
Chapter Title: Sufism and Modern Muslim Ethics in 14th/20th Century Russian Islamic Thought

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Book Title: Mysticism and Ethics in Islam

Book Editor(s): Bilal Orfali, Atif Khalil, and Mohammed Rustom

URL: <https://www.aub.edu.lb/aubpress/Pages/Mysticism-and-Ethics-in-Islam.aspx>



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SUFISM AND MODERN MUSLIM ETHICS IN 14TH/20TH CENTURY RUSSIAN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

Leila Almazova

The first Russian Revolution of 1905 opened a whole set of new opportunities for different segments of society. For the first time in Imperial Russia, ten million Muslims received the right to establish religiously or ethnically based institutions, such as political parties, print media, and different social and cultural associations.¹ Wide discussions were initiated about reform of the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly (est. in 1789)² and issues related to native languages.³ The key point of all these debates was the question of educational reform.⁴ It is noteworthy that this theme concerned a very wide range of problems, including the proportion of religious vs. secular subjects in the *maktab* and *madrasa* curricula, the content of

1. The vast majority of Imperial Muslims were Turkic-speaking (82%), followed by speakers of Caucasian languages (14%), and of Persianate languages (4%). These estimates by the author are based on data published in the book *On the Eve of the All-Russian Census. An Alphabetical List of Peoples Living in the Russian Empire* (Saint-Petersburg: Office of the Committee of Ministers, 1895).

2. Catherine the Great (1729–1796) established this institution in 1789 with the goal of gaining control over the Muslim population.

3. The Turkic-speaking population of the Volga region, Siberia, and the Urals played a leading role in the discussion of public issues. The language (Volga-Ural Tatar) that had developed by the beginning of the twentieth century in this geographical area was understood by a vast majority of the Muslim population of the Russian Empire: Azerbaijanis, Bashkirs, Kazakhs, Karachais, Crimean Tatars, Kumyks, Nogays, Tatars, Uzbeks, and other Turkic-speaking peoples. In general, up to the twentieth century, Russians commonly called all these peoples Tatars. M. Z. Zakiev, *Deep Roots of the Turkic Nations* (Astana: Kantata Press, 2011).

4. The topic of education and upbringing was the main theme in the newborn Muslim press. For example, the popular magazine *Shura* (Assembly), published in Tatar from 1908–1917, had the obligatory section “Upbringing and Education” (*Tarbiya va Taglim*); each of the 240 issues featured several articles on the issue of educational reform. Over just ten years, at least eighty articles on education were published. D. Brileva, “Public Discussions on Social Reform in the Tatar Press (based on the materials in the *Shura* magazine, 1908–1917)” (PhD thesis, Kazan Federal University, 2012).

courses, the production of new textbooks, reinterpretation of traditional concepts of Muslim theology (*kalam*) and Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), and many others.⁵ The discussion on education represented a sort of mirror that reflected all of the social problems and issues of the time.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Russian Muslims had two competing systems of education: “Qadimist” and “Jadidist.” The first drew its name from the Arabic word ‘*qadīm*’ (old), and the second from the Arabic ‘*jadīd*’ (new). The Qadimist system, traditionally common in the Muslim world, included two levels of education—the *maktab/kuttab* and the *madrasa*.

Maktab-based schools were established in the Islamic world by the ninth and tenth centuries. A limited range of subjects were taught in maktab⁶ that usually concentrated on reading and memorizing the Quran. Their main task was to teach children to read, write, and calculate numbers as well as to accustom them to discipline and obedience.

The development of the *madrasa* system began in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and then quickly spread throughout the Muslim world.⁷ The subjects taught in the *madrasa* were divided into two categories: ‘*ulūm naqliyya* (knowledge of tradition transmitted in writing or orally), and ‘*ulūm ‘aqliyya* (the rational sciences). The range of traditional knowledge included theology (*tawhīd/‘aqā’id*), Islamic Law (*fiqh*), interpretation of the Quran (*tafsīr*), recitation of the Quran (*qirā’at*), sayings of the Prophet (*hadīth*), and Arabic (*al-lughā*). The rational sciences consisted of grammar (*naḥw*), logic (*manṭiq*), mathematics (*ḥisāb*), medicine (*ṭibb*), philosophy (*falsafa*), and rhetoric (*balāgha*).⁸ Given the wide range of topics considered in the classical curriculum, an education in a *madrasa* could take from four to twenty years.

The traditional (Qadimist) educational system by the 19th century no longer met the needs of the society. The military, economic, and intellectual superiority of the West had grown. It became obvious for every Muslim country’s political and intellectual elites that the previous system of education did not train the professionals needed for the development of Islamic communities. They therefore started preparing their own “response” to this civilizational challenge.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, as part of its modernization process, Turkey began to implement European educational standards.⁹

5. This chapter will use two different systems of transliteration: one for the Arabic-based content and one for Tatar. The latter is simpler and does not have any additional symbols except for the ‘*ayn* and *hamza*.

6. E. Hassim, *Elementary Education and Motivation in Islam. Perspectives of Medieval Muslim Scholars 750–1400 CE* (New York: Cambria Press, 2010), 41.

7. The expansion of the caliphate required a large number of literate people. Ibn Haukal (d. 988), a geographer and tenth-century traveller, counted 300 teachers/*kuttabs* alone in the city of al-Madina/Palermo. It was called al-Madina during the Muslim period of Sicily (827–1091). A. Shalaby, *History of Islamic Education* (Karachi: Indus Publications, 1979), 22.

