



## Islamic Tasawwuf: It's Relevance & Role in Resolving Conflict Resolution

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### Abstract

The most insisting aspect of the Islam is that it constantly urges mankind to realize the actions close to the creator. Islamic teachings frequently remind humanity of the primordial covenant which took place between God and Humanity wherein the souls of hum beings categorically witnessed that God is our lord. In fact it was a covenant of future relationship between God and Humanity. Islamic Taşawwuf being a spiritual mechanism which aims to fulfill this covenant. It is an attempt to bring the creation close to its creator (Allah). Islamic Taşawwuf is an integral and integrated element of the socio-religious aspect of the Muslim societies. Nevertheless, the need of hour is to understand the continuing significances of Islamic Taşawwuf in modern times, where, although the scientific and technological developments are contributing a lot towards providing a considerable amount of amenities for human beings, however spiritual crisis is one of the grave issues confronting by the human beings in modern times, consequently there is an imbalance between spirituality and mundane concerns of the Humanity.. Therefore, Islamic Taşawwuf can play a paramount role in pulling out the humanity from the spiritual crisis and it can also espouse the society in terms of spiritual development. Islamic Taşawwuf can maintain a balance between mundane needs and spirituality. Similarly, taking into account the phenomenon of inter faith dialogue, especially in the contemporary world which presents a heterogeneous picture, Islamic Taşawwuf is of inestimable importance. Because of its peaceful nature, Islamic Taşawwuf can be an effective tool for the inter faith dialogue. Moreover, in contemporary times, it can play a vital role in environmental conservation as well besides the moral and the social up gradation of the Humanity. Islamic Taşawwuf is a prerequisite with regard to the meaning and purpose of life. Islamic Taşawwuf which focuses more on spirituality, God - realization, ethics and human service, is the only possible solution to the issues confronting by the modern societies, and has legitimacy in Islamic teachings. The Sufi heritage of Islam actually manifest in contemporary societies. Therefore, in this paper my venture is directed to highlight the key features of Islamic Taşawwuf and its manifestations and relevance in the contemporary times.

**Keywords** *meaning and characteristics, role of Taşawwuf, Qur'anic justification, early evidences of Taşawwuf, religion and contemporary world*

### INTRODUCTION

Islamic Taşawwuf being a religious mechanism of the spiritual nourishment of the individuals, has a paramount importance in the contemporary world, wherein people are experiencing a spiritual downfall, though the scientific developments have left no stone unscathed in providing all the amenities of the life, and hence there is an imbalance between the spiritual and mundane aspects of the individuals. Human value crises, violence, corruption, hoarding, social inequalities and much other social malice are there which are contributing much towards the downfall of the humanity in contemporary world. Therefore, the resurgence and re-conceptualization of Islamic Taşawwuf as a total socio-religious fact in the contemporary Muslim societies has become need of the hour. Need is to enforce the Islamic Taşawwuf as a spiritual mechanism of the religion in the society, and it must be understood in accordance with the dynamic nature of the society. Islamic Taşawwuf act as panacea to moral degradation of the society. It pacifies the society.

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### MEANING OF ISLAMIC TAŞAWWUF

During the early centuries of Islam some Muslims who were much more concerned about their faith adopted the way of seclusion in order to achieve the target of God-realization by relinquishing all the worldly pleasures, and they focused more on the esoteric purification of their lives, and this trend gradually gained popularity among the Muslims and there was a huge inclination of the Muslims towards this trend. Subsequently these Muslims came to be known as the Sufis. However, there has been a remained frequent controversy among the Muslim scholars regarding meaning of the word Sufi. Conventionally the word Sufi has been defined in multiple ways. The most commonly used term is that, *Sūf* means wool, and the people who were used to wear woollen clothes as a mark of austerity in their lives came to be known as Sufis. And the term 'Sufism' is the production of subsequent scholarly study of Islamic *Taşawwuf* in western countries.

