RESURGENCY OF SUFI ISLAM IN INDONESIA: FROM THE PERIPHERY TO THE CENTER

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Abstract*: This article is about the re-emergence of Sufi Islam in Indonesia, which is a huge turnaround from the periphery towards the core of spiritual and social life. Based on a literature review, the article discovers that Sufism has been revitalized in the following four areas: (1) doctrinal renovation through the Neo-Sufism paradigm, (2) reformatting of tarekat's social spaces in education, economic empowerment, and healthcare services, (3) infiltration of Sufi values into cyber culture through social media and online da'wah, and (4) Sufism as a type of social and cultural capital that determines public morals and social cohesion. Based on the above discoveries, the article confirms that Sufism has survived and has become a spiritual and social force that is responsive to the current challenges as well as strengthening the strengthen the weak version of Islam and the values of Islam Nusantara in the urban society in Indonesia.*

Keywords*: Sufism; Neo-Sufism; Indonesian Islam; Religious Movements; Social Transformation.*

Abstrak: *Artikel ini membahas kebangkitan Sufi Islam di Indonesia yang menunjukkan pergeseran signifikan dari posisi marjinal menuju pusat kehidupan keagamaan dan sosial. Berdasarkan kajian pustaka, ditemukan bahwa sufisme mengalami revitalisasi dalam empat aspek utama: (1) rekonstruksi ajaran melalui model Neo-Sufisme, (2) transformasi ruang sosial tarekat dalam bidang pendidikan, ekonomi, dan kesehatan, (3) penetrasi nilai sufistik ke dalam budaya digital melalui media sosial dan dakwah daring, serta (4) peran sufisme sebagai modal sosial dan budaya dalam membentuk etika publik dan kohesi sosial. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa sufisme tidak hanya bertahan, tetapi juga berkembang sebagai kekuatan spiritual dan sosial yang responsif terhadap tantangan zaman, serta berkontribusi pada penguatan Islam moderat dan nilai-nilai Islam Nusantara di tengah masyarakat urban Indonesia.*

Kata Kunci: *ISufisme; Neo-Sufisme; Islam Indonesia; Gerakan Keagamaan; Transformasi Sosial.*

Introduction

Sufi Islam has been a part and shaper of Indonesia's Islamic civilisation for centuries. Being one of the earliest syntheses of Islam to reach the archipelago, Sufism had significantly influenced the spiritual, social, and cultural lives of Indonesian Muslims. Divine love, humility, patience, and compassion, which were stressed by Sufism, blended easily with the local ethic of communal gathering and tolerability, generating a type of religiosity that was both deep and versatile. Traditionally, Sufi masters (*mashāyikh*) were spiritual teachers, cultural brokers, community leaders, and educators who conveyed Islam through wisdom, example, and discussion instead of force. Accordingly, Sufism became the core of the Indonesian Islam—a moral interior guide that directed faith, culture, and society for centuries.

But in the recent decades, the status of Sufi orders (*ṭarīqa*) and Sufistic practices would seem to have dramatically changed. For the better part of the twentieth century, Sufism was either identified with pesantren-based rural communities or deemed marginal to the mainstream religious discourse. With the rise of the modernist and reformist Islamic currents, with their appeal to rationality, textual authority, and puritanical reform, Sufism was frequently relegated to the backwoods, superstition-prone, or irrelevant to contemporary life. But that enduring impression is finally effacing. Today, Sufistic values and practices have undergone a stupendous revival and are growingly adopted even among the urban elite, educated professionals, and among the younger Muslims.

This renaissance mirrors a broader shift in the religion-consciousness of Indonesia. During times when fast-paced social transformation and spiritual disorientation have become commonplace, Sufism has re-emerged as a powerful source of meaning, moral direction, and interior

serenity. It can be observed in the increasing number of *majelis dzikir* (community remembrance meetings) and *majelis shalawat* (devotion chant assemblies) that gather thousands in mass metropolitan areas like Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya. It can be seen in the increased popularity of Sufi-influenced literature, poetry, and music that capture the spiritual aspirations of the contemporary spirit. And, finally, it can be seen in the increased social activism among Sufi orders in education, healthcare provision, environmental conservation, and drug recovery. These modes reflect that Sufism has transcended as an interior, personal experience into the exterior, socially constructive force.

This resumption of Sufism can also be seen as part of the wider process in contemporary Islamic thinking—commonly called Neo-Sufism. This name conveys that combination of the antique Sufi religiosity with contemporary social conscience. While still anchored in the inner practices of remembrance (*dhikr*), meditation (*murāqabah*), and moral purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), Neo-Sufism incorporates these with outward engagement in public life. No longer is the aim the salvation solely of the individual soul, but the moral and spiritual rebirth of human society. This combination enables Sufism to meet the ethical, psychological, and social crises of the contemporary world without sacrificing the metaphysical intensity that is characteristic of Sufism.

