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RESTATEMENT OF CONTEMPORARY SUFI EPISTEMOLOGY: THE CASE OF BADI'UZZAMAN SA'ID NURSI

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the epistemological construct of Sufism according to Sa'id Nursi in the contemporary era. Sufism is seen as having deviant concepts and practices contrary to Shari'a in the modern era. Some muslim and non−muslim thinkers argue that Sufism does not originate from Islam. Therefore, there needs to be an effort to decipher this misunderstanding by exposing how Sufism's epistemology was genuinely constructed by referring to the teachings and practices of a contemporary Sufi, Sa'id Nursi. This study is qualitative library research. Data in this study, both primary and secondary, were collected using documentary techniques. The collected data were analyzed utilizing the content analysis method. This work finds that Nursi outlines four pillars of Sufism epistemology. First, true Sufism is based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, internalized and manifested through the soul and heart, as is the view of the authoritative Sufis. Second, purification of the teachings and practices of Sufism must depart from the purgation of the heart and soul. Third, social equality refers to carrying out life's values, meaning that all are equal before Allah SWT. Fourth, consistently instill the Qur'an's four values: *tauhid* (unity and oneness of God), *nubuwah* (prophecy), *hashr* (resurrection), and *'adl* (justice).

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi konstruk epistemologi tasawuf menurut Said Nursi pada era kontemporer. Tasawuf dipandang memiliki konsep dan praktik menyimpang yang bertentangan dengan syariat Islam di era modern. Bahkan beberapa pemikir muslim dan non-muslim berpendapat bahwa tasawuf tidak berasal dari Islam. Oleh karena itu, perlu ada upaya untuk mengurai kesalahpahaman ini dengan menampilkan bagaimana bangunan epistemologi tasawuf itu sebenarnya dengan merujuk kepada pemikiran seorang Sufi kontemporer, Sa'id Nursi. Kajian ini merupakan studi kepustakaan yang bersifat kualitatif. Data dalam penelitian ini; baik primer maupun sekunder, dikumpulkan menggunakan teknik dokumentar. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan metode analisis konten. Studi ini menemukan bahwa Nursi menguraikan empat pilar epistemologi tasawuf. Pertama, tasawuf yang sejati itu berlandaskan pada al-Qur'an dan Sunnah yang dihayati dan diwujudkan melalui hati dan akal, seperti pandangan para sufi otoritatif pada umumnya. Kedua, pemurnian kembali ajaran tasawuf harus berangkat dari penyucian hati dan jiwa. Ketiga, kesetaraan sosial adalah acuan dalam menjalankan nilai-nilai kehidupan, artinya semua sama di hadapan Allah SWT. Keempat, konsisten dalam upaya menanamkan empat nilai dalam al-Qur'an, yakni tauhid, nubuwah, hasyr, dan 'adl.

Background

The epistemological study of Sufism is essential to the intellectual and spiritual tradition of Islam. Sufism's epistemological framework has occasionally impeded the development of its teachings and doctrines as well as the acceptance of its orthodoxy throughout its history.[1]

Sufism is frequently regarded as having erroneous teachings and practices that contradict Islamic law. For authentic Sufis, however, such deviations from the Sufi path constitute pseudo－Sufism.[2] Pseudo－Sufis legitimize their teachings and practices even though they are derived from superstition (*khurafat*), and heresy.[3] This error starts from heretical sources and then influences followers of Sufism to carry out practices such as the cult and purification of tombs in the hope of gaining intersession (*wasilah*) of their inhabitants, who are considered to have spiritual privileges.[4] Therefore, it is necessary to restate the true epistemological structure of Sufism so that its teachings and practices can be properly understood and applied and to reestablish its orthodox credentials.

Furthermore, there is an argument that Sufism is not purely derived from the Islamic tradition. This opinion was put forward by orientalists such as Ignaz Goldziher, Alsin Palacios, Alfred von Kremer and R. A. Nicholson, who saw that Sufism originated from Christianity.[5] This argument is incorrect because Sufism is an Islamic intellectual and spiritual tradition.[6] This can be proven by the existence of Sufis such as Ibn Arabi,[7] al Jili, al－Ghazali, and later Said Nursi. Said Nursi practiced Sufism daily, even though he did not mention a particular order he was attached to. This proves that Sufism is an inseparable part of Islam.[8]

The author's previous research dealt with the epistemological construct of Sufism. However, previous researchers have focused on one figure, including "Epistemology of Modern Sufism: the Study of Hamka's Modern Sufism Book,"[9] "Nursi's Sufism Concept, a Refreshment of Contemporary Sufism Discourse,"[10] "Junaid Al－Baghdadi Sufism and Its Implications in the Contemporary Era,"[11] "Sufism in the Modern Era (Comprehensive

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[1] Abdul Kadir Riyadi, "Jalan Baru Tasawuf: Kajian Tentang Gagasan Abu Bakr Al－Kalabazi," *Tsaqafah* 11, no. 1 (2015): 29, https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v11i1.252.

[2] Nur Hadi Ihsan et al., "Sufi Epistemology: Being the Earliest Exposition in Kitвb Al－Luma' of Al－Sarrвj and its Manifestation in the Works of Indonesian Sufis," *Tsaqafah* 17, no. 2 (2022): 275－302, https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v17i2.7104.