### THE QUR'ANIC JUSTIFICATION OF TAŞAWWUF

In fact, Islamic *Taşawwuf* aims at to fulfil the primordial covenant which took place between God and the souls of humanity, Holy *Qur'an* mentions, "*When your Lord brought forth offspring from the lions of the children of the Adam and them bear witness about themselves, He said, 'Am I not your Lord? They replied, 'we bear witness that you are.' This He did, lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'We had no knowledge of that.'*" (Ar'af 07:172)

It was a covenant of living and firm relationship between God and human beings, and hence most insistent religious aspect of the Islamic teachings is this covenant. This primordial covenant constitutes the most important aspect of the religious commitment of the Muslims than any other aspect. Islamic *Taşawwuf* primarily focuses upon the acknowledgement of this religious conviction. The religious conscience of Islamic *Taşawwuf* revolves around the concept of disinterested love of God; it extends an unconditional loyalty to God. Islamic *Taşawwuf* aims at to attain the higher degree of *Tawhīd* (oneness of God) by acknowledging God alone worthy for worship.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the whole Islamic *Taşawwuf* its sources, teachings and practices are summed up in the verse '*Guide us along the straight path*', which is the sixth verse of the opening chapter of the holy *Qur'an*, and also which is the most often repeated supplication in Islamic teachings. This verse supplies the basis for Islamic *Taşawwuf*. Muslim Sufi saints are more concerned towards this supplication, and constantly seek the right way. Hence, Islamic *Taşawwuf* presents a comprehensive and explicit answer to the question 'what is right path.'<sup>2</sup>

The main objective of Islamic *Taşawwuf* is to bring individuals close to God. In Islamic *Taşawwuf*, a Sufi concentrates more on the acquisition of God-realization, and in fact the God-realization is the real aim of a Sufi. Holy *Qur'an* mentions, '*So let him who hopes to meet Allah do good deeds and let him associate no one else in the worship of his Lord*' (Al- kahf 18 :110). Hence, the Sufis basis the main aim of their lives on this verse. Islamic *Taşawwuf* constitutes three main elements i.e *Tawhīd* (Oneness of Allah), *Taqwa* (Piety) and complete love of God. All these three elements have been deduced from the *Qur'an*. So, there will be no exaggeration to say that Islamic *Taşawwuf* fetches all its teachings from the *Qur'an*, though later on, Muslims experienced a penetration of some un-Islamic elements either consciously or unconsciously in Islamic *Taşawwuf* by the Sufi saints.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, *Tazkiya-i-nafs* (self-purification) which also constitutes an important aspect of the teachings of Islamic *Taşawwuf* has been deduced from the *Qur'an*. In this regard holy *Qur'an* mentions, "*It is He who has raised among the unlettered people a messenger from among themselves who recites His revelations to them, and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and Wisdom, for they had formerly been clearly misguided.*" (Surah Jumu'ah 62:02). Therefore, it explicitly reveals that the Muslim mystics were real adherents of *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.<sup>4</sup>

The emergence of *Taşawwuf* in Islam was a natural phenomenon of the religion. Although the dominant feature of the *Taşawwuf* is the esoteric purification, yet being a religious mechanism of the spirituality, *Taşawwuf* recognizes the exoteric aspect of the life as well. Because Islam is the alone way of life which realises the mundane concerns along with the spiritual necessity of the

individuals, Islam maintains a balance between stability and change. It seeks an enforcement of both faith and action in the lives of individuals. Islam believes in a moderate attitude towards every aspect of the life. Therefore, on the basis of these revolutionary features of Islam, *Taşawwuf* also demands a complete modification of inner as well as outer aspect of the life.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the whole structure of knowledge in Islamic *Taşawwuf* is based on the realization of Allah almighty. The main aim of knowledge, according to Sufis is to realize God almighty in a real sense, and this is known as *Ma'arifat* or '*irfān*' in the terminology of *Taşawwuf*. A beneficial knowledge, according to Sufis is that which brings an individual near to Allah.<sup>6</sup>

Islamic *Taşawwuf* constructs the life of individuals on the basis of good morality. It builds up both inner as well as the outer aspect of an individual's life in order to gain Allah's pleasure. Furthermore, Islamic *Taşawwuf* seeks avoiding of all those pleasures and activities which are repugnant to the Islamic teachings. It makes individuals subservient to the will of Allah and makes the lives of the individuals free from lust, greed and carnal desires. Islamic *Taşawwuf* demands the effacement of one's desires in the will of Allah almighty.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the subject matter of Islamic *Taşawwuf* is to construct the lives of the individuals according to the teachings of Islam. It teaches individuals to strive utmost to fulfil their obligations and to fight strenuously for the cause of Allah and to show consistency in the way of Allah.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of being heterogeneous nature of the universe, Islam believes in unity (*Tawhīd*), which is the cardinal principle of Islam, in fact, Islam has always sought to bring about integration in all the aspects of human life. Hence, *Taşawwuf* is an inner dimension of Islamic teachings, through which a living concept of *Tawhīd* can be achieved. Islamic *Taşawwuf* integrates individuals by pulling out them from the state of chaos and disintegration. There is no scope for *Shirk* (Polytheism) and multiplicity in the teachings of Islamic *Taşawwuf*, rather it vehemently resists against even a micro level element of polytheism. In fact, Islamic *Taşawwuf* believes in life based on the concept of *Tawhīd*. In nutshell, *Taşawwuf* is an inner aspect of Islamic teachings which teaches and assists the individuals in the purification of the self. The main sources of Islamic *Taşawwuf* are *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, whose sole motive is to bring the humanity under the umbrella of single concept of *tawhīd* (oneness of God). Islamic *Taşawwuf* demands the execution of Islamic *Shari'ah* in all the aspects of the human life.<sup>9</sup>

