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Integrating Hadith Understanding and Sufi Character Education: Insights from Imam Al-Ghazali's Minhaj Al-'Abidin

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the Sufi interpretation of the Prophet's Hadiths as expounded by Imam al-Ghazali in his masterpiece, Minhaj al-'Abidin. The discourse surrounding Sufi commentaries on Hadiths frequently sparks debates regarding the extent to which inner (esoteric) meanings are employed without neglecting the outer (exoteric) aspects of Sharia. This qualitative, library-based study utilizes a Sufi hermeneutic approach (sharh al-hadith al-sufi) and content analysis. Out of the 86 Hadiths found in Minhaj al-'Abidin, 19 were identified as containing interpretations infused with Sufi meanings. The findings indicate that: first, Imam al-Ghazali tends to narrate Hadiths bi al-ma'na (conveying the meaning rather than the exact wording) without citing the chain of transmission (sanad) or the original compiler (mukharrij), thus requiring a takhrij process (source trace-back) to major Hadith collections such as Sunan al-Tirmidhi. Second, al-Ghazali's understanding of Hadiths does not deny the textual meaning of Sharia; instead, it integrates its outer and inner dimensions. This is evident in his interpretation of the Hadith regarding the virtue of knowledge, where he asserts that knowledge serves as the foundation for outer worship while simultaneously evoking a sense of khashyah (reverent awe of Allah) as a form of inner worship. Third, the nature of al-Ghazali's Sufi interpretation in Minhaj al-'Abidin falls under the ishari typology, which aligns with Sharia principles (tazkiyat al-nafs), rather than the speculative-philosophical nazhari typology.

KEYWORDS: Imam al-Ghazali, ishari-nazhari, sharh al-hadith al-sufi, tafsiran sufi

INTRODUCTION

Sufism (Tasawwuf) is a branch of Islamic knowledge that emphasizes the spiritual dimension of Islamic teachings (Arafat, 2017). This spirituality aims to draw closer to Allah the ultimate source and goal of human life through the process of self-purification (tazkiyat al-nafs) (Maisyaroh, 2019). These spiritual aspects influence how Sufis (practitioners of Sufism) understand the sources of Islamic teachings, namely the Quran and the Prophet's Hadiths, thereby producing a distinct style of textual interpretation often referred to as Sufi exegesis (tafsir sufistik). According to Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi, there are two categories of interpretation that significantly influence the Sufi interpretative model: theoretical Sufi exegesis (tafsir sufi nazhari) and practical or evocative Sufi exegesis (tafsir sufi isyari) (Al-Dhahabi, 2000). Sufi exegesis (tafsir sufi isyari) involves interpretations that diverge from the apparent (literal) meaning of the text due to deeply esoteric (inner) allusions that are understood exclusively by Sufis. Conversely, theoretical Sufi exegesis (tafsir sufi nazhari) is constructed to promote and consolidate mystical theories by redirecting the focus of the Quran and Hadith toward the interpreter's own mystical objectives. Al-Dhahabi asserts that, in practice, theoretical Sufi exegesis consists of commentaries on the Quran or Hadith that disregard both linguistic dimensions and the true intent of the Sharia (Al-Dhahabi, 2000).

Imam al-Ghazali is a prominent Sufi figure endowed with profound knowledge and authority, earning him the title Hujjat al-Islam (Proof of Islam). The depth and breadth of his erudition are evidenced through his works, which remain accessible to us today. Alongside his magnum opus, Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, another text frequently cited by Sufi scholars is Minhaj al-'Abidin (Al-Ghazali, 1111/2013). This book is widely utilized by scholars in Indonesia for Sufism studies and is taught across numerous pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) throughout the country.

