Chapter 3

Syncretic

Sufi

Literature
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Now I will tell a tale of long ago.
How first the Faith began, and how it grew
To full perfection: yea, and I will tell
How next it withered, till it had become
E’en as a faded garment. After this
I have for thee a very gem of knowledge
Which thou canst gain, if thou wilt heed my words,
A knowledge copious, to scour the heart
Of stain and rust, and make it clean and bright.
True is my knowledge, clear and eloquent,
Precious as pearls and rubies of great price:
By grace Divine I indicate the truth,
Being taught by God Himself, for that I live
Within an age become exceeding strange.
Cruel, and terrible, wherein we need
Most urgently a statement of our faith
And intellectual arguments thereto:
Islam hath been most nobly eulogized-
As mourners praise the dear, departed dead!

These lines by Ahmed b. Asim al-Antaki of Antioch, who was born at Wasit (Iraq) in 140/757 (the former numerals indicate the Islamic year and the latter the Common Era) and died at Damascus in 215/830, express the religious mood in the early days of the Abbasid caliphate. The Islamic conquests brought immense power
and wealth, but not to Prophet Mohammed's house, who had dominion over vast territories and in their palaces lived a life of luxury and plenty that scandalized simpler souls, which sparked into a mystical sect.

1. Islamic Background of Sufism

To trace the roots of Sufism, we must know the historical background to the rise of Islam in the seventh century C.E. According to Islamic historical tradition, as in the eighth and ninth century works. Prophet Mohammed, the founder of Islam was born in 570 C.E. in Mecca, in central western Arabia. In 610 onwards he had revelations from God (*Allah*) through the agency of Archangel Gabriel, which were later written in the Qur'an (meaning ‘recitation’ or ‘reading’). When encountered opposition, Mohammed fled to Medina in 622 (200 miles to the north), where he founded the religion of Islam, followed by his death in 632.

Islamic origin of Sufism took place as a protest against the successful Muslim empire. Mohammed was both a prophet and a statesman, but after his death this office of enforcing the will of God was taken over by the caliphs (‘caliph’ is from the Arabic root ‘*khalifa*’ meaning successor. The four caliphs were Abu Bakr, Omar, Uthman and Ali, who were called *Rashideem*), who supposed to have been spiritually rich and temporally ascetic. But the caliphs became spiritually poor, temporally rich, corrupt and unjust, which resulted in strong reactions by various groups. This is similar to the origin of Christian mysticism, wherein the clergy as spiritual leaders supposed to have been ascetics, became more worldly and so the Christian faithful strongly reacted by going away from the world by adapting the mystical path. During the Ummayad period, Islam had direct contact with Eastern Christianity and other oriental religions. Given the corrupt caliphates, a similar mystical movement arose within Islam, which was influenced by these faiths for its motivation and principles, but nonetheless
developed an independent theosophy purely within the Islamic framework. The movement came to be known as Sufism and its followers Sufis. In pre-Islamic times ascetics often dressed in wool as a symbol of their ascetic way of life and the early Muslims who practiced austerity were duly nicknamed ‘Sufis.’ Later on the name was adopted by those who sought to obtain knowledge of God through various stages of spiritual self-denial as asceticism in Islam gave way to mysticism.

2. Etymological Origin of Sufism

Sufism is Islamic mysticism. The word ‘Sufism’ (or ‘Soofism’) is derived from the Arabic root ‘Tasawwuf’, which comes from the word ‘Suf’ (or ‘Soof’) meaning wool, and ‘Sufi’ means ‘wearer of wool.’ This is due to the Sufi tradition of wearing woolen robes, a designation of their initiation into the Sufi order, symbolizing dedication to a life of mysticism. The early Sufi orders believed that wearing such robes was in imitation to Isa bin Maryam (i.e. Jesus). Ibn Taymiyyah replied them saying:

There are a people who have chosen and preferred the wearing of woolen clothes, claiming that they want to resemble al-Maseeh ibn Maryam. But the way of our Prophet is more beloved to us, and the Prophet used to wear cotton and other garments. (Al Fatawa 11/7)

Before the advent of Islam, in Nestorian Christian asceticism wool was a significant garment, wherein the novice was ritually seated on a woolen tunic, symbolizing a grave which declared him dead to the world. Thus, robe was a customary attire of the Christian monks popularly known as the desert fathers, which was imitated by Prophet Mohammed, whom the Sufis emulated by wearing similar robes. As per literary evidence, during the Islamic period in Nestorian Christianity, a wearer of wool meant a monk, and in early Islam wearing of wool was characteristic
of the lowest classes of society, which consequently symbolized humility. The earliest Sufis adopted woolen clothing, thus accepted the explanation of the term. This etymology is indisputably and exclusively correct, were it not for a long-neglected counter-argument. This is how ‘Suf-ism’ came into being.

Further, it is a fact admitted even by the Sufis that both the terms Sufi and Sufism, and Sufi beliefs have no basis in the traditional Islamic sources of the Qur’an and the Sunnah.¹ Muhasibi (d. 857 C.E.), whom the Sufis claimed as a great figure among them, which Joseph van Ess denied in his work *Die Gedankenwelt von Harit al-Muhasibi* saying that he was neither a Sufi nor a mystic but a moralizing pious theologian, restrained approach to the Christian roots of Sufism. He referred to contemporary ascetics dressed in wool or patched frocks as dubious, a characteristic of Christians. He spoke of ‘wearers of wool’ from Mecca, South Arabia, Syria and Iraq by various tribal, religious groups, but did not give evidence of specific Sufi practices. Further, Muhasibi was not hostile for the term ‘monasticism’ (rahbaniyya). Quoting the biblical parable of the sower (Mathew 13:1-23), he showed no discomfiture using Christian sources. Hence, essential Sufism is a conglomerate of extracts from innumerable other religions with which Sufis interacted.

In 1893 Adalbert Merx asserted that originally the term ‘Sufi’ could not have meant ‘wearers of wool’, because logical formation of the word in Arabic would mean ‘a man made of wool’ or ‘a seller of wool.’ According to him, it must have come from the Greek *sophos*, meaning ‘wise’, rather than Greek *philosophos*, ‘philosopher’, became Arabic *faylasuf*. The Greek *s* in Arabic is represented by the letter *sin* (as in *faylasuf*), not the letter *sad* (as in *sufi*), thus the Greek *s* does correspond to an Arabic *sad*. Furthermore, Sufism is greatly indebted to the Neo-Platonist philosophy. The

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¹ The Sunnah includes the specific words, habits, practices and tacit approvals of Prophet Mohammed.
term *sufi* emerged simultaneously with the translation of Greek philosophical works into Arabic, which was heavily patronized by some caliphs of the ‘Abbasid dynasty, which reigned in Baghdad from 750, and it was extended in the first half of the ninth century. However, in 847 C.E. a change of ruler ushered in a dramatic fall for Greek philosophy, thus looking at it as un-Islamic, and so to be abhorred. Thus, the Sufis suppressed the original Greek explanation of their name. Goran Ogen challenges Merx saying that originally the word *sufi* could have meant ‘wearer of wool’, in the spoken, colloquial dialect, and then transposed into literary Arabic, without accurate formation in the latter.

There is a legend about the associates of Mohammed called the people of the *suffa*, a long bench in Medina which was believed to be their sole home, as they devoted themselves to piety and poverty. This led to the postulation of a fanciful derivation, of the word *sufi* from *suffa*, i.e. people of the bench. Other Sufi etymologies are:

- ‘Suf’, i.e. ‘wool’ (called by the Sufis themselves).
- ‘Saff’ means ‘rank’, ‘degree.’
- ‘Saff awal’, i.e. the first line of worshippers at the *namaz* (Islamic prayer).
- ‘ahl al Saffa’, i.e. people of the bench, (‘suff’ means bench).
- ‘Banu Sufa’, i.e. name of a tribe.
- ‘Sawfana’, i.e. name of a very bitter vegetable.
- ‘Safwal al Kifa’, i.e. lock of hair at the nape of the neck.
- ‘Sufiya’, i.e. comes from the word ‘Safa’ means ‘purity.’
It is puzzling whether Christianity represented by ‘wool’ as opposed to Neo-Platonist philosophy had more influence on the rise of Sufism. However, Christian mystical thought itself was essentially Neo-Platonist.

3. Definitions of Sufism

Studies have proved that Sufism is so broad and diverse that it is impossible to formulate an inclusive definition. People have realized that those who try to define Sufism - as in a story by Jalal al-Din Rumi - are like the blind men describing an elephant. Further, if a Muslim defines ‘Sufism’, then there is a problem of Sufi definition per se, because Sufis use poetico-rhetorical-language, which puts an ordinary Muslim into confusion of one’s rational faculties; it shocks people, and it kindles discussion. As a result, at the end there comes a non-rational understanding. Hence, Sufi definitions use categories which are obscure and don’t explain the truth in itself.

According to Fred Donner, “Mohammed built a movement of devout spiritualists from many faiths who shared a few core beliefs: God was one, the end of the world was near, and the truly religious had to live exemplary lives rather than merely pay lip service to God’s laws. It was almost a century after Mohammed founded his ‘community of believers’ and launched the great Islamic conquest that his followers started to define their beliefs as a distinct religious faith.” (Mohammed and the Believers)

Madka Dargha defines Sufism as to sleep with one’s mother, to rob, and to eat what is forbidden.

To sleep with one’s mother: The child sleeps with the mother. Earth is like the mother who gives us food and everything we need, and it is where we go when we die. ‘Sleep with one’s mother’ means keep contact with the earth as one had contact
with one’s mother when he was a child by three ways: walking bare-footed, sleeping on the floor, treating all creatures with respect. Then the earth will protect him.

**To rob:** It means to worship. Just as a thief robs in the death of a night, with fear in the heart, one must worship in the death of the night with fear in the heart for or with anything not God.

**To eat what is forbidden:** It is faith. We love to do what is forbidden, and so must we be strongly attracted to faith. For example, anger is forbidden. When one is angry, he forgets everything and everybody, and does what he wants. So one must do what God wants.

According to Kalabadi, “Sufism is related to the bench and to the wool. The stress is that the Sufi has left the world, departed from home, fled his companions, and is busy mortifying his carnal desires.”

According to Junayd, “Sufism is not much prayer and fasting, but security of the heart. It is generosity of the soul, and it finds its prototype in the prophets in the Qur’an. Sufism seeks to emulate the generosity of Abraham, who was ready to sacrifice his son. It seeks to emulate the self-sacrifice of Ishmael who readily offered himself for sacrifice. It seeks to emulate the patience of Job in the midst of worms and jealousy. It seeks to emulate the symbolism of Zechariah, who could not speak for three days. It seeks to emulate the strangerhood of John. It seeks to emulate the pilgrimhood of Jesus, who had nowhere to lay his head and who was so poor, he had only three things: bowl, comb and needle, of which, the first two he gave away. Jesus must come with the robe of Moses and emulate the poverty of Mohammed, because Mohammed was given the keys of the whole world but he rejected. For, he favoured poverty. Hence, Mohammed is poorer than Jesus, because Jesus kept the needle with him.”
In the words of Ruwaym, “Sufism is a sacrifice of the soul and faithfulness to contract. It is not tiring of searching or disappointment. It is to prefer God to everyone else, and to find God preferring one to everyone else.”

Nuri says, “Sufism is to follow and to obey the commands of God as understood in their deepest sense.”

According to Hujwiri, “Sufism is to have a heart free of discord.”

Jalal al-Din Rumi says, “Sufism is to find joy in your heart in the midst of grief.”

al-Junaid describes Sufism as meaning that “God should cause thee to die from thyself and to live in Him.”

In Sufis’ own words, Sufism is a four-fold path or a three-fold path. The four-fold path is, Shariat (law), Tariquat (way / order), Marifat (choose one’s superior), and Haqiqat (truth / name of God). And the three-fold path is, sometimes they say Tariqat, Marifat and Haqiqat, and some other times Shariat, Marifat and Haqiqat.

The working definition of Sufism is: Sufism is first mysticism (i.e. mysterious, because it aims at union with God), which can’t be attained by use of the senses (don’t use senses but inner senses), which can’t be attained by use of the logical / rational faculties. It is attained by closing the eyes, by insight (i.e. wisdom of the heart which is the centre of one’s being) or intuition; and which can’t be attained by purification from inordinate attachments.

4. Types of Sufi Mysticism

In general, mysticism is of two types: Mysticism of infinity and mysticism of personality. Mysticism of infinity believes everything to be God, because everything is an emanation of God. This is pantheism, which is the philosophy of Plotinus. Mysticism of personality says that God is completely different from the world and
from that anything that exists in the world. Sufism has both types of mysticism. When it says, “Everything is He. Nothing is like Him”, it is mysticism of infinity. On the other hand, when it says, “I am He. I am truth”, it is mysticism of personality. It is similar to the Indian Advaitic philosophy, wherein realizing one’s divine status the Advaitin utters *Ahm Brahmasmi* (i.e. I am Brahman) or *Tattvamasi* (i.e. Thou art That).

Further, mysticism can be voluntaristic and Gnostic. In voluntaristic mysticism, the mystic puts on the qualities of God, such as God is loving, forgiving, merciful, life-giver, guide, etc. and one tries to become that. In Indian philosophical system, the voluntaristic mysticism is known as *Saguna Brahman*, i.e. Brahman with qualities. In Gnostic mysticism, the mystic wants to have the knowledge of God like, ‘How does God act? Everything is an act of God’ and so on. Sufism is both voluntaristic and Gnostic.

Sufism consists of a unique kind of person, who believes that it is possible to experience God, for which he is willing to put himself into an esoteric state where he can experience God, and he is willing to undergo the discipline necessary for self-purification. The aim of Sufism is union with God. It is understood in an Islamic way, because it is taken from the Qur’an.

And remember when God called forth from the children of Adam from their reigns, and made them testify about themselves, saying, “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes verily. Alast we testify.” This was so that you may not say on the day of resurrection, “Lo of this, we are unaware.” This is the covenant of Alast. (Qur’an, surah *Al-A’raf* 7:172)
According to Islamic tradition, the Isra and Mi'raj (in Arabic al-'Isra' wal-Mi'raj) are the two parts of a night journey that Prophet Mohammad took during a single night in 621 C.E., which has been portrayed as both a physical and spiritual journey. A brief sketch of the journey is given in Qur'an 17:1 sura Al-Isra', and other details come from the Hadith literature - supplemental traditions about the life of Mohammad. In the journey, Mohammad travels on the steed Buraq from al-Masjid al-Haram (at Mecca) to al-Masjid al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem), where he leads other prophets in prayer.

Glorified (and Exalted) is He (Allah) [above all that (evil) they associate with Him] who took His slave (Muhammad) for a journey by night from al-Masjid al-Haram (at Mecca) to al-Masjid al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem), the neighbourhood whereof We have blessed, in order that We might show him (Muhammad) of Our Ayat (proofs, evidences, signs, etc.). Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seeer.”

He then ascends to heaven where he speaks to God, who instructs Mohammed to take back to the faithful regarding the details of prayer. As per tradition, the journey is associated with the Lailat al Mi'raj, as one of the most significant events in the Islamic literary tradition.

And [remember], when We told you: “Verily, your Lord has encompassed mankind (i.e. they are in His Grip)” And We made not the vision which We showed you (O Muhammad as an actual eye-witness and not as a dream on the night of Al-Isra’) but a trial for mankind, and (likewise) the accursed tree (Zaqqum, mentioned) in the Qur’an. We warn and make them afraid but it
only increases them in naught save great disbelief, oppression and disobedience to Allah. (Qur’an, surah Al-Isra’ 17:60).

And indeed he (Muhammad) saw him (Jibril) (Gabriel) at a second descent (i.e. another time)

Near Sidrat-ul-Muntaha (a lote-tree of the utmost boundary over the seventh heaven beyond which none can pass). Near it is the Paradise of Abode. When that covered the lote-tree which did cover it.

The sight [of Prophet Muhammad] turned not aside (right or left), nor it transgressed beyond the limit (ordained for it). Indeed, he (Muhammad) did see of the Greatest signs of his Lord (Allah). (Quran, surah An-Najm 53:13-18).

There is a brief sketch of the above story of Mohammed’s ascension to heaven and appearance before God in his biography, composed in the mid-eighth century and edited in the early ninth - a familiar Middle Eastern motif with shamanistic antecedents. Islam has always linked this story with a passage in the Qur’an (17:1), where an unnamed person goes on a mysterious journey at night. However, it has been convincingly pointed out that there is no reason to identify this person with Mohammed or the night journey with his ascension. All the more, the Sufis rendered a rich and colourful expansion, revisiting in it a prototype for their own mystical experiences. Yet in another legend, set in Mohammed’s boyhood, in which mysterious visitors open his breast and extract his heart, we again find a well-known element of shamanistic religion, where it was an indispensable initiatory procedure. Sometimes the story of Mohammed having his breast opened is put just before his ascension - a syncretic Sufi character.
6. Early Sufi History

The following anecdotes are the Sufi concoctions explaining their initial roots with their resultant fruits. In the first story, Sufism is associated with its central institution called 'piri-muridi', i.e. the relationship between the spiritual director, who is also the superior and the spiritual child. The Persian *pir or peer* means master, and *murid* is from the Persian *murad* meaning desire. *Murid* is the one who desires union with God, i.e. ultimately paradise. Zulfikar, son of Jangi, in his “Discipleship” narrates the importance of the *pir*:

With a guide you may become truly Human.

Without a guide you will remain mainly Animal.

If you can still say: ‘I could not submit to any man’
- You are still worthless for the road.

But if you say: ‘I wish to submit’, in the wrong way
- The road will never find you, and you are lost.

*Piri-muridi* began with Mohammed, who was taught by the Archangel Gabriel the secret of the Qur’an. Mohammed gave this secret to his son-in-law Ali, who gave it to the heads of the Sufi orders. Here we can recall Jewish Kabbalah wherein the master has a secret handed down to him by his predecessors, which are revealed only to the Kabbalah disciples. This is a Gnostic ideology entered into Sufism via Judaism and Christianity.

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2 *Pir or Peer* (Persian literally ‘old person’) is a title for a Sufi master equally used in the Nath tradition. They are also referred to as a *Hazrat or Shaikh*, which in Arabic for ‘old man.’ It is translated into English as ‘saint’, which could be interpreted as ‘elder.’ Other words that refer to a *Pir* include, *Murshid* (in Arabic meaning ‘guide’ or ‘teacher’), *Sheikh* and *Sarkar* (Persian/Hindi/Urdu word meaning ‘Master’, ‘Lord’). *Peer Baba* is commonly used in Hindustani as a honourific title to Sufi masters.
According to the second story, *piri-muridi* began after the Mongol invasion. Because of this invasion, Muslims began to lose their faith, who needed to be strengthened in their faith by giving a faith experience. In order to give this experience, some Muslim holy men undertook this task. Eventually their teaching resulted in different Sufi orders.

As per the third story, Sufism began with Adam. God had decreed that the world exists for a given period of time, and that there is only one person who is submissive to God. To execute that the people are submissive, God sent the prophets who taught Islam. When the prophets died people returned to heedlessness. Therefore, God had to send the next prophet... until Mohammed...with whom prophethood ended. But people had gone to heedlessness. Therefore, God sent *pirs*... to guide, protect and bring people back to God.

Speaking on the origin and evolution of Sufism, Bayazid Bistami beautifully puts in his *The Seed of Sufi Knowledge* thus:

The true seed was made in Adam’s time. The miracle of life, existence.
It germinated in the time of Noah. The miracle of growth, rescue.
By the time of Abraham it had sent forth branches. The miracle of spreading, maintenance.
The epoch of Moses saw the making of the grapes. The miracle of fruit.
The time of Jesus was that of the ripening of the yield. The miracle of tasting, joy.
Mohammed’s time saw the pressing of clear wine. The miracle of attainment, transformation.3

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To become a Sufi, a Muslim must attach himself to a tariqah - one of the Sufi orders - and submit himself to a pir. Bay'ah is the convent by which the murid is initiated into the particular order he enters, which attaches him to his pir. The Sufis form a group of guilds, where they have pirs, initiates and novices. While joining the novitiate the initiate has to make a lifelong commitment to be under a pir, and while making the promise, he has to put his hand in the pir's hands, who accepts him by putting a shawl on his head. Jalal al-Din Rumi beautifully expresses this Sufi tradition in his couplet.

Do not look at my outward shape,

But take what is in my hand.

Only when the pir adorns the disciple with a khirqah, a robe inducting him into the order, does he become a recognized Sufi, and only then can he embark on a valid pilgrimage through the various stages towards his goal of union with God. Once a Sufi disciple qualifies to be a pir, his pir bestows him with 'barrakah' or power and gives him 'Farman' or orders, after which he can accept disciples in the name of his pir. In the conferring ceremony the pir ceremoniously ties the turban on the murid's head and then embraces him. While embracing, the power from the pir's heart is believed to pass on to the murid's heart. The silsilah (chain) is the one from which the pir derives his power (barrakah) and authority. If the pir has produced many pirs, he has to choose one to be the head either from pirs or from initiates though a test.

Accordingly, whenever an unknown dervish comes into a convent or wishes to join a company of Sufis, they ask him “Who was the Pir that taught thee?” and “From whose hand didst thou receive the khirqa?” Sufis recognise no relationship but these two, which they regard as all-important. They do not
allow anyone to associate with them, unless he can show to their satisfaction that he is lineally connected in both these ways with a fully accredited Pir.⁴

This ceremonial tradition reflects the ordination ceremony in Christianity, wherein the ordinandi puts his hands in the hands of the ordaining Bishop and makes the promise of lifelong commitment. The Bishop in turn adorns him with the vestments, and then gives him the ‘kiss of peace’ by embracing, and it is believed that the Holy Spirit descends upon the ordinandi. This also reflects the apostolic authority conferred on Roman Catholic priests through the laying on of hands which goes back to the Apostles. However, like Christians, the initial Sufi experience is not a rebirth experience in which the person, once born of the flesh, is now born of the Spirit, has a totally new relationship with God and knowledge of Him, and through his unity with God in the Spirit develops this new relationship. On the other hand, the Sufi really seeks only “to become aware of what one has always been from eternity (azal) without one’s having realised it until the necessary transformation has come about.”¹⁵

The major Sufi orders are: Qadiriyya by Abdul Qadir al-Jilani; Rifaiyya by Ahmed ibn Ali ar Rifai; Chishtiyya by Mu’iniddin Chishti who is buried at Ajmer in India; Yasawiyya by Ahmed al Yasawi; Kubrawiyya by Majmaddin Kubra; Mawlawiyya a Turkish order founded by Jalaluddin Rumi who is buried in Konya in Turkey; Suhrawardiyya by Diyya Uddin Najb Suhrawardi; and Naqshabandiyya by Bahauddin al Naqshbandi, prominent in Iran and Asia.

7. Syncretic Evolution of Sufism

Goran Ogen, in his *Did the term “Sufi” exist before the Sufis?* states that the first time the word ‘Sufism’ was used was in the second half of the eight century C.E. in ‘Kufa’ (now in Iraq) for Djabir bn Haiyan of Kufa, an alchemist (i.e. who turns iron

into gold by pouring some water on it) and a practising ascetic. Then it was used for Abu Hashim of Kufa (d. 776), a mystic, after which it was used for Shia uprising of Kufa, followed by a school of Shia mystics in Kufa. Fifty years later, it was used for Muslim mystics all over Iraq and two hundred years later it was used for all Muslim mystics all over the world. This, however, contradicts all the classical Muslim sources, according to which the term dates 816. For, there is no evidence addressing a group of people ‘Sufis’ about 776, and it is only around mid-ninth century that there were such groups in Baghdad.

From Kufa the Sufi movement spread to all parts of the Islamic world, especially Khorasan, wherein the Umayyad caliphate⁶ was overthrown and established the Abbasid caliphate. Khorasan was once the flourishing centre of Buddhism had enormous influence on Sufism. Ibrahim ibn Adham, prince of Balkh (d. 160/777) from Khorasan has the legend of his conversion to austerity was popular among Sufis and has often been compared with the life of Gautama Buddha.

‘My father was of Balkh’, Ibrahim b. Adham is reported to have said, ‘and he was one of the kings of Khorasan. He was a man of wealth, and taught me to love hunting.’ One day I was out riding with my dog, when a hare or a fox started. I pricked on my horse; then I heard a voice behind me saying, ‘It was not for this thou wast created: it was not this thou wast charged to do.’ I stopped, and looked right and left, but saw on one; and I said, ‘God curse the devil!’ Then I pricked on my horse again; and I heard a voice clearer than before, ‘O Ibrahim! It was not for this thou wast created: it was not this thou hast charged to do.’ I stopped once more, and looked right and left, and still I saw no one; and I repeated, ‘God curse the devil!’ Then I pricked on my horse

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⁶ The Umayyad dynasty came to power under the third Caliph, Uthman ibn Affan (r. 644-656), but the Umayyad regime was founded by Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan, long-time governor of Syria, after the First Muslim Civil War in 41/661 C.E.
once more; and I heard a voice from the bow of my saddle, ‘O Ibrahim! It was not for this thou wast created: it was not this thou hast charged to do.’ I stopped, and said, ‘I have been roused! I have been roused! A warning has come to me from the Lord of the Worlds. Verily, I will not disobey God from this day on, so long as the Lord shall preserve me.’ Then I returned to my people, and abandoned my horse; I came to one of my father’s shepherds, and took his robe and cloak, and put my raiment upon him. Then I went towards Iraq, wandering from land to land. 

The legend continues that he roamed from place to place seeking a way of lawful living, until worked as a gardener in Syria and earned his daily bread. But when his identity was revealed, he went to the desert, wherein he came in contact with the Christian monks, from whom he learned the true knowledge of God. ‘I learned gnosis (ma’rifa),’ he related to a disciple, “from a monk called Father Simeon. I visited him in his cell, and said to him, ‘Father Simeon, how long hast thou been in thy cell here?’ ‘For seventy year’, he answered. ‘What is thy food?’ I asked. ‘O Hanifite’, he countered, ‘what has caused thee to ask this?’ ‘I wanted to know’, I replied. Then he said, ‘Every night one chick-pea.’ I said, ‘What stirs thee in thy heart, so that this pea suffices thee?’ He answered. ‘They come to me one day in every year, and adorn my cell, and process about it, so doing me reverence; and whatever my spirit wearies of worship, I remind it of that hour, and endure the labours of a year for the sake of an hour. Do thou, O Hanifite, endure the labour of an hour, for the glory of eternity.’ Gnosis then descended into my heart.”

