting the above views writes Jami:

1. Ibid, p.4
2. Ibid, p 4
3. Ibid, p 5
4. Ibid, p 6
5. Ibid, p 6
O Votary of earthly idols fane,
Why let these viels of flesh enwrap thy brain?
'Tis folly to pursue a host of loves;
A single heart can but one love contain!
Lawa’i Flash I. (Tr. by E H. Whinfield)

Muhammad Manzur Numani (1952) writes that Sufism is the name given to those activities by which ‘din’ and ‘iman’ is strengthened. He writes:

“Sufism is not anything other than constructing the religion and developing in a man those characteristics which have been suggested in the Quran and the Sunnat and which have been declared necessary for the perfection of the faith and the Islam….

After studying the Quran as well as the holy sayings (hadith) it is known that besides the health of the building of the faith and religion and ideologies and action, the heart and the inner nature of man demands some special characteristics to be present there. For example, about love the Quran says in its ayat of ‘Surah baqra’ –

These who are men of the Faith, they get the most of love from God.

And it is said in the following hadith –

“The wealth of the faith is given to the one who is possessed of three qualities – firstly, he loves God and his messenger more than anything else; Secondly, if he loves a human being that too should be for the sake of God and thirdly, once he has followed the faith, it would be as worse for him to follow any shirk as to be burnt in fire.”

It is given in the Surat Al-Anfal Ayat-3 (the Holy Quran).

\footnote{Ibid, p 7}
‘For, Believers are those who when Allah is mentioned, felt a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear His revelations rehearsed, find their faith strengthened, and put (all) their trust in their Lord.’

And in the Surat al Momin, the people of God has been described as “Successful indeed are the Believers, those who humble themselves in their prayers; who avoid vain talk; who are active in giving Zakat; who guard their modesty.”

Then in Surat al Zumar it is revealed ‘The skins of those who fear their Lord tremble in threat; then their skins and their hearts do soften to the remembrance of Allah.’ (ayat – 23).

Then in Surat al Imran it is said ‘Men who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides and contemplate...’ (ayat, 191)

Then in the Surat Muzammil the Rasul is addressed as:

‘But keep in remembrance the name of thy Lord, and devote thyself to Him wholeheartedly.’ (ayat – 8).

In the above ayat the following characteristics of a man of faith have been described as necessary.

a) They should love God more than anything else.

b) Their heart should be such that whenever God is mentioned there should arise fear and trembling in it.

c) Whenever the Holy Quran is read before them, their faith should increase by it.

d) They should have firm faith in God and this faith of them should be their biggest support in life.
e) They should always fear God.

f) The fear of God should possess them in such a way that when they do good deeds they do it in fear whether these deeds would be accepted to God or not.

g) When they hear the recitations from the Holy Quran, their body should tremble and their interiors as well as exterior should bend towards God and His remembrance.

h) They remember God every time and in every condition and they do not forget Him at any condition.

i) Their state is to detach themselves from everything and divert their attention towards God. 

In addition to the above lines, then, quotes many Holy Sayings (ahadith) by which the faith is built. According to Maulana Numani, Sufism is nothing but strengthening the above characteristics in a man. He writes:

Maulana Numani in the following lines hints at the growth of human self by the help of Sufi practices:

2 Ibid p. 38
Sufism is based on the Quranic teachings. The Quran is full of those ayat which describe those characteristics of a believer, which are also supposed to be those of a Sufi. For example, in Surat al Imran it is said:

Those who show patience (firmness and self-control)
Who are true (in word and deed);
Who worship devotedly;
Who spend (in the way of Allah),
And who pray for forgiveness in the early hours of the morning. (S.3, A.16).

