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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Salafi Sufism in Central Asia and its Future

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**Abstract:** Salafism and Sufism are two old Islamic movements that have had major conflicts throughout the history of Islam, which were mainly related to aspects of adherence to and respect for Islamic law and jurisprudence and different interpretations of religious texts. Simultaneously, these two movements have also had some interactions with each other, and there have emerged some individuals or groups who have combined a number of the manifestations of Sufi practices and actiond with those of Salafi and thus creating Salafi Sufism or Sufi Salafism. The Central Asian region is the cradle of a great number of Sufi orders. It has delivered great mystics to the Islamic society. Moreover, several signs of Sufism can be observed in its people's general culture. However, the people's inclination towards Islam at the time of liberation from the yoke of communism and the formation of Islamic groups and parties – who wanted Islam to play a greater role in governing the society – besides some countries' cultural and propaganda exercise, it has led to the creation of various Salafi groups in the region. Naturally, Salafi's entry into Central Asia's mystical culture paves the way for the creation and growth of a discourse that has nurtured a combination of Salafism and Sufism in itself. The present study examines the Salafi Sufis in Central Asia and the Sufi-Salafi interactions in this region. Although there are many references on Sufism and Salafism in Central Asia, no independent reference on Salafi Sufism was found in the land.

**Keywords:** Salafism, Sufism, Central Asia, Deobandism, Tablighi Jamaat

## Introduction

Political aspect of Islam and the effect of this religion in socio-political arenas have not been put into debate by western scientific assemblies until recent eras. Islamic studies concerning the issue of Islam in Central Asia also refused to consider political aspect of Islam. Such ignorance took place until the time that the countries of Central Asia gained independence from Soviet Union during 1990s. However, the inclination of people towards Islam in times of freedom from Communism and formation of Islamic parties and groups who were in support of a leading role for Islam in terms of governing the society caused socio-political atmosphere of the Societies to concentrate on this issue. This concentration became more during the incidents that occurred on 11<sup>th</sup> of 2001. From this time onwards, with the creation of extremist groups like ISIS and people's attraction towards them, the focus of the societies has reached a peak. On the one hand, the studies around Salafi groups in Central Asia and the issues related to them have become far more than before. On the other hand, Sufism as the best means of

controlling people's inclination towards extremism has been at the center of attentions. Benigsen is one of the prominent scholars in the field of Islamism and Soviet Union. He has achieved a high status concerning the study of Sufism in Central Asia, through writing the book '*Sufis and the Commissars*' and also other books about Soviet Union. In addition, He has played a major role by nurturing a generation of researchers in this field of study. '*Sufis and the Commissars*' introduce Sufi orders and their socio-political activities during the period of Communism and explain some of their rituals and traditions.

In the book '*Sufism in Central Asia*', Pakatchi presents a historical account of mysticism and spirituality in Central Asia. He also introduces the great scholars and intellectuals of mysticism in this region from the first presence of Islam there up to now.

As one of the last publications in the field of Sufism in Central Asia, one can refer to the book '*Expression of Sufi Culture in Tajikistan*' which reviews this subject from a different point of view. This

book is written by Gatling and studies Sufism in Tajik folklore culture.

The researchers conducted about Salafism in Central Asia are a lot in terms of number, but similar in terms of content and approach. Most of the published books and articles concerning Salafism are about introducing extremist groups in the region, teachings of political Islam in Central Asia etc. For instance, Namukin introduces three main branches of Salafism in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan, The Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan and The Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islami .

In the book *'Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia'*, Olcott reviews the history of Salafism and extremism from 1920 to 2000. In his other book *'In the Whirlwind of Jihad'*, he also presents the aspects of Islamic extremism and elaborates the status and role of Islam in Uzbekistan during the communist ruler and after Uzbekistan got independence.

Johnson has also done a similar task in his book *'Oil, Islam, and Conflict'* and has studied the presence of Islam in the social life of the people of Central Asia before and after their independence. He has also

introduced Jihadi and Salafi groups of this region.

In the present paper, through a library research method, Salafism and Sufism are taken into consideration. Furthermore, the Salafi 38tic in Central Asia, and the roots and results of their close links are expounded.

### **Definition of Salafism**

Salafism has a deep connection with the concept of Salaf in Islamic thought. Salaf means “the past, and refers to those who have lived in the past” (Ahmad Ibn Fares, 1979: 95, Ibn Manzoor, 1993: 158) and as an expression, it means “the first generation of followers” (Farmanian, 2014: 165) or “Muslims of the first three centuries of Islam” (Alizadeh Mousavi, 2014: 31).

Perhaps the first Salafi tendencies can be seen in the people of Hadith of the fourth century AH, who were among the followers of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Ibn Taymiyyah in the seventh century AH is the next to be referred to since he undoubtedly played a unique role in reviving Salafi thought. Subsequently, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab – another Hanbali scholar – in the twelfth century, revived the teachings of

Ibn Taymiyyah and helped this culture to spread in the Islamic society (Al-Kathiri, 2008: 38).

