Assessing The Relevance Of 'Salafi Sufism' in Urban Society

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Abstract: The Salafī Sufism movement, pioneered by Ibn Taymiyyah introduces a new classification in Islamic Sufism, dividing it into three groups: the early pure Sunni Sufis, Sunni Sufis influenced by non-Islamic thought, and the Sufi Falsafī considered deviant. Fazlur Rahman proposed "Neo-Sufism" to accommodate the textual Sufism of Ibn Taymiyyah, emphasizing moral and spiritual purification. However, other scholars prefer to call it "Salafī Sufism," aligning with Salafist ideology. In modern urban society, the strict approach of Salafī Sufism may be less flexible in dealing with life pressures and rapid social changes, requiring a more dynamic and adaptive spiritual approach. Although Salafī Sufism teaches a balance between worldly and spiritual matters, its highly literal approach may be less effective in addressing complex urban communities' emotional and psychological needs, which require innovative and adaptive solutions.

Introduction

The Salafī Sufi movement introduces a new perspective in the scientific classification of Sufism within Islamic thought. Traditionally, Sufism has been generally divided into two main typologies, *sunni* and *falsafi*.[1] Ibn Taymiyyah categorized Sufism into three groups; First, the early generation of Sunni Sufis whose teachings and works were pure from external influences; second, the generation of Sunni Sufis who were influenced by non-Islamic elements and incorporated philosophical thought into their doctrine; third, the Falsafī Sufis of the contemporary generation who were considered to have deviated from the straight path of Islam.[2] However, these two typologies (*sunni* and *falsafi*) are insufficient to accommodate the Sufism of figures from the Ḥanbali school such as Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Anṣārī al-Harawī, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, who demonstrate unique and distinct characteristics. Works such as *Manāzil al-Saʾirīn* by al-Harawī, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā* by Ibn Taymiyyah, and *Madārij al-Sālikīn* by Ibn Qayyim provide different perspectives on Sufism. Ironically, modern research often regards them as anti-Sufi, which may be due to deliberate elements rather than in-depth

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[1] Hazim Fouad, "Unveiling the Innovators—a Glimpse on Sufi-Salafi Polemics," *Religions* 11, no. 3 (2020): 1–24, doi:10.3390/rel11030144.

[2] Kamal Gasimov, "Muslim Saints Contested: Ibn Taymiyya's Critique of Al-Qushayrī's Risāla," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 34, no. 2 (May 1, 2023): 153–211, doi:10.1093/jis/etac045.

analysis. Modern Salafī groups also deny any connection between Sufism and Ibn Taymiyyah.[3]

Fazlur Rahman and several other academics felt the need to develop a new typology, namely Neo-Sufism, to accommodate the textual Sufism of Ibn Taymiyyah and his group. This Neo-Sufism is considered capable of purifying deviations within Sufism and emphasizes the practices of *dhikr* and *murāqabah*.[4] The goal of Sufism for this group is to strengthen faith and purify morals and spirituality. Neo-Sufism contributed to the revitalization of *salafī* doctrine and a positive worldview. They accept *kashf* (the experience of understanding divine truth) but reject claims of human infallibility. Unlike Rahman, Muhammad Mustafā Hilmī, 'Abd al-Fattāh Muhammad Sayyid Ahmad, and 'Abd al-Qādir Mahmūd position Ibn Taymiyyah's Sufism outside the typologies of *sunni* and *falsafī* Sufism, referring to it as "Salafi Sufism."[5] This typology is considered aligned with Ibn Taymiyyah's ideological Salafism model, which refers to the early generations of Muslims who received knowledge directly from Prophet Muhammad SAW and adhered to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

It is important to investigate more deeply the doctrines taught by figures known as *anti-Sufi*. They actually brought forth a unique form of Sufism that differs from both *Sunni* and *Falsafī* Sufism. In Indonesia, there needs to be more in-depth research on the typology of Salafi Sufism to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Sufi intellectual tradition in Indonesia. This Salafi Sufism movement emphasizes purifying Sufi teachings from external influences and returning to authentic Islamic foundations, although it differs from *Sunni* and *Falsafī* Sufism which are more open to interpretation and external influences.

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing a comprehensive literature review and critical analysis methodology. The research design was primarily descriptive-analytical, focusing on systematic examination of primary and secondary sources related to Salafi Sufism. Data collection involved an extensive review of scholarly works, including historical texts, academic journals, and critical analyses of Ibn Taymiyyah's writings and Sufi thought.[6] The methodological framework drew upon interpretive and hermeneutical approaches, emphasizing a nuanced understanding of textual sources and their historical contexts.

