

## *Sufism and the School of Isfahān*

*Taṣawwuf and 'Irfān in Late Safavid Iran ('Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī and Fayḍ-i Kāshānī on the Relation of Taṣawwuf, Hikmat and 'Irfān)\**

LEONARD LEWISOHN

### I. INTRODUCTION

It is generally agreed today that the claim made by both E.G. Browne and Mīrzā Muḥammad Qazwīnī that hardly a single Persian poet of merit may be found during the entire Safavid period, such that “under this dynasty, learning, culture, poetry and mysticism completely deserted Persia,”<sup>1</sup> is no longer tenable. Although the patronage and support which Persian poets were offered in Iran were “inadequate compared to India,” for Hindustan “appeared to offer better opportunities of economic gain to the Persian poets,” scholars generally acknowledge that the claim made by Browne that poetry and Sufism in Iran vanished from Persia during this period is greatly exaggerated.<sup>2</sup> Yet there is no escaping the fact that the flag of Persian mystical poetry hung at half-mast in Iran under the Safavids,<sup>3</sup> while in Mughal India, at least down to

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<sup>1</sup> Browne's *Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1956–9), IV, p. 26, cited by both E. Yarshater, “Safavid Literature: Progress or Decline,” *Iranian Studies* (1974 pp. 217, and 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb in his *Dunbāla-yi Justujū-yi dar taṣawwuf-i Īrān* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr 1362 A.Hsh./1983), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> Aziz Ahmad in his study of “Safavid Poets and India,” *Iran*, 14 (1976), pp. 118–19, thus argues that “there is considerable evidence that most of the Ṣafawīd monarchs from Ismā'īl I to 'Abbās II continued to write poetry and to patronize religious as well as non-religious verse.”

<sup>3</sup> “With the exception of Muḥtasham Kāshī and Waḥshī Bāfqī, all the great poets of Ṣafawīd Iran migrated to India, and only one of them, Ṣā'ib, returned permanently to his homeland,” Aziz Ahmad points out in his “Safavid Poets and India,” p. 122. “In Persia the Safavid period was a generally unfavourable time for Persian language and literature,” concluded Dhabīḥu'llāh Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i adabiyāt-i Īrān*, II (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Firdaws 1373 A.Hsh./1994, 13th edn), V/1, p. 422; regarding which he supposes that the fact that Turkish and not Persian was the mother tongue of the founder of the dynasty, played a key role (*ibid.*, p. 424).

the reign of Awrangzīb the Puritan, Persian poets and poetry flourished with greater lustre (being provided with considerably more lucre there, as well<sup>4</sup>).

Since Browne's researches over three-quarters of a century ago, the development of Persian Sufism and Sufi poetry in Safavid Persia has been reappraised by scholars such as Ehsan Yarshater,<sup>5</sup> Aziz Ahmad,<sup>6</sup> Roger Savory,<sup>7</sup> 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb,<sup>8</sup> Dhābīḥu'llāh Ṣafā<sup>9</sup> and, more recently, Kathryn Babayan.<sup>10</sup> Examining the situation of Sufism in Safavid Iran in general and in the seventeenth century in particular, though no doubt it was a period of "unfavourable conditions for *taṣawwuf*",<sup>11</sup> what remains to be adumbrated is the peculiar social typology of the Sufism in Safavid Iran, both popular and 'high', '*amm wa khāṣṣ*', during and despite the theocratic regime.

In his classic study of *Sufism and the Sufi Literature* composed in the first half of the twentieth century, Y.E. Bertels was right to point out that "to date only the basic contours of the intellectual history of Sufism has been mapped out. Although substantial work has been done on the classical period which allows one to vaguely imagine its circumstances, next to nothing has been written about Sufism of the late classical [Safavid] period."<sup>12</sup> While the

<sup>4</sup> There are some quite contrary views about the reputed decline of Safavid-period poetry. On the contrast between the discouragement of Persian *belles-lettres* in Iran and their encouragement in India, see Ṣafā's *Tārīkh*, V/I, pp. 491–97 on Iran as a *kishvar-i bī-ravāj*, 'a land gone out of circulation' for Persian letters, as well as his similar discussion on pp. 421–4. On the other hand, the *Tuḥfa-i Sāmī* by Sām Mīrẓā remains, as Aziz Ahmad pointed out, "an incontestable proof of the early Ṣafawīd interest in poetry" ("Safawid Poets and India," p. 120). The baroque *quality* of the poetry also needs re-examination (cf. the views of Shiblī Nu'mānī, *Sha'r al-'ajam*, Persian trans. by Muḥammad Taqī Fakhr Dā'ī Gīlānī [Tehran: Ibn Sīnā 1335 A.Hsh./1956; 2nd ed], translator's introduction, pp. ḥ–ṭ.) For further discussion of the position of poetry in Safavid times, see Roger Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980), pp. 203–14; Ṣafā, *Tārīkh*, V/I, pp. 497–502.

<sup>5</sup> Article cited in n. 2 above and also revised version of the same: "The Indian or Safavid Style: Progress or Decline," in *Persian Literature*, ed. E. Yarshater (Albany: SUNY Press 1988), pp. 249–88.

<sup>6</sup> Aziz Ahmad, "Safavid Poets and India," pp. 117–32.

<sup>7</sup> *Iran Under the Safavids*, pp. 203–15.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in note 2 above.

<sup>9</sup> Ṣafā, *Tārīkh*, V/I, *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Kathryn Babayan, 'Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas: The Controversy over Spiritual and Temporal Dominion in Seventeenth-Century Iran', in *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society*, ed. Charles Melville (London: I.B. Tauris 1996), pp. 117–39; *idem*, "The Safavid Synthesis: from Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shī'ism," *Iranian Studies*, 27/1–4 (1994), pp. 135–62; *idem*, "The Waning of the Qizilbash: The Spiritual and the Temporal in Seventeenth Century Iran" (University of Princeton doctoral dissertation 1993). I would like to thank Dr Babayan for providing me with a copy of her thesis.

