

Sufism in Imam Abū Ḥanīfa's Perspective

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Abstract: Sufism has been a source of knowledge for Muslims throughout the history. Sufi practices has been criticized and evaluated from different perspectives by many Muslim scholars; as Sufis themselves, also referred to sayings and practices of great Muslim scholars to prove their activities. Because Imam Abū Ḥanīfa is one of the most influential scholars whose opinions has been adopted by many Muslims, this article attempted to examine his views on some important Sufi concepts in order to prove or disprove them. Those concepts that are discussed in this article from Abū Ḥanīfa and Sufi point of view are: knowledge, science, asceticism, worship and dream.

Key words: Sufism, Abū Ḥanīfa, knowledge, science, asceticism, worship and dream

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the study

After advent of Islam in the Middle East and its neighboring countries, followers of this religion became familiar with lots of ideas and perspectives. They accepted some of them and rejected some others. These ideas mostly had entered the Islamic culture from the neighboring cultures and civilizations. However, some of the new Muslims, on the basis of their attitudinal and ideological infrastructures, made new ideological achievements.

Piety and avoiding worldly life appeared in Muslims of the earliest centuries in different forms. It had various reasons such as popularity of materialism, political tensions, social chaos, preferring poverty, contentment, etc. As a result, some concluded that they should avoid the world and the crowd of the society; they preferred to cleanse their souls by selecting a life of seclusion. This led to appearance of various sects of Sufism in the Islamic societies which all had opponents as well as proponents. This was because Sufism was a new phenomenon in Islam and had advantages as well as disadvantages. Attitudes of great imams and scholars towards Sufism need to be considered in more details.

Research objectives

Introduction of Imam Abū Ḥanīfa and different aspects of his life as a great scholar who presented the correct pattern of Islamic life.

Explaining misunderstandings about heart deeds and real piety on the one hand, and behaviors and perspectives of Sufis on the other hand, so that the truth of Sufism could be clarified according to Imam Abū Ḥanīfa.

Distinguishing between correct and incorrect Sufism so that Muslims can find the way.

Literature

Although a lot of books and articles have been written about Sufism and its related subjects, some of which have been mentioned in the references, -to the best of my knowledge-, no one has specifically studied Imam Abū Ḥanīfa's attitude towards Sufism and his Sufi perspectives.

METHODOLOGY

This article has been presented in the descriptive-analytical method, because it is a mixture of historical discussions where the relationships need to be explained, analyzed and interpreted.

Part one: introduction of Abū Ḥanīfa and his period

Abū Ḥanīfa's name is Noman Ibn Sabet Kofi. He was born in the year 80 Hejira and died in 150 Hejira. His shrine is now in Azamia region in Baghdad. He is considered as the founder of jurisprudence in Islam. Muhammad Ibn Edris Shafei writes about him: "people need Abū Ḥanīfa in jurisprudence". On the basis of his vast knowledge of the Book and Sunnah, he laid the foundations of jurisprudence and educated a lot of students on the basis of this method and school of thought (See Shak'eh, Muhammad Mustafa, *The Four Imams*, Dar-ul-kitab Al-Misri, 1411 Hejira, p. 64).

At the end of Omavi period and the beginning of Abbasid dynasty, the time of this Imam was along with important political tensions and vast social changes which led to decline of Bani Omayya and coming to power of Abbasids. In the meantime, it was called the time of confrontation of ideas and various opinions. In this period, Muslims had appeared in different nations such as Arab, Persian, Turk, Indian, etc. Different social classes had been mixed and lots of slaves were working and living alongside aristocrats in the society (See Sharbasi, Ahmad, *The Four Imams*, Ard-ul-Hilal, Bitā, p. 15).

The most important ideological feature of this period was confrontation of rationalist and contextualist ideas in the field of Islamic knowledge and jurisprudence; it was because existence of different perspectives among scholars had led to appearance of two main currents. One of these currents was adherence to the texts of the Quran and Sunnah and the other one was destinationism. Abū Ḥanīfa was one of the scholars who is attributed to belong to the school of intellect. Other names such as the schools of narrative and intellect or the people of Hadith and opinion had been popular in those days for introduction of intellectual schools of jurisprudence (See Sharbasi, *ibid*, p. 16).