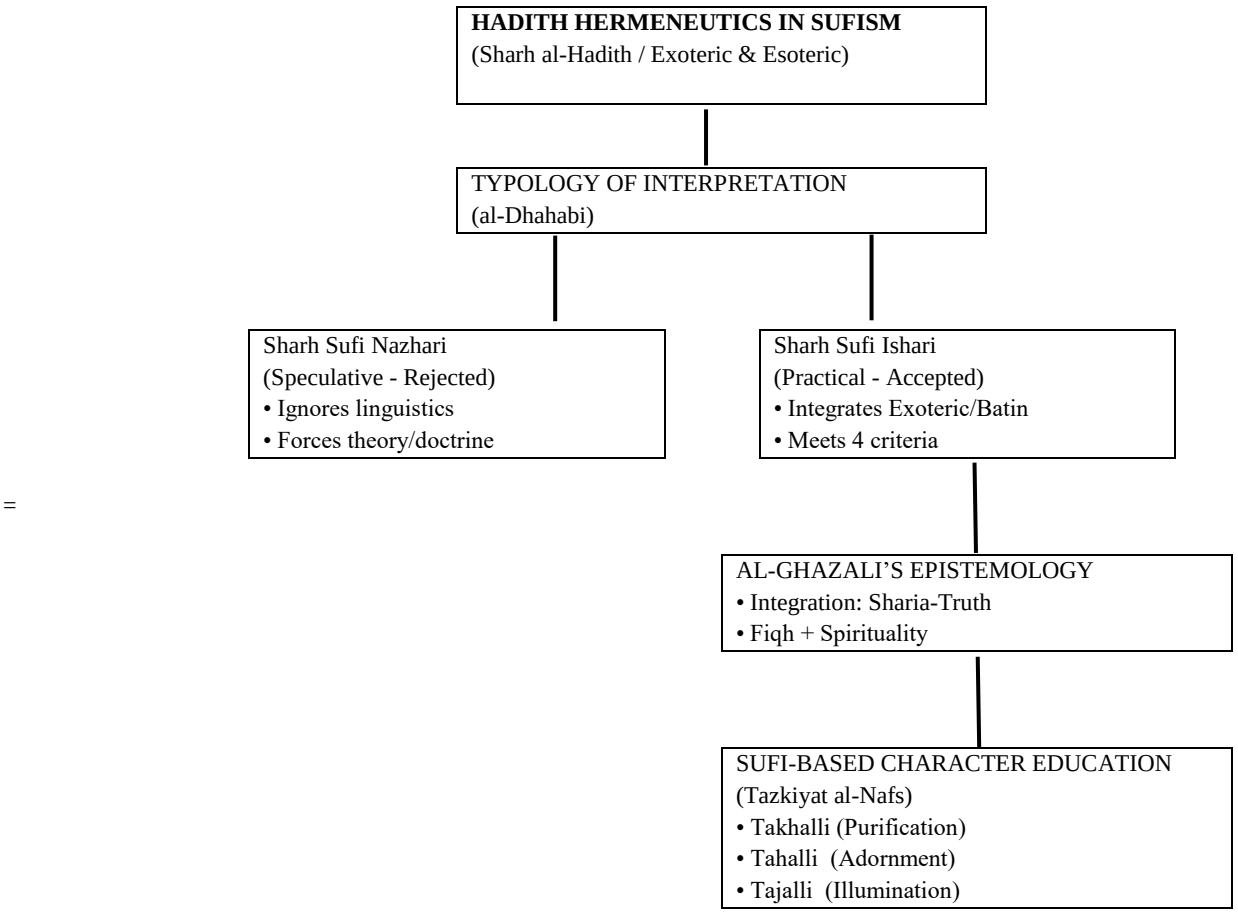
This book is a Sufism treatise detailing various pathways to the Hereafter--such as the path of worship (as the fruit of knowledge), the path of obedience, and the methods for attaining Paradise. In elaborating on each topic, Imam al-Ghazali frequently adduced Quranic verses and Prophetic Hadiths. Through his commentaries on these texts, readers can discover the spiritual dimensions unveiled by Imam al-Ghazali, which transcend mere literal comprehension. This necessitates an examination of Imam al-Ghazali's scholarly persona to understand his specific approach to Hadith, as well as how he applied a Sufistic perspective in interpreting Prophetic traditions to yield a Sufi-oriented interpretation. Accordingly, this study aims to identify and characterize the Hadiths imbued with Sufi nuances presented by Imam al-Ghazali in the book Minhaj al-'Abidin. Furthermore, it seeks to analyze the Sufi-oriented interpretations applied to these nineteen Hadiths, as well as to elucidate and classify the nature of Imam al-Ghazali's comprehension based on the criteria of nazhari (theoretical) and ishari (practical-esoteric) Sufi interpretations.

