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Sufism and Personality Development

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Abstract:

Personality development is the process of improvement in behaviors and attitudes to make an individual a unique person. Sufism brings about positive changes in the behaviors of individuals. The positive changes are brought through moral development within inductive environment griped by building of character. Moral development guides through "Zuhud" and "Taqwa" for minimization of material luxuries, enhancement of repentance and self-purification. The purpose of moral development is achieved with an institution articulated with teacher-student (Murshid-Murid) relationships; this environment ensures the provision of guidance and scholarships for the engaged students. The engagement of students revolves around knowledge, awareness and behavior. In the dimension of knowledge students are helped with raising moral and spiritual awareness to enhance firmness in faith and encouragement towards good deeds. In addition, behavioral (amal) dimension is covered with remembrance of Allah, optional prayers, fasting services, alms giving along with obligatory ones. All these behavioral deeds are performed with devotion for the sake of closeness "Taqarrub" to Allah. Finally, ma'rifat (Recognition) is applied to secure soundness in building of character.

Keywords: Sufism, self-purification, Personality development, moral development, character building

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Introduction:

Success in life depends on temperament and character of individuals. Achievement of success varies from person to person possibly because of the environmental factors. Individuals with failure may suffer disintegration in their personal life which could be associated to defective personality. Sufism can play a vital role in shaping personality through development of certain traits and characteristics (Nicholson, 1923).

Personality development refers to improvement in behaviors and attitudes in an organized manner that makes an individual a unique person. This process takes place through consistent interaction of temperament, character and environment. Hence personality is the combination of unique qualities and characteristics that can be recognized after birth (Healthofchildren.com).

Temperament refers to a set of traits that are identified genetically which helps in determination of individuals approach to the world and learning about the world. These genes control development of nervous system that leads to the control of behavior. Hence it can also be called as nature. Similarly, another component of personality is environment which helps an individual in adaptation of behaviors from specific environment. Therefore it can also be called as nurture. Final component of personality is character which is a set of learned behaviors from experiences that highlights way of thinking, feelings and behaving of a person. Evolving of character continues through entire life span while character is strongly associated with moral development of a person (Encyclopedia of children health).

Personality and moral development can be streamlined with the help of Sufism. Sufism brings about self-purification. It focuses on practical activities for actualizing the process of purification. This process can be performed under the supervision of qualified scholars of Islam where guidance and scholarship are offered to students (Surrenderworks.com).

Sufism encourages remembrance of Allah as an activity of spiritual nourishment for engaging students. This activity can be performed individually or in groups. In Sufism remembrance of Allah highlights the connection of inner soul of humans with their lord; such connections develop a strong individual in terms of obeying orders of Allah. Hence Sufism encourages such activities to contribute to personalities of people. The Holy Quran expressed the importance of remembrance of Allah in the following words "Hearts become tranquil through the remembrance of Allah"(Quran 13:28) (BBC.UK).

Sufism also concentrates on discouragement of those behaviors where disobedience of orders of Allah is expressed. These include immoral behaviors that may create disturbance in society. Hence Sufism is demoting immoral acts by promotion of education and spirituality. This highlights the role of Sufism in shaping personalities (Britannica.com). This process leads to a positive contribution in the society (ReShel, 2020).

The process of Sufism brings devotion in purification where individual avoid self-centeredness with clarity in mental setup. Additionally, firm believe in Allah develops because of clarification in mental setup while control over desire can be seen through maintenance of self-discipline. Therefore Sufism can bring positive changes in the habits, actions and character of people (Britannica.com).

Sufism helps in the personality development through moral development with in a specific environment with efficacious inputs to build character. The details are

1. <u>Moral development</u>

Sufism helps in moral development through installments of moral standards and its fellowship. The association of moral development links to asceticism (Zuhud) where Sufis try to minimize reliance over material luxury. They do try to limit material luxuries. It's worthy to mention that complete negligence relates to deviation from Islamic teaching hence minimization enables individuals to control their desires and then achieve desired goals, also attachment with Allah by detaching from self for the sake of virtue relates to "Taqwa". Sufism encourages Taqwa to help individuals in attachment to Allah in all actions with purity. These actions are the dimensions for covering moral development of individuals in Sufism (Al-Sya'rani, 1992).