The research utilized purposive sampling techniques in selecting scholarly sources, with a focus on peer-reviewed journals, academic monographs, and critical editions of primary Islamic texts. Data analysis employed a critical discourse analysis method, examining the conceptual development of Salafi Sufism through a careful interpretation of textual sources, paying particular attention to the historical and intellectual contexts of the sources. The methodological approach aimed to provide a comprehensive and critical

[3] Muktafi dan Nur Hidayat, "Paradigma dan Doktrin Tasawuf Salafi: Arah Baru Taksonomi Sufisme di antara Sunnī Dan Falsafī" (Surabaya, UIN Sunan Ampel, 2019), hal. 1-2

[4] Encung and Baiq Rida Kartini, "The Urgency of Renewing Islamic Sufism (Neo-Sufism) Fazlur Rahman's Perspective in the Discourse of Modernity," *Al-Ikhsan: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2023): 31–47, doi:10.61166/ikhsan.v1i2.12.

[5] Mukhammad Zamzami, "Rekonstruksi Pemikiran Dan Posisi Sufi-Antisufi Ibn Taymīyah," *Teosofi* 7, no. 1 (June 1, 2017): 30–63, doi:10.15642/teosofi.2017.7.1.30-63.

[6] Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2011) 45-47.

understanding of Salafi Sufism, its historical emergence, and its contemporary relevance in urban society.[7]

Results and Discussion
Dynamics and Development of Salafi Sufism

The concept of Sufism in Islam developed approximately one hundred years after the death of Prophet Muhammad, emerging as a response to Islamic culture that was considered overly materialistic. Scholars developed Islamic spirituality through the Sufism movement that invited the community to distance themselves from worldly life, known as *zuhūd* in the second century Hijri. Across various regions, the teaching of *zuhūd* had different characteristics.[8] In Basra, ascetics confronted the Qadariyah and Mu'tazilah groups in spiritual debates. In Kufa, ascetics from Shia groups were fatalistic and emotional. These early developments demonstrate the spiritual complexity in Islamic history, where each region developed its own unique approach to understanding spirituality. The dynamics of spiritual thought reflect the intellectual diversity within the Islamic tradition.[9]

The ascetic group in Kufa was known as *al-bakkā'* because they often wept and struck themselves during dhikr practices. Meanwhile in Egypt, ascetics followed the teachings of zuhūd according to the Qur'an, with the majority being students of the Prophet's SAW companions. Sufism is defined as the path of Allah's truth,

beginning with full concentration on worship and distancing oneself from worldly pleasures. By the 2nd century Hijri, those who focused on worship and avoided worldly life began to be called Sufis or *mutaṣawwifīn*.[10] This spiritual development marks a fundamental transformation in religious understanding. Each stage reflects efforts to comprehend the profound relationship between humans and God. Spirituality evolved as a new way of understanding existence and spiritual connectivity.[11]

The transition from *zuhūd* to Sufism became apparent at the end of the 2nd century Hijri, although distinguishing between the two is difficult. Nicholson noted the complexity of spiritual thought development during this period. The practice of Sufism in the form of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul) had existed since early Islam, but the term Sufism was only recognized after the second century Hijri. This term became standardized in the late second and early third centuries Hijri.[12] The spiritual practice of self-purification had been an integral part of Islamic teachings, but its formal naming as Sufism emerged later. This conceptual journey demonstrates the intellectual dynamics in the development of Islamic spirituality. The process of religious thought transformation occurred gradually and in complex ways. Each stage reflects efforts toward a deeper understanding of spirituality.[13]

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[7] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2018), 90.

[8] Fahmi Rizal Mahendra et al., "Between Baghdad and Khurasan: Early Sufism in Islamic History at 7-9 M Century," *JUSPI (Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam)* 7, no. 2 (2024): 118–28, doi:10.30829/juspi.v7i2.14747.

[9] Aly Mashar, "Tasawuf : Sejarah, Madzhab, dan Inti Ajarannya," *Al-A'raf : Jurnal Pemikiran Islam dan Filsafat* Vol. 12, no. 1 (30 Juni 2015), hal. 103

[10] Syamsul Rijal, "Kritik Ibnu Taimiyyah terhadap Tarekat," *alulum* Vol. 2, no. 1 (2015), hal. 4

[11] Christiaan Hermans, "Spiritual Transformation: Concept and Measurement," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 26, no. 2 (January 1, 2013): 165–87, doi:10.1163/15709256-12341275.

[12] Dheen Mohamed Mohamed Meerasahibu, "Origin of Tasawwuf (Sufism) and Critiquing The Thesis of Transition from Zuhd," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah Dan Pemikiran Islam* 26, no. 2 (December 31, 2024): 255–94, doi:10.22452/afkar.vol26no2.8.