<sup>11</sup> Ṣafā, *Tārīkh*, V/I, p. 201.

<sup>12</sup> *Taṣawwuf wa adabiyāt-i taṣawwuf*, Persian trans. by Sīrūs Īzādī (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr 1976), p. 661. Y.E. Bertels also pointed out here that Browne's treatment of Sufism in the fourth volume of his celebrated history was disappointingly meagre.

present volume in general aspires to rectify the omission of Safavid Sufism from the intellectual history of Iranian Islam, this chapter merely aims to illumine a small, but significant, aspect of the subject, namely the tense and difficult relationship between the Mujtahid cult and the Persian Sufism of late seventeenth-century Iran, as reflected in the school of Iṣfahān in general and the writings of ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī and Fayḍ-i Kāshānī in particular.

Without understanding the political climate of the contemporary religious debates within which Safavid intellectual currents flowed, one can hardly hope to understand the attitudes towards Sufism which prevailed in seventeenth-century Persia. No literature – or indeed any art form – is created in a contextual vacuum, but closely mirrors the political views and social concerns of the age which nurtured it; the mind of intended audience plays an equal role in shaping a literature’s rhetorical patterns of expression with the author’s independent intellect. Just as one cannot divorce the poetry of John Milton (1608–74) from, for instance, his anti-Presbyterianism, republicanism, support for Cromwell and advocacy of civil liberties against the despotism of Charles I in England, so it is impossible to separate the politico-theological works of the thinkers of the seventeenth-century school of Iṣfahān from their philosophical, mystical and poetic writings.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, it is necessary briefly to trace the contours of the Safavids’ suppression of Sufism (section II below) and the rise of the *mujtahid* cult (section III) in order to understand the political currents which affected the development of *taṣawwuf* and ‘*irfān*’.<sup>14</sup>

At first sight, Safavid Sufism appears to be a completely different world from pre-Safavid Sufism. It is infused with extremism (*ghuluww*) and fuelled by fanatical Qizilbāsh *dervichisme*,<sup>15</sup> repackaged, decked out in a parti-

<sup>13</sup> In the introduction to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley made this clear: “We owe the great writers of the golden age of our literature to that fervid awakening of the public mind which shook to dust the oldest and most oppressive form of the Christian religion. We owe Milton to the progress and development of the same spirit: the sacred Milton was, let it ever be remembered, a republican and a bold inquirer into morals and religion.”

<sup>14</sup> In his pioneering work on the history of the khānaqāh institution in Iran *Tārīkh-i khānaqāh dar Irān* (Tehran: Kitābkhāna Tahūrī, 1369 A.H.sh./1990), M. Kiyānī, while tracing the cause of the suppression of Sufism in Safavid Iran, insightfully observes that “the acceptance or rejection of Sufism in any society is, aside from historical circumstances, the product of the fluctuations in the relations of the clergy, rulers and political authorities with the Sufis. The average man in the street will form an opinion either favourable or adverse to the Sufis on the basis of the pronouncements of his religious authorities and the acceptance or rejection of the Sufis by the political leaders of his day” (p. 500).

<sup>15</sup> This is a term coined by Jean Aubin (“La Propriété foncière en Azerbayjan sous les Mongols,” in *Le Monde iranien et l’Islam*, 4, 1976–7), p. 128, to describe an essential component of a type of hereditary Sufism passed down by lineages of ‘sacred families’ during the Mongol period, so that “spiritual authority and material management was transmitted, hand to hand, hereditarily, with their morally privileged status and their ancestry assuring the social position of the inheritors.” The social contexts of Safavid *dervichisme* are discussed by Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, pp. 232–3; Savory, “Some Reflections on Totalitarian Tendencies in the Safavid State,” p. 229; *idem.*, *Iran under the Safavids*, p. 25ff.

coloured cloak of Shī'ite piety, its most celebrated exponents' diction and lexicon tainted by their Arab colleagues in the *madrasa*, all of whom are steeped in the semi-alien language of Lebanon from whence so many Safavid 'ulamā' hailed.<sup>16</sup> Seldom now does one imbibe the fresh highland air of the ecstatic and wild beauty of 'Aṭṭār and Rūmī, almost as if one had crossed a mountain pass and suddenly descended into a strange foreign gorge: that misty clime of Shī'ite theological speculation.<sup>17</sup> *Stricto sensu*, one now feels outside the realm of classical Persian Sufism;<sup>18</sup> most of the Safavid mystics discourse in a different tongue from that of Seljuk, Mongol and Timurid-period Sufism, basing themselves on Shī'ite imāmology and writings. Suffering under the growing pressure of puritan militancy, these writings

