



## The Influence of Sufism Traditions in Modern Society: A Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

Sufism traditions have become a significant foundation in shaping the spirituality of modern society, which faces the challenges of materialism and secularism. This study aims to analyze the influence of Sufism traditions on the spiritual life of modern society and the role of Neo-Sufism in addressing the spiritual crisis. Using a literature review method, this research examines various relevant primary and secondary sources. The findings reveal that Sufism significantly contributes to inner peace through practices such as dhikr (remembrance of God), meditation, and self-control. These traditions have adapted to modern contexts, including through spiritual workshops, Sufism-based communities, and digital applications. Neo-Sufism, as an innovation of Sufism, offers an inclusive approach relevant to modern life, such as integrating spiritual values into leadership and rejecting materialistic perspectives. This study concludes that Sufism traditions remain relevant as a spiritual solution to the crisis of meaning in life and provide a foundation for individuals and communities to achieve worldly and spiritual balance.

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### INTRODUCTION

Tradition represents an aspect of culture that is not only practiced in daily life but is also continuously passed down through generations in the form of values, ways of thinking, and behaviors. Consequently, the patterns of thought and values inherited from the past are collectively referred to as tradition. As a cultural element, tradition—though inherited—continues to evolve gradually along a continuum, maintaining continuity. Hence, advanced cultures often possess strong roots in the traditions and histories of their nations (Suryalaya, 2022).

When Islam was first introduced in Indonesia, it did not immediately erase the existing culture and beliefs of local communities. The acculturation of Islamic and local cultures was inevitable. Therefore, it is not surprising that various Islamic religious practices in Indonesia still reflect the indigenous cultural heritage (Nugroho & Hidayat, 2021). However, religious traditions are sometimes perceived merely as formalities to preserve ancestral heritage. For instance, among the followers of Islam Aboge in Mudal Village, not all individuals necessarily understand or internalize the spiritual dimensions embodied in their religious traditions (Nugroho & Hidayat, 2021).

Sufism, as understood by the author, is a way for individuals to draw closer to God, striving to achieve the utmost proximity to Him. In philosophical Sufism, this closeness may even culminate in unification, where God becomes the ultimate goal of the servant (Azwar, 2016).

According to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), Sufism is defined as "a doctrine for drawing closer to Allah, enabling a conscious and direct connection with Him" (Izzuddin et al., 2023).

The etymology of the word "Sufism" can be traced to several theories: 1) Ahlu Shuffah: Refers to the "People of the Bench," a group of the Prophet's companions who lived modestly, devoted themselves to the mosque, and exemplified pious living; 2) Shaff: Meaning "row," often referring to the front rows in prayers or acts of worship, symbolizing the devout who aspire to be closer to God; 3) Shuuf: Meaning "rough wool," representing the simple clothing worn by those who live modestly in pursuit of divine proximity; and 4) Shafaa: Meaning "purity," highlighting the efforts of individuals to purify themselves through rigorous spiritual exercises to draw closer to Allah (Sukardi, 2015).

Historical accounts suggest that the first form of Sufism in the Nusantara (Indonesia) was of a philosophical nature, developed by figures such as Hamzah Fansuri (circa 16th to early 17th century) and Syamsuddin Sumatrani (circa 1575–1630). These figures lived during the reign of Sultan Alauddin Ri'ayat Syah in Aceh (1588–1604). Their teachings expanded upon the philosophies of earlier Sufi figures like Ibn Arabi and Al-Hallaj. Later figures, such as Nuruddin Ar-Raniri (resided in Aceh, 1637–1644) and Abdul Rauf Al-Singkili (1620–1693), critiqued these earlier teachings, deeming them overly speculative (Rambe, Saparuddin, 2019).

Sufism has since developed into two major branches: 1) Sunni Sufism: Rooted in simple and experiential spirituality; and 2) Philosophical Sufism: Emphasizes symbolic and profound philosophical teachings (Izzuddin et al., 2023).