#### **EARLY EVIDENCES OF TAŞAWWUF IN ISLAM**

The revolutionary feature of the Islamic teachings is God fearing (*taqwa*), which differentiates Islam from rest of the ideologies. This *taqwa* brings an individual near to Allah (SWT), it teaches a complete surrender in the front of Allah's will. This revolutionary characteristic of Islam reminds individuals that covenant which took place between the spirits of humanity and God. In fact, the primary duty of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was to create *taqwa* among the followers of Islam. Similarly, Holy Qur'an frequently talks about the people of piety of earlier times, and speaks highly about those people. Holy Qur'an mentions, "*Those who are close to God shell certainly have no fear, nor shell they grieve*", (*Youns 10:62*). During life time of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) we can find the people of extraordinary pious life. The life of Prophet (SAW) is an outstanding example in this regard. So, this feature of Islam inspired its adherents to care about the future life by avoiding the mundane pleasures, which is the primary target of Islamic *Taşawwuf*. *Taşawwuf*, being an Islamic mechanism of spiritual purification, seeks a pious life from the individuals. Therefore, it vividly reveals that *Taşawwuf* always has been remained an inseparable part of Islam in its teachings, features and practices, though the term *Taşawwuf* by name was unknown for early adherents of Islam.<sup>10</sup>

However, later on, during the second half of the eight century and first half of the ninth century, when the scholarly study on Islamic mystic aspect was initiated in Western countries the term 'Sufism' appeared in the Muslim societies. Primarily, Mesopotamia, Syria and Iran noticed the emergence of many Muslim saints who led a life of seclusion for the sake of Allah's pleasure. Subsequently, there was a huge inclination of the Muslims towards *Taşawwuf*, and it spread to other

parts of the Muslim world establishing various *Tariqās*, (Brotherhoods) and spreading its teachings, and gradually *Taşawwuf* became a dominant feature of the Muslim societies, and had a pervasive impact on spiritual aspect of the life of the people. Furthermore, during this period it extended its manifestations from religious spheres to the social spheres, and gained a social popularity among the masses.<sup>11</sup>

### GENERAL PICTURE OF TAŞAWWUF DURING THE PROPHETIC PERIOD

Prophetic period also witnessed the inclination of the people towards seclusion life for the sake of Allah's pleasure, though the term *Taşawwuf* or Sufism did not exist during those days. There are various stories associated with the ascetism of multiple companions (*Ṣaḥāba*) of the Prophet (SAW). For example, it is said that Abū'l Dardā 'Uwaymir ibn Zayd exercised *tafakkur* (mediation) and piety (*taqwā*) for forty years. Furthermore, he said that without disassociating ourselves from the mundane concerns we cannot achieve Allah's pleasure. Similarly, Abū Dharr Jundub Ghifārī, a celebrated companion of the Prophet (SAW) is an even more remarkable example of asceticism. He recommended *I'tikāf* (spiritual retreats in a mosque) and used to practice fast for self-purification. Not only this, rather Muslim history narrates multiple stories of the same nature. Nevertheless, the companions of the Prophet (SAW) were real and practical adherents of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, and hence, their ascetic way of life was according to *Shari'ah* (Islamic teachings), yet Prophet (SAW) did not allow his companions to go for the life of seclusion because Islam keeps no scope for monasticism and embraces both the spiritual and mundane concerns of the individuals. Islam vehemently condemns such a way of life. This was the real image of Sufi ideal life during the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).<sup>12</sup>