<sup>16</sup> Referring to the Arabization of Persian culture (due to the Safavid's desire for competent Shī'ite clerics) which ensued in the sixteenth century, Dhabīḥu'llāh Ṣafā notes how Al-Ḥurr al-Āmulī in his *Amal al-āmil* listed 1,100 Arabic-speaking scholars who migrated to Iran during the period, a statistic which indicates among other factors "the deep effect on Iran of the renewed propagation of Arabic language and culture" (*Tārīkh-i adabiyāt-i Īrān*, V/1, p. 128; see also n82 below). Ṣafā devotes an entire sub-chapter, based on detailed primary-source evidence, to the "severing of national ties" which occurred under Safavid rule, noting that because of the influx of Arabic-speaking clerics from Lebanon and Iraq, "Persian culture during the period was, in many respects, under the direct influence of Arab culture. Academic lessons and studies would begin and end in Arabic, and until the end they were involved with that language, in which most of their works were written. ... So it is no surprise if we find that these clerics are far from liking Persian culture." (*Tārīkh*, V/1, p. 187; also cf. 126–8; 366–8 for further comments on the Arabization of Persian culture). The great Persian literary critic and poet M.T. Bahār in his *Sabk-shināsī* (Tehran: Chāp-i tābān 1337 A.Hsh./1958) points out that the destruction of and corruption in the style and expression of Persian prose writing during the Safavid period is "without equal in any other historical period in Iran" (III, p. 301). He devotes an entire section of this study to 'the decline of Persian prose', where he observes how "sweet and subtle Persian terms and words are replaced by dry Arabic compounds and expressions" (*ibid.*, III, p. 256). For further comments about the Arabization of Persian culture during this period, see Ali Banuazizi, *Iranian Nationality and the Persian Language 900–1900: The Roles of Court, Religion and Sufism in Persian Prose Writing*, trans. J. Hillmann (Washington: Mage 1992), pp. 140–2. Of course, the 'Arabization' thesis advanced here by Ṣafā, Bahā and Meskoob has limited value, being restricted to the fields of theology and literature. It can be conceded that Safavid government maintained the same high level of Persian culture in other areas such as book painting, textiles and carpet manufacture as any previous dynasty in Iran.

<sup>17</sup> Discussing the disastrous impact of Shī'ism on Iran, M.T. Bahār notes that from the accession of Shāh Tahmāsp onwards, "in the space of fifty years, the condition of Persian literature was turned upside down; a new culture takes over which gives its own weird form to everything. Even if the Safavids came to power under the pretence of [Sufi] guidance (*irshād*), the gates of guidance during their reign are shut down, such that only one Sufi order (*silasila*) is allowed to exist ... an order whose adherents lacked all faith in Sufism (*taṣawwuf*). ... The true Sufis having suffered defeat at the hands of jurists and Akhbārīs, in Shī'ite books Sufis are now called irreligious and labeled heretics, such that even the works of Rūmī are reviled and fatwas for the death of the Sufis frequently given" (*Sabk-shināsī*, III, p. 255).

<sup>18</sup> On which, see the previous two volumes of *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. L. Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld 1999).

reflect the suppressed nightmare of religious antagonisms which afflicted them. Such mystics, steeped in the rational tradition of legalistic scholarship, emphasize the socially acceptable nomocentric over the ecstatic and erotic aspects of *taṣawwuf*. Generally speaking, they all express themselves in a consciously esoteric philosophical language, the works of Avicenna and the Iṣhrāqī master Suhrawardī featuring as often, if not more frequently, than those of the great Sufis such as Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī, whose works had all but succumbed to the *mujtahids*’ efforts culturally to expurgate *taṣawwuf* from the Persian psyche.

Even the highest adepts of the Iṣfahān School of theosophers generally seem to show scant respect for institutional Sufism and the traditional *khānaqāhs*. They rigorously insist on distinguishing between the “vulgar” or “popular” (*‘awāmm*) generality of dervishes and the “high” and “elect” (*khāṣṣ*) Sufis. In spiritual method, they are also usually sober in orientation, after the fashion of an Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī rather than an Abū Sa‘īd ibn Abi’l-Khayr or an ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī. The rage of Ḥallāj, the ecstasy of Kharaqānī, the visionary transports of Bayazid, even the selfless *samā’* of Ṣaḥī al-Dīn Ardabilī, are now all considered politically incorrect – or at least a social embarrassment to the state-owned *faqīh*’s dignity.

Then perhaps the dearth of studies on Sufism in Safavid Persia – as the academic silence on the subject would implicitly imply – is simply because one can, or should, view Safavid Sufism as an epiphenomenon of politics and history? Perhaps the soul fled from Safavid Sufism, a lifeless social body left as heir to the vanished loves of the Mongol and Seljuk Sufis? One glimpse of the *Dīvān* of Ḥātif Iṣfahānī or the verse of Fayḍ-i Kāshānī, however, indicates that this is but a half-truth.<sup>19</sup>

## II. THE SUPPRESSION OF SUFISM IN SAFAVID PERSIA

Nor happiness, nor majesty, nor fame  
 Nor peace, nor strength, nor skill in arms or arts,  
 Shepherd those herds whom tyranny makes tame;  
 Verse echoes not one beating of their hearts,  
 History is but the shadow of their shame

Shelley

Say to the Court it glows  
 And shines like rotten wood,  
 Say to the Church it shows

<sup>19</sup> Cf. S.H. Nasr’s comments in his article “Spiritual Movements, Philosophy and Theology in the Safavid Period,” *The Cambridge History of Iran V* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1968), pp. 661–2.

What's good, and doth no good.  
 If Church and Court reply  
 Then give them both the lie.

Sir Walter Raleigh<sup>20</sup>

Although the Safavid theocracy arose "in the milieu of Sufism and of extremism,"<sup>21</sup> its "totalitarian state" as Roger Savory termed it,<sup>22</sup> was based on a politicalization of the master-disciple relationship, focusing upon an idolatrous cult of personality built around the ruler as both 'perfect master' (*murshid-i kāmīl*) and absolute monarch.<sup>23</sup> Apotheosized as a divine incarnation, the first Safavid ruler Ismā'īl I (reg. 1501–24) was glorified as the Mahdī<sup>24</sup> and even as God himself<sup>25</sup> by his zealous Qizilbāsh army. A Venetian merchant who visited Iran in the early sixteenth century reported:

The name of God is forgotten throughout Persia and only that of Ismael remembered; if any one fall when riding or dismounted, he appeals to no other God but Shiac (Shaykh), using the name in two ways: first as God Shiac, secondly as prophet: as the Mussulmans say "laylla, laylla Mahamet resuralla [*lā ilāha ilāllāhu wa Muḥammadun rasūlullāhi*], the Persians say "Laylla yllala Ismael velialla" [*lā ilāha ilāllāhu (va) Ismā'īl valī allāhi*]; besides this, everyone, and particularly his soldiers, consider him immortal."<sup>26</sup>

In this attitude, Ismā'īl was faithful to the extremist cults of personality instituted by his Safavid forefathers Junayd (1447–60) and Haydar (1460–88), who had transformed the originally peaceful Safavid order into "a militant ghāzī movement,"<sup>27</sup> thus beginning what was to become one of the darkest chapters in the entire history of Islamic Sufism. As S.A. Arjomand has

<sup>20</sup> Cited in *Elizabethan People*, ed. J. Hurstfield and A.G.R. Smith (London: Edward Arnold 1972), p. 164.

