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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Sufis and Sufi-Pretenders: Approaches to Intra-Group Social Differentiation in Medieval Iran

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**Abstract:** After moving from the asceticism (See Arberry 2007: 32–47), Sufism has always tended to redefine its basic beliefs and restrictive frameworks to getting out a number of groups who distanced themselves from certain frameworks and social behaviour and called them "non-Sufi" or "Sufi-pretenders." This method of differentiation was basically to reduce public criticism of contradictory behaviors of members of Sufi groups. This article focuses on the procedures of differentiation between members of Sufi groups in the Middle Iranian history, its goals and social consequences. The issues of this research are: Was the formation of a group called "Sufi-Pretender" among Sufi communities, due to the people's acceptance of the teaching of this movement or the weaknesses of Sufi organizations that provide the opportunity to form a group disproportionate to the invitation of Sufis? What solutions did the Sufi leaders find to deal with this problem and to settle the heterogeneous people from within their community? The methods of differentiation among Sufi groups were based on what necessitated and how were they defined? In this regard, it seems that the procedures of redefining the identity, in the form of formulating the practical life of mystics, emphasizing the practices of Sufi education, improving the livelihood of the group, informing the people.

**Keywords:** Sufis; Social Reform; Non-Sufis; Sufi-pretenders; Social Differentiation.

## Introduction

The movement of mystical ideas and the practical conduct of Sufism in the Islamic world appeared from the second century AH. With its rapid growth in various areas, this trend became an influential element in the intellectual-social atmosphere of Muslim societies.<sup>1</sup>

Although Sufi and mystical communities followed certain principles of thought and behavior and their population was not large, but the rapid growth and spread of their teachings in the third and fourth centuries AH caused the process of attracting those interested in Sufi communities to accelerate. The development of Sufi communities in the Middle Age was significant in many parts of the Islamic world.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the fact that from the beginning of Sufi groups, there was a tendency to organize them in specific organizations, with the growth of Sufi communities, the effort to differentiate between their members and others increased and specific instructions and

behavioral and lingual indicators were institutionalized. With the sudden acceleration and growth of members of Sufi circles in various areas and the reduction of membership criteria, the provision of private, vocational and special education to newcomers could not be complete, and as a result, a number of individuals with different motivations (such as social prestige, poverty, gaining social support, etc.) entered the Sufi community. The consequence of this situation was the emergence of a phenomenon of duality in the Sufi community, which on the one hand had a glorious image of mystical beliefs and on the other hand some people belonging to these groups were far from the expected behavioral and moral standards. This contradictory situation reduced the legitimacy and acceptance of this group among people and led to a widespread criticism against them. In this study, we have tried to focus on whether the formation of a group called non-Sufis or Sufi-pretender among Sufi communities was

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<sup>2</sup> For more details, See: Zakavati Gharagozloo (2008: 35-75), Zarrinkoub(2004: 45-56), Lewisohn (2005: 50-99)

due to the people's acceptance of teachings of this movement or the weaknesses of Sufi organizations. In addition, what solutions did the Sufi leaders find to deal with this problem and purify the heterogeneous people within their community? Finally, we will evaluate the effectiveness of those methods.

It seems that due to the negative effects of the presence of such disparate elements among the Sufis, in order to maintain their social acceptance, the Sufi leaders inevitably had to react and take effective actions. Their corrective actions were based on redefining the ideas and characteristics of this school, as well as refining and tightening the process of education to shape the character of Sufis, as well as increasing social control over the behavior and social practice of the Sufi community.

Regarding the background of this issue, despite the importance of this issue there are only scattered, general and transient researches are conducted on the social history of Sufi groups.

The works of Abdolhossein Zarrinkoob i.e. *Search in Iranian Sufism* (Zarrinkoob, 1978), (Zarrinkoob, 1344), *Escape from School*

(Zarrinkoob, 1974), Abu Saeed Abu al-Khair's *Reality and Myth* (Meier, 1999), *Sufi Criticism* (Yousefpour, 2001) provide useful information regarding the concerns of the great Shaykhs about the deviation in Sufism. Also the dissertation "Social Critique of Sufism" (Nikoobakht, 2009) deals with interactions and issues of various Sufi groups in the society. In the book *Recognition and Critique of Sufism* (Zakavati Gharagoozloo, 2011), various aspects of Sufism and their critique by Sufis and non-Sufis themselves have been studied. But in fact, the approach of this study to the subject has not been explored yet.

The method of this research is interdisciplinary in the field of social history and literary studies (studying the texts of the Sufis and analyzing the relevant data in the Middle Ages of Iranian history). Accordingly, the subject and causes of the emergence of non-Sufis are examined as a subgroup of individuals within Sufi organizations and communities, and then the social consequences of their performance in society and in the eyes of Sufis are examined and analyzed. In the next step, the plans, measures

and strategies of Sufi leaders to settle and eliminate Sufi-pretender communities are described and analyzed.