During the early days of Islam's inception, purification of *nafs* (corporal self), attaining highest degree of the spirituality and to maintain a firm relation with God Almighty were some main objectives of Islamic *Taşawwuf*, subsequently about the end of 8<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when the political, intellectual, and social conditions were not too much favourable and congenial, and the people either consciously or unconsciously were less concerned towards their spiritual dimension of the life, Islamic *Taşawwuf* emerged in a practical shape to cure the society in terms of spirituality. Moreover, the political unrest and the emergence of various schools of thought within Islam contributed immensely in this regard. Especially, during the ending moments of the Umayyad dynasty and the initial years of the Abbasid dynasty, when the moral, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions of the Muslim society were not so healthy, because of the ruler's negligence towards their responsibilities, some sensitive souls who were caring about the world to come, decided to disassociate themselves from mundane concerns and led a life of seclusion as panacea to their spiritual and moral ills. Therefore, in such conditions we can trace and comprehend the origin and development of Islamic *Taşawwuf*.<sup>13</sup> During the same time Islamic *Taşawwuf* emerged as a distinct element of Islamic teachings in the Muslim societies, and the propagation of Islamic teachings and doctrines was launched at a large scale, and it was the time when Islamic *Taşawwuf* got a chance to have a contact with philosophy, theology and jurisprudence Persia, Central Asia and India like countries experienced the development of *Taşawwuf* during this period. Dhu'l-Nūn of Egypt, al-Muḥāsibī of Bagdad, Ibrahim bin Adm and Bāyazīd Baṣṭāmī were some prominent Sufi saints during this period. Islamic *Taşawwuf* witnessed a new development in its practical aspect during 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century. Meanwhile various classical manuals of *Taşawwuf* appeared, like '*Kitāb al-luma'*' (The Book of Flashes) by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-ta'arruf* (Doctrine of the Sūfis) by Kalābādhī and *Kashfal maḥjūb* (The Unveiling of the Hidden) by Hujwīrī. These works represent the practical dimension of Islamic *Taşawwuf*. Besides, at the same time, various other developments also took place at the intellectual level of the Islamic *Taşawwuf*.<sup>14</sup>

During the late tenth century, Islamic *Taşawwuf* would present in its original shape by purifying it from the elements repugnant to the teachings of Islam, and made it completely subordinate to the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. And the Muslim Sufis held that the teachings of *Taşawwuf* aims to represent the purposes of *Shari'ah*. These attempts to purify Islamic *Taşawwuf* from un-Islamic elements were continued furthermore. Islamic *Taşawwuf* experienced a new development in its whole structure during the time of Imam Ghazzālī, in fact, he was a reformer in the history of Islamic *Taşawwuf* who

brought these both *Taşawwuf* and *Shari'ah* very close together, and attempted to present the *Taşawwuf* as an inseparable part of Islamic teachings.<sup>15</sup>

Imam Ghazzāli, from his early youth had an inclination towards Islamic mysticism, his father was a Sufi saint. In his youth, al-Ghazzāli had studied mysticism, and had been a keen observer of Islamic mysticism. He got mystical education and training from Yūsuf al-Nassāj in Ṭus. So, al-Ghazzāli's Sufistic commitment can be seen in the light of his association with the *Taşawwuf* from his early life, and hence, it's not reasonable to say that al-Ghazzāli's later association with mysticism was the result of his separation from philosophy. He took a positive view of Islamic *Taşawwuf*, and said that mysticism is an important dimension of religion which brings individuals very close to the religion and cultivates religious values in the individuals by bring them close to the reality, furthermore, the living and firm experience of God can be achieved through mysticism. AL -Ghazzāli's mystical thought and teachings can be seen in his *magnum opus*, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-Din* (Revivification of the Sciences of Religion). His mystical views about God are different from philosophers. He emphasis on the unity of God and says that God is real and ultimate cause for being. Al-Ghazzāli's concept of God is based on the principle of omnipotent, he says that God does what He wills because He is willing agent.<sup>16</sup> During his time Islamic mysticism got a paramount importance in the Muslim societies, and considered to be utmost necessary to enrich the esoteric aspect of the individuals with spirituality. The subject matter of Islamic mysticism was the to mould the society according to the Islamic tenants. It was because of the efforts of al-Ghazzāli that Islamic mysticism penetrated into the Muslim societies with its positive and original image, and the people associated with the Islamic mysticism were the real adherents of *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.<sup>17</sup>

By and large Islamic *Taşawwuf* continued with the same popularity and same position among the Muslims till first half of eighteenth century when it had to encounter with strenuous criticisms by some Muslim scholars because of penetration of some un-Islamic elements and innovations in its teachings and doctrines, and the extreme and monastic attitude of the life by the Muslim Sufi saints , though in nineteenth century efforts were made for the revival of Islamic *Taşawwuf*, particularly in India and Central Asia.<sup>18</sup>

