

Ibn Khaldun And Sufi Perspectives: A Theoretical And Methodological Analysis

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Abstract: This article examines the Sufi perspectives of the 14th-century scholar Ibn Khaldun. It emphasizes that there is no evidence of practical Sufi engagement in his personal life and analyzes his Sufi views within social, scientific, and philosophical contexts. Through the works *Mukaddima* and *Shifau's-sail li-tehzibi'l-mesail*, the study explores Ibn Khaldun's concepts, his approach to visions and karamat, and the distinctions between Sharia and practice. The research aims to elucidate the historical, sociological, and religious dimensions of Sufi thought.

Keywords: Ibn Khaldun, Sufism, *Mukaddima*, *Shifau's-sail*, visions, karamat, Sharia, socio-historical analysis, religious-philosophical perspectives.

Introduction: Sufism is worthy of attention as a complex phenomenon that has deeply influenced Islamic worldview and the history of culture, as well as shaped the spiritual and educational aspects of personal and social life. In the Middle Ages, especially in the 14th century, Sufi life was widespread in Muslim societies and developed in various forms; however, the theoretical analysis and scholarly interpretation of these processes were carried out to a limited extent. From this point of view, the study of Ibn Khaldun's Sufi views makes it possible to gain a deep understanding not only of historical and sociological aspects, but also of philosophical and religious dimensions.

Ibn Khaldun presented his reflections on Sufism from various perspectives in his work *Muqaddimah*. This approach was directed not at studying Sufism merely as a phenomenon arising from personal experience or practical life, but within a social, historical, and philosophical context. Therefore, Ibn Khaldun's Sufi views were considered necessary to be analyzed from the standpoint of their relation to practical and theoretical aspects, as well as to Sharia and social norms.

The purpose of this article is to study Ibn Khaldun's attitude toward Sufism through his views expressed in *Muqaddimah* and *Shifā' al-Sā'il li-Tahdhīb al-Masā'il*, and at the same time to analytically highlight the socio-historical, ethical, and religious aspects of Sufism. In the

course of the research, Ibn Khaldun's understanding of Sufism, its theoretical foundations and practical limitations, as well as various Sufi directions and the differences between them, are identified. In this way, the article reveals the significance of Sufi views in the social and philosophical context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ibn Khaldun was well acquainted with the Sufi life of his time and sought to study it with all its theoretical and practical subtleties. At the same time, there is no reliable source indicating that in his personal life he chose the Sufi path in practice, joined a tariqa, or was affiliated with a shaykh. This situation shows that, in the process of studying Ibn Khaldun's Sufi views, it is necessary to analyze separately their theoretical and methodological essence. In other words, Ibn Khaldun's attitude toward Sufism should be regarded not so much as a product of practical experience, but rather as views formed within a social, scientific, and philosophical context.

There were a number of key factors in the formation of Ibn Khaldun's Sufi views and his philosophical approach. These factors are closely connected with personal family upbringing, early religious experience, as well as the social and cultural environment. When these factors are analyzed scientifically, the following stand out:

Firstly, Ibn Khaldun's father was engaged in scholarly and religious activities at a center (ribat) and was a person distinguished by his moral virtues and scientific competence. This family influence shows the importance of hereditary and cultural factors in the formation of Ibn Khaldun's Sufi concepts. That is, from childhood he was familiar with a religious and scholarly environment, growing up with an appreciation for worship and moral values. Moreover, this circumstance also laid the foundation for the development of his ability for socio-historical analysis, since Sufi life and practices provided him with the opportunity to understand that they are closely linked not only with personal experience but also with the religious and moral environment of society [1].

Secondly, during his activities in the Maghreb, Ibn Khaldun lived near the mausoleum of Abu Madyan, one of the famous shaykhs and saints. This period enabled him to closely observe the Sufi environment and to understand the system of relations between disciples and shaykhs. Through this, he gained the opportunity to analyze more deeply not only the ritual and devotional aspects of Sufi life but also its spiritual and aesthetic dimensions. This experience formed the basis of Ibn Khaldun's method of presenting Sufism in a socio-historical context in his work *Muqaddimah* [2].