[3] Muhammad Azhar dan Hamim Ilyas (ed), "Pengembangan Pemikiran Keislaman Muhammadiyah: Purifikasi dan Dinamisasi" (Yogyakarta: PP. Majelis Tarjih dan PPI & LPPI U MY, 2000), 120.

[4] Bahwan, "Konstruksi Sosial dalam Tradisi Keagamaan (Analisis Tentang Praktik Ziarah Makam Keramat di Lombok)" (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2019), 115－55.

[5] Taufik Abdullah and Dkk, *Ensiklopedi Tematis Dunia Islam: Pemikiran dan Peradaban*, vol. 4 (Jakarta: Ichtiar Baru Van Hoeve, 2002).

[6] Riyadi, "Jalan Baru Tasawuf: Kajian Tentang Gagasan Abu Bakr Al－Kalabazi."

[7] William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Pakistan: Suhail Academy Lahore, 2000), 145－90.

[8] Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Siratu Dzatiyah*, trans. Ihsan Kasim Salihi (Istanbul: Sozler Nesriyat, 1998), 268.

[9] Selamet Hariyanto, "Epistemologi Tasawuf Modern (Telaah Atas Buku Tasawuf Modern Karya Hamka)" (IAIN Surakarta, 2017).

[10] Muhammad Faiz, "Konsep Tasawuf Said Nursi: Satu Penyegaran Wacana Sufisme Kontemporer," *Al-Zehra* (Dershane Mesir, 2015), 1－14.

[11] Atika Yulanda and Ario Putra, "Tasawuf Junaid Al－Baghdadi dan Implikasinya di Era Kontemporer," *Manthiq* 5, no. 2 (2020): 74－85.

Study of Neo－Sufism)."[12] "Sufi Epistemology: Being the Earliest Exposition in Kitвb al－Luma' of al－Sarrвj and its Manifestation in the Works of Indonesian Sufis."[13] The novelty of the present paper lies in its emphasis on the epistemological construct of Sufism by a contemporary Sufi to understand Sufism reasonably and proportionally.

Using library research and content analysis methods, this article attempts to explain the epistemological structure of Sufism by reference to a contemporary Sufi figure, Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi.[14] First it provides a brief overview of the history of Sufism. Then it deals with the epistemological principles of Nursi's Sufism.

History and Development of Sufism

The Sufi tradition can be said to have existed in the early Islamic period. Amin Syukur mentions that Sufism when through five periods. First is the formative period. This period started from the time of the Prophet and the Righteous Caliphs. Although the use of the term *sufi* was not employed, this does not mean that the practice did not exist. Sufism can be said to exist in the discipline of fasting, asceticism, and other spiritual practices, which was exemplified by the Prophet and his companions, who fasted throughout the days, prayed, and read the Qur'an at night. The companions who practiced asceticism were Abu Darda', Abu Dzar al－Ghifari, Bahlul bin Zubaid, and Kahmas al－Hilali. Furthermore, in the middle of the 2nd century Hijri, Hasan Basri (110 H/ 728 AD), the first and most famous ascetic (*zahid*) figure, appeared first by sharing the teachings of *khauf* (fear) and *raja'* (hope). Then, several teachers joined him, who wanted to improve the spiritual life of Muslims. Furthermore, in the 2nd century Hijri, a female *zahid* from Basrah, Iraq appeared, named Rabi'ah al－Adawiyah (185 H/ 801 AD). Rabi'ah expressed the teachings of love for God (*hubbullah*). With this teaching, she entirely devoted herself to God by eliminating the hope of getting rewards for heaven and fear of the punishment of hell.[15]

The second period is the development period. This period occurred between the 3rd and the 4th centuries H. At the beginning of the third century Hijriyyah, the discourse on *zuhd* (asceticism) began to be replaced by a recognizably "Sufi" path. The expansion of Sufi teachings was also marked by the promotion of a spirituality that went beyond mere asceticism. This period was identified with many new concepts and terminologies such as *maqam* (station), *hal* (condition) *ma'rifah* (direct knowledge of Allah), *fana'* (annihilation), *hulul* (amalgamation), etc. The notable figures of this period included Ma'ruf al－Karkhi (200 H), Abu Sulaiman Ad－Darani (254 H), Dzun Nun Al－Mishri (245 H), and Junaid al－Baghdadi.[16] In the later period, several Sufi figures appeared, such as Abu Yazid Al－Bustami (261 H) with his teachings on *fana'* (annihilation), *liqa'* (meeting with God), and *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being or the union of the servant with God), Abu Mansur Al－Hallaj (309 H) with his teachings on *hulul* (God's incarnation), *nur Muhammad* (the light

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[12] Muhammad Sakdullah, "Tasawuf di Era Modernitas (Kajian Komperhensif Seputar Neo－Sufisme)," *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses* 3, no. 2 (2020), https://doi.org/10.14421/lijid.v3i2.2504.

[13] Ihsan et al., "Sufi Epistemology: Being the Earliest Exposition in Kitвb Al－Luma' of Al－Sarrвj and its Manifestation in the Works of Indonesian Sufis."