According to some scholars, the Salafi title is more appropriate for a movement founded in Egypt by Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi (1828-1898) and his students such as Muhammad Abdu and Rashid Reza. These three people believed that the Islamic society will not be refined unless through returning to the principle of religion and separating its pure teachings from deviations (Hanafi, n.d.: 20)

Some experts believe that the origin of all contemporary Islamic movements in Central Asia go back to the Islamic Awakening Movement led by Seyyed Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi (Kolaei and Khansari, 2014: 250).

### **History of Salafism in Central Asia**

At least two questions can be asked about the history of the Salafis' presence in Central Asia: 1) When does the presence of the first Salafi individuals and groups in this region go back to, and how have they grown? 2) Which Salafi individual or group's ideas and teachings did the Salafis

of Central Asia follow, and who holds their intellectual authority?

Experts are not unanimous in answering the above two questions. Perhaps one can demonstrate the outcome of all the dominant views in the form of the following historical trend:

1. The founder of the first Wahhabi-oriented seminary in the Fergana Valley in 1912 is believed to be a Saudi named Sayyid Sharif Muhammad.
2. One of the most influential clerics in Central Asia was Mohammadjan Hindustani (1892-1989), who played an important role in promoting underground and secret education in Uzbekistan.

Saeed ibn Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahd ibn Ali al-Tarabulsi al-Shami, known as Shami Dumullah or Mohammadjan Hindustani, entered Tashkent in 1919. It is not exactly clear who invited him or why; however, it is believed that Bolsheviks of ex-Soviet Union brought him to this land to weaken the power of Sufism. Shami Dumullah was initially considered as an intellectual and modern figure who could win over Sufism. Nevertheless, after some

time, when his fundamentalist and Salafi approaches became clear in 1924, his sermons were prevented from being held, and thus his secret activities began.

Naturally, the formation of an Islamic government and the effort to implement Islamic law was Hindustani's greatest propaganda goal. He prohibited any cooperation with the communist government, but simultaneously was opposed to any military action against the Soviets. According to him, the Soviet government was a test for Muslims, in which, success was based on patience and trust in God, not political or military struggle (Khalid, 2014: 114).

Hindustani was accused of spying for Britain in 1932 and was forced to escape. But he was arrested in Khwarazm and exiled to Siberia for fifteen years. After his release, he settled in Dushanbe and lived there until the end of his life (Vitaly, 2005: 40). Six volumes on Qur'anic commentary and several articles and writings have survived from Hindustani (Olcott, 2007: 13).

Such ideas as Islam's refinement from the excesses and mistakes were prevalent among Hindustani's followers and

disciples, which were completely opposed by him (Dudoignon & Hisao, 2002: 205). Hindustani did not agree with all of the Salafist ideas, e.g., he believed it was not right to use force to promote religious beliefs, and jihad against compromising infidels or secular non-Islamic states was only wasting of blood (Babadzhanov, 2002: 307). However, other historical reports state that Shami Dumullah did not agree with some of the traditional rituals and personally participated in the destruction of at least one shrine, or opposed such traditions as feeding at circumcision ceremonies, attending mourning ceremonies or giving bride price at wedding.

It is worth mentioning that some of Hindustani's students included Hanafi scholars who were opposed to Salafism and Wahhabism. For instance, Ismaeel Qari – Imam of the Great Mosque in Kokand – can be referred to as the one who was taken captive by the followers of a Wahhabi sect due to his opposition to Wahhabism. Mohammad Sadegh Andijani and Abdul Latif Andijani were also Hindustani's students who were active in writing against the Wahhabi ideology (Olcott, 2012: 92).

Interestingly, Hindustani's teaching circles were not empty of Sufis either. An important example is Abdul Rahmanjan, Great Naqshbandi Sheikh, who was in touch with Hindustani during and after his studies. He ran his own teaching circles in 1956, in which, he dealt with the rituals of secret remembrance, reading the poems of Rumi and Biddle, reviewing mystic manuscripts, and meditating. In addition to Abdul Rahmanjan, Sheikh Asadullah (d. 1976) can also be mentioned as one of the famous Sufis of the region who was one of Hindustani's students as well (Olcott, 2012: 96).

One of the Hindustani's students was Hakim Qari, who separated from him after attending Hindustani's teaching circle for a year in Dushanbe<sup>1</sup> and established an underground and secret school in Margilan, Uzbekistan. Considering Hindustani to be an ally of the Soviet Union, he gathered some of Hindustani's students, such as Abdul Wali Qari and Rahmatullah Qari, and held a teaching circle to present a Salafi interpretation of Islam and counter Soviet anti-religious policies. The contradictions

in the methods of struggle caused a conflict between Hakim Qari and his two students as well. Hakim Qari focused more on confronting the innovations and deviations created in religion, while Abdul Wali and Rahmatullah had made effort to fight the anti-religious government overtly. It may be said that Hakim Qari was more influenced than Ibn Taymiyyah. However, Abdul Wali and Rahmatullah mostly promoted the works of Hasan al-Bana, Sayyid Qutb, and Abu al-Ali Maududi. Some scholars consider Hakim Qari to be Wahhabism's father in Central Asia (Center for International Cultural Studies, 2015: 222).

The establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 greatly influenced the growth of Salafism. Muslims of Central Asia considered Arabs to be the owners and bearers of true Islam, and thus the inclination of the Saudi people to Wahhabism led to an increase in the followers of Salafism and Wahhabism in Central Asia (Khalid, 2014: 46).