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Although this study examines a new subject matter (material object), its methodological approach (formal object) has been explored in previous research. A prominent example is the study by Suprayitno and Santoso (2020) titled The Concept of Sufism from the Perspective of Imam Nawawi: A Study of Sufi Hadith Interpretation in Arba'in an-Nawawiyyah. That study elaborates on the Sufi-oriented Hadiths compiled by Imam Nawawi in the book Arba'in an-Nawawiyyah and examines how Imam Nawawi, renowned for his profound mastery of Hadith and jurisprudence (fiqh), understood and explained Sufi concepts within the work.

Next is the study conducted by Satria (2021), titled Pentafsiran Sufi terhadap Hadis: Satu Kajian tentang Pemikiran Jalaluddin Rumi dalam Kitab Fihi Mā Fīhi (Sufi Interpretation of Hadith: A Study of Jalaluddin Rumi's Thought in the Book Fihi Mā Fīhi). This study examines the Sufi interpretation by Jalaluddin Rumi in his work, Fihi Mā Fīhi. It demonstrates that the interpretation of Hadith by a Sufi figure, in this case, Jalaluddin Rumi, does not necessarily contradict the textual meaning of the Hadith. Indeed, under certain circumstances, Rumi interprets Hadith textually, in line with the interpretations and understandings held by other Hadith scholars. There is also a study by Khamid (2018) titled Pentafsiran Sufi terhadap Teks al-Quran: Memahami Analisis Nazhari dan Isyari (Sufi Interpretation of Quranic Texts: Understanding Nazhari and Isyari Analysis). While this study similarly examines Sufi interpretation, its focus of study is Quranic verses. It analyzes the forms of Quranic exegesis employed by two Sufi streams: the Nazhari (theoretical) Sufis and the Isyari (practical-esoteric) Sufis. Nazhari Sufi exegesis interprets the Quran using intellect (reason), whereas Isyari Sufi exegesis interprets it through allusions or symbols derived from the inner (esoteric) meaning of a verse.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



1. Sufi Hadith Hermeneutics (*Sharḥ al-Ḥadīth al-Ṣūfī*) and Typologies of Interpretation

Sufi Hadith hermeneutics is an approach to understanding Prophetic traditions that goes beyond the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) meaning of the text to unearth deeper esoteric (*bāṭin*) dimensions through intuitive unveilings (*kashf*) and spiritual purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) (Arafat, 2017). According to Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī (2000), the Sufi intellectual tradition categorizes religious text interpretation into two primary typologies:

- **Theoretical/Theoretical-Speculative Sufi Interpretation (*Tafsīr/Sharḥ Ṣūfī Naẓarī*):** An interpretative model that uses the text to legitimize specific philosophical or mystical theories held by the interpreter. This approach often forces esoteric meanings while disregarding Arabic linguistic conventions and the objective intents of Islamic law (*Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*) (Abdurrahman, 2015).
- **Practical/Allusive Sufi Interpretation (*Tafsīr/Sharḥ Ṣūfī Ishārī*):** An interpretative model that integrates the exoteric dimension of the text with spiritual subtle allusions (*ishārāt*) perceived by the Sufi's inner heart during the spiritual journey (*sulūk*). Valid (*maqbūl*) *ishārī* interpretation must fulfill several criteria: it must not negate the exoteric meaning of the law, must be supported by other legal evidence (*dalīl sharʿī*), must not contradict the rationality of Islamic jurisprudence, and must aim to reinforce devotion (Syukur, 2015; Al-Qaththan, 2005).

