

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN SUFISM: THE STUDY OF UNIQUENESS OF SUFISM IN RELATION TO MYSTICISM

Angga Arifka

Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, Universitas Gadjah Mada

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates Sufism and its closeness with the so-called mysticism. Indeed, mysticism is chiefly characterized by mystical experience, referring to, broadly speaking, that of union with the ultimate reality. On this basis, Sufism also evinces mystical experience from which the Sufis elaborate some terminological concepts such as fanā', wahdat al-wujūd, ittihād, etc. As a qualitative study with a type of library research, this article employs content analysis to provide an in-depth interpretation of the texts analyzed, especially literature relevant to the field of study. The results of the analysis demonstrate twofold. On the one hand, Sufism is arguably Islamic mysticism due to its emphasis on mystical experience about God. On the other hand, Sufism has its own uniqueness since it also pays much attention to moral development and human behavior. In addition, Sufism has great contribution and significance to Islamic civilization in particular and modernity in general, ranging from Islamic psychology, metaphysics, art and literary world to human peace and spiritual crisis.

Keywords: *Islamic Mysticism, Mystical Experience, Sufism*

A. INTRODUCTION

Sufism or *tas}awwuf* is a branch of the Islamic tradition that is often associated with mysticism, a spiritual path that seeks to bring humans closer to the ultimate reality through deep inner experiences. In the study of religion and spirituality, Sufism has attracted the attention of scholars across disciplines because of its unique approach to the relationship between humans and the Transcendent. However, although often grouped under the category of mysticism, Sufism has characteristics and objectives that distinguish it from other mystical traditions in the world (cf. Burckhardt, 2008: 9-10).

In mystical traditions, the search for spiritual experience often involves an attempt to transcend the material world and achieve unity with the Divine. Mystical traditions can be found in almost all major religions, such as Kabbalah in Judaism, the hesychasm tradition in Orthodox Christianity, and Advaita Vedanta in Hinduism (Armstrong, 1994: 24-25, 70, 107, 111). Although they have similarities in seeking closeness to the Transcendent, each of these mystical traditions carries unique characteristics influenced by the doctrines, practices, and cultural contexts of each religion. Sufism, as a form of mysticism, has distinctive characteristics that are born from Islamic teachings. Its focus is not only upon mystical experience, but also on ethical, social, and love dimensions for God that emphasize the balance between spirituality and daily life practices.

The study of Sufism has produced a variety of literature that describes various aspects of this tradition, from doctrine, practice, to its social role. Annemarie Schimmel (2011) explains that Sufism is an esoteric dimension of Islam that aims to cleanse the soul and achieve closeness to God through love and devotion. Schimmel highlights how love (*mah}abbah*) is at the heart of Sufism, which is different from the mystical approach in other traditions that may emphasize intellectualism or metaphysical knowledge.

Henry Corbin (1994) emphasizes aspects of Sufi cosmology and the role of creative imagination in a disciple's mystical journey. This perspective provides a deeper understanding of how Sufism combines metaphysics and spiritual experience that are manifested in certain symbols and rites. On the other hand, Fazlur Rahman (1979) emphasizes the role of Sufism in shaping Islamic ethics and connecting the spiritual dimension to the practice of daily life, an aspect rarely found in other, more individualistic mystical traditions.

Outside of Islamic literature, Evelyn Underhill (1912) examines mysticism in general, including elements found in Sufism. She notes that while Sufism shares some similarities with other mystical traditions, such as the experience of ecstasy and oneness with God, Sufism stands out for its preoccupation with an intimate love relationship with the Divine and its emphasis on spiritual community (cf. Trimingham, 1971).