[14] Imam Suprayogo and Tobroni, *Metodologi Penelitian Sosial Agama*, ed. Miftah F Rahmat (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2003), 71.

[15] M. Amin Syukur, *Menggugat Tasauf : Sufisme dan Tanggung Jawab Sosial Abad 21* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2002), 30.

[16] Haidar Bagir, *Buku Saku Tasawuf*, 2nd ed. (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2006), 100.

of Muhammad), and *wahdatul adyan* (unity of religions). Other Sufi teachings were *wahdat as-syuhud* (oneness of witnessing), *Ittishal* (union with God), *jamal wal-kamal* (beauty and perfection of God), and *insan kamil* (the perfect human). These concepts then cannot be obtained without spiritual discipline (*riyadhah*).[17]

The third is the consolidation period (5th century). This period continued the debates between the two schools of thought in the previous Sunni and Mu'tazilah periods. In this period, the Sunni school of Sufism won the battle, and this was part of the victory of the *ahlussunnah wal jama'ah*, a theological school pioneered by Abu Hasan al−Asy'ari (324 H). Al−Asy'ari criticized the theories of Abu Yazid and al−Hallaj, which are considered to have deviated from Islamic principles. This period was a period of strengthening and returning Sufism to its initial foundation, namely the Qur'an and Hadith. The leaders of this school include al−Qusyairi (376 − 465 H), al−Harawi (396 H), and al−Ghazali (450 − 505 H).

The fourth period took place in the 6th and 7th centuries. It was marked by the emergence of two important trends: the revival of semi−philosophical Sufism, which intersected with philosophy and the emergence of the various orders of Sufism (*thariqa*). Figures in philosophical Sufism included Ibn Arabi with *wahdatul wujud*, Suhrawardi with *hikmah isyraqiyyah* (illuminationist wisdom), Ibn Sab'in with his theory of *ittihad*, Ibn al−Faridh with his theory of *mahabbah* (love), *fana'*, and *wahdatus syuhud*. Meanwhile, the Sufi orders appeared in the 7th century H, such as the Qadiriyyah led by Abdul Qadir Al−Jailani based in Baghdad, the Naqshabandiyyah led by Muhammad ibn Baha'uddin in Central Asia, the Maulawiyyah (Rumiyyah) led by Jalaluddin Rumi in Persia, the Bekhtasyiyyah led by Bekhtasyi in Turkey, the Tijaniyyah led by at−Tijani in Morocco, and many others numbering around thirteen orders, according to Ja'far Shodiq.[18]

The fifth period is the purification period in the 7th century. This was a period when previous Sufi development was criticized. Figures such as Ibn Arabi, Ibn al−Faridh, and Jalaluddin Rumi greatly influenced the spread of this model of Sufism. Even sultans and princes did not hesitate to extend personal protection and loyalty to them. However, over time, corruption and scandals emerged, destroying the good image of Sufism. During that period, Sufism was infested with heresy, *khurafat*, occultism, and disregard for the *shari'ah*, moral laws, and contempt for science.[19] Scholars like al−Ghazali tried to carry out improvements and purification. Sufism then shifted and was mixed with Greek, Hindu, and Persian philosophy, etc. Furthermore, Ibn Taimiyyah (661−728 H) appeared as a figure who tried to purify Islamic teachings, which he said had been distorted. This purification was also continued by other figures such as Ibn Qoyyim al−Jauziyyah (691− 751 H), Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahab (1112−1198 H), Sidi Muhammad as−Sanusi (1206−1275 H), Jamaluddin al−Afghani (1839−1897 AD), Sheikh Muhammad Abduh (1849−1905 AD), Muhammad Iqbal (1878−1938 AD).[20] And also Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi (1877−1960).

Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi (1877 − 1960 AD) was a figure who was followed by adherents in many Muslim societies that were experiencing a crisis of faith during the early twentieth century, especially in Turkey. The emergence of Mustafa Kemal as the country's leader led to several radical changes: the caliphate was abolished, state laws

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[17] Amin Syukur, *Menggugat Tasauf : Sufisme dan Tanggung Jawab Sosial Abad 21*.

[18] Ja'far Shodiq, *Pertemuan Thareqat Dan NU* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2008), 31.

[19] Amin Syukur, *Menggugat Tasauf : Sufisme dan Tanggung Jawab Sosial Abad 21*.

[20] Syamsuddin Ni'am, *Tasawuf Studies: Pengantar Belajar Tasawuf*, ed. Rose KR (Yogyakarta: Ar−Ruzz Media, 2014), 133.

based on Islamic law were replaced with Swiss laws, Western lifestyle was imposed, Arabic letters were replaced with Latin letters, the call to prayer was recited in Turkish, and other radical changes.[21]

Mustafa Kemal implemented total secularism, which caused the Turkish Muslim community to experience spiritual restlessness.[22] Nursi recognized this spiritual restlessness and tried to provide answers from the perspective of Sufism. However, Nursi realized that the Sufistic discourses he had to present should not be the old Sufism that had deviated and were no longer relevant to contemporary times, but a new Sufism that was suited the needs of 20th—century Turkish Muslim society.[23]

The old *tasawwuf* that was fragmented into a variety of *thariqa* movements, such as the Naqsabandiyah, Qadiriyah, Syadziliyah, Maulawiyah, and others, was no longer able to respond to the spiritual decline of Muslim society. In Nursi's observation, the most urgent need of most Muslims, especially Turkish Muslims in the 20th century, is to save and strengthen their faith, which is constantly attacked by the onslaught of secularism and materialism.