8 Ibid., p. 37.
In Christian monastic mysticism, poverty, celibacy and obedience to the abbot or abbess were the vows pronounced by the mystic monks or nuns at the end of the novitiate. Similar practices were also prevalent in Buddhism. Influenced by Buddhism and Christianity, Adham advocates other-worldliness, celibacy, and poverty. For, he said that a true Sufi desires nothing in this transient world or in the next but must inculcate steadfast love and devotion to God, which he beautifully puts in this lyrical verse:

I swear it is the nobler part
To drink the salt tears of the heart.
And crush the datestone, than to stand
With greed in soul, and cap in hand,
To gain - for recompense enow!
The lowering glance and wrinkled brow.
Then with despair be satisfied;
'Tis greater wealth than aught beside,
A bargain to rejoice the soul.
Despair is fine and worshipful;
God's fear is true nobility.
Despair leads on to infamy;
For, let the world be fair to-day,
It shall at last assault, and slay.  

Poverty was an important virtue in the life of a mystic. In Buddhism the monks and nuns were mendicants, who were addressed as bikkus and bikkunis respectively. Similarly in Christianity, the monastic mystics were not to possess
anything, but live on alms – a sign of total self-surrender and other-worldliness. Sufis being the true followers of Islam (Arabic aslama means ‘surrender’) adopted poverty as the virtue cum a sign of total self-surrender and other-worldliness. When a man approached Abu ’l-Hussain al-Nuri on the eve of the Bairam festival, asking him what garments were best suited for the morrow, he replied:

‘Tom-morrow is the festival!’ they cried,

‘What robe wilt thou put on?’ And I replied:

‘The robe He gave me, who hath poured for me

Full many a bitter potion. Poverty

And patience are my raiment, and they cover

A heart that sees at every feast its Lover.

Can there be finer garb to greet the Friend,

Or visit Him, than that which He doth lend?

When thou, my Expectation, art not near,

Each moment is an age of grief and fear;

But while I may behold and hear Thee, all

My days are glad, and Life’s a Festival!’

Further, celibacy was a vow for the Christian monastic mystics, who believe to be ‘married to God in Christ.’ Buddhist bikkus and bikkunis also were the strict observers of celibacy. Abu ’l-Hussain al-Nuri advised that in adopting poverty one should not contract marriage, since one cannot fulfill the needs of a wife. In the Bible, St Paul’s letter to the 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 gives similar advice:

Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose

10 Ibid. p. 62.
therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a
man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou
loosed from a wife? seek not a wife... for the fashion of this world passeth
away. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how
he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of
the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife
and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she
may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the
things of the world, how she may please her husband. But if any man think
that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of
her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them
marry. Nevertheless he that standeth steadfast in his heart, having no
necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart
that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage
doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better... and I think
also that I have the Spirit of God.

Ibrahim ibn Adham said that when a Sufi marries, he boards a ship; but when
he gets a child, his asceticism shipwrecks. Al-Fudail b. Iyad (d. 187/803), a
Khorasanian by birth, lived at Kufa and died in Mecca, preached on the inter-
relatedness of poverty and celibacy thus:

In truth I would rather be this dust, or this wall, than dwell in the shambles of
the noblest of earth’s inhabitants to-day. Thou fearest death; but dost thou
know death? If thou tellest me that thou fearest death, I will not believe thee;
for if thou didst indeed fear death, it would not profit thee to eat or to drink, or
to possess anything in this world. If thou hadst known death truly, thou wouldst never have married, or desired children.\textsuperscript{11}

Rabi’a, a woman Sufi held austerity, poverty and celibacy with high esteem. Many a man had sought her hand in marriage, but she rejected all saying,

The contract of marriage is for those who have phenomenal existence. But in my case, there is no such existence, for I have ceased to exist and have passed out of self. I exist in God and altogether His. I live in the shadow of His command. The marriage contract must be asked for from Him, not from me.\textsuperscript{12}

Marital communion with God is alien to Islam. It is a typical Buddhist and Christian mystical concept syncretically appropriated into Sufism. Moreover, celibacy is not at all a virtue in Islam. The Qur’an says, “You shall encourage those of you who are single to get married. They may marry the righteous among your male and female servants, if they are poor. God will enrich them from His grace. God is Bounteous, Knower.” (Qur’an, surah An-Nur 24:32).

“Among His proofs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, in order to have tranquility and contentment with each other, and He placed in your hearts love and care towards your spouses. In this, there are sufficient proofs for people who think.” (Qur’an, surah Ar-Rum 30:21)

“Marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four.” (Qur’an, surah An-Nisa’ 4:3)

The Muslim historian Al-Tabari says that Mohammed consummated marriage with thirteen women. But if all the sexual relationships and all the legal marriages are included, it will be twenty-four. Initially, Sufis had considered celibacy necessary to concentrate fully on God with an undivided heart, and it was recommended so. Once

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. pp. 41-42.
\textsuperscript{12} Farid Al-din ‘Attar, Tadhkirat al-auliya’ (Muslim Saints and Mystics) p. 66 (quoted by M. Smith, Early Mysticism, p. 186).
on seeing a Sufi kissing children, Rabia retorted. “If he kisses children he can’t have
good relationship with God.” Further, Kutbudin, a Sufi was married, but after four
days he realized that he did not remember God but his wife. And so he divorced his
wife. Since marriage is not against Islam, Sufis gave up celibacy. All the more, down
the Sufi memory lane there were Sufis who practised celibacy.

Christianity, in particular Christian mysticism holds that one must love God,
not out of fear of hell, nor reward for heaven, but for God’s own sake. ‘Love God for
God’s own sake’ is the basic premise in Christian spiritual theology. Having
assimilated this concept into Sufism, Rabi’a has composed a verse running on similar
lines:

O God, if I worship you out of fear of hell, burn me in hell.
If I worship you in the hope of paradise, forbid it to me.
And if I worship you for your own sake,
do not deprive me of your eternal beauty.
O God! If I worship thee in fear of Hell,
Burn me in hell;
And if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise,
Exclude me from Paradise;
But if I worship Thee for Thine own sake,
Withhold not Thine Everlasting Beauty! 

Arthur Voobus, the historian of Christian asceticism par excellence
emphasizes the uniqueness of Christian mystical literature in Syria, Iraq and Iran,
based on a covenant between God and people, which is also found reflected in
classical Sufism. In Eastern Christianity special emphasis was given to the ‘Sons of

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the Covenant’, who don’t belong to the Order of the clergy or monks, but live among the hoi polloi with mortification of the flesh and a life of devotion. It was here that we witness ‘solitaries’ within society, in an anticipation of Sufi mystics. Accordingly, the Sufis conceive themselves as having covenant with God, who are constituent of a religion having neither priests nor (in theory at least) monks, but only Muslims. Thus, often than not, in the true Christian spirit of Karl Rahner as ‘spirit in the world’ or ‘embodied spirit’, Sufis live amidst other people while rejecting the world. In fact, there are no ‘cut-off points’ in Islam, at which a man is consecrated and set apart to the Order of priests, or canonized as a sanctus or saint. All the more, Peter Brown says that Muslims preserve and advance the early Christian concept of friendship with God, however, in a different perspective. In Islam ‘the friend of God’ (wali Allah) is both His client and patron, which in the Roman sense is a dependant, a protector of lesser men. Early Islam inherited from the Romans a temporal institution of clienthood, by which a non-Arab convert to Islam acquired dependent legal status, thus becoming a sort of second-class citizen, an associate member of the community.14 Here we can observe the striking counterpart to the spiritual concept.

8. The Pre-Islamic Religio-Philosophical Influence on Sufi Literature

As the peoples of the Arab conquered territories converted into the new found religion (i.e. Islam), they carried on some of their former beliefs and practices which contributed to enhancing the Islamic faith, especially its spiritual dimension, i.e. Sufism. Myriad elemental configurations that are the distinct characteristic of Sufism have their roots in the various religions and philosophies of the pre-Islamic Middle East. Let us glance at some of them.

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8.1. Greek Philosophy in Sufi Literature

By the ninth century, Baghdad had become the most important centre of Sufism as it had also come to be the focus of literature, theology, law and philosophy. The translation of Plato, Aristotle and the later Greek philosophers into Arabic played an important role. Hunain b. Ishaq who translated Plato and Aristotle into Arabic, and FitzGerald summarized in English Verse. Iraq was the most sophisticated of all in its adaptations of the Greek philosophical traditions, which came into Sufism via Christianity. For example, the ‘remembrance of God’ in Greek mneme Theou, which is found first among the Stoic philosophers, is found in the Hebrew Bible with the term zakar, means ‘remembering.’ This isn’t intercessory prayer, but a form of repetitive prayer connected with the ‘Jesus Prayer’ (Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name...), the continually repeated invocation of the name of Jesus, a distinctive feature of Eastern Christianity. The same term is used in Islam and Sufism, dhikr Allah or ‘remembrance of God’ in the repetition of the short formula.

Islamic thought was influenced by Greek philosophy, especially the ideas of Aristotle and Plato. Nazar ela ‘l-murd or ‘gazing at beardless boys’ is a distinct Sufi practice, has its roots in Plato, which Sufism justifies saying that one is contemplating Absolute Beauty in human form. It has been speculated that this was a directly inherited tradition, passing from late antiquity into Islam. This literary tradition of expressing love for beardless boys comes from later Greek literature into classical Arabic prose. But the Sufi practice of ‘gazing’ itself could either have been inspired by Plato’s writings or come from central Asian sources. Though this practice has invited condemnations galore, it has also provided much inspiration to classical lyric poetry in the Muslim world.
Scholars have proved beyond doubt that the practice of deliberately incurring ‘blame’ (shituta in Syriac; malama in Arabic) through apparently reprehensible conduct, such as, pretending to engage in illicit sexual relations, behaving like a madman, sitting on a dunghill, etc. has come to Sufism from Greek philosophical tradition via Syrian Christianity. This has remained an important facet of Sufi poetry to this day. Shiblī and Junaid express this in a verse:

To your mind, I am mad.
To my mind, you are sane.
So I pray to increase my madness
And to increase your sanity
My ‘madness’ is from the power of Love;
Your sanity is from the strength of unawareness.¹⁵

Further, Farid ud-Din Attar’s Sufi classic The Conference of the Birds has a poem titled, “Another story of Shah Mahmoud in India” in which he portrays a situation of a ‘pious fool.’

Mahmoud began his Indian campaign
And saw before him, drawn up on the plain,
The massive army of his enemy --
In fear he prayed to God for victory
And said: ‘If I should win this doubtful day,
The dervishes will bear the spoils away.’
They fought, and Mahmoud’s conquest was complete --
His captives piled their treasures at his feet.
The king declared ‘I will fulfil my vow;

The dervishes shall have this booty now."

But all his courtiers cried: ‘Can gold and jewels
Be given to that crowd of cringing fools?
Reward the soldiers who have won this war.
Or have it piled up in the royal store.’

What should he do? Shah Mahmoud was unsure.

Just then his eye caught sight of Boul Hoosein.
A pious fool whom many thought insane;
He said: ‘Whatever that man says, I’ll do --
No kings or armies influence his view.’

They called the madman over to the king.
Who welcomed him and told him everything.

The madman said: ‘O king, these anxious plans
Are not worth more than two small barley grains --
If all your dealings with the Lord cease here,
Forget the vow you made and never fear;
But if you think you might need Him again
Then keep your promise to the final grain.
God gave the victory to you; now where
In this agreement is your lordship’s share?’

So Mahmoud gave the gold where it was owed.
And took his way along the royal road.”

In the above poem, the Sufi is indifferent to the opinions held by others about
him like, ‘A pious fool whom many thought insane’, who even prefers to be despised.
The syncretic roots of such a Sufi tradition of ‘blame’ are evident from the following excerpt.

Another strand of the Greek philosophical tradition has been much neglected in the study of Sufism’s origins: that of the Cynics. These uncouth vagrants, who rejected society’s institutions to take a ‘short cut’ to the philosophers’ goal of enlightenment, behaved very much as did the more extreme of the eastern Christian mystics who deliberately incurred ‘blame.’ It is likely that this practice passed from the Cynics into Christianity before going into Sufism and libertine groups on its fringes. There is no evidence that Cynics continued to exist in the sixth and seventh centuries CE: it is usually considered that they were absorbed into Christian monasticism. Here they survived as ‘wanderers’ (gyrovagi) who, as such, were disreputable. Their successors in the Muslim world were generally classed as dervishes rather than as Sufis, and cut themselves off from Sufism by openly breaking Islamic law.16

De facto, the term ‘fools for Christ’ appears in the letter of St Paul to 1 Corinthians 4:10:

We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ;
we are weak, but ye are strong:
ye are honourable, but we are despised.

Accordingly, the Desert Fathers and other saints acted as ‘holy fools’, as did the yurodivy (or iurodstvo) of Eastern Orthodox asceticism. St Ignatius of Loyola, a mystic cum founder of the Society of Jesus (or the Jesuit Order), in his spiritual treatise The Spiritual Exercises says, “I desire to be regarded as a useless fool for Christ, who before me was regarded as such, rather than as a wise or prudent person

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in this world.”¹⁷ ‘Fools for Christ’ often encompasses shocking, unconventional behaviour to challenge accepted norms, pronounce prophecies or to conceal their piety. Parallels of this type of extremist mystical Behavioural language exist in non-Christian traditions as well like, the Aavadhuta (Sanskrit), the Malamatiyya Sufism and other crazy-wise mystics who display similar traits. The doctrine of blame is found in the works of Isaac of Nineveh, a seventh-century Iraqi Nestorian-Christian mystical writer, who by emphasizing the humanity of Jesus came close to Islam’s rejection of His divinity, thus cultivated good relations with early Muslims.

Farid ud-Din Attar in his The Conference of the Birds writes a poem titled, “The death of Socrates” wherein we observe Socrates’ lifelong search for his ‘self.’

When Socrates lay close to death, a youth --
Who was his student in the search for truth --
Said: ‘Master, when we’ve washed the man we knew
And brought your shroud, where should we bury you?’
He said: ‘If you can find me when I’ve died,
Then bury me wherever you decide --
I never found myself; I cannot see
How when I’m dead you could discover me.
Throughout my life not one small particle
Had any knowledge of itself at all!

Here, Socrates’ search for ‘self’ is also the sole destiny of every Sufi. No doubt, the quintessence of Sufism - search for ‘self’ - has its roots in Greek philosophy, which proves the syncretic assimilation of Greek philosophical thought in Sufi literature.

8.2. Shamanistic and Turkic Overtones in Sufi Literature

The Cynics have their roots in shamanism as well - an age-old religious tradition of central and North Asia, and Diogenes was believed to be its early Greek archetypal representative. Shamanism is characterized by magic, rain-making, healing, and the flight through the heavens. Tirmidhi’s (d. 700) shamanistic inspiration from the north-east is evident when the ‘friend’ flies through the air. In fact, the century that followed Tirmidhi evidenced disagreement galore doubting if he was a Sufi or not. Bernd Radtke (specialist on Tirmidhi) observes anachronism in Sufi classic manuals, a tenth-century construction which pushes its early history further back than is justified.

As Sufism first emerged, it was directly influenced by shamanism from central Asia. The Sufi dance to produce rain for instance, resembles shamanistic practice. The shamanistic elements are typical of tribal and nomadic religious traditions. Moreover, there was the constant influx of nomadic Turkic tribes from the north-east. For example, the veneration of beauty (i.e. human beauty) among the central Asian Turks prior to their conversion to Islam comes from the Gnostic religion of Manichaeanism. Similarly, Sufi legends as ‘flyers’, which are common in the north-east of the Muslim world, near the frontier with unconverted Turks; the deliberate provoking of ‘blame’ is also characteristic of this area in early Sufism. The flight of the shaman, either Central-Asian influence or imported from the indigenous religious traditions, is the ascent of the soul in Gnosticism, a second-century mystical movement in the
Mediterranean and in the Middle East, distinct for its emphasis on a higher knowledge (gnosis) reserved only for a select elite. Hence, it is obvious that Shamanistic and Turkic elements were spelt over to Sufism from its genesis.

8.3. Neo-Platonism in Sufi Literature

Neo-Platonism, as developed by Plotinus assumes God to be the origin and destiny, sum and summit of everything. Plotinus’ philosophy supplied necessary philosophical edifice for Sufism, and consequently to Sufi literature. Neo-Platonism had such a powerful influence on Sufi literature that there is no aspect of Sufi philosophy without Neo-Platonic antecedents. A review of both Sufism and Neo-Platonism reveals close similarities between the two with regard to the nature of God, the soul, the body, concepts such as goodness, evil and beauty, death and life, and creation. Moreover, the Neo-Platonic triad of the One, Reason and the Soul is apparent in the twelfth and thirteenth century Persian Sufi didactic poems. The Sufi philosophical roots have traces of Neo-Platonist philosophy, which is clearly spelt in Ibn El-Arabi’s “The Face of Religion”:

Now I am called the shepherd of the desert gazelles.

Now a Christian monk.

Now a Zoroastrian.

The Beloved is Three, yet One:

Just as the three are in reality one.18

According to Sufi philosophy, Absolute Being is also Absolute beauty. Beauty tends towards manifestation. The phenomenal world is an emanation of the Absolute Being, wherein human beings are the only ones to share the divine essence of God, because they have souls. Thus a human being is a combination of body (natural


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element belongs to the phenomenal world) and soul (divine element belongs to the Absolute Being). Sufi philosophy is similar and at the same time dissimilar to Neo-Platonism. According to Greek philosophy, human being is an amalgam of three elements - body (natural element), soul (that which gives life to the body) and spirit (divine element). Like Christianity, Islam and Sufism too have incorporated only two Greek elements into their philosophical system - body (natural element) and soul (not in the Greek sense but a divine element equivalent to the Greek spirit, which is a life-giving elixir as well, i.e. a conglomeration of soul and spirit).

As per Sufi philosophy, after death the soul returns to its original source (which is also its destiny), the Absolute Being, while the body dissolves and decays. Since the soul transfigures a human being into a person, one should habituate virtues such as poverty, austerity, humility, fortitude, and discipline by devoting oneself to the ways of inwardness such as withdrawal, silence, solitariness, and self-examination, thus being constantly aware of the divine (dhikr Allah) with faith and love. This way, one can have direct communion with God, the Absolute Being, which is the ultimate goal of every Sufi. If a Sufi follows these guidelines with adequate perseverance, he will advance through the mystic stages of concentration, appreciation of the oneness of everything, epiphanies, i.e. sudden and unpredictable illumination, blissful ecstasy, union with God, sense of one’s own nothingness, and finally sense of the nothingness beyond nothingness.

Neo-Platonism is the closest philosophical thought to Sufi doctrine in terms of its system of belief. A comparison between these two doctrines reveals their similarities. In Sufism, the universe is an emanation of God, and has no autonomous existence of its own. To perceive God and the universe as being separate is to deny the ‘Oneness’, which results in ‘duality.’ But in truth, God and the universe are ‘One’
and God manifests and reflects Himself in and through the universe. One cannot imagine God and the universe as separate entities, for, God is not something outside the universe (as Islam favours), rather something within. This is a Neo-Platonic philosophical concept (which is also pantheistic) syncretically adapted by Sufism, which is distinct from Islamic philosophy. Both Neo-Platonism and Sufism view the existence of the universe as an emanation of God.

Sufism postulates a trilogical union of God-Universe-Humans, in which, God has the highest position, followed by the universe, and finally human beings. Even though humans rank last in the trilogy, they are intimately close to God, and almost identical to Him. raison d’être the soul inherent within them. Further, human beings are just an appearance of God. But God’s appearance in the human being is just an appearance, and nothing more. The reality is not a duality between God and humans, rather sameness. oneness between them. A human person is a talking, thinking, acting God. This essential Sufi doctrine of the oneness of God-Universe-Humans is beautifully expressed in Yunus Emre’s poetic verse:

I didn’t know you were the eye inside of me
You were a secret essence both in body and soul
I asked you show me a symbol of you in this world
Suddenly I realized you were the whole universe.

Both Sufism and Neo-Platonism share the same assumptions about soul. Neo-Platonism believes that the soul is a divine essence, a substance, and the very source of existence, which is the effect, image, or copy of pure thought, namely God. It is immortal, infinite, distinct and separate from the body. The soul is entrapped in the cage of the body, which can be liberated when the body dies. The soul, by its nature,
always tends toward perfection, beauty, goodness and exaltation. Sufism holds similar views on the soul - a divine essence in the humans.

Like soul, body is also similarly viewed, both in Sufism and Neo-Platonism. According to Neo-Platonism, the body is mortal, temporary, and not divine, which does not impel towards beauty and goodness, but towards ugliness and evil, thus being inclined to temporary wishes and desires. It is not body, but soul that is beautiful, good, valuable and divine. The soul is caged in the body, whose sole task is to purify the body from evil tendencies and deficiencies. Sufism shares the same belief that the body is created from the earth, and will go back to the earth and decays. Hence the body is immaterial and worthless, and one should not consort to the desires of the flesh, but turn from carnal, sensuous life to thought, and through it, to God. Both Neo-Platonism and Sufism assume that death separates the mortal body from the immortal soul. At death, the soul as a divine essence does not die, but goes to its eternal abode (Jannat) while the body decomposes, decays and dissolves into the earth. Thus, death is a disintegration of two distinct but not separate entities - mortal body and immortal soul.

Beauty for Neo-Platonism is much more than mere symmetry, implying an intimately close relationship with the ideal reality. It is an appearance of God over the objects of the universe, and anything on which the divine light shines, turns to be beautiful. Sufism has exactly the same views about beauty, wherein beauty is expressed with ‘cemal’ (human face), i.e. the beauty of human face. What is really expressed in ‘cemal’ (human face) is the appearance of divine light in the human face. Husrev beautifully expresses this ‘beauty’:

Want to understand an example of the real essence of God

Look at the face of a beautiful woman and there see the face of God.

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Speaking on the source of beauty Jami said, “You are nothing but a mirror in which beauty is reflected. Because beauty and its reflection are both from that one source, it is both treasure and treasure-house.” Neo-Platonism identified beauty with divine essence, which syncretically entered Sufism. The divine characteristics in human beauty are a Neo-Platonic syncretism on Sufi philosophy, which Sayyid Ni’mat Allah expresses in the following verse:

Since I saw Your beauty in manifestation
I saw and witnessed the Beloved’s face.
Then I looked upon the seeing eye,
And I saw a bodily form as essential meaning.

The Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi praising divine ‘beauty’ in his poetry exclaimed:

The beauty of these verses baffles praise
What guide is needed to the solar blaze?
Extol that artist by whose pencil’s aid
The virgin thought so richly is arrayed;
By me as by none else are secrets sung,
No pearls of poesy like mine are strung.

Both Neo-Platonism and Sufism believe that, like beauty, goodness is also a divine virtue. It is goodness that exalts a human person to the acme of one’s being. Both Islam and Sufism associate goodness as a divine virtue, which is proved in the Qur’an.

Those who believe and do righteous good deeds, there is no sin on them for what they ate (in the past), if they fear Allah (by keeping away from His

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forbidden things), and believe and do righteous good deeds, and again fear Allah and do good deeds with *Ihsan* (perfection). And Allah loves the good-doers. (Qur’an, surah Al-Maidah 5:93)

Further, the Qur’an bestows special favours on those who do good deeds in the present world as well as in the next:

Those who believed (in the Oneness of Allah - Islamic Monotheism), and used to fear Allah much (by abstaining from evil deeds and sins and by doing righteous deeds. For them are glad tidings, in the life of the present world (i.e. through a righteous dream seen by the person himself or shown to others), and in the Hereafter. No change can there be in the Words of Allah. This is indeed the supreme success. (Qur’an, surah Yunus 10:63-64.)

The belief that God will recompense good deeds in blessing is neither new nor original in Islamic philosophy. It was in Plato that goodness was first formulated systematically as a philosophical problem. In Plato’s philosophy, goodness, honesty, bravery, wisdom, and virtue form the principal themes of *Etik*. Later Plotinus assimilated Plato’s philosophy with religion under Neo-Platonism. Thus, the concept of goodness as a divine virtue in Sufism is a syncretic adaptation from Neo-Platonism. Both these doctrines hold that more the soul purifies itself from temporary passions and desires, more harmonious it becomes with goodness. At the close of his life Ibn Hazm came up with his life time work, *A Philosophy of Character and Conduct* in which he seems to have discovered a method for arriving at what all seek to reduce anxiety in life as a continual process. His eloquent portrayal is as follows:

I discovered that this method consists in nothing else but directing one’s self towards a Supreme Goodness by means of good works conducive to immortal life.
For, as I investigated, I observed that all things tended to elude me.
and I reached the conclusion that the only permanent reality possible
consists in good works useful for another, immortal life.
Every other hope that I desired to see realized was followed by melancholy.
sometimes because what was ardently desired escaped me,
sometimes because I decided to abandon it.
It seemed to me that nothing escaped these dangers
but good works, directed by a Supreme Goodness.
These alone were always followed by pleasure
in the present and in the future;
in the present because I was freed from numerous anxieties
which disturbed my tranquillity,
and, moreover, friends and enemies concurred in commending me;
and in the future because these works promised immortality.21

According to Sufis, this virtuous work is free of defects and the most effective
way to stop anxiety. Ibn Hazm observed that those who worked for this end were
joyful and free of cares, even when they faced unpleasant trials and tribulations,
because of the hope that they will be awarded in life after life. He compared the
spiritual life to sensual pleasures.