### **Formation of Islamic mysticism and Sufism and Sufi organizations**

During the Umayyad dynasty, the formation and expansion of sectarian and religious organizations from the sight of the government was considered as an illegal activity. Hence, the mystical approach to religion was also expressed in an individual form and did not enter the stage of creating social organization. During the Abbasid Caliphate, due to socio-political and cultural developments, a good opportunity arose for the establishment and growth of social and intellectual movements, and as a result, intellectual movements were formed and were able to emerge. Sufism, which founded as a school of thought in the first century AH, in the form of ideas and in concepts of asceticism and social behavior, took advantage of this opportunity to spread its teachings in the

society. Gradually, the social situation of that time greatly influenced the growth and organizational formation of this intellectual-social movement, and as a result, mysticism and Sufism became a movement that left a huge impact on Iran and the Islamic world in the form of social organizations and different order.

In the early stages of this movement, Sufis appeared in the form of the famous ascetics in big cities, who with their teachings and behavior, promoted asceticism and austerity, as well as a kind of monasticism and apostasy.

Figures such as Hasan al-Basri (642-728)<sup>3</sup>, Abū Hāshim al-Ṣūfī (d. 768 AD), Dawud al-Ta'i (d. 782 AD), Fudayl ibn 'Iyad (d. 803 AD), Shāfiq al-Balkhi (d. 810 AD), Bishr ibn Hareth (d. 841 AD) and Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 782 AD) were prominent representatives of this period.<sup>4</sup> With the increase of the followers of this movement and their gathering in the second and third centuries, the establishment of special organizations, focusing on the character of a Shaykh or leader with a

<sup>3</sup> On his life and opinions, see: *Subūt* (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the life and opinions of these people, see: *Qeshiriyeh* (1995, pp. 24-86) *Hojviriyeh* (1994: 107-

202) *Attar Neyshabouri* (2012); *Jami, Abdul Rahman Ibn Ahmad* (1336) Also from recent sources, see: *Renard* (2005).

charismatic personality (charisma), was formed and gradually grew in different parts of the Islamic world. *Shaykh* or *Pir Tarighat* was the axis of the sect and in fact its main structure. Sufism can be considered as a foundation whose laws, rules and structure are based on pure obedience to the *Shaykh* or elder and valid teaching is carried out under his guidance.<sup>5</sup> He was indeed “the spiritual representative of the Prophet's mission among the followers of the Sufi order” (Nasr, 2003: 99).

After this period, the role of a *Shaykh* changed from a model and example to a guide and leader, and in fact found a pivotal role. This feature gave Sufism a different stature compared to other Islamic sects. Of course, the inevitable consequence of this situation was that according to each character and thought of these *Shaykhs* and guides, a method was formed and each sect in Sufism was defined based on states, authorities and educational methods of its own *shaykh*. This led to such differences in the social form of Sufi practices

in the Islamic world, and various currents of Sufism emerged in Khorasan, Baghdad, Persia, and other areas, inevitably creating confusion in their identification and teachings. In response to this situation, from the sixth century AH onwards, the principles of methodical education was considered and attention to the behaviors and thoughts of the founder of the Sufi order, the criterion for judgment and function in the order was formed.

*Shaykhs* or Sufi elders were tolerant of the other religions and sects of the Islamic world. This approach, in addition to the Sufi theoretical foundation, was highly welcomed due to the situation of sectarian conflicts in the Islamic world in the third and fourth centuries AH and had a great impact on attracting different layers of people to Sufism and the growth of Sufi communities. In such a situation, Hujwiri (d. 1073 AD/465 AH) met in Khorasan with three hundred Sufi *Shaykhs*, each of whom had his own style of Sufism (Hujwiri, 1974: 216). When the Sufis attained

<sup>5</sup> According to Qushayri, “Sufi elders at the beginning and before the third century AH are in fact ascetics, and the Sunnis in particular, who after each ethnic group claimed in their own name, did not engage their breath

in anything other than the remembrance of God and became known as Sufism.” See also, Qashiriyah, 1374, pp. 24-25.

the position of influential social authority, in order to deepen their educational functions, they established monasteries to guide, organize, train and educate Sufi seekers (Meier, 1999: 347) and gradually added the functions of the monastic system (Yousefifar, 2007: 229). Even among the people of other Islamic sects such as Shafi'is, Karrāmiya, Shiite, Manichaeon (Hodud al-alam: 1983, 107) the creation of a *Ḳānaqāh* (Sufi monastery) was experienced (Qazvini Razi, 1979, 36; Malamud, 1999, 59) One of the functions of the *Ḳānaqāh* institution was to provide welfare and accommodation services to travelers and passers-by (Bukharaei, 1996: 456) and act as a 'dwelling place'. This increased the number of Sufis in these places. *Ḳānaqāh* played an essential role in effective propaganda and public inclination towards Sufism and training of its followers.