Thirdly, upon arriving in Egypt, Ibn Khaldun was appointed as the shaykh of the famous Baybars khanqah and served in this position for a certain period. This gave him the opportunity to closely study Sufi organizations, their socio-legal structure, and the disciple-shaykh system. At the same time, during his stay in the khanqah, he composed poetic works on Sufi and philosophical themes, which contributed to the consolidation of his theoretical views [3]. In addition, Ibn Khaldun created poetic works on Sufi and ascetic themes. This literary activity enriched his Sufi views not only in a practical sense but also in an aesthetic and cultural context [4]. After his death, Ibn Khaldun was buried in the Maqbara al-Sufiyya. This shows that he was regarded by society and his contemporaries as being connected with the Sufi environment, although this fact does not prove that he practically followed the Sufi path [5].

In his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun presents Sufism from several perspectives. In Chapter VI, he devoted special attention to Sufism [6, pp. 105–127], and after arriving in Egypt, he further expanded this chapter by analyzing the emergence, development, method, purpose, and division of Sufism into various forms. At the same time, he criticized the obscure expressions of philosopher-mystics and emphasized that extreme Sufis, Batiniyya, and representatives of the Isma'ili sect followed the same path. He noted that certain elements of concepts

such as "Qutb," "Ghawth," "Awtad," and "Rijāl al-Ghayb" originated from the Isma'ili school, and he strongly opposed the forms of Sufism based on hulul (incarnationism) and ittihad (unionism) [7].

In the section of the *Muqaddimah* titled "Knower of the Unseen," Sufi aspects were also considered through the topics of revelation, unveiling (kashf), miracles, saintly wonders (karamat), dream interpretation, and the science of the secrets of letters ('ilm al-asrar al-huruf). Ibn Khaldun also referred to Sufism when explaining Mahdism and expressed opinions connected to Sufi principles in the subjects of "Ahl al-Hadith and madhāhib." Moreover, while discussing alchemy, hunger, and satiety, he indirectly alluded to Sufi principles and spiritual-ethical values [8]. It can be stated that Ibn Khaldun had his own distinct conception of Sufism, according to which Sufism is based on practice, worship, and moral virtue. If a Sufi orientation sets its goal on attaining unveiling and miracles, removing the veil of perception to observe the unseen world, or speaking about the essence and categories of beings, then in Ibn Khaldun's view, the religious significance of such activity diminishes considerably [9].

Ibn Khaldun's work *Shifā' al-Sā'il li-Tahdhīb al-Masā'il* devoted special attention to Sufi issues. The publication history of this work further increases its scholarly value: it was first published in Ankara in 1958 by Muhammad Tanjī, later in Beirut in 1959 by Ignajj 'Abdu Khalīfa, and in 1977 a translation was released in Istanbul [10]. These publications serve as important sources for the study of Ibn Khaldun's Sufi views, as they help to understand his theoretical and practical approaches in different periods and geographical contexts.

The fact that the real author of the work is Ibn Khaldun is indicated by several sources. At the beginning of the book, the name "Abū Zayd 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Khaldun" is mentioned as the author [10], which clearly shows the connection of the work with Ibn Khaldun. Moreover, Ibn Khaldun did not mention this work in his famous *al-Ta'rīf*, but this does not deny his authorship, since in other works Ibn Khaldun also did not list all his books in full [11]. At the same time, in terms of expression and style, the work resembles Ibn Khaldun's other writings [12], which is regarded as additional evidence confirming his true authorship.

However, some scholars, such as Muhammad 'Abd al-Ghanī Hasan and 'Abd al-Wāḥid Wāfī, questioned the true authorship of the work. Wāfī argued that the book did not belong to the author of the *Muqaddimah*, but rather to Ibn Khaldun's cousin, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Khaldun [13]. This issue still remains a subject of scholarly debate, as the similarity of the content and

approach of the work with Ibn Khaldun's other writings has been emphasized by many researchers.

There are methodological and conceptual differences between Ibn Khaldun's Sufi concepts in *Muqaddimah* and *Shifā' al-Sā'il*. In the *Muqaddimah*, he held a rather lenient view toward the Sufis, likening claims about unveiling (*kashf*) and miracles (*karamat*) to concepts incompatible with human reason. This approach is connected with his sociological and historical analytical methodology and is directed toward viewing Sufism as a socio-historical phenomenon [13]. Here, Ibn Khaldun analyzes Sufism not as a phenomenon arising from personal experience or practical life, but as a scientific phenomenon studied in the context of human history and social relations.