The pleasure which the intelligent man experiences in the exercise of his
reason, the learned man in his study, the prudent man in his discreet
deliberation, and the devout man in his ascetic combat is greater than the
delight which is felt by the glutton in his eating, the toper in his drinking, the
lecher in his incontinence, the trader in his painful bargaining, the gamester in

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21 Ibn Hazm (trans.), "A Philosophy of Character and Conduct," in Anthology of Islamic Literature by
his merriment, and the leader in the exercise of his authority. The proof of this lies in the fact that intelligent, learned, prudent, and devout men also experience those other delights which I have just enumerated in the same way as one who lives only to wallow in them, but they tend to abandon and separate themselves from them, preferring instead the quest for permanent release from anxiety through good and virtuous works.\(^{22}\)

Sufism perceives creation as an emanation from God, thus an appearance of God. This assumption of creation is unlike the Orthodox Islamic ex nihilo theory of creation, i.e. creation out of nothing. According to this belief God created the universe, humankind, and all living creatures from nothing but out of self-love. This is the belief of all monotheistic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which assume the existence of only one God. Sufism, like Neo-Platonism, views creation rather in a pantheistic mode. Razbihan Baqli in his essay “On the Courtesy of the Lover and the Beloved” speaks on creation thus:

> The bird in the garden of pre-eternity had been hidden in the nest of divine actions by the veil of creation. The clothing of “We created man in the most beautiful of the stations” (Qur’an 95:4) was adorned with the beauty of “He has made your forms beautiful” (Qur’an 40:66), with the beautiful meaning of “God created Adam in His own form.” The creativity of the Creator was lost in the creature.\(^{23}\)

Both Sufism and Neo-Platonism believe that the soul achieves its noble perfection, thereby reaches exaltation by passing through spiritual stages and states.

1. **Purification**: Purifying the soul from passions and sensual desires.

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\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 134.

2. **Introspection:** Due to its divine nature, the soul is immortal. Still, its susceptibility to the transitory, ephemeral, terrestrial things can effectuate into degeneration and deterioration. To check this, the soul must introspect and learn to ‘know thy-self.’

3. **Self-knowledge:** The soul can reach exaltation by self-knowledge, and the way to ‘know thy-self’ is through love, which is the appearance of God.

At the last stage, as the person ‘knows thy-self’, and brings to pass the essence of the soul, one realizes that one is identical with the universe and all creatures, wherein God is the only Being manifesting Himself in all creation. Here, one is free from dualism. It is the stage of unification of God-Humans- Universe, wherein words such as ‘you’ and ‘I’ implying separation and differentiation, no more exist. There is only ‘One’, which is a unification in the essence of God - the highest stage of exaltation, wherefrom one sees God in one’s own self, and realizes that God is the only being in the universe, and that one’s self is nothing but God. This divine-human communion is clearly expressed in the verse, “No Room for ‘Me’”:

A man knocked on God’s door.

“Who’s there?” asked God from within.

“It’s me”, said the man.

“Go away then. There’s no room here for two”, said God.

The man departed and wandered in the arid desert until he realized his error.

Returning to the door, he knocked once again.

“Who’s there?” asked God, as before.

“You”, answered the man.

“Then come in”, God replied.
Jalal al-Din Rumi expresses this divine-human communion in his couplet:

Union exists beyond all thought and speech
Between Great Allah and the Soul of Each.

Farid ud-Din Attar, in his world famous Sufi classic *The Conference of the Birds* has the poem titled, “Shah Mahmoud at Sommat”, in which he calls on the Sufis to ‘destroy the idols within one’s heart’ and to ‘burn one’s self.’

When Mahmoud’s army had attacked Sommat
They found an idol there that men called “Lat” *
Its worshippers flung treasure on the ground
And as a ransom gave the glittering mound;
But Mahmoud would not cede to their desire
And burnt the idol in a raging fire.
A courtier said: ‘Now if it had been sold
We’d have what’s better than an idol -- gold!’
Shah Mahmoud said: ‘I feared God’s Judgement Day;
I was afraid that I should hear Him say
“Here two -- Azar and Mahmoud -- stand, behold!
One carved his idols, one had idols sold!” ’
And as the idol burned, bright jewels fell out --
So Mahmoud was enriched but stayed devout;
He said: ‘This idol Lat has her reward,
And here is mine, provided by the Lord.’
Destroy the idols in your heart, or you
Will one day be a broken idol too --
First burn the Self, and as its fate is sealed
The gems this idol hides will be revealed.

Your soul has heard the Lord’s commanding call;

Accept, and at His threshold humbly fall.

Your soul and God have formed a covenant;

Do not turn back from that first firm assent --

Will you object to what you once averred,

Swear true allegiance and then break your word?

Your soul needs only Him -- through good and ill

Keep faith, and what you promised Him fulfil.

* Lat is one of the three pagan Arabian pre-Islamic goddesses. As per tradition, Allah was the principal deity in Mecca who had three daughters Uzzah, Lat, Manat, who were Allah’s intercessors (Qur’an, surah An-Najm 53:19-20). Mahmoud attacked and conquered Somnat in north-west India in 1026 C.E. and destroyed the Hindu temple there. Attar has either confused the Arabian and Indian deities, or used the name ‘Lat’ generically, or has been seduced by the fortuitous rhyme in the Pagan Arabian religion.

It is transpicuous from the above that there are close similarities between Sufism and Neo-Platonism. The obvious question here is, how both of them interacted with each other, given the socio-cultural milieu in which Sufism germinated. It is the established fact that Islamic philosophy (or Islamosophy) is mostly rooted in Aristotelian philosophy - in the works of Aristotle which were all translated into Arabic. Islamic philosophers construed Aristotle from the Islamic point of view (as did Thomas Aquinas and the scholastics in the Christian optic), and established their (Islamic) theories on the basis of Aristotelian philosophy. Further, due to the translations of Plato and Plotinus, they were initiated into the Anatolian culture,
blended with divergent ancient Anatolian beliefs, like Orpheus. The mystical elements within Neo-Platonism, mingled with ancient Anatolian beliefs (e.g. the sacrosanctity of natural elements such as the sun, which is incorporated into Sufism with the belief of God’s resemblance to the sun), paved the way for liberal interpretations of Islamic doctrines and principles in Sufi philosophical theory and praxis. Thus, Neo-Platonism is the underlying philosophical system of thought for Sufi philosophy.

8.4. Gnosticism in Sufi Literature

Gnosticism is a thought and belief system of various cults, developed in ancient Syria and Persia during fifth century B.C.E., and was popular in late pre-Christian and early Christian centuries, which believed matter to be intrinsically evil, and emancipation could be attained through a deep, mystic, and divine gnosis. Gnostic philosophy believes that there is a divine spark in the human which is imprisoned in earthly matter or body. The Gnostics were a sect of philosophers, who believed to have possessed the true and occult gnosis (of Christianity), and formed a theology based on Pythagorean and Platonic philosophical line, accommodating their unique scriptural interpretations therein. They held that all natures, intelligible, intellectual and material are successive oecoms or emanations from the infinite fountain of deity (Sufism has exactly the same belief). These doctrines were a syncretic amalgam of oriental philosophy and mysticism with Greek philosophy, and Christian ideas were quickly incorporated into these syncretistic systems. The Gnostics claimed mystic and esoteric religious insights, and laid great emphasis on transcendent human gnosis. There were many Gnostic cults who incorporated elements of many religions into this syncretic movement, which were later merged with Manichaeism. Today, the terms Gnosticism and Gnostic are used metaphorically to describe beliefs and
attitudes that assign to humans unlimited powers of mind and the capability of attaining their own salvation unaided.

Gnostics believe to be a privileged class of people having bestowed with secret divine gnosis. The Qur’an in surah Yumus 10:62, which is central to the Sufi doctrine, speaks of a privileged class of people, the ‘friends of God’ (Auliya’ Allah). It also speaks of love between God and these privileged class of people, in a passage much quoted by the Sufis:

O you who believe! Whoever from among you turns back from his religion (Islam), Allah will bring a people whom He will love and they will love Him; humble towards the believers, stern towards the disbelievers, fighting the Way of Allah, and never fear the blame of the blamers. That is the grace of Allah which He bestows on whom He wills. And Allah is All-Sufficient for His creatures’ needs, All-Knower. (Qur’an, surah Al-Maidah 5:54)

Dhu ’l-Nun (d. 246/861) the Egyptian, almost a legendary figure, half-mystic half-alchemist and a contemporary with al-Muhasibi introduced the idea of gnosis (ma’rifa) into Sufism. Although later Sufis claim him as the originator of some strategic concepts like stations (maqamat) and states (ahwal) of the Sufi Path, it falls short of evidence. He is believed to have known the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, and also familiar with the Hermetic wisdom. Works on alchemy, magic and medicine are attributed to him. We can ascertain the impact of Greek philosophical tradition, including alchemy and medicine upon the beginnings of Sufism. Tustari (d. 896) emphasized a ‘secret’ within man cum the mystery of direct gnosis (ma’rifa) of God, which syncretically came from Gnosticism into Sufism. He uses typically gnostic themes - luminosity within men, direct gnosis of God and the importance of the elite. Influenced by Greek philosophical tradition, Tustari says that the four branches of
science are religion, medicine, astrology and alchemy. Inevitably, there is unreliable evidence connecting him with Dhu 'I-Nun, who saw himself as an authority on gnosis and the occult sciences. Omar Kyayyam in his quatrain, “The Secret” speaks of the privileged elite being bestowed with such a gnosis (ma’rifa):

The secret must be kept from all non-people:

The mystery must be hidden from all idiots.

See what you do to people-

The Eye has to be hidden from all men.\textsuperscript{24}

By its very nature, the original Gnostic elite was severely restricted and consequently so was its Islamic progeny, which is the principal minority sect of Islam, the Shia. All the more, the Gnostics live on not in the main Shiite sub-sect constituted by the ‘Twelvers’, who recognize twelve leaders after Mohammed and are strong in Iran, but in the petty sub-sects, whom western academics call ‘extremist Shiites’, such as the Isma’ilis, led by the Aga Khan, and the Druz of the Lebanon. The Gnostic influences are detected in Sufism through their use of a distinctive imagery of light and darkness, which are found in the works of exceptionally sophisticated thinkers, whose teachings were reserved for a miniscule of people. Hasan of Basra strongly brings out this imagery in his verse “Where it Went”:

I saw a child carrying a light.

I asked him where he had brought it from.

He put it out, and said:

‘Now you tell me where it is gone.’\textsuperscript{25}


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 247.
But when the Qur’ān says “God is the light of the heavens and the earth” (surah An-Nur 24:35), it is a Christian image (having a remarkable poetic development) and not the Gnostic habitual theme of light and dark.

Tirmidhi (d. 700) lived in north-east of the Islamic world (present Soviet Central Asia) presents Sufism in terms of Greek philosophical concepts. Out of the Universal Intelligence or Reason, other intelligences proceed to enlighten the human intellects. Here the Arabic term ‘aql’, i.e. ‘reason’, is translated as ‘intelligence’ when referring to the supra-terrestrial entity, and ‘intellect’ when referring to the human mind. On top of the accepted Christian mystical Path, Tirmidhi superimposes ‘direct knowledge’ (gnosis) with light imagery, and presents the tributes of God as kingdoms of light, which reflects Gnosticism.

In the Qur’ān, the Judeo-Christian mystical influences are closely bound up with the Gnostic influences, especially the idea of a ‘True Prophet’ who is manifested in the person of Adam and later in that of Jesus. The Qur’ānic statement, “Mohammed is the Seal of Prophets” (surah Al-Ahzab 33:40) is a Manichaean term came via Judeo-Christianity. The Qur’ānic declaration in surah An-Nisa 4:157 says:

And because of their saying (in boast), “We killed the Messiah ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), the Messenger of Allah”, - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them [the resemblance of ‘Isa (Jesus) was put over another man (and they killed that man)], and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely; they killed him not [i.e. ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)].
Here the statement that Jesus was not killed on the cross, but only appeared to be so, reflects a Gnostic source. The dramatic discovery in Egypt of Gnostic texts contains this doctrine. Recent Qur’anic studies reveal that the Gnostics appear in the Qur’an under the name Sabians, and also that Gnosticism had contact with Judeo-Christians in the northern Arab world before Islam.

The Gnostic philosophy is assimilated in Manichaeanism, the main Gnostic religion, which was named after Mani (d. 274), the prophet who inaugurated it, who was brought up in a Judeo-Christian sect speaks of Manichaean origins. Plethora of Manichaean elements, especially its rejection of the flesh was taken over by Christianity before Islam came into Sufism via Christianity. Manichaeanism was popularly known as ‘Iranian religion’, which is now called ‘one of the religions of Iran.’ There was a time in the past, when Sufism was viewed as an Aryan or Indo-European racial reaction of the conquered Iranians to their Arab, Semitic rulers. But the major Iranian religion before Islam was Mazdaism (named after its chief god Ahura Mazda) or Zoroastrianism (named after its founder Zarathustra or Zoroaster), which fell short of spirituality, and so was in a lackadaisical state at the emergence of Islam. Class ridden, hostile to asceticism, persecuting Christian and Manichaean mystics, it was turned into an empty shell of taboos and rituals, thus losing track of the original significance. The only element of interest within it was borrowed from shamanism, i.e. with the aid of hallucinogenic drug the flight of the soul in a simulation of death. Furthermore, the fourteenth century Islamic institution of ‘youngmanliness’ (futuwwa), which was coalesced with Sufism and was compared to European chivalry is of Iranian origin. However, this is a military rather than a religious tradition.

al-Hallaj (d. 922), the most famous martyr of Baghdad was eager to be martyred performing miracles and maintained an exemplary attitude in the face of imminent death. The biography which was transmitted by his son says that he preached in Iran and travelled to India and South Asia, who called him ‘the Succourer’ and ‘the Nourisher’ respectively, and finally landing up in Baghdad. He preached that the pilgrimage to Mecca could be performed while staying at home. Moreover, he claimed divinity for himself. While some accused him of magic, others saw him as a performer of real miracles. There is a hard core of early evidence from his life that he was working wonders, such as appearing to fill an empty room with his body and producing fruit out of thin air, etc. Massignon, a scholar on al-Hallaj believed that al-Hallaj was working miracles with supernatural intervention. The obvious explanation is that al-Hallaj was operating in the well-known tradition of producing visual illusions by hypnosis. This was firmly established in the Middle East before Islam and has always flourished there up to our own time.

8.5. Pantheism in Sufi Literature

Pantheism (from Greek pan means ‘all’ and theos means ‘God’) is a philosophic-religious belief that the spirit of God manifest in all things, and finite objects are at once both God and the manifestation of God. It is the ardent faith in nature as both the revelation of deity and deity itself. Pantheists do not believe in a personal or anthropomorphic God. The word was first used by the deist John Toland in 1705 C.E. in his work Socinianism, who called himself a pantheist. All the more, the pantheistic attitude is much older, for, it pervades the early thought of Egypt and India, was common in Greece long before Christ, was taken up by the Neo-Platonists of the Middle Ages, and has played an important part in Christian and Hebraic
doctrine. In the modern era, pantheism was popularized as both theology and philosophy based on Baruch Spinoza’s work *Ethics* (1675), which was an answer to Descartes’ famous dualist theory that the body and spirit are separate. Spinoza held the monist view that the two are the same, and monism is the essential corpus of his philosophy. He was portrayed as a ‘God-intoxicated-man’, and used the word ‘God’ to delineate the unity of all substance. Although the term pantheism was not coined until his death, Spinoza is the greatest exponent of pantheism, as Goethe is the greatest poet of the idea. In world literature pantheism finds frequent expression. Wordsworth in England and Emerson in America may be selected from many as giving typical expression to the pantheistic conception. The following lines form Wordsworth’s *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* express the idea clearly:

... a sense of sublime

O something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean and the living air

And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;

A motion and a spirit, that impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

And rolls through all things.

Pantheistic Sufism sees creation as the manifestation of God and so a part of God Himself, which goes against the fundamental Islamic tenet *tawhid*, i.e. Oneness of God. Hence, the Sufis came up with a theosophic explanation, combining pantheism with *tawhid*:
God of the mystic is one;
From God comes the world;
From the one you get only one;
Therefore, the world is one.

In Sufi biographies Dhu '1-Nun’s poems and prayers give a truer impression of his mode of thought, which is marked by distinctly pantheistic tendencies.

O God, I never hearken to the voices of the beasts or the rustle of the trees, the splashing of waters or the song of birds, the whistling of the wind or the rumble of thunder, but I sense in them a testimony to Thy unity (wahdaniya), and a proof of Thy Incomparableness: that Thou art the All-prevailing, the All-knowing, the All-wise, the All-just, the All-true, and that in Thee is neither overthrow nor ignorance nor folly nor injustice nor lying. O God, I acknowledge Thee in the proof of Thy handiwork and the evidence of Thy acts: grant me, O God, to seek Thy Satisfaction with my satisfaction, and the Delight of a Father in His child, remembering Thee in my love for Thee, with serene tranquility and firm resolve.28

Abu Yazid (Bayazid) of Bistam (d. 261/875), a Persian, first of the intoxicated Sufis used pantheism on oneself, who at the climax of mystical ecstasy perceived God within his soul which he expressed with loud ejaculations. “Glory to me! How great is my Majesty!” that scandalized the orthodox. al-Junaid, a commentator and no drunkard wrote on Abu Yazid developing a unique technique of interpreting them as innocent of the blasphemy that to the uninitiated seemed apparent. Abu Yazid was also the first to take the Prophet’s Ascension (mi’raj) as a theme for expressing his own mystical experience, a fashion which others followed later.


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I saw that my spirit was borne to the heavens. It looked at nothing and gave no heed, though Paradise and Hell were displayed to it, for it was freed of phenomena and veils. Then I became a bird, whose body was of oneness and whose wings were of Everlastiness, and I continued to fly in the air of the Absolute, until I passed into the sphere of Purification, and gazed upon the field of Eternity and beheld there the tree of Oneness. When I looked I myself was all those. I cried: 'O Lord with my egoism I cannot attain to Thee, and I cannot escape from my selfhood. What am I to do?' God spoke: 'O Abu Yazid, thou must win release from thy thou-ness by following my Beloved (sc. Muhammed). Smear thine eyes with the dust of his feet and follow him continually.'

Juanyd in his commentary on Abu Yazid rejects the latter's expression of 'flight as a bird.' For, he felt that Abu Yazid reached only the beginning of the Path, and, if he had been further advanced, he wouldn't have thought of such things as birds, bodies, atmospheres and so on. al-Hallaj (d. 922) speaks dismissively of Abu Yazid when he refers to a bird with two wings which doesn't succeed on the way to God.

While in certain passages Ibn al-Farid appears to claim no more than union with the spirit of Mohammed, in others it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he is pretending to union with God, and in language that lays him open to the charge of pantheism in its extremist form, as in one passage he writes:

My degree is of such a height that a man who has not reached it may still be deemed happy; but the state for which I am deemed happy transcends thy degree.

29 Ibid., p. 54-55.
All men are sons of Adam, (and I am as they) save that I alone amongst my brethren have attained to the sobriety of union.

My hearing is like that of Kalim (Moses) and my heart is informed (about God) by the most excellent (Ahmad) vision of an eye like that of him who is most excellent. (Ahmad = Mohammed)

And my spirit is a spirit to all the spirits (of created beings); and whatsoever thou seest of beauty in the universe flows from the bounty of my nature.

Leave, then, to me (and do not ascribe to anyone else) the knowledge with which I alone was endowed before my appearance (in the phenomenal world). while (after my appearance) amongst created beings my friends knew me not (as I really am).\(^{30}\)

An Arab commentator interpreting these lines says that Ibn al-Farid claimed himself to be the Quth (‘Pole’ or ‘Logos.’ ‘Logos’ is a Greek word meaning ‘the Word Incarnate’ referring to Jesus). But it may be that here and elsewhere he is speaking of that Idea as the true Quth.

In ecstasy, Jalal al-Din Rumi identifies the Sufi being one with nature - this is extremely pantheistic - before one gets united with God.

Men have argued (but they lied)

That this image does not bide;

One declared we are a tree.

Said another, grass are we.

Yet the rustling of this bough

Proves the breeze is stirring now:

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 96.
Silent then, O silent be:
That we are, and this are we.

This is a syncretic borrowing from Christian mysticism of St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226 C.E.), who is the patron saint of animals and ecology had declared, ‘Brother sun, sister moon.’ For, St Francis of Assisi and Rumi were contemporaries, though from two distant continents. Franciscan mysticism was popular before his death and many mystics were his followers. Rumi in his quatrain has epitomized the entire history of the phenomenal world - the progress of man out of God, into the universe, and back again to God:

I sought a soul in the sea.
And found a coral there;
Beneath the form for me
An ocean was all laid bare.

Into my heart’s night
Along a narrow way
I groped; and lo! The light,
And infinite land of day.

Happy was I
In the pearl’s heart to lie;
Till, lashed by life’s hurricane.
Like a tossed wave I ran.

The secret of the sea
I uttered thunderously;
Like a spent cloud on the shore
I slept, and stirred no more.
Pantheism is vividly spelt in Abu Talib Kalim’s couplet “We are Alive”:

We are waves whose stillness is non-being.

We are alive because of this, that we have no rest.

All the above arguments duly supported by literary pieces adequately prove that pantheism did affect Sufism, which in turn got reflected in Sufi literature. For, literature mirrors times.

8.6. Zoroastrian Influence on Sufi Literature

Zoroastrianism has cast tremendous influence on all Semitic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, not to mention their sub-sects and mystical branches like Hekhalot, Merkabah, Kabbalah, Hasidism, Sufism, etc. The concepts like angels and demons, light and darkness, God and adversary, stories about God, creation, a sacred time-line, duality of good and evil, end of the world, divine judgement, eschatology, along with the symbolism of fire, light and darkness, yazatas or intermediate spiritual beings enter the Sufi world through Islam via Judaism and Christianity. The Zoroastrian imagery of light has influenced the Qur’an, surah An-Nur 24:35, which sees God as An-Nur or the Light:

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth,

The parable of His Light is as if there were a niche,

And within it a Lamp: The Lamp enclosed in Glass;

The glass as it were a brilliant star;

Lit from a blessed Tree,

An Olive, neither of the East nor of the West,

Whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it;

Light upon Light!

Allah doth set forth parables for men: and Allah doth know all things.
While speaking on ‘passing away’ in God (fana’) and ‘survival’ (baqa’), Kharraz (d. 899) says that ‘survival’ is allied to the original Covenant, when all the spirits said Yes to God. The estrangement between friends and enemies of God was apparent only after the creation of the lower souls. In contradiction to this, Kharraz says that the spirits of the believers were created ‘from the place of light’ and the spirits of the unbelievers ‘from the place of darkness.’ Nwyia sees inconsistency in Kharraz. For, he did not succeed to reconcile different currents of thought. This is a Zoroastrian concept Kharraz borrowed to explain the Sufi creation story.

Tustari (d. 896), who taught in south-western Iran followed by Basra in southern Iraq came up with his own unique Sufi doctrine, which is far from the Qur’anic truth. Gerhard Bowering’s study enables us to see in Tustari commentary on the Qur’an, a distinctive and original fund of theories which are certainly archaic and represent his own contribution.

God, according to Tustari (and here we have an original doctrine, apparently held only by him at that time), created Muhammad before everyone else, as a light which he caused to appear from his own Light. Muhammad then stood in adoration before him. Much later he created Adam from this Muhammadan light, before creating mankind and making a primordial Covenant with it. The heart of Muhammad is also all-important: it is the mine of God’s absolute Uniqueness, of the attestation of that Uniqueness incumbent on all Muslims, and of the Koran itself.31

al-Hallaj (d. 922), a disciple of Tustari, composed some short prose texts wherein he presents latter’s doctrine of Mohammed’s primordial light. But al-Hallaj goes further than his teacher in what might be taken to mean self-identification with

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God Himself. He says: “Leave created nature, so that you may be he, and he may be you, from the standpoint of reality.”\textsuperscript{32} His famous verse goes thus:

I saw my Love with the eye of my heart.

And He said, ‘Who are you?’ I said, ‘You!’

Annemarie Schimmel in her \textit{I Am Wind, You are Fire; The Life and Work of Rumi} brings to light the finest poem on individual death wherein Rumi utilizes an ancient Persian (Zoroastrian) idea of the \textit{daena}, the spirit who encounters the dead in the other world and who appears as either a beautiful maiden or an old ugly hag, depending upon the soul’s former actions, which Rumi cleverly interweaves with Qur’anic expressions concerning the ‘faithful Muslim women.’\textsuperscript{33} In the poem Rumi speaks to the pious listener:

Your fine ethical qualities will run before you after your death--

Like moon-faced ladies do these qualities proudly walk...

When you have divorced your body, you will see houris in rows.

“All Muslim ladies, faithful women, devout and repenting ladies” (Sura 66/5)

Without number will your characteristics run before your bier...

In the coffin these pure qualities will become your companions,

They will cling to you like sons and daughters.

And you will don garments from the warp and woof of your works of obedience...

Further, Rumi’s insights from the Zoroastrian sources are vivid in his “History of Light” in \textit{Divan of Shems of Tabriz,} selected odes:

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 47.
\textsuperscript{33} Annemarie Schimmel, \textit{I Am Wind, You are Fire; The Life and Work of Rumi}, Shambhala, Boston, 1996, pp. 104-105.
God gives me my food, like a child in the womb;
Man is born once, I many times.

Wearing the cloak of my body, I worked hard in this world,
I’ve often had to rip this cloak with my bare hands.

I’ve slept nights with monks in their monasteries,
I’ve slept with unbelievers before their idols.

I’m the booty of robbers, the pain of the sick;
Both cloud and rain, I’ve inundated fields.

O dervish! Never has annihilation’s dust settled on my clothes.
I’ve gathered armfuls of roses from eternity’s garden.

I’m neither fire nor water, nor the following wind;
I’m not clay either; since I’ve left them all behind.