### **Increasing Tendency towards Sufi Organizations and Inefficiency of Sufi Educational Methods**

Thus began a process during which people converted to Sufism in groups; and there were many who turned to Sufism out of greed for

wealth and power, or at least to seek refuge from the harms of society, such as insecurity, poverty and hunger. Harith al-Muhasibi is the first person in his book to protest the entry into the world of Sufism in such a way that a group of people enter the Sufism not for the cultivation of the soul and the interior, but for the pleasure (Yousefpour, 2001: 67). After that, other Sufis object to this kind of entry into the school of Sufism, as Shaykh Ahmad Jam says wherever there was laziness, irreligion, cowardice, and immorality, he came to this school and dressed as a dervish, thinking that he would gain a lot of wealth and position here, and as a result, every unworthy person would enter the school of Sufism (Yousefpour, 2001: 74–75). Shaykh Omar ibn Mohammad Suhrawardi considers the result of this trend to be the famine of the Sufi scholars of his time: "What can we say in this age that is the lack of ascetic scholars and mystics" (Suhrawardi, 2014: 5).

Sometimes some people turned to Sufism for the purpose of abusing the beliefs of the rulers to the Shaykhs and Sufi elders and achieving their worldly goals and sometimes ignorant people came to the court of kings and

rulers without the slightest knowledge of the Shari'a and Tariqat, and abused them under the pretext of being Sufis (Ayati, 2004: 95). Some followers of other Islamic sects, such as the Ismailis (or, in the words of historians of the day, *Malahedeh*), also appeared in Sufi costume in order to promote their beliefs, which sometimes contradicted the popular beliefs of the time. (Ibn al-Jozi, 1989: 88) Or to perform their desired acts such as the murder of Khajeh Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092 AD/485 AH) in the costume of Sufis and dervishes (Hendushah, 1978: 280).

Although it cannot be said that the situation of Sufis in the was good and they had extensive facilities and capacities to live in this place, but the elders care and support of these groups made the disciples feel less worry about their life situation and future. Shaykh Abu Ishaq Kazeruni (963-1023 AD/ 352-426 AH) arranged the livelihood of sixty-five *Kānaqāhs* and fed the travelers, dervishes and the poor on the days of Ashura, and in times of famine and hardship gave the incomes to the poor and deserving people (Mahmoud Ibn Uthman, 1358: 186) The *Kānaqāhs* were usually managed from their income of endowments,

donations, and other resources (Bertels, 1997: 48) and thus had an economic base to help the dervishes and the deserving people. (ibid) Therefore, it is not unreasonable to expect that many people, out of greed for these incomes, turn to *Kānaqāhs* and wear dervishes' clothes without considering themselves obliged to follow the instructions of the Sufi path. In addition, with the joining of craftsmen and artisans to the school of Sufism, especially the fraternal associations, the economic approach of the *Kānaqāhs* expanded and Sufism had a higher impact on this sector (Zarrinkoub, 2004: 73).

*One of the salient features of Sufi thinking is not preparing for tomorrow.* Shaykh Abolhassan Kharghani (d. 1033/425 AH) says: "Just as God does not ask you to pray for tomorrow, do not ask Him for sustenance tomorrow" (Minavi, 1373: 116). Ibn Khafif (d. 982/371 AH) said that zakat al-fitr was not obligatory on me for forty years (Deilami, 1363: 19) Abu Hafs Haddad (d. 884/270 AH) worked for twenty years and earned one dinars every day and paid alimony to their dervishes, and in the evening he would go out and beg to break his fast (Qushayri, 1374: 464).

Therefore, with the successive increase in the number of Sufis, who each came to this school under different pretexts and intentions, it became difficult to guide and control this large population in all directions, and various educational and moral issues arose for their elders and school, which will be discussed in the following.

### **Social Educational Issues in Sufi's Teachings**

Sufi social and personal upbringing has some characteristics that created problems in itself, and people that are opportunistic, lazy, and far from the truth of Sufism, who turned to it only to achieve worldly desires can abuse them. Here we address the issues and problems in the method of social education of Sufis and abuses of them in general:

#### ***Lack of planning and preparation for the future***

According to what was said and that the "preparations for tomorrow" were some kind of principle for the Sufis, there would be no planning and economic and financial organizing for Kānaqāhs (Sufi monasteries), so

Sufis who did not have a deep belief in the school of Sufism and did completely not trust the Sheykhs, worrying about the living conditions of tomorrow, will do things that are against the character and practice of Sufism. It can be said that understanding the concept of "not preparing for tomorrow" in Sufism has been one of the problems that if not solved has led to deviations in Sufism. The story of "selling Sufis, the donkey of a traveler for Sama" from the second Chapter of Rumi's Masnavi (Rumi, 1974: 168) is one of the examples that confirms this.

#### ***Sufis' excessive emphasis on the inside***

The Sufis' excessive emphasis on the inside and neglect of the external and external worlds cause some Sufis to be indifferent to the external world and, despite the repeated emphases of the Sufi elders, preferred Tariqat to the Shari'a. They go aside and resort to acts contrary to the Sharia' and customs of society, and as a result, cause the discrediting of the Sufi school (Yousefpour, 2001: 56).