Gradually, the scholars of the region were divided into two groups, including the

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<sup>1</sup> Seemingly, Hindustani himself fired Hakim Qari and rejected him from his classes.

Hanafi scholars as traditional and conservative clerics and the Salafi scholars as fundamentalist clerics, and this categorization became a reason for further conflicts among Muslims and led to the increase of violence.

A man named Ziauddin Baba Khan underwent ideological training in Saudi Arabia in 1947 and 1948 and then returned to Uzbekistan. The Baba Khan dynasty was responsible for administering religious affairs in Central Asia. As his father was involved in the establishment of this center, Ziauddin was the head of this office for many years, and after him, his son Shamsuddin Baba Khan was appointed as head. Some believe that Baba Khan's connection to Saudi Arabia increased the influence of the Wahhabi ideology on the muftis of Central Asia.

However, clerics inclined to Salafi and Wahhabi ideology had also realized that the culture and customs of the people of Central Asia were miles away from the culture that Wahhabi missionaries sought to promote in the Islamic world. It should not be expected that those teachings, with the same concentration and shape, would

have significant followers in Central Asia or be met with general appreciation.

Between 1950 and 1970, groups similar to the Tablighi Jama'at emerged in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which were inactive due to society's oppression and lived in isolation without any influence on the society's general atmosphere.

From the early 1970s to the late 1980s, due to the less sensitive government and the granting of more religious freedom to Muslims, Salafist activities gradually grew, and students were recruited in secret and underground schools. They distributed pamphlets and tapes of speeches among their confidants. During these years, there was no courage to involve in political and social issues and criticize the government, and Salafi religious activities were limited to promoting morality and encouraging piety (Rashid, 2008: 170).

Among the famous preachers during these years were Abdul Wali and Rahmatullah, who were mentioned earlier as Mohammadjan Hindustani's students. Rahmatullah published a pamphlet called *Muslimabad* in 1981, shortly before he died in a car accident. This pamphlet presented a picture of an ideal Islamic government

and society. Abdul Wali disappeared suspiciously in 1995, but his audio and video files are still popular and can be found on sites such as YouTube (Olcott, 2012: 12). The issue that Abdul Wali seeks to promote is the use of weapons to defend beliefs (Abduvakhitov, 1993: 83). Among Abdul Wali's most famous students are Juma Namangani and Tahir Yuldashev, who later founded the Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan.

In the late 1980s and 1991s, and at the end of Soviet history, Salafis began to infiltrate various schools and mosques, and their criticism of the people's traditional and religious customs intensified. The foreign relations of these groups and the foreign supports of them also took a more serious form.

In 1991 and 1992, after the independence of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and with the wave of Islamism of the people of the region, Salafi movements, focusing on the Fergana Valley and creating Islamic communities, called for the establishment of an Islamic state and the centrality of Sharia to govern the society. During this period, there was still no pessimism about the new rulers, and

there was a tendency to cooperate with the government among various religious centers.

In 1992, repression of religious activists began in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Some fled to Afghanistan and joined Afghan Salafists, while others took part in the Islamic Movement's struggle against the Tajik government.

The peace agreement between the parties to the Tajik civil war was signed in 1997, and since then, various Salafi and jihadist groups have been established in the two countries, especially Uzbekistan, and have turned to widespread sabotage and violence.

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan joined the US-led coalition's fight against terrorism, and tensions escalated against Islamic groups and activities. Some of the Salafis of the two countries allied with the Taliban against the American coalition, and many lost their lives along the way, and some fled to Pakistan.

The events of the Islamic world, especially the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, created a good opportunity for those who



were disappointed with establishing an Islamic government in their own country and saw Iraq and Syria as fertile grounds for achieving their dream. According to some available statistics, the share of fighters from Central Asia and the Caucasus in Iraq and Syria has been higher than those from other countries.

Of course, it should be noted that Islam, on the one hand, was imbued with customs and traditions of the people of the region, and on the other hand, the color of Sufi culture has spread everywhere. It is clear that in such atmosphere, a percentage of the traditional clergies oppose this way of religiosity of people and consider it tainted with superstitions and deviations and try to refine it from deviations. These objections to society's general culture can be considered similar to Salafism, which has sometimes been aligned with it – from time immemorial to the present.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Muslim countries in the early 1990s can be seen as a new chapter in the life of Salafi thought in the Central Asian region. The formation of Muslim countries and the sense of freedom and independence of the Muslim people of the region caused

the creation and acceleration of the return to Islam in society, the effects of which can be traced in various manifestations of the issue.

Along with these issues, the growth of Islamophobia and the desire for the presence of Islamic teachings in all political and social aspects of people's lives has led to the spread of Salafi thought among the communities of Central Asia and the Caucasus, and therefore, has made the control and confrontation with Salafi movement as the greatest security and social concern of the people, rulers, and neighboring countries.