8. Bradley J. Cook (ed.), *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought. A Compendium of Parallel English-Arabic Texts* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2010), xx.

9. The Military Medical School was opened in 1827. The *Musika-i Humaiyun Mektebi* (School of Music) was opened in 1831 to provide the army with drummers and trumpeters. The School of Military Surgeons was established in 1832, the Military Command School (*Harbiye*) in 1834, and the Law School in 1837. L. Wolff, *The Singing Turk* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016), 361.

Reforms such as the Arab Renaissance (*al-Nahḍa*) in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon rapidly gained attention throughout the Muslim world, and seekers of knowledge (*shakird*) from the Russian Empire subsequently changed their usual education practices. In the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, their scholars generally had studied at the traditional *madrasas* of Bukhara and Samarkand. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the *madrasas* of Istanbul and Cairo had replaced those of Bukhara and Samarkand in popularity. For example, the renowned Tatar theologian and journalist Musa Bigiev studied in Turkey, India, Syria, and Egypt in addition to studying at the *madrasa* in Bukhara.¹⁰ Zakir Kadyry, a famous Tatar scholar, *mudarris*,¹¹ and journalist, studied in the educational centers of Bukhara, Mecca, Istanbul, and Cairo.¹² Ziyaaddin Kamali, a philosopher and director of the High Muslim *Madrasa* “Galiya” (1906–1919/Ufa), studied in Turkey and Egypt. These scholars of the early twentieth century led educational reforms in the Russian Empire.

Muslim society in Russia did not have the same resources as the other more or less independent Muslim States, so it was forced to reform its educational systems solely within the means of local religious communities (*maḥalla*).¹³ Russian Muslim intellectuals followed Ismail Bey Gasprinsky (Gasprali) in the development of the *Jadid* system. Gasprinsky, in 1884, established a first New Method school in Bahchysarai (Crimea), where teaching was conducted in Crimean Tatar language instead of Arabic or Persian, as in a traditional *maktab* or *madrasa*; where children were forced to cram without understanding the meaning of the subject; and where, alongside the traditional religious disciplines, natural sciences—geography, geometry, and arithmetic were added.¹⁴ By the first decade of the twentieth century, the *Jadid* educational system had become more prevalent and, despite the fact that the Qadimist *madrasas* still played a prominent role in the society, students increasingly gave preference to the New Method (*jadid*) schools, especially in the Volga–Urals.¹⁵

As previously mentioned, Tatar newspapers and magazines published many articles on the subject of Islamic educational reform. Many scholars (*ulamā*) wrote special treatises criticizing the curricula of the *maktab* and the *madrasa*. One of them was Ziyaaddin Kamali (1873–1942), whose essay “Management in the Sphere of Religion” (*Dini Tadbirdlar*), written in 1913, aroused negative responses from a wide audience. Much of the criticism was published in magazines such as *Religion and Life* (*al-Din va ma’ishat*) and *Assembly* (*Shura*), where the author was criticized not only by his opponents from the Qadimist camp, but also by his colleagues, the

10. M. J. Bigiev, *Selected Works*, 2 vols. (Kazan: Tatar Publishing House, 2005), 16.

11. A *mudarris* is a teacher in a *madrasa*.

12. I. Turkoglu, “Adding a Few More Touches to Zakir Kadyri-Ugan’s Creative Biography,” *Tatarica* 1 (2019): 122.

13. The Russian State viewed the policy of educating non-Russian populations exclusively as a colonial project. See more about the topic in R. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

14. Z. Khayretdinova, “Reform of the System of Ethno-Religious Education of the Crimean Tatars in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the Activities of the Taurian Mohammedan Spiritual Assembly.” In *Islamic Education in Crimea: Historic Milestones and Avenues of Renewal* (Simferopol: Tarjuman Publishing House, 2016), 162.

15. In the Ufa governorate 61.1% of all confessional schools, which comprised 73% of all students, were new method schools by 1914. D. Iskhakov, *The Phenomenon of Tatar Jadidism: Introduction to Socio-Cultural Reflection* (Kazan: Iman, 1997), 26.

Jadids. Muslim reformer Musa Bigiev¹⁶ (1875–1949) wrote a critical essay, “Small Thoughts about Big Problems” (*Boek Mauzuglarga Ufak Fikerlar*) on Kamali’s treatise. Rizaaddin Fakhraddin also commented on the topics raised by Z. Kamali and M. Bygiev in his works “Religious and Public Questions” (*Dini va Ijtima’i Fikerlar*) and “Commentaries on the Compendium of Sayings of the Prophet” (*Gavami’ al-kalim sharhi*).

Kamali’s treatise is a 75-page critical response (*raddiya*) to the textbooks that were used in traditional Qadimist *madrasas* to teach students Muslim Creed, a subject that played a crucial role in shaping the mindsets of young people. The course covered the basics of Islam: the question of the unity of God (*tawhīd*), the problem of the creation of the world (*hudūth*), the essence of the Quran, and the concepts of the believer (*Muslim*), faith (*īmān*) and disbelief (*kufri*), principles of seeking the truth, predetermination and freedom of the will (*qadar and ikhtiyār*), and good and evil. Among the ‘*Aqīda* textbooks usually used in Tatar *madrasas* were the following medieval treatises: “The Great Fiqh” (*al-Fiqh al-akbar*) attributed¹⁷ to Imam Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767),¹⁸ the “Commentary on the Doctrine of al-Nasafi” (*Sharḥ ‘aqā’id al-Nasafīyya*)¹⁹ by Sa’d ad-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 1390),²⁰ and the “Commentary on the Doctrine of ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī” (*Sharḥ ‘aqā’id al-‘aḍudiyya*)²¹ by Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 1501);²² the latter textbook was called “*Mullah Jalāl*.” Such essays on ‘*Aqīda* are very common in the Muslim world and can vary in length from one page to many volumes. In his criticism, Kamali discussed a rather traditional range of issues that are described in detail in Islamic doctrinal literature. Thus, his work comprises the following sections:

16. A few words about this author: he was born in 1875 in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don, studied in Kazan, Istanbul (military school), then left his military career and entered the famous al-Azhar University in Cairo. In al-Azhar, Bigiev met the chief mufti of Egypt at that time, Muḥammad Abduh, and the publisher of *al-Manar* magazine, Rāshid Riḍā. After some time, he left Egypt and traveled to India. In 1904, Bigiev returned to Russia, settling in Petersburg. He even became a law student at the University of Saint Petersburg. Bigiev joined the political struggle, the national liberation movement, and participated in the first Congresses of Muslims of the Russian Empire. Thus, before the Revolution of 1917, Bigiev led an active public life, working as a Muslim theologian, religious thinker, teacher, newspaper publisher, and journalist. In 1930, he emigrated from the Soviet Union and traveled to China, India, Japan, Turkey, and finally Egypt, where he died, in poverty, in 1949.

17. Andrey Smirnov claims that the text of this book deals with issues not discussed during the time of Abu Hanifa; therefore, he denies the possibility that this treatise was composed by this author. A. Smirnov, “The Emergence of Muslim Doctrinal Thought and Early Islamic Philosophy (on the issue of mutual influence, as exemplified in *al-Fiqh al-akbar* by Abū Ḥanīfa), introduction, translation from Arabic and comments by A. Smirnov.” *Newsletter of Russian State University of the Humanities* 4 (2000): 52–86.

18. Abū Ḥanīfa (699–767) was a Muslim jurist, after whom the Hanafi school (*madhhab*) of fiqh was named.

19. Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafi (1067–1142) was a Central Asian Muslim scholar and the author of a very short (only 4 pages) but famous treatise on Islamic Creed (*‘Aqā’id al-Nasafīyya*). This work played a decisive role in spreading the Maturīdī school of *kalām* in the region. D. Shagaviev, *Introduction to Sh. Margani “Kitāb al-Ḥikma al-bāligha”* (Kazan: Tatar Publishing House, 2008), 93.

20. Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (1322–1390) was a theologian (*mutakallim*) and Islamic scholar known for his writings on religion, logic, grammar, and mathematics, which were used in the Middle Ages as teaching aids. His treatise “Commentary on the teachings of an-Nasafi” was written within the framework of the Maturīdī school of *kalām*. As time unfolded, this school became firmly established in the Volga–Urals and Siberia.

21. ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (1281–1355) was an illustrious representative of Ash’arī Kalām, judge (*qāḍī*) of the Shafi’ī *madhhab*, and the author of numerous works. The most popular was the four-volume “Book of Spiritual Stages” (*kitāb al-mawāqif*), in which the problems of *kalām* were dealt with in detail. His book on the doctrine of “‘*Aqīda al-‘aḍudiyya*” is a textbook on the main problems of Muslim dogmatics.

22. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (1426–1502) was a leading Iranian theologian, Sufi shaykh, and faqīh of the 15th century. One of his most famous works was “The Essay on Ethics” (*Akhlāq Jalālī*). He taught at the “Begum” *madrasa* in Shiraz. His treatise “*Sharḥ ‘aqā’id al-‘Aḍudiyya*” was apparently used as a teaching aid for students, and was widely distributed in the Tatar Qadimist *madrasas*. R. Safiullina-al-Ansi, *Islamic Doctrine in Textbooks and Writings of Tatar Authors at the Beginning of the 20th Century: Anthology* (Kazan: Kazan University Publishing House, 2012).

1. The concept of a “believer” (*muslim*),
2. Increase and decrease of faith (*īmān*),
3. The category “People of the Prophet’s Way and the Community” (ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā’a) and the division of law schools in Islam (*madhāhib*),
4. The inclusion of the issue of Allah’s attributes (*al-ṣifāt*) in the textbooks on Islamic doctrine (*‘aqīda*),
5. The question of whether prohibited food could serve as a meal for a Muslim,
6. The question of the imposition of responsibilities on a person which are beyond his or her capabilities,
7. The degree/supremacy of an angel over a human being,
8. Saints (*awliyā’*) and miracles (*karāmāt*),
9. The imamate and the caliphate,
10. The Companions (*ṣahāba*) and their ranking over each other,
11. The faith of the Prophet Muhammad’s parents, and
12. Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf*).

Since the subject of this chapter is the attitude of Kamali towards Sufism and Sufi ethics, the most relevant to consider here will be the sections on saints and miracles and on Sufism.