O Son, I’m not Shems of Tabriz, but pure Light;
If you see me, look out! Tell no man either.34

Omar Khayyam, a philosopher, scientist and practical instructor on Sufism,
whom Edward Fitzgerald popularized in the European literary circles, written a
couplet titled “Man” which reflects Zoroastrian overtones:

34 Jalal al-Din Rumi, Rumi’s Divan of Shems of Tabriz: Selected Odes. Element Classics of World
Spirituality. Rockport, Massachusetts, 1997. (Ode 49, p. 149)
Do you know what a man of earth may be, Kyayyam,
A lantern of imaginings, and inside a lamp.

8.7. Jewish Influence on Sufi Literature

Judaism has not made direct contribution to Islamic mysticism, but provided legal boundaries to confine the spiritual expressions. The Sufis are often accused of erring by using Christian expressions, while Muslim lawyers (Khazis) are sometimes criticized for being too much like Jewish rabbis. While Sufis frequently think that Christians hold important secret opinions, the praiseworthy aspects of Judaism are found by Muslims to lie in the straightforward observance of ritual purity. Thus one Sufi observes that Syriac (the language of Eastern Christians) represents what is highest and most hidden, whereas Hebrew (the language of Judaism) represents what is lowest and most obvious, and Arabic (the language of Islam) unites the two extremes.\footnote{Ali Harrali (d. 1240), quoted by P. Nwyia, \textit{Ibn `Ata’ Allah et la naissance de la confrérie sadilité}. Dar el-Machreq, Beirut, 1972, p. 62.} There was no significant presence of Jewish mysticism in the background to the rise of Sufism. The time of Philo Judaeus (fl. 40 C.E.), the great exponent of symbolic interpretation of the scriptures, had long since passed. Only the Merkabah or ‘Throne of God’ mysticism flourished before Islam. Here the descriptions of the soul’s journey to God’s Thorne, with its crossing of seven planetary spheres, resembles the visionary accounts in the Greek philosophical tradition as continued in the Muslim world rather than what is found in Sufism. Moreover, as per sources, there isn’t so much Judaism as Gnosticism in Judaic garb in Sufi literature. Gershom Scholem says, “There was no authentically Judaic mystical tradition in the lands of Islam before the Kabbalah arose in southern France in 1200 C.E. This is underlined
by the fact that up to the thirteenth century Jews in Muslim countries just imitated Sufi writings.\textsuperscript{36}

All the more, Qur'an has incorporated myriad elements from Jewish sources, especially the Torah, which is also the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) of Christians. Let us have a glance at a couple of literary excerpts from Farid ud-Din Attar's Sufi classic \textit{The Conference of the Birds}. The background story in both the poems is imported straight from the Jewish Torah: “Joseph and his Brothers” (Genesis 37:12-36, 42:1-25) and “Zuleikha has Joseph whipped” (Genesis 39:1-23)

\textbf{Joseph and his Brothers}

Ten starving brothers left their home to stand
In Joseph’s presence, in a foreign land,
And begged for some benevolent relief
To ease the torments of their wretched grief.
Now Joseph’s face was veiled; he took a bowl
And struck it hard -- a sound as if a soul
Cried out in misery was heard. He said:
‘Do you know what this means?’ Each shook his head.
‘Lord, no one in the world, search far and wide.
Could give this noise a meaning,’ they replied.
Then Joseph said: ‘It speaks to you; it says
You had a brother once, in former days.
More precious than this bowl -- he bore the name
Of Joseph; and it says that, to your shame.

His goodness overshadowed all of you.

Once more he struck the bowl. "It says you threw

This Joseph in a well, then stained his cloak

With wolf's blood; and it says the smeared rags broke

Poor Jacob's heart." He touched the bowl again:

"It says you brought your father needless pain

And sold the lovely Joseph. Is this true?

May God bestow remorse to chasten you!"

These brothers who had come to beg for bread

Stood speechless, faint with apprehensive dread:

When they gave Joseph for the merchant's gold,

It was themselves, and all the world, they sold --

And when they threw their brother in that well,

They threw themselves in the abyss of hell.

Whoever hears these words and cannot find

How they apply to him is truly blind.

There is no need to scrutinize my tale,

It is your own; when thoughtlessly you fail

To render loyalty its proper due.

How can the light of friendship shine for you?

But, till you're woken, sleep -- too soon you'll see

Your shameful crimes, your infidelity.

And when you stand a prisoner in that place

They'll count them one by one before your face;

There, when the bowl is struck, you too will find
That fear dissolves your reason and your mind.
You’re like a lame ant struggling for its soul.
Aimlessly sliding, caught inside this bowl --
Blood fills it, but a voice beyond its rim
Still calls to you -- rise now, and fly to Him.”

The story from the original Jewish Torah (Genesis 37:18-28) has been interiorized with the Sufi taste and touch to serve the inbuilt needs of Sufi theory and praxis. Now, let us have our hands on another Judeo-Sufi literary piece with its spiritual nuances and practical cadences.

**Zuleikha has Joseph whipped**

Zuleikha used her great authority
To have poor Joseph kept in custody --
She gave her callous orders to the guard:
‘Give that man fifty lashes, good and hard!
Deal with this Joseph’s body so that I
From far away can hear him groan and sigh.’
But when the guard saw Joseph’s face he felt
The cold indifference of his calling melt.
There was a leather coat left on the ground,
And with his whip he made this skin resound --
As every blow descended on the coat,
A scream of pain went up from Joseph’s throat.
But when Zuleikha heard his voice she cried:
‘You are too soft; whip harder. break his pride!’
The guard said: ‘What, dear Joseph, can I do?
Zuleikha only has to look at you
And see no weals or bruises on your back.
And I’ll be torn to pieces on the rack --
So bare your shoulders to the lash; some sign
Must mar your skin if I’m to rescue mine.’
When Joseph stripped in readiness, a sound
Of mourning spread from heaven to the ground;
The guard’s right arm was raised, and its descent
Produced a cry that split the firmament --
Zuleikha said: ‘Now Joseph cannot bluff;
This sigh is from his inmost soul -- enough!
This sigh was real and from his essence came --
His former groans were nothing but a game.’

In these Judeo-Sufi literary pieces, Attar has used the Jewish Torah source and
creatively and artistically seasoned it to Sufi ideology. The literary pieces have a Sufi
flavour, but the original components of the story go back to the Jewish sources -‘old
wine in new wineskins’- a syncretic Sufi character.

8.8. Christian Influence on Sufi Literature

It has been ascertained that Islamic mysticism, i.e. Sufism, grew out of
Christian monastic mysticism. The very word *Sufi*, being derived from the Arabic
word *suf* meaning wool, a characteristic garment of the Eastern Christian monks, and
was taken over by the early Islamic mystics, reflects the influence of Christian
mystical legacy and heritage. Other types of dress adopted by the Sufis, like the
patchwork frock made from rags, and the use of the colour of mourning - black for
Christians and dark blue for Muslims - are assimilation from pre-Islamic Christianity.
During its formative years, Sufis were gathering at a monastery established by a wealthy Christian at Ramlah in Syria, wherefrom and from other Christian monks, they adapted various mystic practices. De facto, it is the Christian doctrines and monastic practices that had immense influence on Sufism.

With the Fall of Adam (Genesis 3:1-24), Christianity believed that sin entered the world. And so, the world is sinful and causes people to sin. Due to the influence of Greek Platonic philosophy, the monks considered flesh, because it comes from the sinful world, is also sinful. To be sinless, one has to 'go away from the world.' Hence emerged monasteries, which were in the deserts, far from the madding crowds, and so the term 'Desert Fathers.' The monks after their one to two years of novitiate (depends on the Monastic Order) would take three vows (poverty, celibacy and obedience); spend long hours in prayer, meditation, contemplation, rosary, breviary, etc.; study philosophy, theology and spirituality; the mortification of flesh (practice of monastic 'discipline' like using foot-chains pricking the flesh, wearing metal waist-belt, self-flagellation, sleeping on bed of nails, eating ash-mixed food, etc.). No doubt, Sufism does emit regional flavours of Eastern Christian devotionalism. Egypt, being the legendary birthplace of Christian monasticism, practised moderate self-abnegation. However, Syria, mortifying the flesh stringently with its 'browsers', wearing heavy iron chains, and eating nothing but plants, continued among Muslim extremists on the fringes of Sufism producing visionary experiences and ecstasy.

Christian doctrines like contemplation on God, adaptation of Greek philosophy to a devotional framework, and the mystic’s progress through hierarchical stages, have also made inroads into Sufism. On the practical side, the mortification of flesh, monastic poverty and repetition of special prayers like the 99 names of God or Allah, and so on.
al-Hasan al-Basri (d.110/728), eminent theologian and renowned ascetic, who is claimed by the Sufis as one of their first and most distinguished partisans wrote the following letter to his exalted patron Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (717-20), which may be taken as typical of the ascetics of the first age:

Beware of this world with all wariness; for it is like to a snake, smooth to the touch, but its venom is deadly. Turn away from whatsoever delights thee in it, for the little companioning thou wilt have of it; put off from thee its cares, for that thou hast seen its sudden chances, and knowest for sure that thou shalt be parted from it; endure firmly its hardships, for the ease that shall presently be thine. The more it pleases thee, the more do thou be wary of it: for the man of this world, whenever he feels secure in any pleasure thereof, the world drives him over into some unpleasantness, and whenever he attains any part of it and squats him down upon it, the world suddenly turns him upside down. And again, beware of this world, for its hopes are lies, its expectations false; its easefulness is all harshness, muddied its limpidity. And therein thou art in peril: or bliss transient, or sudden calamity, or painful affliction, or doom decisive. Hard is the life of a man if he be prudent, dangerous if comfortable, being wary ever of catastrophe, certain of his ultimate fate. Even had the Almighty not pronounced upon the world at all, nor coined for it any similitude, nor charged men to abstain from it, yet would the world itself have awakened the slumberer, and roused the heedless; how much the more then, seeing that God has Himself sent us a warning against it, an exhortation regarding it! For this world has neither worth nor weight with God; so slight it is, it weighs not with God so much as a pebble or a single clod of earth; as I am told, God has created nothing more hateful to Him than this world, and
from the day He created it He has not looked upon it, so much He hates it. It was offered to our Prophet with all its keys and treasures, and that would not have lessened him in God’s sight by so much as the wing of a gnat, but he refused to accept it; and nothing prevented him from accepting it - for there is naught that can lessen him in God’s sight - but that he knew that God hated a thing, and therefore he hated it, and God despised a thing, and he despised it, and God abashed a thing, and he abashed it. Had he accepted it, his acceptance would have been a proof that he loved it; but he disdained to love what his Creator hated, and to exalt what his Sovereign had debased. As for Muhammed, he bound a stone upon his belly when he was hungry; and as for Moses, the skin of his belly shewed as green as grass because of it all: he asked naught of God, the day he took refuge in the shade, save food to eat when he was hungered, and it is said of him in the stories that God revealed to him, ‘Moses, when thou seest poverty approaching, say, Welcome to the badge of the righteous! and when thou seest wealth approaching, say, Lo! A sin whose punishment has been put on aforetime.’ If thou shouldst wish, thou mightest name as a third the Lord of the Spirit and the Word (Jesus), for in his affair there is a marvel; he used to say, ‘My daily bread is hunger, my badge is fear, my raiment is wool, my mount is my foot, my lantern at night is the moon, my fire by day is the sun, and my fruit and fragrant herbs are such things as the earth brings forth for the wild beasts and cattle. All the night I have nothing, yet there is none richer than I!’ And if thou shouldst wish, thou mightest name as a fourth David, who was no less wonderful than these; he ate barley bread in his chamber, and fed his family upon bran meal, but his people on fine corn; and when it was night, he clad himself in sackcloth, and chained
his hand to his neck, and wept until the dawn; eating coarse food, and wearing robes of hair. All these hated what God hates, and despised what God despises; then the righteous thereafter followed in their path and kept close upon their tracks.\textsuperscript{37}

Here we witness the edifice of an essential Sufi theory, that poverty and abstinence, even the wearing of wool - the distinct characteristic feature of Sufis - were handed down through the prophets, especially Jesus and David. Ibn Sirin (d. 110/728), a scholar cum contemporary of al-Hasan attacked the latter’s teachings and habits, in particular, the wearing of wool (\textit{Siif}), which was already being affected by certain devotees, as being in imitation of Jesus, saying “he preferred to follow the example of our Prophet who clothed himself in cotton.”\textsuperscript{38}

In the past, scholars have opined that we can trace the origins of Sufism by casting more light on Messalians or Prayerites, a seventh-century Christian sect which became extinct by the end of eighth-century, because of its apparently continuous praying. The Messalian works which influenced Sufism are \textit{Book of Degrees} and \textit{The Homilies of Pseudo-Macarius}. Isaac of Nineveh asserted that Messalians claim to be perfect and so are above normal restrictions. Such accusations were made by early Sufi writers against extremists on the fringes of Sufism, and it is only later that the mainline Sufi thinkers support the idea that perfection puts the Sufi above the law. All the more, they do not advocate violating Islamic legality.

A wide range of early Judco-Christian opinions and observations were attributed to a Christian sect, namely the Ebionites, meaning ‘the poor’, which is highly relevant to mysticism in early Islam. The original and literal meaning of the words which have passed into English as ‘fakir’ (Arabic \textit{faqir}) and ‘dervish’ (Persian


\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., p. 35.
*darwish*) is 'a poor man', which gradually acquired the connotations 'a man of the spiritual life' or 'a mystic.' 'Dervish' has a wider meaning than 'Sufi.' For, all dervishes are not Sufis. Furthermore, 'dervish' indicates more of a practical dimension, whereas 'Sufi' designates a theoretical one. In brief, the dervish is a Sufi in action, and the Sufi is a dervish in the abstract.

Reliable evidence shows that the Jewish Christians of the first few centuries CE (if not the Ebionites themselves) adopted a number of positions later taken over by Islam: retaining Jewish law in religious matters, and thus insisting on circumcision and rejecting Saint Paul; believing that Jesus was the Messiah, but just as a man, *not* as the Son of God; seeing Adam as a prophet; insisting on ablutions before worship and after sexual intercourse; and, in their later development, rejecting sexual continence and insisting on marriage. Some of them lived in the north of the Arab world, in Syria, before the Muslim conquest. It seems probable that they had a great influence at an early stage of Islam’s development. Even if this is not the case, it would appear that from fairly early on the Muslims adopted their main pattern of belief and practice.39

Christianity being one of the most syncretic religions has vast other philosophic-religious elements in its spiritual coffers. Moreover, from its advent down the corridors, Sufism has assimilated innumerable Christian elements into its corpus - even the very name ‘Sufi’, comes from the Christian monastic background - however, all the Sufi adaptations must be supported by two witnesses, the Qur’an and the Hadith. Sufis adopted from the Christian monks, woolen robe, love of Jesus, Mary, Sermon on the Mount, long hours of prayer, preference for celibacy, stressing the love

of God, asceticism and especially intense fast. In his *An Introduction to Sufism*, Julian Baldick clearly shows the Christian impact on Sufism:

Christianity’s contribution to the rise of Sufism is further apparent in the obvious influence from the neo-Platonist school of Greek philosophy. Plato himself had already provided a firm basis for early Christian spirituality: the doctrines of the contemplation of eternal Ideas and intimate knowledge of them; the soul’s ascent from the false reality of the senses; and the love of true Beauty. The neo-Platonist school of Plotinus (d. 270 CE) and his followers had developed these doctrines into a great system, dominated by the triad of the One, Reason and the Soul. This system exercised an immense influence upon Christian mystical thought, with which it was often identical. There were neo-Platonist philosophers in the background to the rise of Islam who were not Christians, but the process of transmitting Greek philosophy to the Muslims was essentially conducted by the Christians as translators and teachers, throughout the ninth century and well into the tenth. Thus to ask whether the origins of Sufi thought are neo-Platonist as opposed to Christian, or vice versa, would be to pose a false problem.40

The Qur’an, the very source of Sufism, surah *Al-Madiha* 5:82-83 contains a striking example of sympathy for Christians, and Christian monasticism in particular:

Verily, you will find the strongest among men in enmity to the believers (Muslims) the Jews and those who are *Al-Mushrikun* (polytheists), and you will find the nearest in love to the believers (Muslims) those who say, “We are Christians.” That is because amongst them are priests and monks, and they are not proud. And when they (who call themselves Christians) listen to what has

been sent down to the Messenger (Mohammed) you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of the truth which they have recognized. They say: “Our Lord! We believe; so write us down among the witnesses.

Another Qur’anic passage surah *Al-Hadid* 57:27 speaks on Jesus and Christian monasticism:

Then, We sent after them Our Messengers, and we sent ‘Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), and gave him the Injeel (Gospel). And we ordained in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy. But the monasticism (rahbaniyya) which they invented for themselves. We did not prescribe for them, but (they sought it) only to please Allah therewith, but they did not observe it with the right observance. So We gave those among them who believed their (due) reward.

Here we can observe an anticipation of the course later taken by Sufism. Monasticism is seen by the Sufis as a specifically Christian institution, which did not practice it in an expected way, thus obscuring a true, underlying and ideal essence.

Further, the Qur’an in surah *Al-Araf* 7:172 speaks of a covenant between God and man - a theme strongly emphasized by Eastern Christianity:

And (remember) when your Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their seed (or from Adam’s loin his offspring) and made them testify as to themselves (saying): “Yes! Am I not your Lord?” They said: “Yes, We testify.”

This passage is central to all Sufi doctrine. The Qur’an also repeatedly and frequently emphasizes the Christian theme of ‘remembrance of God’, i.e. *dhikr Allah* (Qur’an, surah *Al-Maidah* 5:91; Qur’an, surah *Ar-Ra’d* 13:28). Further, Isaac of Nineveh, a seventh-century Iraqi Nestorian-Christian mystical writer taught the
doctrine of ‘trust in divine providence’, which Sufism holds with high esteem. Isaac
set a pattern, a configuration or structure which is also found reflected in Islam.
Unlike the earlier isolated themes, he provides a fair amount of systematization,
which corresponds with Sufi theory and clearly establishes the Christian character of
Islamic mysticism. His teachings include three-fold model: (1) the body; (2) the lower
soul (i.e. the self or nafs in Sufism); (3) the higher soul or spirit (ruh in Sufism) -
which is a predominant feature in Isaac’s portrayal of the Path (tariqa), and this Path
is identified with Sufism itself. Sufism too believes in a somewhat ambiguous carnal
soul (nafs), which urges evil (Qur’an, surah Yusuf 12:53), but can be rendered tranquil
(Qur’an, surah Al-Fajr 89:27) and be found acceptable by God (Qur’an, surah Al-Fajr
89:28). There is a Spirit (ruh), which is God’s, and part of which he breathed into
Adam (Qur’an, surah Al-Hijr 15:29) and Mary (Qur’an, surah At-Tahrim 66:12). This
Spirit will give rise to questioning, and the answer is that all belong to the amar
(‘command’ or ‘affair’) of God (Qur’an, surah Al-Isra’ 17:85). In Sufism there is a
great mystery about the relationship between this Spirit of God and the spirit of higher
soul within man. The Qur’an also speaks of man’s heart (qalb, Quran, surah Al-
Baqarah 2:97; 2:204). Thus Sufism will depict a battle between the lower or carnal
soul and the spirit, with the heart in the middle. Jalal al-Din Rumi in his verse
compares the carnal soul or lower self (nafs) to dragon:

Your lower self is that dragon, a savage, a bloody tyrant.
It is not dead, merely frozen.
Keep your dragon in the snow of self-discipline.
Do not transport it to the sunshine of Baghdad.
Let that dragon of yours remain dormant.
Should it be released, it will devour you.41

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As long as the lower self rules the heart, one is not free from the love of this world, for, it prevents him from *dhikr Allah* or remembrance of God. Nurbakhsh says that continuous remembrance of God produces gradual transmutation of the attributes of the lower self into the attributes of God. For, those who are dead to their selves are alive with God. Sheikh Tosun Bayrak compares the lower self to a thief who sneaks into the house at night to steal. One cannot fight this thief without the help of God. The only practical solution is to turn on the light by practising *dhikr Allah*. The thief, who is a coward at heart, will then run out.

In his version of the Path, Isaac indicates three phases - in the Sufi manner - in a mystic’s upward progress. They are repentance, purification and perfection. Repentance includes righteous works performed with the body, such as fasting, almsgiving and vigils. Purification includes love of neighbour and humility with other virtues pertaining to the lower soul. The first two phases involve labour on the part of the mystic, whereas, in the third phase, God bestows gifts like delight, exultation and love on the higher soul or spirit.42 This ordered correspondence between Isaac’s triads and the mainstream of classical Sufi theory demonstrates a repeated configuration.

*Kitab al-sidq* or *Book of Truthfulness* by Kharraz is akin to the treatises of Isaac of Nineveh, wherein he initiates the concept of truthfulness (*sidq*), applying it to the sequence of ‘stations’ in the Path. The first part of truthfulness is repentance (*tawba*), which is the first ‘station’ in Isaac and later Sufism. After this station are: knowledge of the lower soul, knowledge of the devil, scrupulousness, ‘the lawful and the pure’ - the right attitude to material possessions, renunciation of the world (*zuhd*, translated as ‘asceticism’), trust in God (*tawakkul*) - here Kharraz particularly resembles Isaac in speaking of cutting off ‘causes’, i.e. visible means of support - fear,

42 Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises*, translated from Bedjan’s Syriac text by A.J. Wensinck, Koninlijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, Amsterdam 1923, pp. 246-47.
shame, knowledge of God’s bounties and gratitude, love, acceptance, desire and finally intimacy. At the omega point, being in the presence of God, rather being in God, the mystic attains gnosis or direct knowledge of God. As in Isaac, there isn’t a ratiocinative frame-up of the ‘states’ which follow the acquisition of the ‘stations’ or ‘virtues.’ Ultimately the mystic reaches a ‘state’ where he is absolutely truthful, because it is made easy by God. The Book of Truthfulness is for the hoi polloi, unlike the Gnostic elite. Whereas Kharraz’s short Epistles (Rasa’il), which are analyzed by Paul Nwyia are meant for the elite, wherein Kharraz mentions an elite class of mystics calling them ‘people of wanderinghood and perplexitude’ (ahl tayhuhiyya wa hayruriyya), thus inventing new abstract words in imitation of the Hellenized philosophers. As these elite mystics reach the essence of God’s Quintessence (‘ayn), their attributes vanish, thus incorporating the attributes of God.

As the name suggests, the principal purpose of Qur’an is liturgical - ‘reciting’ or ‘reading’ (from Scripture) - and so it contains myriad familiar biblical stories in Arabic. The indignant attacks on adversaries in an atmosphere of sectarian strife, is a Judeo-Christian biblical element in Islam’s formation, however, it is more stringent in the Qur’an.

And make ready against them all you can of power, including steeds of war (tanks, planes, missiles, artillery) to threaten thereby the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others besides them whom you may not know, (but) whom Allah does know. And whatever you shall spend in the Cause of Allah, shall be repaid to you, and you shall not be treated unjustly. (Qur’an, surah Al-Anfal 8:60)
And those who strive against Our Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.), to frustrate them, they will be brought to the torment.

(Qur'an, surah Al-Hajj 22:38)

Many ‘sacrosanct Traditions’ are borrowed from Jewish-Christian sources. For instance, God speaks of men who love one another in Him, as in the New Testament:

Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done [it] unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done [it] unto me... Inasmuch as ye did [it] not to one of the least of these, ye did [it] not to me. (Mathew 25:40, 45)

Similarly, the following words are found in almost identical wording in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas. “I have prepared for my pious servants what no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, and has not occurred to the heart of any man.” The following ‘sacrosanct Tradition’ is a cornerstone of all later Sufi doctrine:

My servant does not stop drawing close to me by extra acts of devotion until I love him. Then when I love him I am his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hand by which he grasps and his foot by which he walks.43

In one passage, which was a later insertion, al-Hallaj (d. 922), a contemporary of al-Junaid, went further in mystical reunion with God and likening himself to Jesus he proclaimed that man is the very God Incarnate. In the portrayal of his execution, we come across to his best known saying: “I am the Truth” (or “I am the Real”, ana ‘l-haqq), which was understood as “I am God.” But an early manuscript describes it as, “I see the Truth” (ara ‘l-haqq). This is a biblical phrase by Jesus, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). Further, the phrase “I am the Truth” frequently

occurs in Greek magical papyri of the first few centuries of the Common Era. Though al-Hallaj did not claim divinity for himself, his words, “I am the Truth” (*ana ‘l-haqq*) were a blasphemy to the Muslim orthodoxy and crucified him in 309/922 C.E. This startling paradox occurs in his *Kitab al-Tawasin*.

If he do not recognise God, at least recognise His signs. I am that sign, I am the Creative Truth (*ana ‘l-haqq*), because through the Truth I am a truth eternally. My friends and teachers are Iblis and Pharaoh. Iblis was threatened with Hell-fire, yet he did not recant. Pharaoh was drowned in the sea, yet he did not recant, for he would not acknowledge anything between him and God. And I, though I am killed and crucified, and though my hands and feet are cut off - I do not recant.

al-Hallaj comes across to us as more extreme, more intoxicated Sufi. The legend of his death is similar to the Crucifixion of Jesus, of which he may have been familiar.

When he was brought to be crucified and saw the cross and the nails, he turned to the people and uttered a prayer, ending with the words: ‘And these Thy servants who are gathered to slay me, in zeal for Thy religion and do desire to win Thy favour, forgive them, O Lord, and have mercy upon them; for verily if Thou hadst revealed to them that which Thou hast revealed to me, they would not have done; and if Thou hadst hidden from me that which Thou hadst hidden from them, I should not have suffered this tribulation. Glory unto Thee in whatsoever Thou doest, and glory unto Thee in whatsoever Thou willest.’

