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THE ROLE OF SUFI TEACHINGS IN OVERCOMING SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND INEQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

The teachings of Sufism as an esoteric dimension of Islam not only offer a spiritual path for individuals, but also contain ethical and social principles that are able to respond to various issues of social injustice and inequality. This paper aims to examine how the core values in Sufi teachings - such as fana' (the elimination of ego), tawadhu' (humility), and khidmah (selfless service) - can become an ethical foundation in forming a more just and equal society. Through a qualitative approach based on literature review. This study highlights the historical and contemporary contributions of Sufi orders in the social field, such as empowerment of marginalized groups, health and education services, and critique of exploitative order. The results of the study show that Sufi teachings have transformative potential in forming a collective consciousness that emphasizes empathy, egalitarianism, and social solidarity. Thus, Sufism is not only relevant as a spiritual practice, but also as a moral force in the struggle against structural injustice in modern society.

INTRODUCTION

Social injustice and economic inequality are two fundamental problems that continue to haunt global society, including in the Muslim world. The gap between the rich and the poor, the marginalization of certain groups, and the dominance of exploitative power structures are serious challenges in realizing a just and civilized society. In this context, the role of religious values as a foundation for social ethics becomes very relevant to be studied and actualized Sufism, as the inner (esoteric) dimension of Islam, has long been better known as a personal and transcendent spiritual path. However, throughout its history, various Sufi orders and figures have played significant roles in defending the oppressed, fighting for equality, and forming social networks based on compassion and selfless service. Sufi teachings emphasize the cultivation of the heart (qalb), the elimination of the ego (nafs), and the manifestation of divine love (mahabbah), which implicitly and explicitly encourage an attitude of empathy, humility, and solidarity towards fellow human beings.

Some great figures such as Jalaluddin Rumi, Al-Ghazali, and Abdul Qadir al-Jailani have emphasized the importance of the relationship between spirituality and social action. Even in the modern context, a number of orders such as the Chishti in South Asia and the Naqshbandi-Haqqani in the West have demonstrated a commitment to social activities such as free education, community health services, and advocacy for vulnerable groups. This shows that Sufi teachings have an important and relevant socio-political dimension in facing the challenges of inequality today.Based on this background, this paper aims to examine the contribution of Sufi teachings in responding to social injustice and inequality. This study is based on the assumption that Sufism is not merely an inner practice, but also a system of ethics and social practice that is able to foster collective awareness to build a more just, equal, and dignified society, the phenomenon of social injustice and economic inequality is a multidimensional problem that not only impacts material welfare, but also has implications for moral crises, social conflicts, and the disintegration of human values. In various parts of the world, including in countries with Muslim-majority populations, the gap between the elite and the poor is widening, resulting in various forms of marginalization, social exclusion, and structural violence that occur systematically. In a context like this, the emergence of alternative narratives that are able to restore human values, equality, and justice is a necessity.

Religion, as a value system and source of ethical inspiration, has an important role to play in responding to these challenges. However, religious responses to injustice are not uniform. On the one hand, there are expressions of religiosity that tend to be normative and individualistic on the other, there are more transformative approaches, which see spirituality as a path to social change. In this spectrum, Sufism or tasawwuf occupies a unique position because it combines a deep spiritual dimension with concrete social praxis.

RESEARCH ETHODOLOGY

The data used in this study are sourced from various primary and secondary literature. Primary literature includes classical works of Sufi figures such as Ihya Ulum al-Din by Al-Ghazali, Masnawi by Jalaluddin Rumi, as well as teachings from tarekat figures such as Abdul Qadir al-Jailani and Sheikh Ahmad al-Rifa'i. Meanwhile, secondary literature includes academic journals, scientific articles, research reports, and contemporary books that review the social dimensions of Sufism and its implications in the modern context.

The analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach. The researcher identified the main recurring themes in Sufi teachings, such as fana', tawadhu', zuhud, and khidmah, and linked them to theories of social justice from the perspective of Islam and universal humanism. This approach also allows the researcher to connect spiritual values with concrete social practices in the history of Islamic civilization as well as in contemporary reality.

With this methodology, the research is expected to provide a deep and reflective understanding of the potential of Sufi teachings in becoming an ethical and practical foundation in overcoming social injustice and inequality in the modern era

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This study reveals that the core teachings of Sufism not only have spiritual depth, but also contain very strong social ethical principles in responding to the reality of injustice and inequality. By referring to the study of classical and contemporary Sufi literature, it was found that Sufism builds a collective moral awareness rooted in the values of love, the elimination of ego, service to others, and the ontological equality of all humans before God. The following is a thematic mapping of the results of the study based on these values:

DISCUSSION

1. Ontological Equality and Rehabilitation of Human Dignity

In Sufi teachings, all creatures are seen as manifestations of al-Haqq (Absolute Truth). Therefore, every human being, regardless of their social, economic, or ethnic background, has an equal spiritual status. The principle of monotheism is not only the basis of divinity, but also the principle of the unity and equality of all existence.