#### ***Sufis' great emphasis on divine knowledge***

Sufis' great emphasis on divine knowledge and knowledge of the heart versus apparent and



formal knowledge caused some Sufis to despise science and knowledge and scholars and jurists without having a correct understanding of the sayings of the Sufi elders without any inner and heart knowledge. In this regard, al-Ghazali taunts Sufis whose "job is to wash themselves every day and adorn themselves with Sufi customs, while at the same time denouncing jurists and scholars." Al-Ghazali recognizes these people as the devil of the people and the enemy of God and the Prophet (Zarinkooba, 1983: 24-25).

#### ***Lack of rules and laws to reach the guiding positions in Sufism***

Given that in Sufism there were no written rules and laws to show who has reached a high spiritual level and are true mystics and Sufis and in medieval Iran, permission did not seem to be required for guidance from the Shaykh and Sufi elder. As a result, many incompetent people and fraudulent Sufis have claimed to be Shaykhs and leaders, and without any authority, they were guiding the people, even though they were in fact misleading the people.

#### ***Scattered teachings and impossibility of supervising Sufis***

Also, due to the geographical dispersion and diversity of the teachings of the elders and their extent, it was practically impossible to monitor the mystical and Sufi community. And there was no clear and centralized center to monitor the behavior of Sufi elders and disciples. This led to the appearance of those who, far from the supervision and management of the great shaykhs, spread ideas that were foreign not only to the spirit of mysticism and Sufism, but also to Islam.

These people created sects that were completely outside the realm of true mysticism and Sufism that the great Shaykhs wanted; therefore, some scholars and people attributed Sufism and mysticism to these groups and considered them out of the circle of Islam due to these deeds (Razi, 2004: 122).

#### ***Lack of rules and regulations for joining Sufism***

Entering the school of Sufism was usually not subject to any special rules except for some Sufi elders, and those who intended to enter Sufism could enter the KĀNAQĀH as Sufis without having the talent and merit in this

field and without confirming the truth of their words. Misuse of this title and acting against their ideals will cause the disgrace and discredit of Sufis and Sufism. Of course, in some cases the Sufi elders had strict rules for beginners to enter the Sufi profession.<sup>6</sup>

### **Social Consequences of Sufi-pretender Behavior**

Those who entered the world of Sufism to satisfy their carnal desires showed behaviors and speeches that were contrary to beliefs and ideals of Sufi-elders and the nature of Sufism. Observing such behavior by others, especially those who had less knowledge of mysticism and Sufism, caused people to suspect Sufis and their beliefs and creeds, and this was the first direct consequence of the behavior of Sufi-pretenders. As when Amir Massoud Ghaznavi (d. 1041 AD/432 AH) wherever saw a Sufi, he believed that he had set a trap and had a heart darker than his clothes (Bayhaqi, 1995: 2-735). As a result, when the common people of the time looked at the Sufis and saw the their dancing as Sama` and associating with sultans

to catch morsels and do other indecent acts, they mistrusted whole Sufis, and said that all Sufis are alike in words and deed and those who were before have been the same and these people have followed the ideals of the past (Hujwiri, 1994: 48) Hujwiri (d. 1073 AD/465 AH) after stating these words says that it was not known to the people that "it is a time of calamity, and in these days, the greed of the king compels them to oppress, and the greed of the scientist leads him to immorality and hypocrisy. In the same way, the passion caused a Sufi to dance and sing so that the Tariqats would be destroyed, but the principles of them would not be destroyed (ibid)

Similarly, opponents of Sufism such as Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201 AD/597 AH) also believed that some Sufi traditions such as Sama' at this time are contrary to the principles of previous Sufis and has caused the Muslim public to be skeptical of the Sufi ancestry. (Yousefpour, 2001: 54). Consequently, this kind of notoriety spread to such an extent that some people even used the word Sufi to describe religious people for their lack of humility and tendency to

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the Sufi elders gave humiliating instructions to some novices who had to serve other

Sufis for a while and clean their seats and bring thorns to burn, and so on. See: Bertels (1997: 47).

pretend, which was in fact considered against the principles of Sufism (Ramli, 2015: 17).

Another consequence of the social behavior of these Sufi-pretenders was the objection of Islamic scholars and jurists of the time, both Shii'tes and Sunnis, and the stance and writing of books against Sufi school by these groups. Ibn Jawzi, for example, believes that "Sufism was an ideology that began with absolute asceticism." He accepted the behavior of past Sufis and affirmed it.

He interprets them as asceticism (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1989: 5-6) but attacks his contemporary Sufis and criticizes them for their lack of piety and worldliness (Zakavati Qaragoozloo, 2011: 395).

Also, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 AD/728 AH) did not oppose Sufism until they were heretic (Zakavati Qaragoozloo, 2011: 21), but he was opposed to what later appeared in Sufism by Sufi-pretenders and he in his books refer to them as enemies of Islam and apostates. Also among the Shii'tes scholars who oppose Sufism, Seyyed Murtaza Razi (966-1045 AD/355-436 AH) divides them into six sects by attributing Sufis to the Sunnis (Razi, 2004: 122). True Sufi shaykhs do not accept any of

these six sects and do not accept their behaviors and beliefs and consider them to be non-Sufis. A closer look at the beliefs of these groups reveals that they are all outside the early Sufi groups and are among the non-Sufis who have had caused Islamic jurists to launch protest against Sufis.