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Here is the biblical parallel to the above legend. “Then said Jesus, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’” (Luke 23:34). It is evident here that al-Hallaj not only made one of the seven last words of Jesus his own, but also paralleled his execution with Jesus’ crucifixion, thus making him a legendary figure - a syncretic Sufi mystique. Farid ud-Din Attar beautifully brings out the martyrdom of al-Hallaj in his *The Conference of the Birds* titled “The martyrdom of Hallaj”:

Hallaj was taken to the gallows tree
And cried: ‘I am the Truth’; they could not see
The meaning of his words and hacked at him,
Tearing his bleeding carcass limb from limb.
Then as his face grew deathly pale he raised
The bleeding stumps of broken arms and glazed
His moon-like face with glittering blood. He said:
‘Since it is blood which paints a man’s face red,
I’ve painted mine that no one here may say
“Hallaj turned pale on that last bloody day” --
If any saw me pale they’d think that I
Felt fear to face my torturers and die --
My fear’s of less than one hair’s consequence;
Look on my painted face for evidence!
When he must die and sees the gallows near.
The hero’s courage leaves no room for fear --
Since all the world is like a little “o”,
Why should I fear whatever it may show?
Who knows the seven-headed dragon’s lair.
And sleeps and eats through summer’s dog-days there.

Sees many games like this -- the gallows seems

The least of all his transitory dreams.*

That sea of faith, Junaid, in Baghdad once

Discoursed with such persuasive eloquence

It seemed the stars bowed down to hear him speak.

This stalwart guide and comfort of the weak

Delighted in his son, a lovely child

Who as his father lectured was beguiled

And murdered by a gang -- they tossed his head

In that assembly’s midst and quickly fled.

Junaid looked steadfastly at this cruel sight

And did not weep but said: ‘What seems tonight

So strange was certain from eternity;

What happens happens from necessity’ .”

The last four lines are Attar’s paraphrase of a poem by al-Hallaj. ‘Seven-headed dragon’ is a Biblical reference appears in the Apocalypse of John (Revelation 12:3). In this and the following anecdote Attar juxtaposes the attitude to death of the ecstatic mystic (al-Hallaj) and that of the sombre mystic (Junaid) in his “The hoopoe answers him (Death)”

The hoopoe said: “How feebly you complain!

How long will this worn bag of bones remain?

What are you but a few bones? -- and at heart

Each bone is soft and hastens to depart.

Aren’t you aware that life, from birth to death.
Is little more than one precarious breath?
That all who suffer birth must also die,
Their being scattered to the windy sky?
As you are reared to live, so from your birth
You’re also reared to one day leave this earth.
The sky is like some huge, inverted bowl
Which sunset fills with blood from pole to pole --
The sun seems then an executioner.
Beheading thousands with his scimitar.
If you are profligate, if you are pure,
You are but water mixed with dust, no more --
A drop of trembling instability,
And can a drop resist the surging sea?
Though in the world you are a king, you must
In sorrow and despair return to dust.

The words in the above poem “you must in sorrow and despair return to dust” have their origin in the Biblical creation story, wherein, after the Fall, God curses Adam with the words “...you are dust and to dust you shall return.” (Genesis 3:19).

8.8.1. Theophany (Tajally) in Sufi Literature

Theophany is the divine voice, which represents God’s manifestation. It is a part of the apocalyptic genre of literature having its origins in the Bible. The Bible contains innumerable apocalyptic narratives or poetic allusions of God’s revelation to humans (Genesis 12:6-7; Exodus 40:34-38; Mathew 17:1-8 etc.), which tend to follow a literary pattern with Canaanite roots - God appears, frequently as divine warrior or king, surrounded by fire or in splendor (Deuteronomy 33:2), sometimes riding like
Baal\textsuperscript{46} upon the wind and clouds (Psalms 18:10; 68:33; 104:3), and the recipient is given a revelation or call. Elijah’s encounter with God in a ‘still small voice’ rather than in earthquake, wind and fire (1 Kings 19:9-18) may represent a rejection of Canaanite imagery associating God with the forces of nature. The inter-testamental usage stems from Ezekiel 1, a central text for the Jewish apocalyptic and mystical tradition, but now the manifestation of God takes place in heaven rather than upon earth, as the culmination of the seer’s ascent to heaven (1 Enoch 14: 8-25; Revelation 4:1-11). Elsewhere in the New Testament, more traditional echoes of the language of theophany are heard in the narratives of Jesus’ baptism (Mathew 3:17), transfiguration (Mathew 17:1-8), and Paul’s conversion (Acts of the Apostles 9:1-9).

For the first time Tustari (d. 896) uses the concept of theophany (\textit{tajally}) in Sufi literature only in the context of Paradise, which later Sufis use to refer to a terrestrial vision of God. This is a typical biblical genre syncretically adapted by Sufism.

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Mathew 3:16-17)

Recent research has revealed that in early Islam God’s speech was not restricted to the Qur’an, rather he was seen as speaking in the first person via Mohammed in sayings collected outside the Qur’anic text. Furthermore, even when utterances attributed to Mohammed didn’t seem to reflect God’s speech, an authority was accorded in the eighth century which equaled the Qur’an. Moreover, the tradition

\textsuperscript{46}Baal (\textit{bay’al}) is a Canaanite god. The Semitic word ‘baal’ means owner, or husband, or lord.
of God speaking in the first person was a ninth-century Sufi invention to suit their own purposes. Originally Islam was seen as a harsh and cold intrusion, which was later given mildness and warmth by Sufism - a foreign borrowing.

In recent years, however, it has been shown that the Traditions used by the Sufis, and notably those of the ‘sacrosanct Tradition’ (hadith qudsi) type, which present God’s own speech, are not likely to be any later in origin than the others in the ninth-century collections. Our chances of determining that a given tradition was really originated by Muhammed are non-existent, unless new evidence is discovered. But the Sufi Traditions seem to be as early as the rest, and probably belong to what now appears as the main source: the large-scale production of Traditions in Iraq from the beginning of the eighth century. Most probably, as the new religion of Islam was gradually built up from its Jewish-Christian base - whether this base was there at the very start, or was subsequently borrowed, or was spontaneously recreated - it produced on the one hand legal Traditions out of Jewish materials in the Babylonian Jewish community in Iraq; and on the other mystical Traditions out of Christian materials in the Nestorian Church in Iraq.47

Theophany is very evident in the Sufi literature of al-Ghazzali:

One day the Prophet Abraham invited a person to dinner, but when he learned that he was an infidel he canceled the invitation and turned him out. Immediately the Divine Voice reprimanded him, saying, “You did not give him food for a day even because he belonged to a different religion, yet for the

last several years I am feeding him in spite of his heresy. Had you fed him for
one night, you would not have become poor on that account. 48

Originally, Abraham is a biblical figure in the book of Genesis, who is
syncretically incorporated into the Qur’an. The above theophanic story is purely a
Sufi concoction. There are other theophanic traditions, in which God is not presented
as speaking through the agency of the prophet, but Mohammed alone, give Sufism
both its direction and boundary: ‘Poverty is my glory’, and ‘There is no monasticism
in Islam’ are some of them.

8.8.2. ‘Passing away’ (Fana’) and ‘Survival’ (Baqa’)

Fana’ in Sufism is ‘passing away’ or ‘dissolution’ or ‘annihilation’ of the
human attributes (sifat), which dwell in the Ego, so that one is alive only in God. The
Sufi is he who possesses nothing, nor is himself possessed by anything. This is the
essence of annihilation (fana’), which when attains its perfection is called fana’-i
kulli, i.e. absolute annihilation. The Sufi scholars have often compared Sufi
annihilation with Buddhist nirvana. Christian salvation, Hindu/Sikh moksa and/or
mukti. Inayat Khan in his A Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty says:

The ideal perfection, called Baqa’ by Sufis, is termed ‘Najat’ in Islam,
‘Nirvana’ in Buddhism, ‘Salvation’ in Christianity, and ‘Mukhti’ in Hinduism.
This is the highest condition attainable, and all ancient prophets and sages
experienced it, and taught it to the world. Baqa’ is the original state of God. At
this state every being must arrive some day, consciously or unconsciously,
before or after death. The beginning and end of all beings is the same,
difference only existing during the journey.

However, this is inadequate as the Buddhist idea of annihilation is independent of the idea of God, and all three Indian religions believe in the transmigration of souls, to which nirvana, moksa and mukti puts an end. Salvation in Christianity is only a post-death reality. In Sufism, there is no metempsychosis and the notion of a personal and omnipresent God is predominant all through. Speaking on the Sufi origin of fana’, Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam says:

The origin of Muslim conception of fana’ has rather to be sought in Christianity from which it seems to be borrowed. This conception simply means the annihilation of the individual human will before the will of God, an idea which forms the centre of all Christian mysticism.49

Fana’ is associated with baqa’ meaning ‘survival’, ‘subsistence.’ The one, who has destroyed his own will, henceforth lives in God; the human will is transitory while God’s will is eternal.

Junayd of Baghdad (d. 910), the greatest of all Sufis, built his Sufi doctrine on two pillars - the covenant and passing away (fana’). In his covenant treatise he says that originally when God called his friends into existence they replied: “He was speaking to them when they were not existing except through his existence for them, since they were existing for God without their existence for themselves.”50 God created them in the genesis of their ‘passing away’ (fana’), wherein ‘passing away’ (fana’) means human transience or impermanence, temporal existence in the empirical world. Mystically ‘passing away’ is liberating from the transient, temporal existence, and returning to one’s original, real existence / state with God, i.e. God makes the mystic to pass away by originating him as God originated him in the

beginning - the perfect existence, in which ‘God was all in all.’ Human ‘passing away’ is one’s survival for the original, the real. God then makes one pass away a second time, by taking one away from one’s personal ‘passing away and survival’ into the ultimate reality of ‘passing away’, where there is no interference from the empirical, material world.

Here is a familiar and recognizable theme in Christian mysticism, found in the works of Meister Eckhart and Angelus Silesius:

Man first realizes, both intellectually and in experience, that his apparent, individual and temporal existence is really non-existence (since it is borrowed from God and not really owned by man), and then turns away, abandoning this negation of his existence, to the positive apprehending of real existence of God. In this one can see the celebrated ‘negation of the negation,’ which is one of the distinguishing characteristics of dialectical thought and finds its ultimate development in the works of Hegel and Marx, while having its earliest roots in Neo-Platonism. The New Testament had already emphasized the importance of ‘dying’ to the world in order to find true life (Colossians 3:3), and the theme of dying in anticipation of one’s eventual physical death continues, albeit without much clarity of definition, in patristic literature. One hears of early Christian monks in North Africa and the East who took the idea of ‘annihilation’ literally, and committed suicide. This motif continues in early Sufi legend, accompanied by disapproval. On the spiritual level, Mohammed is credited with the saying ‘Die before you die!’ The Qur’an also provides justification for the terms of ‘passing away’ and survival’: “Everyone who is on the way passes away, And there survives the face of your Lord with Grandeur and glory” (55:26-27). From this to the Sufi use of the terms seems
quite some way. It would appear that we have a natural development, not out of the Qur’anic text, but out of the Christian theme, generated by the dynamism inherent in Neo-Platonist thought.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 45-46.}

Sufi literary sources claim Tustari (d. 896) from Basra and Kharraz (d. 899) from Baghdad, who were contemporaries were the two ninth century founders of Sufism. According to Sufi tradition, Kharraz was the debut preacher in Baghdad on ‘passing away’ (\textit{fana’}) and ‘survival’ (\textit{baqa’}). Postulating a challenge to the above view Wilfred Madelung asserts that earlier Sufis used these ideas and so were prevalent in his time, however, there is no evidence to the earlier use of the terms. Kharraz taught that human’s lower soul (\textit{nafs}) must be made to ‘pass away’, (\textit{fana’}) along with physical nature, including heart. Only the direct knowledge of God (\textit{gnosis}), the spirit and friendship with God will survive (\textit{baqa’}). These stations of ‘passing away’ and ‘survival’ are the ultimate human achievement, to be reached in this world, not next. ‘Ali b. ‘Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri in his \textit{Kashf al-Mahdjuh} (\textit{The Revelation of the Veiled}, trans. by Nicholson, London, 1911), an early Persian treatise on Sufism, expressly states:

\textit{Fana’} does not mean loss of essence and destruction of personality as some ignorant Sufis think. It is not the essence but the human attributes, which are a danger to the perfection of being, that are destroyed. In India I had a dispute with a man who claimed to be versed in Kur’anic exegesis and theology. When I examined his pretensions, I found that he knew nothing of annihilation. i.e. he had understood the word \textit{fana’} in a metaphysical sense.\footnote{‘Ali b. ‘Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, \textit{Kashf al-Mahdjuh: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism}, trans. (\textit{The Revelation of the Veiled}) by Reynold A. Nicholson, London, 1911, reprinted London: Luzac, 1976, p. 243.}
Speaking on the concept of the nearness to God, Kharraz subdivided this 'station' into three:

Finding - here the mystic concentrates on God with an inner calm;

Stupefaction - the mystic cries out wildly, weeps and sighs;

Forgetfulness - the mystic falls away (fana') and only God survives (baqa'). All questions put to the mystic receive the answer 'God.' If he is asked, 'Who are you?′ he cannot reply 'I.' After this he reaches a point where he cannot even say 'God.'

To some extent Tirmidhi’s (d. 700) idea corresponds to the Sufi conventional concept of 'passing away (fana') and survival (baqa'). He illustrates the Path starting with repentance, abstinence and disciplining the lower soul, thus leading to theophany (tajalli), i.e. God’s self-revelation. Behold! This doesn’t mean that the Sufi has a sight of God in the natural world, but attains the consciousness of God’s Uniqueness - the highest stage that a mortal can reach.

Abu Yazid (Bayazid) of Bistam, a Persian (d. 261/875) has a narrative on 'passing away in God' (fana'):

Once He raised me up and stationed me before Him, and said to me, ‘O Abu Yazid, truly My creation desire to see thee.’ I said, ‘Adorn me in Thy Unity, and clothe me in Thy Selfhood, and raise me up to Thy Oneness, so that when Thy creation see me they will say, We have seen Thee: and Thou wilt be That, and is shall not be there at all.’

Here we can see the doctrine of 'passing away' in God (fana') which from the time of Abu Yazid assumes a central place in the structure of Sufi theory. According to this theory, all else but God is nothing, i.e. in God or compared to God, the world is worthless. When ego or self as well as the world have been cast aside the Sufi has

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passed away into God. It is similar to the Advatic doctrine, wherein when the Advaitin loses oneself into God he utters *Ahm Brahmasmi* (i.e. I am Brahman), he realizes *Brahma satya, jagat mithya* (i.e. Brahman is real, the world is illusion). al-Junaid beautifully expresses this union and separation in a short poem:

Now I have known, O Lord,
What lies within my heart;
In secret, from the world apart.
My tongue hath talked with my Adored.

So in a manner we
United are, and One;
Yet otherwise disunion
Is our estate eternally.

Though from my gaze profound
Deep awe hath hid Thy Face,
In wondrous and ecstatic Grace
I feel Thee touch my inmost ground.\(^5^4\)

al-Nuri expounds the doctrine of *passing away* (*fana’*) and *survival* (*baqa’*) in his verse, which was also taught by al-Junaid:

I had supposed that, having passed away
From self in concentration, I should blaze
A path to Thee; but ah! No creature may
Draw nigh Thee, save on Thy appointed ways.
I cannot longer live, Lord, without Thee;
Thy hand is everywhere: I may not flee.

\(^5^4\) Ibid., p. 212.
Some have desired through hope to come to Thee,
And Thou hast wrought in them their high design:
Lo! I have served every thought from me.
And died to selfhood that I might be Thine.
How long, my heart’s Beloved? I am spent:
I can no more endure this banishment.  

Sufism is principally a quest for the gnosis of the Supreme Being, and so to the Sufi, “God is the One Real Being which underlies all phenomena” (Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, p.80). He is everything and there is nothing but Him. Humans’ purpose is to lose one’s natural sense of a separate identity from the Creator and to be absorbed into his gnosis until there is no distinction of consciousness between him and God. Through a series of stages (maqamat) and subjective experiences (ahwal) this process of absorption develops until complete annihilation (fana’) takes place and the Sufi becomes al-insanul-kamil or the ‘perfect man.’

**8.9. Pagan Influence on Sufi Literature**

Early Sufis generally maintained a decent respect for study, and constantly had upon their lips the Prophet’s injunction to “seek learning, even if it be from China.” Hence, Sufism assimilated a wide variety of Persian cum other religious elements into its corpus. Magic assumed an interesting importance in their repertory, which early Sufism had been free from this most mischievous variety of mystification and obscurantism; charms and amulets came to acquire a special value in the eyes of men no longer confident against the vicissitudes of fortune; cabbalism and witchcraft provided an attractive substitute for defeated reason. Sheikh Muhammad Amin al-Kurdi al-Shafi al-Naqshabandi (d. 1332/1914) wrote *Tamvir al-qiilub* which deals

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Perform the ‘guide exercise.’ when the neophyte’s heart confronts the heart of his sheikh, keeping his image in mind even though he be absent, seeking the sheikh’s blessing, and as it were passing away (fana’) in him.

Recite the *Fatiha* once, and *Ikhlas* thrice, offering them to the spirit of Muhammad and the spirits of all the Naqshabandi sheikhs.

Perform the ‘grave exercise,’ i.e. imagine that you are dead, that you have been washed, wrapped in your winding-sheet and laid in your tomb, and that all the mourners have departed, leaving you alone to face the divine Judgement.

People believe that the dead visit this world on the 15th of Shabaan (8th month of the Islamic Calendar) which they call ‘Eid of the Dead’ on which, some even go to the extreme of preparing the foods that the diseased liked! al-Sha’rani in his autobiography *Lata‘if al-minam* had frequently associated with the dead during his sleep and questioned them on their circumstances in the other world. He had seen dead saints and been courteously received by them. The following is one of his noted dreams narrating his association with the dead.

There used to be a person living in our neighbourhood who was scornful of his fellows. God afflicted him with asthma and paralysis, and he continued thus for about ten years, unable to lay his side to the ground; his chin rested on his knee, and his muscles withered away. So he died, and he was buried. I saw him after his death, and asked him, ‘Are you still paralysed?’ He replied, ‘Yes, and I shall be raised up like this too, and mostly on account of you and Shaikh Shu’aib the Pracher.’ When I told this to Shaikh Shu’aib, he remarked, ‘Yes, it
is quite true. Whenever I passed him, he would blow his nose and throw the phlegm in my face as a mark of contempt.’ As for myself, whenever I passed him he would address me in terms not fit to be spoken to a cowherd. God forgive him and be gracious to him!

Communion with the spirits of the dead is an un-Islamic and a pagan adaptation into Sufism. Said Eren opines that calling spirits comes from foreign countries and its origin is not religion but philosophy. The spirit that introduces itself as a dead person’s spirit is not that person’s spirit; it is either one of the evil spirits or a Jinn that helps devil. It can introduce itself as Mawlana’s spirit, and to ensure trust its words, it can recite a couple of couplets from Mawlana. After this, it will try to present and indoctrinate the things away from Islam as if they are the words of Mawlana.

To know whether the spirit is good or evil, Sufism sought the aid of the discernment of spirits - a typical Christian spiritual practice. In a faithful dream, for instance, the evil spirit and devil cannot take the form of Prophet Mohammed. However, during the spirit calling session, it may give itself the name of the Prophet and then it may speak against the Sharia (Islamic law) and religious practices, in which case, it is evident that it isn’t a good spirit, i.e. it is not a believer or a Muslim jinn, but an evil spirit imitating the good one. This mystical practice is syncretically borrowed from the Christian mysticism of St Ignatius of Loyola, who, in his *Spiritual Exercises* deals with the ‘discernment of spirits.’ However, Christian mysticism doesn’t speak of good and evil spirits of the dead, but only as inner spiritual forces.

When the Jews had asked Mohammed about the soul he’d replied, “They ask you concerning the soul. Say that the soul is from Allah and you have not been given knowledge of it except a little” (Qur’an surah *al-Isra’* 17:85). Orthodox Islam
believes that the souls of the dead cannot and do not come back to earth; they cannot appear to or converse with the living inhabitants of the earth. Inducing to believe in the return of the souls is a means adopted by shaytaan (devil) to misguide humans; pretending to be ‘returned souls of the dead’ performing extraordinary feats is devil’s deception to believe in the powers of the dead, thus becoming a religious science of its own having no basis in the Qur’an or the sunnah, ultimately leading to worship the souls of the dead, but actually worship of shaytaan himself. (Majmoo al-Fatawa 5.1 / p. 359-61). Shaikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah (rahimahullah) said:

To take the graves as idols is the first step towards polytheism; it is why some visitors to graves hear the voices near the graves, see certain visions before them, witness strange forces in operation which are taken for a miracle of some righteous deceased people whereas sometimes they are the Jinn and the Shaytaan. For instance, they observe a grave being cleft and the deceased comes out of it, talks with people and embraces them. Such a thing you will witness near the graves of the Divine Apostles and other people, whereas in reality it is Shaytaan. Indeed, the Shaytaan assumes the form of a human being and says: ‘I am so and so Prophet.’ ‘I am so and so Shaikh’; and he tells a lie. The ignorant person believes that the one who came out of the grave, who caressed him or conversed with him, was the inmate of the grave, or was a righteous person or a Divine person. In contrast to it, a perfect believer knows without any shadow of doubt that he is Shaytaan. (Kitab al-Wasilah, tr. p. 42)

al-Hakim al-Trimidhi (fl. 280/893), the psychologist of Sufism, whose lost work the Khatm al-wilaya in which he argued that the saints had a ‘Seal’ as well as the prophets compelled him to flee for his life, and was afterwards a source of Ibn ‘Arabi’s theory of sainthood and prophetship.
8.10. Indian Influence on Sufi Literature

There were pan-Indian influences on Sufism over the centuries, in the form of techniques, such as meditational techniques, Indian breath control methods, worshipping upside down suspended in a well, the use of the rosary (Nam Jap), were transmitted from Buddhism through Christianity to Islam. With regard to the doctrinal influences Julian Baldick says:

We shall see one instance of doctrinal influence from traditional Indian religion, ‘Hinduism,’ upon a ninth-century Muslim mystic, but we shall also see that this was immediately isolated and contained, being perceived manifestly alien to the Sufis’ objectives. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries one encounters elaborate theories of colours in one Sufi brotherhood, with the establishing of a system of correspondences between these colours and spiritual organs within the mystic, in a manner very similar to what is found in Hindu Tantrism. We shall come across these spiritual organs in the work of an eighteenth-century Indian Sufi: there they are located in the body according to Tantric teachings. But such borrowings are not central to Sufi doctrine or relevant to the study of its origins. As for the influence of Buddhism, it would appear to have come via Manichaeanism, and then through the impact of Manichaeanism on Christian monasticism and extremist Shiism. Thus the legend of the Buddha itself, accompanied by repeated complaints about the persecution of ascetics, seems to have been transmitted by Manichaens to the Isma’ili Shiites before turning into the story of a penitent Sufi prince. Such contributions are both minor and indirect.56

Abu Yazid (d. 875) of Bastam in northern Iran is famous for *shath*, ‘the ecstatic utterance’ wherein the mystic gives voice to his most intimate experience, which is an Indian religious influence on Sufism, says R.C. Zaehner. The combination of external evidence (a report of a teacher of apparently Indian extraction) and his internal evidence (the Indian character of Abu Yazid’s sayings) is powerfully Indian. In one of Abu Yazid’s sayings ‘Thou art that’. Zaehner found the parallel Upanishadic expression *Ahm Brahmasmi*. The Upanishadic influence on Abu Yazid is crystal clear in the following excerpt:

Abu Yazid also mentions an encounter, in which he takes the form of a bird, with a ‘tree of oneness,’ its soil, root and branch, and shoots and fruits, and then rejects all this as ‘deceit’ - just as the Vedanta (the Indian philosophical tradition which develops the thought of the Upanishads) rejects the universe as ‘illusion.’ In a passage of the Upanishads two birds are presented as clinging to a cosmic tree, the one bound by the ‘illusion,’ the other not.\(^{57}\)

Further, Abu Yazid had declared, “Glory be to me!” which too is found in the Upanishads. Yet in another place he says:

I sloughed off my self as a snake sloughs off its skin:

then I looked into my self and lo! I was he.

In the Upanishads the body is compared to the sloughed-off skin of a snake, wherein at the highest echelon of *Jnana* or knowledge one bursts out, *Ahm Brahmasmi* (i.e. I am Brahman) or *Tativamasi* (i.e. Thou art That) - which, as in the above verse the Sufi says, ‘I am He.’ Arberry challenged Zaehner’s translation of the Arabic words with the expression ‘Thou art That’ and contested that it should be ‘Thou wilt be that’, i.e. only God will remain after one ceases to exist. Moreover, the

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\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 36.
pronoun ‘that’ is applied to God in the Qur’an (surah Al-An’am 6:95) as well. It was Zaehner’s faux pas imagining that Abu Yazid had altered the essential Sufi orientation to God into monism, the doctrine that there is only one entity in the universal existence. In this controversial debate, I acknowledge the Indian impact on Abu Yazid, but deny Zaehner’s claim of a wider diffusion of Indology into Sufism through him.

The above concept, Ahm Brahmasmi (i.e. I am Brahman) or Tattvamasi (i.e. Thou art That) is found reflected in Sufism as ‘I become Him, whom everyone obeys’, i.e. becoming God-like. As a Sufi story goes, Fariduddin hung himself upside down in a well for twelve years, after which he said, “die” but nothing happened. He went back and hung once again for twelve more years, after which he said, “die” and everything died. Then he said, “live” and everything lived. He is believed to have become God-like. Therefore the Sufi is called the hands, feet, eyes, ears and mouth of God, however, unlike Advaita, here the Sufi remains a creature. In his state God has raised him to the highest level by bringing his soul to the state of perfect obedience, love and surrender - a state of divine visitation.

