A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF SUFI CRITIQUES WITHIN IMAMI SHĪ'ISM DURING THE SAFAVID ERA[*]

Sinan YILMAZ[**]

Tahir ULUÇ[***]

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Abstract

This study provides a thematic analysis of some of the criticisms of Sufism within the Iranian-Shi'i tradition since the Safavid period. These criticisms primarily focus on the origin of Sufism and argue that Sufism is alien to Shi'i thought. In ad-

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[**] Sorumlu yazar, Arş. Gör. Dr., Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi, yilmazsinan44@gmail.com, Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7385-6801, Katkı oranı: %50 / Responsible Author, PhD, Research Assistant, Mustafa Kemal University, yilmazsinan44@gmail.com, Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7385-6801, Contribution rate: 50%

[***] Prof. Dr., Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi, tuluc@erbakan.edu.tr, Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3164-4194, Katkı oranı: %50 / Prof. Necmettin Erbakan University, tuluc@erbakan.edu.tr, Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3164-4194, Contribution rate: 50%

dition, "waḥdat al-wujūd" (unity of existence), some Sufi practices that are claimed to be "bid'ah" (unorthodox innovations), and the method of "kashf" (unveiling), which is the method of obtaining knowledge in Sufism, are among the subjects of criticism. Furthermore, the Sufi concepts of "ittiḥād" (union), "ḥulūl" (incarnation), "fanā" (annihilation), and "tajallī" (theophany) are criticized on the basis of the assumption that God and human beings belong to fundamentally different ontological categories. Finally, Sufism is also subjected to criticism regarding "karāmāt" (miracles) which lack rational certainty. This study also aims at times to question the validity of the criticisms based on various arguments and to address the issues objectively.

Keywords: Sufism, Anti-Sufism, Criticism of Waḥdat al-Wujūd, Criticism of Kashf, Criticism of Bid'ah.

Safevîler Dönemi İmamiyye Şîasındaki Tasavvuf Eleştirilerinin Tematik Bir Analizi

Geniş Özet

Bu çalışma, İmâmiyye Şîası'na bağlı Safevîler döneminde Şîî-İran geleneğindeki tasavvuf eleştirilerini konu odaklı bir perspektifle analiz etmektedir. Bu söylemde yer alan tasavvuf karşıtı önemli şahsiyetleri ele almayı, onların spesifik argümanlarını ve ele aldıkları temel konuları aydınlatmayı, bu konular hakkında bazı tespitler ve değerlendirmeler sunmayı, böylece genellikle göz ardı edilen bu tartışmaları akademik ilginin ön saflarına taşımayı amaçlamaktadır. Şiîlik içinde irfanî bir geleneğin öne çıkması, tasavvuf karşıtı düşünceleri gölgede bırakmış olsa da daha yakından incelendiğinde hem Safevî döneminde hem de İran'ın çağdaş dönemlerinde tasavvufun temel ilkelerini hedef alan belirgin bir eleştiri dokusu ortaya çıkmaktadır. Tasavvufa yönelik söz konusu eleştiriler öncelikle tasavvufun kökenini sorgulamakta ve tasavvufun genel anlamda İslam'a ve özel anlamda Şiîliğe yabancılığı vurgulanmaktadır. Kökene yönelik eleştirilerde amaç, tasavvufun "yabancı" bir unsur olarak İslam geleneğine dâhil edildiği ve sahih İslam itikadı açısından sorunlu bir anlayış olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Tasavvuf karşıtları bu sayede tasavvufun İslam ile meşru bağını koparmayı hedeflemektedirler. Bu amaçla onlar sıkça tasavvufun Hint, Antik Yunan, Yeni-Platoncu ve Ehl-i Sünnet kaynaklı bir uygulama olduğunu ve "gerçek" Şiîlikle bir bağı bulunmadığını ortaya koymaya çalışırlar. Bunun yanında tasavvufun çeşitli meseleleri de eleştiri konusu yapılmaktadır. Bunlardan biri "vahdet-i vücûd" (varlığın birliği) meselesidir. Tasavvufun temel meselelerinden biri olan bu anlayışa göre varlığın birliği esastır. Bu anlayışa yönelik eleştiriler daha çok İslam'daki tevhid inancı endişesine dayandırılmaktadır. Söz konusu eleştirilere göre vahdet-i vücûd anlayışı kabul edildiğinde, Tanrı ile mahlukat aynı ontolojik kategoride değerlendirilmekte ve Tanrı "değersiz" varlıklar seviyesine indirgenmektedir. Buna karşın tasavvuf eleştirmenlerine göre İslam'ın Tanrı anlayışında Yaratıcı, hiçbir şekilde yaratılmışlar seviyesinde ya da onlarla ortak olarak görülemeyecek derecede aşkın ve yücedir. Bu sebeple bu anlayış biçimini kabul eden mutasavvıfların küfre düştükleri iddia edilir. Eleştiri konusu olan bir başka mesele bazı tasavvufî uygulamalardır. Buna göre bazı tasavvuf uygulamaları İslam şeriatında yeri olmadığı gerekçesi ile "bidat" olarak yaftalanmıştır. Özellikle sûfîlerin zikir ya da ibadet adı altında yaptıkları bazı hareketler, çıkardıkları ahenkli sesler, erkeklerin birbiriyle olan ilişkileri hem ahlakî açıdan sorunlu hem de bidat olarak değerlendirilmiş ve bunlar Kur'ân ve hadiste bir temeli olmadığı gerekçesiyle eleştirilmiştir. Tasavvufa yönelik bir başka eleştiri konusu da "keşf" yöntemi hakkındadır. Aklın ve duyusal bilginin yetersiz görüldüğü doğrudan/aracısız bilgi elde etme yöntemi olarak görü-

len keşf, tasavvuf karşıtları tarafından reddedilmiştir. Dolayısıyla bu yönteme yapılan eleştiri, keşf ile elde edilen bilgide doğruyu yanlıştan ayıracak nesnel bir ölçütün olmadığı iddiasına dayanır. Bu sebeple keşfî bilginin dinî bir bağlayıcılığı olamayacağı gerekçesiyle bu tasavvufî bilgi yöntemi de eleştiri konusu yapılmıştır. Ne var ki Şiî düşünürler nesnel ölçütün yokluğu açısından keşf yöntemini eleştirirken, aynı illetle malul imamların masumiyeti doktrinini görmezden gelmişlerdir. Dahası, keşf yöntemi, mutasavvıfların bireysel olarak başvurdukları ve dindar halkın geneli üzerinde bağlayıcılığı olmayan bir bilgi elde etme yöntemidir. Buna karşılık masumiyet iddiası söz konusu mezhebe mensup kimseler üzerinde bağlayıcılığı olan ve hiçbir nesnel veriyle denetlenemeyen bir iddia olarak kalmaktadır. Dolayısıyla Şiî düşünürlerin nesnel verilere dayanmadığı gerekçesiyle keşfe yönelik eleştirileri ile aynı durumun geçerli olduğu masumiyet meselesi arasında bir karşılaştırma yapılmıştır. Ayrıca, tasavvufun "ittihâd", "hulûl", "fenâ" ve "tecellî" kavramları bir diğer eleştiri konusudur. Bu kavramlara yapılan tenkitler de vahdet-i vücûd eleştirilerine benzer şekilde, iki ayrı varlık kategorisi olan Tanrı ve insanın aynı düzeye indirgendiği gerekçesine dayandırılır. Bu yöndeki eleştirilerde temel vurgu Tanrı ve insanın temelde iki farklı ontolojik kategoriye ait olduğu, aksi yöndeki bir anlayışın İslam Tanrı tasavvuruna aykırı olduğu varsayımına dayanır. Örneğin fenâ anlayışı ile ilgili olarak yapılan eleştirilerde, tasavvuf erbabının varlığın hakikatine dalarak elde edilen şuhûd ile varlığı görmeye çalıştıkları, böylece kendilerinden geçtikleri, buna karşılık varlıktan fâni olduklarını zannettikleri ve bu tecrübeye "fenâfillah" adını verdikleri söylenir. Dolayısıyla tasavvuf eleştirmenleri benliğin yok olması ve Allah ile insan arasında, bir damlanın denize ulaştığında yok olması anlamındaki birliği öz olarak imkânsız kabul ederler. Buna, zatıyla kâim, zatî olarak ezelî ve ebedî, saf ışık olan bir varlık olarak Tanrı ile yokluktan yaratılmış, başkasına bağlı, karanlık ve muhtaç bir varlık olarak insanın bir ve özdeş olmasının aklen imkânsız olduğu temelinde karşı çıkarlar. Son olarak tasavvuf "kerametler" konusunda bazı Şiî düşünürler tarafından eleştiriye konu edilmiştir. Bu anlayışa yapılan eleştiriler temelde kerametlerin, velîliğin kesin kanıtı olarak görülemeyeceği ve kerametlerin aklî kesinlikten yoksun olduğu esasına dayanmaktadır. Ayrıca bu eleştirilerde Uzakdoğu dinlerine mensup kimselerin de benzer kerametler gösterdikleri hatırlatılır ve kerametlere itibar edilmesi durumunda, Müslüman olmayan bu kimselerin hakikatin temsilcisi ya da evliya olarak takip edilmesinin gerekeceği vurgulanır. Dolayısıyla kerametler hem aklî kesinliğe sahip olmadığı hem de kerametler ile hakikat arasında zorunlu bir ilişki olmadığı gerekçesi ile eleştirilir. Bu çalışmada nitel verilerin incelendiği tematik analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bunun yanında Şiî ulemânın tasavvufla ilgili görüşlerinin tespit edildiği kaynak taraması ve tasavvuf eleştirilerinde kullanılan delillerin geçerliliği analiz edilmeye çalışılmış, böylece Safevîler döneminden itibaren Şiî-İran dinî geleneği içinde tasavvufun nasıl ve niçin eleştirildiğine dair kapsamlı bir tasvir sunulmaya gayret edilmiştir. Çalışma, bulguların özetlenmesi ve bu tartışmaların Şiî-İran düşüncesinin daha geniş bağlamı içindeki öneminin vurgulanmasıyla sona ermektedir.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Tasavvuf, Tasavvuf Karşıtlığı, Vahdet-i Vücûd Eleştirisi, Keşf Eleştirisi, Bidat Eleştirisi.