Shifā' al-Sā'il, on the other hand, reflects Ibn Khaldun's strict approach against practical Sufi activities. In this work, he scrutinized Sufi practices, warned those seeking unveiling and miracles, and regarded such activities as religiously dangerous and harmful [15]. This approach reflects the perspective of the author as a mufti who adhered to the principles of Sharia and fiqh, and it is aimed at analyzing the compliance of practical Sufi activity with religious foundations [15]. At the same time, Ibn Khaldun viewed Sufi practices as behaviors that could harm the human psyche and the social environment, and he sought to evaluate them within the framework of Sharia principles. The process of analyzing the differences between these two approaches allows for a deeper understanding of Ibn Khaldun's socio-philosophical views. In the *Muqaddimah*, Sufism is studied as a means of historical and sociological analysis, that is, as a phenomenon in society and human life, while in *Shifā' al-Sā'il*, the evaluation of Sufi activity is considered within the framework of religious and practical principles [16]. Taking these aspects into account, it should be stated that Ibn Khaldun is valued not only as a scholar who analyzed Sufi concepts in a purely spiritual or mystical context, but also as one who integrated them with socio-legal, historical, and religious contexts.

Ibn Khaldun also analyzed Sufi matters in aesthetic, literary, and sociological contexts. During his time in *tekkes*, he composed poetic works on mystical and ascetic themes, which served to enrich his theoretical perspectives¹. Through this, he gained a deep understanding of the relationship between Sufi practices and human thought as well as society. Through poetry, he illuminated the essence of Sufi philosophy not only from a spiritual standpoint but also within a cultural and aesthetic context. At the same time, the thinker paid attention to *murid-shaykh* relations, and by examining the functioning of religious institutions and social order, he also analyzed the role

of Sufi practices in society [17]. This, in turn, fully reveals the significance of Sufi activity not merely for personal purposes but also for ensuring social integration and spiritual stability.

From our research it becomes clear that the approaches to Sufism in the *Muqaddimah* and *Shifā' al-Sā'il* contain both differences and complementary perspectives. In particular, the *Muqaddimah* treats Sufism through scientific analysis, examining it as a phenomenon of society and human life, whereas *Shifā' al-Sā'il* discusses its practical and religious aspects within the framework of *Sharī'a* and *fiqh* norms [18].

The Russian researcher, philosopher, and historian V. V. Zolotukhin, who has studied Islamic philosophy and Arab sociology, in his monograph *The Philosophy of Ibn Khaldun*, scientifically analyzes the two distinct approaches in the *Muqaddimah* and *Shifā' al-Sā'il*. He acknowledges that these perspectives allow us to appreciate the thinker as a historian, social philosopher, and religious-analytical scholar. From this point of view, comparing Ibn Khaldun's approaches in the *Muqaddimah* and *Shifā' al-Sā'il* is of significant scholarly importance. By integrating Sufi practices within historical, social, and religious contexts, he created a universal methodological tool for studying the spiritual stability of society and moral values. Thus, his approach continues to serve as a rich source for scientific analysis and socio-philosophical research even today.

Our research shows that Ibn Khaldun's mystical views and methodological approaches make it possible to interpret Sufism as a complete scientific system, not only by incorporating personal thought and practice but also by harmonizing social, historical, and religious contexts. As a historian, sociologist, religious-analytical, and philosophical scholar, he presented his intellectual legacy to world science in a rich and solid manner [8, 220–2025]. From this perspective, the study and analysis of Ibn Khaldun's views on Sufism continue to occupy a central place in contemporary scholarly research.

CONCLUSION

According to the scientific analyses of researchers, Ibn Khaldun's views on Sufism are manifested in two main directions. First, he sees Sufism as a process of purifying the inner world of man, attaining spiritual maturity, and striving for perfection of the soul. At the same time, he evaluates Sufism not only as a personal experience but also as a social phenomenon that plays an important role in the life of society. In his view, Sufism is one of the forces that ensure solidarity, stability, and social harmony within society.

The harmony of these two aspects means that Sufism,

along with regulating the personal spiritual life of the individual, also contributes to the development of social life. Even in the modern era, these views have not lost their significance. In the context of global changes and spiritual vacuums, the Sufi heritage is being re-evaluated as an important source of unity, mutual understanding, and spiritual revival among people. Therefore, Ibn Khaldun's ideas on Sufism serve as an important source for the philosophical understanding of human and social life not only in his time but also today.

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