According to Nursi, the old discourses of Sufism that have been fragmented by the *thariqa* can no longer answer the contemporary situation of Muslims. A new formulation of Sufism was needed that would be accepted by all Muslims. From here, Nursi tried to interpret Sufism by drawing directly from the lantern of wisdom of the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet as the two fundamental sources of Islam. The goal is to produce a Sufi teaching that can be accepted by all levels of Muslim society.[24]

The periodization and emergence of many Sufi figures showed that Sufism developed from authentic Islamic teaching. The categorization and development of Sufism would often lead to the conclusion that Sufism was not only an attempt to get closer to God but was also accompanied with turning away from the world. This resulted in the emergence of different inner experiences and different concepts and terms to express these experiences. This differentiation was caused not only by the different subjective experience, but also political developments and the life the Sufis who produced it.

Typology and Urgency of Sufism

Sufism is intended to achieve the highest degree of practical religious piety. The Sufis base their teachings on Islamic sources. The *thariqah* adopted by the Sufis varies according to lineage of the teacher, the culture, and the social context surrounding it. This difference led to the creation of various schools of thought on Sufism with different teachings. The emergence of differences does not imply mutual contradiction; rather there could be unity in diversity. There are at least four typologies in Sufism, which includes:

The first is *akhlaqi* Sufism. This type of Sufism is oriented towards moral improvement. It focuses on gaining a deeper relationship with God through specific methods. *Akhlaqi* Sufism is also a science that studies human behaviour and moral improvement.[25]

The approach in *akhlaqi* Sufism is the to focus on *akhlaq*, or human character. It has been described as the science of *akhlaq*. The figures who developed this apparoch are

[21] Sukran Vahide, *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Collection Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 1992), 203.

[22] Vahide, *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Collection Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*.

[23] Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Al-Maktubat*, trans. Ihsan Kasim Salihi (Cairo: Sozler Publications, 2011), 27.

[24] Nursi, *Siratu Dzatiyah*.

[25] Syamsul Munir Amin, *Akhlak Tasawuf: Ilmu Tasawuf* (Jakarta: Taruna Grafika, 2012), 221.

Abu Sa'id al−Hasan bin Yasar, commonly known as Hasan Basri (21−110 H), Abu 'Abdillah al−Harith bin Asad al−Bashri al−Baghdadi al−Muhasibi, commonly known as al−Muhasibi (165−243 H), and Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Ta'us ath−Thusi as−Shafi'i al−Ghazali, who is known as al−Ghazali (450−505 H). The teachings they conveyed consists of the following: *takhalli* (abandoning), *tahalli* (adorning), *tajalli* (divine self−manifestation), *munajat* (secret pray), *muraqabah* (observation), and *muhasabah* (retrospection).

The second type is *amali* Sufism. This type of Sufism focuses on performing the *wirid* (quotes from the specified Quran to be read) and other forms of rituals. The practical side of the Sufi path is more dominant than the theoretical side. The purpose of *amali* Sufism is to eliminate undesirable character traits and to direct one's attention solely to God. This involves following the rules of mysticism (spiritual *tarbiyah*) and adhering to various kinds of ethical precepts in detail, such as observing the relationship between students and the master, *uzlah* (remoteness), and *khalwah* (seclution), not eating much, optimizing the use of night time for prayer, observing silence, increasing *dhikr* (remembrance), and everything else related to Islamic and *adab* (etiquette) rules.

Amali Sufism uses several key terms in their Sufi approach. The disciples are divided into three classes, namely, the beginner class or those who are just starting to learn are called *mubtadi'*; the middle class, i.e., those who have sufficient knowledge of the *shari'ah* and are called *mutawassith*; and the last class, i.e., those who have matured in the knowledge of the *shari'ah*, have experience in the Sufi path, and studied spiritual knowledge, and are called *muntahi*.[26] The next level is the *sheikh*, the spiritual group leader, who oversees the disciples in all their lives, guides the way, and is considered to be an intermediary between the disciple and his Lord. The highest level in *amali* Sufism includes the *wali* and the *qutb* (sufi of a high spiritual level). These are figures who have reached the peak of inner purity and have obtained high degree of *laduni* knowledge. To them the veil of the has been lifted.

The third is philosophical Sufism. This type of Sufism combines mystical and rationalist knowledge. They develop an inner purity that is also rich in philosophical views.[27] The approach of philosophical Sufism is understanding and rationality. They use the theological science of *kalam* and Islamic philosophy.[28] The figures representing philosophical Sufism are Muhammad bin Ali bin Ahmad bin 'Abdillah al− Tha'i al− Haithami, who is known as Ibn 'Arabi (560−638 H), and who taught the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being); Abdul Karim bin Ibrahim al−Jilli from Baghdad,[29] known as al−Jilli (767−805 H), who taught the concept of *insan kamil* (the perfect human being)[30];

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[26] Nur Hadi Ihsan, Che Zarrina Binti Sa'ari, and Muhammad Sofian Hidayat, "Abdurrauf Al−Singkili's Concept of Insan Kamil in Facing The Crisis of Modern Human Morality," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 8, no. 1 (July 13, 2022): 22−35, https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v8i1.5487.