Ascetic practices within Sufi philosophy are associated with Buddhism. The notion of purification (cleaning one’s soul from all evil things and trying to reach nirvana and to become immortal in nirvana) plays an important role in Buddhism. The same idea shows itself in the belief of ‘vuslat’ (communion with God) in Sufi philosophy. Further, Dara Shikoh, son of the Mogul emperor Shah Jahan wrote a number of books on Sufism, in one of which, Majam’ al-bahrain he sought to reconcile its theory with the Vedanta.
Metempsychosis is originally an Indian concept, syncretically came into Sufism and the Kabbalah. It is totally an alien concept to the Semitic religious mind - Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All the more, it has been syncretically incorporated into the mystical religious system in spite of the stringent opposition by the orthodox religionists, even to the extent of addressing them as non-Jews or non-Muslims respectively. *The Mathnawi* IV of Jalal al-Din Rumi speaks of metempsychosis or an evolutionary chain of being. By being boiled and consumed, the vegetables become part of human beings which will be transformed into human qualities after they have contributed to the development of the semen. The semen in turn will develop into *mani*, ‘I-ness’, ‘personality.’ This emphasis on ‘everything has capacity to rise through various levels of existence’ connects to a plethora of stories and deliberations. He expresses this idea in the following verse:

I died as mineral and became a plant,
I died as plant and turned to animal.
I died as animal and became man.
What fear I, then, as I cannot diminish by dying?
Once when I die as a human, I’ll become an angel,
and I shall give up angelhood,
For Not-Being, ‘adam, calls with an organlike voice:
“verily we are His, and to Him we return!” (Surah 2/151)

The above idea is not only non-Islamic, but also anti-Islamic. Obviously, it is drawn from the *karma* theory of Indian philosophy, specifically from Jainism. As per the Jain philosophical thought, every object in the universe - animate or inanimate - has souls, however, in varying degrees. All the more, a deeper look into Rumi reveals that he doesn’t borrow *karmic theory* verbatim, but tailors it to the Sufi context. For,
he doesn’t say that every object in the universe has soul, but that it has life-giving constituents.

Farid ud-Din Attar, in his Sufi classic *The Conference of the Birds* has a poem titled, “An Indian king.” narrates the conversion of the king to Sufism, more so, a *metanoia* (or transformation of the heart) from material wealth to spiritual riches:

As Mahmoud’s army moved through India,
They chanced to take an old king prisoner
Who learnt the Moslem faith at Mahmoud’s court
And counted this world and the next as nought.

Alone, a hermit in a ragged tent,
He lived for prayer, an eager penitent,

His face bathed day and night in scalding tears --
At last the news of this reached Mahmoud’s ears.

He summoned him and said: ‘I’ll give to you
A hundred kingdoms and their revenue;
It’s not for you to weep, you are a king;
I promise to return you everything!’

To this the Indian king replied: ‘My lord,
It’s not my kingdom conquered by your sword
That makes me weep, but thoughts of Judgement Day;
For at the resurrection God will say

“O faithless wretch, you had no thoughts of Me
Till you were crushed by Mahmoud’s cavalry --
It took an army’s might to change your mind
And till you stood defenceless you were blind --
Does this make you My friend or enemy?
How long did I treat you with loyalty
And in return endure your thankless hate?
Is this the friendship that you advocate?"
If God says this, what answer can I give
To contradict the damning narrative?
Young man, if you could understand my fears
You’d know the reason for an old man’s tears.’
Learn from these faithful words, and if your heart
Holds faith like this, prepare now to depart;
But if your heart is faithless, give up now,
Forget our struggle and renounce your vow;
The faithless have no place on any page
Within the volume of our pilgrimage.

All these observations prove ‘Indianism’ writ across Sufi life and literature. Sufi literature has absorbed diverse Indian philosophical theories with religious systems into its literary corpus, which speaks of the syncretic element of Sufi literature.

9. A Bird’s Eye View of Sufi Literature

Sufism is not one, but many. Each Sufi sect has its own unique spiritual dynamics pertinent to its doctrine, which gets reflected in its literature. Hujwiri in the middle of the 5th/11th century notes twelve Sufi sects, named after their founders except one and each having its own distinct doctrines, of which ten were stated to be
orthodox and two heretical. As the need arose the Sufi schools produced mystics, who brought out works to suit their purpose. Sufi literature is unique and universal with its own sui generis literary genres. Further, it has assimilated multifarious genres from other literary sources, such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu, English, besides literary traditions from Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Indian and other religio-philosophical systems. Let us have a glance at some of these Sufi literatures.

9.1. Early Sufi Syncretic Legends

Like any other mystical religion, Sufism too is endowed with legends. A pre-Islamic tradition says that Abraha, the Abyssinian Christian ruler of Yemen, went to attack Mecca with a herd of elephants imported from Africa. Abraha wanted to destroy the Ka’ba and build a church at Sana’ the new religious centre of the Arab world. The terrified Quraysh had never seen an elephant, much less a whole herd, so they escaped to the mountains, leaving the Ka’ba defenseless. But just as it was about to be attacked the sky went dark as a flock of birds, each carrying a stone in its beak, rained down on the invading army which was forced to retreat.

There are Sufi legends connecting Mohammed with highly venerated figures in Sufism, which are syncretic in nature. According to an early Christian source, Salman the Persian, a convert from Christianity, had a hand in the composition of the Qur’an, thus fashioning it with a Christian touch. Similarly, Uways of South Arabia, who is believed to have communicated with Mohammed by telepathy, thereby rolled in a curiously puzzling tradition in Sufism wherein disciples are presented as being instructed by the spirits of physically absent or dead masters. It is an ancient Persian (Zoroastrian) idea of the daena, the spirit who encounters the dead in the other world, syncretically entered into Sufism.

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The eighth-century Sufi legends, in the veneration of ‘Sufis’ don’t address them as Sufis, but as ‘world renouncers’ (zuḥhad) or ‘devotees’ (nussak) after Christian monks, who were sternly pious cum self-mortified ascetics. Moreover, a number of stories about them are anecdotes about Christian monks, which are isolated tales rather than a pattern with a continual flow of Islamic ideas. All the more, such a pattern could be deduced only in two legends of two women, Rabi’a of Basra and Rabi’a of Syria. Rabi’a of Basra (d. 801) in Iraq, is the most famous woman Sufi, who was a slave girl prior to her repentance followed by a life of renunciation and asceticism in the desert. One version of her legend says that she ‘fell into minstrelsy’, which is a reminiscence of the celebrated converted prostitutes of early Eastern Christianity. For, at that time the singing slave girls of Iraq catered to the psycho-sexual cum cultural needs in the manner of classical Athenian courtesans and the Japanese geisha.\(^5\) This gels well with the anecdotes of Rabi’a’s witty replies and her recitations of love verses. Based on verses attributed to her by a source 200 years later, modern scholars claim that she introduced the theme of love into Sufism. As per popular belief, her tomb is confused with that of St Pelagia of Jerusalem, a penitent entertainer and courtesan, who became a cultic figure from the sixth century on the Mount of Olives.

In contrast to the above Rabi’a of Basra, there is Rabi’a of Syria, who lived in Syria in the early ninth century. As per late tenth century sources, she was married to a leading Sufi, but did not consummate the marriage. Here we can observe a practice, rare in Islam, but common in early Christianity, under the patronage of Mary the mother of Jesus.

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\(^5\) Geisha, geiko or geigi are traditional Japanese female entertainers who act as hostesses endowed with skills to perform various Japanese arts such as classical music, dance and games.
Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus. (Matthew 1:24-25)

Behind the contrasting pair of Rabi’as, we can perceive a pair of contrasting Marys. Behind Rabi’ā of Basra we can see Mary Magdalene, the anonymous penitent in Luke (7:37-50) identified by a ninth-century Iraqi Nestorian writer; and Mary of Egypt, who had repented of her life of promiscuity after the intervention of Mary the mother of Jesus, and was buried in the shrine of Pelagia. Behind Rabi’ā of Syria and her Sufi husband we can see the reflection of Mary the mother of Jesus and St Joseph, and also Mary and Theophilus of Antioch, representatives of the Syrian tradition of ‘blame.’ Mary and Theophilus of Antioch come across as a prostitute and a juggler, but in reality a pious and sexually abstinent married couple. Thus the two Rabi’as reflect the pre-Islamic Iraqi culture with its wit and sophistication, and Syria, with its simple but rigorous asceticism. The pair of the penitent courtesan and the sexually abstinent wife forms a pattern which continues in Sufi biographies.

Tirmidhi (d. 700) lived in the north-east of the Islamic world (present Soviet Central Asia) came up with a novel concept in Islamic mysticism that just as Mohammed is the ‘Seal of the Prophets’, so too there is a ‘Seal of the Friends’ (*khatm al-awliya*). In one of his wife’s dreams, Tirmidhi having a superior position sees himself as that Seal. A prince in the dream with his Turkish soldiers threatens the country and Tirmidhi leads forty men to him. The prince takes Tirmidhi’s heart out of his breast (as happens to Mohammed in the legend), shakes him, so that he thinks that all his limbs are being torn apart (another standard shamanistic theme), and confirms his leading position.
al-Hallaj (d. 922) has left some peculiar traditions. Instead of the usual lists of the names of men as transmitters and guarantors of authenticity, he gives a colorful variety of intermediary entities, such as the Spirit, heaven and earth, the ‘ruby light’, the ‘crescent of the Yemen’ and so on, before God Himself is made to speak, saying such things as:

God casts 360 glances during each day and night. In each glance he brings closer to himself the spirit of one of his loved ones, and replaces him with one of his sincere ones. And with his looking at his loved one he gives mercy to 70,000 of those who profess friendship.60

One of these traditions reads:

From the quintessence of the balance of the year 902, from the age of the announcer of the year seven of the call, from the friend of nearness: God says, ‘My attribute succeeds my attribute, and my looking my looking, and lights and spirits are linked to one another until the Day of Resurrection. Whoever understands the work of attesting that God is Unique utters God’s supreme name and reaches a glorious station after he has left this world.’61

A number of anecdotal verses attributed to al-Hallaj envisage him anticipating his crucifixion. There were stories directly borrowed from Christianity, and some short poems, wherein he asks to be killed - historically typical Christian desire for red martyrdom - and foretells his death in the religion of the cross, wherefrom, al-Hallaj appears as a deeply Christian figure, dying to redeem the Muslim community or be united with Jesus.

61 Ibid., p. 48. (The year 902 is in reference to an extreme Shiite uprising).
9.2. Sufi Love Poetry

Mystical love-verse is intimately close to the heart of a Sufi, who imagines God as the lover and the Sufi as His beloved. Down the Sufi corridors of history, innumerable legends and anecdotes unfold before us their fondness of love-poetry - initiating with a purely human character, then allegorically interpreting to the divine, to accord with their own passionate spiritualism. The allegory of love is cardinal in Sufi thought, wherein human and divine imagery is easily interchanged in Sufi minds.

Ruzbihan Baqli in his “On the Courtesy of the Lover and the Beloved” speaks on the origin and development of love in Sufism:

...When I arrived from the journey of servanthood to the world of lordship, and I saw the beauty of angelic world with the angelic eye, I travelled through the stations of unveilings, and I ate the meal of spiritual stations and miracles at the table of spiritual beings. With the birds of the Throne I flew through the atmosphere of ‘Illiyin (The Highest Heaven), and I beheld the pure manifestation of the witnessing of God (great is His name) with His single eye. The wine of His majestic love reached the taste of my soul in the cup of pure beauty. The sweetness of eternal love cloaked my heart with the garment of divine knowledge and primordial unveilings... In the ocean of divine knowledge I became strengthened by God, and on its surges in the ship of wisdom I cut through the waves of grace and wrath, and I reached the shores of the divine attributes and actions. By degrees I went through the knowledge of unity, isolation, and detachment toward the world of pre-eternity, and I found the clothing of eternity. I heard the speech of greatness, might, beauty, and nearness. The annihilation of unity showed its power to me, and it annihilated me from all the traces of time in the essence of eternity. It made
me eternally present... God took me to His own sanctuary, and He removed the cloak of servanthood from me. He cloaked me with the clothing of freedom, and He said, "You have become a passionate lover, a tender lover, a pure lover, one who longs, one who is free, one who speaks ecstatically, one who is comely, one who is united, one who is sincere. So create by My creation, look by My glance, hear by My hearing, speak by My tongue, judge by My wisdom, and love by My love. In truth, you are one of My saints. You are in my immaculate sanctuary, and by the essence of My grace I have made you safe from My wrath. But I will test you with the sufferings of love, and I will examine your truth. I will save anyone who loves you from the pain of My punishment, for he will be among the chosen disciples of My lovers." 62

Yahya b. Mu'adh artistically brings out the above divine-human love in his love verse:

The lover joys to dwell
In love with Love;
Yet some, as strange as I tell,
Do Love reprove.
About God's Love I hover
While I have breath,
To be His perfect lover
Until my death. 63

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In Sufi literature, Rabi'a of Basra is known for enunciating the doctrine of Divine Love, which later became a distinct feature of the Sufi movement. All Sufis across sects practice it to this day. Rabi’a’s poem on this theme of Divine Love is one of the most often quoted in Sufi literature.

Two ways I love thee: selfishly,
And next, as worthy is of Thee.
’Tis selfish love that I do naught
Save think on Thee with every thought.
’Tis purest love when Thou dost raise
The veil to my adoring gaze.
Not mine the praise in that or this:
Thine is the praise in both, I wis.⁶⁴

In his poetry Dhu ’l-Nun deploys the passionate language of the devoted lover, as Rabi’a of Basra did in her poetry before him, which set a tradition, thus becoming a prominent characteristic of Sufi literature thereafter to this day.

I die, and yet not dies in me
The ardour of my love for Thee,
Nor hath Thy Love, my only goal,
Assuaged the fever of my soul.

To Thee alone my spirit cries;
In Thee my whole ambition lies,
And still Thy Wealth is far above
The poverty of my small love.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 43.
I turn to Thee in my request,
And seek in Thee my final rest;
To Thee my loud lament is brought,
Thou dwellest in my secret thought.

However, long my sickness be.
This wearisome infirmity.
Never to men will I declare
The burden Thou hast made me bear.

To Thee alone is manifest
The heavy labour of my breast,
Else never kin nor neighbours know
The brimming measure of my woe.

A fever burns below my heart
And ravages my every part;
It hath destroyed my strength and stay.
And smouldered all my soul away.

Guidest Thou not upon the road
The rider wearied by his load,
Delivering from the steps of death
The traveller as he wandereth?
Didst Thou not light a Beacon too
For them that found the Guidance true
But carried not within their hand
The fairest glimmer of its brand?

O then to me Thy Favour give
That, so attended, I may live,
And overwhelm with ease from Thee
The rigour of my poverty. 65

This passion for Divine Love comes out strongly in al-Nuri’s passionate poem:

So passionate my love is, I do yearn
To keep His memory constantly in mind;
But O, the ecstasy with which I burn
Sears out my thoughts, and strikes my memory blind!

And, marvel upon marvel, ecstasy
Itself is swept away: now far, now near
My Lover stands, and all the faculty
Of my memory is swept up in hope and fear. 66

Rumi sees the ‘sameness’ or ‘oneness’ in the Lover and the beloved as he says:

Since I have heard of the world of Love.
I’ve spent my life, my heart
And my eyes this way.
I used to think that love
And beloved are different.
I know they are the same.

65 Ibid., pp. 53-54.
66 Ibid., p. 62-63.
The Persian poet ‘Iraqi (d. 688/1289) in his *Lama'at* has the special theme, ‘the doctrine of the mystical trinity of Love, Lover and Beloved.’

Love soars beyond the Reach of Human Mind,
By Paring and Reunion unconfined:
Whene’er a thing o’er Fancy rides supreme,
Image is vain, and Comprehension blind.

*Love sings a song within the Veil:*
Ho, lover! listen to his tale.

New airs each moment he doth raise.
Each instant lifts new songs of praise.
The whole World echoes with his song:
Was ever Voice so sweet and strong?
The universe his secret knows:
Could Echo keep his secret close?
This mystery each Atom tells:
No need have I to utter spells.

In silence and in speech He talks to me,
In flashing eye, and eyelid’s modesty.

Knowest thou what story Love whispers in my ears?

‘I am Love: in all the world I have no home.
I am Anqa of the West: unseen I roam.
Earth and Heaven have I ta’en, with Eye and Brow:
Neither bow nor shaft have I, yet ask not how;
Like the Sun in every Atom I am shewn.
Yet in Light’s Transcendency abide unknown.

Every Tongue my Word bears, with all Ears I hear:

Mystery how strange, I have not Tongue nor Ear!

Since that every Living Thing I am Alone,

Unto me in Earth and Heaven like is none.

The marriage of romance to mysticism was an early entrant into Sufism. The language of human love was deployed to describe the relations between the mystic (beloved) and his Divine Lover. The Persian love of allegory is remarkable in the prose of Suhrawardi Maqtul whose story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife found in the Qur’an - however, was adapted from the Jewish Torah / Christian Bible (Genesis 39:1-23). The best love poem with the same characters is Jami’s (d. 898/1492) Yusuf Zulaikh, translated by R.T.H. Griffith (d. 1882) and A. Rogers (d. 1892). Jami also spiritualized other love-stories, such as the desert tragedy of Laila-Majmun: the Tale of Salaman and Absal by Hunain b. Ishaq; The Pilgrim’s Progress of Sana‘i is Sair al-‘ibad which is compared with Dante’s Divina Comedia, so on and so forth.

Farid ud-Din Attar in his The Conference of the Birds has a poem titled “A bird who cannot leave his beloved” which clearly demarcates between ‘true love and real beauty’ i.e. divine love and Ideal beauty, compared to the noumenal superficial love and fleshly beauty adorned with blood and bile.

“Great hoopoe,” said another bird, “my love

Has loaded me with chains, I cannot move.

This bandit, Love, confronted me and stole

My intellect, my heart, my inmost soul --

The image of her face is like a thief

Who fires the harvest and leaves only grief.
Without her I endure the pangs of hell.
Raving and cursing like an infidel;
How can I travel when my heart must stay
Lapped here in blood? And on that weary Way,
How many empty valleys lie ahead,
How many horrors wait for us? I dread
One moment absent from her lovely face;
How could I seek the Way and leave this place?
My pain exceeds all cure or remedy;
I've passed beyond both faith and blasphemy --
My blasphemy and faith are love for her;
My soul is her abject idolater --
And though companionless I weep and groan,
My friend is sorrow; I am not alone.
My love has brought me countless miseries.
But in her hair lie countless mysteries:
Without her face, blood chokes me. I am drowned.
I'm dust blown aimlessly across the ground.
Believe me, everything I say is true --
This is my state; now tell me what to do.”
The hoopoe answers him
The hoopoe said: “You are the prisoner of
Appearances, a superficial love;
This love is not divine; it is mere greed
For flesh -- an animal, instinctive need.
To love what is deficient, trapped in time,
Is more than foolishness, it is a crime --
And blasphemous the struggle to evade
That perfect beauty which can never fade.
You would compare a face of blood and bile
To the full moon -- yet what could be more vile
In all the world than that same face when blood
And bile are gone? -- it is no more than mud.
This is the fleshly beauty you adore;
This is its being, this and nothing more.
How long then will you seek for beauty here?
Seek the unseen, and beauty will appear.
When that last veil is lifted neither men
Nor all their glory will be seen again,
The universe will fade -- this mighty show
In all its majesty and pomp will go.
And those who loved appearances will prove
Each other’s enemies and forfeit love,
While those who loved the absent, unseen Friend
Will enter that pure love which knows no end.

In the same treatise, speaking on ‘love beyond all telling’ i.e. commitment to one’s true love to the point of misery and penury, Attar’s poem “A lord who loved a beer-seller” goes:

Love led a lord through paths of misery.
He left his splendid house and family
And acted like a drunkard to be near
The boy he loved, who lived by selling beer --
He sold his house and slaves and all he had
To get the means to buy beer from this lad.
When everything was gone and he grew poor
His love grew stronger, more and then yet more --
Though food was given him by passers-by,
His endless hunger made him long to die
(Each morsel that he had would disappear.
Not to be eaten but exchanged for beer,
And he was happy to endure the pain.
Knowing that soon he could buy beer again).
When someone asked: ‘What is this love?’ he cried:
‘It is to sell the world and all its pride --
A hundred times -- to buy one drop of beer.’
Such acts denote true love, and it is clear
That those who cannot match this devotee
Have no acquaintance with love’s misery.
And the ultimate end of all life, mystical life in particular, is salvation, which
Rumi and Sufis believe is possible only through love:
There is no salvation for the soul
But to fall in Love.
It has to creep and crawl
Among the Lovers first.
Only Lovers can escape
From these two worlds.
This was written in creation.

Only from the Heart
Can you reach the sky.
The rose of Glory
Can only be raised in the Heart.\textsuperscript{67}

9.3. Parables in Sufi Literature

The term parable comes from the Greek \textit{parabole} means comparison, illustration, analogy; \textit{paraballein} means to compare; from \textit{para} + \textit{ballein} means to throw. The Latin \textit{parabola} also means comparison. Thus parable is a succinct allegorical story, in prose or verse, designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson indirectly by the use of comparison, analogy, or the like. It differs from fable, which uses animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as characters, while parables generally feature human characters. The parable is related to figures of speech such as similes and metaphors, aphorisms and stories, proverbs and riddles, dialogues and discourses, as long as these are metaphorical and figurative. The term was given by Greek rhetoricians (cf. Aristotle's \textit{The Art of Rhetoric} 2.20) to any fictive illustration in the form of a brief narrative, to convey spiritual and moral lessons. John P. Meier, in his \textit{A Marginal Jew} (Vol. 2) says that the biblical parables have been inspired by \textit{mashalim}, a form of Hebrew comparison. For example, in the Old Testament. The parable of the ewe-lamb by Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-9). The parable of the woman of Tekoah (2 Samuel 14:1-13). The Song of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7); in the New Testament, The Good Samaritan

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., p. 115.

The Biblical Mashalim or parables also reflect in Islam, especially in Sufi literature as ‘teaching stories’, which are used to impart valuable lessons for life. Farid ud-Din Attar’s Sufi classic, The Conference of the Birds has a parable, “A king who built a splendid palace”:

A king who loved his own magnificence
Once built a palace and spared no expense.
When this celestial building had been raised,
The gorgeous carpets and its splendour dazed
The crowd that pressed round -- a servant flung
Trays heaped with money to the scrabbling throng.
The king now summoned all his wisest friends
And said: ‘What do I lack? Who recommends Improvements to my court?’ ‘We must agree,’
They said, ‘no man could now or ever see,
In all the earth, a palace built like this.’
An old ascetic spoke. ‘One thing’s amiss.’
He said; ‘there’s one particular you lack.
This noble structure has a nasty crack
(Though if it weren’t for that it would suffice
To be the heavenly court of paradise).’
The king replied: ‘What crack? Where is it? Where?
If you’ve come for trouble, then take care!’

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The man said: ‘Lord, it is the truth I tell --
And through that crack will enter Azra’el.*
It may be you can block it, but if not.
Then throne and palace are not worth a jot!
Your palace now seems like some heavenly prize.
But death will make it ugly to your eyes;
Nothing remains for ever and you know --
Although you live here now -- that this is so.
Don’t pride yourself on things that cannot last;
Don’t gallop your high-stepping horse so fast.
If one like me is left to indicate
Your faults to you, I pity your sad fate.’

* Azra’el is the angel of death.

The idea and the story of the above poetic-parable is a direct adaptation from the Bible, ‘The Parable of the Rich Fool’ (Mathew 12:13-21) - shows the syncretic feature of this new genre in Sufi literature, both in its form and elemental matter.

El-Ghazali’s “Parable of the People with a Higher Aim” relates to Sufi tradition a parable from the life of Jesus, who was popular for this literary genre found widely in the Bible.

Isa one day saw some people sitting miserably on a wall, by the roadside. He asked: ‘What is your affliction?’ They said: ‘We have become like this through our fear of Hell.’

He went on his way, and saw a number of people grouped disconsolately in various postures by the wayside. He said: ‘What is your affliction?’ They said: ‘Desire for Paradise has made us like this.’
He went on his way, until he came to a third group of people. They looked like people who had endured much, but their faces shone with joy.

Isa asked them: ‘What has made you like this?’ and they answered: ‘The Spirit of Truth. We have seen Reality, and this has made us oblivious of lesser goals.’

Isa said: ‘These are the people who attain. On the Day of Accounting these are they who will be in the Presence of God.’

The Sufi genre of parable, including some of its major contents has been syncretically borrowed from other sources and assimilated into Sufi literature. Recent authors such as Idries Shah and Anthony de Mello have popularized the Sufi parables beyond Sufi circles.

9.4. Sufi Apocalyptic (Revelation) Literature

The term ‘apocalypse’ is from Koine Greek *apokalypsis* meaning ‘unveiling’ or ‘revelation.’ It is revealing or disclosing of some truth or knowledge by a deity or supernatural entity, that predicts the ultimate destiny, usually destruction of the world through a symbolism that is obscure, strange or difficult. Many religions view their sacred texts as divine or supernatural revelations or inspirations. For instance, Orthodox Judaism holds that the Torah was received from God on Mount Sinai; Muslims believe the Qur’an to have been revealed word by word and letter by letter; in Hinduism some Vedas are considered *apaṃraṣṭeya*, i.e. not human compositions, and are believed to be directly revealed, and so are called *sruti*, i.e. heard; Christianity believes Bible as divinely inspired. The ‘prophetic books’ of William Blake are considered apocalyptic, as is some of the poetry of William Butler Yeats.

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Between 200 B.C.E. and C.E. 150, the apocalyptic writing was common in Jewish and Christian writing, and the language of revelatory experience became an essential element in the developing genre that we now call ‘apocalyptic.’ Revelatory literature is found in the works of Daniel, 2 Esdras, Revelation, and 1 Enoch, wherein a prophet or seer through ecstatic experiences reveals the secrets of various kinds - about the past, the future, the universe (1 Enoch 41), the heavenly court, etc., particularly the transition from the present age to the world to come. Such experiences evoke prophetic visions as Abraham’s meeting with the three travelers (Genesis 18:1-19:1), Moses’ encounter with the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-4), Ezekiel’s vision of the chariot (Ezekiel 1:1), Jeremiah’s call (Jeremiah 1:11-13), auditions as in Isaiah 22:14 and ecstatic experiences in Paul (2 Corinthians 12:1-7).