Furthermore, the ultimate goal of Sufism is not only limited to the attainment of ecstasy or union with God, but also to the moral and social transformation of the individual. In this regard, Sufism demonstrates a balance between the vertical (relationship with God) and horizontal (relationship with human beings) dimensions, an approach that is often considered unique compared to other mystical traditions that tend to be more introspective. Another interesting aspect of Sufism is the use of art, such as poetry, music, and dance, as a means to achieve spiritual experience (Hadi W. M., 2020). The poetry of Rumi, Hafiz, and Attar, for example, is one of the great legacies of Sufism that not only enriches the world literary tradition but also provides deep insights into mystical experience (Hadi W. M., 2002). Art in Sufism serves not only as an expression of mystical experience but also as a tool to transmit spiritual teachings to the wider community.

Through the discussion above, this article aims to highlight Sufism as a unique and relevant form of mysticism, while distinguishing its approach to spiritual experience from other mystical traditions. In doing so, Sufism not only becomes part of the study of mysticism but also offers insights that enrich our understanding of the human relationship with the Divine. This article aims to explore the concept of Sufism as a form of mysticism and mystical experience of the Sufis, as well as highlight the spiritual goals and crucial significance that distinguish Sufism from other mystical traditions.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method employed in this study is a qualitative one with a type of library research. This library research is conducted by collecting relevant data and information from various literature sources, including books, journal articles, and other scientific works (Zeid, 2008: 3). The data obtained is then studied in depth to understand the concepts, theories, or phenomena related to the research topic. This qualitative method was chosen because it is more flexible and able to explore the meaning behind

non-numerical data, so that it is in accordance with the objectives of the study which focus upon theoretical exploration and analysis (Sudarto, 1997: 66).

The approach utilized in this study is content analysis. This approach involves reviewing and analyzing the literature to identify key themes, certain patterns, and conceptual relationships that support the research objectives (Suprayogo, 2001: 192). With this approach, the study attempts to provide an in-depth interpretation of the texts analyzed, especially literature relevant to the field of study. Through content analysis, this study not only explores the explicit content of the literature but also tries to uncover implicit meanings that can enrich understanding of the matter discussed.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Definition and Types of Mysticism

The term mysticism comes from Greek which has various meanings. Its etymology derives from the word *myein*, which means to close the eyes, to hide, or mystery. Mysticism in Christianity refers to biblical liturgy, to matters of spirituality, and to the contemplative dimension of early and middle Christianity. During the modern century, the discourse of mysticism has developed to include more broadly such as beliefs and even ideas related to extraordinary states of mind (Jones & Gellman, 2022). In fact, the term mysticism comes from the Greek mystery religions whose prospective adherents were given the name *mystes*. Technically, the term mysticism was apparently first used by Dionysius Aeopagite (Bagus, 2005: 652).

The term mysticism is usually used with the most uncertain connotation. In German, the word “mysticism” has two connotations. First, “*mistikismus*” which means the worship of supernatural powers, theosophical search, the investigation of spirituality in psychic phenomena. Second, “*mystic*” which means direct experience that occurs in the relationship between human and God. The word mysticism is generally understood in the latter sense. However, mysticism is also understood as a theological and metaphysical doctrine regarding the possibility of the soul to unite with the ultimate reality (Jones, 1917: 83). The definition of the term mysticism has been discussed since the second half of the nineteenth century. Gershom G. Scholem asserts that there are

almost as many definitions of mysticism as there are authors. It is inevitable that mysticism cannot be defined with certainty and in a final way (Zarrabizadeh, 2008).

According to Annemarie Schimmel (2011: 2-3), mysticism is a great spiritual current that exists in all religious traditions. In its broadest sense, mysticism can be defined as awareness of the Supreme Reality—which may be called wisdom, being, ground, light, love, or emptiness. Nevertheless, such depiction cannot touch upon mysticism in its entirety. Put differently, such depiction is a hint to understand its surface since the goal of mysticism is often indescribable and cannot be understood and explained by any reasoning but requires a spiritual experience that does not depend upon the mind. Broadly speaking, the goal of mysticism is *unio mystica*, a state when the soul experiences union with the Absolute Being.