<sup>21</sup> Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> "Some Reflections on Totalitarian Tendencies," pp. 226–41.

<sup>23</sup> For further discussion of Isma'īl's messianic self-divinization, see S.A. Arjomand, "Religious Extremism (*Ghuluww*), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran (1501–1722)," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 15/1 (1981), pp. 4–5; R. Savory, "The Consolidation of Power in Safavid Persia," *Der Islam* (1976), p. 91; R. Canfield, "Theological 'Extremism' and Social Movements in Turko-Persia," in *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, ed. R. Canfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), pp. 132–60; K. Babayan, "Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas," pp. 117–19.

<sup>24</sup> A.K.S. Lambton noted that "As representative of the Mahdī, the Safavid shāh was closer to the source of absolute Truth than were other men, and consequently opposition to him was a sin. This theory led to the assumption of kingly infallibility," "Quis custodient custodes?," *Studia Islamica*, (1956), p. 129.

<sup>25</sup> Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> *Travels of Venetians in Persia* London 1873: Hakluyt Society, p. 206; cited by Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984), p. 79.

observed, the main result of this movement was that "action governed by ethical norms became devoid of significance for salvation." The "Islamic normative order became inoperative," since the Safavid leader's stance

implied the suspension of all Islamic normative influences which, for their efficacy, depended critically on the transcendence of God and mediation of the sacred law between God and man. It amounted to the abolition of all normative order independent of the personal will of the supreme leader, who was, at the same time, the Sufi murshid, the Shi'ite Imam, and the primordial godhead.<sup>28</sup>

Addressing the question how such extremist beliefs found acceptance in Anatolia and Kurdistan in the fourteenth century, Roger Savory posits the view that the Mongols' rule of Iran had displaced orthodox Islam and allowed the conditions for religious extremism or *ghuluww* to become normalized:

The religious tolerance (some might say indifference) of the Mongol rulers deprived Sunnī or "orthodox" Islam of its dominant position and created conditions which facilitated the development not only of Shī'ism but of popular religious beliefs of every kind.... Anatolia in particular became a veritable melting pot of religious ideas. The two principal ingredients in this pot were Shi'ism and Sufism, and in the course of the fourteenth century these two ingredients became permanently blended.<sup>29</sup>

However, the tolerance of the Mongols, modelled on the religious pluralism of Sufism,<sup>30</sup> which was the chief characteristic of Persian mystical topography from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, as Hodgson makes clear,<sup>31</sup> was all but snuffed out under Ismā'īl<sup>32</sup> who not only insisted on sectarian conversion

<sup>28</sup> Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, pp. 81–2.

<sup>29</sup> Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, pp. 23–4, whose general observations are borne out by M. Mazzaoui's more detailed analysis of primary-source material in his *The Origins of the Safavids: Šī'ism, Sūfism, and the Gūlāt* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner 1972), pp. 59–80.

<sup>30</sup> See my *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Spiritual Teachings of Maḥmūd Shabistārī* (London: Curzon 1995), chap. 3, for an extended discussion of the Mongols' attitude towards Sufism.

<sup>31</sup> "The Sufis tended to be as naturally tolerant of local differences as the Shar'ī 'ulamā' tended to be intolerant. The 'ulamā' had to concentrate on matters of external conformity, as dictated by the Shari'ah, in order to maintain the legal and institutional framework for social unity... For the Sufis, on the contrary, externals were secondary. For many of them, especially by the Earlier Middle Period, even the difference between Islam and other cultural traditions such as Christianity was of secondary importance in principle; of still less moment were the various differences in social custom within the community of Muhammad. What mattered was the inner disposition of the heart to God" (*The Venture of Islam* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1977], II, p. 203).

<sup>32</sup> Referring to Shāh Ismā'īl I's (reg. 1501–24) reign of terror against those who did not conform to Safavid dogma, Tomes Pires, the Portuguese ambassador to China who visited Iran in 1511–2, noted: "He (i.e. Shāh Ismā'īl) deforms our churches, destroys the houses of all Moors who follow (the Sunnah of) Muḥammad and never spares the life of any Jew" (Tomé Pires, *The Suma Oriental: 1512–1515*, trans. from Portuguese by Armando Cortesao

to Shī'ism but believed Sufism to be incompatible with Sunnism.<sup>33</sup> The form of Shī'ism which Shāh Ismā'īl's followers professed, even the form which his immediate father and grandfather espoused, merged with the vulgarized *dervichisme* of his armed Qizilbāsh quasi-Sufi followers to produce "the same sort of claims and beliefs which typify the *ghulāt* Shī'ites."<sup>34</sup> "Because of the oppositional stance of both the Imāmīs and the *ghulāt*, the 'Alīd cause came to be the rallying cry around which both groups united,"<sup>35</sup> and in this manner, as Kathryn Babayan points out, exactly like the Fatimids who rose to power by use of similar revolutionary utopian slogans, "Shāh Ismā'īl too played on the *ghulāt* spirit of the *Qizilbash* to establish the Safavi empire. In his poetry Ismā'īl refers to himself as Farīdūn, Rustam, Alexander, Jesus, and the son of 'Alī . . . He saw himself as the reincarnation of a host of holy and heroic figures from Islamdom's cultural past."<sup>36</sup>