Islam, being a universal ideology, embraces all the aspects of human beings, and recognises all the legitimate needs of the individuals, therefore, *Taşawwuf*, as an indispensable dimension of Islamic teachings possesses the first and foremost characteristic that it views an individual holistically, it appeals to both esoteric as well as exoteric aspect of the human beings, though it is more concerned with spirituality rather than tangible world. Not only this, positivism and pragmatism are two revolutionary characteristics of Islamic *Taşawwuf*. It takes a positive view of human life and is practical in its nature; furthermore, it remains active in its own business. And further Islamic *Taşawwuf* does not allow its adherents to confine themselves up to their personal salvation rather it concerns with the spiritual culture of all the individuals in a total. Islamic *Taşawwuf* involves utmost efforts to reach up to the Reality. The public slogan of Islamic *Taşawwuf* is "Love of God", and it seeks a return of whole self towards the Absolute Reality.<sup>19</sup>

Islamic *Taşawwuf* seeks the inculcation of patience, perseverance, austerity, and contentment like qualities in its adherents. Furthermore, one of the outstanding features of adherents of Islamic *Taşawwuf* is that they relinquish all the worldly pleasures in the quest of Allah's pleasure, however, taking in to consideration the service towards other creatures of God, it never neglects its duties. Living and firm faith on Allah, showing sympathy and respect towards other fellow beings, disinterested or selfless worship of Allah, and to make self (*nafs*) subordinate to *Shari'ah* are some other characteristics of the Sufis.<sup>20</sup>

The remarkable feature of Islamic *Taşawwuf* is that, it basis its mystical insight and teachings on the *Sunnah* after the *Qur'an*, in fact, Prophetic *Sunnah* offers model for the whole structure of *Taşawwuf*, and is an example for Muslim Sufi saints, and they tread the path of Prophet (SAW). For the purpose of spiritual development, Sufi saints frequently quotes a famous tradition of the Prophet (SAW), when Prophet was asked about the devil, Prophet answered that "*As Lama shaitān*"

(My devil has become Muslim). It means that the whole self was subordinate to the will of God. On the basis of this tradition Muslim Sufi saints shows persistency in the struggle of overcoming the worldly pleasures. The prophet's saying (I have defeated devil) reminds the individuals of their inner power to modify their personality in accordance with the will of God, which God primarily seeks from individuals.<sup>21</sup> Islamic *Taşawwuf* involves knowing the real nature of existence and it provides all the basis to achieve the main objective of the life. Spirituality and self-purification are the two focal dimensions of Islamic *Taşawwuf*; Sufi saints are much more concerned towards purification of the self and spiritual achievement than any other dimension. The constant struggle of the Sufis to resist against the devil is another magnificent characteristic of Islamic *Taşawwuf*.<sup>22</sup> Islamic *Taşawwuf* seeks an inculcation of all those qualities in an individual which *Qur'an* has made prerequisite for a living and firm faith on Allah (SWT) i.e., repentance (*tawbah*), sincerity (*ikhlas*) (remembrance (*dhikr*), and love (*maḥabbah*), in fact, Islamic *Taşawwuf* constructs its whole structure on these qualities. And besides truth (*haqq*), heart (*qalb*) and poverty (*faqr*) also constitute the main ingredients of Islamic *Taşawwuf*, while as poverty in the terminology of *Taşawwuf* is the simplicity of the life. These qualities are the different manifestations of the efforts to attain the pleasure of Allah (SWT).<sup>23</sup>

The central goal of Islamic *Taşawwuf* is the real experience of God (*ma'rifa*) which is the key concept of Islamic teachings, and hence, all the teachings and doctrines of the *Taşawwuf* leads towards the real experience of God. Therefore, Sufis concentrates more and more on attaining the real knowledge of God by relinquishing all the mundane desires. This major characteristic of Islamic *Taşawwuf* demands self-realization and self-sacrifice to maintain firm relation with Allah (SWT).<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, Islamic *Taşawwuf* teaches individuals to show consistency in relation with Allah (SWT), and at the same time never ignore the relation with society and other fellow beings, and, therefore, it creates a balance between spirituality and mundane affairs. Islamic *Taşawwuf* infuses a spirit of service towards humanity. Love and compassion like main features of Islamic *Taşawwuf* have a paramount importance in the context of societal needs. With the rise of Islamic *Taşawwuf* in its practical form, the social structure of Islamic societies witnessed a progress and Islamic culture was presented positively by making it compatible with the dynamic nature of the society.<sup>25</sup>