On the one hand, mysticism as an experience is a psychological matter, while on the other hand, the doctrine of mysticism is a metaphysical one. It is undeniable that mystical experience is the oldest experience for *homo religiosus* that is not limited to a particular group. This experience is an original personal religious sort. Moreover, mystical experience is characterized by the emergence of a sharp type of consciousness and is not differentiated between subject and object. That is to say, subject and object become united and indivisible (Jones, 1917: 83-84).

All types of mysticism culminate in some form of experience of union, a feeling of oneness with both internal and external reality. Its striking characteristic is a sense of detachment from empirical phenomena and a break with common awareness of the self. It is true that there are differences among religions, partly due to differences in doctrine, cultural or belief systems, or goals to be achieved. That being said, those differences seem to disappear when the mystic attains a mystical experience, such as the universal soul (Brahman) in Hinduism, the Supreme Soul (*purusha*) in Samkhya, and union with the personal God in ancient Egyptian, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian traditions (Marcoulesco, 1993: 240).

According to Bertrand Russell (1976), mysticism has four characteristics. *First*, belief in intuition and inner understanding as a method of gaining knowledge (as opposed to rational and empirical knowledge). *Second*, belief in the unity of being and denial of contradiction and differentiation in whatever form. *Third*, denial of the reality of the age.

Fourth, belief in evil as a mere external illusion. Schimmel (2011: 5) divides mystical experience into two types: “Mysticism of Infinity” and “Mysticism of Personal”. The first type can be found in the philosophical system of Plotinus and in the Upanishads, especially elaborated by Shankara in *advaita* philosophy. In Islam, this type of mysticism is found in the school of Ibn ‘Arabī. The type of “Mysticism of Personal” can be found in the early development of Sufism. This type is characterized by a relationship between creature and creator that remains differentiated, which, put differently, maintains the duality between the servant and God.

As Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, and others have emphasized, there is a common point underlying the differences in the mystical expressions. The diversity of such mystical expressions is predicated upon the experience of the ultimate reality, the unity of being, annihilation, cosmic sublimation, union, revelation or enlightenment (*satori*), and emptiness. In stark contrast to that, according to Gershom Scholem there is no mysticism in general, but rather there are only specific and individual systems of mysticism, such as Hindu mysticism, Christian mysticism, Jewish mysticism, Buddhist mysticism, or Islamic mysticism (Dupre, 1993: 246).

Geographically, mysticism is often distinguished between the West and the East. Eastern mysticism does have a distinction with Western mysticism. What is meant by this difference is that Eastern mysticism is mysticism that is in the East, such as the mysticism in Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism, while Western mysticism is in the West, such as Jewish mysticism and Christian mysticism. Be that as it may, mysticism as an esoteric doctrine is certainly intertwined with exoteric doctrine. In other words, mysticism is always based upon a certain religious belief. There is no mysticism that is empty of belief, which is without its exoteric foundation (Nasr, 1977: 37-38).

In Islam, the mystical doctrine is called Sufism (*tas}awwuf*). Although the word “mystic” originally came from the Greek religion, which then entered the European literature, but often in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, the word is paired with *tas}awwuf*. The two terms do not have the same meaning on the grounds that the term *tas}awwuf* has a religious and distinctive connotation. The word *tas}awwuf* is usually used in a strict way, that is, referring to the mystical expressions within Islamic traditions. According to

Reynold Nicholson (2002: 2), the term *tas}awwuf* has a more specific meaning and radiates religious modesty.

Sufism or Islamic mysticism is a path of knowledge (*al-ma'rifah, irfān*) with which the element of love is closely related contingent upon the contours of Islamic revelation. That is why, according to Nasr (1996), Islamic mysticism has always been close enough to the discourse of Islamic philosophy for centuries. The most important thing to emphasize here is that Sufism has remained alive and vibrant for centuries. It provides a means of practice for the spiritual awareness of God and the activation of the potential of the spiritual faculty in the human self.