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In reading Hadiths, moderate Sufis, such as Imam al-Ghazālī, utilize the *ishārī* typology to harmonize jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and spirituality (*taṣawwuf*), ensuring that textual and esoteric meanings complement one another (Said, 2014).

2. The Integration of Exoteric and Esoteric Dimensions in al-Ghazālī's Epistemology

Imam al-Ghazālī's framework is built upon a robust integration of knowledge (*ʿilm*), action (*ʿamal*), and spiritual states (*ḥāl*). In the context of Hadith comprehension, al-Ghazālī rejects the dichotomy between the external law (*sharīʿah*) and spiritual reality (*ḥaqīqah*) (Al-Ghazali, 2013).

According to al-Ghazālī, legal knowledge (*ʿilm al-sharīʿah*) serves as a foundational prerequisite for the validity of physical acts of worship (such as prayer, fasting, and charity). However, this knowledge must yield an inner understanding that evokes reverential fear (*khashyah*), awe (*taʿẓīm*), and devotion (*ikhlāṣ*) toward Allah SWT (Syafril, 2017). Consequently, Prophetic traditions are understood not merely as a set of normative rules, but as guidance for soul transformation.

3. Sufism-Based Character Education (*Tazkiyat al-Nafs*)

Character education from a Sufi perspective centers on the concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (soul purification), which involves three systematic stages (Maisyaroh, 2019; Mashar, 2015):

- ***Takhallī*:** The process of cleansing oneself from blameworthy traits (*al-akhlāq al-madhmūmah*), such as ostentation (*riyāʾ*), arrogance (*kibr*), envy (*ḥasad*), and excessive love for worldly life (*ḥubb al-dunyā*).
- ***Taḥallī*:** Adorning the soul with praiseworthy virtues (*al-akhlāq al-maḥmūdah*), such as repentance (*tawbah*), patience (*ṣabr*), reliance on God (*tawakkul*), contentment (*riḍā*), and sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*).
- ***Tajallī*:** The manifestation of spiritual enlightenment and inner peace as a result of spiritual purity and complete obedience to Allah SWT.

METHODS

This study is qualitative in nature, specifically structured as a library research project that focuses on the collection, examination, and analysis of scholarly data from library resources. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach combined with a Sufi hermeneutic framework (sharh al-hadith al-sufi). The descriptive dimension is utilized to outline Imam al-Ghazali's understanding and interpretation of the Prophet's Hadiths, whereas the analytical dimension serves to critically evaluate and categorize those interpretations according to specific Sufi interpretative tendencies (whether leaning toward a nazhari-theoretical or an isyari, practical-esoteric approach). The primary data source is the book Minhaj al-'Abidin by Imam al-Ghazali. Out of the 86 Hadiths cited in the book, this study concentrates its analysis on 19 Hadiths that are interpreted with specifically esoteric or Sufi-oriented connotations and content. Meanwhile, secondary data are retrieved from Hadith collections such as Sunan al-Tirmidhi and other works within the Kutub al-Sittah, which are utilized to trace the takhrij (original sources) and verify the authenticity of the text (matn) of the Hadiths quoted by al-Ghazali, alongside relevant secondary literature such as Al-Tafsir wa al-Mufassirun by Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi, works on Hadith hermeneutics, and related academic journals.