Part two: origin and meaning of the word ‘Sufism’

In the dictionaries, there are controversies about the origin of the word ‘Sufism’. Some believe that its origin is the word “Sofia” which meant knowledge and wisdom in ancient Greek (Nashar, Ali Sami, *The Emergence of Philosophical Ideas in Islam*, 1416 Hejira, p. 279). Some believe that its origin goes back to the people of Suffah who stayed next to the Mosque of the holy Prophet (SAW) and worshipped God (Tousi, Abu Nasr Al-Siraj, *Al-Lam’*, Sherlat Al-Quds, 1429, Hejira, p. 165). Some believed that the origin of this word is the word *sof* meaning wool because Sufis wore ragged wools (Ibn Khaldunm Abdurahman, *Moghadama*, Bija, Bitā, 334). Some others believe that it originates from a person called Ghos Ibn Amr whose mother had dedicated him to the Kabaa and had tied his forehead to its wall with some wool. Because of this, he was known as *sofeh* i.e. wool (Ibn Temiyeh, *Alssufia wa Al-foghara*). Some believe that this word is taken from the name of a mule called Sofaneh that is contented with the dry grass of the desert (Ibn Jozi Abdurahman, *Talbis Eblis*, Dar-ul-Kitab Al-Arabi, 1415 Hejira, p. 201). Most experts believe that the origin of the word ‘Sufism’ comes from the word *sof* which means wool, because their clothes represented that. (Sohravardi, Shahab-ed-Din, *Avaref-ul-Ma’arif*, Dar-ul-Kitab Al-Arabi, 1966 AD, p. 14).

Definition of the word ‘Sufism’

Similarly, there are different ideas about definition of the word ‘Sufism’ as well. Some have mentioned about 100 definitions for it (Tousi, Al-lam’, *ibid*, p. 45-48; Ghashiri, *ibid*, 279).

Marouf Karkhi¹² has stated: “Sufism means taking the truths and having no expectations from people” (Sohravardi, *ibid*, p. 61).

Junaid Baghdadi has stated: “Sufism means immediate relationship with God”. He has also said: “Sufism means cleansing the heart from people’s company, leaving the habits aside, drying up human attributes, avoiding sensual pleasures, reaching divine qualities, attachment to true knowledge and following the holy Prophet (SAW) in Sharia” (Tousi, *ibid*, p. 45; Ghashiri, *ibid*, p. 280).

When Sahnun³ was asked what Sufism was, he answered: “it means neither you possess anything nor anything can possess you”.

If we look at these definitions well, we see that none of them is perfect, because they either have vagueness, or they are incompatible with Islamic instructions. For example, Marouf Karkhi has talked about truth, but what truth and where is that truth? Or escape from the world is not welcome in religion because the holy Quran says: “...eat of the good things We have provided to you and be grateful to Allah...” (Baqara: 172). Or it says: “Say, Who has prohibited the adornment Allah has brought forth for His servants ,and the wholesome things of sustenance?...”

Some have mentioned that “Sufism means engagement in worship, setting off towards God Almighty, turning away from the worldly beauties and decorations, piety and avoidance of what the public turns to such as pleasure of property and glory, and seclusion for worship” (Ibn Khaldun, *Introduction*, p. 467).

Out of different definitions proposed for Sufism, it can be concluded that according to the perspectives of individuals, Sufism is both pleasant and unpleasant, because some have defined it as escaping from the world and its blessings i.e. negative seclusion and as a result, they have rejected it; but some others have defined it as freedom, cleansing, leaving many lusts, and as a result, something pleasing. In other words, Sufism can be divided into Islamic and innovative or distorted types.