2. The Foundation of Sufism

Sufism is known to be an established discipline since the ninth century, almost three centuries after the arrival of Islam. Before the term *tas}awwuf* emerged, it was still known as the practice of asceticism. Asceticism has existed since the first century of Islam, especially in the Prophet Muhammad's life. Besides the Prophet, the companions and the followers of the companions were also known as ascetics. Historically, the first Sufi was H}asan al-Bas}ri (d. 728 CE) who contributed ideas about *khawf* (fear of God) and *rajā'* (hope for God) (Riyadi, 2016: 9).

The term *tas}awwuf* itself emerged in history in the eighth century from an alchemist from Kuffah, that is, Jabīr b. H}ayyān (d. 815 CE). Terminologically, the meaning of *tas}awwuf* is not singular. Indeed, the term *tas}awwuf* is not easier to define than the term mysticism. If the term mysticism is very diverse in its definition as many as its authors, so is the term Sufism due to its subjective nature. Sufism can be said to be a personal science, so it is always open to expression and discussion. This has a good impact on Sufism as a discourse which can develop in a richer way and is multidisciplinary in nature. That is to say, the spiritual experience of the Sufi can be studied with other sciences, such as philosophy, psychology, science, or even social and political science (Riyadi, 2016: 9-10).

There are some scholars who suggest that Sufism is actually influenced by various mystical and philosophical schools. It is said that Sufism is influenced by Christianity in terms of asceticism. The asceticism of the Sufis is considered to have been adopted from Christian monks. The monks do live celibate lives, and it is true that some Sufis do not

marry, but many Sufis remain married in order to follow the Prophet's traditions. Likewise, there are those who argue that Sufism is influenced by Neoplatonism. Neoplatonism is the philosophy of Plotinus based upon Plato's philosophy. This accusation is certainly not so accurate, although it is difficult to deny, for the term emanation is also widespread in Islamic philosophical thought and Sufism (Nicholson, 2002: 7-9).

In addition, Sufism was also influenced by ancient Gnosticism. As Nicholson (2002: 9-12) reports, many Sufis used the terminology of the Gnostics. The understanding of Ma'rūf al-Karkhī (d. 820 CE) that Sufism is "the recognition of the Divine Reality," was arguably taken from the Sabaeans. Ibrāhīm b. Adham once taught the "Mystery of the Great Name" received from the Prophet Khid̥r to everyone he met. The Sufis are also said to have borrowed the term "*s/jiddiq*" from Manichaeism, which they then applied according to their spiritual abilities. Even the phrase popular in the Sufi world, that is, "seventy thousand veils," is thought to have taken from the remnants of old Gnosticism. Further, the use of prayer beads is an adoption of Buddhist culture, and methods such as ascetic meditation and intellectual abstraction were borrowed from Buddhism. Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 874 CE), the founder of the *fanā'* teaching, was a student of Abu Ali of Sind whose teachings were contingent upon the pantheistic teachings of Vedanta (Zaehner, 2016).

Be that as it may, Sufism is truly based upon Islamic principles. Indeed, Sufism as a discipline is certainly open to be explored and critiqued. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that Sufism is internally predicated upon the Quran and Hadith. The Quran as a guide for Muslims is certainly the main source of matters related to worship and spirituality. In the same vein, the life of the Prophet Muhammad becomes the main source of Muslim life. Inevitably, the ascetic and modest life of the Prophet Muhammad is an epitome for the Sufis (Burckhardt, 2008; Chittick, 2008; Lings, 2005). Therefore, it is actually too hasty to state that Sufism is a teaching influenced by various external doctrines.

In the Sufi discourse, a distinction is often made between Sunni Sufism (*tas}awwuf Sunnī*) and philosophical Sufism (*tas}awwuf al-falsafī*). The former term can also accommodate two typologies, namely moral Sufism (*tas}awwuf al-akhlāqī*) and

practical Sufism (*tas}awwuf al-‘amalī*). The former aims to cleanse (*takhallī*) the soul from bad behaviors and fill (*tah}allī*) it with good morals, whereas practical Sufism is a way to get closer to God by doing many good deeds and spiritual practices such as *dhikr*, prayer, fasting, and the like. In contrast to philosophical Sufism (*tas}awwuf al-falsafī*), it is said that, on the one hand, it is not pure Sufism since it uses philosophical language, and on the other hand, it is also not pure philosophy because its epistemology is based upon *dhawq* (spiritual tasting), not analytical reason (al-Taftazani, 1976).