The rising public interest in spirituality is evidenced by the proliferation of religious studies addressing the aridity of the heart. Sufism has regained popularity, with numerous tarekat (Sufi orders) emerging, particularly in urban areas. However, Sufism has also undergone innovations to address the challenges of the modern era, giving rise to what is now known as Neo-Sufism.

The emergence of Neo-Sufism in the Islamic world aligns with a religious revival rejecting excessive reliance on science and technology as products of modernism. Modernism is perceived to have failed in fostering a compassionate, humane, and meaningful life. Instead, it often alienates humanity from their essence, prompting many to return to religion as a source of spirituality. In this era, religion is seen as a means to guarantee a life imbued with purpose (Rostitawati, 2018).

Sufism is not merely theoretical but a practice emphasizing the importance of cultivating a pure heart and a cleansed soul to gain deeper understanding of life's meaning and existence. By integrating religious knowledge, ethics, and spiritual practices, Sufism provides a foundation for individuals to explore and develop their inner dimensions to achieve closeness to Allah SWT (Sudirman, 2022).

Previous studies demonstrate that Sufism significantly influences the formation of identity and cosmology in communities. For example, research on the Aboge community in Mudal Village highlights the noble values of Sufism in religious traditions like Suronan and Ruwahan (Nugroho & Hidayat, 2021). Additionally, the cosmological traditions of the Uluan community in South Sumatra reflect Sufi influences, as seen in concepts like tajalli and martabat tujuh (Izzuddin et al., 2023).

Neo-Sufism, as explained by Fazlur Rahman, emphasizes a balance between worldly and spiritual interests and the adaptation of Sufi values in social life (Rostitawati, 2018). However, religious traditions are often regarded as mere formalities without a deeper understanding of their spiritual values (Nugroho & Hidayat, 2021).

While many studies have examined Sufism within local and historical contexts, few have explored its relevance in modern society. Specifically, how these traditions serve as spiritual

solutions in addressing existential challenges. This research aims to fill this gap by analyzing the influence of Sufism traditions on modern society through a literature review.

This study formulates the following questions: 1) How do Sufism traditions influence the spiritual lives of modern societies?; and 2) What role does Neo-Sufism play in addressing spiritual challenges in the modern era?. The objectives of this research are: 1) To identify the relevance of Sufism traditions in modern society; and 2) To analyze the contributions of Neo-Sufism in providing solutions to contemporary spiritual crises.

This study is expected to contribute theoretically by enriching discussions on Sufism and its applications in modern life. Practically, it offers implications for society and policymakers in designing spiritual programs relevant to contemporary needs. Consequently, this research not only provides new insights into Sufi studies but also offers approaches to help communities confront spiritual challenges in the modern era.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a literature review approach to examine the influence of Sufi traditions in modern society. A qualitative-descriptive method was utilized to understand the phenomenon of Sufi traditions through the analysis of relevant textual literature. The research data were derived from primary sources, such as books, scholarly articles, and journals discussing Sufism, religious traditions, the acculturation of Islamic culture, and the evolution of Sufism in modern society. Secondary sources included encyclopedias, research reports, and theses. Key references included works of classical Sufi figures, academic articles on Neo-Sufism, and empirical studies on the practice of Sufism in a modern context.

The data collection technique involved documentation, which included searching for literature in libraries, online journals, and scientific databases such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate. Literature was selected based on its relevance to the main research theme, which was the impact of Sufi traditions on modern society.

The data obtained were analyzed through several stages. First, thematic identification was conducted to recognize key concepts in the literature, such as the fundamentals of Sufism, the acculturation of traditions, and the challenges of modernity to spiritual values. Next, the data were classified into traditional perspectives (classical Sufism) and modern perspectives (Neo-Sufism). Comparative analysis was then applied to examine the influence of Sufi traditions on traditional and modern societies. Finally, information synthesis was developed to understand how Sufism adapted and exerted influence in the modern era.