Also, the growth of *Abahtians* is another consequence of the misbehavior of Sufi-pretenders and one of the severe blows inflicted on the social body of Sufism by them. *Abahtians* were those who said that sin is not harmful to us because our faith is perfect and impurity is not harmful to it. They spread such thinking, and many of them claimed to be Sufis. But in fact no particular person in the history of Sufism has been accused of this belief. (Zarrinkoub, 2004: 77) Nevertheless, the behavior of Sufi-pretenders had caused some Islamic scholars and jurists to often see Sufism from this point of view and therefore criticize it a lot. Some other opportunistic people, who have seen the behavior of the *Abahtians*, think that the Sufi school is of the same opinion, and that they have been able to find a sect under which they can do whatever

they want, and as a result they are inclined towards it.

True Sufism remained more and more hidden, and as the community of Sufis and Sufi-pretenders grew, so, according to Ibn Jawzi, the Aباhtians placed themselves among the Sufis in order to save their lives. And these were three groups: a group of infidels who did not accept God and found Sufism as a suitable cover only to free their souls in their desires, and the other group who accepted Islam and acted against the commands of Islam due to following some elders, and a group that had personally become suspicious and immersed in the act of *Aباhtians* (Ibn al-Jawzi, 1989).

Another damage of Sufi-pretender to the Sufi school was the creation divisions and differences among the followers and Shaykhs of Sufi School. Sufi-pretenders who have falsely claimed to be Shaykhs and their followers acted against the ideology of Sufism; inevitably developed new beliefs and ideologies and defended them against true Sufis and others. Gradually ,the number of these claims increased and the number of sects and ideas multiplied ,and as a result , there were many divisions and differences

among the followers of the sects. Hujviri , Qusheyri Siraj ,etc. have mentioned their names and symbols in their books (Zarrinkoub, 2004: 46).

### **Strategies of Sufi Leaders to Purge Sufism of Sufi-pretender**

Therefore, Sufi leaders were forced to take measures to preserve their schools and keep them away from scourges of Sufi-pretenders. In this section, we will briefly review these measures:

#### ***Writing books and treatises and compiling the teachings of Sufism***

The first action of some Sufi shaykhs who had official knowledge and used the Shari'a and the common way of the day to show the Sufi ideology and profession to the general public who were curious or interested in it by writing treatises and books. They were able to introduce and, at the same time, reveal the true teachings of Sufism in order to show the corrupt beliefs and thoughts unrelated to Sufism. This type of works became popular from the fourth century AH. In the introduction of many of these books, it is

explicitly stated that the author(s) intends to write a treatise on revealing true Sufism and refining it and showing the behavior of the past. In the introduction of Abu Nasr Siraj's book (d. 989 AD/378 AH) *Al-Lama*, there is a clear reference to those who associate themselves with Sufism and introduce Sufism incorrectly, and at the same time consider their worldly fantasies and intend to show Sufism in works and speeches. The actions of great mystics are the former<sup>7</sup> [1] in order to clarify the truth for the researcher by comparing it with the behavior of the group of Sufis (Siraj, 2015: 3). Qushayri (d. 1072 AD/465 AH) also says in the introduction of his treatise that the time of returning to the true Sufis is worse and more difficult every day. And most of the people of the time are in corruption, and I was afraid that the people of this time would believe that Sufism is the behavior and speech of these Sufi-pretenders. And the elders of the past also behaved according to these incorrect rules, Therefore, I wrote this treatise in order to remind the past elders about their behavior in etiquette, ethics,

intention and behavior, so that the truth would be revealed to the disciples (Qushayri, 1995: 12). Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 990 AD/385 AH) also explicitly mentions in his famous and important book *Al-Ta'rif* (The doctrine of Sufis) that he tried to prove that the way by quoting hadiths, verses and speeches of religious leaders' Sufism is inseparable from the Shari'a (islamic laws) and is strongly dependent on it (Klabazi, 1933: 6). Ali ibn Uthman al-Hujwiri (d. 1073 AD/465 AH) also considers the reason for writing the book *Kashf al-Mahjoub* to answer the questions that had arisen for people about the ideology and profession of the Sufis. (Hujwiri, 1994: 3) Attar Neyshabouri states that one of the reasons for writing the book "*Tazkerat al-Awliya*" (Saints' Lives) is that since times have passed and the men of this people (Sufis) have passed away, by reading their anecdotes and words, the disciples will remain safe in the path of the Sufis (Attar, 2012).

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<sup>7</sup> To see the historical background of Sufi biographies, see: Mojaddedi (2013).