*Tawhīd* (monotheism) constitutes the focal point of Islamic teachings, Islam provides no scope for (*shrik*) polytheism, and in fact, it was the primary duty of the Prophets to call humanity towards monotheism. The whole structure of Islam is based on this concept which distinguishes it from other ideologies. So, *Taşawwuf* being a spiritual aspect of Islam strongly believes in monotheism without any sort of compromise, Islamic *Taşawwuf* wants to build a world of human beings based on monotheism which is a remarkable feature its teachings. Notwithstanding, all these social and religious manifestations, the authority of Islamic *Taşawwuf* in the contemporary world has been remained frequently a debatable issue that weather it can maintain its identity in the modern social context where societies are in favour of constant change and modernization.<sup>26</sup>

## RELIGION AND THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Religion has been remained an inseparable part of the life in the history of human beings, and hence, we cannot deny the continuing social significances the religion. Religion embraces all the aspects of human life. It ranges from individual level to collective level of human beings. In contemporary times where society is quest of peace, and in its entirety is preoccupied with various issues, so, need is to realize the continuing significances of the religion in its practical form. The situational role of the religion needs to explore with a sophisticated interpretation and comprehension, and the boundaries of the religion has to be widened, because religion is not the name of dogmas and rituals rather it has a substantial role in the society.<sup>27</sup> Religion plays a paramount role in the society in terms of values, dignity and purpose of the human life. It shapes the lives of individuals according to the high standard of morality, and the outstanding function of the religion is to hold society together.<sup>28</sup>

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), a French sociologist takes religion as a social character. Religion provides basis for comprehending society and its individuals. He says religion brings people close together on the basis of shared beliefs and practices, and the religious committed people always search the truth. He calls for the leadership of religious minded people to lead the society in every respect. Although religion covers all the aspects of human life, however, spirituality which constitutes the most characteristic aspect of the religion needs to recognise, explore, and celebrate at a large scale to counter the challenges and issues confronting by the contemporary world. Because the primary function of religion is spiritual and moral development of the human beings rather than establishing any political system.<sup>29</sup>

### **ROLE OF ISLAMIC TAŞAWWUF IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES**

Being a cosmopolitan religion Islam has a civilizational character, it guarantees all-round nourishment of its adherents in the society. The most important dimension of the Islamic teachings is *Taşawwuf* which needs to explore in the contemporary world to counter the challenges facing by the humanity from individual level to collective level, and from social level to economic and political level. Avarice, lack of love, affection, and justice are some issues which naturally invites the manipulation and exploitation of the humanity, and other insidious consequences in the society. These issues effects society deleteriously and are pernicious for the moral structure of the society. Therefore, Islamic *Taşawwuf* offers a remedy to these social malice and issues. It believes in a peaceful social atmosphere, and guarantees justice, honesty, altruism in a society, and espouses a passion for selfless service towards deserved people in the society, it guarantees human security. It has a substantial role in Islamic societies, and its role extends from public level to private level of the society. As an inner aspect of Islam, *Taşawwuf* gives meaning to the faith of the believers.<sup>30</sup>

Islamic *Taşawwuf* views the life of individuals positively and optimistically by giving it meaning both in outer as well as inner level. It awakes the conscious of individuals about the responsibilities towards society, and induces them for sincerity, and hence, constructs a healthy society based on morality, spirituality, and human values. Nonetheless, Islamic *Taşawwuf* needs a comprehension according to the modern societal needs, and its comprehensive understanding is must to cover all the fields of the society. Moreover, Islamic *Taşawwuf* needs liberation from un-Islamic elements, and its objectives should be framed according to the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. The role of Islamic *Taşawwuf* should be extended to all the spheres of the life.<sup>31</sup>

