

*Special Paper***RELEVANCE OF SUFISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD  
AS AN ANTIDOTE TO VIOLENCE & TERRORISM****Masud Anwar Alavi\***

We are at the zenith of advancement and expansion of human potentials. Educational developments have opened new vistas of worldwide technology, swift information systems and highly advantageous economic patterns. Man is at the height of power and authority. A worldly superiority has been established with the tools of material, physical and technical abilities, the outcome of the European Renaissance. This led to transformation of consciousness, which according to intellectuals were demonic in nature. We produced giant weapons and toys but we lost the human to pride and prejudice. The relationship between man and nature lost its sacred dimensions with the emergence of the secular human model whose sole references are in this world and no longer in realms of transcendence. For this new type of human, it is not enough to be a manifestation of God and to be in harmony with a nature identified on the macro level as the same form. Presently the entire world is looking for the human. Nowadays radical voices “stop” have begun to emerge. In many intellectual circles in the west returning to ages has become popular. Big companies are sending their workers to meditation programs. Humanity is looking for the happiness it lost.

Materialism and capitalism are on the prowl, hunting us with their attractive and sharp talons. There are wars everywhere. We are using our intelligence to invent ways to kill one another we are using our intellect to devastate culture and humanity, yet we have been granted that intellect in order to find better ways to live our lives. The scene before us is so exasperating that the feeble heart is being tormented every moment. The inhumane atmosphere looking around us has engulfed us in its deadly clutches. All are under the same spell of agony and there is no place to go and seek refuge. All roads to peace seem to be blocked. The evil hands of tyranny are getting stronger day by day. The heart lies dead in the dust, darkened by the setting sun of our moral, into the alleys of fear and turmoil. The heart no more sings to the music of love, seeking the soothing fingers of benevolence and harmony.

No doubt desires are the reason behind man's opulent and selfish behavior. Worldly attraction and material gains have enslaved man to a mere tool in their hands. Thus he indulges in all sorts of unlawful and improper acts which makes him hardhearted, cruel, pitiless, selfish and tyrant and drives him to injustice, violence, bloodshed and carnage. This creates a vortex of anguish and depravity for him in the world. The question arises that in such a grave atmosphere is there any source of relief, especially when man has given repeated trials to all sorts of isms for his survival? Some refuge across the fiery river of his egoistic nature, a realm of peace and tranquility where being a mere human being with very limited powers, in spite of his mastery on the earth he could learn the art to live, serve and survive as goes the popular idiom live and let live! Definitely, if we were to look back the only hope lies in love and devotion, the base of Sufi thought, the rapidly expanding interest in

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Sufism today as an escapade from trials and tribulations and deliverance to a better world needs some retrospection into mystery behind the mystical approach of Sufism.

Love is the base of all things. Plato calls it “divine passion”. the Holy Bible says ‘God is love’, The Holy Qur’an says that ‘Allah is Wadood (one who loves) The Sufis believe that love was the reason behind the creation of the universe, thus proving that love is a universal phenomenon. The great Persian Sufi and mystic Al-Hujwiri popularly known as Data Ganj Bakhsh says, “Love is the fountainhead of life. Just as the seed is the source of a tree”. Thus when the creator is the one who loves, He wants, to see his beloved Man in a form flowing with love, for all around him the Sufis seek reality beyond the grasp of intellect in a direct loving communion with the creator. The great mystic and teacher and exponent of metaphysical doctrine Al-Shaik al-Akbar Muhyiddin Ibne arabi (638AH /1240 A.C) says in one of his love poems of Tarjuman-al –Ashwaq

My heart is open to all forms;  
 It is pasturage for gazelles  
 And a monastery for Christian monks  
 A temple for idols and the  
 Ka’bah of the pilgrim  
 The tables of the Torah and  
 The book of the Qur’an.  
 Mine is the religion of love  
 Where ever His caravans turn the religion of  
 Love shall be my religion  
 And my faith,

Mystical experiences confirmed for him the unity of religious forms, despite their external divergences

Sufism is the science of the direct knowledge of God, its doctrines and methods are derived from the Holy Qur’an and Sunnah . Sufism freely makes paradigms and tallies with Greek and even Hindu sources, and it is not at all strange that the most recent of the great revealed religions should take account of the intellectual developments which preceded it when these are compatible and useful in bridging the gape between human reason and sure knowledge of the Divine.

