# The History of the Ideas of "Absence" and "Presence" in the Khafīfīyya Order in Shiraz

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## Abstract

The Khafīfīyya Order is attributed to Ibn Khafīf, Sūfī of the fourth century AH (882/982) who lived in Shiraz. The concepts of Absence (*ghaybah*) and Presence (*ḥoḍūr*) are central ideas in Ibn Khafīf's school. However, the existing literature provides only a brief mention of this attribution to Ibn Khafīf, the founder of the Khafīfīyya Order. Given the lack of in-depth study on Ibn Khafīf's social approaches, this article seeks to elucidate the significance of mentioned ideas within Ibn Khafīf's intellectual framework and expound on the interpretation of their meanings. This research adopts Chandler's semiotic approach to delve into the ideas of "absence and presence" within context. The findings of this study reveal that Ibn Khafīf endeavored to show isolation and seclusion as different and sometimes even contradictory acts of abstinent (*tark*) from worldly matters.

**Keywords:** Sūfīsm, Ibn Khafīf-Khafīfīyya, Absence, Presence, Seclusion.

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## Introduction

Shirāz, located in the southern region of Iran, was a prominent center where numerous renowned Sūfīs trained disciples and established lodges. Sūfī masters such as Ibn Khafīf played a pivotal role as intermediaries connecting the Sūfīs of Khurāsān with those in Baghdād. Ibn Khafīf's journeys and interactions with other Sūfīs brought about a strong effect on the Orders of the time. Notably, ʿAzud al-Dawla, who held the position of Emir within the Buyid dynasty during Ibn Khafīf 's residence in Shirāz, displayed a remarkable devotion to him (Zarkoob Shirazi 1931, 126).

Referring to Ibn Khafīf's Order indicates that it is about an individual who had his own school of thought that held appeal for a particular group of people who subsequently adopted and adhered to his teachings. Building on this premise, wherever we refer to the Order of Khafīfīyya or the Order of Ibn Khafīf in this study, we are referring to Ibn Khafīf's personal way of thinking and not his disciples or followers.

Ibn Kh fīf Shirāzī, a patriarch of his time, died in 331 or 371 AH in .hir az (Hujwīrī 2006, 37; Suhrawardī 1996, 10). He was known as Ibn Khafīf (Khafif meaning "gentle") in the texts because of his mild demeanor, ethics, behaviors, and deeds (Maʿṣūm Alishāh n.d, 2: 310-475). Two major characteristics of Ibn Khafīf's thought can be traced in the surviving sources: one is his jurisprudential point of view and the other is his school of thought as a Sūfī. Ibn Khafīf's extensive travels throughout his lifetime (Jāmīn.d, 622) profoundly influenced his intellectual development and ideas. He learned principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and ḥadīth studies in the presence of masters (Rashād 1972, 13-14). In addition to being one of the elders and the most knowledgeable person in the ẓāhīrī school of thought, he was also aware of the Shari'a principles and the ḥadīths of the Prophet Muhammad. He was also recognized as a Shāfiʿī jurist (Rashād 1972, 30; Junayd Shirāzī 1949, 38-41). Daylamī asserts that he adhered to the Shari'a and practiced jurisprudence and ḥadīth for many years, which resulted in the writing of his renowned work, *Al-Minhāj fi al-Fiqh* (Daylamī 2011, 18). Some scholars claim that Ibn Khafīf was a writer of ḥadīth (*Muḥaddith)* who was influenced by Ruwaym, a third-century (AH) mystic, and then he embraced the ẓāhīrī religious tradition (Karamustafa 2007, 57) while

he was a disciple of Ash'ari in theology (Kraus and Massignon 2011, 140; Vadet 1993, 394). Since this particular aspect of Ibn Kh fīf's thought has already been studied by some scholars, the current study will not delve further into it.

The other side of Ibn Khafīf's character is linked to Sūfīsm, the signs of which can be found in surviving sources. It is said that Faraj Zanjānī received his attire from al-'Abbās Nahāvandī and he was in turn clothed by Abū Abdullāh Khafif Shirāzī who was clothed by Abū Muhammad Ruwaym ibn Ahmad Baghdādi who was himself clothed by Junayd (Zarkoob Shirazi 1931, ۱۲۹; Ma'ṣūm Alishāh n.d, 2: 302). Ibn Khafīf's dynasty is connected to Ruwaym and further back to Junayd (Daylamī 1984, 17). Historical sources have cited his followers as well as those who have learned Samā' (a Sūfī ceremony performed as *ḏikr*) from him (Junayd Shirāzī 1949, 556; Rashād 1972, 41). He authored papers with Ruwaym, Ibn Atā, Jariri, and Mansour Hallāj, and he had the opportunity to engage in meetings with Junayd (Aṭṭār 1996, 556).