An outstanding illustration of this dynamic is the Qadiriyah–Naqshabandiyah Order around the Suryalaya Islamic Boarding School in West Java. Under visionary direction, the Sufi order has become a hub of social empowerment and reform. It has been a leader in initiatives such as the *Inābah* method—a faith-based method of drug reform—that aids in schools, health clinics, and training institutes in community development. They provide evidence that Sufism, far from being an escape from the affairs of the world, can be an ethical guide towards dealing with the salient human issues of our time. It proves that social progress and spirituality are not adversary forces, but rather, two facets of human flourishing.[1]

Evolution of Sufism as a heterodox spiritual movement into a vibrant force of social transformation betrays larger trends in the Islam of Indonesia as well. In the present day, Sufi fraternities are brought more and more into the national fold as champions of moderation, inclusiveness, and nonviolence. Their values focus on spiritual purification, self-restraint, and universal love, presenting a forceful antidote to the emergence of religious extremism and intolerance. By projecting talk, compassion, and the oneness of creation, Sufism presents a spiritual antidote to the divisive forces of contemporary society.[2]

In the Indonesian experience, the return of Sufism has also fortified the narrative of Islam Nusantara—a uniquely Indonesian expression of Islam that is derived from local culture, pluralism, and social harmony. The Sufi virtues of compassion (*maḥabbah*), peace (*salām*), humility (*tawaḍu'*), and respect for difference have always had a special resonance with the values of Indonesia's multicultural society. They have always been the moral foundation of Indonesia's multicultural coexistence, making Islam coexist peacefully with other faiths and traditions. Sufism, then, is not just a spiritual orientation; it is also a civilizational ethos that underpins the moral and cultural unity of the nation.[3]

In addition, the experience of urban Sufism demonstrates the potential for spiritual traditions to evolve creatively in new social contexts. In the midst of today's cities, whose lives are frequently characterised by pace, tension, and materialism, younger Muslims have looked toward Sufism as the way forward toward equilibrium and significance. Organisations like the Majelis Rasulullah in Jakarta have effectively converted the centuries-old devotional practices into mass spiritual festivals that accommodate contemporary sensibilities. They bring together group chanting, sermons, and socialisation, making the spaces where spiritual experience is no longer individual, exclusive, or isolated but communal, inclusive, and emotive. In the process, Sufism has spread beyond the areas in which it had traditionally existed—moving into universities, corporate saloons, and even cyberspace—closing the distance between the sacred past and the contemporary present.[4]

The digital revolution has sped up this shift further. In the form of online sermons, live-streamed *dhikir*, and Sufi-interest social networking sites, the mystical stream has discovered new ways of expression in cyberspace. The internet is transforming into a virtual *zawiyah*—a new meeting ground for spiritual seekers. In this internet *zawiyah*, Sufi teachings are disseminated not just by orthodox masters, but also by scholars, artists, and campaigner NGOs who interpret them anew in the light of contemporary challenges like mental ailments, environmental concern, and social activism. This mass popularisation of spiritual access is the new dawn breaking on the horizon of Sufism, one in which the spiritual path of the heart is brought home to all who seek meaning in a disconnected world.[5]

In this respect, the revived presence of Sufi Islam in Indonesia is more than a spiritual fashion; it is a deeper quest after authenticity and wholeness in a fragmented age. Modernity has yielded unparalleled progress as well as unprecedented psychological and moral crises. Speeded-up life, the commercialisation of relationships, and the dissipation of customary

values have rendered the spiritual lives of many people confused. In the midst of this situation, Sufism appears as a current in opposition—a warning that true progress is not outward conquest but inner renovation. The way of remembrance and humility provides what technological as well as economic advancement cannot provide: the breeding of interior peace, compassion, and moral awareness.

Spirituality's immediacy today cannot be overstated. As the human family struggles with ecological devastation, moral bankruptcy, and the isolation of hyper-connectivity, there is increasing recognition that the answers cannot be found through material advancements. What is required is the revivification of the spirit—a spiritual intelligence that informs action with compassion and discernment. Sufism, with its integrated imagination of the human being, is a path towards such revival. It is a learning that faith is not limited by ritualism but is a dynamic relation with the Divine, revealed through compassion, justice, and service towards others.

This paper is composed of what is needed. It aims to analyse the way the reviving Sufi Islam in Indonesia is part of a broader process of spiritual and social change. It wants to know how a previously discounted periphery has returned as a centre force that defines religious thinking, public morals, and cultural identity. In the book, the historical process wants not just to be traced, but, more importantly, is interpreted as part of their actual relevance nowadays—illuminating the way the timeless wisdom of Sufism still directs the human heart through the vulnerabilities of the contemporary world.

Finally, this article is the product of the belief that the spirit still is critical to the survival of human civilisation. At a time when religion is politicised or enshrined as dogma, Sufism is a reminder that religion's highest goal is the inculcation of love, humility, and peace. Indonesia's renewed Sufi Islam, then, is not just any new chapter in religion, but a tribute to the timelessly powerful capability of the spirit to renew itself—to illuminate areas of confusion, and heal areas of strife. In this book, the reader is invited to bear witness that renewal and consider further how the mystical path still infuses the very heart of contemporary Islam, and, indeed, the very soul of humanity.