Part three: Abū Ḥanīfa's perspective to some popular concepts among Sufis Cognition

Most Sufis believe that astonishment and wandering is the highest level of Sufism. Or they believe that the only way to reach divine cognition is unity with God Almighty. They believe that the route to reach cognition is passing different specific levels which they determine themselves for their disciples and these levels are achieved through austerities of the heart and sensual efforts (Taftazani Abul-wafa, Al-Ghanimi, *Studies in Islamic Philosophy*, p. 153). Some believe that only specific classes of people can achieve cognition or some others have stated that cognition cannot be achieved except with empty stomach and those who are busy with faith and worship cannot achieve cognition (Al-Isfahani, Abu Naim Ahmad, *Helyat-ul-Olia wa Tabaghat-ul-Asfia*, vol. 10, p. 39).

However, Imam Abū Ḥanīfa, like other predecessors of the Islamic nation, believed that the nature of mankind is blended on the basis of faith and there is the possibility of achieving divine cognition and that the source of achieving this cognition is the Quran, without the need to sophistry and debates with orators and philosophers. He also hated shallow looking and showy schools of thought, because they did not pay attention to the purposes and contents of the words. Abū Ḥanīfa disliked imitation and believed in innovation and *ijtihad*. He did not believe in the cognitive methods of Sufis which were based on fancies, superstitions and imaginations.

He has stated: "we know God as He has introduced Himself in the Quran with all His qualities. No one can know him deservedly, however, He must be known on the basis of the Book and Sunnah" (Hanafi, Mulla Ali Qari, *Sharh-ul-Figh-ul-Akbar*, Dar-ul-Kitab Al-Elmia, 1416 Hejira, p. 5).

Abū Ḥanīfa believed that faith and cognition is a natural issue within human beings which can be achieved without engagement in and the need to the knowledge of rhetoric and philosophy. He did not believe in the levels and moods of Sufis, because they were based on human sensation and perspective. According to him, the correct way of reaching cognition is the very path that the holy Quran and correct Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) have laid before mankind.

Once, he came out to debate a group of orators to prove existence of God and monotheism. Beforehand, he asked: "is it possible that a ship can cross River Tigris without a captain and can be loaded and unloaded or can anchor?" They answered: "this is impossible". He replied: "how is it possible that such a huge world can run without a captain or a manager?" (Mulla Ali Qari, *ibid*, p. 22). It means that without oratory and philosophical debates, and with a simple example, Imam Abū Ḥanīfa proved his beliefs.

Knowledge

There are famous sentences in the sayings of Sufis which mean there is no need to knowledge. For example, they say: "we take our knowledge from a living who does not die, but you take your knowledge from a living who dies" (Ibn Arabi, Mohyeddin, Ali Ibn Muhammad, T 638 Hejira, *Al-Futuhat Al-Makkia*, vol. 1, p. 139) or "knowledge is a barrier between the heart and God"⁴ (Al-Isfahani, Abu Naim, *Helyat-ul-Olia wa Tabaghat-ul-Asfia*, vol. 2, p. 438).

However, considering so many verses of the Quran and Hadiths of the holy Prophet (SAW) which encourage to acquire knowledge, Imam Abū Ḥanīfa invited everybody to acquire knowledge. He has mentioned: "if you remain ten years without ailment and job, you never give up knowledge, because if you turn away from it, your life will become hard" (Ghazi, Taqi-ed-Din Tamimi, *At-Tabaghat As-Sunnia fi Tarajim Al-Hanafia*, Dar-ur-Rifaae, 1403 Hejira, p. 162).

He once said to Ibrahim Ibn Adham: "you have taken a good share of worship, but also pay attention to knowledge, because it is the peak of worship and axis of all affairs" (Makki, Movafagh Ibn Ahmad, *Managheb Abi Hanifa*, Dar-ul-Kitab Al-Arabi, 1981 AD, p. 350).