[27] Abdul Aziz Dahlan, "Tasawuf Sunni Dan Tasawuf Falsafi : Tinjauan Filosofis," *Ulumul Qur'an: Jurnal Ilmu dan Kebudayaan* II, no. 8 (1991): 31.

[28] Arki Auliahadi and Ariska Oktavia, "Perkembangan Awal Islam Di Nusantara Dan Wacana Sufistik Tasawuf Falsafi Pada Abad 17," *Islam Transformatif : Journal of Islamic Studies* 03, no. 01 (2019): 5, https://doi.org/10.30983/it.v3i1.857.

[29] Muhammad Thoriquddin, *Sekularitas Tasawuf: Membumikan Tasawuf dalam Dunia Modern* (Malang: UIN Malang Press, 2008), 177.

[30] Muhammad Sholihin, *Sejarah dan Pemkiran Tasawuf di Indonesia* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2001), 16.

and 'Abdul Haq bin Ibrahim Muhammad bin Nasr, known as Ibn Sabi'in (614－669 H), who taught absolute unity of existence. There also many others, such as Jalaluddin Rumi, Abu Bakar Asy－Syibli, Sheikh Abu Hasan al－Khurqani, 'Ainal－Qudhat al－Hamdani, and Sheikh Najamuddin al－ Kubro, etc.

The fourth is *irfani* Sufism. This Sufism seeks to uncover the truth or *ma'rifat*, which is obtained not through logic, learning, or thinking but through God's gift (*mauhibah*). Knowledge is obtained because the Sufi tries to do *tashfiyat al-qalb* (purify heart). With a pure heart, he can have a spiritual dialogue with God. God gives knowledge or *ma'rifah* to the human heart, through which the essence of the truth is revealed. This is intuitive knowledge. Those who advocate this approach are: Rabi'ah al－'Adawiyah (96－185 H), whose teachings are love for God; Dzu an－Nun al－Mishri (180－246 H), whose teachings are to gain *ma'rifah* of God with inner understanding; Abu Yazid al－Busthami (200－261 H), whose teachings are *fana'* (annihilation) and *baqa'* (the state of subsistence), and Abu Hasan al－Hallaj (224－309 H), whose teachings are *hulul* (God's presence in a human body) and *wahdat al-syuhud* (witnessing the beauty of the Creator with the eyes of the heart and enjoying the love of the Creator, so that they are no longer cognizant of themselves).

Badi'uzzaman Sa'id Nursi's Attachment to Sufism

The typologies above were eventually integrated with the renewed method of the modern period. This method was formed due to the challenges of modernity, which began to undermine Islamic teachings. Bad''uzzaman Said Nursi is one of the central figures who is included in the *thabi'ah manhaj al-tajdid* (The nature of the renewal method). He writes of the importance of *al-ta'amul al-afaqy wa-l-anfusy* (contemplating the universe and oneself), *al-manhaj al-tamtsili au dlarb al-amtsal* (using the method of the parable), and *al-tawazun baina al-'aql wa al-qalb* (having balance between the *shari'a* and reality). Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi explains that Sufism and the *thariqah* are intermediaries (*wasilah*), not the final destination. Carrying out a *fardu* (obligatory) worship based on obedience to the commands of God is more important than the practice of remembrance of certain *thariqah* rituals.[31]

Nevertheless, Nursi appreciates the *thariqah* movement, which is an undeniable historical fact, and which has maintained the *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) between Muslims for centuries. The *thariqah* brotherhoods succeeded in maintaining the center of the Islamic caliphate, survived for more than 550 years during the reign of the Ottoman dynasty in Turkey, and faced a hegemonic struggle with the great Christian empire.[32] Besides, in discussing Sufism and the *thariqah*, Nursi also mentions several advantages and benefits of the *thariqah* groups, which consists of the spiritual and positive social impacts, which were facilitated by the *thariqah* organizations. Following them will make it easier to maintain faith and free oneself from confusion and doubt. It will bring oneself to the level of *'ain al-yaqin* (sure knowledge gained through observation and experience) and to uphold the right pillars and to not deviate.

Nursi further explains that a person can realize the nature of his true self by moving every part of his body and the five senses to carry out the task for which he was created,

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[31] Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Anwar Al-Haqiqah: Mabahits Fi Al-Tasawuf Wa Al-Suluk*, trans. Ihsan Kasim Salihi (Cairo: Syarikat Sozler, 2002), 82.

[32] Nursi, *Anwar Al-Haqiqah: Mabahits Fi Al-Tasawuf Wa Al-Suluk*.

i.e., to worship God. Through the *thariqah*, people can free themselves from alienation. Humans will get a connection with brothers in a traveling caravan and foster true friendship of sincere affection when heading together to the Hereafter.