Lawrence Kohlberg in his theory discussed three levels with six stages in the process of moral development. According to him, this process is sequential, therefore he organized in preconventional level, conventional level, and postconventional/ principal level (Bratannica.com). At the first level (preconventional), external elements control morality for applying rules to figure out punishment or rewards. This level identifies personal satisfaction at availing or avoiding something. This first level is further divided into two stages (Punishment/obedience orientation and instrumental purpose orientation). Stage one is a way of identification of individual's behavior through obedience by avoiding punishment while stage two concentrates on individual's behavior for receiving rewards or satisfaction of personal needs. The second level (conventional level) identifies individual's conformity to rules in society. At this level importance is given to social rules because individual focuses more on social relationships than personal interest. Individual assists social rules to get agreement or consent of the immediate authorities to ensure maintenance of order in society. This level is further divided into two stages (Good person orientation and law & order orientation): At 3rd stage, behavior is identified through approval from society. Individual tries to ensure maintenance of order to get consent of surrounding people to be labelled as a gentle and nice person. Additionally, 4th stage identifies behavior of individual through law and order. At this stage broader view is brought into consideration to encompass laws of the society. Morality enters between

relationships with a focus on it to ensure maintenance of law and order at societal level. The last level (Principle Level) where an individual reaches to application of morality to all circumstances in the society. This level is further divided into two stages (Social contract orientation and universal ethical principle orientation). In social contract laws and rules are considered as tools to the improvement of human purposes and rights are used to determine individual's behavior. Furthermore, universal ethical principle orientation is the peak stage of performance, behavior is at the highest level of operation, but rare individuals may reach this stage. So, these are principles that determine appropriateness of action and behavior (Solares,2019).

Principle
Social Contract
Law & Order
Good Person
Instrumental purpose
Punishment and obedience
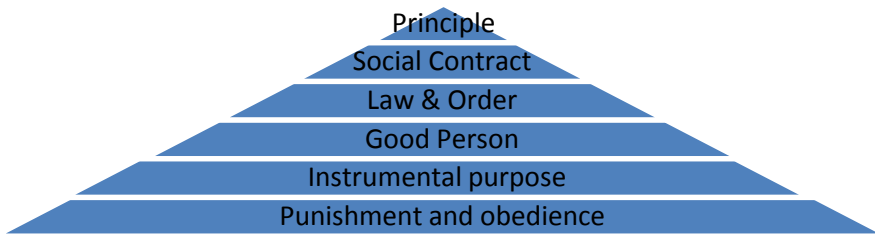
Furthermore, the material renunciation brings about attention towards practicing repentance and purification. Repentance encompasses adoption of straight path by avoiding immoral activities or deeds such as speaking lies, back biting, jealousy, pride, over comfort, greediness, anger etc. Furthermore, purification links with the soul by cultivating purity in the heart through avoiding sins and bringing discipline through organization in life with the help of detachment from material world. Additionally, moral development also associates with act of love for humanity that is expressed through altruism (Patheos.com).

2. <u>Sufism creates an environment</u>

Sufis create an environment for their students by establishing an institute. Such institutes are established in line with Sufi orders (Tariqahs) in places such as monastery (Khanqah) or mosque where they deliver lectures, promote Dhikr & it's methods along with proper guidance for life. This teacher (murshid) and student (murid) relationship develops an environment where students are keenly observed by teacher in accordance with teaching of Holy Quran and Prophet (PBUH). This environmental factor plays an important role in personality development. Students learn Islamic knowledge from teachers as well as books. Teachers follow their order through generations to the Holy Prophet (PBUH), they show strict adherence to teachings in order to ensure proper transfer of knowledge and transformation because they believe improper transfer of knowledge may not have similar effects (Tanwil).

Sufism focuses on practical aspects rather than theoretical ideas. It brings virtues, and faith in practical life of the community. The effects of such practices do extend towards outgroup from ingroup. They keep practicing these actions with everywhere human irrespective of religious affiliation. Sufism creates a conducive environment with the help of following aspects (Bhardwaj, 2015):

2.1. Relationship

Sufism focuses and develops a strong relationship amongst members of Sufi community. In this context, relation between the teacher and student is vital as this relation need legitimacy to follow a specific path. The teacher must be a person with authorization while a student must chain himself into the succession of his teacher to ensure continuation of entire chain. The teachings are transmitted through heart to heart connection. These teachings include divine light while they believe there is a stage of reaching to the glory of knowledge and knowing of Allah. So Sufism is connected to direct personal experiences. Sometimes reaching to highest level of success is related to serving a teacher for a long duration of time. So in this relation a student has to pass to different stages (Bhardwaj,2015).