Of course, all three schools have the same goal, which is to re-know (*ma‘rifah*) God as in the day of *alastu*, which was the primordial covenant (*mithāq*) wherein all humans were taken to bear witness to their Lord (Schimmel, 2011: 24). Be that as it may, there is something conspicuous in philosophical Sufism that is related to mystical experiences. In Sufism, there are terms such as *wah}dat al-wujūd*,¹ *ittih}ād*,² *fanā*,³ *mushāhadah*,⁴ *h}ulūl*,⁵ *wah}dat al-shuhūd*,⁶ which often end in ecstatic utterances (*shat}ah}āt*). Ecstatic utterances exemplify the disappearance of self-identity so that what is witnessed is only the unity of being that envelops reality. In fact, the existence of the cosmos is considered as an illusory fog that veils the eyes of the human heart. This unitive experience is a sort of mystical experience for the Sufis.

3. Mystical Experience in Sufism

William James (2002: 295-296), a psychologist who has given much attention to mysticism, identifies four chief marks of mystical experience. The four marks are ineffability, noetic quality (the impression of the recipient that all things contain

¹ *Wah}dat al-wujūd* is a term popularly attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240 CE). This term has philosophical complexity, for the term cannot be immediately interpreted as pantheism as in Western philosophy (Noer, 1995: 201-217).

² *Ittih}ād* is the union or combination of two things. It is seen as a teaching that refers to the union of two separate beings. This term also refers to the experience of union with God (Armstrong, 2001: 96).

³ *Fanā*’ is annihilation of the self. When united with God, human experiences *fanā*’ or self-annihilation where the boundaries of individual identity are lost in the state of mystical unity (Armstrong, 2001: 46).

⁴ *Mushāhadah* is a kind of direct knowledge of the nature of reality. Some Sufis witness God in everything, some witness God before, after, and with everything, and some others witness God alone. Since God never manifests in the same way in two consecutive moments, *mushāhadah* is infinite and has no end (Armstrong, 2001: 160-161).

⁵ *H}ulūl* indicates the infusion of something into something else, which refers to the divine indwelling in human’s soul (Armstrong, 2001: 76).

⁶ *Wah}dat al-shuhūd* is distinguished from *wah}dat al-wujūd*. This vision belongs to the servant who witnesses the presence of God according to the servant’s ability, while *wujūd* belongs to God, namely His presence in everything (Armstrong, 2001: 254).

knowledge), temporary or tentative, and passivity for the subject experiencing (cf. Bagir, 2017: 52-53).

Sufis often report their mystical experiences. The mystical experience referred to here is the experience of union between the self and God. When this experience takes place, a Sufi's tongue becomes numb, emphasizing that there is no effort and ability to verbalize and articulate it. However, this mystical experience does not last long as exemplified by the experience of *fanā'* which takes place to be surpassed towards *baqā'*. When *fanā'* is over, the Sufis are able to reconstruct the experience using many symbolic languages, e.g. poetry (Muzairi, 2014: 59).

In one of Abū Yazid al-Bisṭāmī's experiences, God called Abū Yazīd, "O My beloved, come near! Have a sit on the carpet of My holiness!" Abū Yazīd described, "At that time I melted like lead melted by fire..." Such a story is an experience of Abū Yazīd's spiritual ascension which is almost exactly similar to that of Plotinus, since they both had the same goal to achieve, which was to witness the One (*mushāhadah*), to be annihilated in God (*fanā' fī Allāh*), and to be united with Him (*al-ittihād*) (Hilal, 2009: 60-62).