The apocalyptic (Revelations) literary genre plays a significant role in Islam, and more so in Sufism. Sufism believes that God is both immanent and transcendent, and we know the transcendental God through revelation. For the Qur’an says, “God is closer to your jugular vein.” The Qur’an is believed to be a book with a series of revelations from God through the agency of Archangel Gabriel. “God is the One who revealed to you the Book; some of its verses have a clearly fixed meaning, and some others are symbolic” (Qur’an, surah Al ‘Imran 3:7). “We revealed the Book to you as a clarification for everything, and as a guidance, a mercy, and good news for all those who have submitted” (Qur’an, surah An-Nahl 16:89). Qur’an 53:4 surah An-Najm says, “It is only a revelation revealed.”

The first ever Islamic revelation is this. One day, when Mohammed was about forty years old, he was alone in the cave Hira when suddenly a man in a white dress appeared to him. Mohammad himself described what happened:
Then he took me and squeezed me vehemently and then let me go and repeated the order ‘Recite.’ ‘I cannot recite’ said I, and once again he squeezed me and let me go till I was exhausted. Then he said, ‘Recite.’ I said, ‘I cannot recite.’ He squeezed me for a third time and then let me go and said: ‘Recite in the name of your Lord who created -

From an embryo created the human.

Recite your Lord is all-giving
Who taught by the pen
Taught the human what he did not know before
The human being is a tyrant
He thinks his possessions make him secure
To your Lord is the return of everything’ (Qur’an, surah Al-‘Alaq 96:1-8)

According to Qur’an 17:1ff. surah Al-‘Isra’ Gabriel came to Mohammed one night and took him in a flash from Mecca to Jerusalem on Buraq, i.e. the horse with a human face and wings, and revealed to him paradise, hades, hell and the divine abode.

And we carried our servant (i.e. Mohammed) in one night from the invisible place of worship to the far distant place of worship (i.e. the Jewish temple of Jerusalem, which is called now Al Aqsa) so that we could show him of our signs. (Qur’an, surah Al-‘Isra’ 17:1)

In Jerusalem, at the site of the Jewish temple, on the spot that is now marked by Al Aqsa or the Dome of the Rock, Mohammed met all 1,24,000 prophets from Adam to Jesus, who rose from their graves, and prayed namaz led by him. Then Archangel Gabriel led Mohammed up to the celestial spheres by a ladder, in each of the spheres he visited one of the prophets and various angels. He was also given a tour
of hell and paradise. Finally, Gabriel could lead him no further, so Mohammed had to ascend on his own to meet God.

The Sufis in their ecstatic union with God believe to get revelations, which are later written for the spiritual benefit of other Sufis. The leading Sufi in this literary genre is al-Niffari, whose works Kitab al-Mawaqif and Kitab al-Mukhatabat are revelatory narrations, purported to have received directly from God in a state of ecstasy, possibly by automatic writing. The author pictures oneself as standing before God (mauqif) in one or other spiritual state, hearing God speaking to him.

He stayed in Death; and I saw the acts, every one of them, to be evil. And I saw Fear holding sway over Hope; and I saw Riches turned to fire and cleaving to the fire; and I saw Poverty and adversary adducing proofs; and I saw every thing; and I saw this world to be a delusion, and I saw the heavens to be a deception. And I cried out. ‘O Knowledge!’; and it answered me not. Then I cried out, ‘O Gnosis!’; and it answered me not. And I saw every thing, that it had deserted me, and I saw every created thing, that it had fled from me; and I remained alone. And the act came to me, and I saw in it secret imagination, and the secret part was that which persisted; and naught availed me, save the Mercy of my Lord. And He said to me, ‘Where is thy knowledge?’ And I saw the Fire. And he said to me, ‘Where is thy act?’ and I saw the Fire. And he said to me, ‘Where is thy gnosis?’ And I saw the Fire. And He unveiled for me His Gnosis of Uniqueness, and the Fire died down. And He said to me, ‘I am thy Friend.’ And I was established. And He said to
me, ‘I am thy Gnosis.’ And I spoke. And He said to me, ‘I am thy Seeker.’

And I went forth.69

There is a Sufi story titled “The Book” typical of the revelatory genre of literature, wherein Ibrahim (Abraham) is a biblical character in the Old Testament (Genesis), syncretically adapted by the Qur’an into its corpus. Sufism goes a step further concocting a story on him:

Ibrahim dreamt once that he saw the angel Gabriel.

The angel had a book in his hand, and Ibrahim asked what it contained.

Gabriel said: ‘In this book I am writing the names of the friends of God.’

Ibrahim asked: ‘Is my name to be there?’

The angel replied: ‘Ibrahim, you are not a friend of God.’

Ibrahim answered: ‘That is so, but I am a friend of the friends of God.’

For a time Gabriel said nothing. Then he addressed Ibrahim: ‘I have received instructions to record your name at the head of this list; for hope is born of lack of hope.”70

Apocalyptic literature was a Judeo-Christian genre syncretically borrowed by Islam. Along with the texts, Islam also incorporated the Judeo-Christian literary genre, including the genre of revelatory experience. As Reza Aslan notes, it is not surprising that: “There are striking similarities between the Christian and Qur’anic description of the Apocalypse, the Last Judgment, and the paradise awaiting those who have been saved. These similarities do not contradict the Muslim belief that the Qur’an was divinely revealed, but they do indicate that the Quaranic vision of the Last Days may have been revealed to the pagan Arabs through a set of symbols and

metaphors with which they were already familiar, thanks in some part to the wide spread of Christianity in the region.  

9.5. Sufi Music (Sama')

The Arabic *sama'* or the Turkish *sema'* means ‘listening.’ It is a ceremony, performed since the tenth century as a spiritual concert, as *dhikr* (remembrance) which includes prayer, song, dance, playing instruments, recitation of poetry and prayers, wearing symbolic attire, and other rituals. Hence, Sufi music is a genre based on the devotional music of the Sufis, inspired by the works of Sufi poets. This genre is generally used as an expression of devotion to God, but it also can be a way to enhance the connection between the physical and spiritual aspects of the listener or performer. Many Sufi orders perform this form of music in a variety of sub-genres during special ceremonies. One of the well known sub-genres of Sufi music is *qawwali,* which has its roots in India and Pakistan. Traditionally, this genre consists of four distinct sections: *hamd* (a poem or song in praise of Allah usually in Arabic, Persian, Punjabi or Urdu), *naat* (praise and extolling of Prophet Mohammed), *manqabat* (devotional songs), and *ghazals* (expressions of the longing to be close to the divine). Another popular classical sub-genre is *kafi,* which is culled from the poetic verses of well-known writers. Though *kafi* is similar to *qawwali* in its delivery, the two forms differ in execution. While *qawwali* is made up of a larger ensemble, *kafi* consists of a few percussion instruments, a keyboard, and a single vocalist. Sufi love songs are often performed as *ghazals* and *kafi,* a solo genre accompanied by percussion and harmonium, using a repertoire of songs by Sufi poets.

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As we have observed, umpteen world cultures syncretically entered into Sufism - Arab, Turk, Kurd, Persian, Aramean, Syrian, Egyptian, Greek and Goth - among which, two cultures played prominent role in Sufi music - east and west. Greek music was more theoretical, dominated by works of ancient authors for centuries. The visible signs of music and religion in ancient Arabia, confirms that the Arabs of the peninsula had syncretically inherited Mesopotamian cultural heritage. Music was then largely delegated to women, especially in the upper elite class, and those who were attached to upper class households were employed as qainat (singing women) for entertainment. The male mughani (singing men) and mitrib (musicians) and the alati (instrumentalists) were written about by Ibn Musa al-Nasibi (d. 860) in his Kitab al-Aghani (“Book of Songs”). In ancient Arabia, the Ka’aba was a pilgrimage centre. In the Hijaz, Mecca was the centre for fairs, where musicians and poets met in contest like the Mu’allaqat, who recited or sang the qasa’id (odes). Ghina (singing) came from huda (caravan song); out of this developed biqa (lamentation), nauh (elegies), and nash (secular songs). Two types of songs were used, the Himyaria and Hanifiya - all tell of joy in the then Arabia.

The Ghassanids employed singing-girls of Mecca in their capital al-Hira and Byzantium, who sang with accompaniment of barabat (lute). The reed-pipe came from their region, and the Arabs borrowed it, calling it zambaq, as it was made from Hijai or Hejaz was a coastal region of the western Arabian Peninsula bordering the Red Sea, includes both Mecca and Medina, an independent kingdom until it united with Nejd to form the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Ghassanids (al-Ghasasinah, also Bani Ghassan ‘sons of Ghassan’) were a group of Hellenized and later Romanized South Arabian Christian tribes that emigrated in the early third century from Yemen to Southern Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and the Holy Land, where they eventually merged with Greek-speaking Early Christian communities. The term Ghassan refers to the kingdom of the Ghassanids, an ancient Arab Christian kingdom in the Levant. After the fall of the first kingdom, the Ghassanid Dynasty ruled other realms, both Christian and Muslim, until 1747 C.E. in Mount Lebanon.
sambucus wood. The Arabic harp is called *zannaj* or *wannaj*, a loose phonetical pronunciation from Syriac-Greek dialectic word for phoenix. The other great influence to the north-east was Persia, the then font of culture. The origin of Persian music was in Mahabad in the beginning of *Dabistan* (School of religions). Firdausi in his great epic, *Shaha Nama*, tells of *rud* (resplendent music) and *sarwad* (singing), strings of *chang* (harps), *tanbur* (pandore), *barabat* or *rubab* (lutes), *ruyin* (pipes) and *ney* (reed-flute), which gave out delightful notes. Processions resounded with blasts of *karranay*, *shaipur*, and *buq* (horns-trumpets), *tabira* and *kus* (kettledrums), and the noise from *hindi*, *daray*, *zang*, and *sinj* (tininabulating throngs), *chang* (upper-chested harp), *von* (lower-chested harp), *kannar* and *shisak* - cousins of *ghoshaka* (sitar), and *tumbak*, *dumbalak* (drums). All these instruments are shown in reliefs at *Taq-i Bustan* (590-628 C.E.).

In Persia, the scientific theory of music was existent in the pre-Islamic music treatise, and practical theory was evident in *Dastanat of Barabad*, which mentions seven modes and 360 melodies relating to the numerical metaphysics of ancient Mesopotamia. From al-Hirah, the Christian capital of the Lakhmids, Persian music filtered into Arabia, who were great lovers of musical arts. This is the syncretic evolution of Sufi music.

Further, as expressed in a series of contradictory concepts, the Islamic world always had an ambivalent attitude towards music: predilection-mistrust, divine-devilish, exalting-disruptive, admissible-prohibited (Shiloah, 1995). Views about music or sound art in Islam run the gamut from complete negation to complete acceptance. Many Muslims fear the magical, intoxicating powers of music and

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75 The Lakhmids is a pre-Islamic (3rd to 6th century C.E.) Bedouin tribal dynasty that fostered early Arabic poetry.
prohibit it as the devil’s tool. On the contrary, others see it as spiritual and so inspiring. Islam doesn’t use the term ‘music’ in the same sense as English and other Western languages do. *Musīqa*, the Arabic term for ‘music’ does not apply to all types of artistic vocal and instrumental sounds or tones and rhythms, rather, the Muslims term this *handāsah al sawt*, i.e. the art of sound - a recently coined term used by Muslims to distinguish the Islamic conception of music from the Western and non-Islamic one. *Musīqa* applies only to particular genres of sound art, and for the most part it has been designated for only those that have a ‘somewhat questionable or even disreputable status in Islamic culture’ (*al Faruqi*, 1986). Most Muslims fall somewhere between these two poles - restricting *handāsah al sawt* to some degree but allowing it in various controlled forms of *musīqa*. The opponents of music use the Qur’an in their defense:

> And of mankind is he who purchases idle talks (i.e. music, singing, etc.) to mislead (men) from the Path of Allah without knowledge, and takes it (the Path of Allah, or the verses of the Qur’an) by way of mockery. For such there will be a humiliating torment (in the Hell-Fire). (Qur’an, surah *Luqman* 31:6)

*Hadith-Bukhari* 787 says that ‘idle talks’ in the above Qur’anic verse is singing and the like.

> And befool (*Istafiz*) them gradually those whom you can among them with your voice (i.e. songs, music, and any other call for Allah’s disobedience)...

(Qur’an, surah *Al-Isra’* 17:64).

Abu ‘Amir or Abu Malik Al-Ash’ari narrates that he heard the Prophet saying:

> From among my followers there will be some people who will consider illegal sexual intercourse, the wearing of silk, the drinking of alcoholic drinks, and the use of musical instruments as lawful. And (from them), there will be some
who will stay near the side of a mountain, and in the evening their shepherd will come to them with their sheep and ask them for something, but they will say to him, 'Return to us tomorrow.' Allah will destroy them during the night and will let the mountain fall on them, and Allah will transform the rest of them into monkeys and pigs and they will remain so till the Day of Resurrection" (Hadith-Bukhari 7:494).

Ibn al-Qayyim in Ighaathat al-Lahfaan (1/256) says that the prohibition against the use of instruments refers to all kinds of things used for entertainment. Further, speaking on amusements on the Day of Resurrection the Qur’an says:

The Day of Resurrection draws near,
None besides Allah can avert it, (or advance it, or delay it).
Do you then wonder at this recital (the Qur’an)?
And you laugh at it and weep not.
Wasting your (precious) lifetime in pastime and amusements (singing, etc.).
So fall you down in prostration to Allah, and worship Him (Alone). (Qur’an, surah An-Najm 53:57-62).

Shaykh Ibn Baz said in Majmoo’ al-Fataawa, 3/423-424:

Ma’aazif refers to singing and musical instruments. The Prophet told us that at the end of time there will come a people who will allow these things just as they will allow alcohol, zina and silk. This is one of the signs of his Prophethood, for all of this has happened. The hadeeth indicates that [musical instruments] are haram (prohibited), and condemns those who say they are halal (permissible), just as it condemns those who say that alcohol and zina are allowed. The aayaat and ahaadeeth that warn against singing and musical instruments are many indeed. Whoever claims that Allaah has allowed singing
and musical instruments is lying and is committing a great evil. We ask Allaah to keep us from obeying our desires and the Shaytaan. Even worse and more seriously sinful than that are those who say it is mustahabb. Undoubtedly this stems from ignorance about Allaah and His Religion; it is insolent blasphemy against Allaah and lying about His Laws.

The above hadith compares musical instruments to zina and alcohol, and so forbidden. On the other hand, those who support music refer to the Qur’anic passage on a ‘beautiful voice’: “He increases in His creatures that which He wills” (Qur’an, Fatir 35:1); and referring to singing: “So give good tidings to my servants who listen to al-qawl (the spoken word) and follow the fairest of it” (Qur’an, Saba’ 34:17-18 - Shiloah, 1995). Further, they say that the Qur’an doesn’t proscribe music, but the surah on ‘The Poets’ referring to ‘idle talks’ means it may lead to forget God (Subhanna wa Ta’ala). There are many hadiths from the Sunnah al-Hadiths forbidding drums, flutes, string instruments such as guitar and female singers, which are related to ‘public houses’ or bars / taverns, associated with drunkenness, which may lead astray from Islam, God (Subhanna wa Ta’ala). Moreover, there are several hadiths where Mohammed often defended music, especially when he came into his wife Aishia’s house where two young girls were singing to a drum. When Abu Bakr (later the first Muslim caliph) rebuked the girls for singing, Mohammed responded “Let them alone” (Shiloah, 1995). All the more, this same hadith is also used by anti-music Muslims, saying that Abu Bakr had called the above singing mizmar al-shaytan or reed-pipe of Satan. In fact, Ibn Umar had once seen Mohammed plug his ears when he heard the sound of mizmar (Shiloah, 1995). Both the Qur’an and the hadith don’t come to a definite conclusion with regard to music in Islam.
‘Human deeds are judged by their intentions,’ says Sufism. Accordingly, in music, the intention of the composer and that of the listener are to be thought through. Music is to praise, glorify, reverence and remember (dhikr Allah) God, but ‘idle talks.’ It shouldn’t manifest improper sexual expressions, degrade others, especially women or promote unchastity and impurity. The Sunnah permits the use of duff, i.e. simple hand drum made of animal skin, for a practical purpose, like beating for exercise, rowing, other labours, etc. Females too can sing and beat the duff on two ‘Eids (festivals), and to announce a Muslim wedding amongst themselves, but their voices shouldn’t be heard by men, and it cannot be used for entertainment or idleness. Further, originally there wasn’t Sufi music, but a syncretic incorporation from other religio-cultural systems.

9.6. Dance of the Whirling Dervishes (Sama’ or Sema’)

Sama’ or sema’, i.e. the dance of the whirling dervishes is a divine meditative means through focusing on melodies and dancing, which expresses the Sufi’s love of God, purifies his soul, thus a way of finding God. It reveals the Sufi’s heart and soul, rather than merely generating emotions, which are in direct communion with God. Its goal is wajd - a trance-like or ecstatic state and includes various movements with all types of dancing. Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali advocating sama’ said that wajd aroused passionate love for God. Furthermore, another state that Sufis try to reach through sama’ is khamra, i.e. spiritual drunkenness. The ultimate of wajd is that Sufis try to unveil the mysteries, thus gain spiritual gnosis. In frenzy some tear their garments into pieces which people collect as relics. At times, wajd becomes so intense that fainting, and in extreme circumstances, even death occurs.
The sama’ had its origin in Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-73 C.E.), the founder of the Mevlevi Order of dervishes, a native of Balkh who migrated to Konia in Asia Minor. As per the legend of this unique form of dhikr, one day as Rumi was walking through the town marketplace, he heard the rhythmic hammering of the goldbeaters like dhikr “la ilaha ilallah”, i.e. no god but God. In-spirited, he stretched out both of his arms and started spinning in a circle (Sufi whirling). With this, sama’ and the dervishes of the Mevlevi order were born. Sama’ has its roots in Persian and Turkish culture, and is associated with oriental traditions. It has a form of music called Ayin, a vocal cum instrumental piece with Turkish classical instruments like the ney (a reed flute). The West African gnawa is another form. The whirling is mainly centered in Turkey, and practiced by the Mevlevi Turkish Sufis. However, it is also performed in Egypt and other countries in the region.

The mystery of rejuvenating death that lies behind the parable of the moth who casts itself into the ‘flame to become flame.’ This is what Rumi experienced in his own life and what inspired the ritual of the whirling dance, in which death and resurrection in the orbit of the spiritual sun are symbolized in physical form:

Those who know the secret power
of the whirling, live in God:
Love is slaying and reviving
them--they know it....

A dervish has removed himself from society, and lives in isolation, often with other dervishes. He is totally committed to love God and sees the divine in humans and in nature. To them, music is life itself, who play/hear it with different perception than even other Sufis. Abu Sa’id (357/967) from Mayhana, former Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan, established rules of conduct in the khanqah (Sufi monastery) and also
introduced music, poetry and dance, as Sufi collective devotional ritual of *dhikr*. speaks of the syncretic character of *sama*'.

In *sama*', the Sufi in trance whirls round - the highest expression of one’s mystical union with God. The ceremony includes singing of hymns called *qawl* and *bayt*; poetry (even erotic); playing of instruments (symbolic and not profane) such as, tambourine, bells and flute. The listener must be pure at heart, else *sama*’ may lead to lust instead of love for God. Moreover, erotic poetry may cloud one’s mind as being in love with a person rather than with God. Qur’anic verses are not to be used for *sama*’, for, they aren’t set for meditation, nor can they be ornamented or improvised in any way, so that they remain sacred.

The *semazens* or whirlers or swirlers, as they are called, wear a camel’s-felt cylindrical headdress and then remove a black cloak to show a white one, symbolizing the tombstone cum the shroud of their ego respectively. By uncovering the white cloak, they reveal divine truth. They cross their arms and stand erect, reflecting the number ‘one’ symbolizing *Tawhid* or God’s unity. Then they begin to turn passing the sheik, who stands on a red sheepskin and acts as a channel for the divine. At the onset and stopping of each part of the ceremony, the *semazens* turn to each other and bow, acknowledging the soul within. Then they open their arms - the right arm extending towards the sky, showing their readiness to receive divine love, and focus on the left arm, which is pointed towards the earth, symbolizing the bestowal of God’s love and truth. The feet touching the earth is a contact point to travel the blessing, and the *semazen* acts as a circuit.

The choreography and general order of the ceremony is called *sema*’, which consists of seven parts. The first part is a eulogy for Prophet Mohammed and other prophets. The second part is a drum introduction, symbolizing divine command at the
genesis of creation. The third part is an instrumental improvisation on the ney, symbolizing the breath of life - a divine gift. The fourth part is the greeting, acknowledging other semazens’ embodied souls, followed by the circular walk around the sheik three times. The fifth part signals the commencement of the actual whirling, which grows progressively faster as the ritual advances. It consists of four salutes, or positions the semazen assumes while whirling. The first salute testifies his birth to the truth that he knows the existence of God and that he is God’s creation. The second salute expresses his amazement at God’s creation and magnificence. The third is the transformation of this amazement into love and complete submission to God. It is the state of ecstasy that the semazens have been trying to achieve. Sufis claim this state to be similar to the Buddhist nirvana, the highest stage in Buddhism. The highest grade in Islam is that of the Prophet. The semazen stays conscious and then crosses his arms in approval of God. The fourth salute is the recognition of the semazen’s place in creation and his destiny. At this state, the sheik enters into the centre of the dervishes, where they revolve around him as the earth revolves around the sun. In the sixth part, the whirling ends with a reading from the Qur’an, Bakara 2:115: “Unto God belong the East and the West, and whither over ye turn, you are faced with Him. He is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.” The ritual ends with the seventh part, wherein the semazens compose themselves who have fallen on the floor after the whirling. The semazens exchange greetings of peace with the sheik, and leave with joyous music in the background. Farid ud-Din Attar’s Sufi classic The Conference of the Birds has a poem titled, “A dervish in ecstasy”:

A frenzied dervish, mad with love for God,
Sought out bare hills where none had ever trod.
Wild leopards kept this madman company --
His heart was plunged in restless ecstasy;
He lived within this state for twenty days.
Dancing and singing in exultant praise:
‘There’s no division; we two are alone --
The world is happiness and grief has flown.’
Die to yourself -- no longer stay apart.
But give to Him who asks for it your heart;
The man whose happiness derives from Him
Escapes existence, and the world grows dim;
Rejoice for ever in the Friend, rejoice
Till you are nothing, but a prating voice.
‘For seventy years my happy heart has led
A life of constant bliss,’ a sufi said.
‘My God has been so good to me that I
Am bound to Him until the day I die.’

_Sema’_ symbolizes Sufi’s mystical journey of spiritual ascent. As the earth revolves around the sun, so does the dervish around God. In his _Ghazal_ Rumi has invented symbolism of circling spheres and planets, of mill-wheel and mill-stone.

Thy mountain of the sun
I’ll fashion to a mill,
And as my waters run.
I’ll turn thee at my will.

Comparing _sema’_ to earthly (Mecca) and heavenly _hajj_ Rumi said, “For them it is the _sama’_ of this world and the other. Even more for the circle of dancers within the _sama’_ who turn and have in their midst, their own Ka’aba.” Once the _semazen_
returns from this spiritual sojourn, he is to love and serve the whole creation regardless of species, race, gender and religion. In the semazen's view, women are equal to men, who also join the whirling ritual.

Yahya b. Muadh gives a glimpse of the Sufi ritual of dancing, which had begun to enliven their austerities and was later to become an essential feature of their spiritual life.

The truth we have not found;
So, dancing, we beat the ground;
Is dancing reproved in me
Who wonder distraught for Thee?
In Thy valley we go around.
And therefore we beat the ground.76

The sema' is always accompanied by musical song with some Sufi story attached to it. Farid ud-Din Attar's The Conference of the Birds has "The story of a dervish and a princess."

There was a king whose comely daughter's grace
Was such that any many who glimpsed her face
Declared himself in love. Like starless dusk
Her dark hair hung, soft-scented like fine musk;
The charm of her slow humid eyes awoke
The depths of sleeping love, and when she spoke,
No sugar was as sweet as her lips' sweet;
No rubies with their colour could compete.

A dervish saw her, by the will of Fate.

From his arrested hand the crust he ate
Dropped unregarded, and the princess smiled.
This glance lived in his heart -- the man grew wild
With ardent love, with restless misery;
For seven years he wept continually
And was content to live alone and wait.
Abject, among stray dogs, outside her gate.
At last, affronted by this fool and tired
Of his despair, her serving-men conspired
To murder him. The princess heard their plan,
Which she divulged to him. 'O wretched man,'
She said, 'how could you hope for love between
A dervish and the daughter of a queen?
You cannot live outside my palace door;
Be off with you and haunt these streets no more.
If you are here tomorrow you will die!'
The dervish answered her: 'That day when I
First saw your beauty I despaired of life;
Why should I fear the hired assassin's knife?
A hundred thousand men adore your face;
No power on earth could make me leave this place.
But since your servants mean to murder me,
Explain the meaning of this mystery:
Why did you smile at me that day?' 'Poor fool,
I smiled from pity, almost ridicule --
Your ignorance provoked that smile.' She spoke.

And vanished like a wisp of strengthless smoke.”