[13] Hamdan Maghribi dan Alfina Hidayah, "Antara Salafi Dan Sufi: Tasawuf Menurut Ibn Taimiyyah

Ibn Taymiyyah noted that at the beginning of the third century Hijri, the term Sufi was given to several figures such as Jābir b. Hayyān and Abū Hāshim al-Kūfī. A student of al-Hasan al-Basrī, Abd al-Wāhid ibn Zayd, had popularized the teaching of *zuhūd* since the early second century Hijri. In the third century Hijri, great scholars emerged such as al-Muhāsibī, Dhū al-Nūn al-Misrī, Abū Yazīd al-Bustāmī, al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, and al-Hallāj who wrote many books on Sufism. During this period, Sufism was known in three main patterns: Salafī, Falsafī, and Sunni. The development of this spiritual thought demonstrates the intellectual diversity within the Islamic tradition. Each stream has its unique contribution to understanding the human relationship with God. The complexity of spiritual thought reflects the depth of religious reflection.[14]

The early development of Salafi Sufism in the third century Hijri was promoted by legal scholars under the name of *zāhid*. These *zāhid* were extremely cautious in property ownership and worshipped earnestly, only seeking livelihood for basic worship needs. Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal and his disciples were prime examples of this group. He wrote the book al-Zuhd as a guide to asceticism to avoid the influence of worldly life that causes humans to forget God.[15] This spiritual approach emphasized simplicity and closeness to the Divine. The practice of zuhūd became a method of cleansing the soul from material temptations. Every action was designed to bring oneself closer to God. Spirituality became the main path to understanding existence.[16]

Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal was known for practicing regular voluntary fasting and night worship. He was extremely cautious about using goods whose permissible-forbidden status was unclear, and once even refused a gift from Caliph al-Ma'mun. Although a fiqh expert, he taught Sufism based on *fiqh* and *kalām*, such that Sufism was considered a guardian of fiqh knowledge. His Sufism was a continuation of the practices of the Tabi'in such as al-Hasan al-Basri and Sufyan al-Thawri.[17] His contribution was highly significant in shaping Islamic spiritual understanding. He successfully connected the legal dimension with the spiritual dimension. His holistic approach became an example for subsequent generations. Spirituality was not merely ritual, but a comprehensive practice in religious life.

Salafi Sufism represents an effort to reaffirm comprehensive Islamic values, promoting a healthy lifestyle in all aspects of life. It encourages a complete and balanced understanding of religious meaning and practice. Every Muslim must acknowledge the importance of spirituality in Islam, yet the Qur'an states that this world is real, not an illusion. This approach emphasizes balance between spiritual and material dimensions. Spirituality is not an escape from reality, but rather a way to understand reality more deeply.[18] Every aspect of life has the potential to bring oneself closer to God. Balance becomes the key

Dan al-Qusyairi," *Tsaqafah* 19, no. 2 (28 November 2023), hal. 465

[14] Muktafi dan Hidayat, "Paradigma dan Doktrin...." hal. 15

[15] Christopher Melchert, "The Ḥanābila and the Early Sufis," *Arabica*, 2001, 352–67.

[16] Abd Rozak dan Rosihon Anwar, *Ilmu Kalam Untuk UIN, STAIN dan PTAIS* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2010), 111 dalam Muktafi, "Paradigma dan Doktrin....", hal. 17.

[17] Melchert, "The Ḥanābila and the Early Sufis."

[18] Merve Cetinkaya and Jo and Billings, "Systematic Review of the Relationship between Islamic-Sufi Spirituality and Practice and Mental Well-Being," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 26, no. 10 (November 26, 2023): 1065–80, doi:10.1080/13674676.2023.2256265.

to understanding Islamic teachings. Spirituality opens new perspectives on existence.

Qur'anic verses connect faith with righteous deeds and the Day of Judgment, demonstrating the unity of spiritual aspects and concrete actions. Salafi Sufism is not something entirely new, but rather the realization of Sufism in both personal and public life.[19] In principle, it is based on three elements: (1) the Qur'an and Sunnah, (2) taking the Prophet PBUH and the salaf generation as exemplars, and (3) the principle of tawāzun (balance) in Islam. This approach offers a comprehensive perspective on Islamic spirituality. Each principle has profound meaning in shaping Muslim character. The concept of exemplars becomes key to understanding spiritual practice. Balance becomes the primary method of living religious life.[20]

The difference in typology between Salafi Sufism in the third century Hijri and Sunni Sufism during al-Ghazālī's time was highly significant. Each stream influenced the Islamic world and often competed, even accusing one another. Salafi Sufism only taught asceticism, wara', increasing voluntary worship and dhikr, as well as avoiding bad deeds. Therefore, it was often called Ethical Sufism.[21] The dynamics of