During the nineteenth century the continuing significance of the religion became the focal point of the Muslim scholarship and the Muslim world experienced some movements of Islamic resurgence, however, unfortunately these movements gave much more attention on the political aspect of the Islam, and hence, the spiritual dimension of the Islam received meagre attention. Nonetheless, in the context of contemporary social structure of the Muslim societies, need of hour is to recognise the dynamism and importance of Islamic *Taşawwuf*, because in the contemporary times the efficacy of Islamic *Taşawwuf* can be seen in multiple ways. During the age of Enlightenment in eighteenth century western scholars targeted the religion and said that now religion is no more veiled in the society and argued that the religion would be replaced by science and gave the concept of religious-less society. Therefore, Islamic *Taşawwuf* can be fruitful to avoid this tussle between religion and state and can prove the authenticity of religion in the modern societies. Islamic *Taşawwuf* can highlight the remarkable guiding principles of religion regarding the spiritual and mundane concerns of an individual. And furthermore, the modern societies lack the brotherhood, consequently society has become vulnerable for many social malice which causes human rights violation at a large scale. So, the Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqās*) can be helpful to maintain the brotherhood among the individual.<sup>32</sup>

Islamic *Taşawwuf* promotes people not only spiritually; rather it binds people in a community and makes them able to fight collectively against social problems. Because of unifying nature, the significances of Sufi brotherhood can be seen in the societies where Muslims are in majority and also in those societies where Muslims present a picture of minority. Broadly speaking *Taşawwuf*, being a part of Islamic teachings recognises change in a society, because change inherits in Islam on

one hand, and it inculcates a sense of brotherhood among its adherents on the other hand.<sup>33</sup>

In contemporary times the prevalence of modernization, development, and progress like ideas especially in the Muslim societies which are purely materialistic in nature, have created a chasm between spiritual and material dimensions of the individuals, and people are more inclined towards material concerns, which henceforth substantially contributes decline at spiritual level of the individuals. So, it is a matter of concern for Islam with regard to its values and basic teachings, because Islam guarantees the development and progress of individuals both in spiritual as well as material level and believes in a moderate and balanced society. Therefore, *Taşawwuf* can be an effective tool to create a balance between the spiritual and material needs of the individuals.<sup>34</sup>

Undeniably, in modern times the scientific and technological developments are contributing immense to provide basic amenities of the life in a society, however, these developments are do not satisfy the individuals spiritually and morally, consequently the lives of individuals experience a state of an imbalance. Therefore, the societal efficacy of Islamic *Taşawwuf* exists continually, and it is inevitable to recognise the utility of Islamic *Taşawwuf* to build a healthy and classless society based on spiritual and religious values. The social significances of Islamic *Taşawwuf* can be seen in multiple ways, spiritual progress, maintenance of a firm relationship with Allah, inculcation of human values, and promotion of brotherhood in a society are some primary functions of Islamic *Taşawwuf*. And furthermore, in contemporary world where Islam is being targeted as a source of violence and terror, Islamic *Taşawwuf* can be fruitful to present a positive and clear picture of Islam.

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During nineteenth century Islamic *Taşawwuf* encountered with criticism and blamed for inculcation of renunciation from worldly affairs in its followers at social level and promotion of the innovations in the Islamic teachings at religious level. However, these blames were because of poor comprehension about Islamic *Taşawwuf*. To prove the legitimacy of *Taşawwuf* in Islam and taken into consideration the social vitality of *Taşawwuf* in modern Muslim societies, during nineteenth century Islamic *Taşawwuf* underwent through a process of reformation by the Muslim scholarship. The sole motive of the revival of Islamic *Taşawwuf* was to bridge the dichotomy between *Taşawwuf* and Islamic *Shari'ah* and to made *Taşawwuf* subordinate to *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, although Islamic *Taşawwuf* has already experienced a reformation during the times of al-Ghazzālī and Shah walliullah. Subsequently, Islamic *Taşawwuf* proved useful for the Muslim societies in terms of construction of the society on the basis of sociomoral values.<sup>36</sup>

In contemporary world environmental degradation is one of the grave issues facing by the humanity. Therefore, the religious importance of environment in the context of Islam needs to highlight towards environmental conservation. To continue the social significance of Islam in modern societies an islamically recognizable campaign has to be launched to conserve the environment. The theological discourse of Islam needs to explore regarding nature, especially environmental conservation, and awareness will have to create among the individuals to maintain an interrelationship between religion and nature. Since in Islamic *Taşawwuf*, nature has a spiritual significance, therefore, in modern times, the importance of the Islamic *Taşawwuf* regarding environmental conservation has to be recognised.<sup>37</sup>

It is fact that technological revolution has made the lives of the masses easy, but simultaneously it has created an imbalance between human beings and nature due to the destruction of the environment, and has divorced environment from religious teachings. Hence need is to explore the spiritual traditions of the Islam concerned with nature especially environmental conservation and taking of deliberate efforts are utmost necessary to implement the spiritual aspect of Islam to protect environment. Therefore, Islamic *Taşawwuf*, in modern times possesses substantial significances towards environmental conservation and to maintain a balance between human beings and nature.<sup>38</sup>