Shāh Ismā'īl's Shī'itized reorientation of Sufism was tinged with his self-conception as not only a Sufi master, but the veritable hand and shadow of God on earth. He inherited the bloodthirsty and ruthless nature of his father and grandfather, and was notorious for his readiness to massacre those who disagreed with his political or religious views.<sup>37</sup> Shelley's verse:

He loathed all faith beside his own and pined  
To wreak his fear of Heaven in vengeance on mankind.<sup>38</sup>

best portrays the religious archetype at play. Hence, in examining the rise of the Safavid order from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, one is no longer studying *taṣawwuf* in the classical sense of the word, but rather an absolutistic despotism and theocratic autocracy masquerading with the mannerisms of

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London: Hakluyt Society 1944, I, p. 27. Cited by David Yeroushalmi (ed.), *The Judeo-Persian Poet 'Emrānī and his Book of Treasure: Emrānī's Ganj-nāme, A Versified Commentary on the Mishnaic Tractate Abot* [Leiden: Brill 1995], introduction, p. 20. The great hatred that Shāh Ismā'īl bore for Jews is especially striking for its intolerance. Raphaël du Mans, *Estat de la Perse en 1660*, ed. Ch. Schefer (Paris: Ernest Leroux 1890), p. 274, reported that "So deep is his hate that whenever he sees a Jew he orders to put out his eyes." (Cited by Yeroushalmi *The Judeo-Persian Poet Emrānī*, introduction, p. 20.)

<sup>33</sup> Rasūl Ja'fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsat dar dūra-yi Ṣafavī* (Qum: Intishārāt-i Anṣariyān 1370 A.Hsh./1991), p. 225.

<sup>34</sup> Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 228.

<sup>35</sup> Babayan, "The Waning of the Qizilbash," p. 28.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33; *idem*, "Safavid Synthesis," p. 143.

<sup>37</sup> When someone objected that the Sunni peasants might protest at the imposition of Shī'ism, he replied: "If they do, we will not leave a soul of them alive." Cited by Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 224 (citing Abū Bakr Tihirānī, *Tārīkh-i Jahān-ārā*, quoted in Naṣrū'llāh Falsafī, *Zindagī-yi Shāh 'Abbās Awwal* [Tehran: 1332 A.Hsh./1953], I, p. 167). M.T. Bahār has compared the effect of Shāh Ismā'īl on Persian culture to a "nest of wasps more deadly than all the Tartar hosts" (*Sabk-shināsī*, III, p. 250), for, in the pursuit of his own Shī'ite extremist faith, "he had no qualms at all in massacring, murdering, and wreaking mayhem, in which policy he exercised no degree of restraint" (*ibid.*, III, pp. 253–4).

<sup>38</sup> Shelley, "The Revolt of Islam," XXXII.

*taṣawwuf* put on as a social facade;<sup>39</sup> in a word, the ideologization of mysticism to suit a particular religio-political agenda.<sup>40</sup>

Just as the shadow-self of puritanism is prurience, even the purest faith being prone to hypocrisy, so no religious sect or party exists whose piety and politics cannot be tainted and corrupted:

The same ambition can destroy or save  
And make a patriot as it makes a knave.<sup>41</sup>

Despite its grand ideals, Sufism is no exception to this rule. Sir John Malcolm's remarks on the decline of Sufism under Zand rule in nineteenth-century Iran apply equally well to the Sufi sultāns of sixteenth-century Safavid Persia:

There is no path to fame and power, however unseemly and rugged, on which man will not enter; the same passions which excite the worldly votary of ambition to the attainment of royal robes and a sceptre, fill the breast of the mendicant devotee, striving for the holy staff and sacred mantle that are to vest him with power over the minds of the multitude.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The Safavid sovereigns' economic exploitation and politicized truncation of the master-disciple relationship in Sufism appears in the accounts given by contemporary European travellers to Persia. Michele Membré, a Venetian envoy to the court of Shāh Tahmāsp, for one, observed at first hand the absolutist tyranny which the king exercised over his dervish subjects. In Membré's description of the dervish dances of the "sophians" (i.e. Qizilbāsh Sufis) in the early sixteenth century, he relates that they play and sing praises to God and Shāh Tahmāsp "For they say that the said Shah receives the tenth of what they earn each year, for being their prophet. And there are those of them who, when a daughter is born to them, say, 'She will be *nadhr* for the Shah', that is a gift for a vow. And when she is of a suitable age, many bring her and show her to the said Shah, who keeps those who please him and lets the others go" (Michele Membré, *Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia (1539-1542)*, trans. A.H. Morton [London: SOAS Publications 1993], p. 32).

<sup>40</sup> As Professor Şafā (*Tārīkh*, V/1, p. 201) points out: "The tinpot sect of Safavid Sufis who flourished during the uprising and expansion of power and under the rule of Shāh Ismā'īl and his son Shāh Tahmāsp were devoid of all the disciplines of classical Sufism; not only were they unaware of the higher ideals of Sufism, they had only a vulgarized apprehension of the existence of such ideals, their understanding being based on popular, watered-down beliefs followed without any deeper awareness. Since they followed the *ṭarīqat* of their own shaykhs in such an ignorant manner, no wonder that they readily condemned all other intellectual movements besides their own as heretical, and endeavoured to eliminate everyone else ... These pseudo-Sufi Turkish *Qizilbāsh*, from the time that Sultān Junayd and Sultān Haydar had decked them out in coats of mail and stripped them of their dervish robes, forging their pious strings of beads into sabres and spears ... were in reality, no longer Sufis, although we can see, incredible as it appears, that they still insisted on calling themselves Sufis."

<sup>41</sup> Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, II, 201-2.

<sup>42</sup> *History of Persia* (London 1829), II, p. 287. Lamenting similar conditions prevailing in Christianity in England a century later, while criticizing those who use "religion as a stalking horse to get and enjoy the world," the seventeenth-century English Nonconformist preacher John Bunyan told the same truth when he observed in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (ed.