Sufism's development demonstrate the complexity of Islamic spiritual thought. Each stream brings a unique perspective to understanding the human relationship with God. These differences reflect the intellectual richness of the Sufi tradition. The struggle of ideas serves as evidence of the depth of spiritual reflection in Islam.[22]

This form of Sufism does not emphasize achieving fanā' and baqā' as prerequisites for ma'rifat, but rather focuses on guarding behavior from forbidden acts and increasing istighfar. The stage of al-takhallī refers to efforts to adorn oneself with good qualities. After tahallī, the Sufi strives to achieve al-tajallī, a spiritual condition of seeing God in various aspects.[23] The concept of self-purification becomes the core of spiritual practice. Each stage has profound meaning in the spiritual journey. The process of soul purification is not merely ritual, but a fundamental transformation. Spirituality becomes a way to achieve moral perfection. Each step moves toward closeness with God.[24]

Sufism is a way of building awareness of the human relationship with God. This relationship produces different perspectives among Sufis, developing into two streams: Sunni and Falsafī. Sunni Sufism formulates arguments

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[19] Suraiya Uin, Syamsul Rijal, and Zaenuddin Prasojo, "Sufism and Religious Practices in Modern Lifestyle," *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 9, no. 1 (March 20, 2019): 1–21, doi:10.15642/religio.v9i1.1231.

[20] Muktafi dan Hidayat, "Paradigma dan Doktrin...", hal. 90

[21] *Moral Sufism* focuses on cleaning the behavior of oneself or others, with the aim of improving human morals. This can be seen as a way of upholding the morality of society. This Sufism emphasizes moral improvement, the search for truth, and awareness of man's ability to understand Allah SWT. To achieve this goal, various methodologies are used. The Sunni school, also known as the Sufi tradition of morality, seeks to develop noble morals and eliminate reprehensible morals. Salaf as-shalih is responsible for developing this morality of Sufism. See: Muhammad Nur dan Muhammad Iqbal Irham, "Tasawuf dan Modernisasi: Urgensi Tasawuf

Akhlaki pada Masyarakat Modern," *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 25, no. 1 (30 April 2023), hal. 110

[22] Muliadi et al., "Intellectual and Spiritual Integration in Self-Actualisation of the Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah Tarīqah," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education (AJIE)* 8, no. 4 (2024): 1261–73, doi:https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v8i4.681.

[23] Noraini Ismail et al., "A Study of At-Takhalli and At-Tahalli Practices among University Students," *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147-4478)* 11, no. 7 (July 1, 2021): 662–669, doi:10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i7/10524.

[24] Nita Trimulyaningsih, M. A. Subandi, and Kwartarini W. Yuniarti, "The Process of Spiritual Transformatioto Attain Nafs Al-Muṭmaʾinnah in Islamic Psychology," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024): 1–9, doi:10.4102/hts.v80i1.8526.

that are easily understood, with figures such as al-Junayd al-Baghdādī, al-Qushayrī, and al-Ghazālī. Falsafī Sufism employs complex and symbolic thinking, with figures such as Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī, al-Hallāj, and Ibn ʿArabī.[25] The differences between streams reflect the intellectual diversity of the Sufi tradition. Each stream has a unique approach to understanding spirituality. The complexity of thought demonstrates the depth of religious reflection. Spirituality is not merely ritual, but a way of understanding existence.

The two streams have different epistemologies. Sunni Sufism is based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, while Falsafī Sufism emphasizes philosophical thought and Theophanic experience. Salafi Sufism is called Qur'anic Sufism because its practices conform to the Qur'an and Sunnah. Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized maintaining the purity of Sufism from *bid'ah* and *khurafat*. This epistemological difference demonstrates the complexity of Islamic spiritual tradition. Each approach has its uniqueness in understanding the human relationship with God. The effort to maintain spiritual purity becomes the main focus. The Islamic intellectual tradition is always dynamic and critical. Spirituality is not merely heritage, but a continuous process.

In Sunni Sufism, Al-Junayd al-Baghdādī taught living actively in moral piety. He developed the doctrine of *fanā'* and *baqā'* in three stages: releasing lower human attributes, acquiring divine attributes, and feeling united with God. However, God makes His followers realize that this union is an illusion. Followers live in the awareness that they cannot truly unite with God, but continue striving with full consciousness of His presence. This spiritual teaching has complex philosophical depth. Each stage contains meaning of spiritual transformation. The process of self-release is not merely ritual, but an existential journey.[26]

Falsafī Sufism encompasses complex concepts such as hulūl, ittihād, wahdat al-wujūd, ma'rifah, and mahabbah, which are influenced by philosophical thought about the unity of existence. Chronologically, Sunni Sufism developed in the first and early second centuries Hijri, while Falsafī Sufism developed from the late second to the fourth centuries Hijri. The development of spiritual thought demonstrates the intellectual diversity within the Islamic tradition.[27] Each concept brings a unique perspective on the human relationship with God. The complexity of philosophical thought reflects efforts to understand transcendental reality. Spirituality becomes an arena of dialogue between thought and mystical experience.