Sufis divide the path into three movements: makhafah (way of fear and purification) mahabbah (the way of love and sacrifice ) and ma’rifah (the way of knowledge). This cycle is present in every religion and in a sense is to be seen as an equivalent of vedantine ternary Karma (action),bhakti (devotion) and gyan (knowledge) and also within the Abrahamic tradition itself in the appearance of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, for they had already become manifest within the Sufi tradition. The Sufi doctrine has been likened to Neo-Platonism, to Vedanta , to the mystical theology of Eastern Christianity and even toTaoism , all of which it clearly resembles . Sufism itself had also left its early period of relative silence and heroic asceticism to enter into the phase of eloquent expression of love and gnosis. Thus giving it a universal status for spreading the message of love to the very core of human intellect. The Sufis say, “To get the kernel one has to break the shell” as Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi 672 AH/1273 AD, one of the greatest mystical poets puts it “Go into that ocean so that your drop of water will become one with the sea”. Also as the old rhetoric of the Sufis goes:

(All humans are sons of Adam and are parts of each other because according to their genesis they belong to the same source).

Man and cosmos are in a state of unity and harmony. Manifestation of unity upon the plane of multiplicity. It reflects in a blinding manner the unity of the divine principle, the dependence of all multiplicity upon the one, the ephemerality of the world and the positive quality of cosmic existence or creation. Milton in his *paradise lost* prays to the Holy Spirit to be given a vision of the invisible world, which would then be translated into poetry:

And chiefly thou o spirit, that dost prefer  
Before all temples th' upright heart and pure  
Instruct me, for thou know' st:

.....  
So much the rather thou celestial light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight",

The Sufi is a man whose thought keeps pace with his foot. The 'solitary' who is in the world as it is, but lives as if he was not in it at all, and adheres rather to the rule of an ideal society

(O, heart! If you have to learn ways and manners of belonging then learn from the wild duck, which inspite of living in the water, when it comes out of it , there is no trace of water on its wings)

A Sufi is a person who fulfils the constant need of an adviser, observer, devout guide and an intellectual scholar for the reflective expansion of human psyche at every level. A person who could be functionary even from his solitary recluse and inspite of his lack of any desire for propagation and exposure, he would be the voice of the hour, adhering to all ages and time with his prophetic renderings. His ideology would be an essential factor in the achievement of goals and even with the passing of time his memorable deeds would be worth following. A Sufi is a powerful antidote to the ills from which the world suffers because they are the limited few who can reach the stage of complete detachment from the material, without need of material and formal support.

Become nothing so that being become established  
As long as thou art, how can being establish itself in thee?

The fall of mankind is the result of its taking for reality something other than God: of seeing the world as a separate reality it is the result of perceiving the relativities of the world as absolute rather than the essences of being. In the modern world, impoverished of spirituality and suffocating in an ambience where ugliness has become the norm, the goal of Sufism is to lead man from the world of form to the world of spirit. As the Bible says, "the kingdom of heaven is within you" or "seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you:", but how many have received any instruction in the way of seeking or the art of knocking. All the mystical and intellectual faculties of mankind can be easily manipulated towards either good or evil. A life away from *tarbiyah* (refinement) and *tazkiyah* (self-control) is like that of an animal because there is no pity like abstinence and no ancestry better than good character. Compassion and mercy are basic

characteristics of the soul. The heart is like a power source of the glory of faith that enlightens the soul with love, brotherhood and generosity- all of them being ideals of Sufism which promotes complete submission of the self, that an act based on love alone. The opposite being hate which is the most bitter thing prevalent in this tarnished world. It converts all the gifts of nature into a disaster and all the vistas of success into hopeless as we see in various fields and aspects of human developments and so called achievements today. When this hatred becomes a part of the social framework it obstructs and diminishes the chances of benefit from developing strategies. Societies, which are in the grip of such a danger, are prone to see the deterioration and decline of human values and social upliftment. The prophet of Islam Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) has said: "The most degraded person is the one who makes enemies and the people too have enmity with him".