This study applies the qualitative method and, library research method. This method has the overriding goal of holistically knowing the phenomenon that is the revival of Sufi Islam in Indonesia through the interpretation of multiple written sources. The study is not conducted through field data collection, but through reading, reviewing, and critically examining literature that is pertinent to the subject of the study.

Data utilised in this work include academic journals and textbooks, both national and foreign. All the sources were meticulously chosen on the basis that they are relevant thematically, academically sound, and recent. Journals utilised were fetched through credible academic databases like SINTA, DOAJ, Garuda, and Google Scholar.

Marginalisation of Sufism

Marginalisation of Sufism in the contemporary discourse on Islam in Indonesia is a multifaceted process that is the product of the meeting ground between Islamic purification movements and Islamic modernism. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Muhammadiyah and Persatuan Islam (Persis) have characterised Sufism and *ṭarīqa* (Sufi fraternities) as unscientific, irrational religion, deviant in nature. It is because these perceptions are based on the belief that Sufism is ridden with superstitions, innovation (*bidʿah*), and *bidʿah*-ridden and weakly textual religion as far as the Qur'an and Hadith are concerned. As a result, Sufism and *ṭarīqa* have been the target of earnest ideological squeeze in formal Islamic studies, Islamic media, and even government-funded Islamic institutions. Sufism was excluded from the curriculum of contemporary madrasas and linked with "village Islam" or customary practices that were incompatible with the rationalist spirit of Islamic reform. The reformist endeavour, therefore, encouraged a paradigm of religiosity focused on textual literalism, rational interpretation, and social activism, frequently at the expense of mystical experience and spiritual formation.

Budi Rahman Hakim points out that such marginalisation did not occur solely under the influence of modernist pressure, but also through epistemological dismantling of spirituality on the part of reformist groups. He elaborates on a shift in Islamic epistemology—by one that previously balanced the esoteric (inner) and exoteric (outer) levels—a shift towards domination by legalistic and scripturalist exotericism. But Hakim asserts that all ṭarīqa did not sit back under such pressures. For example, the Qadiriyah–Naqshabandiyah Order in Suryalaya, Indonesia, accommodated through actualisation toward Neo-Sufism, through the integration of Sufi values into social programs like drug rehabilitation (*inābah*), character education, and community service. In this way, the example illustrates that Sufism could thrive under contemporary social conditions without losing the substance of its teachings.[6]

The Suryalaya affair is representative of the larger tendency under which Sufism, far from retreating into seclusion, reconfigures the meaning of the

ethical and transforming force that society needs. It demonstrates that Sufi religiosity is compatible with the contemporary project, providing a moral check on the rationalist model of reformist Islam. Here, Sufism serves at the same time as a spiritual asylum as well as resistance, saving the human aspect of belief as institutional rationalisation presses on.

Meanwhile, the marginalisation of Sufism cannot be disconnected from the colonial and postcolonial evolution that configured religious power in Indonesia. The contemporary state, by the logic of bureaucratic rationality, had the tendency to favour formal, standardised Islam over mystical traditions as informal or folkloric. Consequently, Sufi networks that had previously existed as independent bastions of learning as well as social solidarities came under growing regulation or marginalisation on the part of reformist rhetoric as well as the policies of the state.

However, Sufism persisted as a dynamic undercurrent among Indonesian Muslims. In spite of non-inclusion in the institutional power structures, Sufi activities like dzikr, maulid, and spiritual guidance found a pivotal position in the lives of the people. They persisted in conveying ethical values—patience, sincerity, compassion—that underlay everyday piety and social cohesion. For most believers, Sufism offered not just the way towards personal transcendence, but also a moral orientation towards accommodation to social and cultural change.

This continuity over the past decades has allowed Sufism, in recent decades, to resurface as a point of spiritual regeneration and intellectual introspection. As our contemporary civilisation suffers moral dislocation, consumerism, and psychological burnout, the principles of Sufism are again being found as an inner equilibrium and moral resistance. Instead of being outdated, Sufism presents a humanist alternative to the challenges of modernity through the reunification of faith with compassion, collectivity, and conscience of the Divine.

Finally, the marginalisation of Sufism in contemporary Indonesian Islam cannot be understood as a narrative of descent, but as a process of mutation. Dethroned from institutional religious authority, Sufism has been resilient—forming moral imagination and social ethics under the radar of institutional religion. Its survival, accommodation, and unobtrusive persistence show that the spiritual centre of Islam in Indonesia still pounds vigorously, cautioning the contemporary world that true progress entails not just knowledge and reform, but remembrance, humility, and love.