Salafi thought has emerged in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as an organized group under three subdivisions: the Islamic Movement of Tajikistan, Hizb ul-Tahrir, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

### **Sufism in Central Asia**

Numerous opinions have been expressed about the lexical meaning and roots of Sufism, all of which have been challenged. Momentarily speaking, from one perspective, it can be said that some people consider this word to have Arabic roots, and some people look for its roots in a

language other than Arabic. The third perspective is that the word has no roots at all and is a kind of code name that every letter of it refers to a subject. In conclusion, considering all opinions, it can be said that the connection between Sufism and Suf, in the sense of wool and referring to the wool-covering of Sufism, has fewer problems and more supporters. (Sadeghi: 2003)

In the definition of Sufism as an expression, various ideas have been offered by different people. The multiplicity of these definitions and meanings is so numerous that Shahabuddin Suhrawardi computes the number to be more than one thousand. (Suhrawardi, 1983: 57) The common aspect of these definitions can be summarized in the search for closeness to God through asceticism and secularism, solitude, austerity, and confrontation with the soul, and more attention to esoteric and intuitive spiritual journey and conduct instead of rationality and rational knowledge (Chitik, 2007: 25).

In ancient times, Central Asia was the cradle of Islamic civilization and one of the centers of religious spirituality, in which three important Sufi orders, namely Kubrawiya, Yasawiya, and Naqshbandi,

were born and propagated. Considering all Sufi orders, the Naqshbandi order was able to become a universal one, which is the largest Sufi order in the Islamic world in terms of population and extension throughout the world.

### **Relationships and Affinities between Sufism and Salafism**

The Naqshbandi order has become the cradle of birth and growth of some Sufi-Salafi movements due to its special characteristics, including greater adherence to the Sharia and avoidance of other mystical sects' customs and rituals. Among these, there are two important movements in the Islamic world, both of which originated through the Naqshbandi order of India, and in both movements, elements of Salafi thought have penetrated. These two Sufi-Salafi movements, which also have a strong presence and influence in the Central Asian Naqshbandi order, are Deobandi and Tablighi Jamaat.

#### **E) Deobandi**

To get acquainted with Deobandi and the Tablighi Jama'at's thinking and to find the connection between the aforementioned

movements, it is necessary to search in history and get acquainted with some characters.

### ***1) Deobandieh Movement***

#### **Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi**

Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, who has been named by some as the Reviver of the Second Millennium, was born in Sirhind in 1563 and died in 1625.

In addition to studying religious sciences, Sheikh Ahmad also paid attention to mysticism and Sufism. On the one hand, he grew up in theoretical mysticism by studying such books as *Al-Ta'rif* by Kalabadi, *Awarif al-Ma'arif* by Suhrawardi, and *The Bezels of Wisdom* by Ibn Arabi. On the other hand, in the presence of his father, he adhered to the sect of Chishtiyya and practiced spiritual journey and conduct, and after a while, he received the permission to guide others. Soon after, he became acquainted with Qadiri's order and received permission to teach, from Qadiri's elders. Sheikh Ahmad decided to go to Hajj in 1599 and on the way to Hajj and in the city of Delhi, he met Sheikh Abdul Baqi Badakhshi (Khaja Baghi Ballah) and selected the path of

spiritual journey and conduct based on the etiquette of Naqshbandi and considered this sect as the best pattern that embraces both Islamic law and mysticism. After a while, Sheikh Ahmad wore the Naqshbandi order cloak (kherqeh) and became the caliph of Sheikh Abdul Baqi (Al-Nadwi, 1994: 123).

Sheikh Ahmad's spiritual conduct didn't last long and, according to him, this spiritual journey took him less than three months to reach the peak. A summary of what Sheikh has explained in detail is that Sheikh Abdul Baqi teaches him a dhikr concerning the name of God. After two days, he sees the whole universe as a one whole unit and achieves the state of annihilation. In the next stage, he draws the spiritual veils aside and steps in the path of amazement, after which he experiences the state of perceiving God's presence. After these steps, which have lasted only a few days, he achieves a state in which he perceives everything around through the mirror of his heart and see himself in all things around. The master warns him that this position of the unity of existence is not yet perfect, and he must achieve the state to consider himself as nothing and God as the

only Existing one. After going through some stages, Sheikh Ahmad achieves the state in which he denies the relationship between people as nothing and God as the existing one or that is to say the relation between the Creator and the creatures. It is clear that at this stage, he rejects the issues that Sufis care for, such as the unity of existence (Ahmad Sirhindi, 2004: 686-690).

According to Sheikh Ahmad, human beings should first correct their beliefs based on Islam's pure teachings and then try to carry out practical and jurisprudential instructions according to Islamic law. Passing these two stages, the spirit of Islam is achieved. Sufi spiritual journey and conduct is a recommended stage that contributes to the perfection of the previous two fundamental stages. (Ahmad Sirhindi, 2004: 210).

Sheikh Ahmad believed that Islamic laws must be practiced alongside Spiritual conduct. He did not tolerate many Sufi practices and rituals such as *sama* and ecstasy. Furthermore, according to his Salafi and Akhbari inclinations, he considered some Sufi rites, such as vows and sacrifices for religious leaders,

appealing to others than God, and the like as examples of polytheism. His critiques of Sufism led to the creation of a sect within the Naqshbandi body known as the Mujaddediyya or Ahmadiyya order (Alizadeh Mousavi, 2013: 69).