In the fifth and sixth centuries Hijri, Sunni Sufism reached its golden age. The main difference between Salafi and Sunni Sufism lies in the acceptance of religious text interpretation. Sunni Sufism accepts interpretations by both classical and contemporary scholars, while Salafi Sufism adheres strictly to the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Salafiyah. This dialectic of spiritual thought demonstrates the complexity of Islamic intellectual tradition. Each stream brings a unique approach to understanding religious texts. Differences in interpretation reflect the dynamics of spiritual understanding. Each

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[25] Salminawati, Zulkipli Nasution, and Dedi Sahputra Napitupulu, "Philosophical Sufism and Its Implications for Islamic Education," *EDUTEC Journal of Education And Technology* 5, no. 4 (2022): 1000–1010, doi:10.29062/edu.v5i4.397.

[26] Fazlur Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam* (England: Oneworld Publications, 2000). hal. 82-83

[27] St. Nurhayati et al., "Recontextualization of Wihdatul Wujud Ibnu Arabi's Sufism with the Local Wisdom of the Indonesia's Buginese," *International Journal of Religion* 5, no. 5 (2024): 620–31, doi:10.61707/e6997p13.

approach contributes to enriching religious insight.[28]

The development of Sufism demonstrates that Islamic spirituality is a living, dynamic, and continuously evolving tradition. From its early emergence to the classical period, Sufism underwent significant transformations, reflecting the depth of Muslim spiritual thought. This conceptual journey shows spirituality as an ongoing process in understanding the human relationship with God.[29] Each stream and school of thought provides unique contributions enriching Islamic spiritual tradition. The dynamics of spiritual thought reflect the intellectual and spiritual wealth of Muslims. Each generation has the opportunity to reinterpret spiritual heritage. Spirituality develops through dialogue, reflection, and deep understanding. The Islamic intellectual tradition remains alive and dynamic.[30]

Thus, Salafi Sufism is not merely a spiritual method, but a comprehensive way of understanding the human relationship with God. It presents a balanced approach between spiritual and material dimensions, between ritual and concrete action. Salafi Sufism reminds us that spirituality is not an escape from reality, but rather a transformative way to understand and live life. Each spiritual practice is designed to bring oneself closer to God while remaining actively engaged in social life. The principle of balance becomes the key to understanding Islamic teachings. Spirituality is not limited to individual rituals, but encompasses all aspects of life. Every action has the potential to become worship. The spiritual journey is an endless journey toward closeness with the Divine.

The Role of Ibn Taymiyah in the Development of Salafi Sufism

Ibn Taymiyyah, whose full name was Taqiy al-Din Ahmad bin Abd al-Halim, was born on 10 Rabi' al-Awwal 661 H (January 22, 1263 CE) in Harran, Mesopotamia. He came from an educated family, with his grandfather being a Hanbali jurist and his father teaching religious and exact sciences. From his family, he studied hadith from various books such as Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih al-Muslim. Although often considered anti-Sufi by modern Salafī groups, Ibn Taymiyyah did not actually reject Sufism as a whole. He gave a different character to Sufism that is called Salafi Sufism. According to him, true Sufis are those who focus on love for Allah and live in asceticism (*zuhūd*). Their hearts are clean from impurities, full of contemplation, and they consider gold and stones to be of equal value.[31]

Ibn Taymiyyah is regarded as a "puritan"[32] who inspired the renewal of religious teachings from *bid'ah* and superstition. His thoughts were later widely reproduced by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb and the Wahhābī group. He is known for his commitment to *ijtihād* and his rejection of *taqlīd*. He prioritized the authority of the first three generations of Muslims, known as al-salaf al-sālih. The Wahhābī movement firmly rejected Sufism and its organized practices. Ibn Taymiyyah's harsh stance toward Ibn 'Arabī's thought is often considered an attempt to

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[28] Mashar, "Tasawuf : Sejarah...." hal. 105-106

[29] Muhammad Mohsin Habib and Irfan Ullah, "The Influence of Sufism on Islamic Spirituality and Cultural Practices," *ASSAJ* 3, no. 1 (2025): 1166–84.

[30] Ahmad Muttaqin, "Islam and the Changing Meaning of Spiritualitas and Spiritual in Contemporary Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 50 (January 26, 2012), doi:10.14421/ajis.2012.501.23-56.