Such marginalisation was also seen by Julia Howell, a renowned foreign scholar who has systematically and continuously tracked the development history of Sufism in the countries of Southeast Asia. She uncovered that

such marginalisation not only originates from the Muslim community itself, but also comes from Western scholarly methods that commonly perceive ṭarīqa as local, mystical, unchanging, and culturally retarded formations, isolated from the domain of rational discourse as well as social progress. As Howell says, Sufism is under the process of deep epistemic erasure that originates from the lasting belief that mystical spiritualism, reason, and modernity are incompatible fields of thinking. She defines such a situation as one such as the process of "two times marginalisation": inwardly, from Muslims who seek purification legally on behalf of the orthodoxy, outwardly, from scholars who cannot see the intellectual dynamism, adaptive history, ethical richness, as well as the reformist social potentiality of Sufism across the Muslim societies in the contemporary world.[7]

However, in popular culture, the values of Sufism have endured as well as undergone a symbolic renaissance. According to Knauth, Sufism still flourishes through popular cultural forms. Shalawat and faith-based music lyrics issued by such icons as Emha Ainun Nadjib (Cak Nun) and Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym) express Sufi values like love, forbearance, and coexistence. In the words of Knauth, that is a cultural re-embedding process in which Sufism is reintroduced into public sites through user-friendly cultural conduits, particularly among the youth. This indicates that Sufism is not passé, but rather has evolved via more adaptive mass media.[8] Through artistic and musical expressions, Sufism endures as an inclusive and adaptive form of religiosity in contemporary culture.

Yuyun Wahyuni, in her research, confirms the significant function of the pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) as the final stronghold of Sufism in Indonesia. She observes that even though they have had to contend with curricula in formal education stressing scripturalism, a number of the pesantren have persisted in the Sufi practices like collective *dhikr*, litany (*wirid*), and *tawajjuh* in the education of their students. Some of the pesantren combine the education with the enhancement of interior spirituality, and the students that they produce are both religious and contemplative. In this regard, the pesantrens are not just learning institutions, but societies that pass on the Sufi moral values across the generations.[9] This illustrates how pesantren successfully merge Sufi traditions with modern educational demands, strengthening Sufism's resilience in contemporary Indonesian Islam.

At the same time, Dudung Abdurahman highlights character education in tarekat teachings. He stresses that Sufi values such as humility (*tawadhu*'), sincerity (*ikhlās*), and patience (*ṣabr*) contributed immensely

to the development of public ethics among Indonesian Muslims. He insists that when Sufism is not incorporated into education, society loses not just spiritual depth but also an ethical system that is necessary for sentiment-based society relationships. Vertically, tarekat in the past also cultivated relationships with God, while horizontally, they also fostered relationships among people, as witnessed in the Sufi society organisational structure.[10] Therefore, marginalising Sufism entails the loss of both spiritual and ethical foundations in Muslim society.

As the foregoing discourse, it is clear that Sufism's marginalization is more a function of ideological rhetoric rather than an absolute social reality. While it has been relegated to the fringes of the formal Islamic discourse, Sufism still exists in new guises—through structural transformations in pesantren, sociocultural reformation by tarekat, and injections of spiritual values into mass cultural arenas.

The Transformation of Tarekat and New Social Spaces

Evolving *tarekat* (Sufi orders) in Indonesia for the last two decades is a new development in Nusantara Sufism's history. Previously identified with elitist *dhikr* (remembrance of God), asceticism, and reclusion, tarekat is now a socially engaged being that is formative for participatory spheres in education, economy, da'wa, and culture. It signifies that Sufism is in no way static—it enjoys a great deal of flexibility in facing the tests of modernity.

Budi Rahman Hakim accounts for such a change in terms of Neo-Sufism, a resurgence of Sufi spirituality that combines old-world religiosity with a transformative mission for society to respond to contemporary crises. In his case study of the Qadiriyah–Naqshabandiyah (TQN) Order in the Suryalaya pesantren, Hakim highlights that such a movement has institutionalised spiritual values in the form of the establishment of diverse social programs, such as the Inabah rehabilitation clinic for drug patients, community health units, Sufi-focused schools, and cooperative economics. Such efforts demonstrate that spiritual values such as *dhikr, ṣabr* (patience), and *zuhd* (asceticism), rather than being modes of withdrawal, form bases of ethics in terms of empowering society, moral formation, and communal well-being in contemporary Indonesia.[11]

Furthermore, tarekat outreach methodologies have grown more prominent through their ingenious applications of new media, fortification of teaching infrastructure, and involvement in civil society

networks. These trends reflect that Sufi orders in contemporary times no longer operate solely in the realm of old-world religious spaces but rather actively seek newer communication instruments and institutional apparatuses in order to grow their social catchment. Zainurofieq spotlights the region of Tasikmalaya's Idrisiyyah Order as a peculiar example of such evolution, as it illustrates how Sufism can combine spirituality with community-based economic entrepreneurship. While larger, more centralised Sufi organisations operate on a macroeconomic model based on the assigning of spiritual value, the Idrisiyyah Order centres on a microeconomic model based on spiritual value, developing what Zainurofieq terms a "Sufi economic guerrilla movement.".[12]

This principle is not only rhetorical but is realised through practical and viable economic projects, for example, the formation of member-owned cooperatives, organic farming schemes, herbal medical centres, and entrepreneurship training schemes to develop the *jamā'ah* (followers). These activities value Sufi entrepreneurship, motivating members to engage in livelihood activities based on Sufi values, including honesty, simplicity, and community responsibility. Through these activities, the community of the Idrisiyyah was able to develop an autonomous and viable economic network that is viable for spiritual as well as material well-being.