According to Junayd al-Baghdādī, *tawhīd* (oneness) is total togetherness with God. When asked about the meaning of *tawhīd*, he replied, "A meaning in which all images and knowledges merge into it." It can be seen that there is a closeness to the concept of union, which is the core of Plotinus' thought, namely that all images merge into it. When explaining *fanā'* and *baqā'*, Junayd stated, "It is a being that is absent. It does not exist at the same time as it exists. It exists as in the realm of nothingness. It does not exist as it did when it existed. Then it exists after it did not exist before. And it exists forever" (Hilal, 2009: 64-65).

Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī—as a reliable exponent of Sunni Sufism—maintains that the highest level of *tawhīd* is that of *tawhīd al-muwahḥidīn*, referring to when one does not witness anything save God. This is the highest *tawhīd* in *ma'rifat fī Allāh*. A *muwahḥid* is not present at the witness except the One. Put simply, a person does not see all of nature in its diversity, but in unity. This state is called *al-fanā' fī al-tawhīd* or also called *'ayn al-ma'rifah* (the essence of gnostic knowledge). Hence, there is no existence that the Sufi witnesses save God's existence alone (Ghozi, 2017: 111-112).

Mystical experience makes reason not function properly so that it can give rise to a state of intoxication. The philosophical school of Sufism (*tas}awwuf al-falsafī*) is often identified with ecstatic utterance (*shat}ah}āt*).⁷ The famous figures include Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and al-Hallāj. The phenomenon of *shat}ah}āt* occurs because *first*, the strength of *wajd* (mystical feeling); *second*, the experience is that of unification (*ittih}ād*); *third*, the Sufi experiences a state of spiritual intoxication (*al-sukr al-rūh}ānī*). Such spiritual intoxication due to God's self-manifestation (*tajallī*) makes the Sufi realize that he is God and God is he. *Fourth*, the Sufi hears a divine whisper (*hātif ilāhī*) which drives him to unification (*ittih}ād*). *Fifth*, this state is experienced by the Sufi devoid of consciousness (*'adam al-shu'ūr*) (Ghozi, 2017: 123-125).

Abu Bakr al-Kalābādhī states that the Sufi who experiences *fanā'* is one who sees everything as one existence (*wujūd*) and he becomes very passive because all his movements are in accord with God's will—not a single act is contrary to His will. In other words, one also becomes free from actions that are contrary to God's and is immersed in a state according to God's will (Siregar, 2000: 151-153). Nonetheless, such a state of *fanā'* (*al-fanā'* *'an shuhūd al-sawī*) is not permanent and is very short-lived in time, since when the state of *fanā'* has vanished, one will be subsisting in God (*baqā'*). Put simply, *fanā'* is actually a tentative state for the mystic towards the state of *baqā'* (Ghozi, 2017: 128-129; cf. Schimmel, 2011: 144-146).

When such a mystical experience takes place, a mystic is tongue-tied, highlighting that there is no language that can represent the mystic's state, which is ineffable in nature. This is because the experience occurs in a framework of unity, not plurality. Conceptualization can only take place within the framework of plurality as only in the world of plurality can the references and differentiations in the mind be operative. After the mystical witnessing process (*shuhūd*) occurs, the subject's consciousness returns to the world of plurality. On this basis, memory can recollect the experience in order to create a concept or understanding. However, because the basis of mystical experience is

⁷ Etymologically, *shat}h* means *al-h}arakah*, which means a very strong emotional movement, so that it is expressed with words that sound strange to the listener. *Shat}h* is also described as an overflow of water flowing in a river, an overflow of feelings that cannot be contained by the Sufi, thereby making the Sufi express ecstatic utterances.

metaphysical fixation, the expressions uttered are only contradictory ones, that is to say, not truly adequate and congruent (Fazeli, 2011: 21).