Introduction: Examining the Contours of Sufi Critique

Sufism, encompassing theoretical and practical dimensions, often manifests most prominently in its practice. This practical dimension, commonly referred to as "Sufism" itself, prioritizes the inner world of the heart over external appearances. Sufi practice cultivates an inward focus, emphasizing spiritual transformation over superficial expressions.

While an emphasis on the inner reigns supreme, external differences emerge between various Sufi orders, notably in attire. During the Abbasid era, for example, black was a prevalent color amongst Sufis. In contrast, Alevites favored green, while young children and students often donned yellow. Older children, in turn, were distinguished by their specific trouser style. Despite these external variations, the heart of Sufism remains anchored in its inward journey and pursuit of spiritual development.[1]

However, appearance is not the only factor that differentiates Sufi orders. Sectarian affiliation within Islam also plays a role. For instance, the Naqshbandiyya order is considered largely Sunnite in orientation, while the Bektashiyya order is partially associated with Shīʿism.[2] This diversity in sectarian affiliation highlights the complex tapestry of beliefs and practices within Sufism.

The bloody Mongol invasions and subsequent social upheavals that brought great turmoil to the Islamic world[3] significantly affected the relationship between Sufism and Shiism in Iran. Amidst widespread violence and unrest, many sought solace and spiritual refuge within Shīʿitete-leaning Sufi orders, contributing to their proliferation amongst the Shiite populace[4].

However, this burgeoning confluence during periods of crisis also underscores a long-standing tension between the two traditions. Critiques and condemnations of Sufi thought and practice marked early Shīʿism. Narrations attributed to prominent Shīʿitete

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[1]   Kāmil Muṣṭafā al-Shāʿibī, *al-Ṣila bayna al-taṣawwuf wa-al-tashayyuʿ* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1982), 1/455.

[2]   Al-Shāʿibī, *al-Ṣila bayna al-taṣawwuf wa-al-tashayyuʿ*, 1/13-14.

[3]   Hacı Ahmet Özdemir, "Moğol İstilâsından Bazı Öğrenilmiş Çaresizlik Örnekleri", *Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 29/29 (2010), 25-29.

[4]   Doğan Kaplan, "Şiîliğin İran Topraklarında Egemenliği: Safeviler Öncesi Arka Plan ve Safevi Dönemi Şiîleştirme Politikaları", *Marife-Şîa Özel Sayısı* 3 (2008), 190.

Imams like Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), 'Alī al-Riḍā (d. 818), and 'Alī al-Naqī (d. 868), for example, reveal sharp criticisms and accusations leveled against Sufis. This historical backdrop highlights the complexities inherent in understanding the evolving and often conflicting relationship between Sufism and Shī'ism within the Iranian context[5].

The existence of independent works directly targeting Sufism within the Shī'ite tradition coincides primarily with the Safavid era (1501-1736), when Akhbarism reached its zenith. Nasr suggests that the Qizilbash rebellion and the infiltration of Sufi orders by individuals seeking worldly benefits led to a political and religious backlash against the movement.[6] However, this reaction against Sufism that emerged during the Safavid era has persisted beyond the dynasty and continues to exist today. Studies conducted in this field have either explicitly focused on the Safavids or have been individual-centric, neglecting the period following the Safavids and lacking a subject-centered analysis.

During the waning years of the Safavid era, a period marked by the rise of a Sufi-influenced state,[7] the term "Sufism" itself became a target. Especially against the Shi'iteization policy of the Safavids, Sufi orders, which presented a Sunnite appearance, became the target of Safavids.[8] Therefore Shi'ite jurists, long opposed to the Sufi way, twisted its meaning, imbuing it with negativity and transforming it into a weapon of censure. In more precise terms, anyone who attracted unwanted attention risked being branded a Sufi, a label now synonymous with deviance.[9] The pioneers of this mystical tradition were not spared, condemned with epithets such as "mis-

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5   Süleyman Gökbulut, "Safevîler Devrinde Şiîliğin Yayılmasında Tasavvufun Rolü: Tasavvuf Tarihi Açısından Bir Değerlendirme", *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 15/30 (2016), 272-273.
6   Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Spiritual Movements, Philosophy And Theology in The Safavid Period", *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. Peter Jackson - Laurence Lockhart (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6/662-663.
7   'Abdulmuṭṭalib 'Abdullāh, "Dīn va Dawlat dar Aṣr-i Ṣafaviyyah", *Rahyāft-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī* 1 (1386), 98-100.
8   Abdülcebbar Kavak, "Safevîlerin Şiîleştirme Siyasetinin Mağduru Olan Bir Aile: Haydarîler ve Irak'taki Faaliyetleri", *Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 46/46 (2018), 40-42.
9   İmān Amīnī - Shahrām Pāzūkī, "Taṣawwuf dar Ṣūratbandī Goftumānī Risāla-i Radd-i Ṣūfiyyah", *Tārīkh u Tamaddūn-i Islāmī* 29 (1398), 173-174.

guided deceivers," "leaders of lying infidels," "heretics," "atheists,"[10] "chieftains of bandits," "disciples of Satan," "malefactors," and even "wolves in sheep's clothing."[11] From this point forward, Sufis have been criticized, often unfairly, in terms of issues such as "waḥdat al-wujūd" (unity of existence), "*kashf*" (unveiling), "ittiḥād" (union), "ḥulūl" (incarnation), "fanā" (annihilation), "tajallī" (theophany), and "bid'ah" (unorthodox innovation or heresy).[12]

One of the most fervent critics of Sufism during this period was Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Qummī (d. 1098/1687). Initially based in Mosul, he later settled in Qom after the city fell under Ottoman rule. However, his notoriety truly blossomed upon his appointment as Shaykh al-Islām. Not only did he vehemently oppose philosophy and Sufism, but he also denounced individuals within his own Akhbārī school of thought, such as Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679) and Mullā Khalīl Qazvīnī (d. 1089/1678), over specific theological disagreements.[13]

Enjoying a privileged relationship with the ruling powers, Qummī embarked on a mission to reshape the religious landscape of the Shī'ite world and reach a broader audience. Central to this endeavor was his desire to diminish the influence of Sufism. To achieve this, he strategically employed specific terminology and presented a Qur'ān-centric paradigm as an alternative. For instance, he championed the term "maḥabbah" (affection) over the Sufi concept of "'ishq"[14]

Qummī's preference for the term "maḥabbah" (love) over "'ishq" (passionate love) when expressing love for God reflects a

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[10] Ḥasan b. 'Alī al-Qarakī al-'Āmilī, *'Umdat al-maqāl fī kufri ahli al-ḍalāl*, ed. Sayyid Mahdī al-Rajā'ī (Qom: Maktabat Samāḥat Āyatullāh al-'Aẓīmī al-Mar'ashī al-Najafī al-Kubrā, 1389), 170.

[11] Ḥusayn 'Ābidī - Sayyid Mahdī Zarqānī, "Taḥlīl-i Guftumānī-i Risāla-i Raddiya bar Taṣawwuf dar 'Aṣr-i Ṣafaviyyah", *Pajūhashī Adabiyyāt-i Irfānī Dānishgāh-i Zahrā* 16 (1396), 131-132.

[12] Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ardabīlī, *Ḥadīqat al Shī'a*, ed. Ṣādiq Ḥasanzadah - 'Alī Akbar Zamānī Najād (Qom: Intishārāt-i Anṣāriyān, 1378), 1/755-815; Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qummī, *Tuḥfat al-akhyār*, ed. Dāvūd Ilhāmī (Qom: Ketabfurūshī Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1393), 62; Farzānah Ḥurr 'Āmilī, *Naqd-i jāmi' bar taṣawwuf*, trans. 'Abbās Jalālī (Qom: Intishārāt-i Ansāriyān, 1382), 87-105.