Additionally, such Sufi-oriented economic activism is also a moral opposition to the hegemony of world capitalism, much of the time prioritising money-making over human well-being. In that sense, the Idrisiyyah model shows that spirituality can also represent an alternate prism of sustainable development, marrying faith, ethics, and economic justice in a common sense of socialism.

The evolving face of tarekat is also revealed in its active engagement with urban public life. As an illustration, the Shiddiqiyyah Order is not exclusively concerned with dhikr but also with nationalism and civic duty. Through the case study of the Shiddiqiyyah Order, Ahmadi reveals that tarekat evolution goes beyond the realms of economy and schooling to the ideological and political realm. He examines in what ways Shiddiqiyyah teachings entail nationalistic sentiment through the principle of the "*ḥubb al-waṭan min al-imān*" (fiction of love for the homeland is of faith). Here, the tarekat is more than a site of remembrance — it becomes a site for creating religious national identity. The order is then a force of culture aligning with the Islam Nusantara

discourse, with all that it underscores, including unity, toleration, and patriotism.[13]

No less significant, Budiman Mahmud Musthofa also notes the important contribution of Sufism to the creative economy of Indonesia, as it shows that spiritual values need not displace but rather complement and strengthen the contemporary cultural industry. Saung Angklung Udjo in Bandung is an interesting example of such a combination. Begun on grounds as deep as Sufi moral values of such things as harmony, humility, and service to mankind, the institution combines traditional music, teaching, and spirituality in a unitary format of cultural sustainability. The Sufi culture that the founding family inherited from their forefathers not only informs their strategy of preserving Sundanese culture but also their purpose of utilising culture as a tool of moral instruction as well as community empowerment.

By means of its artistic education, training for performances, and spiritual tourism, Saung Angklung Udjo becomes a cultural centre more than in name—it becomes a vivid realisation of Sufi principles in the terms of creativity and of commerce. Intercultural dialogue is fostered by the organisation, ethical entrepreneurship among artists is encouraged, and a communal sense of responsibility is inspired by cultural involvement. The tarekat and the Sufism, in such a manner thus operate as the invisible spiritual text supporting an inclusive, educational, as well as globally competitive, popular culture.[14] This example affirms that Sufism endures not merely as a ritual practice but as a transformative cultural force capable of engaging with and enriching the realities of modern life.

Also, Wildan Sena Utama examines the evolution of Sufi praxis into being a constituent of a new spiritual life among the urbane, with an emphasis on the manner in which spirituality in Indonesia's post–New Order society has become a consumable and symbolic commodity. While, in the estimation of Utama, the Muslim middle class's exponential rise saw the decline of materialistic desire in favour of a search for spiritual significance and emotional contentment, such a shift also signifies a larger sociocultural trend in which spirituality, from being limited to ritual and isolated devotion, is being voiced in pretty much mundane aesthetics as well as consumable decisions.

Sufism, in contemporary urban settings, was reimagined as a "spiritual lifestyle" that combines religio-identity with contemporary

consumptive modes. It is witnessed through rising popularity in modest fashion brands based on Sufi symbolism, organic and moral food economies, and online sites providing dhikr software, self-healing radio, and online *majelis* (spiritual events). These all bring spirituality into wider realms of people while enabling individuals to express religiosity through visible, personalised, and socially mediated modes.[15] Utama refers to this phenomenon as the "commodification of spirituality," a double-edged process that both risks superficiality and enables the democratisation of Sufi ethics. Even when filtered through consumer culture, these new modes of spiritual expression help embed Sufi values—such as mindfulness, compassion, and sincerity—within the rhythm of modern urban life

In conclusion, the transformation of tarekat and Sufism in Indonesia represents far more than a mere symbolic adaptation to modernity—it signifies a profound social, cultural, and epistemic expansion of Islamic spirituality in the contemporary era. The evolution of Sufi orders has allowed them to transcend their traditional roles as exclusive centres of spiritual retreat, positioning them instead as dynamic agents of social transformation. Today, tarekat no longer operates solely within the confines of spiritual instruction or ritual practice; they have entered public arenas—engaging in education, welfare initiatives, environmental stewardship, and digital outreach.

This evolution illustrates Sufism's extraordinary ability to transcend the sacred and the social, combining time-transcending spiritual insight with the practical imperatives of contemporary life. Community-oriented initiatives, dialogue among religions, and social entrepreneurship all help Sufi networks build a more inclusive, moral, and compassionate civil society. Additionally, the involvement of Sufi authorities in public forums and national debate attests that Sufism reasserted its role as both moral guide and intellectual voice in Indonesian Islam.

Finally, such evolution signals a new Sufi renaissance that reimagines spirituality as a dynamic, operative player in Indonesia's common destiny. Sufism thereby emerges not as a forerunner of bygone days, but as an effervescent moral and cultural template for developing harmony, justice, and spiritual richness in a more complex world.

Digital Sufism and the Construction of Contemporary Discourse

The development of digital technology has rewritten the fabric

of religious experience in Indonesia, including the narration of Sufi activities. Once familiar through localised and ritualistic practitioners, Sufism has acquired new modes through social media, mobile applications, YouTube channels, and online sites. This shift entails not only new modes of religious spread (*da'wah*) but also reconfigures societal notions of spirituality, religious authority, and religiosity in public life.