The above can be a definition of a Sufi as well. Even the famous Sufis base Sufism on the Quranic teachings. Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani writes:

Ibid p. 39
Idries Shah quotes the above saying as being the authorship of Junaid of Baghdad as:

'The Sufi has eight qualities –

Liberality such as that of Abraham;

Acceptance of his lot, as Ishmael accepted;

Patience, as possessed by Job;

Capacity to communicate by symbolism, as in the case of Zacharias;

Estrangement from his own people, which was the case with John;

Woolen garb like the Shepherd’s mantle of Moses:

Journeying, like the traveling of Jesus;

Humanity, as Mohammad had humility of spirit.'

1 Futah al Ghaib. Darul Kitab. Deoband 1987 P.133
Idries Shah wrote:

"Sufism is a rich mystical tradition that arose in the Middle East, a tradition that promotes an experience of life through dealing with life and human relations. Historically, as much research has shown, the Sufis have profoundly influenced Jewish, Christian, and Hindu literature and attitudes. In so doing, the Sufis have played a unique part, for no other body of thinkers has had an analogous effect on this group of major belief system."

Ted Hughes, a famous English poet admired the Sufis and says:

"The Sufis, fifty million strong, must be the biggest society of sensible men there has ever been on earth."

Indries Shah interprets Sufism in the modern terminology. He quotes Sayed Iman Ali Shah’s views on Sufism which are very rich in psychological viewpoints:

'To be a Sufi is to become what you can become, and not to try to pursue what is, at the wrong stage, illusion.

It is to become aware of what is possible to you, and not to think that you are aware of that of which you are heedless.

Sufism is the science of stilling what has to be stilled, and alerting what can be alerted; not thinking that you can still or alert where you can not, or that you need to do so when you do not need it...

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2 Sufism, Ibid. p. 25
The success of man in raising himself higher comes through the right effort and the right method, not merely by concentrating upon the right aspiration or upon the words of others directed to yet others."\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1} Idries Shah, the Sufis. Penquin Books, 1986. p. 243
A FEW FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS IN SUFISM

Sufism is the mysticism of the religion of Islam. Like any other religion, Islam too has two domains – outward and inward or exoterism and esoterism. In the Sufi terminology it is called Shariat and Haqiqat. Sidi Imran Yalya (alias William Stoddart) writes -

“The outward religion, or exorcism, (known in Islam as the Shariat), may be likened to the circumference of a circle. The inner truth, or ‘esoterism’, that lies at the heart of the religion (and is known in Islam as haqiqat), may be likened to the circle’s center. The radius proceeding from circumference to center represents the mystical or ‘initiatic’ path (tariqat) that leads from outward observance to inner conviction, from belief to vision, from potency to act.”

But some Sufis distinguish between Shariat and Haqiqat, Hujwiri writes:

‘Haqiqat, then signifies a reality which does not admit of abrogation and remains in equal force from the time of Adam to the end of the world like knowledge of God and like religious practice, which is made perfect by sincere intention, and Shariat signifies a reality which admits of abrogation and alteration, like ordinances and commandments. Therefore, Shariat is Man’s act, while Haqiqat is God’s keeping and preservation and protection, whence it follows that Shariat cannot possibly be maintained without the existence of Haqiqat, and haqiqat cannot be maintained without observance of Shariat. Their mutual relation may be compared to the body and spirit.”

We do not want to fall in controversies regarding the terminologies here. We shall confine ourselves to the esoteric part i.e. Sufism.

The Sufi believes in the tauhid (oneness of God). Tauhid is imminent in the Shahada 'la ilaha illa Llah, Muhammad Rasul Allah' i.e. there is no God but God and Muhammed is His Prophet. To believe in 'tauhid' has two meanings:

i) that besides God there is no other reality, everything else is perishable.  

ii) Tauhid means to detach one's heart from everything save God. It is to unite heart, to assemble its divided parts as Jami says – 'Tauhid means to unite one’s heart'.

The state of Tauhid is not something as a pregiven to a Sufi, rather he achieves it after undergoing a gradual process of disintegration and integration called as fana and baqa. The Sufi believes that 'jihad (the holy war) with the self as the bigger and the more difficult and worthwhile form of jihad than the jihad against the political enemy with the help of the sword.'