[13] Muhammed Ṭāhir Qummī, *Opposition to Philosophy in Safavid Iran (Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir-Qummī's Ḥikmat al-'Ārifīn)*, ed. Ata Anzali - S. M. Hadi Gerami (Boston: Brill, 2018), Introduction.

[14] Qummī, *Opposition to Philosophy in Safavid Iran*, Introduction.

long-standing debate within Sufi tradition. His stance is far from unprecedented, as many classical Sufi figures similarly avoided using the term "'ishq" when describing devotion to the Divine.

Prominent Sufi authors like Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 996), Hakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 932), Muhammad bin Ibrāhīm al-Kalābāzī (d. 990), ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), and al-Ḥujwīrī (d. 1072) either omitted "'ishq" altogether or employed it sparingly in their works, favoring "maḥabbah" to articulate the nature of divine love. However, other Sufi thinkers like Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 1126) and ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī (d. 1131) embraced "'ishq," reflecting a diversity of views within the tradition[15].

Given this historical context, Qummī's claim of establishing a uniquely Qur'an-centered alternative paradigm by championing "maḥabbah" over "'ishq" is problematic. This choice aligns him with a well-established strand of Sufi thought, making his proposed paradigm less of a departure and more of a continuation of an ongoing debate within Sufism.

Similarly, Qummī prioritized the Ḥadīth attributed to the Imams, "*Whoever dies without knowing his Imam dies in a state of ignorance,*"[16] over the oft-repeated Sufi maxim, "*He who knows himself knows his Lord*."[17] Notably, Qummī's semantic choices were not limited to Sufism; he applied the same strategy to philosophy, reinterpreting terms like "ḥikmah" (wisdom) to diverge from their established philosophical meanings.[18]

According to Qummī, the "ḥikmah" mentioned in the Qur'ān differed significantly from the understanding of "corrupt" philosophers. In the Qur'ānic context, "ḥikmah" signified obedience to God and the Imams of the time. It represented the knowledge possessed by the Imams, and the "ḥakīm" (wise) were those who recognized the "rightful Imams" and sought religious expertise from them. He asserted that the "infallible Imams" were the sole source of truth

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15 Süleyman Uludağ, "Aşk", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1991), 11-17.

16 Ebû Hâtim Muhammed b. Ḥibbân, *Ṣaḥîḥu İbn Ḥibbân*, thk. Şuayb el-Arnavûd (Beyrut: Müessesetü'r-risâle, 1993), 10/434.

17 Abū Zayd 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Umar ibn 'Īsá al-Dabūsī, *Taqwīm al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, ed. Khalīl Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Mays (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001), 452.

18 Qummī, *Opposition to Philosophy in Safavid Iran*, Introduction.

and wisdom, having received it directly from the Prophet Muḥammad.[19]

Following his teacher's footsteps, Majlisī (d. 1110/1698) also cultivated close ties with the political establishment. He wielded considerable influence over the Safavid ruler Shāh Ḥusayn (1694-1722) and even drafted a decree aimed at furthering the Shī'ite sect's objectives, which the Shāh readily approved. This decree outlawed activities deemed contrary to religion and compelled Sufis to adhere to established religious regulations.[20]

The stance adopted by figures like Qummī and Majlisī against Sufism cast a long shadow, establishing a precedent for their successors and placing Sufism firmly in the crosshairs of criticism. For example, Antonio, a Portuguese Augustinian monk who converted to Islam and took the name 'Alī-Qulu Jadīd al-Islām,[21] harshly criticized Sufis after embracing the Akhbārī school of Shī'ism in Iran. Jadīd al-Islām argued that Sufis, by failing to condemn idolaters, fire-worshippers, and even those who worshipped oxen, essentially equated these practices with the worship of the Truth. He attributed to Ibn Arabī the statement that *"Sāmirī made a statue of an ox and the Israelites worshipped it, and God did not prevent this because He desires to be worshipped in all forms."* Based on this, he declared Ibn Arabī and those who failed to refute him as infidels.[22]

This critical perspective persisted into the last century. Mujtabā al-Qazvīnī (d. 1966), for instance, expressed the following opinion regarding Sufism:

> "As for Irfan and Sufism, there is no doubt that from the emergence of Islam and the infallible Imams to the present day, jurists and Ḥadīth scholars have unanimously opposed and denied the claims of Irfan. They have abhorred the school of Sufism and Irfan. This is because the subjects of Irfan are, in reality, contradictory and opposed to the Qur'ān and the Ahl al-Bayt. These schol-

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[19] Qummī, *Opposition to Philosophy in Safavid Iran*, 71-72.

[20] Khulyā Manshārī - Fahima Mahbar Duzfūlī, "Naqd-i Sufiyah dar Rūzgārī Safaviyah: Mukāyese-i Ārāi Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Kūmī va 'Allāma Majlisī", *Tārīkh ū Tamaddūn-i Islāmī* 31 (1399), 297-298.

[21] Qummī, *Opposition to Philosophy in Safavid Iran*, Introduction.

[22] 'Alī-Qulu Jadīd al-Islām, *Risāla-i dar Raddiya bar Jamā'at-i Ṣūfīyān*, ed. Rasūl Ja'fariyān (Access December 6, 2022), 23.

ars have vehemently denied the pronouncements ema-
nating from the topics of Irfan. The Sufis and Irfanis, on
the other hand, have always been ostracized and sub-
jected to accusations of disbelief."[23]

Ultimately, it becomes clear that criticisms directed towards
Sufism often hinge on a strategy of othering. A stark division is
created between "I" and "those who belong to me" on one side, and
the "other" on the other. Within this framework, the "self" and its
affiliates are portrayed as adhering to the path of the Qurʾān, Sun-
nah, and the Imams. At the same time, the opposing view, labeled
as "foolish and deceitful," is relegated to the position of the ostra-
cized "other."[24]

1. Questioning the Roots of Sufism: Historical and Theolog-ical Perspectives:

One of the fundamental criticisms leveled at Sufism, often
through the strategy of "othering," focuses on its origins. These
critiques typically dissociate Sufism from Shīʿism, instead linking it
to various external sources such as Ancient Greece, Christianity,
Sunnite Islam, or the Far East. For instance, Mujtabā al-Qazvīnī
posits that the Sufi path transcends Islam and possesses ancient
roots, claiming that Hindus, spiritual Christians, and even some
contemporary Europeans adhere to this path.[25]

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With the express intention of demonstrating Sufism's purport-
edly non-Islamic nature, Majlisī penned the treatise "Ayn al-Ḥayāt"
as a refutation of Sufi practices. He begins by extolling the virtues
of Abū Dharr and Salmān Fārsī, attempting to redirect individuals
away from the diverse beliefs and practices of contemporary Sufism
and instead anchoring the source of "true" Islamic gnosis in these
figures.[26]

Majlisī contends that Sufism, or mysticism, is a structure with
tendrils reaching into all religions, existing in pre-Islamic traditions
like those of Greece, Christianity, and India before infiltrating Is-

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23 Shaykh Mujtabā Qazvīnī, *Bayān al-furqān fī tawḥīd al-Qurʾān* (Mashhad: Mashhad-i Muqaddas, 1389), 1/746.

24 ʿĀbidī - Zarqānī, "Taḥlīl-i Guftumānī-i Risāla-i Raddiyya bar Taṣawwuf dar ʿAṣr-i Ṣafaviyyah", 130-131.

25 Qazvīnī, *Bayān al-furqān*, 1/45.

26 Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *ʿAyn al-ḥayāt*, ed. Sayyid Mahdī Rajāʾī (Qom: Intishārāt-i Anvār al-Hudā, 1382), 1/9-41.

lam. He argues that a specific verse is not necessary to refute non-religious Sufism, deeming it superfluous and comparing it to demonstrating the invalidity of a particular sect or school of thought. According to him, such practices, devoid of any connection to Islam, can be directly dismissed based on their doctrines without resorting to a specific verse.[27]

While figures like Ḥurr Āmilī (d. 1692) have maintained that Sufism is a practice originating from Sunnite Islam,[28] this claim is more prominently voiced by Qummī. He argues that Sufi orders initially have no connection to the Shīʿa sect. With this claim, he aims to demonstrate the supposed opposition of past Sufis to religion, thereby discrediting the Sufi understanding and practices of Shīʿa Sufis in his own time.[29]

This is because, according to Qummī, this entire understanding is purely Sunnite practice. He argues that Sunnite rulers have always held these orders in high regard and built "khanqahs"[30] for them. As evidence, he points to the absence of ancient khanqahs in cities with predominantly Shīʿa populations, such as Qom, Astarabad, Jabal Amel, Sabzevar, and Hilla. Conversely, the abundance of "kumbads"[31] in cities sacred to Shīʿism, like Qom, and the contrasting abundance of khanqahs in Sunnite settlements, is presented as proof of Sufism's absence in Shīʿism.[32]

Contrary to Qummī's assertion, the historical record demonstrates that *khanqāhs* (Sufi lodges) existed in numerous regions of present-day Iran, including areas commonly identified as "Shīʿite towns," long before the periods he cites. These historical examples challenge Qummī's claim and invite a more nuanced understanding of Sufism's presence throughout Iran's history. In Tus, for example,

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27 Sayyid Qāşim ʿAlī Aḥmadī, *Sharḥ-i Risāla-i Iʿtiqād-i ʿAllāma Majlisī* (Qom: Intishārāt-i Dalīl-i Mā, 1395), 71-72.