Technological advances have fundamentally transformed the manner in which Muslims access, interpret, and communicate religious teachings—even in Sufi contexts. Rituals that were secluded in personal rites, such as public dhikr in pesantren or Sufi groups, have transferred into large and open virtual spheres. The process signals more than just a novelty in religious media, but an epistemological move for the reimagining of their religio-identity by urban Muslim communities.

Budi Rahman Hakim highlights that Neo-Sufism in the age of digitisation allows Sufi values of empathy, service to society, and spiritual healing to interact with contemporary welfare strategies. In the case of Indonesian Muslim social workers, Sufism in the digital age becomes a tool for service delivery in the form of healthcare, campaigns of donations, and creating social empathy through shared and affordable online technologies.[16] Hakim terms this phenomenon "digital spiritual activism," in which the Sufi values of *iḥsan* (excellence) and *raḥmah* (mercy) are internalised into contemporary social movements that transcend class and communal boundaries.

In his case study of Qadiriyah–Naqshabandiyah Order of Suryalaya, Taufik observes that the mass media is being used for both internal communications among members as well as for consolidating the outside spiritual power of the *murshid* (spiritual guide). Official sites, Instagram, and YouTube channels are used as channels for broadcasting sermons, routines of dhikr, as well as social activities.[17] This reflects a shift from exclusive scholarly authority—limited to direct disciples—to an open form of authority accessible to broader audiences online. According to Taufik, this opens up new possibilities for digital-based cadre development within the tarekat.

Zamhari's paper sheds light on the Sufism of cities' dynamic phenomenon by studying the Nurul Mustafa Dhikr Assembly, a development that adeptly blends classic spirituality with contemporary cultural form. By embracing the aesthetics and parlance of popular

culture—in the form of Islamic musicals, rhythmic recitations, poetic renditions, and stage designs that maximally capture stages' visual imaginations—the assembly, with great effectiveness, re-contextualised Sufi devotion for the contemporary age of digitisation and cities. This new strategy allows for spiritual interaction that strongly resonates among young, media-conscious people, enabling them to experience Islam's mystical realms while neither being estranged by hard-and-fast or exclusive religio-structural frames.[18]

By fusing creativity with dhikr, Nurul Mustafa Dhikr Assembly bridges sacred and secular in bridging the sacred and the secular, and makes dhikr, or remembrance of God, into a community-based and affective experience that is attuned with the pulse of life in the city. Relating *dhikr* as "spiritual concerts" allows them to experience transcendence in a sense through communally felt joy, sounds, and motions—making spirituality into an available, celebratory, and inclusive experience.

It shows that Sufism is capable of co-existing with the entertainment rationale of the contemporary world, not as a dilution of the faith but as a survival strategy that maximises its range and pertinence. Sufism, embracing cultural creativity, still manages to present spiritual profundity in modes that relate to the sense of aesthetics and emotions of the contemporary generation.

In her perceptive sociological study, Nurani examines Sufism's symbolic reappropriation in the domain of popular culture in the formation of present-day piety among Muslim millennials in cities. This evolution is most apparent in the evolution of the hijrah movement, the development of fashion industries of religion, and the spread of spiritual lifestyle trends that inject Sufi consciousness into mundane practice in daily life. Sufism is no longer relegated to spiritual introspection or the classic ritual ground but is increasingly understood as a cultural brand—an ethos of living that fuses inner religiosity with external aesthetics.[19]

Nurani notes that Islamic fashion lines, workshops on dzikr-based self-healing, and online "Islamic wellness" applications like mindfulness applications and guided programs of *dhikr* as a form of prayer have taken Sufi spirituality as a sellable and identifiable brand. The new religiosity makes Sufi-inspired values of balance, sincerity, and calmness available in the larger cultural economy of cities, tending to consumers who need

spiritual significance as well as contemporary expressions of the self.

In such a context, Sufism is no longer limited to contemplative withdrawal or the search for transcendental communion with God, but becomes an everyday practical ethics—shaping how people dress modestly with fashion sense, utter softly, manage feelings, and create sympathetically based social relations. Sufism in popular culture, in such a sense, marks not an escape from, but an imaginative realisation of, spirituality in the beats and aspirations of everyday modern city life.

In his detailed study, Luthfi Makhasin foregrounds the epistemic resistance embodied in the emergence of digital Sufism as a theological as well as socio-cultural development, which challenges the predominance of strict, conservatively-minded religious talk online. As he observes, Sufi brotherhoods like the Naqshabandiyah Haqqani Order have adoptingly taken to digital technologies, especially YouTube channels, blogs, podcasts, and social networks, as vehicles of promulgating messages of moderation, mercy, and spiritual inclusiveness. By means of such digital activism, Sufism positions itself as a living counter-narrative to digital Salafism and other exclusivist visions of Islam that frequently flourish in algorithmic echo chambers.[20]

Makhasin conceptualises the phenomenon as a "Sufistic counter-public"—a virtual spiritual and intellectual space where competing Islamic discourses are democratised and grown. In such an online space, Sufi practitioners and intellectuals promote interfaith dialogue, mutual respect, and the search for inner peace as key pillars of Islamic practice. Not only is the online existence of such tarekat rejuvenating the public perception of Sufism, but it also makes Sufism a transnational movement that is no longer bound by geographical as well as sectarian boundaries.