The decline and descent of the Safavid *dudmān* into the Hades of political cultism had begun in late Timurid times when Shāh Ismā‘īl’s grandfather Junayd (1447–60), the first Safavid master to assume the title of Sulṭān “indicative of temporal authority . . . introduced a militant note into the peaceful Safavid Order<sup>43</sup> by inciting his disciples to war against the infidels.”<sup>44</sup> The Sunni theologian Faḍlullāh b. Rūzbihān Khunjī-Iṣfahānī in his *Tārīkh-i ‘ālam-ārā-yi Amīnī* recorded Junayd’s change of policy as follows:

He had altered the character of his ancestors. In the nest of fantasy, the bird of temptation had laid the egg of the desire for temporal rule. Of course, as a consequence, it set flight in the air of his deranged desires. He allowed the falcon of his thoughts to soar every hour in a different direction, towards conquests of lands and climes.<sup>45</sup>

Junayd was chased out of Ardabīl by Jahānshāh and took refuge in Syria with the Āq Quyūnlū leader Ūzūn Ḥasan whose sister he married, thus cementing “his political alliance.”<sup>46</sup> Khunjī-Iṣfahānī again wonders why

instead of raising the flag of spiritual guidance, did he unfold the banner of military command, changing his mantle of renunciation (*khirqā-yi parhīz*) for bloodsoiled garments. Why did he switch the staff of ascetic restraint (*zuhādāt*) for a death-dealing javelin, he wondered:

What was it, what was it you missed in life,  
To gain what name or fame, or rank you wished  
Which made you switch your dervish robe for it,  
Change your Sufi cell for the barracks?

Roger Sharrock: Penguin 1987; Harmondsworth) that “the man that takes up religion for the world will throw away religion for the world; for so surely as Judas designed the world in becoming religious, so surely did he also sell religion and his master for the same. . . . The Pharisees were also of this religion, long prayers were their pretence, but to get widows’ houses was their intent” (pp. 154–5).

<sup>43</sup> The contrast between the religious idealism of the original Safavid Sufi masters and the militant fundamentalism of the later Safavid sovereign *pīrs* is extraordinary. It is said that when the founder of the Safavid order, Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī was once challenged by Amīr Chūbān, the most formidable vizier at the court of the last Ilkhānid Sulṭān Abū Sa‘īd (*reg.* 1317–35), with the question: “Who are more numerous, your disciples or my men?” Shaykh Ṣafī shamed him by his reply, “In Iran today, for every man at arms there are one hundred men of devotion” (Qaḍī Aḥmad Ghaffārī, *Tārīkh-i Jahān-ārā* [Tehran: 1343 A.Hsh./1964], p. 260; cited by Mazzaoui, *The Origins*, p. 71).

<sup>44</sup> Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, p. 16. Michael Mazzaoui, in his *The Origins of the Safavids*, noted that “From contemplative *ṣūfism* under Ṣāḥī Ṣafī ad-Dīn to open heresy of the *ḡulāt* type under Ġunaid and Ḥaidar is a long way and a far cry. The only explanation that could be offered (and this only by looking at the consequences rather than at the causes) is that by assuming this super-human and divine role, the new-type leaders of the Order could rally their followers and lead them to *gazā* and conquest. . . . In other words, the religious change was simply a pretext for political ends” (p. 273).

<sup>45</sup> Faḍlullāh b. Rūzbihān Khunjī-Iṣfahānī, *Tārīkh-i ‘ālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, ed. John Woods (London: Royal Asiatic Society 1992), p. 266.

<sup>46</sup> Savory *Iran Under the Safavids*, p. 17.

With the sword cut your focus on Oneness off,  
 Leave your Sufi refuge and slash all ties  
 With holiness, to toss away your staff  
 of pious righteousness, and raise the axe?<sup>47</sup>

The answer to the question posed in this *dūbaytī*, of course, had been given half a century earlier by Ḥāfiẓ in famous verses exposing the dark side of the Pharisaical hypocrisy lurking within Islamic piety:

I have a difficulty, and submit it to the wise men of this assembly:  
 Those who exhort to penitence, why aren't they penitents themselves?  
 One could say that not longer believing in the day of the last judgement,  
 They corrupt, by their fraud, the work of the supreme Judge.<sup>48</sup>

Contrary to the customary historical platitude, Shāh Ismā'īl, the first Safavid ruler, did not establish the new religion of Persia on the basis of either Shī'ism or Sufism. His religion was a kind of sectarian religious totalitarianism focused on *ghulāt* Islam, the doctrines and practices of which are completely alien to both traditional Shī'ism<sup>49</sup> and classical Sufism.<sup>50</sup> As Zarrīnkūb, Savory, Amoretti and so many other scholars have pointed out, the tone of his movement was primarily that of a personality cult based on his apotheosis "as a divine incarnation;"<sup>51</sup> while his claims were so fantastic and exclusivistic that he had no choice but to strive to expel every other Sufi order from the arena lest they be tempted to make similar claims.<sup>52</sup> If Sa'dī's tolerant Sufi ideal expressed in his famous maxim contrasting the simple piety of spiritual poverty to the grandiose pretensions of temporal power –

<sup>47</sup> *chih shud kaz faqr mayl-i jāh kardī*  
*bijā-yi khānaqah khargāh kardī*  
*biḥ tīgh az khalwat-i waḥdat burīdī*  
*'aṣā afkandī u nayza guzīdī*

(*Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā-yi Amīnī*, p. 269.)

<sup>48</sup> *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. Parwīz Nātil Khanlarī (Tehran: Sahāmī 'ām 1362 A.Hsh./1983; 2nd edn.), p. 404; Ghazal 194; vv. 2, 3; translation by Peter Russell.