[31] Ahmad Taqiuddin, "Pemikiran Tasawuf Ibnu Taimiyyah," *EL-HIKAM: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kajian Keislaman* Vol. 3, no. 2 (2010), hal. 78

[32] The term puritan is often interpreted as someone who lives piously and considers luxury and pleasure as sin.

eliminate the dimension of Sufi thought. However, this obscures his effort to form a Sufism different from the Sunni and Falsafī models. His view was more complex than mere absolute rejection.[33]

Several studies, such as those by George Makdisi, Fazlur Rahman, and Nurcholis Madjid, have attempted to explore Ibn Taymiyyah's intellectual position between Sufis and anti-Sufis. They demonstrate that Ibn Taymiyyah actually valued Sufism in a unique way. The view that he was an enemy of Sufism is largely held by orientalists such as D.B. MacDonald and Louis Massignon.[34] However, other scholars have shown that Ibn Taymiyyah accepted the basic principles of Sufism and only criticized practices he considered deviant. There is evidence that he wore the Sufi *khirqah* from the Qadiriyah order and greatly admired 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, whom he called the Sufi master. The complexity of his thought demonstrates a critical approach yet not a complete rejection of spiritual tradition.

The character of Ibn Taymiyyah's spirituality emphasizes perfect obedience to Allah's law in the Qur'an and Sunnah, rather than union with God. He considered worship according to the Qur'an and Sunnah as the only way to draw closer to Allah. In his debates with Sufis in Egypt and Damascus, he filtered Sufi themes and practices based on these criteria.[35] Ibn Taymiyyah divided Sufis into three categories: first, the shaykhs of Islam who adhered to the Qur'an and Sunnah; second, Sufis who experienced *fana'* and *sukr* who were excused; and third, Sufis with beliefs contrary to

Islamic principles whom he criticized. This approach demonstrates the depth of his analysis of spiritual practices.

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, a *sālik* must free himself from permissible desires to avoid risks. He acknowledged that the Qur'an and Sunnah do not cover all occurrences in Muslim life. To achieve compliance with Allah, he proposed ijtihad using inspiration or intuition. A true Sufi must reach a point where his desire is only for the highest good. When rules do not help him, he can turn to the Sufi worldview through inspiration. In situations where Islamic law does not provide clear guidance, a Sufi can use spiritual intuition guided by pure intention. This approach demonstrates how Ibn Taymiyyah accommodated elements of Sufism within a strict Islamic framework.[36]

Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that following motivation or dhawq (spiritual intuition) is not the same as following personal desires. In his letter to Nasr al-Manbiji, he referred to this intuition as al-dhawq al-īmānī, a feeling guided by faith. According to his explanation in al-Futūh, guidance from inspiration must be tested against the standards of truth in the Qur'an and Sunnah. He believed inspiration does not always lead to absolute truth, but can provide strong impetus for Muslims in choosing appropriate actions in certain situations. Spiritual intuition can help transform desires and life according to the Creator's will. This approach demonstrates the depth of Ibn Taymiyyah's spiritual thought. He did not reject intuition, but integrated it within a

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[33] Lukmanul Hakim and Rahmad Tri Hadi, "Ibn Taymiyyah's Philosophical Critique to Ibn 'Arabi's Wahdat Al-Wujud Thought," *Kanz Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* 10, no. 2 (2024): 229–50.

[34] Mukhamad Zamzami, "Rekonstruksi Pemikiran dan Posisi Sufi-Antisufi Ibn Taymiyyah," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* Vol. 7, no. 1 (2017), hal. 39.

[35] Hamdan Maghribi, Alfina Hidayah, dan Arikhah Arikhah, "Ibn Taimiyyah dan Rancang Bangun Taṣawuf Salafi," *Esoterik* Vol. 8, no. 2 (28 Desember 2022), hal. 198

[36] Zamzami, "Rekonstruksi Pemikiran ....", hal. 44

strict framework of faith. Spirituality is not merely feeling, but a guided transformative process.[37]

In his Sufi practice, Ibn Taymiyyah acknowledged that Sufis strive to build a deep love for Allah. This love causes them to dissolve in Allah's presence until they no longer pay attention to themselves. In such states, they might utter expressions like *anā al-ḥaqq*, *subḥānī*, or *mā fī al-jubbah illā Allāh*. These expressions emerge because they are intoxicated in love for Allah and cannot control themselves in spiritual ecstasy. Ibn Taymiyyah recognized that this phenomenon could be either true or false. If a Sufi enters a phase of intoxicated love for Allah and loses rational consciousness, he might experience a phase of union with Allah. Ibn Taymiyyah did not consider this a sin because the person is not aware of his actions.[38]