28 ʿĀmilī, *Naqd-i jāmiʿ bar Taṣawwuf*, 227.

29 Halil Işılak, "11/17. Asırda Bir Şiî Alimin Tasavvuf, Felsefe ve Tıp Hakkında Fetvaları Muhammed Tâhir Qummī: Risāle-i Suʾāl u Javāb -Critical Edition and Analysis-", *Turkish Journal of Shiite Studies* 4/2 (2022), 182.

30 Süleyman Uludağ, "Hankah", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: TDV Yayinlari, 1997), 16/42-43.

31 Muhammet Kemaloğlu, "XI.-XIII. Yüzyıl Türkiye Selçuklu Devleti Dini Eserlerinden Kümbet, Türbe Ziyâretgâh, Nazamgâh ve Câmîler", *Akademik Bakış Dergisi* 39 (2013), 13.

32 Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qummī, *Radd-i Şūfiyyah*, ed. Riḍā Mukhtârî Hūyī (Qom: Iʿtiqād-i Mā, 1439), 67-69.

Shaykh 'Abdullāh Gurjistānī (d. 1332), a commander under 'Alā al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 1336), established a *khankāh*. In Shiraz, 'Aḍud al-Dawla (d. 983) constructed a *khankāh* for Sufis to reside. Taqiy-yuddīn Dādā Muḥammad (d. 1300), following his *shaykh*'s instructions, founded multiple *khanqāhs* in and around Yazd. Even in Kirman, under the patronage of Seljuk rulers Qāwurd Beg (d. 1073) and his son Turanshah I (d. 1097), several *khanqāhs* flourished, underscoring a pattern of Sufi presence throughout these historically significant areas. This historical evidence underscores the need to approach Qummī's assertions regarding the absence of *khanqāhs* in Shī'ite areas with considerable caution. His claims are demonstrably contradicted by historical records, highlighting the complex and often intertwined histories of Sufism and Shī'ism within the Iranian context.[33]

Associating Sufism with Sunnite Islam, Qummī criticizes this understanding through figures like Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848?), Ḥallāj Manṣūr (d. 309/922), and Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), who are considered authorities in Sufism. He aims to eliminate the influence of Sufism on Shī'ism.[34] An example reflecting this objective is his statement: "*O Shī'as and lovers of the Ahl al-Bayt! This order in question is that of Ḥallāj, Bisṭāmī, and their followers and imitators. Beware of this style, conduct, and path!*"[35]

Similarly, Qummī targets Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240). He quotes Ibn 'Arabī as saying, "*Christians did not become infidels because they said Jesus is God; rather, they fell into disbelief because they limited God to Jesus and said that there is no God but him.*" Qummī then argues that, according to this statement, all Muslims should be considered infidels because they believe in monotheism.[36]

While often associated with the Sunnite branch of Islam, Sufism has also been linked to other religious traditions. One such proponent of this connection is Mirzā Jawād Agha Tahrānī (d. 1989). He posits that with the spread of Islam in Syria, Iraq, and

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[33] Muḥsin Keyānī, *Tārīkh-i Khānqāh dar Īrān* (Tahran: Kutubkhāneh-i Tuhūrī, 1369), 193, 207, 219-220, 226.

[34] Qummī, *Tuḥfat al-akhyār*, 14; Manshārī - Duzfūlī, "Naqd-i Ṣūfiyyah dar Rūzgār-Ṣafaviyyah: Muqāyasa-i Ārā-i Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Kūmī va 'Allāma Majlisī", 294-295.

[35] Qummī, *Radd-i Ṣūfiyyah*, 55.

[36] Qummī, *Tuḥfat al-akhyār*, 59.

Egypt, Muslims came into increased contact with Christian monks, adopting their customs, beliefs, and practices. Tahrānī argues that many practices entered Islamic Sufism through the Nestorian branch of Christianity.[37]

Tahrānī also explores the historical connection between Sufism and Indian and Buddhist teachings. He suggests that trade flourished with Far Eastern countries with the expansion of Islam. Additionally, during the translation movement of the second century AH, works containing elements of Hindu and Buddhist thought were translated into Arabic. According to Tahrānī, these works contained practices such as asceticism and renunciation of worldly possessions, which form the basis of practical Sufism. Furthermore, Buddhist travelers who visited the Islamic world spread their teachings and influenced Muslim Sufis with their ascetic lifestyle. It is also noteworthy that Buddhism, with its ancient culture, was prevalent in eastern Iran, particularly in Balkh, Bukhara, and Transoxiana, before the advent of Islam.[38]

Tahrānī further identifies the Neoplatonists as another school of thought that influenced Islamic Sufism. He argues that this philosophical movement exercised the deepest impact on Sufism, providing it with a theoretical background that previously consisted primarily of practical applications. For example, Stephen Bar Sudhaile, a Neoplatonist who lived in the 5th century CE, was a mystic from Edessa (Urfa) who later migrated to Jerusalem and disseminated his teachings. According to Tahrānī, Stephen, who also wrote a commentary on the Torah, was declared an apostate by some for two reasons: his belief in the limited temporal punishment of sinners in the afterlife and his concept of waḥdat al-wujūd (unity of existence). Stephen asserted that the relationship of the entire world to God is like that of light to the sun, and all beings emanate from and return to God. In his view, the world emanates from a pure being, and the human mind must traverse various stages and states in pursuit of its perfection in this world. Upon reaching a pure being, humans must dissolve and return to it. Tahrānī argues that these ideas of Stephen spread in the regions of

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[37] Mīrzā Javād Ākā Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?* (Tehran: Neshr-i Āfāq, 1389), 43-44.

[38] Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?,* 44-48.

Iraq and Syria during the Islamic era and influenced Sufism on a theoretical level.[39]

Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī (d. 2021) is another scholar who believes the position of Sufism is problematic within the framework of Islam. He argues that Sufism's non-Islamic origins, Sufis' reluctance to observe religious practices and Sunnah, their neglect of social responsibility, and the overall incompatibility of Sufism with Islam demonstrate that it is not an authentic part of the religion. Ḥakīmī believes that Sufism is not a genuine school of thought within Islam but rather an adaptation of Stoic and Alexandrian philosophies that took on an Islamic guise during the Abbasid era.[40]

Sufism's origins have been contested, with some utilizing traditions to argue for its non-Islamic roots. Qazvīnī, for example, cites pronouncements that portray Sufism as a deviation from Islamic orthodoxy, labeling its adherents as "caliphs of Satan," "Zoroastrians of the Islamic community," and even "enemies of Muslims."[41]

Given such criticisms, the persistence of Sufism from the early days of Islam to the present day raises a crucial question: why has it endured, despite allegedly lacking integral links to Islam in general and Shīʿism in particular?

Tahrānī offers a multi-pronged response:

1. Emotional Resonance: Sufis often express their beliefs through evocative mediums like ghazals and poems, resonating with people's emotions and sensibilities.

2. Sharīʿa Adherence: Sufis demonstrably adhere to the commandments of Sharīʿa, the guiding framework for Muslims, while embracing asceticism and morality.

3. Freedom from Obligations: Sufism proposes that reaching spiritual perfection liberates one from conventional obligations and rules, a privilege typically reserved for prophets and spiritual guides.

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[39] Tahrānī, ʿĀrif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?), 52-59.
[40] Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī, "Aql-i Sorkh, ed. Muḥammad Kāẓim Ḥaydarī - Muḥammad Asfandiyārī (Qom: Intishārāt-i Dalīl-i Mā, 1391), 370-371.
[41] Qazvīnī, Bayān al-furqān, 1/61, 66.

4. Attainment of Truth: The Sufi path of spiritual wayfaring (sulūk) is presented as a means to achieve unveiling and access the ultimate truth.

5. Miraculous Attributions: Sufi shaykhs and guides are often attributed with miraculous powers, bolstering the tradition's appeal.

6. Compatibility with Scripture: Sufis assert that their practices and beliefs are compatible with the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, grounding themselves within the Islamic framework.

7. Intellectual wayfaring: Some prominent figures argue that intellectual pursuits can lead to the Sufi conception of tawḥīd (monotheism).

8. Political and Theological Support: Certain caliphs have historically favored Sufism for political and theological reasons, lending it further legitimacy.[42]

Criticisms of Sufism's origins attempt to paint it as an import – Hindu, Buddhist, Greek, or even Sunnite – lacking any authentic connection to Shī'ism. However, dismissing these criticisms entirely is difficult. Even if certain practices originated outside of Islam, the human desire for deeper spiritual engagement beyond outward rituals or legalistic interpretations of fiqh is understandable. The presence of shared elements with other religions or cultures does not necessitate outright rejection. Instead, focusing on and cultivating the beneficial aspects of these practices can be a more constructive approach.