Data collection was conducted using documentation research methods, which comprised the following steps: data inventorying, namely identifying and listing all Hadith citations in Minhaj al-'Abidin; and data selection, namely filtering the Hadiths that al-Ghazali expounded or interpreted with spiritual or Sufi understandings (a total of 19 such Hadiths were identified). Subsequently, qualitative data analysis was executed using content analysis and hermeneutic analysis techniques, encompassing data reduction as well as textual and contextual analysis stages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Getting to Know Imam al-Ghazali and the Book of Minhajul 'Abidin

The full name of al-Ghazali is Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali. He was born in the small township of Thus, a locale within the historic realm of Khurasan in Iran, in the year 450 AH (corresponding to 1058 CE). The moniker "al-Ghazali" itself is derived from Ghuzalah, the name of a village in Thus. It was in this very town that he passed away and was laid to rest in the year 505 AH (1111 CE) (Syafril, 2017).

During his childhood, al-Ghazali immersed himself in the study of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) in Thus under the tutelage of Ahmad al-Radzakani. As he transitioned into adolescence, he journeyed to the city of Jurjan to seek knowledge from Abu Nashar al-'Isma'il, ultimately proceeding to Naisabur to study under Abu al-Maali al-Juwaini, revered as Imam al-Haramain. From Imam al-Haramain, al-Ghazali mastered the *kalam* (theology) of the Ash'arite tradition to complete erudition. Following an extensive period under Imam al-Haramain's guidance, he traveled to the city of Askar (Mu'askar) to meet Nidzam al-Mulk, the Grand Vizier of the Seljuk Empire. Recognizing his brilliance, Nidzam appointed al-Ghazali as a distinguished scholar at the prestigious Nizamiyya University in Baghdad (Syafril, 2017).

Al-Ghazali was a preeminent Sufi luminary who lived during the 5th century Hijri, amid the reign of the Seljuk Dynasty. He stands as both a phenomenal and controversial figure. He is regarded as phenomenal because his intellect continuously invites deep study from diverse academic vantage points, spanning jurisprudence (*fiqh*), legal theory (*usul fiqh*), theology, and philosophy, through to Islamic mysticism (*tasawuf*). Conversely, he is deemed controversial as his sharp critique of philosophers and their doctrines in his work, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), ignited extensive polemics regarding the stagnation of Islamic thought, particularly across the eastern realms of the Islamic world (Syafril, 2017).

Among the monumental literary works of Imam al-Ghazali are *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), *Bidayah al-Hidayah* (The Beginning of Guidance), *Minhaj al-'Abidin* (The Methodology of the Worshippers), *Mizan al-'Amal* (The Criterion of Action), *Kimiya' as-Sa'adah* (The Alchemy of Happiness), *Mishkah al-Anwar* (The Niche for Lights), *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Deliverance from Error), *Al-Adab fi al-Din*(Etiquette in Religion), *Kitab al-Arba'in* (The Book of Forty), *Ar-Risalah al-Laduniyyah* (The Treatise on Divine Knowledge), and *Rawdah al-Talibin* (The Garden of the Seekers) (Syafril, 2017).

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The treatise *Minhaj al-'Abidin* (The Pathway of the Worshipers) is a Sufi work profound with resonance for anyone endeavoring to tread the spiritual path toward Allah (SWT). It elucidates the multifaceted dimensions of the soul's pilgrimage, as well as the essential provisions required by authentic seekers of Truth and those yearning for guidance so that they may ultimately encounter their Sustainer in a state of Divine Pleasure (*Redha*) (Al-Ghazali & As-Sasaki, 2013, hlm. 10). This stands as the final magnum opus penned by Imam al-Ghazali prior to his departure from this earthly realm.

2. Sufism and the Nuances of Sufistic Exegesis

Tasawuf (Sufism) stands as a prominent construct within the Islamic tradition. As an expression of spiritual interiority, it is recognized in Western parlance as Islamic mysticism (Susanti, 2018). The term *Tasawuf*(Sufism) was neither utilized during the era of the Prophet nor during the epoch of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*Khulafa' al-Rashidin*). It emerged only when Abu Hashim al-Kufi (d. 250 AH) appended the epithet *al-Sufi* to his name in the third century Hijri.