During Ibn Taymiyyah's time, the Sufism practiced by the Prophet's companions was revived, although it focused more on the afterlife. However, contemporary Sufism has transformed into a form oriented toward balance between worldly life and the hereafter, in accordance with Qur'anic teachings. Ibn Taymiyyah's approach to Sufism reflects an effort to reconcile the spiritual and practical dimensions in Islam.[39] He did not merely reject Sufi practices, but rather criticized and filtered practices he considered deviant. Every spiritual practice must be returned to the primary sources: the Qur'an and Sunnah. Spirituality is not merely ritual, but a comprehensive way of life. Every action has the potential to bring oneself closer to

God. This approach demonstrates the depth of Ibn Taymiyyah's spiritual understanding.[40]

Ibn Taymiyyah's intellectual legacy regarding Sufism is highly complex and often misunderstood. He was not merely an opponent of Sufism, but rather a critical spiritual reformer. His criticism was not aimed at destroying spiritual tradition, but at returning it to the essence of Islamic teachings. He distinguished between true spiritual practices and deviant ones. Every form of spirituality must be measured based on compliance with the Qur'an and Sunnah. Ibn Taymiyyah offered a model of Sufism that was active, critical, and transformative. Spirituality is not merely an individual achievement, but a way of life that affects all dimensions of existence. He reminded that the spiritual journey is an ongoing process toward closeness with God.[41]

Ibn Taymiyyah's thought on Sufism goes beyond mere rejection or criticism. He offers a critical, profound, and transformative spiritual model rooted in the Islamic tradition. For him, spirituality is not a rigid or isolated domain, but a dynamic space for understanding and experiencing faith. Every spiritual practice, no matter how popular or longstanding, must be tested against the Qur'an and Sunnah. His critique was never aimed at dismantling spiritual traditions, but at restoring their essence in light of authentic Islamic teachings. In doing so, he opens a space for dialogue between tradition and renewal, spirituality and rationality. His approach

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[37] Muktafi dan Hidayat, "Paradigma dan Doktrin...." hal. 61

[38] Hakim and Hadi, "Ibn Taymiyyah's Philosophical Critique to Ibn 'Arabi's Wahdat Al-Wujud Thought."

[39] Ibid.

[40] Hamdan Maghribi and Alfina Hidayah, "Between Salafi and Sufi: Ibn Taimiyyah's Critique of Al-

Qusyairi's Views on Sufism," *Tsaqafah* 19, no. 2 (2023): 463–84, doi:10.21111/tsaqafah.v19i2.9618.

[41] Arjan Post, "A Glimpse of Sufism from the Circle of Ibn Taymiyya: An Edition and Translation of Al-Baʿlabakkī's (d. 734/1333) Epistle on the Spiritual Way (Risālat Al-Sulūk)," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016): 156–87, doi:https://doi.org/10.1163/22105956-12341289.

reflects the depth of Islamic spiritual thought—ever-evolving, open, and grounded.[42]

Salafi Sufism in Urban Society

In the modern context, humans often rely too much on science and rationality, which leads to secularism and distances them from divine values.[43] Sufism emphasizes the importance of integration between spirituality and worldly life to achieve balance and inner peace. Scholars observe that the main characteristic of urban culture is existential dissatisfaction characterized by excessive desire for power, pleasure, wealth, and ambition, so that life becomes empty and purposeless.[44] As a consequence, various negative behaviors such as crime, violence, drug abuse, divorce, and various other moral crises emerge. This phenomenon occurs because modern society idolizes science and technology while abandoning religious understanding, living in a secular mentality that erases the vision of divinity.[45]

Modern culture trapped by social demands feels bound to follow social scenarios that determine various dimensions in people's lives. Psychologists and sociologists state that the fundamental problems of modern culture are dissatisfaction, existential crisis, alienation, skepticism, despair, and emptiness. Amin Syukur in his book "Menggugat Tasawuf" quotes Atho Muzhar who describes modern society with five main characteristics, namely the development of mass culture, the desire for freedom, rational tendencies, materialistic attitudes, and increasing urbanization. The modernization that is desired turns out to only fill physical needs and fails to touch the deepest space of the human soul. As a consequence, urban society continues to be plagued by anxiety, worry, and loneliness as long as their spiritual needs are not met. Modern humans live in a spiritual emptiness, only following trends and social demands that are not always based on noble principles.[46]