2. Contesting the Doctrine of Waḥdat al-Wujud: Theological and Philosophical Arguments

The concept of waḥdat al-wujūd (unity of being) is central to Sufi thought, which posits a singular, unified reality—one being and existence—underpinning the cosmos. This singular being manifests through a hierarchy of levels, where the multiplicity and diversity of the universe express Divine attributes and states emanating from God's essence. According to this perspective, the world serves as a dynamic locus for the unfolding of Divine manifesta-

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[42] Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?*, 70-71.

tion[43]. Although recognized as the architect of waḥdat al-wujūd, Ibn 'Arabī did not use the term directly. It was his student, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274), who first coined the phrase "waḥdat al-wujūd," providing a philosophical articulation of his teacher's intricate metaphysical vision.[44]

Ibn 'Arabī's teachings emphasize the inherent difficulty in categorizing existence. It defies simplistic classifications like universal or particular, general or specific, transcending the limitations of "one and many." According to Ibn 'Arabī, these categories stem from the diverse levels, manifestations, and stations within existence itself. Moreover, existence cannot be neatly categorized as either substance or accident; it encompasses all—absolute, contingent, universal, particular, one, and many—within its essence and reality.[45]

A central critique of waḥdat al-wujūd within specific segments of the Shiite-Iranian tradition stems from the conviction that this understanding fundamentally undermines the Islamic concept of tawḥīd. Critics within this school of thought perceive waḥdat al-wujūd as blurring the lines between the Creator and creation, thereby compromising God's absolute oneness and transcendence. Ardabīlī (d. 1585), a prominent voice in this discourse, fiercely denounces waḥdat al-wujūd and labels its proponents as apostates, considering their interpretation a grave threat to orthodox Islam. He attributes this allegedly damaging Sufi perspective to their engagement with philosophical texts, arguing that Sufis prioritized the symbolic language of figures like Plato and incorporated ideas from heterodox philosophical schools, misconstruing them as waḥdat al-wujūd. Ardabīlī further asserts that this misinterpretation has led many astray from the true path of Islam.[46]

Qazvīnī reiterates this concern, suggesting that the opposition to Sufism amongst jurists and religious scholars arises primarily from differing understandings of tawḥīd. He argues that advocates

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[43] Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?*, 172-190.

[44] Ahmet Avni Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1987), 1/Mukaddime.

[45] Dāvūd Qayṣarī, *Fuṣūṣu'l-Ḥikem Şerḥi*, trans. Tahir Uluç (Istanbul: Ketebe Yayinevi, 2023), 25.

[46] Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ardabīlī, *Ḥadīqat al-Shī'a*, ed. Ṣādiq Ḥasanzāda - 'Alī Akbar Zamānī Najad (Qom: Intisharat-i Ansariyan, 1378), 1/752-753.

of philosophical and mystical interpretations, including proponents of waḥdat al-wujūd, employ the concept in a manner divergent from mainstream Islamic thought, potentially causing confusion and misguidance, especially amongst those lacking in-depth theological knowledge.[47]

Similarly, Tahrānī asserts that jurists, dedicated to understanding and preserving Islam, are engaged in a constant struggle against the tawḥīd espoused by the proponents of waḥdat al-wujūd. He argues that if the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth were revealed to guide humanity towards this specific understanding of tawḥīd, then the countless jurists who have diligently studied these texts should have naturally arrived at it. However, this is demonstrably not the case.[48]

Tahrānī underscores a perceived divergence between the Quranic notion of tawḥīd (divine unity) and the concept of waḥdat al-wujūd (unity of being) frequently explored within Sufi circles. From his vantage point, a genuine understanding of fiṭra (innate nature) or a deep, scholarly engagement with the Qur'an and Ḥadīth inevitably leads to a rejection of the Sufi interpretation of tawḥīd. He expresses apprehension regarding pronouncements within Sufi discourse, which he interprets as equating all beings in the universe with God, regardless of their moral or intellectual stature, ultimately culminating in the doctrine of waḥdat al-wujūd—a doctrine he deems problematic[49].

However, Tahrānī's argument, while appearing straightforward, relies on a simplification of multifaceted theological concepts. His assertion that the Quran's emphasis on tawḥīd intrinsically refutes waḥdat al-wujūd overlooks the rich diversity and nuance within Islamic thought regarding both. To suggest that fiṭra or religious knowledge guarantees a monolithic understanding of tawḥīd disregards the vibrant history of theological debates within both Sunnite and Shī'itete intellectual traditions.

Furthermore, Tahrānī's claim that Sufis equate "all beings" with God presents a reductionist view of waḥdat al-wujūd. The concept, far from promoting simplistic equivalence, grapples with a more

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[47]   Qazvīnī, *Bayān al-furqān*, 1/747.
[48]   Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?*, 325.
[49]   Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?*, 172-190, 323-324.

profound ontological relationship between Creator and creation. By portraying waḥdat al-wujūd as a mere leveling of all beings, Tahrānī circumvents engagement with the subtle metaphysical dimensions embedded within this complex philosophical and mystical perspective.

As the critiques mentioned earlier demonstrate, a central concern lies in the potential for waḥdat al-wujūd to suggest an ontological resemblance between God and humans. This concern fuels much of the criticism directed towards the concept.[50] Critics argue that God, as an indivisible and absolute being, transcends all forms of division, whether in external reality, intellect, or even the realm of imagination. From this perspective, any notion of a partnership or resemblance between God and creation on an ontological level becomes inconceivable. Therefore, the relationship between God and the universe must be one of absolute and complete contrast, precluding any possibility of identity or even a generic similarity.[51]

Criticisms directed at Sufis concerning waḥdat al-wujūd (unity of being) and its perceived violation of the Islamic principle of tawḥīd (divine unity) appear to be misguided. This misinterpretation stems from a failure to grasp the subtle distinction between waḥdat al-wujūd and waḥdat al-mawjūd (unity of existents). These are not interchangeable concepts, and a closer examination of waḥdat al-wujūd reveals its profound affirmation of God's absolute oneness. Ibn ʻArabī, a pivotal figure in the articulation of waḥdat al-wujūd, asserts that existence itself is singular and belongs solely to God. There is no other existence besides that of Allah. Consequently, within his framework, only God possesses absolute existence[52]. This understanding is vividly illustrated in Ibn ʻArabī's use of mirror symbolism. He recognizes God as the ultimate reality while perceiving creation as a mere reflection or shadow of the Divine. [1] Conflating the essence of something with its reflection or mistaking its shadow for its reality would, therefore, constitute a fundamental misreading of this doctrine.

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[50] Sinan Yılmaz, *Şiî Gelenekte Felsefe Karşıtlığı: Mekteb-i Tefkîk Örneği* (Ankara: Fecr Yayınları, 2024), 340.

[51] Muḥammad Bayābānī Askūyī, *Tawḥīd va Jabr va Ikhtiyār dar Qurʼān-i Karīm: Dars-i Guftarhāy-i Āyatullāh Sayyid Jaʻfar Saydān* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dalīl-i Mā, 1394), 91-92, 108.

[52] Konuk, *Fusûsuʼl-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 1/276.

From the Sufi perspective, the existence of another absolute and independent being alongside Allah would inevitably lead to shirk (polytheism) – a concept fundamentally antithetical to Islamic belief. Furthermore, drawing a rigid boundary between God and other beings would ultimately limit God's absolute existence[53].

Various theoretical arguments further support the unique nature of existence. The existence of two distinct beings possessing absolute existence would require a fundamental difference to distinguish them; otherwise, there would be no basis for discerning two separate existences. Conversely, if these beings shared all attributes, including necessity and existence, they would ultimately collapse into a single entity. Such an entity, composed of shared and distinct aspects, would imply dependence and negate their absolute nature. Therefore, the notion of two different, absolute existences in reality is logically untenable[54].

In conclusion, accusations of Sufis transgressing the principle of tawḥīd through waḥdat al-wujūd appear unfounded. Such criticisms stem from a lack of understanding of the intricate ontological nuances embedded within this Sufi doctrine. Rather than contradicting tawḥīd, waḥdat al-wujūd, when properly understood, offers a profound affirmation of God's absolute and singular existence.

3. The Issue of Bid'ah: Examining Sufi Practices and Beliefs

The criticisms leveled at Sufism within the Shī'ite tradition revolve around the issue of heretic innovation (bid'ah). Sufi opponents perceive any actions performed by Sufis for worship as practices lacking foundation in Islam and subsequently incorporated as extraneous elements. For instance, Qummī, in a poetic critique directed towards Sufis, denounces bid'ah as follows:

> "A group seeking to ensnare the foolish, they wear,
> Hats, cloaks, and bray like donkeys.
> Hearing the voice of a singing woman, they dance,
> They sigh at the sight of fair-faced idols.
> They sing songs like a songstress, but

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[53] Konuk, *Fusûsu'l-Hikem Tercüme ve Şerhi*, 1/Mukaddime.
[54] Muhammed Bedirhan, *Vahdet-i Vücûdu Savunmak* (Istanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2009), 528-529.