<sup>49</sup> Dhabīḥū'llāh Ṣafā in his *Tārīkh-i adabiyāt-i Īrān* (V/1, p. 170) underlines the fact that "the political milieu of the Safavid Redhat autocracy is one completely at variance with traditional Twelver Shī'ism, or in fact with any other Shī'ite denomination. More than anything, it was composed of popular beliefs professed without any intellectual verification or analysis of the religious subject-matter." Although Kathryn Babayan is right to state that he "came to place his messianic claims within an Imami framework" ("Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas," p. 119) this is but an alibi for the crime already committed.

<sup>50</sup> On which, see Javad Nurbakhsh's informative essay: 'The Key Features of Early Persian Sufism', in L. Lewisohn, *The Heritage of Sufism*, I., pp. xvii–xli.

<sup>51</sup> Savory *Iran Under the Safavids*, p. 23; Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 227; Amoretti, "Religion in the Timurid and Safavid Periods," in *Cambridge History of Iran*, V, pp. 634–40.

<sup>52</sup> Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 228.

Two dervishes sleep in peace beneath a single sheepskin  
But a single country is too small to contain two kings.<sup>53</sup>

– pithily sums up what Marshall Hodgson referred to as “the comprehensive humanity from which a Sufi could preach,” which “gave the Sufi tradition an often spectacular advantage,”<sup>54</sup> – then Shāh Ismā‘īl’s conquest of Iran illustrates the perversion of this ideal and the forfeiture of this historical advantage.

Recognizing that his position as the cult leader of a radical religio-political party was far too left of centre to obtain a popular vote of confidence,<sup>55</sup> shortly after his seizure of Tabriz, the capital of Iran in 1501 at the age of 14, Shāh Ismā‘īl proclaimed nominal ‘Shī‘ism’ to be the state religion of Iran. However, in the frenzy of his adolescence, and apparently in order to conserve and redirect the momentum of his revolutionary followers<sup>56</sup> who were attracted by “the vehemence of a fascinating ideology,”<sup>57</sup> he decreed that his supporters introduce the ritual cursing of the three other caliphs: Abū Bakr, ‘Uthmān and ‘Umar. Thus, Safavid party members known as *tabarrā’iyyān* were instructed to pace the streets and marketplaces, cursing three of the four ‘righteous caliphs’ (besides ‘Alī). Whoever did not respond

<sup>53</sup> As Ṣafā notes (*Tārīkh*, V/1, pp. 203–4), the real reason behind the opposition of the Shī‘ite ‘ulamā’ to the Sufis centres on a power struggle based on a theological divergence of interpretation regarding the Islamic doctrine of ‘sainthood and the sacrosanct’ (*wilāyah*). “The Shī‘ite divines (‘ālimān) understood *walāyah* and guidance of people as part of the exclusive domain of the Imām, and in his absence, those appointed by him. The Sufis, on the other hand, included their own ‘poles’ (*aqāb*) and shaykhs among the number of the saints, considering both implicit and explicit obedience to *them* as incumbent, effectively disregarding the legalist scholars who claimed to be successors of the prophet. So it is evident that even two kings cannot rule a single clime although the dervish is ready to sleep under a single blanket with the rest of humanity” (see also n. 65 below).

<sup>54</sup> *The Venture of Islam*, II, p. 207.

<sup>55</sup> Both V. Minorsky and R. Savory have appropriately noted the resemblances between the *ahl-i ikhtiṣāṣ*, and Lenin’s Politburo of 1919 which controlled the Bolshevik movement. See V. Minorsky, *Tadhkirat al-mulūk* (London 1942), pp. 1–3; Savory, “Some Reflections on Totalitarian Tendencies,” pp. 226–41.

<sup>56</sup> Arjomand points out that when Shāh Ismā‘īl proclaimed Shī‘ism as the state religion in Tabriz, “that city, like the rest of Iran, was predominantly Sunnī. It was only after much searching that a book containing the basic tenets of Imāmī Shī‘ism, the *Qawa‘id al-islām* by Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Hillī (1250–1326) was found in the library of a qāḍī, and was made the basis of the new religion.” (S.A. Arjomand, “Religious Extremism (*Ghuluww*), Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran (1501–1722),” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 15/1 [1981], p. 3). Also cf. Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 224. Shī‘ites existed in pre-Safavid Iran but were constituted a very small minority living in Qum, Kāshān, Rayy and Sāva. On the Sunni origins of the Safavids, see Aḥmad Kasravī, “Tabār va kīsh Ṣafaviyān,” *Iran Nameh*, 13/3 (1995), pp. 377–86; Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safavids*, pp. 46 ff.

<sup>57</sup> Hans R. Roemer, “The Qizilbash Turcomans: Founders and Victims of the Safavid Theocracy,” in *Intellectual Studies on Islam*, ed M. Mazzaoui and V. Moreen (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press 1990), p. 30.

with the slogan, "Sing more abuse of them, not less!" (*Bīsh bād, kam mabād!*) was put to death immediately.<sup>58</sup>

Under the spell of superficially disguised shamanist concepts, Ismā'īl himself – who was of Turcoman not Iranian descent<sup>59</sup> – advocated even more barbarous customs; he made himself a cup out of the skull of a defeated enemy, and instructed his cannibal Qizilbāsh followers to roast their defeated foes alive and eat their flesh to acquire strength!<sup>60</sup> A special national holiday to celebrate the murder of 'Umar was invented by the adolescent Shī'ite autocrat,<sup>61</sup> still faithfully observed in the Islamic Republic of Iran today!<sup>62</sup>