In his wisdom (*hikmah*), Ibn ‘At}ā Allāh al-Sakandarī explains the position of the mystic’s expressions. Actually, a mystic does not have the slightest hint of his or her own spiritual experience. The inability to give a hint is a reality experienced during the experience. A hint is a more subtle, more complex, more vague form of describing something clearly. Ibn ‘At}ā Allāh al-Sakandarī maintains that ecstatic utterances should not be understood as the experience itself. Rather, they are expressions uttered due to a very strong overflow of feeling (*fayd} wajd*). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the truth of a mystical experience is not due to the truth of its expression on the grounds that neither word nor speech can translate such sublime experiences (Ghozi, 2017: 244-245).

Based upon the structure of Arab-Islamic reasoning according to ‘Ābid al-Jābirī (2009), Sufism or Islamic mysticism is operative at the epistemology of *‘irfāni*. Practically speaking, *ma’rifah* is indeed the main goal of the Sufis. In mystical experience, a mystic experiences *kashf* (spiritual unveiling), so that he or she can know secrets that are not known by the laity. By opening the spiritual veil, one knows the hidden knowledge about metaphysical realms such heaven, hell, and other secrets that are hidden for ordinary people (Ghozi, 2017: 129).

Mystical experience does contain knowledge that cannot be obtained through reason and senses. With immediate tasting (*dhawq*) and spiritual unveiling (*kashf*), the mystic tears the horizon of outer knowledge and penetrates into the horizon of inward knowledge. Such knowledge is, once again, not obtained through reason or senses, but through direct intuition. In fact, *kashf* is a kind of *ijtihad* and can be used to understand *dalīl* and religious teachings. According to the Sufis, through the *kashf* method, the credibility and accountability of knowledge cannot be denied because such knowledge of matters is a sort of enlightenment directly obtained from His side (*al-‘ilm al-ladunnī*) (Hilal, 2009: 153-160).

Mysticism as a general term encompasses a range of intellectual ideas and psychological experiences. Despite the diversity of mystical experiences in different cultures, religions, and times, there is at least one common core to which all mystical experiences are related. That core is the state of union. This state of union is not a specific

mode of unity and identity in appearance, but rather the witnessing of the unity of being and cessation of multiplicity in whatever form it may be—whether in the experience of union with the Personal One as in Western mysticism, or of union with the Impersonal or the Cosmos as in Eastern mystical experience. In such a mystical state, the subject-object dualism becomes meaningless (Yazdi, 1992).

As for the identification of Sufism as mysticism, according to al-Taftāzānī (1976), Sufism in general has five characteristics, including psychic, moral, and epistemological aspects. These five characteristics can be used as indicators as well as extensions of mysticism in general. *First*, moral improvement. Sufism has certain moral values that aim to cleanse the soul. Thus, physical and spiritual training is necessary to obliterate the desire for worldly material. *Second*, annihilation (*fanā* ') in the ultimate reality, which is the chief characteristic of Sufism in the true sense. *Third*, knowledge by presence (*h}{ud}{ūrī*), which is the epistemological aspect. *Fourth*, happiness, which refers to a state free from anxiety and fear of anything that is not real. This happiness is the result or effect of union with the Real (*al-H}{aqq*). *Fifth*, the use of symbolic expressions, which is so common since mystical experience is indescribable, so that Sufis often use inscriptive metaphor in the form of poetry that is of high value because it is driven by divine inspiration.

4. The Significance and Objective of Sufism

As a form of mysticism in Islam that revolves around mystical experience, Sufism has made a great contribution to the intellectual civilization and culture in Islamic history. *First*, Sufism has contributed to the field of Islamic philosophy, particularly metaphysics which includes ontological, theological, cosmological, and anthropological concepts. The philosophical concept of the Sufis that is closely related to metaphysics is *wah}{dat al-wujūd*. *Second*, Sufism has also contributed to the field of art and literature. The Sufis are the group that most appreciates and pays the most attention to art and literature. In this regard, love is the driving force of the Sufis to create priceless works of art and poetry. Undoubtedly, their spiritual creativity has placed Sufism as an element that enriches Islamic civilization in the field of art and literature (Noer, 2017: 369-374). Moreover, art or poetry often becomes a medium for expressing Sufi experience. In addition, the Sufis

also use art or poetry as a medium for preaching and spreading Islam in a gentle and aesthetic way.