Although numerous studies have been carried out on the thought of Ibn Khafīf,[1] the lack of serious research on the order of Ibn Khafīf as one of the most famous Sūfīs of the fourth century AH is still felt in the scientific community. The most prominent studies on Ibn Khafīf refer to his manuscripts and writings. His most extensive book, *Al-Iqtiṣād,* has been editey by Florian Sobieroj who has written articles on the subject.

The other t o m nuocripts was e i te  b  Fātemeh Alāgheh and Kāzem Bargnīsī with poverty as the principal theme. Schimmel also edited the book, *Sīrat al-shaykh al-kabīr*, which was written by Ruwaym, Ibn Khafīf's disciple. These works are the most prominent studies that have been done on Ibn Khafīf as a Sūfī.

According to Sobieroj's research, while Ibn Khafīf was in favor of meeting necessary needs such as eating, dressing, and housing, he was against living a lavish lifestyle and using superfluous things because he considered such a lifestyle prevents purification (*Ikhlāṣ*) (Sobieroj 1998, 332-333). From this point of view, the concept of poverty has a special

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1. Studies on Ibn Khafīf are twofold: 1. Editions of remained corpora or a brief historical background (Schimmel, Chittick, Alāgheh and Mojtabaei). 2. Discussions about his religious attitudes and his inclination towards the Zāhīrī strand (Wüstenfeld, Goldziher, Schimmel).

status for Ibn Khafīf; He criticizes the unemployed and jobless Sūfīs and beggars as arrogant poverty, but he does not humiliate the wealthy (Sobieroj 1998, 334-335).

Thus, poverty is not limited to spiritual poverty in Islamic mysticism; in addition to spiritual poverty, which is referred to as true poverty (*ḥaqīqī*), worldly poverty has also been one of the subjects discussed by Sūfīs. The "practice of poverty" (*Rasm-e Faqr*) is a term used by Hujwīrī for worldly poverty (Hujwīrī 2006, 17; Tāherī and Pākdel 2019, 112). Ibn Khafīf's anecdotes regarding worldly poverty have survived (Sobieroj 1997, 311). It is also known from older writings that mystics and Sūfīs have dealt with both worldly and spiritual poverty (Kalābāzī 1994, 67). When Sūfī sexplain truepoverty , they place Sūfī'spoverty in frontof God's self-sufficiency (*Ghanī:* freedom from all needs)dnd when theyconsider worldly poverty, the poor are perceived as pleasing to God, leading some Sūfīs to live as beggars to gain God's satisfaction as the poor (Mostafavī and shajarī 2020, 84). Ibn Khafīf's thinking was considerably in opposition to this belief.

In the earlier sources, the school (ṭarāz) of Ibn Khafīf in Sūfīsm has been reported as absence and presence with no explanation or interpretation (Hujwīrī 2006, 366-367; Suhrawardī 1996, 10; Ma'ṣūm Alishāhn.d, 2: 475). These ideas have their definitions and meanings (In this regard, see: the following research), but it is worth considering that Ibn Khafīf regarded them as a benchmark and indicator. There is nothing in the sources concerning these beliefs, except for this brief mention. Several scholars have edited his remaining corpus. These works are among the most important studies that have been done on this Sūfī. However, no independent research has been done on Ibn Khafīf's social approaches. Because Ibn Khafīf's views and theories, in particular, have limited sources, studying the ideas of Absence and presence will aid in gaining a deeper grasp of Khafīf Ibn's thought. What was the meaning and significance of these two notions from Ibn Khafīf's perspective? and what changes were made to these ideas compared to the Sūfīs before him? That is the main subject of this study.

**The History of the Ideas with a Semiotic Approach**

The holistic nature of the history of ideas makes it possible to

abandon detailed studies of meaning that is an inseparable part of semiotics and focus more on text analysis in its general meaning based on the practical use of words in the sentence. In this study, we adopt semiotics as our framework for textual analysis (Chandler 2007, xv). Examining a word through a semiotic lens unables us to delve into its historical evolution as an idea. This is precisely why a historical study of ideas may span several centuries, while semiotic research primarily examines words or phrases through a "synchronic" perspective.