Etymologically, scholars hold divergent perspectives regarding the genesis of the word *Tasawuf*, yielding at least six distinct derivations. First, it is posited to originate from *suffah*, denoting the veranda of the Prophet's Mosque inhabited by a section of the *Ansar* (the Helpers). This association arises because the practices of the Sufis closely mirror those of these companions; namely, drawing near to Allah and embodying a life of austerity. Second, it is suggested to stem from *saff*, meaning "row" or "rank." Certain scholars consider this the root of the term, given that a Sufi is an individual or a member of a collective that purifies the heart in the aspiration of standing in the foremost rank (*saff*) before Allah. Third, it derives from *shafa*, signifying purity, as practitioners of Sufism actively strive to cleanse their souls to draw closer to Allah. Fourth, from *shufanah*, the name of a resilient shrub capable of surviving in desert environments; this symbolizes how Sufi teachings endured amid the turbulent societal shifts of the time, when the Muslim populace was enthralled by materialism and political power, much like the *shufanah* plant thrives in barren desert terrains. Fifth, from *Theosophy*, borrowed from the Greek language meaning divine wisdom, owing to Sufism's extensive engagement with divine metaphysics. Sixth, from *shuf*, denoting coarse wool, because early Sufi ascetics customarily wore humble garments fashioned from animal hides or sheep's wool (*shuf*) (Mashar, 2015).

Terminologically, Sufism has been delineated in multifaceted ways by both Muslim and Western scholars. It is recorded that Ma'ruf al-Karkhi (d. 200 AH/816 CE) was the first to formalize a definition of Sufism: clinging steadfastly to divine realities while relinquishing attachment to all created beings. Bishr bin al-Harith al-Hafi (d. 227 AH) posited that a Sufi is one whose heart remains pure solely for Allah. Furthermore, Abu Turab al-Nakhshabi (d. 240 AH) defined a Sufi as an individual untainted by anything, through whom everything becomes purified. Abu al-Husayn al-Nuri (d. 295 AH) asserted that Sufism is neither a formal ritual (*rasm*) nor mere academic knowledge, but rather refined spiritual character (*akhlaq*). He reasoned that if Sufism were a mere ritual, rigorous exertion (*mujahadah*) would suffice; if it were academic knowledge, formal instruction (*ta'lim*) would be enough; instead, it is the embodiment of divine traits (*takhalluq bi akhlaq Allah*), an inner state unattainable solely through external ritual or formal study.

Meanwhile, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali articulated that Sufism is an intrinsic spiritual affair whose true essence cannot be strictly measured or defined except through observation of the outward traits conventionally associated with the designation "Sufi". Nonetheless, these attributes may dissipate, along with the forfeiture of the title of Sufi itself, because the true reality of a Sufi resides in righteousness and specific spiritual virtues; such attributes can erode due to unwholesome deeds, even if the individual continues to don the attire or display the external hallmarks of Sufism (Arafat, 2017).

Exegesis featuring a Sufistic orientation (*tafsir sufis*) represents a distinct hermeneutical method in Islam. Deeply influenced by the mystical tradition, this approach leans heavily on intuitive flash (*ilham*) arising from a purified heart during the interpretative process. Moreover, Sufistic exegesis places paramount emphasis on ethical refinement, soul purification, and the cultivation of asceticism (*zuhd*), prioritizing the eternal realm over worldly pursuits (Satria, t.t.).