Sufism in Tatar Religious Thought

Sufism has played a very significant role in the history of the Tatar people. Historical analysis of the early literature of the Bulgar Khanate (10th century–1236)²³ indicates the spread of a moderate (sober) form of Sufism.²⁴ Since the twelfth century, the Yasaviyya Order gained the support of much of the Tatar population. In the fourteenth century, the Naqshbandiyya also began to spread and later successfully co-existed with the Yasaviyya in the region.²⁵ After the conquest of the Kazan Khanate by Ivan the Terrible in 1552, all the traditional religious and political institutions were destroyed and the Sufi networks were the only uniting thread nationwide:

Sufism, as a popular version of Islam, previously [before 1552] performed the social and ideological function of a counterweight to the official religion and canonical theology. After the demolition of all institutions of Muslim statehood, Sufism remained the only ideologically organized force in the Muslim community capable of resisting Orthodox missionaries. This is why the social ideology and literature of the Muslim

23. The official adoption of Islam by Volga Bulgaria took place in 922, but there is reason to believe that Sufism influenced society at the earliest stages of the spread of Islam in the region. I. L. Izmailov, “Islam in Volga Bulgaria: Dissemination and Regional Features,” *History and Modernity* 2, no. 2 (2011): 48.

24. R. Amirkhanov, *Turko-Tatar Medieval Philosophical Thought (XIII–XVI Centuries)* (Kazan: Master-Line, 2001), 40.

25. L. Borodovskaya, “Traditions Reflected in the Islamic-Sufi Symbolism of Tatar Folklore Munajates,” *Islamic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2016): 106.

Turks demonstrate the growth of Sufi ideas and the expansion of their social functions in the life of the Muslim community.²⁶

Much later, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Russian Muslims developed very strong relationships with Central Asian intellectual circles. Young people from the Volga region traveled to Bukhara and Samarkand in pursuit of knowledge.²⁷ The most prominent shaykhs at that time were Faizkhan al-Kabuli (d. 1802) and Niyaz-Kuli al-Turkmani (d. 1821), both followers of the *tariqa* Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya. According to Michael Kemper, each of the above-mentioned shaykhs had at least a dozen pupils in the Volga-Ural region who had received special permission (*ijāza*) to disseminate Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya teachings among the local population.²⁸

When we consider Central Asian society in the nineteenth century, we can actually see its gradual stagnation and decline. The Russian Empire had conquered vast territories of the Kazakh Juzes and Khanate of Kokand and, in 1865, had established Russian Turkestan. In 1868, the Emirate of Bukhara fell and became a Russian vassal state and, in 1873, the Khanate of Khiva also acknowledged its dependence on the empire. Muslim society went through a bitter period of reflection about the causes of its defeat. Intellectuals blamed themselves and their contemporaries for distortions of the faith. They opined that the Islam that they followed was overburdened by non-Islamic elements, including ritualistic forms of Sufism, which had transformed into the phenomenon of *īshānism*:²⁹

Over time, Sufism has been transformed into *‘īshānism*—i.e., a phenomenon in which mystical philosophy has been relegated to second place, and in the first place, ritual and social aspects of the relationship between the Sufi master (*murshid*) and his followers (*murīds*) have emerged. Gradually, the activities of the *īshāns* consisted of healing (especially of the mentally ill), making and issuing protective charms, and organizing regular collective rituals. In the nineteenth century, each major *īshān* was the de facto founder of an independent Sufi community.³⁰

These old traditions, to a certain extent of utilitarian and folk Sufism, were brought home from Central Asia to Volga-Urals by the Tatars, and then spread among their compatriots. The deep and inner aspect of intellectual Sufism was neglected, which is why some authors condemned Sufis and their practices. For example, Tatar scholar Gabdrahim Utyz-Imyani (1756–1836), himself a practicing shaykh and disciple of Faizkhan al-Kabuli, opposed the following Sufi statement: “Whoever does not have a Shaykh, his Shaykh is a Satan.”³¹ He believed that following a Sufi path was not

26. R. Amirkhanov, *Turko-Tatar Medieval Philosophical Thought*, 86.

27. According to the data provided by Rizaaddin Fakhraddin in his four-volume biography, *Asar*, approximately two-thirds of Muslim scholars (170 out of 250) had acquired their training in Central Asia, and many of them had permissions (*ijāza*) from Central Asian shaykhs. R. Fakhraddin, *Asar*, 4 vols. (Kazan: Ruhayat, 2001).

28. M. Kemper, *Sufis and Scholars in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Islamic Discourse Under Russian Dominance* (Kazan: Russian Islamic University, 2008), 141–144.

29. *īshān*, the Persian extremely polite form of the third person, is used in Central Asian Sufism as a respectful term for a Sufi master.

30. S. Abashin, “*‘īshān*,” in *Islam in the Territory of Former Russian Empire. Encyclopedia*, ed. I. S. Prozorov (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2006), 165.

31. It was a widespread expression, attributed to Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī. ‘Umar al-Kharbūṭī, *‘Aṣīda al-shahīda* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutūb al-‘Ilmiyya, 2017), 70. Some scholars interpret it as meaning that it is a necessity to have a teacher for understanding Islam correctly, because Islam began with an oral tradition, transmitted from person to person. Sufis interpret it in the sense that every person should have a Sufi master to attain the Truth.

obligatory. He was confident that “nowadays it is all the more necessary to avoid the search for Sufi shaykhs,” and argued that it was due to the attitude prescribing the need for a shaykh that unscrupulous mentors or pseudo-shaykhs could mislead ignorant followers.³²

In the Muslim world, meanwhile, a powerful movement for renewal and reform had begun. Some of the Muslim reformers, following Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792), had started to criticize Sufi rites and customs, such as the practice of building shrines and tombs above graves and viewing Sufi saints as intermediaries between God and human beings. It is noteworthy to mention here, as Natana DeLong-Bas had emphasized: “The founder of Wahhabism barely mentioned Sufis in his writings, and the word “Sufi” was never used in his works. Without referring to Sufism in general, he denounced certain rites and rituals and explained why he considered them sinful.”³³

However, while Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, whose life spanned the entire eighteenth century, did not encounter colonialism and the West directly,³⁴ the next generation of reformers, including Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī (1838–1897), Muḥammad Abduh (1849–1905), Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935), Aḥmad al-Fatānī (1856–1908), Ahmad Khatib Minankabawi (1860–1916), and many others, were faced with a somewhat different context. They, as well as their Muslim sympathizers in the Russian Empire, drew attention to the fact that Muslims, despite their religious beliefs that were intended to lead people to happiness, lagged behind advanced nations in terms of living standards, scientific achievements, technology, and even morals.