Al-Nadwi lists the names of thirty-one students and caliphs of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi who were considered as sheikhs of Naqshbandi. These sheikhs accepted the reformist thinking of the Mujaddidiyya movement and spread such thinking among their followers during different generations. Among these names, the names of some of the elders of the Deobandi school can be seen, which shows that Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi can be introduced as the intellectual source of Deobandi (Al-Nadwi, 1994: 308).

### **Shah Waliullah Dehlawi**

Shah Waliullah Dehlawi is considered to be the greatest Muslim scholar of India (Farmanian, 2007: 667), and he, along with his son and grandson (Shah Abdul Aziz and Shah Ismail Dehlawi), are considered to be the architects of Deobandi school (Alizadeh Mousavi, 1392: 76). Shah Waliullah Dehlawi was born in 1703. After

years of studying and teaching in India, he emigrated to Mecca and Medina at the age of twenty-nine to continue his education. Fourteen months later, he returned to Delhi and began his religious activity, which was based on a hadith-based and strict approach to reform the religion and refine superstitions and deviations.

The hadith view of Shah Waliullah was continued by his son and took on a more extreme aspect. He promoted the same view of Ibn Taymiyyah and other Salafis about monotheism and polytheism and opposed many Muslim customs and beliefs under the pretext of polytheism. The important difference between the Deobandis and the Wahhabis is that in the thinking of the Deobandis, the followers of *Tawassul* and *Istighatha*, etc., although they have committed polytheism, are not accused of infidelity, and for this reason, their blood, property, honor, and reputation is respectable (Al-Osmani, 2005: 257).

Shah Waliullah learned the Naqshbandi order from his father, and his son and disciples never abandoned their Sufi sect. He considered the way of the prophets and saints to be complementary, but he believed

in the need to reform the teachings of Sufism (Farmanian, 2007: 667).

### **Mohammad Qasim Nanotavi**

The nineteenth century in India was the period of British colonial rule and the general struggle against it. One of the most important periods of this popular struggle was the general uprising of 1857 during which the scholars and the people were severely repressed by British colonialism. Following this repression, various approaches emerged among Indian thinkers and elders, one of which was the establishment of fundamentalist schools. Mohammad Qasim Nanotavi (1833-1880), following Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, established the Dar al-Uloom school in the city of Deoband in 1867, which spread surprisingly around the world. For example, according to some statistics provided around 2013 and 2014, the number of official Deobandi schools in Pakistan and Bangladesh was 20000 each, and it was more than 9000 in India, while there are informal schools about twice as many, where millions of students study from all over the world (Azimi et al., 2015: 274).

## **Relationship between Deobandi School and Sufism**

As mentioned above, the Deobandi school's elders and founders, such as Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi and Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, despite their opposition to some Sufi rites and beliefs, were themselves considered as the elders of the sect and they have founded the Naqshbandi Mujaddidiya order. Among the great and famous Indian mystics, the name of Haji Emdadullah Mohajer Makki has been mentioned as the spiritual leader and the elder of the Deobandi sect. He was the elder and mentor of many Deobandi scholars such as Mohammad Qasem Nanotavi, Ashraf Ali Tahanavi, and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, and in Deobandi sources, he is mentioned with such titles as Amir al-Mo'menin, Qows al-Kamelin, etc. (Alizadeh Mousavi, 2013: 172).

One of the most important sources for understanding Deobandi's ideas and teachings is the book of Al-Muhannad ala al-Mufannad written by the great Deobandi scholar Khalil Ahmad Saharanpouri. In the eleventh question of this book, he raises the issue of Sufism and asks about engaging in mystical occupations, pledging allegiance

to Sufi elders, and receiving esoteric blessings from great figures during their life or even after their death. Saharanpouri's answer to this question is as follows:

In our opinion, it is recommended that a person who is done with correcting his beliefs and studying the necessary issues of Islamic doctrine, pledges allegiance with Sheikh of an order. This sheikh should be steadfast in terms of Islamic laws, heedless of worldly affairs and interested in the Hereafter. He should have passed through hardships in the way of self-improvement, and become adherent to righteous deeds, and separated from evil deeds. Furthermore, he should trust and rely sheikh, exclusively associate with his opinions, and engage in Sufi practices like remembrance, thought, and annihilation... (Saharanpouri, 2015: 46).

At the beginning of the questions and answers mentioned in the book, he states:

Thanks to God, Concerning the orders of Sufism, we, our elders and our followers are all attributed to Naqshbandiya, Chishtiyya, Qadiriyya, and Suhrewardiyya. (Saharanpouri, 2015: 29).

The presence of Naqshbandi Deobandis is also significant in Central Asia. Even the extremist Salafis of the region sometimes mingle with the Naqshbandi Sufis and unite to find a foothold. The education of Central Asian Sufi youth in Deobandi schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan has also led to a further expansion of the Naqshbandi movement. Central Asian Sufis have combined Salafi thinking with their Sufi character (Kolaei, 2015: 210).