Furthermore, Nursi also mentions that the *thariqah* can free the human soul from worldly shackles and lead him out of his imprisonment in this world. A person will be able to feel the nature of the burden (*taklif*) that he bears, and he will be able to feel the importance of Divine law in his heart. He will also live and breathe with remembrance of God. Then, he emphasizes that through proper *thariqah* education, the student would be able to resign completely to God and will feel ultimate pleasure. This level is the intermediate way to true delight and happiness in the Hereafter. It led Nursi to the argument that Sufi orders can save humans from *khafy* (hidden) *shirk* (attributing partners to Allah) or *riya'* (showing off). This argument is not purposeless because Nursi explains that a follower of a *thariqah* will be careful and always try to make every habit and daily life an act of worship and every worldly affair a matter of importance for the Hereafter. Hence, a *thariqah* is a practice that can lead to the formation of *al-insan al-kamil* (the perfect human being), because the student surrenders to God during his worship to improve his spiritual life. The correct *thariqah* can help him reach the stage of the true believer.[33]

This section reveals Nursi's general acceptance and permissive attitude towards the *thariqah* movement as long as it does not conflict with the *shari'a*. However, it is necessary to look at other parts of his thoughts, which reflect caution or a firm warning for those who want to enter the *thariqah*. This serves as a counterbalance to his views on Sufism and simultaneously shows his objectivity on matters of the *thariqah*. He shows his firmness and seriousness in keeping Muslims away from *thariqah* practices that do not follow the *shari'ah*. Then, he explains the challenges and negative aspects of the *thariqah*: First, if someone takes an order without following the guidance of the *sunnah* (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad, he will be at risk of being implying that his teacher in the *thariqah* is higher in rank than the Prophet.[34] This opposes the consensus of the scholars regarding the primacy of the Prophet Muhammad. Second, if the members of the *thariqah* glorify the saints more than the Prophet Muhammad's companions and even the prophets, this too opposes basic Islamic teachings. Third, if members of the *thariqah* have *ta'assub* (fanatical adherence) to theor own group and prioritize the *wirid*s and practices of the *thariqah* rather than the *sunnah* of the Prophet, this too is a violation of Islamic teachings. Fourth, mistaking God's inspiration or guidance for revelation. Revelation is only for the prophets, not for Sufi saints or teachers. Fifth, Nursi emphasizes that the *thariqah* is not the primary goal in the journey of Sufism. However, for members of the *thariqah* who do not understand this, they will be easily caught up in the slander of *karamah* (high−mindedness), *dzauq* (perceptivity gained through divine grace), and *nur* (light). These are gifts from God, not something that can be chased after and fought over.

By focusing his attention on the positives and negatives of the *thariqah* that aims at purification of the soul, Nursi highlights the importance of Sufism in terms of several aspects. First, "*Hajat al-'alam al-islami ila nazhariyah wadhihah 'an al-tasawwuf al-sunni wa al-tarbiyah al-ruhiyah, fa i'adatu al-wa'yi bi ahammiyati al-bu'd al-ruhi syai'un la budda*

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[33] Nursi.

[34] Ibn Taimiyyah, *Fiqh Al-Tasawuf Li Syaikh Al- Islam Al-Imam Ibn Taimiyyah*, ed. Zahir Syafiq Al−Kabby (Beirut: Dar al−Fikr al−'Araby, 1993), 128.

minhu." (The Islamic world is in dire need of purification of the soul by the Sunnah; spiritual education and returning to the spiritual dimension is needed)*.* Second, "*katsratu al-da'wah al-dlallah bi al-madhahib al-maddiyah al-munharifah al-lati ta'arra al-insana wa tusyajji'uhu 'ala ittijahi manhaj hayatin mabniyyin 'ala al-mashlahah al-dzatiyyah ba'idin 'an al-ab'ad al-ruhiyyah.*" (Many misleading invitations have emerged using materialistic means, which have mislead people and directing them towards a materialistic life and removing them away from spirituality)*.* Third, "*inghimasu qolbi al-nas fi talaqqiyati matalibihim al-dunyawiyah wa ittisa'i ghazairihim al-syahwaniyyah mimma ja'alahum yastaqilluna al-iltizam bi sya'irihim al-ta'abbudiyah mutaghfilin 'an al-sa'adah al-ruhiyyah.*" (The sinking of people's hearts due to trying to fulfill worldly needs and the widespread fulfillment of lustful needs loosens their worship and makes them forget spiritual happiness)*.* Fourth, "*ihtimamu al-Nursi bi al-Qur'an ihtimaman faridan min nau'ihi faqad ja'ala minhu al-mihwar al-asasi fi manhajihi al-da'wi, fa kana tarsikhu al-haqa'iq al-imaniyyah mazhar al-jam'i baina al-'aqli wa al- qalbi wa baina al-maqru' wa al-manzur.*" (Nursi's attention to the Qur'an is extraordinary; it is the foundation of his preaching method; deepening faith requires the combination of textual and contextual verses)*.*