He once said in reply to someone: "know that deeds are a function of knowledge, as the body limbs are functions of the eyes. Knowledge with few deeds is far better than a lot of deeds without knowledge, as a few supplies along with a guide in a desert are far better than a lot of supplies without a guide", because of this, the holy Quran has stated: 'Can those who know and those who do not know become equal?'" (Makki, *ibid*, p. 89). He believed that scholars and jurisprudents are friends of God: "if scholars and jurisprudents are not friends of God in the world and hereafter, then no one is friend of God" (Makki, *ibid*, p. 340).

Abū Ḥanīfa believed that knowledge can be obtained by learning from the Book and Sunnah, not by fancies and imagination or dreams and Sufi revelations. For acquiring knowledge, the very path should be followed which has been followed by the elders of the Islamic nation, not the path invented by some innovators and some Sufis or orators.

Piety

Most Sufis think that piety means turning away from the world, so much so that the individual escapes from work and efforts and does no activity for their earning, or stands contrary to the rich and owners of properties and wealth. However, Abū Ḥanīfa was not like that, and although wealth came towards him from any aspect, he never made himself dependent on it.

Once the Abbasid Caliph sent Abū Ḥanīfa 10,000 Dirhams, but he rejected it and said in reply: "I do not have such an expectation from Amir of believers" (Makki, *ibid*, p. 187).

He collected the profit of his annual business and used it to fulfill requirements of *muhadiths* and scholars. He bought food and clothing supplies for them. Then, he gave the remaining to them and said: "fulfill your requirements and praise none but God, because I did not give to you from my own property; this is the blessing and mercy of God. It is the profit of your own goods. This is something God does for you through me (Khatib Baghdadi, Abubakr Ahmad, *History of Baghdadi*, vol. 13, p. 360).

He believed that piety does not mean abandoning the world, because a pious individual gains the worldly things but believes that he and his property belong to God (*ibid*).

Part four: study of the narratives attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa

In order to prove their claims and perspectives, Sufis have used and referred to actions of great figures in the Islamic nation since long ago so that they could justify their own deeds. Abū Ḥanīfa is a figure whose worship, deeds and behaviors have always been referenced. Sometimes, his deeds and thoughts are referred to as appraisal and compliment, and sometimes it is done by individuals and groups so that they can justify their own deeds. Two examples are given below:

First: Abū Ḥanīfa's worship

In *History of Baghdad*, it is mentioned that: "Ali Ibn Hassan Muadil narrated from Abubakr Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Yaghub Kaghazi from Abu Muhammad Ibn Abdullah Ibn Muhammad Ibn Yaghub Ibn Hareth Harethi Bukhari and he from Ahmad Ibn Hussein Balkhi that Hammad Ibn Quraish has said: "I heard Asad Ibn Amr saying: 'Abū Ḥanīfa has prayed morning prayer with the *wuthu* of *isha* for forty years. He used to read the whole Quran in one *rak'at* at night. His neighbors heard him crying and pitied him. He had finished reading the Quran seven thousand times on the spot where he died" (Khatib Baghdadi, vol. 13, p. 354).

This author has also stated that: "Hussein Ibn Ali Ibn Muhammad Muadil has narrated from Qazi Abu Muhammad Ibn Sahl Neishabouri and he from Ahmad Ibn Harun Faghih that Muhammad Ibn Monthir Said Heravi has narrated from Muhammad Ibn Sahl Ibn Mansour Marvzi and he has narrated from Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim that he has said 'I heard Mansour Ibn Hashim saying that: we were in Qadesiya with Abdullah Ibn Mubarak when a man from Kufa came to him and started saying bad things about Abū Ḥanīfa. Abdullah Ibn Mubarak said to him: alas! Do you backbite one who has prayed five times prayers with a single *wuthu* for forty five years? One who recited the whole Quran at one night in two *rak'ats*!?" (*ibid*, p. 355).