### **Tablighi Jama'at**

The Tablighi Jama'at can be considered as the propaganda branch of Deobandi. Perhaps the most important difference between Deobandi and the Tablighi Jama'at that can be expressed is the method of propagating and promoting the teachings of religion. The Deobandis seek to establish seminaries and provide specialized religious education to students, while Tablighi Jama'at seeks to teach simple religious beliefs to the public through face-to-face propaganda (Azimi et al., 2015: 317). In the following, a brief look is cast upon the background and performance of this group.

### **Tablighi Jama'at Movement**

Molavi Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi (1884-1943) was one of the graduates of Deoband seminary who founded the Tablighi Jamaat in 1927.

The reason for launching this propaganda movement is considered to be the coexistence of Indian Muslims with Hindus and the public's ignorance about religious beliefs. When Muhammad Ilyas saw that seminaries', educational system did not seek the public dissemination of Islamic knowledge and did not have a plan to publicize Islamic issues, he thought of forming propaganda groups from among the public and sending them to different parts of the country.

After the death of Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi in 1943, his son Mohammad Yusuf became the leader of the Tablighi Jamaat. After him, several people were in charge of leading this Tablighi Jamaat, the last of whom is Mohammad Saad Kandhlawi, who has been the leader of the Tablighi Jamaat in India since 2014 (Azimi et al., 2015: 348).

Tablighi Jama'at is now active in almost every country in the world and has created the world's largest propaganda organization. The annual gathering of the

Tablighi Jamaat in Dhaka, Bangladesh, with about five million participants, is the largest annual gathering of the people in the world after the Arbaeen gathering, which is attended by Muslims from about 130 countries, and its lectures are translated simultaneously into 21 languages (Azimi et al., 2015: 326).

### ***Tablighi Jama'at in Central Asia***

Relations between India and Central Asia, which have normally been warm and close, were minimized during the tsarist colonial period and through religious repression. However, after the independence of the Central Asian countries, relations between the two regions resumed as one of the manifestations of the Tablighi Jama'at's presence in the Central Asian countries.

The missionaries of Tablighi Jama'at in Central Asia, known as '*Da'wat chi*' (meaning propagator) there, appearing in the same Pakistani style – long beards, pants, shirts, and sweatshirts – can be viewed in various Central Asian countries. However, these people's presence and activity are more prominent in a country like Kyrgyzstan, which has more religious freedom, and less in a country like

Uzbekistan, where religious activities are tightly controlled by the government (Center for International Cultural Studies, 2015: 238).

According to some Tablighi Jama'at members, the movement's first presence with the aim of propagation in Central Asia was in the 1960s, as part of a student exchange program between the Soviet Union, India, and Bangladesh. These students have made efforts for propaganda activities in the region, which, of course, have expanded to religious activities since 1991, following the opening of the region's doors (Center for International Cultural Studies, 2015: 244).

Uzbekistan may be the first country that Tablighi Jama'at were active in Tashkent in the early 1990s, especially in Andijan and Kokand's eastern cities. Although the Tablighi Jama'at was never a threat to the Uzbek government, it quickly became a suspect and was blacklisted in 2004 for extremism and terrorism. The result of these restrictions has been a reduction in the volume of activities and the inconspicuous presence of Tablighi Jama'at.



The situation of Tablighi Jama'at in Tajikistan is not better in Uzbekistan. Tablighi Jama'at was outlawed in Tajikistan in 2009, and many of them were imprisoned. The Tajik government's crackdown has intensified following clashes between the government and the Islamic extremists in the Rasht Valley in 201, and all Tablighi Jama'at has been blacklisted by the government (Center for International Cultural Studies, 2015: 247).

### **Relationship between Tablighi Jama'at and Sufism**

There are various and contradictory judgments about the nature, function, and goals of the Tablighi Jama'at, which have raised doubts in the relationship between the Tablighi Jama'at and Sufism. The fact that the Tablighi Jama'at can be considered a Sufi thought has its proponents and opponents, whose views are briefly mentioned below.

### **Proponents of Considering Tablighi Jama'at as Sufis**

Apparently, Muhammad Anwar al-Haq was the first person who dedicated his scientific treatise to the Tablighi Jama'at

and subsequently published it. According to Anwar al-Haq, the Tablighi Jamaat is a continuation of traditional Sufism in India, which has also led to the conversion to Islam in this country (Gaborieau, 2006: 54). In general, those who consider the similarities between the Tablighi Jama'at and the Sufis and do not consider any fundamental difference between the two movements provide reasons and evidence for their claim, the most important of which is as follows:

#### **1) The Personality Features of the Founder of Tablighi Jama'at**

The first evidence to consider the Tablighi Jama'at as Sufis is the very fact that its founder has been a Sufi. Although, Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi has been specifically considered as one of the elders of Chishti Saberi. Like many other Indians, he was not merely devoted to a single sect, but also followed the Naqshbandi, Qadiriyya, Suhrewardiyya, and Chishti orders as well. However, he established the first center of the Tablighi Jama'at, which is now also the center of the Tablighi Jama'at organization, in the Nizamuddin complex in the city of Delhi, next to the

shrine of the great mystic – Nizamuddin-ul-Awliya (Gaborieau, 2005: 530) which is itself a proof of the belonging of the Tablighi community to the Sufi thought.