### ***Revealing Sufi-pretender and their misconceptions and misconduct***

Sufi-pretender, through their behavior and speech, led to the spread of some innovations in Sufi culture that were strongly opposed by the great shaykhs. Fighting against these heresies and exposing them and those who have practiced these false customs and misconduct, and warning the disciples not to associate with these heretical groups, was one of the duties performed by some of the Sufi-elders.

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 AD/450-505 AH) was one of the most important Sufi elders who criticized the common customs and beliefs of Sufis-pretenders who deviated from Sufism in various aspects in his books. He complains about the obscenity of Sufis in Sama and criticizes the Pederasty of some of the Sufis with a complaining form. (Al-Ghazali, 1954: 379). He criticizes some wrong customs such as obsession and excess in the purity of some Sufis, which was common among some Sufis at that time (Zarrinkoub, 1983: 26). He criticizes the useless travel habits of some Sufis who are lazy and do not intend to see the Shaykhs, and deem those who mock the

scholars and jurists without any outward or inward knowledge worthy of murder (Al-Ghazali, 1954: 30).

Shaykh Ahmad-e Jami (1048-1141 AD/440-536 AH) is also one of the strongest critics of Sufis who have deviated from the tradition of Sufism and have been led to deviations. He complains about the enjoyment, comfort-seeking, luxury of Sufi-pretenders, decorated tablecloths, colorful food of some Sufis, hymns, lyric singing, absenteeism, greed, accumulation of wealth, ornate houses, immorality, and lies of some other Sufis of his time (Jami, 1968: 194). He then advises that none of his friends and dervishes should sit with these congregations, and instead sit and stand with the scholars and elders of the truth and the pious, and follow the true scholars and the pious people (Jami, 1968: 195).

Exclusively in the book *The Mistakes of the disciples*, Ruoz bahan Baqli (1128-1209 AD/522-606 AH) has introduced the types and kinds of deviations committed by Sufi-pretenders and considers the number of mistakes as the number of breaths of the disciples (Ruoz bahan Baqli, 1972: 91). Among

the deviations that he enumerates in this book are: selfishness and not following the Sufi elders, not following the etiquette, mocking the worshipers, not reading and bothering the Shari'ah, not restraining oneself from forbidden food, not paying attention to ablution and purity, absenteeism and non-acceptance of the truth, engaging in obscenity, and preferring the rich to the dervishes, etc.<sup>8</sup> (Rouz bahan Baqli, 1972: 90-98).

Therefore, in order to inform and enlighten the people, the leaders of Sufism in sharp tone recounted the bad manners of those who associate themselves with Sufism but are not of them but are included in the term "Sufism", so that by exposing them, correct and accepted practices of Sufi shaykhs should be revealed and, in fact, the identity of the Sufi school should be redefined and recognized.

### ***Emphasis and strictness in Sufi educational practices***

The behavior of Sufi-pretender and their indolence caused some Sufi elders to become stricter in training and educating the disciples

and compiled treatises on the conditions and manners of disciple training (Suhrawardi, 1984). They did not consider anyone worthy of the title of Sufi and dervish, and in order for anyone to deserve this title, they forced him to severe austerities. Abu Sa'id Abu al-Khair (967-1049 AD/357-440 AH), despite all his gentleness and moderation, was sometimes so strict and inflexible that he forced a son of gentleman who sought his guidance to do the meanest things and treated him harshly and violently (Mohammad b. Munawwar, 1899: 347). In another case, he sent a disciple who was annoyed Sufis by the sound of his shoes to the valley for rebuke and punishment (Mohammad b. Munawwar, 1987: 99). Hujviri, who complains about Sufi-pretenders, writes that when a disciple enters the circle of Sufism, he should be forced to serve and humble for three years in order to reduce his worldly desires, so that if he fails, should not be accepted; the first year in the service of the people and the second year of the Creator and the third year for the care of the heart (Nicholson, 1341: 36).

<sup>8</sup> For details on Roozbeh Bali's views, see: (Ernst, 1996).

Obedience to the rules of the Shari'a and the study of the Qur'an to learn and practice the laws of the Shari'a were among the things that some Sufi shaykhs strongly emphasized. In most places of Abu Talib al-Makki's book (d. 996 AD/386 AH) *The Nourishment of Hearts (Qut al-qulub)*, the recitation of prayers and the Qur'an and the observance of the commands of the Shari'a are emphasized and certain times are dedicated to it (Abu Talib al-Makki: 1417). Emphasis on studying and reading the anecdotes and sayings of the past greats of Sufism is also one of the ways to acquaint newcomers with the tradition and behavior of great Sufi elders to prevent deviation in Sufism and to prevent the growth and dissemination of ideas contrary to this creed. Also, telling and listening to anecdotes causes the souls of disciples to gain strength in the way of Sufism (Siraj, 1394: 205; Attar, 1391: 7).

By following the correct and original educational methods and procedures taken by the great shaykhs, the risk of their distance from Sufism and becoming Sufi-pretenders is reduced, and the acquisition of knowledge from the Sufi elders and the applying this

knowledge deprived them of Sufi-pretenders away. Such strategies, willingly or unwillingly, moved to preserve the Sufism school and keep it away from the harm of the Sufi-pretenders.