Reflecting on the reasons for all this and analyzing the basic tenets of the faith according to the Quran and Sunna, they concluded that the practice of their co-religionists had little to do with what Muhammad preached. They contended that it is only by returning to the original principles of Islam that Muslims can take their rightful place among civilized humanity. It should be noted, however, that they intended to have much more nuanced views towards Sufism than we see in the teachings of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.

In chapter 7, “Reconfigurations of Law and Ethics in Colonial Egypt,” of his monograph *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Talal Asad writes about Muḥammad Abduh’s criticism of Sufis who promoted doctrines and practices that he considered contrary to the *Shari‘a* (*ghulāt al-ṣūfiyya*) and who served the political ambitions of rulers by providing them what he called “corrupt fatwas.” He also mentions Abduh’s condemning the “vicious” practices of drumming, dancing, and loud *dhikr* in mosques, and the worshipping of Sufi saints (*awliyā’*) and holy places. Yet it is important to note that Abduh strongly endorsed the Sufi understanding of ethics and spiritual education. He even said, “All the blessings of my religion that I received—for which I thank God Almighty—are due to Sufism.”³⁵ In turn, Rashīd Riḍā denied the truth of the Sufi state of *fanā’*, and criticized the relationship between the shaykh and *murīd* for submerging the latter’s identity and

32. G. Utyz-Imyani, *Selected Essays* (Kazan: Tatar Publishing House, 2006), 63.

33. N. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Moscow: Ladomir, 2010), 97.

34. *Ibid.*, 245.

35. T. Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2003), 224.

for introducing non-Islamic practices into Islam. Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī condemned Sufi religious leaders for their passivity. All these leaders represented an intellectual trend that was united “by the desire to uphold Islam against unlawful innovations (*bid‘a*, plural *bida‘*) and the claim to represent a correction (*iṣlāḥ*) to its original message.”³⁶

In the Tatar context, Kamali’s opinion of *taṣawwuf* was distinguished by some radical views in comparison to other contemporary scholars. In fact, his attitude towards Sufism was entirely negative. The most significant drawback of mystical teachings, according to his view, was that Sufism created a whole series of concepts, practices, and relationships that did not exist in the original Islam, and that Sufism was responsible for the emergence of innovations in religion. Among the accusations of religious innovations that had emerged due to Sufis, he lists:

“In our faith Islam there is no chain of carriers of spiritual authority (power) and monasticism (*rahbāniyat*).”³⁷

“The religion of Islam requires that its followers seek the help and protection of God alone. Meanwhile, the Iṣhāns teach to ask for help from the shaykhs (“Oh, my shaykh, help!”) (*al-tawaṣṣul*).”³⁸

“God Almighty Allah has said: Allah wants relief for you but does not want difficulties for you. That is, He has declared that Islam is religion of easiness, and this is the manifestation of the divine will. Meanwhile everyone knows: Iṣhānism is nothing but an additional burden for Muslims.”³⁹

“And take the so-called ‘*dhikr*’, accompanied by playing on musical instruments! It is impossible to describe the damage that was caused to Islam by all this.”⁴⁰

“The Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqa/turūq*) divide Islam into different segments which is forbidden in our religion (*harām*).”⁴¹

Another set of criticisms was caused by the Sufis’ fascination with miracles. It is known that in Sufism, various miracles (*karāma*) performed by Sufi shaykhs serve as proof of proximity to God.⁴² Meanwhile, Kamali appears in his writings as an extreme rationalist. First, he focuses on the rationality of Islam as a religion. He wrote that the Prophet Muhammad had no supernatural powers other than a revelation from Allah—the Holy Quran. This gave Kamali the right to claim that Islam is the most rational religion compared to the other two Abrahamic religions, in which there are constant appeals to miracles to confirm the prophetic gifts of Moses and Jesus and many others.

36. A. Kateman, *Shared Questions, Diverging Answers. Muhammad ‘Abduh and his Interlocutors on ‘Religion’ in a Globalized World* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 2016), 36.

37. Z. Kamali, *Dini Tadbirdlar* (Ufa: Shariq Matbagasi, 1913), 59.

38. Z. Kamali, *Dini Tadbirdlar*, 61.

39. Z. Kamali, *Dini Tadbirdlar*, 62.

40. Z. Kamali, *Dini Tadbirdlar*, 69.

41. Z. Kamali, *Dini Tadbirdlar*, 59.

42. A. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism. A Short History* (Saint-Petersburg: Dilya, 2004), 143.

Second, he believed that there are no supernatural phenomena, in principle, in this world. It is only limited human knowledge that prevents people from understanding the nature of what is considered to be a miracle.⁴³ Accordingly, it is logical for him to deny the claimed Sufi ability to produce miracles (*karāmāt*). He wrote:

Our *īshān-Karāmatist* Sufis who trade in miracles “ascend” and float up there, “cross” the territory of the seven climates, “rise” to the empyrean (*arsh*), and together with Allah secretly recite prayer litanies (*munājāt*). And one shaykh with his *murīd* crossed the sea, not on a boat, but on a prayer rug! And when the *murīd* addressed the shaykh with the words “Oh, my shaykh, help!”, that rug did not sink, and only when he thought that he could also, like the shaykh, mention the name of the Almighty and pronounce the words “Oh Allah!”, then the rug sank.