However, offering a research mechanism for the connection between the history of ideas and semiotics is not impossible. The history of ideas offers a comprehensive conclusion regarding the historical evolution of an idea in the form of "diachrony" by combining "synchronic studies". Thus, different approaches to the study of meaning, such as structural semiotics, can be used to give synchronous data of a historical idea's study. In this research, based on this broad approach, we will attempt to study the ideas of absence and presence using the Chandler semiotic approach to carry out an in-depth analysis of their meaning and the form of their evolution during the life of Ibn Khafīf and before him.

The idea is to look at the terms from the standpoint of their historical meaning in a continuum. Besides, it is a perception that men have had of a certain subject in a certain time and place, and the idea is identified with that particular understanding. It appears that the history of ideas is an approach to examining the type of application and notion of different ideas in historical contexts. It should also be noted that it is usually used for historical text analysis.

Semiotics, furthermore, is an attempt to understand how words and phrases make sense (Palmer 1988, 30-59); each word has a natural meaning or interpretation that is perceived as the word's meaning (Palmer 1988, 56). This study attempts to examine the semiotic changes in the ideas "absence and presence" in the Khafīfiyya Order based on the Chandler model. Chandler's model can lead us to a new understanding of ideas by expressing the triple relation of representamen/ signifier, interpretant/ signified, and referent/ object. It may not be possible to study the exact relationship between concepts without this approach. The semiotic approach used in this research as a tool to study the ideas of "absence and presence" in Ibn Khafīf's thought in comparison to the

early Sūfīs in synchronous form, and then to examine the historical transformation of these ideas.

The significance of Chandler's model lies in its capacity to elucidate highly abstract ideas. Even when the concepts and implications are clear, there are still different interpretations. Chandler's model serves the purpose of mitigating the inherent abstraction of an idea, facilitating a more lucid comprehension of the signifier, signified, and referent. It aids in attaining a more profound understanding of Sūfī thoughts and notions.

Chandler's triangular framework represents a process in which semiotics, as an outcome, emerges from a dynamic interaction of three key elements: A. The signifier/ representamen/ sign, B. The signified/ interpretant/ sense, and C. the referent/ object. Chandler shows this triangular connection that leads to a more profound understanding of a word, phrase, or idea by explaining this model (Chandler 2007, 26-38). Take a crossroad and a traffic light as an example; the semiotic process of the traffic light indicating the stop command is a sign of A. The red light in a traffic light at the crossroads (signifier/ representamen); B. The sense that the red light is a sign of stopping (signified/ interpretant); C. The stopping of vehicles (referent). In this case, if the red light were not a signal to stop, the referent would be different and would no longer cause vehicles to halt. In the case of traffic lights, because they may be visual signs and social codes, it is highly unlikely that a different interpretation could also be formed, but we are faced with various interpretations of ideas because they are abstract. These different interpretations and ideas lead to numerous representamens and interpretants through the course of human history. In this study, the ideas of "absence and presence" are examined by Chandler's model. The question that arises here is whether Ibn Khafīf's perception of the above ideas was the same as that of the Sūfīs before him or whether it has had semiotic changes.

**The Ideas of "absence and presence" Before nbn Khafīf**

From the first centuries of Islam, the ideas of "absence and presence" were defined by various religious traditions, sects, and groups, often with differing and distinct interpretations. Among this, Sūfīs developed their understanding of these ideas from the early centuries of its formation. In

most cases, the ideas of "absence and presence" are used together in Sūfīsm. One of the problems of research on Sūfīsm in the early centuries is that there are no texts from the first and second centuries AH, and the number of surviving books from the third and fourth centuries is very limited; Therefore, there is no choice but to rely on the surviving texts of later centuries to ponder and study Sūfīsm in this period.

One of the earliest mystical sources available today is the book *Al-Lum'a fi L-Taṣawwuf,* which was written in the second half of the fourth century AH. In this book, the author refers to the "absence and presence" as one of the Sūfī states. A condition that can be reached just when hearts are immersed in the remembrance of God in order to reach the truth (Tūsī 2003, 375). In a surviving book from the second part of the fourth century, absence implies disappearing from one's own self (Qushayrī 1966, 109). "Absent" refers to a Sūfī who has achieved absence. One of the main characteristics of a person who attains presence is that he never overlooks the remembrance of God which requires absence. The importance of the idea of presence among Sūfīs is so great to the extent that Junayd Baghdādi, a prominent Sūfī figure from the third century, considers one hour of "presence" during his life to be superior and more transcendent than anything else (Aṭṭār 1996, 432). It is difficult for Sūfīs to reach the level of presence, as Junayd emphasized. Therefore, not everyone has been able to obtain this degree.