Use God as a pretext for their Sunday revelry.
Not an atom of love for God exists in their hearts,
Though they speak of love day and night.
On their heads, nothing but the desire for forelocks and curls,
While the Essence of the unseen realm was the guide for the head.
This group made thirty of their number viziers on the path of seeking religion,
And thus became disciples of the owner of dinars."[55]

Qummī's criticisms of bid'ah extend beyond poetry; he also expresses his disapproval of Sufis in prose. He contends that Sufis have misconstrued practices such as shouting, clapping, jumping, whirling, and even affection for men as forms of worship and obedience, thereby straying from the intended purpose and path of religion.[56]

Discussions and criticisms of the Sufis' practices go back even before Qummī. However, some criteria have been set to resolve these debates and doubts. For example, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī (d. 378-988) quotes them as follows:

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1- Avoiding all sins, small and big, difficult and easy.

2- To fulfill all duty acts of worship (farḍ) completely.

3- Leaving all worldly possessions, including everything he has acquired through legitimate means, more or less, to those devoted to the world.[57]

Furthermore, Qummī attempts to portray these individuals as leading immoral lives by citing various allegations regarding the relationship between Rumi and Shams, and the claim that Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī harbored affection for a young boy.[58]

These statements of Qummī about the Sufi leaders remain as accusations. The fact that these people were not condemned or

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[55] Qummī, *Tuḥfat al-akhyār*, 32.

[56] Menshārī - Duzfūlī, "Naqd-i Ṣūfiyyah dar Rūzgārī Ṣafaviyyah: Muqāyasa-i Ārā-i Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Kūmī va 'Allāma Majlisī", 192-193.

[57] Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī, *al-Luma' fī al-Taṣawwuf*, ed. Maḥmūd 'Abdulḥalīm - 'Abdulbāqī Surūr (Egypt: Dār al-Kutub, 1960), 519.

[58] 'Ābidī - Zarqānī, "Tahlīl-i Guftumānī-i Risāla-i Raddiya bar Taṣawwuf dar 'Aṣr-i Ṣafaviyyah", 134-135.

punished for these relations in their own time shows that these accusations do not reflect the truth.

Majlisī, a student of Qummī, exhibits a similar critical approach. He argues that Sufis have invented a heretic innovation called "Sufism" and claim to worship through singing and chanting, despite the absence of any Qur'ānic verse, Ḥadīth, or tradition to substantiate these innovations. Majlisī refers to these individuals as "monks" and asserts that they have gone to extremes in this practice, defying God's prohibition of monasticism. According to him, these practices are devoid of religious basis; they are bid'ah, and every bid'ah constitutes a deviation. Majlisī condemns this group, stating that they have abandoned true worship in favor of their own inventions.[59]

Jadīd al-Islām considers Sufis to be in a worse state than Christians due to the innovations they label as "worship." He argues that these individuals have turned away from the Ḥadīths of the "Imams" and instead follow "ignorant sages," mistaking dancing, singing, and love poems for genuine worship. He compares the state of Sufis to children who refuse to drink milk from their mother's breast and seek it from other sources.[60]

Qummī's categorical labeling of all Sufi practices as bid'ah (unorthodox innovations) based on a handful of selective examples represents a reductive approach that fails to acknowledge the diverse and complex nature of Sufism. Such generalizations oversimplify the rich tapestry of Sufi practices, many of which have evolved over centuries and hold significant spiritual and social importance for their adherents.

Moreover, without adequate contextualization and a sincere effort to explore the underlying reasoning and motivations behind these practices, dismissing them as blanket bid'ah risks stifling potentially valuable theological discussions and perpetuating a superficial understanding of Sufi traditions. This approach ultimately hinders the development of a more nuanced and informed appreciation of the diverse expressions within Islam.

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[59] Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *I'tiqādāt-i 'Allāma Majlisī*, ed. Ḥamīdreḍa Ājīr (Isfahan: Markaz-i Taḥqīqāt-i Rāyāneh-i Qāimiyye-i Işfahān, 1387), 33-34; Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī - Ḥusayn Dargāhī, *al-'Aqā'id* (Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Hūdā, 1378), 26-29.

[60] Jadīd al-Islām, *Risāla-i dar Raddiya bar Jamā'at-i Ṣūfiyān*, 21-22.

4. Unveiling the Truth: Critiques of Sufi Epistemology and the *Kashf* Method

Another point of contention within Shī'ite critiques of Sufism centers on *kashf* (spiritual unveiling). *Kashf* refers to the Sufi method of acquiring knowledge through spiritual revelation or unveiling. Shī'ite critics may express concerns about the validity of expertise obtained outside traditional Islamic channels of learning and scriptural interpretation. Tahrānī is among those who criticize this method, arguing that even if they are leaders of arts and Sufis, a person with reason and insight can never rely solely on *kashf* in matters of divine knowledge. He emphasizes that the Qur'ān and Sunnah are the benchmarks for discovering truths and acquiring religious knowledge. The acceptable guides on this path are the Qur'ān, which is protected from error and sin and sent by God as proof for humanity, sound reason, the Prophet, and the "infallible Imams." These guides both protect individuals from dangers and lead them to the truth. Therefore, he believes that it is incorrect to blindly follow a philosopher or murshid (spiritual guide) simply because countless dreams or hundreds of other things have been confirmed in them, as *kashf* alone cannot be considered sufficient evidence for proving anything for a rational person.[61]

In this context, Tahrānī also criticizes Ibn 'Arabī, arguing that Ibn 'Arabī praises himself with lofty language, both in his own words and through the words of the Prophet. According to Tahrānī, Ibn 'Arabī's true intention in his pronouncements about *kashf* is not to praise God or the Prophet but rather to elevate himself above all else.[62]

In this critique, Tahrānī seems less interested in scrutinizing the validity of *kashf* itself and more focused on directing his criticism towards Ibn 'Arabī, claiming a paradoxical intent to praise him through this attack. However, it is essential to recognize that *kashf* within Sufism predates Ibn 'Arabī considerably, finding support and articulation among various Sufi thinkers before him.

For instance, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj al-Ṭūsī, a prominent early Sufi, eloquently describes *kashf* as follows: "*Kashf* is a luminous knowledge that emerges without difficulty and is easily grasped; it

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[61] Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?*, 199-201.
[62] Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?*, 216-219.

is as if one has seen it with one's own eyes."[63] This illustrates that *kashf*, as an epistemological tool within Sufism, possesses a historical lineage that extends far beyond Ibn 'Arabī's contributions.

Like Tahrānī, Ḥakīmī also takes issue with the validity of Sufi unveilings as evidence, drawing upon the ideas of Ibn 'Arabī. He argues that gnostic knowledge hinges on *kashf*, which itself is contingent upon sulūk (spiritual wayfaring) with its various components. However, Ḥakīmī points out that certain aspects of sulūk can be intertwined with satanic illusions and falsehoods, which Ibn 'Arabī terms "satanic thoughts." Discerning these deceptive elements, according to Ḥakīmī, is not readily achievable for everyone.[64]

Consequently, Ḥakīmī asserts that *kashf* can only serve as evidence for the individual experiencing it and holds no weight for others. He further contends that basing reasoning on the data gleaned from *kashf* and spiritual practices lacks methodological soundness. Just as *kashf* itself is not evidence, Ḥakīmī argues, Sufi understandings built upon its claims amount to nothing more than a collection of unsubstantiated assertions. Accepting such claims as evidence without having personally experienced *kashf* constitutes mere imitation of the Sufi rather than the establishment of genuine knowledge.[65]

Shahroudi, drawing on his interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī's writings, critiques the validity of *kashf* by attributing to it "satanic thoughts," arguing that the inherent fallacy of this method is revealed within the Sufi tradition itself. He highlights the Sufi recognition of both satanic and divine unveilings, claiming that distinguishing between these two sources requires proof—proof he asserts Sufis cannot provide[66].

However, Shahroudi overlooks the sophisticated discussions within Sufi discourse regarding this issue. Kalābāzī (d. 380/990), a prominent Sufi author, offers a detailed analysis of *kashf* through a framework of four distinct types:

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[63] Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Lumaʿ*, 422.
[64] Ḥakīmī, *ʿAql-i Sorkh*, 73-75.
[65] Ḥakīmī, *ʿAql-i Sorkh*, 71.
[66] ʿAlī Namāzī Shahrūdī, *Tārīkh-i Falsafe va Taṣavvuf: Yā Munāzere-i Doktor bā Sayyāḥ-i Piyāde* (Mashhad: Velāyat, 1392), 78.

1. Divine Inspiration: Awakening individuals from heedlessness.

2. Angelic Inspiration: Increasing one's zeal for worship.

3. Inspiration from the Lower Self: Leading to lustful desires.

4. Satanic Inspiration: Beautifying and glorifying sin.

Kalābāzī clearly distinguishes between these various sources of unveiling, asserting that only divine and angelic inspirations should be accepted while inspirations emanating from the lower self and the Devil must be rejected[67].