In doing so, virtual Sufism reasserts spiritual power from the grip of orthodoxy and reinterprets Islam's public face as being based on love, tolerance, and cognitive pluralism, in effect creating cyberspace as a contemporary venue for spiritual resistance and renaissance. Considering these works as a whole, they illustrate that virtual Sufism is more than some kind of evolutionary or survivance strategy in the fast-paced world of technological change—the latter marks a deep epistemological shift that redelineates the Sufi contribution to contemporary Islamic thought. No longer relegated to the sidelines of religio-intellectual discourse, Sufism reemerges as a key spiritual and intellectual vector that is in a position to address present-day constituencies by means of virtual sites that combine

tradition with novelty.

New spiritual ground, digital media is where Sufi values – as mercy, modesty, remembrance (dhikr), and purification of the self – are expressed in modes that make sense for an interconnected, visual world in the contemporary age. In messages through podcast, YouTube sermon, online dhikr gathering, and online Sufi communities, Sufism disregards geographical distance and builds horizontal connections of faith and knowledge, making it possible for people of multiple backgrounds to participate in spiritual experiences previously limited to embodied lodges (zawiyahs) or pesantren.

This reimagining shifts religious knowledge from textual dogmatism to operable spirituality, prioritising direct experience with the divine rather than strict dogmatic conformity. In doing so, online Sufism democratizes access to the spiritual, creating inclusivity and humanistic interaction. Online sites consequently become new mihrabs of the modern age—protected yet efficacious arenas by which Sufism reconsorts, as a dynamic, interactive entity, the moral and affectual landscape of the contemporary Islamic world.

Sufism as Social and Cultural Capital

Sufism in Indonesia is more than a spiritual practice among individuals; it has become a kind of social as well as cultural capital that determines interactional patterns, social coherence, and moral orientation in society. Through the organisational networks of *tarekat* and *tasawuf* teachings, values such as truthfulness (*ṣidq*), modesty (*tawaḍu'*), reciprocity of cooperation (*gotong royong*), and patience (*ṣabr*) created deep social connections at both community and beyond-community levels.

The social capital created by tarekat networks has bred solidarity, generic trust, and a public ethic operating outside of formal juridical frameworks. This reinforces tarekat as cultural agents in value reproduction, ideological insubordination, and the fashioning of spiritually based communities.

Budi Rahman Hakim shows here that with Abah Sepuh as leader, the Qadiriyah Naqshabandiyah Sufism was more than a personal devotional experience but a redemptive social movement. In colonial times, such a tarekat had a significant role in developing nationalism through spiritual activism and political and probational involvements.[21] In his later writings, Hakim elaborates the concept of Neo-Sufism as an "ethic of development," wherein Sufi values underpinned social transformation and character building during Indonesia's New Order era.[22] He notes that during this period, the Suryalaya tarekat initiated spiritually based drug rehabilitation

programs (*inābah*), moral education in modern pesantren, and religious training focused on character formation—demonstrating that Sufism is not a passive heritage, but an adaptive ethical system within contemporary socio-political contexts.

The function of tarekat in developing alternative structures of economics based on spiritual ethics is also remarkable. It is manifest in Syakur's study of the Shiddiqiyyah Order, which created an autonomous economic system with a foundation in cooperatives, communal farming, and spiritual training in entrepreneurship. The term "productive *zuhd*" (asceticism) is implemented to denote an economic ethos that eschews materialistic capitalism but foregrounds social obligation and economic justice. It is a combination of spirituality with productivity that works well in developing economic resilience in Sufi communities.

In local culture, Abdul sheds light on the deep significance of tarekat communities in Lombok as the keeper of a philosophical, dialogical, and culture-instituted Islam. It is revealed through the study that such Sufi communities operate not just as devotional religious communities committed to dhikr or ritual prayer but as sites of symbolic as well as moral production, where theology, folk culture, and community morals meet. In the communities, the doctrine of divine love, patience, and humility is expressed with local arts, oral narration, and common rituals that combine Islamic spirituality with native cultural identity.[23]

In multireligious and multiethnic Lombok, such Sufi communities also act as mediating agents of dialogue and peace. Interethnic solidarity among Sasak Muslims, Balinese Hindus, and local communities is fostered through common ethical values and cooperation through their tarekat. Their stress on tolerance, consultative democracy or *musyawarah*, and mercy or *rahmah* make it a practical guide to resolving conflicts and coexistence. These values give a moral grammar that is beyond sectarian divides and fortifies communal harmony. By passing on Sufi ethics in school curricula, through cultural pageants, as well as in community functions, the Lombok tarekat epam for Islam that is highly spiritual but also socially responsive ensures that religion still operates as a fount of wisdom, of identity, as well as of unity in a world that is more divided.