### ***Improving the livelihood of disciples***

But when the living conditions of a group are not good, it is futile to expect them to behave properly, and the elders of Sufism were aware of this. Therefore, they took steps to manage *Ḳānaqāhs* in order to improve the living conditions of the Sufis.

Some of the *ḲĀNAQĀH* revenues were: Waqf, support from rulers and sultans, zakat, public donations to Sufis, gifts, borrowing, beggary, business, financial power of Sufi elders and religious sermons (Siamian, Ahmadvand, Shirinazim: 2017). Sufi elders played a pivotal role in all of the above, and the *ḲĀNAQĀH*'s system made these revenues available to all Sufis in general. Among these, begging was a form of social behavior that was criticized by some Sufi elders for using the earning of others. The people condemned begging so much that Abu Nasr Siraj says that begging is to destroy the credibility and



reputation of a newcomer to the circle of Sufism so that no one gives him anything in the form of gifts, loans and other aids (Ibid. 72). Thus, apart from the moral aversion to begging, many Sufi Shaykhs were also socially opposed to it. It is quoted from the Sari al-Saqati (d. 867 AD/253 AH) that the short way to heaven is that you do not ask for anything from anyone and do not take anything from anyone ... (Abu Nasr Siraj, 2015: 191).

Hujviri emphasizes that the disciples should not be as much as possible and in special circumstances for those who cannot have income, strict conditions have been set for begging so that not everyone can turn to begging (Hujviri, 1994: 467- 70).

Therefore, paying attention to the living conditions of the disciples and improving it helped a lot so that the disciples would not fall into the trap of immoral acts and would not violate the moral rules of the society in order to earn a living and in fact, do not be among the Sufi-pretenders who are ostensibly in the guise of Sufism and in practice act contrary to the teachings of Sufism and discredit themselves and the school of Sufism. On the other hand, by adopting this strategy and

paying attention to the livelihood of the disciples, the disciples' ties with the Shaykhs and the head of the school are strengthened. Because part of the worldly needs of the disciples is met by the mentor, and as a result, they will have more obedience and training from him, and the risk of distancing himself from the school of Sufi elders will be less. Therefore, this approach and strategy can be considered as one of the most effective ways to prevent the formation of a non-Sufi groups among Sufis community.

### ***Approaching rulers to preserve school and disciples***

But the behavior of Sufi-pretender provoked the religious and social feelings of the people against the Sufi community and persecuted the true Sufis and those who were wary of these acts. Therefore, in order to clear the accusation and also to show their true beliefs, some Sufi elders approached the rulers and governors to use their power to reduce the pressure on the Sufis. As in front of Nizam-ol-Molk (d. 1092 AD/ 485 AH) the minister, an Alawite person slandered the Sufis and accused them of ignorance irreligion (Attar, 2012: 336). On the

other hand, rulers and statesmen wanted to approach the Sufis so that they could use their social base to consolidate their power and legitimacy. As we see in the relations of Abu Sa'id Abu al-Khair (967-1049 AD/357-440 AH) and his descendants with the Seljuks (10<sup>th</sup> Century) (Shafi'i Kadkani, 2007: 29). If the Shaykh, who dominated the thoughts of the vast masses of the people of cities, did not approve the actions of the rulers, they would become a dangerous enemy to them (Bosworth, 1997: 49). Some Sufi orders generally believed that because the benefits and harms of society were related to the rulers, communication with the rulers was necessary for them, although some sultans disregarded the Sufis for fear of Islamic jurists. Some other rulers also believed in and approached Sufi shaykhs to reduce the influence of Islamic jurists (Zarrinkoub, 1965: 215). Among the Sufi sects, the Naqshbandiyya considered communication with the rulers permissible and obligatory and in accordance with the interests of the people and their followers. Shaykhs of Suhrawardieh and Shattariyeh orders also had good relations with the rulers (ibid). The Ghaznavid rulers viewed with

suspicion the Sufi shaykhs, who had gathered large groups of followers and the central government could not directly control them. (Bosworth, 1999, 195) There are also narrations that some Shaykhs, such as Abu Sa'id Abu al-Khair, instructed their followers to the rulers to treat them with respect and kindness (Muhammad b. Munawwar, 1987: 177-80). Sometimes the Sufis' relationship with politicians became so widespread that Sufis were among the companions of rulers and sultans at their court, such as Shahab al-Din Omar Suhrawardi (d. 1235 AD/632 AH) and Najm Razi (d. 1256 AD/654 AH) who went to the court of Sultan Kiqbad (d. 1237 AD/634 AH) and gave him the book of *Mursad al-'Abbad* and also wrote the book *Marmūzāt-e Asadī* in the name of Aladdin Davoud Shah II.

