

The Role of Sufism in the History of Education: Harmony of Islamic Heritage and National Spirituality

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Abstract: *This article explores the significant role of Sufism in shaping the moral and ethical foundations of national identity. Sufism, as a spiritual and philosophical dimension of Islam, has deeply influenced the development of personal and social values such as compassion, tolerance, humility, justice, and inner purity. The article examines how Sufi teachings and practices have historically contributed to the formation of a moral society in Central Asia and continue to offer valuable ethical frameworks for contemporary challenges. By emphasizing spiritual self-discipline and universal human values, Sufism has served as a bridge between religious belief and moral conduct, fostering harmony within communities. The article also highlights the relevance of Sufi principles in educating youth and preserving cultural and spiritual heritage in the modern world.*

Keywords: *Sufism, national morality, spiritual heritage, ethical values, moral education, inner purification, tolerance, compassion, cultural identity, youth upbringing, spiritual development, Islamic philosophy.*

Introduction. The spiritual heritage left by our great ancestors continues to serve as a beacon of enlightenment for us today. As a nation that has long revered knowledge, the names of our forebears are still honored on global platforms. Throughout the course of history, various cultures flourished across the world, yet Islam shone among them like a radiant light. Our ancestors embraced Islam not merely as a faith but also as a profound source of spirituality. They consistently demonstrated that knowledge is a powerful torch across all eras and viewed good character and proper manners as essential companions to learning. In their pursuit of true happiness, they regarded these qualities as inseparable.

As a result, they promoted a unique system of ethical upbringing—Sufi morality—built on the foundation of national values. They enriched this with beautiful arts and integrated it into literature, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of our national educational methods.

The teachings of Sufism, which emerged in the 8th century, gradually spread throughout the region of Mawarannahr. Sufism has been defined in over a thousand different ways, a diversity that Sufis themselves consider a sign of its richness. One of the distinctive aspects of this doctrine is its influence on our national education. Drawing strength from Islam, Sufism took deep root in our land, contributing significantly to our spiritual legacy and becoming an important component in moral instruction within our schools.

Sufism, by focusing on the heart and soul of the individual and opposing ignorance and selfishness, aligned closely with the essence of intellectual and creative life. Under the influence of Islam, the educational traditions of the East developed in our historic schools. Education extended beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge—it included moral development as well, with both family and teachers playing crucial roles in the upbringing of children. In this regard, H.H. Niyoziy's insights on education remain profoundly relevant today.

"Knowledge, etiquette, virtue, and skill all stem from the school; every high rank is likewise achieved through learning."

"The school is the vault of all science and education; all wisdom emanates from this treasury of secrets."

The process of nurturing well-rounded individuals—those who are spiritually rich and intellectually mature—has developed and evolved over the centuries. A literary tradition rooted in the teachings of Sufism emerged, and from the 8th century to the early 20th century, this tradition significantly influenced our culture. In traditional schools, along with religious subjects, the themes of ethics and morality were emphasized, especially through the works of classical authors like Alisher Navoiy, Bedil, and Mashrab.

Additionally, students were taught from the moral and spiritual writings of scholars such as Shaykh Sa'di Sherozi, including his "Karimah," Gulistan, and Bustan; Sufi Allahyör's Murad al-'Arifin; and Imam al-Ghazali's Minhaj al-'Abidin. These works greatly enhanced the moral and spiritual development of students.

Historically, elementary education often took place at home or near mosques. During the reign of Ulughbek, the madrasah system was structured into three distinct stages:

Andi-past (beginner level) – This level included foundational texts such as Mabādi' al-Qirā'a and introductory tajweed (Qur'anic recitation rules).

Avsat (intermediate level) – Here, more advanced subjects like Qafiya (Arabic prosody), Mukhtasar, and Sharh-i Mulla were taught.

A'lo (advanced level) – The highest stage covered extensive religious and legal texts, including advanced parts of Mukhtasar, Hidāyah (Islamic jurisprudence), Hadith studies, and Islamic law.

Books and treatises were often memorized or read fluently to enhance literacy and internalization. This structured and spiritually grounded educational system played a key role in shaping generations of morally upright and knowledgeable individuals.

Sufi Literature and Its Continued Relevance in Education

Sufi literature continues to hold an important place in today's school curricula. The works of Ahmad Yassawi, Alisher Navoi, and Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur are still studied by students, and their ethical views play a foundational role in shaping the moral character of young people. One of Ahmad Yassawi's verses featured in textbooks expresses this sentiment:

"Do not strive to be merely a pious ascetic or a ritual worshipper;

Be a true lover, loyal on the path of divine love.