Rizqa Ahmadi's study offers a persuasive description of the Shiddiqiyyah Order as it adeptly intertwines nationalism, religiosity, and Javanese cultural identity in an integrated Sufi system. Sufism is not framed as some sort of abstract or exclusively ascetic endeavour, but rather spiritual teachings of the order are inscribed in local culture's cadences—via indigenous Javanese arts, ritual performances, and ideas such as *manunggaling kawula Gusti*

(unifying of the servant and the Divine). These idioms of culture are not symbolic functions per se but rather through them Islamic teachings find purchase and localising, whereby spirituality becomes relevant as well as proximal to the community at large.[24]

The Shiddiqiyyah Order also incorporates nationalist feelings into its spiritual discourse, heightening the Sufi aphorism *ḥubb al-waṭan min al-imān*. This strategy evacuates the tarekat from being an isolated or fixed institution and turns it into an ideological and moral conduit between Islam and Indonesian identity, advocating a kind of religiosity that is both pluralistic and patriotic. In so doing, the Shiddiqiyyah Order shows that tarekat need not be fixed or isolated entities but rather dynamic cultural forces, open to formulating collective ideologies that respond to the changing imperatives of nationhood, social communion, and cultural sincerity in contemporary Indonesia

The research by Mustofa broadens the conceptual portrayal of Sufism by highlighting the gender-inclusive and culture-transformative facets of the phenomenon, more particularly through the surging figure of female *murshidah*. In a religious environment long controlled by patriarchal authority, the emergence of females as spiritual guides through Sufi orders constitutes a dramatic shift in both theology and sociological workings of Islamic spirituality. Mustofa's research shows that these females do not occupy token positions of ceremonial but rather take active roles in leadership, pedagogy, decision-making, and community guidance, projecting a living example of gender-balanced spirituality.[25]

These women leaders tend to reinterpret fundamental Sufi values—like *mahabbah*, *tawadhu'*, and *sabr*—in a manner that prioritises balance, empathy, and compassion instead of power or mastery. By creating open spaces in which men and women can seek spiritual development, they break patriarchal taboos that have long limited the religious involvement of females. As much as they embody their spiritual mission, *murshidah* also function as cultural refuges of defiance, upholding the spiritual rights of females and embodying alternative models of power based on care and moral fibre. In that sense, Mustofa's research opens up the possibility that Sufism can become a transformative cultural site, one that cultivates gender justice, human dignity, and egalitarian leadership, redefining spiritual power in contemporary Islam.

These results, when combined, highlight that Sufism in Indonesia moves beyond the classical function of a personal pursuit of spiritual purification, developing instead as a communal power of social change and cultural fortitude. Gone is the distance to being limited to the inner

search for spiritual perfection, Sufism operates nowadays as a bank of social Capital—an active circuit of trustworthiness, collaboration, and common moral principles that connect communities through various ethnic and local settings. Its moral discourse—focused on sincerity, humility, patience, and love–is finally implemented in practical social actions that contribute to mutual assistance, community well-being, and intersocial coexistence.

Sufi networks also became the source of competing models of economics based on spiritual values, in which productivity and profit were offset by compassion and corporate responsibility. In such blending of religion and social life, Sufism helps create a particular sense of cultural identity—an identity that celebrates harmony more than conflict, dialogue more than domination, cooperation more than competition. It offers moral leadership that especially appeals to Indonesia's plural society, enshrining values of tolerance, justice, and human dignity.

To that end, Sufism became a moral and cultural spine of the nation—fostering an ideal of religiosity that is inclusive, morally based, and highly human, moulding Indonesia into a society that tries as much as it hopes to be not only devout but also fair, kind, and civilized.

Conclusion

Sufi Islam is currently experiencing a powerful and dynamic resurgence in Indonesia. It's gone from being a marginalised spiritual tradition to holding a central position in the country's religious, social, and cultural life. Essentially, Sufism didn't just survive the critiques from more modernist or reformist Islamic groups—it reinvented itself through smart, adaptive strategies, both within its organisational structure and its public image.

This transformation is evident in four key areas that prove its modern relevance. First, it adopted a Neo-Sufism model, where orders like the Qadiriyah–Naqshabandiyah Suryalaya successfully blend deep spiritual practice with practical social services and community development. Second, Sufi orders (*tarekat*) have expanded their reach far beyond the mosque, getting involved in crucial sectors like education, economics, and digital media, positioning them as progressive and inclusive religious actors. Third, the rise of Digital and Urban Sufism has successfully bridged the gap between traditional spirituality and the needs of modern city life. YouTube channels, mobile apps, and massive *dhikr* gatherings have become new, contextual platforms for sharing Sufi values.

Ultimately, the resurgence of Sufism in Indonesia is far more than just a spiritual trend; it's a profound social and cultural process. By solidifying its position as social and cultural capital, Sufism actively contributes to public

ethics, national solidarity, and the successful integration of Islamic values with local Indonesian culture. It has proven to be a vital moral and social force, one that is not only capable of adapting to contemporary challenges but also serves as a crucial pillar in promoting a moderate, peaceful, and contextually grounded Islam in present-day Indonesia.

Endnotes

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