It is obvious from what has been mentioned regarding the ideas of absence and presence that they were not used precisely and independently in the first centuries. Since there were different perceptions of definitions and meanings, the interpretation of these abstract and revelatory terms was much more difficult. Within the Sūfī tradition, the ideas of presence and absence exhibited remarkably similarity and were employed interchangeably. To attain the position of presence, the Sūfī must be absent. This is why the Sūfīs have placed a high value on the attribute of absence but being absent from what and from whom was not the main issue. They were then unable to understand the social implications of the absence and absent interpretations. Therefore, the external manifestations of these interpretations were able to permeate society and gradually change Sūfīs' social behaviors and

attitudes.[1]

The idea of being absence from people was viewed as a recommended notion advancing Sūfīs closer towards the stage of presence. Abstinence from people and seeking the ultimate truth were considered as complementary endeavors by the majority of Sūfīs. Junayd Baghdādi was quoted as stating: 'I know neither about people nor about myself and this is a good sign of presence' that was his interpretation of absence (Hujwīrī, 2005: 371). In the early eras, Sūfīs believed that the more one disappears from the people, the easier their connection with the truth would become (Rashād 1974, 166). This interpretation led many Sūfīs to pursue seclusion and isolation as integral aspects of their practice. The act of distancing oneself from one's family and society were regarded as a fundamental element of Sufism, emphasizing the avoidance of excessive social interaction. Baqlī Shirāzī articulated this concept by defining absence as the state of one's heart being disconnected from worldly distractions in order to attain a deeper connection with God, and the absence of the soul from the allurements and temptations of worldly pleasures and seductions while defining the presence as seeing the supreme truth (Baqlī Shirāzī 1965, 551-552).

The Sūfīs had a primary and ultimate objective: The quest for truth. Within Sūfīsm, the pivotal goal is the stage of presence, which leads one to the realization of truth. It is essential to note that in Sūfī texts, there is no distinction between being present and reaching the truth, and both terms are used interchangeably. It is impossible to attain the truth without the emergence of absence. The concept of absence signifies the relinquishment of one's own self and a deliberate detachment from society. Consequently, two fundamental aspects of absence, escapism, and self-alienation, prevailed in Sūfī writings. The notion here is that whoever manages to be absent from both himself and people will attain the stage (*maqām*) of presence, thereby achieving a profound understanding of truth. Likewise, those who attain the supreme stage of

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1 Take Ghazālī, living in the next centuries, as an example who got involved with politics as a sociable act; In his chapter on the practice of seclusion *('uzla)* in the *Ihyā'*, as long as he represents the benefits of isolation, he believes that social gains are of crucial; He speaks about the importance of human interactions (*Mu'āmalāt*) and occupation (*Shughl*). This is the ability of the craftsman to get on with a job without disturbance. (Abbasi 2020, 198; Ghazālī 1996, 571).

presence will certainly be absent from their own being and others. Thus, the idea of absence is profoundly intertwined with the self and interpersonal relationships. In other words, man must attain the stage of presence to reach the truth, and this stage cannot be achieved unless he avoids himself and people and distances himself from everyone. Although this interpretation of absence from earlier centuries could not be practicable without interpretation, a lack of attention to the flexibility of interpretations led to its consequences being ignored (Minorsky 1955, 6; Kiani Javadi 1990, 301-302).

nn a broader context, these concepts held an interchangeable nature within Sūfī understanding, as the idea of presence was almost synonymous with that of absence. The pursuit of the truth was also considered as another facet of being away from people. In other words, the idea of absence was the same as presence and vice versa for Sūfīs,, leading to a common external referent that was the centered around the act of abstaining from social interactions.

## The Ideas of "absence and presence" in the nbn Khafīf's Order

The Sūfī tradition emerged as a cultural and social phenomenon in the fourth century AH. Scholars have used the term normative Sūfīsm versus negative Sūfīsm to distinguish between Sūfīs (Karamustafa 2007, 83). Normative Sūfīs acted in accordance with the ḥadīth and the Shari'a and did not consider any contradiction between the Shari'a and the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) (Karamustafa 2007, 158). One of the normative Sūfīs was Ibn Khafīf, who had previously been known as a Muhaddis. He had the same objective as the Sūfīs before him, sharing the common goal of seeking and achieving the Truth, but he interpreted the idea of absence quite differently. The main difference between Ibn Khafīf and some Sūfīs before him was that he reinterpreted the idea of absence and developed a different approach and perception of the idea. Ibn Khafīf emphasized the absence of self, not the absence of the people and society. Ibn Khafīf claims that not belonging to the world does not limit interaction between the community and people, unlike some Sūfīs in the past who would spend time in solitude to obtain the Truth (Minorsky 1955, 6).