Instead of being criticised for its anti-modernist approach and an obstacle in the way of



development because of its superstitious nature, Islamic *Taşawwuf* is able to remain persistent and steadfast in the contemporary world with its social implications, and has a profound impact on the socioeconomic structure of the society. Furthermore, the importance of Islamic *Taşawwuf* can be seen in the public domains related to the development and other modern social changes.<sup>39</sup>

Commenting on *Taşawwuf*, 'Allama Iqbal says that during early days of Islam it was a real part of Islam and had an immense role in directing the religious experience. However, later on it could not gain much more popularity among the Muslims, and became inanimate in the society related to societal needs, because of the ignorance from its representatives. Nevertheless, Islamic *Taşawwuf* needs a reformation in the light of modern social context without fiddling with its basic doctrines and teachings to make it proactive in contemporary world to insulate the spiritual dimension of the Muslims from western materialistic thought, and as well as to assist the Muslims in other aspects of the life also.<sup>40</sup>

From eighteenth century onwards, Muslim scholars from all over the world felt a need of a revival in the traditions of the Islamic *Taşawwuf* to animate it in the Muslim societies considering its social vitality along with its religious implications. And no doubt, *Taşawwuf* played a major role in the Islamic revival along with other Islamic movements. Muhammad 'Abduh of the Egypt, saw Islamic *Taşawwuf* a part of Islamic teachings, and held that its legitimacy cannot be questioned in the modern times, and Islamic *Taşawwuf* have an abundant role in the construction of Muslim societies in an enlightened way.<sup>41</sup>

Living in harmony and cooperation is a *sin quo non* in a society which is characterised by ethnic, religious, cultural diversity. Since we are living in a world which represents a heterogenous picture with diverse religious traditions, cultures, ethnicity, therefore, to avoid any possible threat to the peace, dialogue, especially on the religious level is inevitable to maintain harmony, brotherhood, co-existence among the followers of the diverse faiths. Islam is pioneer of the phenomenon of interfaith dialogue from its early inception in order to bring the people towards unity. This unity is an embodiment of a peaceful society. Holy Qur'an mentions, "Say, 'people of the Book, let us come to a word common to us that we shall worship non but God and that we shall associate no partner with Him and that none of us shall take others, besides God, for lords.' And if they turn away, say, 'Bear witness that we have submitted to God.'" (Al-Imrān 3:64). The interfaith dialogue is not only a theological debate among the people of the different religions, rather the main objective is of this phenomenon is to promote peace, harmony, and mutual understanding among the individuals by inviting them towards the common reality. The religious tolerance constitutes one of the major characteristics of the Islamic *Taşawwuf*, and occupies an interesting place in its teachings. The Sufi teachings emphasis more on a living and firm relation with God Almighty, which guarantees peace in the society of different elements. Islamic *Taşawwuf* is tolerant in its nature and teachings. This approach of the *Taşawwuf* inculcates a sense of religious tolerance in its adherents which is an essential condition for peace in the contemporary world. Therefore, Islamic *Taşawwuf* has a paramount importance in the contemporary world with regard to peace.<sup>42</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Islam has a civilizational character it has a substantial role in all the domains of public life and for all the times. Especially in the contemporary times where humanity is confronting various issues and challenges ranging from spiritual level to social level, and from economic level to political level, the multiplicity of Islamic civilizational character has to be recognised. Moreover, human value crises are another grave issue prevalent in the society in modern times. Therefore, the spiritual aspect of the Islamic teachings has a vital role to solve these issues. Taking into consideration the meaning of life in contemporary times, Islamic *Taşawwuf* has a considerable role in the Muslim societies. In modern societies where science and technology has done a lot towards the mundane concerns of the individuals, however, spiritual aspect of the individuals is in a state of negligence, therefore, in such prevailing conditions it is inevitable to reassess our relationship with Islamic *Taşawwuf*, and

conceptualise it as a religious tradition of the Islam having social and religious importance in the contemporary world so that a balance can be maintained between spiritual and mundane aspects of the individuals. Nevertheless, about Islamic *Taşawwuf*, all that is need is to true and authentic *Taşawwuf* is to be identified by liberating and distinguishing it from irrational and un-Islamic elements that are encrusted over it, and its sophisticated comprehension in the light of modern social context is must to maintain its identity as a socio religious phenomenon in an enlightened way.

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