His cousin and son-in-law Hazrat Ali (R.A) highly revered by the Sufis as the fountainhead of esoteric doctrine and remembered for his piety, nobility and learning says: "If I were to search for a thousand enemies I would succeed but the search for a single friend would be futile"

This is a mirror in which we can see our selfish nature and vested interests behind every step we take. Ibrahim-bin- Adham, a famous Sufi born, a prince of Balkh was out hunting one day, he followed so hard after an antelope that he left his train far behind him. And God gave the antelope voice," waste thou created for this?" it said to him "who bade thee to do such things"? Sufism is actually the re-emergence of the blemished self to a paragon (model of excellence) capable of rising like immortal phoenix. As Amir khusraw the great Sufi poet puts it:

(I am a slave to the courage of the pure servant; I bow to him who lives a life free from the clutches of his evil genius).

A man of patience and perseverance will never wear a crown of greed and pretence and sit on a throne of vanity and lust at the cost of the precious lives of people, for the latter are:  
and

(The king's drum is empty from within but it makes so much that the head starts paining. Meanwhile the one who is content meager belongings truly deserves the sovereignty of land and sea).

Sufism is to bear the burdens of others but not be a burden to others. Sheikh Sa'di the famous Sufi poet of Persia says:

"The most virtuous kind of service is that when you feel strong healthy you bear the burdens of weak and poor".

(If the world inflicts you with a wound your whole being gets wounded. When you who are negligent towards others pain, you are not fit to be called a human).

Sultanul Mashaikh, Mahboob-e-Ilahi Hazrat Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya (RA) who was an epitome of both esoteric and exoteric ideas of Sufism and a remarkable amalgam of theoretical and practical viewpoints of Tasawwuf, the basic doctrine of Sufism has said:

"There are two types of worship. One is that which benefits the worshipper only like, prayer fasting, remembrance of God etc. and the second one is that which is beneficial to

others like affection, benevolence brotherhood and that is the one that holds immense rewards.

He further says:

(No one can have that amount of grief and sorrow as I have because the innumerable people who come to me tell me about their pains and perils, all of which sets deep in my heart and soul. What a strange heart it must be which listens to the agony of his brethren and still remains aloof)

Once he said;

(If someone places a thorn in your way, and you too in revenge keep another thorn there will be plenty of thorns around. The common people follow this custom of being good to their well-wishers and bad to the ill-mannered but ascetic do not follow this. They are gracious and obliging to all, whether good or bad).

Once he saw a woman drawing from a well near the Jamuna River Delhi. He asked her that why did she drink water from a well instead of the river. She replied that her husband was poor and had great difficulty to make ends meet at home. The river water infused more hunger than the water from the well. On hearing this he was shocked with grief. When he came back to the Khanqah he asked his servant to go Ghyaspur and find out the woman whose family did not drink the water from the river only because it infused hunger and ask her about her monthly expenses. He ordered the servant to give her whatever more she needed and to tell her to drink the water further on.

He believed that in serving the people, man expresses his great love for the divine power.