According to Ibn Khafīf, the idea of absence is related to the self. In Ibn Khafīf's approach, ideas such as absence should exist in everything

except the realm of ultimate truth (Ma'ṣūmAlishāh n.d, 504; Aṭṭār 1996, 562). Besides, absence is synonymous with detestation and aversion to the world, which is interpreted as "*Tark*" in Sūfīsm (Iṣfahānī 2005, 490; Daylamī 2011, 270). The ultimate absence is the absence of self. In this state, someone who is absent from themselves becomes fully present in the realm of truth, unlike someone who is present before the truth is absent of their own self (Hujwīrī 2006, 368). According to this interpretation, absence does not contradict activity in society because God is the owner of the heart. As a result, the absence of self leads to the presence before the truth (ḥaq) and the presence before the truth leads to the absence of the self. Ibn Khafīf has considered the absence of self as the final and prominent level of absence, indicating the conflict between "self and the truth". To put it another way, there cannot be a parallel tendency towards self and God. According to what has been mentioned so far, in order to reach the stage of presence, one must destroy one's worldly existence and one's self, which is not in conflict with one's social presence.

**Seclusion as the Common Attitude of Sūfīs**

In Chandler's triangle[1], each interpretation has an external dimension, which is called the referent. The external manifestation of these ideas, whether consciously or unconsciously, was an alienation from society. Junayd, one of the well-known Sūfīs from the third century A.H., considered that the emptiness of property and wealth had a positive significance (Kalābāzī 1994, 65). Masruq, a contemporary of Junayd, also considered that one must give up wealth to attain the truth (Kalābāzī 1994, 65). Many Sūfīs resorted to a life of seclusion. The main consequence of seclusion and moving away from society was that many Sūfīs saw marriage as a barrier to reaching the truth, and preferred a single life to marriage. They also refused to engage in business (Zarrīnkūb 1983, 18). During the second century, many Sūfīs stayed away from society and pushed away any form of worldly indulgence (Nicholson 1979, 17). Tustari, the Sūfī from the second and third centuries, settled into a life of seclusion and introspection marked by

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1. In this model, A is a sign vehicle or signifier (the form of the sign), B is sense (the sense made of the sign), and C is referent (what the sign stands for). A sign vehicle is a form that is signified; sense is the meaning of interpretation and perception that is created by the sign, and the referent or object is what the sign refers to (Chandler 2008, 47-60-61).

systematic hunger and constant remembrance of God as his holy sustenance (Karamustafa 2007, 39). Most Sūfīs believed that they could achieve the truth by staying away from society and forgetting oneself, which had a social dimension of seclusion. Thus, negative Sūfīsm became widespread, resulting in the rise of poverty and begging throughout society (Mostafavī and shajarī 2020, 84-87, Kiani Javadi 1990, 293). This viewpoint led Sūfīs to have many opponents in the first centuries. Some of them were criticized because they stayed away from the people and community. Some scholars believe that Sūfīs preferred self-cultivation to social interactions (Chittik 2009, 62). For this reason, Sūfīs have been rejected or condemned by Shiites, Mu'tazilites, and some other Islamic sects and groups throughout history (Tritton 1951, 93-100; Karamustafa, 2007, 58).

## A Shift from Seclusion to Sociability

One of the shreds of evidence that is the fact that Ibn Khafīf had worked for a living, got married, and also engaged with science such as Hadith. According to the biographical book of *Al-Sheikh Al-Kabir*, Ibn Khafīf's first job was in the spinning wheel industry, but after resigning from this job, he engaged in turnery[1] for a while, then he turned to laundry cleaning (*Gāzarī*) and finally turned to the creating wooden jewelry boxes[2] (*ḥoqqa*) (Daylamī1984, 24-25). Every occupation inevitably forces man to participate in society and contradicts the isolation and distance from people. According to Ibn Khafīf, "austerity is breaking one's self to serve and forbidding one's soul from seclusion to serve" (Daylamī1984, 32). Serving is a concept that calls for gathering, so Ibn Khafīf tried to encourage Sūfīs to attend social gatherings through his speech and behavior. One of the reasons for Ibn Khafīf's support for Hallāj could be attributed to the activities that Hallāj performed in society (Massignon 2011, 25-395) which were incompatible with seclusion. Although historical documents show that he did not always agree with Hallāj's opinions, it is reasonable to believe that Ibn Khafīf appreciated Hallāj in this regard (Kraus and Massignon 2011, 143). Even if we reject this assumption, ample evidence shows

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1. The occupation is called "making *Daraks*." Some believe that they used to call the wooden board that was placed in front of the water-sharing system was called "Darak." Therefore, concluding that Ibn Khafīf's profession must have probably been related to carving wood.