Data validation was performed through source triangulation, which involved comparing various sources to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the information obtained. The results of this study provided an in-depth analysis of the relevance of Sufi traditions in modern society and offered insights into Neo-Sufism as a response to the challenges of modernity.

## **RESULTS**

### **1. The Influence of Sufi Traditions on the Spiritual Life of Modern Society**

Based on the literature analysis, Sufi traditions significantly shape the spiritual life of modern society. These traditions provide a spiritual foundation that helps individuals cope with the pressures of modern life, often marked by materialism and a loss of life's meaning. Key findings include:

#### **a. Increased Interest in Sufi Practices**

Literature review shows that an increasing number of modern individuals are drawn to Sufi teachings, which offer inner peace and spiritual fulfillment. Practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance), meditation, and self-control have become essential tools for achieving balance

between worldly and spiritual life. Rahmawati (2018) states that Sufism is an effort to train the soul through various activities to liberate oneself from worldly influences with the aim of drawing closer to Allah. Furthermore, the positive principles of Sufism foster a moderate life perspective and free individuals from the traps of worldly desires (Ummah, 2019).

#### b. Integration of Sufi Values in Modern Life

Originally rooted in traditional communities, Sufi traditions are now adapted into various forms suitable for modern life, such as spiritual workshops, community-based study groups, and digital applications promoting Sufi teachings. Hasbi (2016) explains that those practicing Sufism view others as mirrors of themselves, encouraging continuous self-improvement and heart purification.

### **2. The Role of Neo-Sufism in Addressing the Challenges of the Modern Era**

Neo-Sufism, as a renewal of Sufi traditions, plays a crucial role in addressing spiritual challenges in modern times. Key findings related to Neo-Sufism include:

#### a. Innovations in Sufi Approaches

Neo-Sufism offers a more inclusive and relevant approach to modern contexts, such as integrating scientific knowledge with spiritual values. For instance, the concept of "spiritual leadership" developed within Neo-Sufism appeals to young urban professionals. Throughout Islamic history, Sufism has influenced prominent scholars like Ibn Arabi and Al-Ghazali, demonstrating its significance in every era (Patmawati & Elmansyah, 2019).

#### b. Rejection of Materialism and Secularism

The literature reveals that Neo-Sufism arises as a response to the failure of modernism in providing profound life meaning. It rejects materialistic and secularistic views, replacing them with a holistic approach combining spiritual, emotional, and intellectual aspects. Rasdiany et al. (2021) note that modern society tends to be driven by desires and social prestige, making Sufism a solution to address these phenomena.

#### c. Dissemination through Digital Media

Neo-Sufism leverages digital technology to spread its teachings. Platforms such as social media and religious applications are used to reach a global audience, making Sufism more accessible to modern society. Nasution et al. (2023) emphasize that technology plays a significant role in transforming the rhythm of life and societal norms.

### **3. The Dynamics of Sufi Tradition Acculturation**

Analysis reveals that Sufi traditions continue to undergo acculturation without losing their core spiritual values. This process includes:

- a. The adaptation of Sufi values into local cultures through tarekat practices developed in various regions, exemplified by the teachings of Wali Songo, which emphasize normative values and fiqh principles (Tambusai et al., 2021).
- b. The integration of classical Sufi concepts with modern philosophy to meet the needs of younger generations. Hilma et al. (2023) explain the similarities between Sufism and Greek philosophy, particularly the concept of ma'rifat as intuitive knowledge.

### **4. Validation and Consistency of Findings**

The validation of this study's findings is supported by various literature. Abu Al-Wafa' Alganimi At-Taftazani (2023) identifies five main characteristics of Sufism: moral values, the fulfillment of fana (annihilation), direct intuitive knowledge, the inner joy of achieving maqamat (spiritual stations), and the use of symbolic expressions. These characteristics reflect the essence of Sufi teachings, which remain relevant to humanity's spiritual needs throughout time.