Third, the contribution of Sufism in the field of psychology. Sufism can be seen as the purification of the soul and heart to get closer to God, thereby evincing that Sufism is directly related to the soul or the self. However, in contrast to psychology in general, Sufi psychology is a sort of spiritual psychology. The model of Sufi psychology combines physical, psychological, spiritual, and divine aspects. If the practice of Sufism is medicine, then the Sufi master (*murshid*) is arguably the doctor. All Sufi masters are spiritual psychologists or doctors who treat spiritual diseases. A healthy person, according to the Sufis, is one who is always with God spiritually (Noer, 2017: 375-376).

In general, the objective of Islamic mysticism is to be as close as possible to God. However, in detail, the objectives of Islamic mysticism can be mapped into three. *Firstly*, it aims for moral development, including the realization of soul perfection and control of lust so that a disciple can be consistent with and committed to moral order. Islamic mysticism that aims for morality is generally practical. *Second*, it aims for knowledge of God through *al-kashf* (spiritual unveiling). This type of Sufism is quite theoretical with a set of special provisions that are formulated systematically. *Third*, it aims to discuss how to be close to God in a spiritual way, studying the relationship between God and creatures, especially the close relationship between human and God and what “closeness” means. In this respect, the word “closeness” has three meanings, namely in the sense of seeing and feeling the presence of God in the heart; in the sense of meeting God so that there is a dialogue between human and God; and in the sense of the unification of human with God (Siregar, 2000: 57).

Further, Islamic mysticism, in fact, has various objectives. Nonetheless, it can be noted that the ultimate objective is personal ethics and psycho-mystical experience. The effort commonly taken by the Sufis in achieving such objectives is to surrender themselves completely to the absolute will of God which requires totally abandoning the desires of the ego in order to be free from profane traits. From such an effort, one can be granted the state of self-annihilation with the result that one can focus only upon contemplating God alone, because there is indeed nothing to aim for save God (Siregar, 2000: 58).

The significance of studying Sufism in today's life is twofold. *Firstly*, in relation to contemporary conditions, Sufism makes a person aware of the lowest point of his existence. The need for the human soul to be purified is the wholeness of human life as a spiritual being. Modernity and technological advances have eroded faith in God, so that spiritual drought on a global scale leads humans to the abyss of existential misery and often ends in humanitarian conflict and exploitation of nature (Saefulloh, 2014: 214-215). Studying Sufism shows that life has a beginning and an end, *Alpha* and *Omega*.

Secondly, in dealing with horizontal conflicts such as intra-religious and inter-religious ones, Sufism provides universalistic and humanitarian approaches. Sufism does not view differences as a disaster or a source of conflict, but rather as a divine gift and natural inevitability. In Sufism, belief is not merely the result of personal gain and a benchmark for truth. Instead, belief is a divine gift that cannot be bought and violated. In this respect, the Sufi approach is an approach of love, one that embraces everything as divine manifestations (Armia, 2013: 148-149). Since everything is a divine manifestation, there is no hatred and hostility in humanity.

D. CONCLUSION

The terms “mysticism” and “mystic” in this study are not words related to the things of shamanism, occultism, psychics, sorcery, black magic, exorcism, and the like. Instead, the term mysticism in this discussion is a discipline that emphasizes more on the inner aspect in reaching the ultimate reality. In this respect, Islamic mysticism is often referred to as Sufism or *tas}awwuf*. Sufism as an esoteric dimension in Islam can be said to be a direct expression of the mystical experience of every Sufi. It has been explained previously that mysticism is an experience of union with God, exemplified by the experience of the Sufis outlined above. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Sufism is not just an experience of unification, but also a moral discipline for Muslims in order to be perfect human beings in horizontal relationships with other human beings.

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