2 Small boxes to put jewelry in were called "ḥoqqa."

that Ibn Khafīf tried to persuade ascetic Sūfīs to join the community. Ibn Khafīf underlined that every human being can earn a living in various ways (Daylamī1984, 36). His resident disciples as beginning-level aspirants were required to earn a living.

Ibn Bākūya quotes Abdullāh Ibn Khafīf as saying "acquire knowledge and do not be misled by the words and teachings of the Sūfīs. I secretly approached the scholars with money and papers concealed beneath my attire. When Sūfīs discovered my actions, they said that I would not have salvation, but they eventually recognized their need for me" (Ibn Jawzī 1990, 230). Ibn Khafīf's primary objective was to reform Sūfīsm from its original form. Ibn Khafīf sought to convert Sūfīs who prioritized seclusion with an emphasis on acquiring knowledge and attending scientific gatherings. Ibn Khafīf aimed to instill in Sūfīs an awareness of the paramount importance of "knowledge and cognition" within their Order. Indeed, knowledge, rather than detachment from society, emerged as a prominent matter for attaining the ultimate Truth. Ibn Khafīf also emphasized that in his will (Ibn Khafīf 1984 b, 274). The pursuit of knowledge was one of the most important functions in Ibn Khafīf's lodges (Zarkoob Shirazi 1931, 126). Building a wide range of lodges by Ibn Khafīf and his followers contributed significantly to the advancement of scholarship in this region.

Some Sūfīs were opposed to Ibn Khafīf's conceptual shift. They expressed frustration with his inclination towards compiling ḥadīth and delving into jurisprudence. This is why he had to attend lectures in secret (Daylamī 1984: 19). Ibn Khafīf's interest in knowledge and cognition, and his experience as a student in the company of masters with different fields, demonstrates his willingness to study different subjects. A narration shows that Ibn Khafīf was a master in his time in various sciences (Rashād, 1974: 25). Knowledge of science was so essential to Ibn Khafīf that he advised his disciples to follow five people: Hārith al-Muḥāsibī, Junayd, Abū Muhammad Rumi, Abū al-'Abbās 'Aṭā, and Umar ibn 'Uthmān. While he and his disciples did not distinguish between science and the truth, other elders, in his opinion, were masters of the present and had attained stages and revelations (Daylamī 1984: 37). In his will, he invited Sūfīs to study science, which requires participation in the community, being on the path of guidance for

reaching the stage of presence and attaining the truth (Ibn Khafīf 1984 b, 281).

One of the significant hallmarks of Ibn Khafīf's lodge (*Ribāṭ*) was its strong emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge and making a livelihood to fulfill necessary needs, as opposed to accumulating wealth (Karamustafa 2007, 114-124). These features gradually became the basic principles for those seeking to join such lodges. Another example of Ibn Khafīf 's emphasis on community involvement is his encouragement of Sūfīs to share meals with the impoverished, a practice he considered a way to get closer to God Almighty (Daylamī1984, 37). In his book *Al-Mu'taqid,* Ibn Khafīf believes that trust in God can be integrated into everyday life. Ibn Khafīf made such statements in reaction to the Sūfīs who believed that Sūfīs should not pursue a livelihood. Some forbade him from joining Ruwaym because he had married and turned to worldly endeavors to provide for his family (Karamustafa, 2007: 23; Ma'ṣūm Alishāh n.d, 198). According to Ibn Khafīf, there is no conflict between the idea of absence and engaging in work or earning a living. In other words, one can be present in society while also being absent. Falling in love with a human being is not even forbidden because it is not an obstacle to reaching the absence of self while a wide range of Sūfīs had believed that one who falls in love or gets married would be excluded in Sūfī Orders (Baqlī Shirāzī 2001, 17-18).
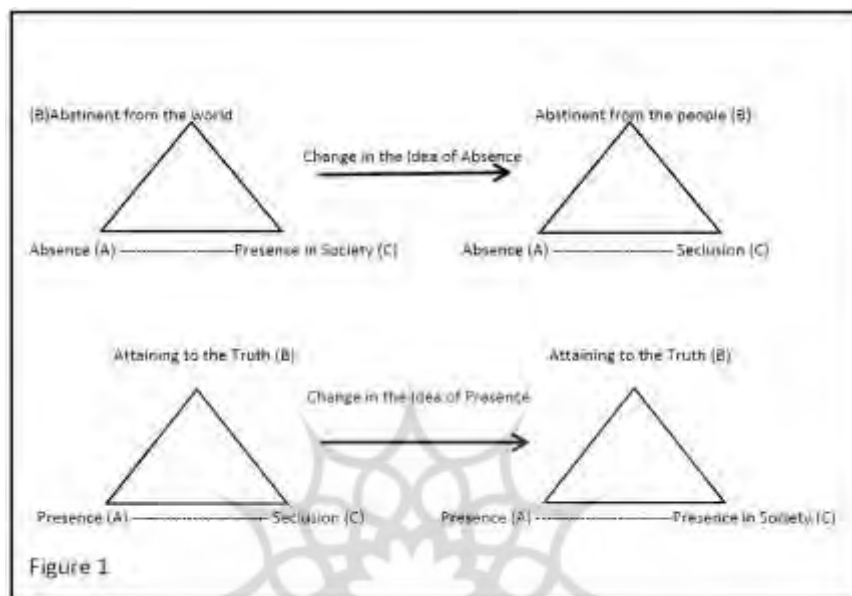
This shift affected not only the other Orders in Shirāz but also the Sūfīs in Baghdād and Khurāsān. Abu Ali Akār and Abu Ishāq Kāzeruni had close communication with Ibn Khafīf and transferred his teachings to the Kāzeruni Order (Daylamī 2011, 8; Zarkoob Shirazi 1931, 132).