It also turns out that the *īshāns*, through prayer, can summon troubles and attack people and thus leave them without legs or eyes, or dispossess them of their belongings . . . By telling such tales, they spread the poison of hatred and harm the sacred and pure spirit of Islam. Astonishingly, if our masters of miracles are going to ascend to heaven, why aren’t they using their powers and serving as air carriers for others? Why aren’t they floating in the sky, doing aerial reconnaissance for the Islamic world? And why, when they sail on a prayer rug on the sea, do they not use this miracle to organize an entire fleet of such “handymen”? Or how do they have the honor “in the name of Islam” to deprive people of sight, to immobilize them, to make them weak and helpless, and to bring on them other troubles and misfortunes?⁴⁴

Another point of Kamali’s criticism of Sufis was their ideology of renouncing the material world (*zuhd*) and promoting poverty (*faqr*), which was originally the essence of *taṣawwuf*.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the peculiarity of Tatar society was that the funding of the entire system of Muslim education was entrusted to the local Muslim community (*mahalla*). It is obvious that the richest members would provide the bulk of the funds. Thus, the success of the Muslim reformers themselves (regardless of whether they were editors of newspapers and magazines – as were Rizaaddin Fakhraddin or Ahmad-Hadi Maqsudi or directors/lecturers in *madrasas*, as were Hasan-Gata Gabashi or Ziyaaddin Kamali) directly related to the generosity of the patrons and their prevalence in society. The wealth and prosperity of *mahalla* members had led to educational and cultural development, and an increase in poverty would thus entail cultural decline. The reformers were keen to popularize such qualities as entrepreneurship and the ability to earn money.

Kamali was sharply against the adage, popular among Sufis, that “poverty is my pride” (*al-faqr fakhrī*). To prove the desirability of material wealth for a pious Muslim, he turned to the basics of the Muslim Creed. According to his argumentation, one of the pillars of Islam is alms-giving (*zakāt*), which consists of the one-fortieth of

43. Z. Kamali, *Falsafa Islamiyya* (Ufa: Shariq Matbagasi, 1910), 220.

44. Z. Kamali, *Dini Tadbirolar* (Ufa: Shariq Matbagasi, 1913), 31.

45. A. Schimmel, *The World of Islamic Mysticism* (Moscow: Sadra, 2013), 85; A. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism. A Short History* (Saint-Petersburg: Dilya, 2004), 42.

disposable property that Muslims pay annually for the needs of society. As a rule, the money is transferred to a mosque and then distributed according to the needs of the poor. Every Muslim is obliged to pay a certain amount, but if he is a debtor himself, payment of the *zakāt* is not considered permissible and becomes *harām*. From this perspective, poverty becomes an obstacle to the realization of one of the most important tenets of Islam. Furthermore, Islam prescribes good deeds for Muslims, and the lack of material means would deprive the believers of the opportunity to perform this charitable act. Thus, the biblical thesis that “it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven” is replaced in the teachings of the Tatar reformers with the justification of the need to increase in wealth in order to use it for the benefit of society. There is an obvious similarity here with the ethics of Protestantism, where the desire to be poor . . . is not only a sin of omission, but also a violation of the will to love your neighbor.⁴⁶

In addition to accusing Sufism of inventing innovations, criticizing the performance of miracles (*karāmāt*) by the Sufis, and denouncing calls for poverty (*faqr*) and asceticism (*zuhd*), Kamali was emotionally opposed to the phenomenon of *ishānism* as an established institution, including being opposed to its practices and ideology:

Īshāns! You agree that your *murīds* are turning into holy fools and even bragging about it! This is amazing! Is the purpose of a religion, sent by God, to make people holy fools? Of course not! Since people who are not in control of their mental state are not obliged to perform religious duties . . . Or perhaps you want the Islamic *umma* to become a community of mad and holy fools?⁴⁷

Oh world of Islam! Answer me for God’s sake! Wherever the *ishān*’s footfalls, the light of Islam fades, its purity disappears, morality and ethics fade, and their place is replaced by immorality; human qualities such as thoughtful, a serious approach to work, industriousness, diligence, courage, and fearlessness disappear; and laziness, idleness, cowardice, and lethargy thrive . . .⁴⁸

Dear *ishāns*! You cannot cite any evidence of the legality and validity of *ishānism*, its terminology and structure, because the Quran declared this phenomenon an unacceptable innovation. Allah did not legitimize it. The Messenger of Allah did not practice *ishānism*. Furthermore, he (the Messenger of Allah) banned *ishānism* and asked not to follow this path. The terms “Sufi” and “*al-taṣawwuf*” did not exist in the era of happiness (*‘aṣr al-sā‘āda*), and the word “*ṣūf*” is borrowed from the Greek language. *Īshānism* under the guise of *taṣawwuf* has penetrated the Muslim environment from Brahmins, Persians, and Greeks. This is a proven historical fact. And if so, what conscience allows you to patronize the apparent *bid’a* and protect it?⁴⁹