According to Sufi doctrine, the rigorous spiritual discipline (*riyadhah*) undertaken by a practitioner elevates them to a realm where they can unveil the sacred allegories concealed beneath the outer phrasing of the Quran. The overflowing torrents of the unseen realm (*ghaib*) and spiritual wisdom conveyed by the Quranic verses flood their hearts. This methodology is formally designated as *tafsir isyari* (allusive interpretation). It operates on the premise that every verse possesses an exoteric meaning (*zahir*) and an esoteric meaning (*batin*). The exoteric dimension is readily discernible through human intellect, whereas the esoteric dimension consists of subtle spiritual allusions inherently accessible only to those traversing the spiritual path (*suluk*). Although *tafsir isyari* risks error if it strays into ambiguous or tenuous claims, it remains valid provided it constitutes a sound deduction (*istinbat*) congruent with the exoteric rules of the Arabic language, supported by authentic proofs, and free from internal contradiction (Al-Qaththan, 2005, hlm. 447).

In the classical tradition of Quranic exegesis, Sufi-oriented exegesis (*tafsir sufis*) is frequently defined as an interpretative framework aimed at elucidating the verses of the Quran from an esoteric perspective or through implicit allusions (*isyarat*) unveiled to a Sufi during their spiritual odyssey (*suluk*) (Abdurrahman, 2015). Sufi exegesis is categorized into two primary branches: *tafsir sufi nazhari* (theoretical Sufi exegesis) and *tafsir sufi isyari* (allusive Sufi exegesis). *Tafsir sufi nazhari* is anchored in philosophical theories and systematic speculative doctrines (Syukur, 2015). Conversely, *tafsir sufi isyari* interprets Quranic verses in a manner distinct from their literal or exoteric meanings, aligning instead with subtle, veiled intimations perceived by practitioners of Sufi disciplines even when such interpretations remain fundamentally harmonious with the literal sense intended by the verses themselves.

3. Imam al-Ghazali's Sufistic Interpretation in Understanding Hadith

In the treatise *Minhaj al-'Abidin*, Imam al-Ghazali delineates an array of pivotal themes, including knowledge (*'ilm*) and spiritual gnosis (*ma'rifah*), repentance (*taubah*), worldly temptations, impediments along the path of devotion, spiritual incentives and motivations, strategies for mitigating factors that impair worship, as well as praise and gratitude. Throughout his exposition of each theme, Imam al-Ghazali systematically anchors his arguments in the Quran, Hadith, statements of the Companions (*Sahabah*) and Successors (*Tabi'in*), alongside the insights of his own mentors, prominent scholars, and venerable Sufi masters. This study specifically focuses its lens on the hadiths cited and elaborated upon by Imam al-Ghazali that embody Sufistic dimensions.

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From the author's perspective, there are 86 hadiths embedded within the text of *Minhaj al-'Abidin*. Out of this corpus, 19 hadiths are identified as containing distinct Sufistic elements. The hadiths cited by Imam al-Ghazali in the work are presented without their chains of transmission (*isnad*) or the names of their primary collectors (*mukharrij*). An exemplar is as follows:

ان الفضل العالم على العابد كفضلي على ادنى رجل من امتي

Translation: Verily, the excellence of a scholar (*'alim*) over a mere worshiper (*'abid*) is like my virtue as a Prophet over the lowest among my nation.

When citing this hadith, Imam al-Ghazali omitted both the chain of transmission (*isnad*) and the complete textual wording (*matn*). Upon further investigation, the author traced this hadith to *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*; however, a slight variation exists within the textual phrasing (*matn*), as the concluding clause in *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*employs the expression على أدناكم.

In the commentary (*syarah*) of this hadith, it is explained that the narration serves to elucidate the preeminence of knowledge and those who master the sacred law (sharia), alongside performing mandatory acts of devotion and voluntary prayers that might prove challenging for ordinary laypersons compared to dedicated worshipers (*'abid*). The phrase *"like my virtue over the lowest among you"* signifies that the disparity in nobility between a scholar (*'alim*) and a devout worshiper resembles the vast dynamic between the elevated status of the Messenger of Allah and that of the companion holding the humblest rank and distinction.

According to Imam al-Ghazali, this hadith underscores that knowledge is fundamentally superior to mere devotion devoid of insight; nevertheless, beyond acquiring and mastering knowledge, a servant remains obligated to perform acts of worship. Knowledge retains precedence because it constitutes the essential foundation for action and serves as an indispensable beacon for the worshiper.