**Changing the Process of "absence and presence" Ideas Based on Chandler's Model**

To apply this model to the notions of "absence and presence", it is important to remember that presence and absence are achieved simultaneously for Sūfīs. Accordingly, presence and absence imply the attainment of the Truth and avoidance from people, respectively, and the external referent of both is also a distance from the society that other ideas and terms revolve around. In the triadic model, both absence and presence are at position A. In other words, the concept of absence is a

sign/ signifier/ representamen. The next step is the interpretation of the absence. Absence was interpreted as a distance from the people and community, which is represented by the B position in Chandler's triangle. Since every interpretation entails an action, the Sūfīs practically settled themselves in seclusion as a result of this interpretation (position C in the Chandler Triangle). In addition, the idea of presence, which signified the attainment of the truth, was the referent of isolation and seclusion.

For Ibn Khafīf, the idea of absence is not incompatible with being among the people. The ideas of "absence and presence" from Ibn Khafīf's point of view on the Chandler triangle reveal his different approach.Ibn Khafīf's different interpretation of absence in Chdndler's model results in a diverse social practice. Without utilizing the triadic model it is difficult to understdnd the place of the ideas of "absence and presence" in ibn Khafif's system of thought." In Chandler's model, absence is placed at A as a sign/ signifier/ representamen. Ibn Khafīf's interpretation is at position B that differs significantly from the dominant interpretation. He offered "arrogance and detestation from the world" and "disappear from the self" as new interpretations of absence which, in the end, are reflected in the society differently and follow an action that is not in conflict with presence in the community. According to this view, Sūfīs can marry in society like other people, earn a living by getting a job, and acquire knowledge and science (position C). Ibn Khafīf aimed to change the social context of Sūfīsm by changing the conceptual meaning of the word absence. He wanted to bring the isolated Sūfīs back to the community. Daylamī and Junayd Shirāzī have associated a book titled *Al-Jam'a wa al-Tafraqah* (Gathering and Dispersing) to Ibn Khafīf. We do not know what it is about, but the title suggests that the subject may be related to the meaning of "change" that many Sūfīs resisted. Based on Chandler's model, this semiotic rotation and its external appearance can be clearly understood. We face a series of terms and meanings that cannot be analyzed without Chandler's triangle. In the triadic model, the coherent connection of signifier signified, and referent can clearly illustrate the ideas of absence and presence.

(B)Abstinent from the world

Change in the Idea of Absence →

Absence (A) ———— Presence in Society (C)

Abstinent from the people (B)

Absence (A) ———— Seclusion (C)

Attaining to the Truth (B)

Change in the Idea of Presence →

Presence (A) ———— Seclusion (C)

Attaining to the Truth (B)

Presence (A) ———— Presence in Society (C)

Figure 1

In the figure above, the presence implies the attainment of the truth. The ultimate goal of Sūfīsm was to obtain the truth, on which there was no disagreement; but over time, various interpretations and notions were offered and proposed by Sūfīs to comprehend how to achieve the truth. There is a connection between absence and presence, which indicates that they both appear together in the same person and as a result, they have the same external manifestation. Unlike Sūfīs inclined to seclusion, Ibn Khafīf not only did not believe social interaction to be an obstacle to attaining the truth but he also considered it necessary. In other words, he replaced the interpretation of abstention from the world with the prevalent interpretation of distance from people. This replacement also changed the referent of absence according to the above figure. By shifting the mental perception of absence, the action of Sūfīsm also changes, so that instead of being isolated, participating in the community (getting married, gaining a job, and pursuing knowledge) becomes the main occupation of Sūfīsm.