2.2. Stages in Sufism

These stages pass an individual through different actions which include Neyyet, Mojahyda, Mukashfa. Neyyet (Intention) refers to doing or avoiding actions, so a person makes an intention to do good deeds and avoid all bad actions or deeds. After intention an individual goes to the second stage Mujahyda (striving) for those actions that are hard to perform for that person. Individual does efforts to get on to the track of performing those activities which were not easy before. Mukashfa (Uplifting) follows mujahyda as a new stage as this is an advance stage where an individual is raised to level of specific accessibilities that can not be accessed by normal human being. At this stage all actions are linked to the will of creator. The condition in each stage is known as Hal (State). At the peak of joy a person has no control over the action "Wajd" (ecstasy) that is performed by an individual. These stages are accompanied by some practices (Oxford Encyclopedia,1995):

2.3. The practices

The purpose of Sufism is to develop quality character of an individual with the help of purification, morality, doing the best and nearness of Allah. In this regard, practices are identified for individuals to get proper training to fit into the chain of succession. These trainings include initiation, center of consciousness, spiritual transmission, and spiritual affinity. Initiation into a Sufi order has its own specific rituals where a teacher takes an oath (Bait) from a student where he promises to keep

himself to the words of his teacher. After initiation, a student must focus on centers of consciousness (Lataaif). These centers are generally believed to be two mind or heart but in Sufism they believe it to be more that needs discovery through spiritual experience. For instance Allah blessed its new creation with certain points of consciousness of light such as self, air, fire, water and earth related to visible world while others such as heart, spirit , secret, hidden and most hidden were related to the commands of Allah. Hence a student makes an intention to focus on one of the centers, so a student my start from heart and then others centers respectively. Once these are completed then a student focuses on the visible centers as mentioned above. Furthermore, spiritual transmission is included in the training knowledge or spiritual discoveries are transmitted to students perfectly engaged in the training. This transmission is followed by spiritual affinity that refers to a connection between Allah and human being and this reflects the sole purpose of sufism (Qasim,1983).

2.4. Dhikr and Sama

Dhikr refers to remembrance of Allah while Sama means to listening. Sufism stresses upon remembrance of Allah every time. The Holy Quran has mentioned dhikr in different words for multiple times.

$$فَاذكُرُونِی اَذكُركُم وَاشكُرُوا لِی وَلَا تَكفُرُونِ$$

"So remember Me and I shall remember you"(Quran,2:152).

$$وَلِلّٰهِ الاَسمَآءُ الحُسنٰی فَادعُوهُ بِهَا$$

"Allah has the most excellent names.[141] So call on Him by His names" (7:180).

Dhikr has been designed with different sequences, it can be done individually or in group. Sometimes they prefer louder dhikr while at a times hidden dhikr are given to he students. Sama is listening to Quran, poems and rhymes regarding the praise of Allah and his Prophet (PBUH) (cultural atlas of Islam,1986).

2.5. Devotional Practices

Devotional practices may vary from Sufi to Sufi as it depends on the lineage and needs of the students as well. There are prerequisites to practices such as regular performance of prayers along with those prayers reported from Holy Prophet (PBUH). The necessary elements in practices include correct creed forms the basis for other actions such as avoiding bad deeds or sins, minimizing love of this world and efforts to devoid satanic inclinations. Also, a student must try prevention of the corrupt deeds particularly those which may demote intentions towards good deeds. Corrupt deeds include ostentation, arrogance, pride and envy. Hence these practices develop spirituality of the student (ibn-Khaldun,1967).

2.6. Muraqaba

Muraqaba "Meditation" means to protect, hence Sufism uses muraqaba to protect an individual from the pursuits of the visible things in the world with the purpose to encourage spiritual nourishment. It also refers to focusing on the centers of consciousness as this process helps a person to move closer and nearer to his creator (Bhardwaj,2015).