This teaching criticizes the hierarchical social structure that differentiates people based on power and wealth. Sufism argues that human excellence is determined only by inner sincerity and sensitivity to others, not by worldly status. This concept has direct implications in the context of modern society experiencing a crisis of values due to materialism and rigid social stratification. Through this principle, Sufism not only advocates social justice, but also restores human dignity that has been reduced by an exploitative economic-political system.

2. Fana' as a Critique of Power Structures and Capitalism

The concept of fana', namely the process of eliminating the ego and worldly self, is the spiritual core of Sufism. However, in a social reading, fana' can be interpreted as a form of spiritual criticism of the dominance of the collective ego, such as greed for wealth, power, and class superiority. The ego in the modern social dimension is manifested in the form of a neoliberal capitalist system that makes humans merely a means of production and consumption, and creates an increasingly wide gap of inequality.

Through fana', individuals are invited to abandon the destructive desire for ownership and power, and replace it with love, empathy, and solidarity. Classical Sufi figures rejected living in luxury despite having access to it. They preferred an ascetic life as a form of spiritual protest against oppressive social structures. In the contemporary context, this value can be a cultural critique of consumerist lifestyles and social systems that perpetuate inequality.

3. Service: Ethics of Service and Social Empowerment

The value of khidmah (selfless service to others) is the most obvious aspect of Sufism's practice in responding to injustice. Throughout its history, Sufi orders have been active in establishing madrasas, hospitals, shelters for the homeless, and providing food for the poor. This service is not merely charitable, but is part of the spiritual path to closeness to God.

In the context of structural inequality, service is a concrete form of inclusive and transformative social empowerment. For example, the Chishti Order in India actively distributes free food (langar) regardless of religion, caste, or social class. In Indonesia, the principle of service is seen in the social activities of order figures such as Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Sambas and Hasyim Asy'ari, who make education and economic independence part of their religious mission. This principle is very relevant as an alternative to the state social assistance system which is often top-down and bureaucratic. Service emphasizes personal closeness, horizontal relations, and recognition of humanity as the basis for social relations.

4. Spirituality as a Tool for Social Transformation

Sufism does not offer direct structural solutions as revolutionary ideologies do. However, the power of Sufism lies in the inner transformation that then has an impact on the social structure. This transformation is radical from within (inside-out), starting from the formation of moral awareness, until it develops into a social movement that fosters justice and equality.

Figures such as Sheikh Yusuf al-Makassari in Indonesia and Umar Mukhtar in Libya used a Sufi approach in the struggle against colonialism, proving that Sufism is able to blend with political-emancipatory movements without losing its spiritual spirit. In a modern context, this approach has great potential to be applied in social education, contextual preaching, and community-based advocacy. Sufi spirituality is also an alternative to the legalistic and political polarization of religion. Sufism builds peaceful, humanistic, and dialogical relations, which are prerequisites for sustainable social change. Therefore, the Sufi path is a path of cultural resistance that is not confrontational, but remains radical in value.

5. Contextual Relevance in Modern Society

As the contemporary world faces a crisis of empathy, social depression, and moral alienation resulting from systemic dehumanization, Sufism offers a way out that is both spiritually healing and social. Values such as mahabbah (divine love), rahmah (compassion), and ikhlas (sincerity) can be the basis for the reconstruction of a more just, humane, and inclusive civilization.

Furthermore, Sufi values can also play a role in the process of post-conflict social reconciliation, strengthening inter-group cohesion, and building a harmonious multicultural

society. Amidst the spread of extremism, religious exclusivism, and identity violence, Sufism is present as a religious approach that calms, unites, and heals social wounds.

CONCLUSION

The teachings of Sufism or Sufism have a very important role in shaping the spiritual and social awareness of humanity. In the context of social inequality and structural injustice that occurs in various levels of society, Sufi values are present as a moral and ethical response that emphasizes love, justice, simplicity, and empathy for others. Sufi figures not only teach the path to closeness to God (ma'rifat), but also call for the defense of oppressed and marginalized groups in the social structure.Principles such as zuhud (staying away from excessive love of the world), khidmat (service to others), and tawadhu' (humility) become a strong foundation for the formation of a more civilized social system. The teachings of Sufism also emphasize the importance of ukhuwah insaniyah (human brotherhood) as the foundation of life together, where every individual is seen as equal in dignity and rights as a human being. Throughout history, Sufis have often appeared as social reformers who opposed tyrannical power and advocated justice for the oppressed through a non-violent and spiritual approach. In a modern world filled with materialism, individualism, and economic exploitation, the teachings of Sufism have become relevant again as an alternative narrative that emphasizes the balance between spirituality and social responsibility. Therefore, the revitalization of Sufism values is not only needed in the personal-spiritual realm, but must also be articulated in the form of social movements, moral education, and public policies that support social justice. Sufi teachings that have been understood as a path of silence actually hold great power to encourage peaceful social change, rooted in love, and aimed at the common good.

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