Curb your ego to become worthy of His presence;

Those without love have neither soul nor faith."

In classical literature, the concept of love (especially divine love) is interpreted deeply, with Sufi thinkers considering union with God as their ultimate goal. On this path, they viewed the ego (nafs) as their greatest enemy, believing that one could not reach the divine without first overcoming it. They shared and taught this understanding to others.

Modern educational programs have also recognized the significance of this idea. Contemporary moral education continues to emphasize the importance of controlling and regulating the ego, integrating this principle as part of national values within the curriculum.

The Role of the Seeker (Sālik) and Sufi Concepts in Classical Literature and Education

In Sufism, the actions, efforts, and even sufferings of the sālik—a person who embarks on the path seeking union with God—are seen as inspired by divine love (ishq). This notion gave rise to one of the most cherished themes in classical literature: the concept of the lover (oshik). Although the beloved figure

often stands at the center of the ghazal, poets use literary devices such as allusion (talmeh), metaphor (tashbih), and contrast (tazod) to convey lessons in morality, etiquette, and spiritual refinement.

For this reason, it is impossible to imagine classical Uzbek literature without Sufism. In fact, the 9th-grade literature textbook for Uzbek-language students includes an introduction to Sufi concepts and terminology. This foundational knowledge greatly enhances students' understanding of classical poetry, enabling them to perceive the aesthetic and ethical dimensions embedded in literary expression. Artistic presentations of Sufi thought subtly shape students' consciousness and pave the way for grasping its philosophical interpretations in the future.

Through this approach, students are able to comprehend the true meaning of ghazals, avoiding superficial or mistaken interpretations. Symbolic words and metaphors are correctly understood in their intended mystical and ethical context.

It is well known that much of our classical poetry was composed in aruz meter, rich with elegant metaphors and symbolic meaning. At first glance, some verses may seem to hold a certain meaning, but when viewed through the eyes of a true lover of God (oshik), they may reveal an entirely different—sometimes opposite—significance. For example, such spiritual duality is vividly present in the poetry of Boborahim Mashrab.

The Spiritual Depth of Classical Poetry and the Role of Pedagogical Interpretation

"When He suddenly cast a glance at me,

I was captivated—

For that single glimpse,

I gave away both faith and the world."

This couplet by Boborahim Mashrab may seem paradoxical at first glance. However, it is not an expression of heresy or materialism—rather, it reflects the pinnacle of spiritual devotion and selfless surrender. Once the identity of the One who casts the glance is recognized as the Divine, the verse takes on an entirely different, transcendental meaning.

Such layers of interpretation underscore the importance of skilled pedagogy in teaching classical literature. The ability to clearly and beautifully explain these deep and nuanced ghazals depends heavily on the teacher's didactic competence. If love-inspired (oshikona), mystical (orifona), just (odilona), and nonconformist (rindona) verses are communicated to students with sensitivity and precision, the refined elegance of our classical literature can be passed from generation to generation without distortion.

Only then can modern students fully grasp the timeless voices of great poets like Navoi, Mashrab, and Yassawi. These works continue to inspire awe, as each line opens a door to spiritual revelation and artistic wonder.

Conclusions. The teachings of Sufism and the classical literature inspired by it have played a profound role in shaping the moral, spiritual, and intellectual identity of the Uzbek people. Rooted in the Islamic worldview, Sufism emphasizes the purification of the soul, the cultivation of ethical behavior, and the pursuit of divine love. These ideals found vivid expression in the works of great poets such as Ahmad Yassawi, Alisher Navoi, and Boborahim Mashrab, whose writings remain essential in the moral education of youth even today.

Through the integration of Sufi ethics into educational systems—especially through literature curricula—generations have been taught the values of humility, self-control, devotion, and social justice. Classical poetry, with its rich symbolism and deep philosophical meanings, serves not only as a literary treasure but also as a powerful pedagogical tool for spiritual enlightenment. When explained by skilled educators,

these verses transcend mere words, becoming vehicles of timeless wisdom that speak directly to the human heart.

In a modern world faced with spiritual confusion and ethical challenges, revisiting and revitalizing the moral legacy of Sufism offers an invaluable pathway to nurture well-rounded, morally upright, and spiritually aware individuals. Thus, the synthesis of Sufi thought and classical literature remains a vital and enduring foundation for the cultural and ethical development of contemporary society.

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