Badi'uzzaman Sa'id Nursi's Contemporary Sufi Epistemology

After gaining experience in carrying out and assessing the development of Sufism, Nursi provides an accessible basis to its practice. First, *Quran huwa al-asas fi tajdid* ("Ensuring that the Qur'an is the main foundation"). Second, *tajdidu al-tasawuf yubda'u min tajdidi al-iman* ("The renewal process of Sufism must start from cleansing the faith"). Third, *al-washfiyah al-ijtima'iyyah li al-din al-ghayah al-qushwa hiya al-nata'ij al-haya* ("Social equality is a reference in carrying out life values, i.e., all are equal before God"). Fourth, *al-iltizam bi maqashidi al-Qur'an al-arba'ah al-tauhid, an-nubuwwah, al-hasyr wa al-'adl* ("Being consistent in efforts to instill at four values of the Qur'an, i.e., *tawhid* (unity and oneness of God), *nubuwah* (prophecy), *hasyr* (resurrection), and *'adl* (justice).

In Said Nursi's view, the spiritual path of the Sufis, *thariqah,* is generally acceptable. This is the *thariqah* contains sacred teachings, which are widely described in the works of the people of *kasyaf* (spiritual understanding) and *dzauq* (intuition). These Sufis emphasize intuitive modes of gaining knowledge. The Sufi can be regarded as the highest secret of humanity, whose main goal is *ma'rifat*. As for *dzauq*, the actuality of faith is the result of undergoing a spiritual journey with the heart under the shadow of the *mi'raj* (spiritual journey) of the prophet Muhammad and the conscious search for the Qur'an and faith.[35]

Furthermore, the spiritual journey of Sufism aims to bring Sufis to perfection that leads to the manifestation of the truths stated in the Qur'an. Nursi believes this Sufi journey can occur through the heart, which is the center of nature. The *fihriste-i camia*, or microcosm, is a concept widely used by Sufi experts. God, as the heart's creator, asks humans to use their hearts when acting. Like the mind, the heart must be operated only to remember God during the spiritual journey. It supports faith.

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[35] Nursi, *Al-Maktubat.*

Said Nursi states that for the heart to follow the Sufi path, it must perform contemplation and remembrance of God (*tafakkur*).[36] These two elements are the key to elevating spiritual life. Both are also sources of peace in the world and the Hereafter. Even in urban social life or a community, the spirit of friendship and entertainment only provides temporary pleasure. According to Said Nursi, someone whose life is far from worldly desires will find true happiness through contemplation and remembrance of God. Thus, humans understand that they are not alone because God is everywhere, and life is only meaningful when they remember Him.

Said Nursi says there is a fundamental relationship between prophethood and trusteeship; the two complement each other. He adds that trusteeship is a proof of prophethood, and *thariqah* also proves the truth of *shari'ah*.[37] Trusteeship justifies everything the prophets convey. Thus, wherever there is a trusteeship, there is also prophethood. Furthermore, where there is a *thariqah*, there is *shari'ah*. In addition, Sufism also serves as the most effective way to strengthen the spirit and brotherhood in the Islamic world. Furthermore, Said Nursi believes that he is obliged to respond to the negative attitude of certain people who were always hostile to the *thariqah*. Mistakes in an institution are usually committed by inexperienced novices, not by its teachers or competent students.[38]

Said Nursi also analyzed the deeper dimensions and psychological levels of Sufi orders. According to Nursi, starting a spiritual journey in Sufism is a highly secret affair and valuable. However, the path is extremely narrow and dangerous because of the difficulties. Sufis who drive on this path sometimes "drown to death" and they frequently fall out of the order. In general, he states that the path of Sufism is long, narrow, and perilous. He firmly follows the traditional doctrine of the Sufism teachers.

According to Said Nursi, Sufism ranks third in Islam. The first rank is the Qur'an, and the second is the Sunnah of the Prophet. Before studying Sufism and *thariqah*, one must protect oneself in matters of faith. Because according to Nursi, faith is the only way to eternal happiness. Hence, according to him, Sheikh Abdul Qadir al–Jailani, commonly known as *Ghouts al-A'dzom*, the founder of the Qadiriyyah order, Shaykh Naqsyabandi (Muhammad Baha'uddin Naqsyabandi, founder of the Naqsyabandi order), and the great Sufi teacher Imam Rabbani spent their efforts in strengthening faith and adherence to the principles of Islam. Although many go to heaven without joining a Sufi order, no one goes to heaven without faith. Nursi describes this matter as a person who cannot live without rice but can live without fruit. Sufism is the fruit, while the essence of Islam is like rice.[39]

Nursi writes that *ma'rifatullah* (direct knowledge of Allah) in the past usually took at least 10, 20, or 40 days for, or sometimes up to forty years. However, during the modern period the situation is different. Nursi writes that reaching the essence of faith must be attained be faster. His masterpiece, *Risalae-i Nur*, is a work that is intended to help the readers to reach the *maqam* (station) of *ma'rifatullah* more quickly. When he was accused of teaching Sufism and founding a *thariqah*, he replied that Islam is essential, but that it was not the right time for a *thariqah*.[40] However, Nursi always claims that he focuses on

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[36] Nursi.
[37] Nursi.
[38] Nursi.
[39] Nursi.
[40] Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Letters*, ed. Osman Birgeoglu and Risale–i Nur Institute, trans. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: Sozler Nesriyat, 2010), 85.

truth and faith.[41] Hence, as long as one accepts the methods of the guidance of the Qur'an, then his views are correct and acceptable. All roads to God are based on the Qur'an, and this road is also relatively short and safer than the others.