(Even if you were to drink wine, drop a handful on the ground, even if a sin benefits others, it does not matter)

Maulana Rum says:

(If people call you a liar and deceit, then say yes in fact I am hundred times more and go your way. If they show their anger and rebuke you, then give them salutations in return and smiling cheerfully go away)

Sufism is a way that provides access to silence hidden at the center of man's being. It is the divine trust originating in the mercy of God. It is a key given to man with which he can unlock the secret of his own existence and come to possess the forgotten and neglected treasure hidden within his being and whose attainment is possible at all time and all places. It can deliver him from the crushing storm of events in this life and the uproar of the external world without it being necessary that he abandons that world.

Khawaja Ubaydullah Ahrar Naqshbandi a remarkably powerful spiritual personality attracted large number of influential disciples, who spread out over India, Turkey, Iran and Arabia As one of the largest landowners in Transoxiana and the de facto ruler of much of the eastern Timurid kingdom, he continued to cultivate close relationships with ruling dynasties. Once he was on a visit to one of his farms with his followers and a group of ascetics there was just a single hut in the field .The people hesitated in sitting along with their ruler due to respect .Although the day was very hot and windy, he called for a horse and said that he had some important affairs to be seen. He just kept wandering in the wilderness throughout the day. He returned when the sun

started to set and it became cool. He continued to do so for as many days as they stayed at the farm, only to provide relief and comfort to his subjects.

Tasawwuf circles around the knowledge of Divine thought, giving it a complete sense of unity in which the nations of the world are all centered into a unit. Thus the trust in unity in Diversity has a wider meaning in Sufism. The great Sufi scholar and a versatile poet of Persian, Awadhi and Urdu Shah Turab Ali Qalandar of Kakori 1858 A.D (RA) says: (Good and bad are all His manifestations I seek a uniform communion with all)

(Turab! if you look at the universe with the real inward eye, all are one, no one is the other).

When the founder of the Chishti order Hazarat Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti (RA) arrived in India, he found that the country was inhabited by a sect which had a marvelous spiritual and cultural past and they had maintained their ancient traditions. Hazarat Khwaja chose Ajmer as his destination, which was the capital of Prithviraj Chauhan, the Rajput king the sacred pond of Pushkar lay in the vicinity of Ajmer, which was great Hindu pilgrimage .His immense spiritual insight and high morals and etiquettes were the main traits which established him in such an area. He said, “God keeps friends with those who are generous like the river, kind like the sun and polite like the earth”

When Maulana Jalauddin Rumi expired people from all religions and faiths were present at his funeral.

Sufism inculcates the notion that all religions are the religion of God. We can arrive to a better conclusion if we see on these lines. All the preachers, Prophets, warners and guide of the various religions followed in the world have a certain unity of thought in their renderings. These revered holy men have struggled solely for the liberation of mankind from material, destructive and vested interests giving a clear picture of a peaceful world sans war and misery. If each one of us would come to the realization that my God is the God of man we would find it impossible to greed for a world of overpowering our fellow being and infliction them with agonies. Definitely Sufism is the best way to heal and cure our physical and spiritual injuries in these turbulent times. We are brought up to believe that from about the sixteenth century onwards the east began to stagnate , whereas the West developed and progressed, Sufism is the only bridge between the East and the West spreading its wings beyond the boundaries of this mortal world .

Increasingly in this century the mediating presence of Sufism enables man to pursue a spiritual path within the conflicting and contending pressures and institutions of modern life. In a way Sufism has emerged as the deciding factor today. The love for Sufi music, literature, art and even dresses are in vogue with the modernized youth of this highly technological, nuclear age. This shows that they are in search of a realm of peace and simplicity barring them from the complications and confusions of the present system. This proves that the survival and well being of humanity is the question of the hour, which has its answer in the safe cradle of Tasawwuf or Sufism. As Hafiz the famous Persian poet of Shiraz says:

O Cup-bearer , brighten our goblet with the light of wine  
 O minstrel, tell how the world has succumbed to our desires  
 We have seen in the cup the reflection of the face of the beloved  
 O you who know nothing of the joy of our eternal wine drinking  
 He whose heart has been made living by love never dies  
 Our permanence is recorded within pages of the cosmic text.

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