The findings of this study provide profound insights into how Sufi traditions contribute to the spiritual life of modern society and how Neo-Sufism serves as an innovative tool to address the challenges of modernity. By utilizing technology and social media, Sufism not only offers spiritual solutions but also presents approaches relevant to the complex rhythm of modern life (Nasution et al., 2023).

## DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that the tradition of Sufism significantly influences the spiritual life of modern society. Sufism serves as a strong spiritual foundation for coping with the pressures of modern life, often dominated by materialism and a loss of meaning. Sufi practices such as dhikr (remembrance of God), meditation, and self-discipline are essential tools for achieving balance between worldly and spiritual life. Studies by Rahmawati (2018) and Ummah (2019) support these findings, emphasizing how Sufi principles foster moderation in life and liberate individuals from the traps of worldly desires.

The integration of Sufi values into modern life is also evident through various innovative forms, such as spiritual workshops, community-based religious gatherings, and digital applications promoting Sufi teachings. Hasbi (2016) explains that individuals practicing Sufism view others as mirrors of themselves, encouraging continuous self-improvement and purification of the heart. This demonstrates the adaptability of Sufi traditions to the needs and challenges of modern society.

The findings align with studies by Nugroho and Hidayat (2021), which highlight the enduring relevance of Sufi values in religious traditions such as Suronan and Ruwahan in shaping community identity. Similarly, research by Izzuddin et al. (2023) on the cosmology of the Uluan community in South Sumatra reveals traces of Sufism reflected in the concepts of tajalli (divine manifestation) and martabat tujuh (seven stages of being). Neo-Sufism, as outlined by Fazlur Rahman, underscores a balance between worldly and spiritual interests, supporting the adaptation of Sufi values in social life.

However, this study provides a new perspective by emphasizing Sufism as a spiritual solution in the modern era through Neo-Sufism approaches. For instance, the concept of "spiritual leadership" developed within Neo-Sufism has gained attention among young professionals in urban areas (Patmawati & Elmansyah, 2019).

This research contributes significantly to understanding the relevance of Sufi traditions in modern society. The theoretical implications include enriching the literature on Sufism and Neo-Sufism as tools to address modern challenges. Practically, the study offers guidance for individuals and communities to adopt Sufi values as spiritual solutions and for policymakers to design spiritual programs relevant to contemporary needs.

For example, the adaptation of Sufism through digital media allows its teachings to reach a global audience, making it more accessible to modern society. Nasution et al. (2023) emphasize that technology plays a crucial role in transforming societal rhythms while offering new opportunities for reconnecting with spiritual values.

This study has several limitations, including:

- a. A reliance on literature analysis, without empirical field data that could provide deeper insights.
- b. A focus on the influence of Sufism in modern contexts, without exploring its dynamics in traditional communities.
- c. A lack of quantitative analysis to measure the adoption of Sufi values in modern society.

Sufi traditions and Neo-Sufism contribute significantly to the spiritual life of modern society. By integrating Sufi values into the modern context, individuals can find solutions to spiritual challenges in an era marked by materialism and secularism. Neo-Sufism, through its inclusive and innovative approaches, bridges the gap between spiritual needs and modern challenges, making it relevant for building a more meaningful life.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the tradition of Sufism significantly shapes the spiritual life of modern society. Key findings show that Sufism, with its noble values such as simplicity, inner peace, and self-discipline, provides solutions to the pressures of modern life. Neo-Sufism, as a renewal of Sufi tradition, has adapted through various innovations, including the use of digital technology to disseminate its teachings and the application of spirituality concepts in social and professional life. The implications of this study include theoretical contributions to enriching Sufi studies and their applications in modern contexts, as well as practical contributions in helping society find relevant spiritual solutions. The research underscores the importance of integrating Sufi values into various aspects of modern life to address spiritual challenges in an era of materialism and secularism. Recommendations for future research include further exploration of Neo-Sufism's implementation in global communities and analyzing the impact of digital media on the perception and practice of Sufism in modern society. This study is expected to serve as a foundation for the development of deeper and more applicable Sufi studies.

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