Study of the above two narratives

In the first narrative, there are some unknown individuals among the narrators whose names have not appeared in the books of modifications and in the sources about narrators. For example, there are no mentions of Hammad Ibn Quraish, Ahmad Ibn Hussein Balkhi or Ali Ibn Hassan. Or Abu Abdullah Ibn Hareth Harethi is considered by *hadith* specialists to be weak. Abu Zar'a and Zahabi have mentioned him as weak in narrating *hadiths*. Khatib Baghdadi has accused him of lying and forging proofs. One of the outstanding features of Harethi, among *muhadiths*, is his concealment (Khatib Baghdadi, *ibid*, vol. 10, p. 126, Zahabi, *Seyar E'lam An-Nabla'*, vol. 15, p. 425).

In the second narrative, too, there are some unknown and weak narrators. For example, the identities of Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim or Mansour Ibn Hashim are unknown. Life stories of some others also could not be found.

Considering existence of some problems in the narrating documents of these two narratives, they are not correct in terms of subjects and meanings as well; how has Imam Abū Ḥanīfa stayed awake all nights for forty years without sleeping!? Whereas undergoing such a difficulty is rejected from the religious perspective and is considered as a kind of extravagance. He, who was close to the era of the holy Prophet (SAW) and his companions, knew very well that the Prophet (SAW) and his companions would not have done such deeds, and even in authentic narratives, the contrary of this deed is approved; when a group of people came to the wives of the holy Prophet (SAW), asked about his deeds, then they saw their own deeds very little compared to those of the Prophet (SAW), each one of them made some decisions. One of them decided not to sleep at nights and always pray, another one decided not to marry, and the third one announced that he would always fast. When the Prophet

(SAW) heard this, he said: "However, I fear God more than you do, and I am more pious, but I fast and also break fast, I pray and also sleep, I marry women, and whomsoever turns away from my Sunnah, is not one of me".

As a result, attributing such narratives to Imam Abū Ḥanīfā is not correct, because it is not compatible with mind nor is it with the narratives. These narratives are forged by fanatic and extravagant individuals who wanted to find proofs for their innovations, superstitions and fancies.

Second: sleep and dream of Abū Ḥanīfā

Author of the book *Majma-ul-Akhbar*⁵ narrates: "I saw in some books that Abū Ḥanīfā has said: 'I saw God Almighty in my dream 99 times. I said to myself that if I see him for the 100th time, I will ask him how people will be saved from hellfire. When it happened, I asked God this question and He replied: whoever repeats these words in the mornings and evenings: subhan Allah Al-Abadi Al-Abad, subhana Allah Al-Wahid Al-Ahad, subhana Allah Al-Fard As-Samad, subhana Allah Rafi-is-Samaa bi ghairi amad, subhana man basata al-Artha ala al-maa'l jamad, subhana man ghasama al-rizgha wa lam yansa ahada, subhana man khalagha al-khalgh wa ahsahom adada, subhana man lam yattakhiz zaujata wa la walada, subhana allazi lam yalad wa lam yulad , lam yakon laho kofoan Ahad⁶, will be safe from my torment (Afif Al-Seyed, *Hayat-ul-Imam Abi Hanifa*, p. 228).

Study of the narrative

This narrative is not valid because it has no documents and its narrators are unknown.

Seeing God Himself in the dream has neither been narrated from the Prophet (SAW), nor from his companions or not even from other great religious figures.

There are some words applied in this text which need Quranic and narrative proofs to be proved, for example, the words "Abadi Al-Abad" have not been mentioned as the adjectives of God Almighty in the Quran and neither in the Sunnah. Most of the scholars believe that names of God are forbidden and no one has the right to name God with a name that neither God Himself has used nor His prophets have used that

This text proves one of the important religious sources for Sufis i.e. dream. On the basis of dreams, they organize a lot of their actions and words. They believe that their dreams are sources of answering religious questions or giving their own *azkar* as well as *aurad*, and they prescribe them to their disciples; whereas, dream of a non-innocent person is not a valid source for Sharia and law.

The sources of dream are three types: spiritual, sensual, and evil according the Prophet (SAW)⁷ (Ibn Majah, *Kitab Sahih*, Hadith 3168).

In another narrative, it is mentioned that: "dream has three forms: some dreams are from Satan to make people sad, another type of dream is the individual's problems in the time of awaking which are reflected in their dreams, and another form is one section out of 46 sections of prophecy" (ibid, Hadith 3169).