In his comments, Nursi states that the ten steps (*al-latha'if al-'asyr*) practiced by the *salik* (spiritual seeker) *thariqah* in a hidden way, as well as the dignity of seven which are practiced through the absolute paths, are difficult stages and paths for ordinary people. Therefore, he initiated four steps to reach God's essence, which ordinary people could easily pass because they were closer to the essence of the *shari'ah* (*al-haqiqah al-syar'iyyah*) than the essence of Sufism.[42]

Said Nursi explains the meaning and privilege of the four short and safe ways to bring the *salik* to the essence of God is as follows: the *first* path, *al-ajz*, which means a weak, i.e., a trait that can bring a servant to God. This path is concise and safe because it brings the servant to his beloved through the container of *ubudiyah* (worship). This trait is like *al-ishq* (sense of longing), which reflects the nature of the *qadir* (the Poweful) of God. The *second* path, *al-faqr*, means feeling poor (being in need of God), i.e., a trait that can bring the servant to the meaning of the Divine attribute *al-Rahman*. The traits of *al-ajz* and *al-faqr* is meant to be shown to God only not to other human beings. The *third* path, *al-syafaqah*, means compassion, i.e., a trait that will lead a servant to a broad and quiet path toward God. With this trait, the *salik* will arrive at the Divine attribute of *al-rahim*. The *fourth* path, *al-tafakkur*, means thinking and employing the mind in worshipping God to the fullest. This characteristic creates a more prominent, luminous, broader sense of *asyiq* (passionate). This trait will bring a *salik* to the Divine attribute of *al-hakim.*

Thus, the epistemology of Said Nursi's Sufism can be summed up and understood through his monumental work, *Risala-i Nur*. In *al-Kalimat* and *al-Luma'at*, i.e., *Raka'izu al-Sufism*, we find the following doctrines. First, *wahdatu al-syuhud bi al-asma' al-husna*. The human being must try to embody the ninety−nine attributes of God in daily life. Second, *al-Sair al-anfusi wa al-sair al-afaqy* is the process of approaching God by reading ourselves and the universe; hence, we are aware that we are a small part of a vast cosmos and that God has incomparable abilities. Third, *nazariyat al-taqarrub* (*mashadir al-ma'rifah wa mashadir al-haqiqah*) is to attempt to master the theory of self−proximity to God so that one can reach knowledge of the essence of the truth. This is performed through two steps in the form of *al-latha'if al-'asyr* (*al-wijdan* (conscience), *al-a'shab* (nerves), *al-his* (feelings), *al-'aql* (reason), *al-hawa* (lust,), *al-quwwah al-syahwiyyah* (the power of desire), *al-quwwah al-ghadabiyyah* (the fear of anger when connected to the heart), *al-ruh* (spirit) *wa al-sir* (secret).[43] The next step is *al-maratib al-sab'u* (″*abshir, da' anka bashisha 'aqlika, wa syahid ma'na al-ayat al-karimah fi nur i'jaziha al-wadhih wdhuh al-nahar, wa hudz najma haqiqatin qahidah min sama'i tilka al-ayat al-karimah, wa iqdzif biha al-syaithan al-qobi' fi dzihnika, wa urjum biha, tsumma qul: rabbi a'udzu bika min hamazati al-syayathin*″) leave the light of your intellect and look at the meaning of the Quranic verses in the light of its miracles that are as bright as the sun. Reach for the star of a reality from the sky of the above verse. then throw the devil in your brain with it. we also do the same.

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[41] Vahide, *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Collection Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.*

[42] Nursi, *Letters.*

[43] Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Al-Lama'at*, trans. Ihsan Kasim Salihi, 6th ed. (Cairo: Sozler Publications, 2011), 157.

let us together say, *rabbi a'udzu bika min hamazati al-syayatin* (My Lord! I seek refuge in You from the temptations of the devils.).[44]

Conclusion

Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi's ideas and views has refreshed the discourse on Sufism and *thariqah*. This came at a time when the challenges of clergy (*ulama*) are getting bigger especially in the face of an increasingly materialistic and even atheistic era. Nursi offered a Sufism that is easily digested and followed by ordinary people. In Nursi's view, saving people's faith nowadays is more critical than *thariqah* practices, which are, to some extent, exclusive and almost a luxury for the common Muslim audience.

Faith according to Nursi is like rice or other staple foods, while the practice of Sufism and *thariqah* are like fruits, which are complementary supplements. The current reality of the global Muslim community requires more spiritual staples rather than fruits. Nursi tries to restore the Muslim paradigm by referring directly to the fundamental values of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, Sufism needs to be continuously explored and developed so that its practice in this era is more applicable and relevant.

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[44] Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Al-Kalimat*, trans. Ihsan Kasim Salihi, 6th ed. (Cairo: Sozler Publications, 2011), 208.

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