For many years, Muhammad Ilyas lived alone near Nizamuddin's tomb and was engaged in worship or guidance of the people. Charismatic attraction, along with mystical obedience, has been two characteristics of the Tablighi Jamaat founder, which can be claimed to be seen in other great Sufi saints and leaders. (Troll, 1982: 142).

## 2) Sufi Rites and Rituals of Tablighi Jama'at

A great number of the superficial and structural aspects of the Tablighi Jama'at are consistent with the teachings of Sufism, such as the following:

- In Salafi thought, hereditary positions have no special value, but in Sufi orders, hereditary positions have always existed. The leadership of Tablighi Jama'at was transferred to his son after Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi, and it remained in the Kandhlawi family after him.

- Muhammad Ilyas describes the Tablighi Jama'at as a "mobile monastery"

that reflects his Sufi vision and goals (Troll, 1982: 149).

- In addition to the prevalence of public dhikr in the Tablighi Jama'at, the leader prescribes a special dhikr for some members of the Tablighi Jamaat, which is a completely Sufi practice.

- Mortification is a special Sufi ritual that is also adhered to in the Tablighi Jamaat (Trimingham, 1998: 187).

## Morality and Apolitical Nature of Tablighi Jama'at

### *Opponents of Considering Tablighi Jama'at as Sufis*

It should be noted that some experts do not define the Tablighi Jama'at in the context of Sufism and do not consider these two to have the necessary similarities to be in harmony. The argument of the opponents, which is somehow an answer to the proponents' argumentations, is the following:

#### 1) What is Tablighi Jama'at seeking for?

The first question and ambiguity raised by the opponents is that everyone agrees that the Tablighi Jama'at is a reformist

movement. The question is whether the Jama'at pursues the propagation in Sufism and seeks to return to Sufism without error and superstition of the early centuries, or pursues reform in religion and seeks to return to the time and thought of the righteous Salaf?

Some believe that the project of Tablighi Jama'at is reform in Sufism, and they are Sufis who, while maintaining their devotion and connection to Sufism, want reforms in it (Anwarul Haq, 1972: 172). From another point of view, the Tablighi Jama'at is a Salafi movement that pursues the goal of returning to the Salaf religion, and of course, in the meantime, there is some space for spirituality (Masud, 2000: X1).

## 2) Propagation of Religion or Substitution in Sect?

As mentioned before, Haj Emdadullah Mohajer Makki was the Sheikh of a great number of the elders of Deobandi. The point made by some scholars is that the followers of Haj Emdadullah were of two kinds: The first group was introduced as his successors, and they were allowed to lead others in their spiritual journey and

conduct. The second group was allowed to propagate the religion without being bound to Sufi conducts. Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi is considered as a member of the second group, and his was more inclined towards propagation rather than practicing Sufi conduct. Therefore, one should not rely too much on the connections between the Tablighi Jamaat and Sufis (Ernst & Lawrence, 2002: 119).

## 3) Monastic Sufism or Islamic Ethics?

Some believe that the Tablighi Jamaat can be described as an ethics-oriented group that seeks to implement various aspects of spiritual life. But this point is far from monastic Sufism, and the Tablighi Jamaat should not be considered to be dependent upon it. Tablighi Jamaat is not an organized Sufism, it does not work based on a discipleship system (Ernst & Lawrence, 2002: 107).

Similarly, the current dhikr in Tablighi Jamaat should not be equated with the dhikr of Sufis which has its own special rituals.

## 4) Tablighi Jamaat, Deobandi, or Barelvi?

Deobandi and Barelvi are the two movements of thought among the Sunnis in the Indian subcontinent. Barelvi thought is closer to Sufism, while Deobandi thought is more inclined toward Salafi teachings. Tablighi Jamaat is a movement that comes from the heart of Deobandi and has little in common with the Barelvi. Hence, some scholars have argued that the Tablighi Jamaat's attribution to Deobandi and their distance from the Barelvi indicates its closer proximity to Salafi thought (Sanyal, 1999: 215).

### 5) **Tablighi Jama'at, a Political or a Silent Movement?**

Although the Sufi orders have been the source of numerous revolutions and uprisings throughout history and in different parts of the Islamic world; however, Sufi thought is known with silence and Salafi thought with the idea of political Islam, violence, and jihad at least in the contemporary era.

Contrary to many experts' beliefs, Tablighi Jama'at is not a silent and isolated

movement in the political space of society, and there are many signs of this movement being political and jihadist, some of which are:

- When Muhammad Ilyas went to Deoband in 1908 to complete his studies, he learned the science of hadith from Mahmud al-Hassan, one of the leaders of the Indian Revolution, and took the oath of jihad in his presence.
- One of the few surviving letters from Muhammad Alias is his message to the Conference of the Scholars and Political Leaders of Indian Independence, held in 1944<sup>2</sup>. The nature of this message and its content show that the leader of the Tablighi Jama'at was not far from the space of politics and jihad.
- The Tablighi Jama'at is affiliated with Deobandi thought and is known as a political and jihadist movement.
- Many of those who have been and are involved in terrorist operations and jihad are trained by the Tablighi Jama'at.
- The policy of the Tablighi Jama'at for a global presence in all countries and the

<sup>2</sup>The text of this message is available on the Internet. For example, this phrase can be used to find a translation of an English letter: "A Call to Muslims –

Message to an All-India Conference of Ulama, and the Muslim Political Leaders at Delhi in April 1944"

creation of the largest religious propaganda network in the world indicate the existence of governmental and political thinking in the minds of those in charge of this movement.