Urban Muslim communities often show an inability to adapt to changes in life values due to globalization. They tend to be rigid in dealing with changes in theological, social, political, and economic aspects, so that they see many changes as deviations from Islamic teachings. Spirituality is a human potential that will not disappear, even in the modern and rational era. Urban communities who feel trapped in social pressures eventually seek peace through Sufism, a spiritual practice that involves dhikr, wirid and suluk to get closer to God, and cleanse the heart. According to Hamka, Sufism functions as a support for those who feel weak and lost. The practice of Sufism is oriented towards ethics and morality, where the better a person's character, the clearer their soul. Hamka emphasized the importance of Sufism for the life of modern society to overcome existential dissatisfaction.[47]

In his book "Modern Sufism" Hamka shows how one can live simply in modern society, remembering the importance of asceticism, while working hard for family and society. Modern culture is characterized by high competition that drives progress, but problems arise when competition is unfair and ignores the values of goodness. Progress in various fields forces rapid adaptation, while not everyone is able to do so, so that many experience mental and physical problems. The presence of Sufism

[42] Gasimov, "Muslim Saints Contested: Ibn Taymiyya's Critique of Al-Qushayrī's Risāla."

[43] yed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 18.

[44] Diah Arviontia et al., "Tasawuf Urban Dan Tasawuf Perenial Dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat Perkotaan," *Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 3, no. 1 (2023): 1–13.

[45] Andi Eka Putra, "Tasawuf Sebagai Terapi Atas Probel Spiritual Masyaraakt Modern," *Al-AdYaN* VIII, no. 1 (2013): 45–57.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Novi Maria Ulfah and Dwi Istiyani, "Tasawuf Modern Studi Pemikiran Hamka (Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah)," *Esoterik* 2 (2017): 95–109.

in modern life seeks to answer the spiritual crisis caused by modernism and positivism. Reason and spirituality must go hand in hand because they complement each other. In big cities including Indonesia, there is a new passion for spirituality marked by an increasing interest in Sufism, seen from Sufism studies and the publication of spiritual books.[48]

Sufism can be a solution to the spiritual emptiness of modern humans because it shows a noble, organized and fixed legality search within the framework of sharia. Sufism provides inner peace and sharia discipline at the same time, shaping behavior through an akhlāqī approach in the midst of busy modern life, and fulfilling intellectual needs through a philosophical approach. Sufism can be practiced by every Muslim from various social strata, including educated modern society. This is proven by the emergence of dhikr groups and Sufism studies for leaders and officials in urban areas.[49] Urban society realizes that Sufism can balance worldly and afterlife affairs. Meditation is not interpreted as self-isolation, but rather an opportunity for reflection, understanding concepts and improving oneself to then bring about social change according to Islamic teachings.

Although Salafi Sufism emphasizes the integration of spirituality and worldly life, a strict and literal approach may be too inflexible to address the challenges of modern urban society. In the context of a society that relies on knowledge and rationality, Salafi Sufism can be too rigid. A rigid approach to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah cannot always adapt to the needs of society in a dynamic environment.

Although the teachings of zuhd, sabar, and īthār teach a simple life and high morality, a less flexible approach may not fully address the complex psychological needs of urban society. A modern culture that idolizes knowledge requires a more inclusive approach to integrating the divine vision into everyday life.[50] In the context of modern urban society, a more contextual and adaptive approach to Sufism is needed, while still maintaining the spiritual essence of Sufism teachings, to truly answer the spiritual needs of urban society in the modern era.

Conclusion

The study reveals that Salafi Sufism represents a critical and transformative approach to Islamic spirituality, bridging the gap between traditional Sunni and Falsafi Sufi streams. Pioneered by Ibn Taymiyyah, this approach emphasizes a balanced integration of spiritual and worldly life, rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah. The research highlights the unique challenges of Salafi Sufism in modern urban society, where its strict, literal interpretation may struggle to address the complex psychological and existential needs of contemporary individuals. Future researchers are recommended to explore more nuanced, adaptive approaches to Salafi Sufism that maintain its core spiritual essence while developing more flexible methodologies for urban contexts. Additionally, comparative studies examining how different Sufi approaches negotiate the tensions between traditional spiritual practices and modern societal dynamics would provide valuable insights into the ongoing evolution of Islamic spirituality.

[48] Muhammad Azzam and Ela Nurlela, "Tasawuf Modern Hamka: Telaah Arti Konsep Kebahagiaan," *Qolamuna: Keislaman, Pendidikan, Literasi, Dan Humaniora* 1, no. 1 (2024): 19–26.
[49] Ghulam Falach and Ridhatullah Assya'bani, "Peran Tasawuf Di Era Masyarakat Modern 'Peluang Dan Tantangan,'" *Refleksi Jurnal Filsafat Dan Pemikiran Islam* 21, no. 2 (2022): 198–99.
[50] Shinta Nurani, "Urban Sufism and Transformation of Islamic Culture in Millenial Society," *Religia* 21, no. 2 (2018): 156–169.

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