46. M. Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Moscow: Progress, 1990), 191.

47. Z. Kamali, *Dini Tadbirdlar*, 67.

48. Z. Kamali, *Dini Tadbirdlar*, 68.

49. Z. Kamali, *Dini Tadbirdlar*, 66.

Kamali's contemporary, Musa Bigiev, agrees with his colleagues on the sad state of modern Sufism: "Yes, modern monasticism is only laziness and begging. Yes, the modern *taṣawwuf* has degenerated from a good thing into the disgraceful cult of absolute poverty and rubbish."⁵⁰ However, in general, his opinion is quite the opposite of Kamali's. First of all, he draws the attention of the reader to the spiritual and intellectual aspects of Sufism, which Kamali completely ignored in his essay. For example, Bigiev wrote:

Sufism is the brightest beam of light among philosophical currents. . . . is a unique Islamic path of mystical enlightenment (*kashf*). If we speak of enlightenment, it means a special form of intellectual contemplation (*naẓar 'aqlī*). So, enlightenment is the penetration (*nufus*) of the mind on the other side of the veil (*parda*) of everyday life.⁵¹ . . . Having achieved freedom of mind and purity of heart, a person acquires such abilities as observation (*murāqaba*). Observation is the constant and attentive contemplation (*naẓar*) of signs and manifestations (*āthār*) of Allah; that is, of each individual object, state, and event occurring in the world of existence. A memory (*dhikr*) is when a person, observing big and small things, does not remain unaware about the nature of their appearance, when he realizes the causes of their origin and their intrinsic significance.⁵²

Bigiev also draws attention to the educational role of Sufism in medieval Islam:

The functions performed by these Sufi brotherhoods (*ṭarīqa*) in the first centuries of Islam were very important and beneficial to the lives of people and the society. Sufi lodges (*zāwiya*) at that time were either schools or religious-political societies that spread Islam around the world. Although Sufi brotherhoods differed because of their environment and region, they all had the same objectives. Ṭarīqas were . . . educational centers that developed Islamic philosophy and thought. Many theologians . . . were educated in the Sufi lodges. Sufi brotherhoods raised the great sages of Islam: Junayd, Maṣṣūf, Baṣṣāmī, Ibn 'Arabī, Shams Tabrīzī, Jalāl Rūmī, Ḥafiz Shirāzī, Mawlawī Jāmī.⁵³

He also drew attention to the role of Sufi institutions in the context of nomadic communities:

There are no schools, no *madrasas*, no courts in the nomadic world. There are no hospitals, no hotels. In the world of nomads, there have never been orphanages or shelters for the destitute. Their world does not know the public charitable organizations, the interest clubs, where like-minded people of religion or politics would gather.

In the world of the Bedouin, there are only the lodges (*zawīyya*) of Sufi brotherhoods (*ṭarīqa*). For children, these lodges are schools; for theologians and Quran readers (*ḥāfīz*), — *madrasas*; for disputes and discord, — places for a fair trial; for the sick, — hospitals; for travelers, — hotels; for orphans, — places of upbringing; for the poor, — homes.⁵⁴

50. M. Bigiev, "Ufaq fikerkar," in M. Bigiev, *Selected Works*, ed. A. Khayrutdinov (Kazan: Tatar Publishing House, 2014), 259.

51. M. Bigiev, "Ufaq Fikerlar," 263.

52. *Ibid.*, 266.

53. *Ibid.*, 269.

54. *Ibid.*, 277.

With regard to the statement about the “honor of poverty,” Musa Bigiev argued that this statement implies not material poverty, but rather human dependence on God.

Further to the Issue of Sufism

The publication of Kamali’s essay and Bigiev’s criticisms of it in the pages of the popular magazines of the time sparked a discussion on the whole range of problems. The greatest number of articles and reviews on this topic can be found in two periodicals: *Religion and Life (Din wa Mashishat)* and *Assembly (Shura)*. Both were published in Orenburg and were closed when the Bolsheviks came to power. Meanwhile, the former, edited by M. Husainov, served as a voice for the conservative Muslim clergy; its content was mainly devoted to religious issues. In it, religious leaders criticized Jadid reforms, discussed theological problems and issued *fatwas* on various questions of *fiqh*. The second, edited by R. Fakhraddin, was financed by the brothers Ramiev, rich goldminers who supported progressive mass media and founded in Orenburg a Jadid *madrassa*, the “Husainiya.” This *madrassa* offered education at the level of the Russian State Gymnasium. The journal *Shura* contained articles on a wide range of subjects, including problems of education, science, philosophy, human and women’s rights, and, of course, religious issues.

It is only natural that *Din wa Mashishat* condemned Ziyaaddin Kamali for his book and strongly supported Sufism in its local form of *ishānism*:

In the very foundation of Sufism, there are many deep meanings: first, the light of knowledge (*ma‘rifat nuri*), and then the abstinence that allows this knowledge to shine, the ability to comprehend internal (*baṭin*) knowledge through the external (*zāhir*) book”; “Sufi scholars have two decrees: they follow the holy shari‘a and they are repositories of inner knowledge.⁵⁵

In the journal *Shura*, we find a more balanced criticism of both authors, Ziyaaddin Kamali and Musa Bigiev:

I agree with what Musa Afande wrote about Sufism, but there is an urgent need to reform Sufism itself, and there is no need for all this secret knowledge (*‘ilm baṭin*). And all these ideas about *quṭb*, *faṣṣ*, *awṭād*, *abdāl*⁵⁶ do not exist in Islam and there is no need of them. These false representations simply create black spots on the face of Islam.⁵⁷

The editor of the magazine, Rizaaddin Fakhraddin, did not remain on the sidelines during the discussion of *taṣawwuf*. Among his books dedicated to the great scholars of the Islamic world are biographies of Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Ghazālī. The works of Rizaaddin Fakhraddin may be among the first scholarly research on the heritage of these mystical thinkers. In another work, his 600-page “Comments

55. Z. Ikbaev, “On [the treatise] ‘Management in the Sphere of Religion’ (*Dini Tadbirdlar*),” *Religion and Life (al-Din wa Ma‘ishat)* 27, (July 11, 1914): 423–424.