●

### **Political Sufis**

Due to its social system, Sufism has a great capability and potential for politicization. The Sufi orders consist of two classes of leaders and followers, and the devotion of the followers to their elders and sheikhs is one of the foundations of this system. Suppose that the elder of doctrine, in addition to his ascetic personality and spiritual grandeur, which exerts great influence among others, has the capacity of social leadership. In that case, he will be able to create a strong socio-political movement and rely on the potential of his followers' social body to put governments and rulers under pressure or be influential in socio-political relations.

This ability to lead and influence the people, which many Sufi elders enjoyed, has manifested itself in the form of social and benevolent services of the Sufis in general and in the form of wars, jihads, and revolutions in particular.

Therefore, despite all the efforts made to show the movements of Sufism in Central Asia peacefully and liberally, there are contexts for the connection of Sufism and Salafism and the creation of new Sufi-Salafi groups in this region, some of which are as follows:

1. The potentiality of the Sufi elders' social leadership and the discipleship system in the circles of Sufism has sometimes put this movement in opposition to the Russian infidelity, Buddhism, etc., in Central Asia and has become the source of jihad. Religious fundamentalism and Salafi thought will be linked to Sufism if they seek to refer to their historical identity and struggle history (Benigsen, 1999: 17).

2. Since the Central Asian governments' current policy is to promote Sufism and put Salafism in a tight spot, it is natural that some Salafis have emerged as Sufis and have the capacity to exploit social movements of secs to pursue their fundamentalist goals.

3. The word Wahhabi in particular and Salafi in a more limited way in the Islamic world does not create a positive mentality in Muslims' minds. In many cases, in the countries of Central Asia, these words are

out of their epistemological meaning. Generally, they refer to individuals or groups who object to and criticize the performance of the government. Naturally, there are different people with different intellectual tendencies from Sufis to Salafis among the opponents of the governments. The continuity of using political aspects of Wahhabi and Salafi titles will cause the protesting Sufis not to hesitate to put a Salafi label on their foreheads, and more common borders will appear gradually between the parties.

4.

### Summary and Conclusion

Central Asia has long been associated with mysticism and Sufism and has embraced

countless Sufis and Sufi orders. Among the Sufi sects, the largest is the Naqshbandi order, which, due to some of its teachings and characteristics, has more capacity than other popular Sufi sects in connecting with Salafism. Hence, the Naqshbandi order has been created in the form of Deobandi and Tablighi Jama'at, and it has many followers in Central Asia. In addition, the political repression in some Central Asian countries and the labeling of Wahhabism and Salafism on the foreheads of many religious activists have led some Salafis to continue their activities under the name of Sufis, creating a combination of Salafis and Sufis.

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## جریان صوفیه سلفی در آسیای مرکزی و آینده آن

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**چکیده:** سلفی‌گری و تصوف دو جریان قدیمی اسلامی هستند که در طول تاریخ اسلام با هم تضادهای عمده‌ای داشته‌اند که عمدتاً به جنبه‌های التزام و احترام به شریعت و فقه اسلامی و برداشته‌های مختلف از متون دینی مربوط می‌شود. همزمان، این دو جریان با یکدیگر تعاملاتی نیز داشته‌اند و افراد یا گروه‌هایی ظهور کرده‌اند که تعدادی از مظاهر عملی صوفیانه را با سلفیه ترکیب کرده و در نتیجه تصوف سلفی یا سلفی‌گری صوفیانه را پدید آورده‌اند. منطقه آسیای مرکزی مهد تعداد زیادی از طریقت‌های صوفی است و عرفای بزرگی را تحویل جامعه اسلامی داده است. به‌علاوه در فرهنگ عمومی مردم آن نشانه‌های متعددی از تصوف به چشم می‌خورد. اما گرایش مردم به اسلام در زمان‌هایی از یوغ کمونیسم و تشکیل گروه‌ها و احزاب اسلامی - که می‌خواستند اسلام در اداره جامعه نقش بیشتری داشته باشد - علاوه بر فعالیت‌های فرهنگی و تبلیغی برخی کشورها، منجر به ایجاد گروه‌های مختلف سلفی در منطقه شده است. طبیعتاً ورود تفکر سلفی به فرهنگ عرفانی آسیای مرکزی زمینه‌ساز ایجاد و رشد گفتمانی است که ترکیبی از سلفی‌گری و تصوف را در خود پرورش داده است. پژوهش حاضر به بررسی صوفیان سلفی در آسیای مرکزی و تعاملات صوفی - سلفی در این منطقه می‌پردازد. اگرچه در منابع پژوهشی مربوط به آسیای مرکزی اشارات زیادی در مورد تصوف و سلفی‌گری وجود دارد، هیچ مرجع مستقلی درباره تصوف سلفی در این سرزمین یافت نشد.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** سلفی‌گری، تصوف، آسیای میانه، دیوبندیه، جماعت تبلیغی.



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