Therefore, Shahroudi's criticism, rather than highlighting a fundamental flaw in *kashf*, unwittingly points to an established discourse within Sufism on discerning genuine divine inspiration from deceptive satanic or ego-driven influences. This *sophisticated* internal debate underscores that Sufi tradition has grappled with the complexities surrounding *kashf*, rather than naively accepting all unveilings as inherently true.

However, Shahroudī argues, we lack definitive proof regarding the nature of these unveilings, rendering them subjective and devoid of objective reality. He further points to the disagreements among Sufis not only in religious principles but also within their ranks regarding their beliefs. Despite relying on kashf and direct experience, each group accuses others of deviation. Shahroudī sees this discord as proof of their error, suggesting that Satan acts as their guide and companion, leading them astray from the true Sharī'a. He further contends that Sufis portray the Sharī'a and religious principles as impediments to attaining the truth.[68]

Ja'far Saydan joins the chorus of scholars criticizing the method of *kashf*, drawing attention to the discrepancies among Sufi experiences. He argues that the inherent subjectivity of *kashf*, where one person's unveilings often diverge from and contradict another's, necessitates a criterion beyond *kashf* to distinguish truth from falsehood. Additionally, Seydan raises the possibility that what is unveiled in *kashf* may be a byproduct of spiritual practices and pre-

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67 Muḥammad bin Ibrāhīm Kalābāzī, *al-Taʿarruf li-madhhabi ahl at-taṣawwuf*, ed. Arthur John Arberry (London: Bayt al-Warrāq Publishing, 2010), 120.

68 Shahrūdī, *Tārīkh-i Felsefe va Taṣavvuf*, 78.

paratory techniques rather than actual truths. He draws an analogy to using certain medications, which can induce experiences that feel real but lack objective reality. Similarly, Seydan argues, spiritual practices can lead to misperceptions of reality due to the altered state they induce.[69]

In conclusion, the concept of *kashf* remains a focal point of contention within Shī'itete critiques of Sufism. Critics argue that the knowledge produced through *kashf* lacks a transparent and verifiable method, setting it apart from knowledge obtained through reason, sensory data, or even established practices within Sufism itself. *Kashf*, by its nature, hinges upon the personal, subjective experiences of the individual seeker. This emphasis on individual experience poses inherent challenges in achieving universal acceptance of *kashf*-derived knowledge as objective truth. The difficulties associated with objectively verifying knowledge attained through *kashf* underpin the sustained critiques directed at this central Sufi practice.

However, the Shī'itete critique that knowledge derived from *kashf* lacks objective verification also applies to the Shī'itete doctrine of the infallibility of Imams –a cornerstone of Shī'itete theology. Shī'itete thinkers have substantiated the Imams' infallibility based on various arguments[70], claiming that continuing the Sharī'a until the Day of Judgment necessitates infallible Imams to safeguard its correct application[71].

This claim, however, while binding for all members of the Shi'a sect, lacks grounding in verifiable objective data. The belief in the infallibility of the Imams, a fundamental tenet for Shī'itetes, cannot be assessed or validated through rational principles. Consequently, a critical inconsistency arises. While confident Shī'itete thinkers readily criticize Sufism for its reliance on the non-verifiable method of *kashf* –a method not obligatory for all individuals–they often overlook the similar lack of verifiability inherent in the doctrine of the Imams' infallibility, a belief binding for all members of their

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69 Sayyid Ja'far Saydān, "Maktab-i Tafkīk Chi Mi Gūyed?", *Sefîr-i Nūr* 1 (1384), 69.
70 Cemil Hakyemez, "İmamiyye Şiasında İsmet İnancı –İlk Tezahürleri, Teşekkülü ve İtikadîleşmesi–", *Marife Dini Araştırmalar Dergisi* 1 (2007), 170-171.
71 Mustafa Yalçınkaya, "Şia'da İmamların Masumiyeti Telakkisi ve Arka Planı", *Uluslararası Anadolu Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 5/4 (2021), 1572-1573.

own sect. This double standard underscores an objective incon-sistency within Shīʿitete critiques of Sufi epistemology.

5. Criticisms of Concepts Such As Union (Ittiḥād), Incarna-tion (Ḥulūl), Annihilation (Fanā), and Theophany (Tajallī)

Sufism often encounters criticism concerning certain vital con-cepts central to its tradition. While fanā' (annihilation) and tajallī (theophany) are established principles within Sufi thought, other notions like ittiḥād (union) and ḥulūl (incarnation) –often mistak-enly attributed to Sufism– are frequently met with resistance and misunderstanding. It is crucial to distinguish between ittiḥād and waḥdat al-wujūd (unity of being) within this context. While ittiḥād typically refers to a transient psychological state where a Sufi expe-riences a feeling of complete oneness with God, waḥdat al-wujūd signifies a more profound ontological unity between God and the cosmos, often understood as God being the sole ontological source or ground of all existence.

Critics of these concepts often dismiss them as mere states ex-perienced within the realms of imagination or dreams, products of spiritual practices but lacking inherent truth. These criticisms usual-ly stem from a belief that such ideas constitute disbelief, associating them with heretical views. A notable example is Majlisī's vehement denunciation of ḥulūl. He draws a parallel between it and the Christian concept of God incarnating in Jesus, which he rejects, arguing that Sufis endorse similar and equally erroneous asser-tions.[72]

Furthermore, Majlisī argues that some Sufis, while avoiding the concept of ḥulūl, have embraced the even "more hideous" concept of ittiḥād, claiming that God unites with everything, manifesting in forms as diverse as a cat, a wave in the sea, or a human being. Maj-lisī asserts that these "blasphemies" uttered in the name of ittiḥād are borrowed from Indian traditions, and some "wretched" Shīʿis have been misled into disbelief by mistaking them for truths.[73]

Jadīd al-Islām, on the other hand, draws parallels between these Sufi concepts and Christianity. He argues that Christianity advocates for achieving union with the Father and the Holy Spirit

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[72] Aḥmadī, *Sharḥ-i Risāla-i Iʿtiqād-i ʿAllāma Majlisī*, 206-207.
[73] "Majlisī, *ʿAyn al-ḥayāt*, 1/89-91.

through asceticism, mirroring the Sufi claim of attaining union with God through similar practices and traversing various spiritual stages. Additionally, he sees a shared approach between the Christian concept of the Trinity (waḥdat al-thalūth) and the Sufi concept of waḥdat al-wujūd.[74]

Similarly, the concept of tajallī, i.e., theophany, also raises theological concerns. Morvarid, for example, identifies four types of tajallī and highlights the associated issues. The first type refers to the reappearance of something, like the rising sun after its disappearance. The second type denotes the manifestation of the cause in its effect, like the sun being visible through its emanating light. The third type signifies the manifestation of a single reality in various states of its own, like water appearing as liquid, vapor, or ice, which parallels the Sufi belief in manifesting the reality of existence in particular and limited beings. The fourth type refers to the manifestation of the Creator through the subtlety and elegance He has instilled in His creations. In other words, God's existence and perfection are revealed in His creatures through their elegance and beauty, serving as His signs.[75]

Morvarid contends that applying the first three types of tajallī to God is theologically unsound. He argues that the first type, characterized by disappearance and reappearance, cannot be meaningfully applied to God in a general sense. The second type, involving concepts like emanation and origination, is deemed invalid for God from rational and Qur'ānic perspectives. Finally, the third type is rejected because it implies change and transformation within God's essence, which Morvarid deems incompatible with the Islamic understanding of God's immutability. He emphasizes a fundamental distinction between finite, limited beings and the infinite, self-existent God. For Morvarid, it is inconceivable for God, who exists through Himself, to transform into beings inherently characterized by limitations and dependence on others for knowledge and consciousness. Therefore, he asserts that only the fourth type of tajallī, which emphasizes God's self-disclosure without compromising His essence, is legitimate and reflected in relevant religious texts.[76]

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[74] Jadīd al-Islām, *Risāla-i dar Raddiya bar Jamā'at-i Ṣūfiyān*, 18.
[75] Mīrzā Ḥasan'alī Morvārīd, *Mabda' va Ma'ād dar Maktab-i Ahl-i Bayt*, trans. Abū al-Qāsim Tajrī Golestānī (Qom: Mu'assasa-i Intishārāt-i Dār al-'Ilm, 1383), 136-137.
[76] Morvārīd, *Mabda' va Ma'ād*, 137-139.