56. Different ranks in the Sufi hierarchy.

57. M. H. Muzaffar, “Assessment on Books of ‘Management in the Sphere of Religion’ (*Dini Tadbirdlar*) and ‘Small Thoughts’ (*Ufak Fikerlar*),” *Assembly (Shura)* 4 (1916).

on the Collection of the Prophet's Words" (*Gawami al-kalim sharhi*), Fakhraddin dedicates many pages to topics related to Sufism, with questions, for example, about the worship of holy places, visits to the tombs of saints, and problems of darvishhood.⁵⁸

Among religious innovations (*bida'*), along with the celebration of *'ashūra*, he treats taking money for reading the Quran in honor of the soul of the deceased, forbidding women to visit the mosque, and visiting graves for the purpose of making vows and requests which had become common among his contemporaries.⁵⁹

On the ideology of poverty, commonly promoted in Sufism, Fakhraddin agreed with Zyaaddin Kamali. He wrote that, for the development of a nation, people needed three components: 1) education and professions, 2) wealth, and 3) energy and harmony among themselves.⁶⁰

Analyzing the unfavorable state of the Muslim *umma* at the beginning of the twentieth century, he concluded that, in the life of each nation, depending on the time, there may be an excess of some qualities as well as a shortage of others. Moreover, the task is to bring all this into balance, through which the *umma*, the Muslim community, can harmoniously develop.

The most important thing preventing the Tatars from development, according to Fakhraddin, was a lack of self-confidence. Concerning his own people, he wrote that they had become accustomed to believing in their ancestors, seeking their blessings and prayers, and asking for help from the dead and the saints.

In a situation where it is necessary to find a solution, people, instead of courageously taking matters in their own hands, are running to the graves of saints or asking for help from shaykhs and *ishāns*. This is a clear sign of disbelief. Moreover, the problem is also deepened by the fact that this habit is passed on to young people. They are not independent; they constantly await external assistance.

At the same time, in the developed countries, people are extremely confident, although they are no different from us in terms of intelligence or talent. This is the key to their success. A man who is self-confident, in the event of obstacles in his way, will not despair, but will simply do his best to overcome them.⁶¹

Conclusion

The debate about the attitudes towards Sufism among Turkic-speaking Russian Muslims is, to a large extent, a regional picture of the broader debate taking place throughout the Muslim *umma*. The range of issues was largely formulated in the eighteenth century in the teachings of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Later, in

58. Darvishes are Sufi aspirants who usually lived wandering lives. Reformers claimed that supporting such Sufis had placed an inordinate burden on the lay people.

59. R. Fakhraddin, *Commentaries on the Compendium of Sayings of the Prophet* (Kazan: Iman, 1995), 481.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, 292.

the nineteenth century, the same issues were discussed by the next generation of Muslim scholars: Muḥammad Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā, Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī, Aḥmad al-Fatānī, Ahmad Khatib Minankabawi, and many others.

In the process of the major economic, social, and political changes that accompanied the inclusion of the Islamic civilization into the world processes of a developing capitalist society, there was a powerful lobby for maintaining the established social relations represented by the institution of īshānism in the regions of Central Asia and the inner regions of the Russian Empire. They were confronted by those who understood that such changes were inevitable, and that if Muslims wanted to compete in this new world, they would have to re-examine all of their old traditions and reinterpret seemingly immutable religious concepts, including those of religious authority, science, teachings of religion, and so forth.

The question they all faced was, “Who would determine the right opinion or a new orthodoxy?” While the institution of īshānism had remained virtually intact among Russian Muslims in the nineteenth century, by the beginning of the twentieth century, very gradually, a leading role in shaping public opinion began to be played by new leaders. Among them, however, there was no consensus on the full range of issues related to Sufism. The only thing they did agree upon was a negative attitude to the phenomenon of īshānism, which had become an obstacle to the development of Muslim society. In all other questions, the range of opinions varied considerably from admiration for the Sufi spiritual heritage and appreciation of the role of Sufism in education, charity, and ethics to criticism of forbidden innovations such as worship of the tombs of shaykhs, *dhikr*, the darvish movement, mediation between God and humans, and the performance of miracles.

The criticism of Sufism by all of the above-mentioned authors was caused by the impulses of the time. Instead of fostering the qualities of the ascetic (*zāhid*), poverty (*faqr*), contentment (*riḍā*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), and so forth, priority turned to striving for material well-being and belief in one’s own strength, determination, and healthy competition—in fact, exactly those qualities which determine business ethics and entrepreneurship: the old traditional passive worldview, long associated with Sufi teachings, was gradually replaced by the purposeful and rational ethics of capitalism.

At the same time, like their foreign colleagues among the Islamic reformers, and with rare exceptions, Russian Muslims appreciated Sufi teachings as a source of intellectual and spiritual development. Ibn ‘Arabī, al-Ghazālī, Rūmī, and other Sufi masters continued to inspire Muslims as well as non-Muslims all across the world.

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