2.7. Visitation

Sufism encourages visitation of students to their teachers or Sufis because it helps them to maintain connection with them and ensures sustainability of the practices. There are other visitations such as visit to shrine etc. but these are controversial aspects as majority of the sects in Islam does not considered them correct according to the teachings of Holy Quran and Holy Prophet (PBUH) (Bhardwaj,2015).

The prevalence of such institutions creates a prominent environment for the students to adopt decent behaviors and avoid immoral activities and behaviors. Additionally, remembrance of Allah (Dhikr) remains a core activity for individuals as well as groups in such environment because they encourage and motivate people for attachment with Allah. The ultimate result of all such deeds leads to the personality development of all those individuals regularly participating in these environments (Manzur, 1966).

3. **Character Building**

Sufism plays an important role in building noble character. Sufism encompasses three different dimensions in building character. Those dimensions include Knowledge (Ilm), awareness and behavior (Ubaidi,2016).

Knowledge helps in raising moral and spiritual awareness in order to enhance firmness in faith and encouragement toward good deeds. Divinity awareness covers an important aspect in character building by the provision of value education which appears naturally in performance. Scholars have pointed out that character relates to the installation of deeds in soul while the emergence of those deeds in actions without personal interest. Character by nature is dynamic as it can be directed to advancement from bad to good habits which can be achieved by practice (Mulkhan, 2007).

Sufism develops character building by enhancement of the dimension of action/behavior (amal). Basically linked to prayers but additional to obligatory there are optional prayers. These prayers help the performer to develop attention towards Allah. In addition, to optional prayers there are fasting services; these services include

obligatory as well as optional fasting. Optional services enhance the capacity of perfection in individual's obligatory services. Furthermore, giving alms services encompass obligatory along with optional service. Optional alms are those which include alms additional to the obligatory ones such Zakat. This is one of the greatest ways of obtaining love of Allah (Ubaidi, 2016).

In addition, Sufism guides character building through making less use of worldliness by keeping it to the basic needs and necessities. This helps in avoiding sins which is termed as Qana'ah. Similarly, patience has placed at a central position for decent character. Patience needs to be shown in performing every action of life such as restraining from all those actions which are unwilling according to the sayings of Allah. Remembrance of death and vising grave remains focus of the teaching of Sufism as it helps in shaping character by considering the world as a temporary location hence people would try to avoid immoral deeds. Sufism also focuses on motivation of others towards good deeds. The primary motive in motivation others revolves around building character of individuals: once they achieve some kind of sustainability then they do help others in motivation. In this regard, they need to show devotion (Ikhlas) that refers to performance of deeds with clean heart directed to Allah for the sake of achieving closeness (Taqarrub) to Allah(Al-Sya'rani, 2012).

The supreme level of character achieved through building is Ma'rifat (Recognition). It has four different kinds: Ma'rifatullah means acknowledgement of Allah through his supremacy and magnificence in every creation. This would encourage individuals to focus on nature to see the greatness of Allah. Second type is Ma'rifat an-nafs; refers to identification of oneself in terms of purpose of life and control of deeds in accordance to the orders of Allah. Third type of Ma'rifat belongs to fellow beings by recognizing them in terms of obligations towards them to create a balance in social life. Lastly, Ma'rifat al-kaun defines recognition of nature by linking supremacy, control and magnificence of Allah through all beautiful creations in nature (Ubaidi, 2016).

Hence Sufism directs personality development with the help of character-building process as discussed above. Every single step in character building depends on continuous efforts, punctuality, and accuracy for performing all actions.

The above discussion explored that Sufism could play a vital role in personality development through moral development offered in a specific environment with ingredients of character building.

Conclusion:

Personality development is the combination of qualities and characteristics. Sufism streamlines personality development through moral development, role of environment and building of character of an individual. Moral development helps in minimization of material luxuries that enables an individual to practice repentance and self-purification. This process needs specific environment for conduction because environment ensures the availability of necessary elements for the entire process such

as teacher-student (murshid-murid) relationship, learning & practice of those activities that can help in developing attention towards Allah (Dhikir). Furthermore, in this environment building blocks for character are offered where dimensions of knowledge, awareness and behavior are covered. Activities such as optional prayers, fasting services, giving alms, patience, and levels of ma'rifat are practiced with true spirit in the guidance of qualified scholars that lead to the development of personality.

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