Therefore, the closeness and relationship of some Sufi elders with the heads of power and rulers could be a useful solution for confronting and repelling the danger of Sufis in two ways:

First, the closeness of the rulers to the elders of Sufism caused the rulers to observe the behavior and speech and beliefs of true

Sufis, and therefore if they observed the behavior and speech of a non-Sufi person, by comparing it with the behavior of true Sufis, they could invalidate that person's behavior and Recognize the falsity of his claims and do not consider him a member of the Sufi school. *Second*, the closeness of the Sufi elders to the rulers could neutralize the accusations made against Sufi Shaykhs and Sufism in the presence of the rulers. These accusations were often made because of the behavior of Sufi-pretenders. But the rulers became aware of their behavior through contact with the Sufi elders and did not pay attention to such slanders.

### **Conclusion**

After Sufism became popular, it went from a stage of asceticism and isolation to a stable social group. During this process, some members of this sect distanced themselves from the group's ideological and behavioral frameworks, which were called Sufi-pretender. The true shaykhs of Sufism decided to make a social distinction between these individuals and the true Sufis in order to reduce the criticism of the society and to protect their

school. In the meantime, there were some inherent issues in the method of the Sufis education, which provided the ground for the creation of this group among the Sufis.

These include lack of planning for the future, too much emphasis on the inner world and the abandonment of formal knowledge and irregularities in the ranks of Sufism, the scattering of the teachings of the elders and the inability to supervise the disciples and lack of rules to enter the school of Sufism.

The existence of these problems and the failure to solve them, led to an increase in the problem of Sufis-pretender, and had consequences for the Sufi communities. The slander and discredit of Sufis in the eyes of the common people, the enmity of religious scholars and jurists with Sufism by observing Sufi-pretender behavior, the growth of the Abahtian group among Sufis, as well as divisions among followers and elders that results in numerous divisions and categories and dynasties Different in Sufism and Mysticism were among these consequences for Sufism and Mysticism.

Therefore, the leaders and elders of Sufism took various measures to solve this problem

and protect their school from the suffering caused by Sufi-pretenders. The solutions that can be explicitly stated are: Writing books and treatises and compiling the teachings of Sufism, exposing Sufi-pretenders and their disliked customs, emphasizing and tightening in Sufi educational practices, improving the living conditions of the disciples and approaching the rulers to protect the school of

Sufism and the disciples from the danger of Sufi-pretenders and Their behavior and performance.

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## صوفیان و صوفی‌نمایان: رویکردهای تمایزگذاری اجتماعی درون گروهی در سده‌های میانه

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**چکیده:** تصوف پس از حرکت از موقعیت زهد و انزوا به ایجاد سازمان‌ها و سلسله‌های طریقت، به‌عنوان یک گروه اجتماعی پایدار، همواره به بازتعریف چارچوب‌های اصول و باورهای محدودکننده فرقه‌ای خود تمایل داشت تا شماری از اعضای گروه را که از چارچوب‌های فکری و رفتار اجتماعی تعیین شده، فاصله گرفته بودند، با عنوان ناصوفی، صوفی‌نما یا مستصوفه از دایره گروه خودی بیرون برانند. این روش تمایزگذاری با اهداف مختلفی صورت می‌گرفت که یکی از آن موارد کاهش انتقادات جامعه بر رفتارهای تناقض‌آمیز شماری از اعضای این گروه بود. در این مقاله در مورد رویه‌های تمایزگذاری بین اعضای یک گروه در سده‌های میانه تاریخ ایران، اهداف و پیامدهای اجتماعی آن پژوهش صورت گرفته است. مسئله و سؤالات این تحقیق چنین است: شکل‌گیری گروه موسوم به ناصوفی در بین اجتماعات صوفیان، ناشی از اقبال مردم به آموزه‌های این جریان بود یا ضعف‌های تشکیلات صوفیان مجال شکل‌گیری گروهی نامتجانس با دعوت صوفیان را فراهم می‌آورد؟ رهبران صوفی برای رویارویی با این مشکل و تسویه درونی افراد غیرهمگون از درون اجتماع خود، چه راه‌حلی‌هایی اتخاذ کردند؟ روش‌های تمایزگذاری و دیگرسازی در گروه صوفیه، براساس چه ضرورت‌هایی وضع و چگونه تعریف می‌شد؟ در این راستا به نظر می‌رسد رویه‌های بازتعریف هویت فرقه‌ای، در اشکال تدوین سیره عملی رهبران فرقه، تأکید بر رویه‌های تربیت صوفیانه، اصلاح وضع معیشت گروه، اطلاع‌رسانی و تنویر افکار مردم، از جمله مهم‌ترین رویه‌های اصلاح اجتماعی در گروه و تسویه افراد ناسازگار با اصول و موازین فرقه‌ای به شمار می‌رفت. این پژوهش با روش تاریخی و با تمرکز بر موضوع رویه اصلاح اجتماعی در یک گروه معنویت‌گرا جهت رفع انتقادات و فشارهای اجتماعی صورت می‌گیرد. امری که به استمرار حیات اجتماعی و انسجام اجتماعی گروه صوفیه در جامعه ایران کمک می‌کرد.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** صوفیان، اصلاح اجتماعی، ناصوفیان، صوفی‌نمایان، تمایزگذاری اجتماعی



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