Similarly, the Sufi concept of fanā (annihilation) is viewed as problematic from a theological standpoint. For instance, Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī (d. 1946) critiques the Sufi practice of attempting to apprehend existence by negating their individual selves and immersing themselves in the reality of existence through direct experience. He argues that this practice leads to the erroneous belief that they have been annihilated in fact, a state termed fanāfillah (annihilation in God). Iṣfahānī further criticizes the rigorous asceticism employed by Sufis to achieve this state, which they consider the pinnacle of spiritual perfection.[77]

Echoing Iṣfahānī's concerns, Morvarid also addresses the impossibility of union with God's essence. He argues that if fanā implies the annihilation of the self and a union between God and humans akin to a drop disappearing into the sea, such unity is fundamentally impossible. This impossibility stems from the categorical difference between a created being – contingent, dependent, and limited – and the eternal, self-subsistent, and purely luminous God. Additionally, Morvarid posits that the notion of complete unity contradicts the state of witnessing, where acts of worship and hardship highlight our dependence on God and underscore the contrast between Creator and creation. Consequently, he deems such union claims invalid, suggesting that Sufis have conflated truth and falsehood in their mystical experiences.[78]

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Tahrānī further critiques the concept of fanā through the lens of dreams. He draws an analogy between the Sufi experience of annihilation in God and a dream where someone encounters his beloved. Even after waking, the dreamer experiences intense longing and ecstasy, but the dream's vividness does not validate its reality. Similarly, Tahrānī implies that the subjective experiences of Sufis do not necessarily reflect ontological truths.[79]

Tahrānī posits a compelling correlation between the stages (maqāmāt) of Sufism and Buddhist practices. He argues that the Sufi's progression through various stations culminating in fanā, the annihilation of the self, bears a striking resemblance to a core Bud-

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[77] Mīrzā Mahdī Isfahānī, *Tarjama-i Abvāb al-Hudā*, trans. Ḥusayn Mufīd (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Munīr, 1389), 162.

[78] Morvārīd, *Mabda' ve Ma'ād*, 195-196.

[79] Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?*, 143.

dhist practice. Notably, Buddhism identifies eight stations along the path to enlightenment, while Islamic Sufism employs a distinct nomenclature for analogous stages. Interestingly, the Sufi practice of murāqaba mirrors the Buddhist concept of dhyana, both culminating in the state of unification where the knower and the known coalesce.[80]

Ḥakīmī aligns himself with Tahrānī's observations, proposing a discernible influence of Buddhist thought on Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848). Ḥakīmī argues for a conceptual equivalence between Bāyazīd Bisṭāmi's concept of fanā fillāh, annihilation in God, and the Buddhist notion of nirvana.[81]

Criticisms directed towards Taṣawwuf concerning concepts such as ittiḥād (union), ḥulūl (incarnation), fanā (annihilation), and tajallī (manifestation) warrant a nuanced analysis. One line of critique stems from a literal interpretation of these concepts. If these terms are construed as signifying a literal union between God and man, or the incarnation of God in a human body, then the criticisms hold significant weight. Such an interpretation contradicts the established Islamic conception of God as a transcendent and absolute Creator, distinct from and infinitely superior to His creation.

Alternatively, these concepts can be interpreted in an abstract sense. If Sufis employ these terms metaphorically to convey the essence of absolute devotion on the path of God and the complete annihilation of the ego, then the criticisms may not be as theologically problematic as initially perceived.

6. The Question of Karāmāt: Assessing the Validity of Sufi Miracles

Sufis often designate individuals they deem as walīs (saints) as spiritual guides, attributing to them titles like pīr, murshid, shaykh, or perfect 'ārif. These individuals are believed to have attained inner truths and reached the stations of spiritual witnessing (shuhūd) and annihilation (fanā) [82].

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80   Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?*, 44-48.
81   Muḥammad Riḍā Ḥakīmī, *Maktab-i Tafkīk* (Qom: Intishārāt-i Dalīl-i Mā, 1383), 401.
82   Tahrānī, *'Ārif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?*, 112-120.

However, this understanding of a walī is also subject to criticism. Iṣfahānī, for example, argues that the mere display of miracles cannot be considered evidence of divine favor or sainthood. He emphasizes the need for reason and sacred knowledge to validate such claims, suggesting that miracles can even be a means of testing and deception. Therefore, even if a shaykh performs numerous miracles, Iṣfahānī maintains that this alone does not demonstrate his spiritual status. He further emphasizes the invalidity of submitting to others in matters of faith without critical examination[83].

Iṣfahānī's student, Shaykh Maḥmūd Ḥalabī, recounts a warning his teacher gave regarding Sufis:

> "If a Sufi in a cloak comes to you and relates something that belongs to you, do not become his disciple and be deceived by this, saying, 'This Sufi knows our hearts.' For these are not the saints of God. Sufism is merely an art. Through asceticism, a person becomes strong and can gauge the thoughts of others."[84]

Tahrānī, like Iṣfahānī, rejects miracles as evidence of sainthood in Sufism. He identifies two key problems: firstly, the rational uncertainty surrounding the authenticity of miracles, and secondly, the observation of similar phenomena among non-Islamic traditions, which clearly cannot be considered evidence of divine favor[85].

Tahrānī's critique of Sufi miracles reveals two prominent concerns. First, he points to the epistemological problem surrounding these extraordinary events. From his perspective, the occurrence of miracles lacks rational certainty, meaning their authenticity cannot be established through objective data or verification methods. Consequently, we lack the capacity to discern genuine miracles from fabricated claims or illusions.

His second emphasis is more theologically rooted. Tahrānī argues that witnessing seemingly miraculous events performed by individuals outside the Islamic fold does not necessarily validate

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83 Isfahānī, *Tarjama-i Abwāb al-Hudā*, 361-362.
84 ʿAlī Akbar Kavtharī, *Shinākhtnāma-i Faqīh-i Ahl-i Bayt Āyatullāh Mīrzā Mahdī Iṣfahānī*, ed. Muʾassase-i Maʿārif-i Ahl-i Bayt (Qom: Nashr-i Maʿārif-i Ahl-i Bayt, 1396), 302-303.
85 Tahrānī, *ʿĀrif va Ṣūfī Chi Mī Gūyend?*, 112-120.

their spiritual authority or beliefs. He cautions against attributing inherent divine endorsement solely based on the performance of miracles.

However, this critique of miracles lack of objective verifiability inadvertently mirrors a similar problem within Shī'ite theology — the doctrine of the infallibility of Imams. While this tenet remains central to Shī'ims, it does not rest on empirically verifiable data. This presents a potential vulnerability for Shī'ite thinkers who criticize Sufism for the unverifiable nature of miracles, as they simultaneously uphold a core tenet within their own tradition that also lacks objective verification.

Ultimately, as Tahrānī rightly points out, discerning the true nature of miracles solely through reason poses inherent challenges. Illusions created by magicians, for instance, demonstrate how readily perceived miracles can be deconstructed and revealed as mere trickery. Likewise, witnessing extraordinary feats performed by those outside the Islamic tradition does not necessarily confirm their spiritual claims. Therefore, relying solely on miracles as a criterion for evaluating spiritual authenticity is fraught with complexities. This perspective lends credence to the critiques of Sufism that question the emphasis on miracles as a defining marker of spiritual authority.

Conclusion

This study has traced the contours of Sufi critiques within the Imamite Shī'a tradition from the Safavid era to the present day, revealing a persistent pattern of questioning Sufism's place within Islam and, specifically, Shī'itesm. These criticisms often rely on a rhetoric of "othering," casting Sufism as a foreign import lacking authentic roots in Islamic tradition. While such pronouncements often neglect the historical reality of Sufism's complex relationship with Shī'itesm and other intellectual currents, they nonetheless highlight areas of genuine tension and disagreement.

Central to these critiques is the concept of tawḥīd (divine unity). From the origins of Sufism to its core doctrines, such as waḥdat al-wujūd (unity of being), Sufi thought and practice are seen as potentially blurring the line between Creator and creation, undermining God's absolute oneness and transcendence. While such critiques often resort to simplification and selective interpreta-

tions of Sufi thought, they forcefully articulate an enduring concern within Shīʿitete theology.

Beyond tawḥīd, Sufi practices labeled as bidʿah, the epistemologically contested method of *kashf* , and the difficult concepts of ittiḥād, ḥulūl, fanā, and tajallī, along with the issue of Sufi miracles, further fuel these critiques. What emerges is a multifaceted and often contentious discourse on authority, epistemology, and the permissible bounds of spiritual experience within Islam.

The persistent recurrence of these criticisms from the Safavid era to today underscores a deeply rooted concern within specific segments of Shīʿitete thought. However, it's crucial to avoid overgeneralization and recognize the inherent diversity of perspectives within Shīʿitesm itself. Not all Shīʿitete thinkers have adopted a wholesale rejection of Sufism, and many have sought reconciliations or engaged in more nuanced dialogues with Sufi ideas.

Instead of succumbing to essentializing categories and sweeping judgments, future scholarship should strive to engage with this complex intellectual landscape in all its diversity. Further exploration of these critiques' specific arguments, contexts, and motivations will contribute to a richer and more accurate understanding of the dynamic relationship between Sufism and Shīʿitesm within Iranian intellectual history. Such an approach will pave the way for more constructive dialogues and help bridge artificial divides, fostering a deeper appreciation of the rich tapestry of Islamic thought.

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