Imam al-Ghazali outlines two primary reasons why knowledge must take priority over worship. First, to ensure that acts of devotion are executed correctly (Al-Ghazali & As-Sasaki, 2013, hlm. 20). A worshiper must possess mastery over the divine commands and prohibitions prescribed by sacred law. Consequently, an individual is required to obtain knowledge regarding prescribed worship, such as purification, prayer, fasting, almsgiving (*zakat*), and related rituals, along with their governing rulings and requisite conditions, so that these duties may be fulfilled flawlessly.

In addition to the aforementioned outward rites of worship, al-Ghazali emphasizes that one is equally obligated to comprehend inward acts of devotion pertaining to the movements of the human heart. Examples include trust in Divine Providence (*tawakkul*), contentment (*rida*), patience (*sabfr*), repentance (*taubah*), and sincerity (*ikhlas*). Furthermore, an individual must be cognizant of forbidden vices that act as adversaries to spiritual devotion, such as yielding to wrathful desires, indulging in unbridled hopes (*tul al-amal*), as well as arrogance and conceit. Acquiring this awareness enables an individual to systematically safeguard themselves against such spiritual ailments.

The second reason why knowledge takes precedence is that beneficial knowledge instills profound awe and veneration toward Allah Exalted. As Allah Almighty declares:

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى ٱللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ ٱلْعُلَمَٰٓؤُا

Translation: It is only those who possess knowledge among His servants who truly stand in awe of Allah. (Fatir: 28)

From the aforementioned verse, it is elucidated that those who lack true knowledge of Allah will not experience reverence, veneration, or awe toward Him. However, through authentic knowledge, a servant comes to recognize and perceive His Divine Presence, exalting Him and harbouring a profound sense of reverent awe and respect. Knowledge yields absolute obedience and serves as a rampart against all forms of transgression, naturally contingent upon Divine guidance (*taufiq*) and grace from Allah.

Furthermore, in relation to the previously cited hadith, Imam al-Ghazali peers beyond the exoteric text to navigate its deeper esoteric meanings. He asserts that knowledge maintains precedence over worship for two primary reasons:

1. **Execution of Correct Devotion:** To ensure that acts of worship are performed correctly, they must be anchored in knowledge aligned with the Sacred Law (Sharia). He further explicates that devotion is bifurcated into two realms: outward (physical) acts and inward (spiritual) acts. Both must be grounded in knowledge. For outward acts such as prayer, almsgiving (*zakat*), and fasting, an individual is obligated to acquire knowledge regarding their jurisprudence and essential prerequisites. Similarly, for inward virtues such as reliance upon Allah (*tawakkul*), divine contentment (*rida*), patience (*sabfr*), repentance (*taubah*), and sincerity (*ikhlas*), it is mandatory to comprehend the destructive vices that corrupt them; such as yielding to wrathful impulses, indulging in excessive worldly hopes (*tul al-amal*), ostentation (*riya'*), and spiritual pride.
2. **Instilling Divine Reverence:** Knowledge takes priority over worship because it cultivates awe and veneration toward Allah Exalted. Imam al-Ghazali adduces a Quranic proof-text to substantiate this understanding, specifically Surah Fatir, verse 28 which declares that only those endowed with knowledge truly stand in awe of Allah.

CONCLUSION

Sufi-oriented exegesis (*tafsir*) constitutes a distinct methodology for interpreting sacred texts, both the Quran and the Prophetic Hadith, associated with the Sufis; this framework employs Sufism itself as an interpretative tool. Sufis tend to comprehend religion through the tripartite framework of *Iman* (faith), *Islam* (submission), and *Ihsan* (spiritual excellence). Furthermore, the Sufi approach to Hadith is predominantly performative and practical in nature rather than merely theoretical or strictly exegestical.

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