The criterion for correctness and incorrectness of a dream is its agreement with the Book and Sunnah. It is stated in the book, *Al-Etesam* that: "the weakest proof among the innovators belongs to the ones who do their deeds on the basis of dreams; and on this basis, do some deeds and leave some others. They say: I saw this righteous person in my dream who said do this thing and leave that thing. They even sometimes mention Prophet (SAW), and on the basis of their dreams, they do some deeds and leave some others. This is wrong, because the criteria of distinguishing deeds is Sharia itself for compilation and implementation of rules and regulations. For example, no one can say that I saw this man stealing in my dream and therefore, cut his hand, etc. (Shatebi, Abu Ishagh, Ibrahim Ibn Musa Lakhmi, *Al-Itesam*, p. 260).

In this dream, unlike clear texts of the Quran and Sunnah, the criterion for salvation has been mentioned to be a few *azkar* and *aurad*.

Therefore, attributing such narratives to Imam Abū Ḥanīfā is not correct, and it seems to be forgery of Sufis who, in this way, have tried to provide some facilities for themselves.

CONCLUSION

The author concludes that:

Sufism has been taken from the root "*souf*" meaning wool, and this word was used for Sufis because of the woolen clothes, this term has become popular for them.

Imam Abū Ḥanīfā believes that the path to reach cognition is the Quran and true Sunnah, not fancies and personal as well as Sufi imaginations.

According to Imam Abū Ḥanīfā, knowledge is gained through education not through dream and revelation; and real knowledge is the knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah, not imaginations and superstitions of Sufis.

Seclusion and turning away from the world has no place in Abū Ḥanīfā's beliefs; and he believes that the world should be benefitted from correctly.

Intolerable worship like staying awake all night or praying morning prayer with the *wuthu* of *isha* during forty years, etc. which are attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa are not correct in terms of narratives and their sources.

True dream has only one aspect i.e. tiding and hope, not determining rules and religious regulations.

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Endnotes

¹ Abu Mahfus Marouf Ibn Firouz converted to Islam in the hands of Ali Ibn Musa Al-Riza. He is the master of Serri Saqati and a friend of Davud Tae. He died in 200 Hejira in Baghdad and was buried there. See: **Stages of Sufism**, p. 83.

² Abul-Qasim Junaid Ibn Muhammad Al-Kharaz was originally from Nahavand and was born in Iraq who grew up there and also died there. He is one of the great figures in Sufism and was a disciple of Abu Thor. He is one of the friends of Serri Saghati and Hareth Mahasebi. He died in 279 Hejira (Ghashiri, *ibid*, p. 420).

³ Sanhun Ibn Umar Al-Moheb who named himself 'Sanhun the Liar'; he was Serri Saghati and Muhammad Al-Ghassab's friend. He is one of the outstanding figures of Sufism in Iraq. He died soon after Junaid (*Stages of Sufism*, p. 195).

⁴ Not all Sufis are the same in these definitions, a lot of them follow the ways of Sunnah wa Al-Jama'ah about their issues.

⁵ Manzur Abu Abdullah Ibn Hassan is one of the great Shafei scholars. The book *Majma-ul-Akhbar fi Managheb-ul-Akhyar* belongs to him. He died in the year 776 Hejira (Zarkali, *Al-Illam*, vol.6, p. 87).

⁶ Translation of this prayer: "virtuous is the God who is eternal, virtuous is the God alone and unique, virtuous is the God who is peerless and needs nothing, virtuous is the God who raised the sky with no pillars, virtuous is the God who spread land on water and dried it, virtuous is the God who distributed alimant and has forgotten no one, virtuous is the One who has created all creation and has perfectly counted them, virtuous is the One who has not chosen any wife or children, virtuous is the One who has not been born nor has given birth, and no one can equal him."

⁷ Translation of the hadith: "dream has three forms: tidings from God, the words of the soul, or formation of fear by Satan."