Al-Ghazzali’s *Concerning Music and Dancing as Aids to the Religious Life,* emphasizes how music and dance are beneficial to Muslims, as long as their hearts are pure before engaging in these practices. In 2005, UNESCO proclaimed the ‘The Mevlevi Sema’ Ceremony’ of Turkey as one of the masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

10. Syncretic Sufi Arabic, Persian and Urdu Literature in English

Classical Arabic, Persian and Urdu literature is Sufi in content and inspiration, which, like the western literature, falls under three main categories - didactic, romantic and lyrical. The Arabic literature stresses the philosophical aspect of Sufism and devotes a special care to constructing a stable theosophical system. Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 386/996) wrote *Qut al-qulub,* a book of religious jurisprudence (fiqh) and a handbook of orthodox Sufism containing theology (kalam) traditions. Sufi rituals, and orthodox Sufi doctrine and practice. Speaking on the syncretic influence of scholastic theology he says:

They used to receive the instruction one from the other and preserved it carefully, because their hearts were clear of doubts, free from worldly preoccupations, and unsullied by passion; because their purpose was lofty, their resolution strong, and their intention excellent. Then after the year 200, and when three centuries had elapsed, in this deplorable fourth century the compilations on scholastic theology (kalam) first appeared, and the scholastic theologians began to write according to opinion, reason and analogy. Gone now was the instruction (‘ilm) of the pious, vanished the intuitive knowledge (ma’rifah) of the firm of faith - the teaching of piety, the inspiration of rectitude.
and belief. Some matters have continued to develop down to this present time. Now the scholastic theologians are called learned (‘ulama’). The real romances are named gnostics (‘arifin). The narrators and informants learned, though they have no true grounding in religious lore nor the apperception that comes of faith.  

‘Abd Allah al-Ansari (d. 481/1088) wrote Manazil al-sairin (Arabic) on Sufi theory. His Munajat (Persian) or orisons is a mixture of rhyming prose and verse. The following translation of its opening passages, beginning with a ghazal (lyric) and ending with a rubai (quatrain), gives an impression of the character of this charming work.

Thou, Whose Breath is sweetest perfume to the spent and anguished heart,  
Thy remembrance of Thy lovers bringeth ease for every smart.  
Multitudes like Moses, reeling, cry to earth’s remotest place:  
‘Give me sight, O Lord!’ they clamour, seeking to behold Thy Face.  
Multitudes no man has numbered, lovers, and afflicted all,  
Stumbling on the way of anguish, Allah! Allah!’ loudly call.  
And the fire of separation sears the heart and burns the breast,  
And their eyes are wet with weeping for a love that gives not rest.  
‘Poverty is my pride’ - Thy lovers raise to heav’n their battle-cry,  
Gladly meeting men’s derision, letting all the world go by.  
Such a fire of passion’s Pir-r Ansar quaffing feels  
That distraught, like Laila’s lover, though a ruined world he reels.  
O Generous, who Bounty givest!  
O Wise, Who sins forgives!

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O Eternal, Who to our senses comest not near!
O One, Who art in Essence and Quality without peer!
O’ Powerful, Who of Godhead worthy art!
O Creator, who shewest the way to every erring heart!
To my soul give Thou of Thy Own Spotlessness,
And to my eyes of Thy Own Luminousness;
And unto us, of Thy Bounty and Goodness, whatever may be best
Make Thou that Thy Bequest.

O Lord, in Mercy grant my soul to live,
And patience grant, that hurt I may not grieve:
How shall I know what thing is best to seek?
Thou only knowest: what Thou knowest, give!

This is typically the mystical literature in Persian Sufism. Ansari, with Abu Sa‘id b. Abi ‘l-Khair (d. 440/1049), created this literary genre which became universally famous afterwards, especially in the writings of Sana‘i, ‘Attrar, Rumi, Sa‘di, Hafiz, Jami and many other poets of Eastern Islam. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali wrote Ihya ‘ulum al-din (Revival of Religious Sciences) written between 492/1099 and 495/1102 is a reconciliation and assimilation of classical Sufi doctrine with orthodox Sunni theology and religious law. Ibn al-Farid’s great masterpiece Ta‘iya (ode rhyming in the letter ‘t’) is a poem of 760 couplets which the Sufis regarded as possessing magical qualities. A translator tried to imitate the original Arabic rhythm of the opening lines of the Ta‘iya in English, however, cannot get the original rhymes and verbal play.

The hand of mine eye gave me of Love’s flaming wine to take.
Yea, and for cup Her Face, surpassing all loveliness;
Yet did I leave my friends supposing their wine it was
Gladdened my inmost soul, so raptured the glance I gave
(Though of a truth I needed not of my cup to taste,
Having the inward eye, to gaze on Her inward Heart
Amazed), and there at said thanks to them, my good tavern-lads,
That kept me my passion hid, for all my celebrity.
Swiftly I sought Her then - for done were my sober days -
No longer by fear held back, but bold in my unrestraint,
Absent the jealous eye, the remnant of self-regard;
And in the privy bridal-chamber I spake with Her
While witnessed my sorry state the flame of the love in me,
Sundered 'twixt self-effacing joy and restoring grief.

Sana’i is known for his Qasida (ode), Ghazal (lyric), Rubaiyat (quatrains) and Mathnawi (rhyming couplets). His epic Hadiqat al-haqiqa is a general survey of ascetic, ethical and mystical thought, illustrated and enlivened by anecdotes of saints and mystics. Jalal al-Din Rumi acknowledged his indebtedness to Sana’i by quoting from the Hadiqa in his own Mathnawi:

Attar was the spirit,
Sana’i his eyes twain,
And in time thereafter,
Came we in their train.

Farid al-Din ‘Attar wrote a valuable and highly esteemed treatise on the biographies of Muslim saints and mystics Tadhkirat al-auliya. His three Mathnawi poems are, Asrar-nama (Book of Secrets) on general Sufi principles; Ilahi-nama (Divine Book) on mystical love; and Mantiq al-tair (Speech of Birds) an allegory
portraying the mystic’s progress towards union with God. Nizami, known for his romantic idyll as the first of his five narrative poems Khamsa, a treatise after Sana’i’s Hadiqa, entitled Makhzan al-asrar (Treasury of Secrets). His hymns to the deity are notable. One of the main hymns is here:

In Allah’s Name, the Kind, the Pitying
This Key unlocks the Treasury of the King.
With God all Thoughts arise, all Words descend;
Then let His Name thy Recitation end.
Before the Birth of Beings transient,
Ere every Essence lasting, permanent,
This timeless World accepts His Regimen.
His Fingers grace the Everlasting Pen.
His Hand unveils the Mysteries of the Skies.
Yet veils the Secrets of the truly Wise.
Sole origin of goodly Essences,
Sole source of every Thing that living is,
He delights the Sun with glowing Jewelry
He clothes with grass the Earth, with gems the Sea.
All leaders of the Faith by Him are led,
He giveth Bread to All who live by Bread.
He threads with Pearls the single-corded Mind,
He lights the Intellect that else were blind:
He marks their Brow who live in Piety.
And to the sceptered King gives Sovereignty.
He brings to naught what heedless Men design,
But spares their Sins who unto Him repine:
He stills the Clamour of the fearful Heart,
And to the Knowing, Counsel doth impart.
First He and Last, in All that is and lives.
Naughts Being, and to Nothing Being gives:
Before His Might the two Worlds sink to death,
The Sum of all our days is but a Breach…
Nizami’s Clay, that by His Feet is trod.
A Furrow is, where grows the Seed of God.

Obviously, this hymn has been syncretically taken from two Christian Biblical sources. The first part of the hymn is from Mathew 6:25-31:

Therefore I say unto you. Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you. That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or. What shall we drink? or. Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (Mathew 6:25-31).

The second part of the hymn is from Mary’s Song of Praise in Luke 1:46-55:
And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:
for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.
He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the
imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty
away. He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;
As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

What Ibn Arabi coalesced everything about Sufism in Arabic, Rumi did so in
his immortal *Mathnawi* in Persian. This prodigious poem, which is translated into
English, ranges over the entire Sufi speculation abounding in wisdom and humour.
Given below are the opening lines wherein Rumi uses the imagery of the reed-pipe to
portray the mystic’s desolate cry to God.

Hearken to this Reed forlorn,
Breathing, ever since ’twas torn
From its rushy bed, a strain
Of impassioned love and pain.
The secret of my song, though near,
None can see and none can hear.
Oh, for a friend to know the sign
And mingle all his soul with mine!
'Tis the flame of Love that tired me,
'Tis the wine of love inspired me.

Wouldst thou learn how lovers bleed,
Hearken, hearken to the Reed!

Persian Sufism had the highest expression in Ghazal (lyric). Ghazal in Arabic means ‘the talk of youths and maidens.’ It was a short poem typically of Arabic genre, which syncretically made inroads into Persian and from Persian into Urdu. Sana’i (d. 1150) wrote Hadiqatu’l Haqiqat (The Garden of the Truth) which is an admixture of Sufi doctrine with extraneous matter. The poem is significant as being the first of the three long narrative Persian poems written in couplets expounding Sufi teachings. The other two are Farid ud-Din Attar’s Manteq al-Tair (The Conference of the Birds) and Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Masnavi-e-Ma’navi.

Farid ud-Din Attar’s Persian classic Manteq al-Tair (The Conference of the Birds) is an over 4,500 lines poem on Sufism. As per its allegorical framework, the birds of the world (numbering twenty-two) come together to seek a king. But the hoopoe tells them that they already have one, the Simorgh, who lives far away. Curious enough! the birds enquire about the journey, which, the hoopoe answers through illustrative anecdotes. The birds are enthusiastic at first, but on realizing the hazards of the journey, they begin to excuse - the nightingale cannot leave his beloved; the hawk is satisfied with his position at court waiting on earthly kings; the finch is too afraid even to set out, and so on. The hoopoe counters them with anecdotes revealing their misconstrued fear mixed desires. After accepting the hoopoe as their leader, they fly a little way, and then ask a series of questions about the Way. The last question being the length of the journey, the hoopoe answers them that they have to traverse seven valleys of quest, such as, Search, Love, Apprehension, Detachment / Independence, Unity, Bewilderment and Fulfilment in Annihilation:
Dear hoopoe, welcome! You will be our guide:

It was on you King Solomon relied

To carry secret messages between

His court and distant Sheba’s lovely queen.

He knew your language and you knew his heart --

As his close confidant you learnt the art

Of holding demons captive underground,

And for these valiant exploits you were crowned.

And you are welcome, finch! Rise up and play

Those liquid notes that steal men’s hearts away;

Like Moses you have seen the flames burn high

On Sinai’s slopes and there you long to fly,

Like him avoid cruel Pharaoh’s hand, and seek

Your promised home on Sinai’s mountain peak.

There you will understand unspoken words

Too subtle for the ears of mortal birds.

And welcome, parrot, perched in paradise!

Your splendid plumage bears a strange device,

A necklace of bright fire about the throat:

Though heaven’s bliss is promised by your coat.

This circle stands for hell; if you can flee

Like Abraham from Nimrod’s enmity.

Despise these flames -- uninjured will you tread

Through fire if first you cut off Nimrod’s head,

And when the fear of him has died put on
Your gorgeous coat; your collar's strength has gone!
Welcome, dear partridge -- how you strut with pride
Along the slopes of wisdom's mountain-side;
Let laughter ring out where your feet have trod.
Then strike with all your strength the door of God;
Destroy the mountain of the Self, and here,
From ruined rocks a camel will appear;
Beside its new-born noble hooves, a stream
Of honey mingled with white milk will gleam --
Drive on this beast and at your journey's end
Saleh will greet you as a long-lost friend.
Rare falcon, welcome! How long will you be
So fiercely jealous of your liberty?
Your lure is love, and when the jess is tied,
Submit, and be for ever satisfied.
Give up the intellect for love and see
In one brief moment all eternity;
Break nature's frame, be resolute and brave,
Then rest at peace in Unity's black cave.
Rejoice in that close, undisturbed dark air --
The Prophet will be your companion there.
And welcome, francolin! Since once you heard
And answered God's first all-commanding word.
Since love has spoken in your soul, reject
The Self, that whirlpool where our lives are wrecked;
As Jesus rode his donkey, ride on it:
Your stubborn Self must bear you and submit --
Then burn this Self and purify your soul;
Let Jesus' spotless spirit be your goal.
Destroy this burden, and before your eyes
The Holy Ghost in glory will arise.
Welcome, dear nightingale -- from your sweet throat
Pour out the pain of lovers note by note.
Like David in love's garden gently sigh;
There sing the songs that make men long to die.
O, sing as David did, and with your song
Guide home man's suffering and deluded throng.
The Self is like a mail coat -- melt this steel
To pliant wax with David's holy zeal,
And when its metal melts, like David you
Will melt with love and bid the Self adieu.
And welcome, peacock -- once of paradise,
Who let the venomous, smooth snake entice
Your instincts to its master's evil way.
And suffered exile for that fateful day:
He blackened your untutored heart and made
A tangled darkness of the orchard's shade --
Until you crush this snake, how can you be
A pilgrim worthy of our mystery?
Destroy its ugly charm and Adam then
Will welcome you to paradise again.
Cock pheasant, welcome! With your piercing sight.
Look up and see the heart's source drowned in light;
You are imprisoned in your filthy well,
A dark and noisome, unremitting hell --
Rise from this well as Joseph did and gain
The throne of Egypt's fabulous domain.
Where you and Joseph will together reign.
Dear pigeon, welcome -- with what joy you yearn
To fly away, how sadly you return!
Your heart is wrung with grief, you share the gaol
That Jonah knew, the belly of a whale --
The Self has swallowed you for its delight;
How long will you endure its mindless spite?
Cut off its head, seek out the moon, and fly
Beyond the utmost limits of the sky;
Escape this monster and become the friend
Of Jonah in that ocean without end.
Welcome, sweet turtle-dove, and softly coo
Until the heavens scatter jewels on you --
But what ingratitude you show! Around
Your neck a ring of loyalty is bound,
But while you live you blithely acquiesce
From head to claw in smug ungratefulness;
Abandon such self-love and you will see
The Way that leads us to Reality.

There knowledge is your guide, and Khezr will bring
Clear water drawn from life’s eternal spring.
And welcome, hawk! Your flight is high and proud.
But you return with head politely bowed --
In blood and in affliction you must drown.
And I suggest you keep your head bent down!

What are you here? Mere carrion, rotten flesh,
Withheld from Truth by this world’s clumsy mesh;
Outsoar both this world and the next, and there,
Released from both, take off the hood you wear --
When you have turned from both worlds you will land
On Zulgharnin’s outstretched and welcome hand.

And little goldfinch, welcome! May your fire
Be an external sign of fierce desire.
Whatever happens, burn in those bright flames.
And shut your eyes and soul to earthly claims.
Then, as you burn, whatever pain you feel.
Remember God will recompense your zeal;
When you perceive His hidden secrets, give
Your life to God’s affairs and truly live --
At last, made perfect in Reality.

You will be gone, and only God will be.

Almost all the characters in the poem, such as King Solomon, Queen of Sheba,
Moses, Pharaoh, Abraham, Nimrod, David, Adam, Joseph, Jonah, including the
Christian concept of the Trinity - God, Jesus, Holy Ghost - are the Judeo-Christian Biblical figures, which shows its syncretic mystical character.

When the birds arrive at the court of the Simorgh they are turned back, but finally they are admitted to discover that the Simorgh they’d sought is none other than their own ‘self.’ It’s the pun - only thirty (si) birds (morgh) are left at the end of the Way, and the si morgh (individual self) meet the Simorgh (divine Self), the goal of their quest. It is similar to Ahm Brahmasmi. i.e. I am Brahman, in the Advaitic literature. Further, the ultimate aim of the journey is purification (Sufi) wherein the aspirant has to purify his nafs. i.e. one’s self from shahawat or natural human thoughts and desires substituting them with love (mahabba), after which he must be cast into the flames of passion (ishq) to emerge in the state of union (wusla) with transmutation of self (fana’) through the gifts of dazzlement and wonder (haira) to survival (baqa’).

Speaking on divine grace and/or individual effort, the hoopoe tells the tale of the poor fisherboy befriended by King Mas’oud. When the king casts the boy’s line he is successful, catching a huge quantity of fish, which he gives to the boy. The next day he makes the boy the partner of his throne. It is an allegorical fable about divine grace, wherein, contextualising the allegory gives a deeper meaning. For, when asked the hoopoe why he is spiritually successful whereas all others aren’t, he says it’s because Solomon (Biblical character) has glanced at him. The boy’s constant fishing everyday at the same spot is the spiritual fishing of constant prayer. The king’s visit is Solomon’s glance. The story is about individual effort and/or divine grace, both of which are necessary for mystical progress. In Indian mystical literature, it is Marjala Nyaya or feline spirituality, i.e. divine grace, and Markata Nyaya or simian
spirituality, i.e. individual effort - a syncretic mystical adaptation from Christian cum Indian mystical literatures.

The hoopoe answered him: “Great Solomon
Once looked at me -- it is that glance alone
Which gave me what I know; no wealth could bring
The substance I received from wisdom’s king.
No one can gain this by the forms of prayer,
For even Satan bowed with pious care;
Though don’t imagine that you need not pray;
We curse the fool who tricks you in this way.
Pray always, never for one moment cease,
Pray in despair and when your goods increase,
Consume your life with prayer, till Solomon
Bestows his glance, and ignorance is gone.
When Solomon accepts you, you will know
Far more than my unequal words can show.”

Some Christian mystical practices, like destroying self and passionate love, which became the core Sufi beliefs caught Attar’s imagination:

“A lover.” said the hoopoe, now their guide,
“Is one in whom all thoughts of Self have died;
Those who renounce the Self deserve that name;
Righteous or sinful, they are all the same!
Your heart is thwarted by the Self’s control;

So long as we do not die to ourselves,
and so long as we identify with someone or something,
we shall never be free.
The spiritual way is not for those wrapped up in exterior life.
The hoopoe tells that sensual love is a game inspired by passing beauty that is fleeting. It asks what is uglier than a body made of flesh and bones? It is better to seek the hidden beauty of the invisible world. An anecdote about Jesus yields the following lesson:
Strive to discover the mystery before life is taken from you.
If while living you fail to find yourself, to know yourself,
how will you be able to understand
the secret of your existence when you die?

Further, the hoopoe warns against the dog of desire that runs ahead. Each vain desire becomes a demon, and yielding to one begets a hundred others. The world is a prison under the devil. Calling pride devil, which could be overcome through destroying ‘self’ he says:

A bird complains of pride
Another said: “Whenever I decide
To seek His presence, that arch-devil Pride
Obstructs my path. I can’t fight back with force;
Against his specious talk I’ve no recourse.
How can I find salvation from his lies,
Drink down the wine of meaning and be wise?”
The hoopoe answers him
The hoopoe said: “This devil never leaves
Until the Self has gone; if he deceives
You now, his cunning is your own deceit --
Your wishes are the devil, you the cheat!
If you accomplish one desire, a shoal
Of struggling demons rises in your soul:
The world’s a furnace and a prison cell,
The devil’s province, an unending hell --
Draw back your hand from it if you would win
An unmolested life secure from sin.

The hoopoe tells that only if death ceases to exercise power over creatures
would it be wise to remain content in a golden palace. Highlighting spiritual richness
over temporal the anecdotal verse says:

A king questions a sufi
A ragged pilgrim of the sufis’ Way
By chance met with a king, and heard him say:
‘Who’s better, me or you?’ The old man said:
‘Silence, your words are empty as your head!
Although self-praise is not our normal rule
(The man who loves himself is still a fool).
I’ll tell you, since I must, that one like me
Exceeds a thousand like your majesty.
Since you find no delight in faith -- alas,
Your Self has made of you, my lord, an ass
And sat on you, and set its load on you --
You’re just its slave in everything you do;
You wear its halter, follow its commands.
A no-one, left completely in its hands.
My study is to reach Truth’s inmost shrine --
And I am not my Self’s ass, he is mine:
Now since the beast I ride on rides on you,
That I’m your better is quite plainly true.
You love the Self - it’s lit in you a fire
Of nagging lust, insatiable desire,
A blaze that burns your vigour, wastes your heart.
Leaving infirmity in every part --
Consuming all your strength, till deaf and blind
You’re old, forgetful, rambling in your mind.

The hoopoe is birds’ leader and guide - equivalent of a peer guiding murids
along the Sufi Path. He expounds the Sufi doctrine and advocates the adepts to
practice it. The birds are identified by their species, each indicating a particular
human type - the nightingale is the lover, the finch is the coward, etc. - who make
excuses typical of their kind. The anecdotes seem obscure initially and the obscurity is
intentional, and often logic is deliberately flouted. The obscurities are to allure the
mind, and the allegorical ambiguities are the dark similitude which strikes the heart
and head, like the paradoxical koans of Zen Buddhism.

Attar was influenced by Sana’i’s Divan in which different cries of the birds
are interpreted as the birds’ ways of calling on or praising God. Rudaki, a tenth
century poet and one of the first Persian poets wrote Kalila and Dimna (The Fables of
Bidpai). a popular work originated in India and was translated into many languages.
Rudaki deployed the same couplet form which Attar used later. In the fables in Kalila
and Dimna animals talk and act as humans, and their narratives are allegories of
human characteristics. Attar used the same method and both the works have a similar
folksy humour. Another work which probably influenced Attar was the short Arabic
treatise *The Bird* by Avicenna, which is the first-person narrative of a bird (representing human soul) who is freed from a cage by other birds, and then flies off over eight high mountain peaks with his new companions on a journey to the Great King. Attar’s poem echoes Avicenna’s imagery. The concept of the Simorgh (the Persian phoenix) originates in ancient Persian myth, which became familiar through the *Shahnameh*.

There are similarities between Attar and medieval European literature. Attar’s poem is close in tone and technique to medieval European classics, like *The Owl and the Nightingale* and Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*. Like Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, it is a bunch of stories bound by the convention of a pilgrimage, and as in Chaucer. Attar gives a panoramic view of the contemporary society. With Dante’s *Divina Comedia*. Attar’s poem reflects the basic technique, multi-layered allegory, and a structure that leads from the secular to the sacred, from the madding crowds to the divine sanctum sanctorum. All three authors emit a basic catholicity of sympathy, at odds with the stereotypes of inflexible exclusiveness often associated with both medieval Roman Catholicism and medieval Islam. Attar’s poem describes the stages encountered by the Sufis’ Way. He has transformed belief into poetry, much in the way that Milton or Dante did.

Attar’s characterization of monasteries as places where orgies go on and devout Muslims are led astray is no more grotesque than medieval Christian depiction of Jewish communities. Further, his imagery of fire indicates the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian Iran, and the Zoroastrians worshipped fire. The ‘fire-worshippers’ of Persian mystical poetry are yet another symbol for an antinomian religious fervour scandalous to the orthodox. In the same way Persian poets used intoxication induced by wine - forbidden to Muslims - as a metaphor for the forbidden mystical
intoxications. In the story of the Arab who was stolen while travelling in Persia, represents the follower of the formal, outward religious path; the Sufis are the bandits. who follow the inward mystical path; the wine the Arab drinks which enables the bandits to strip him of his outward wealth is the Sufi doctrine, which is similar to the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

11. Conclusion

The Sufis were extremely talented, but weren’t professional philosophers or systematic thinkers, nor were they concerned to express their beliefs in a clear and logical manner. The Sufis had taken over the Christian mystics’ Path, with repentance leading through various stages, to ‘what no eye has seen.’ They also had inherited the Jewish ideas of the Covenant and God’s friends (wali Allah). To all this, they tacked on Gnostic teachings about primordial lights and their own development, presumably from Christian and Neo-Platonist sources, of the theme of ‘passing away and survival.’ Here there were differing views about what is made to ‘pass away’: the lower soul, human attributes, the entire individual personality? So too it is not clear what survives: God alone, man with God’s attributes, or man as an original idea in the mind of God?

The principal Sufi doctrines need structuring, rephrasing and clarification. Moreover, great dangers had arisen, wherein some thinkers had assumed that they were the most important people in the universe, with the exception of the prophets. Others had uttered what seemed to be blasphemous expressions of self-identification with God.

We started this chapter with the verses of Ahmad b. Asim al-Antraki of Antioch, and will end our brief review with him. For, he picturesquely narrates the beginning of a transition which affected the very character of Sufism, transforming it
from a way of life taken up as a protest against worldliness. into a theory of existence and a system of theosophy. Being the pupil of a noted Sufi Abu Sulaiman al-Darani, he wrote the earliest surviving mystical treatises. thus becoming the forerunner of the great Sufi authors of the third/ninth century. Here is a brief dialogue between him and an unnamed disciple that shows him as the part of spiritual preceptor - a Sufi genre which now assumes increasing importance.

Q: What sayest thou of consulting with others?
A: Have no faith in it, save it be with a trustworthy man.
Q: And what sayest thou concerning the giving of advice?
A: Consider first whether thy words will save thyself; if so, thy guidance is inspired, and thou wilt be respected and trusted.
Q: What thinkest thou of association with other men?
A: If thou findest an intelligent and trustworthy man associate with him, and flee from the rest as from the wild beasts.
Q: How may I best seek to draw near to God?
A: By leaving the inward sins.
Q: Why inward rather than outward?
A: Because if thou avoidest inward sins, the outward sins will be void as well as the inward.
Q: What is the most harmful sin?
A: The sin thou dost not know to be a sin. And more harmful than this is to suppose that it is a virtuous act, while all the time it is a sin.
Q: What sin is the most profitable to me?

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79 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
A: The sin thou keepest before thine eyes, weeping over it constantly until thou departest from the world, so that thou wilt never have committed the like again. That is `sincere repentance’ (cf. Qur’an 66:8).

Q: What is the most harmful virtuous act?

A: The kind that causes thee to forget thy evil deeds; the kind thou keepest before thine eyes, relying upon it and confident, so that in thy delusion thou fearest not for the evil thou hast done, on account of pride.

Q: Where is my person most concealed?

A: In thy cell, and within thy house.

Q: And if I am not safe in my house?

A: In any place where lusts do not cleave to thee, and temptations do not beset thee.

Q: What grace of God is most profitable to me?

A: When He protects thee from disobeying Him, and assists thee to obey Him.

Q: This is a summary: explain it to me more clearly.

A: Very well. When He assists thee with three things: a reason that suffices thee against the vexation of thy passion, a knowledge that suffices thee for thy ignorance, and a self-sufficiency that drives away from thee the fear of poverty.

Let us end this section with the words of Jalal al-Din Rumi, who has made a bouquet from flowers gleaned from the garden of different religions:

O Marvel! a garden amidst the flames.

My heart has become capable of every form:

it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,

and a temple for idols and the pilgrim’s Kaa’ba.
and the tables of the Torah and the book of the Quran.

I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love’s camels take.

that is my religion and my faith.