The path of a Sufi is a very hard and arduous path. He has to abandon every sort of worldly pleasures. He has to discipline himself in the mystic activities under the guidance of the Master (the Shaikh). To this hard work the Sufis gives the name of mujahadah. The Mujahada leads him to mushahadah (vision or contact with the reality).

Mujahida is a hard process that includes disciplined prayers and ascetic practices. These result in a refined form of the Sufi. This form is more ready to perceive the subtle perceptions of the reality. Mujahida means to develop certain subtle faculties to perceive the effulgence of the reality. This growth process includes certain stations (Maqam) and states (hal). Hujwirti writes:

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1 Jami, Lawaih,
‘Hence the man that has a “station” stands by his own self-mortification, whereas the man that has a “state” is dead to “self” and stands by a “state” which God creates in him.’

According to Hujwiri repentance (tawbat), conversion (inabat), renunciation (Zuhd), trust in God (tawakkul) etc. are the stations that comes one after the other respectively.

Shahabuddin Suhrawardi writes:

‘The Sufis have said: “The hal is a gift (maithah); the maqam, an acquisition (Kash).’

Satisfaction (rida) is the end of the Sufi’s spiritual journey. Hujwiri writes:

‘In conclusion, you must know that satisfaction is the end of the “stations” and the beginning of the “states”. It is a place of which one side rests on acquisition and effort, and the other side on love and rapture. There is no “station” above it: at this point mortifications (Mujahidat) cease. Hence its beginning is in the class of things acquired by effort, its end is the class of things divinely bestowed.’

Suffism is basically a science of the soul. Its ways and methods all aim at constructing a man whose soul is perfect in contents and whose body is disciplined to preserve the sanctity of the soul. The body in Sufism is disciplined so as to keep itself away from contaminating the soul. The soul or self of the Sufi grows towards perfection and passes through various realms. Seyyed Hussein Nasr summarizes these realms which contain within themselves the main levels of cosmic existence as follows:

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1 Ibid, p. 181
2 Shahbuddin Suhrawardi The Awarif al Maarif. Taj Company, 1984, p. 102
3 Hujwiri, op. cit., p. 182

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They can be summarized in ascending orders as the world of the human and bodily forms (*al-nasut*); the world of subtle lights or psychic substance (*al-malakut*); which is also envisaged as the world of imagination or similitude (*alam al - mithal*); the world of spiritual existence beyond form (*al - jabarut*) which transcends all determinations. These worlds, which are also “presences” if considered from the point of view of realization and attainment of knowledge, comprise the mach levels of cosmic existence consisting of the corporeal, psychic, and spiritual manifestation as such. The Sufi delineates these worlds and outlines a science of the Universe based on them in order to be able to realize all these states and finally pass beyond these determinations to attain the state of union with God who is the goal of his journey through all the realms of cosmic manifestations.¹

The Sufis believe that ‘Every phase between *Nasut* and *Malakut* is the *Shariat*; and every phase between *Malakut* and *Jabarut* is the *Tariqa*, and every phase between *Jabarut* and *Lahut* is the *Haqiqa*.²

These realms corresponds to the states of the self which are described as *nafs ammarah, mafi lawwama, nafs mulhama, nafs mutmainna* etc. (we shall discuss these terms in detail in the next chapter).

The Sufis state that the perfected adept in Sufism is called *Insan-e-Kamil* or the Perfect Man. Our present study is psychological study and considers Sufism as a Growth or Transpersonal Psychology and confines itself to the spiritual growth of the self of a Sufi in his *suluk*.

The present study confines itself to the study of the events that take place in the heart (or self) of the Sufi. The Sufis have described the self in various terms which we

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¹ Seyyed Hussein Nasr, Three Muslim Sages, Suhail Academy Lahore, Pakistan 1988; pp. 113-114
shall discuss in the next chapter. In the subsequent chapters we shall study the spiritual growth of the self of a Sufi and compare it with a few modern theories of psychologies of the human self and its growth.