According to Ibn Khafīf, one of the requirements of absence is "certainty" (*Yaqin*) which he defines as "awareness of the rules of absence" (Qushayrī 1966, 272; Iṣfahānī 2005: 490). Recognizing the

value and importance of knowledge and making an effort to attain it, prepares a person to go through these stages. Besides, the desire to reach the Truth is one of the features of a lover using all his efforts in gaining knowledge to reach the Truth. The reason for his emphasis on detestation of the world is the possibility of falling in love with the mortal world, which ends in demise (Ibn Khafīf 1984 b, 278). Ibn Khafīf's advice to his followers is silence, moderation in eating, and limited sleep (Daylamī 1985, 33). This prescription is grounded in the belief that practicing austerity in these cases reduces an individual's attachment to the material world. In the path of Ibn Khafīf, cognition is the attribute of a mystic, and science is the attribute of the erudite. He wants Sūfī to achieve cognition through gaining knowledge because knowledge is a gateway into God's presence which is not possible but by considering God (Ibn Khafīf 1984 a, 297- 298). In the surviving texts of Ibn Khafīf, the emphasis is on attending gatherings and acquiring knowledge. These texts also suggest that a Sūfī can attain knowledge and possess the means, but the poor cannot (Ibn Khafīf 1984 a, 306). Ibn Khafīf's change in the ideas of absence and presence provided a positive tendency of being in the society and gaining knowledge. As a result, Sūfīs received intellectual and practical guidance (Akbarī and Sojūdī 2014: 86).

## Conclusion

The primary objective throughout history has consistently revolved around the pursuit of truth. This noble aspiration was also a considerable concern for Ibn Khafīf. However, what set him apart from certain Sūfīs was that he noticed the incorrect way taken by some Sūfīs which created a negative image of the Sūfīs among other Islamic sects. By reinterpreting the ideas of absence and presence, Ibn Khafīf sought to bring about a profound change in the social practice of Sūfīs. Moreover, he tried to protect the idea of presence which implies the attainment of the truth. In the Sūfī texts, the basis of the binary "absence and presence" was addressed, yet lacked thorough explanations or interpretations.

This research was conducted with intention of employing a semiotic approach within the realm of the history of ideas, drawing upon Chandler's triadic model. Using Chandler's model in this research facilitated the establishment of a semiotic framework for the examination of these aforementioned ideas. Accordingly, the mentioned ideas, which

hdd been used disorganized in the Sūfī corpus in the early era,were epplained dnd interpreted in this study. The evolution of the history of iaeas  wasalso clearly examined.

Accepting the premise that the meaning of a term emerges in its interpretation, the idea of absence has been identified as synonymous with "disconnection from the people." Chandler's approach illustrates how each interpretation leads to a specific action. Consequently, the referent of the above-mentioned interpretation appeared in society as "social isolation and alienation" driving some Sūfīs to reject Knowledge, marriage, work, and livelihoods, ultimately leading them to beg. That resulted in some negative views on Sūfīsm, which led to Sūfīs being condemned and even rejected. Within the Sūfis understanding, the ideas of presence and absence were almost similar, and in many cases, they were often used interchangeably. Achieving the truth was also considered a consequence of isolation from people and distancing oneself from society. In other words, for Sūfīs, absence equated to presence, and presence resembled absence, culminating in a common external referent: seclusion and detachment from people and society.

Ibn Khafīf uses a different interpretation of the idea of absence by shifting from "isolation and alienation from society" to "abstention from the world and worldly affairs." According to Ibn Khafīf, abstaining from the world is not incompatible with getting married, doing business, and gaining knowledge. As a result, the referent of the idea of presence changed as well. It is worth noting that Ibn Khafīf acknowledged that excessive accumulation of wealth could hinder a Sūfī from attaining the stage of presence. In the Khafīfiyya order, engaging in work and fulfilling essential needs is regarded as a social imperative, while saving money and wealth is prohibited. Through this subtle redefinition of the ideas of absence and presence, Ibn Khafīf introduced a novel interpretation that set the stage for the absence of self and worldly attachment. Ultimately, the social outcome of presence is the pursuit of the truth without necessitating social isolation.

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