This proclamation of Shī'ism:

symbolized Shāh Ismā'īl's move away from *ghuluww* toward orthodoxy. The *ghuluww* had served its purpose in carrying the Safavi brotherhood into statehood. From the outset of his rule, Shāh Ismā'īl had realized that to unify and centralize his domains, it would be imperative to alter the nature of his legitimacy and to forge a uniform religion: heterodoxy had to be eliminated. The tensions, however, persisted between the contradictory functions of *pīr* and *shāh*, and the conflicting nature of *ghuluww* and Imamism.<sup>63</sup>

These tensions, with the psychological contradiction that dual recourse to interior sources of spiritual power and the exterior forces of a temporal potentate entail,<sup>64</sup> were resolved with unrighteous might when the Grand Sophy, as Europeans referred to the Safavid sovereigns, like his father and grandfather before him, switched the traditional interpretation of the Sufi doctrine of 'sainthood' (*wilāyah*: the saint's friendship with God) to imply the sanctification of his own political sovereignty on the basis of such extreme Shī'ism,<sup>65</sup> thereby excluding all other Sufis, or indeed, any dissenting expressions of religious belief, from their inhumane 'divine' plan.

<sup>58</sup> Cited by Zarrīnkūb in his *Dunbāla*, p. 224; also see Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, pp. 27–8.

<sup>59</sup> See Šafā, *Tārīkh*, V/I, p. 495.

<sup>60</sup> Hans R. Roemer, "The Qizilbash Turcomans: Founders and Victims of the Safavid Theocracy," in *Intellectual Studies on Islam*, ed. M. Mazzaoui and V. Moreen, p. 31.

<sup>61</sup> This holiday was celebrated annually on the 26th of Dhū'l-Hujjat. See Šafā, *Tārīkh-i*, V/I, p. 168.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Babayan, "The Waning of the Qizilbash," p. 37.

<sup>64</sup> On which, see Zarrīnkūb's interesting discussion and analysis, *Dunbāla*, pp. 230ff. and also Rasūl Ja'fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsāt*, pp. 225–6.

<sup>65</sup> Hermann Landolt drew attention to this change in interpretation of the *wilāyah* doctrine, insofar as once the early Safavid rulers "assumed rule of Iran (with Shāh Ismā'īl I in 1501) they introduced Twelver Shiism, in a form hardly compatible with 'orthodox' Shī'i doctrine, as state religion; their prayer carpet (*sajjādah*), symbol of the dignity of the Šūfī *shaykh*, or Šūfī *wilāyah*, became the symbol of the quasi-divine throne of Persia (*qālichah-i salṭanat*). Their success also brought about ... the establishment of a real Shī'i 'clergy' and its eventual politization" ("Walāyah," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade [New York: Macmillan 1995], XV, p. 320). See also Šafā's comments on the clerical reinterpretation of the doctrine of *wilāyah* by Safavid 'ulamā', *Tārīkh*, V/I, pp. 203–4.

"Isma'il's hostility towards the non-Shī'ites," Kamil Shaibi reveals, "was based on the Musha'sha'a view of considering all their opponents disbelievers. This was why the graves of Jami, a Nasqbandī Sufi, and Abū Ishan of Kazarun, a Sunni Sufi, were despoiled."<sup>66</sup> The Sufi chronologer Ḥāfiẓ Ḥusayn Ibn Karbalā'ī described how Shāh Ismā'īl I "eradicated, destroyed and extirpated most of the initiatic lineages [*silāsil* = Sufi Orders] of the Sayyids and Shaykhs' in Persia,<sup>67</sup> and how "the Sufi lineages (*silasilas*) were crushed by him."<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, during this period most of the great Sufi orders were forced to flee to Mughal India or Ottoman Turkey, or to go underground. The Naqshbandiyya were ferociously suppressed; Sufis of the Khalvatiyya order fled to Ottoman protection in Anatolia; the Dhahabiyya, Nūrbakhshiyya, and Nimatullāhiyya Orders survived, true, but with none of their former glory, remaining mostly underground and persecuted, increasing subjected to fanatic anathema by the theocratic establishment.<sup>69</sup> In 909/1503, after a massacre of 4,000 people, he drove the followers of the Kāzārūnī Sufi order out of Fars and desecrated the tombs of the Sufi shaykhs of that region.<sup>70</sup> As for the Nasqbandiyya, all trace of this order "was extirpated from Western and Central Iran by the Safavids, for whom the slaughter of Sunni scholars and shaykhs was an essential part of establishing Shī'i supremacy."<sup>71</sup> As mentioned above, when Ismā'īl I conquered Herāt in 1510, he desecrated Jāmī's tomb.<sup>72</sup> The Khalwatī Order fled the Shī'ified Safavid regime for the more congenial Ottoman domains and the Nūrbakhshī branch of the Kubrawī order also declined sharply, with the great-grandson of Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh, Qawām al-Dīn being executed by Shāh Tahmāsp (*reg.* 1524–76).<sup>73</sup>

Towards the end of Tahmāsp's reign, while overt Sufi practices on the part of the official Ṣafawiyya were gradually abandoned as politically inexpedient, the Sufi tradition continued in a purely ceremonial capacity. Just as the Safavid Shāhs appointed 'ulamā' to the post of 'archbishop' (Shaykh al-Islām), to regulate religious affairs, they also created a 'general state secretariat for Sufi affairs' in the office of *Khalīfat al-khulafā'*, as is evident from *firmāns* issued from the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp right to the very end of the reign of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn.<sup>74</sup> With the succession of Tahmāsp's son, Ismā'īl II (d. 985/1577) further

<sup>66</sup> Kamil Mustafa al-Shaibi, *Sufism and Shī'ism* (London: LAAM 1991), p. 319.

<sup>67</sup> *Rawḍat al-janān wa jannāt al-jinān*, ed. Ja'far Sulṭān al-Qurrā'ī (Tabriz, BTNK, 1344 A.H.sh./1965), II, p. 159.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 491.

<sup>69</sup> A. Arjomand, "The Suppression of Sufism," in *The Shadow of God*, pp. 112–19.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>71</sup> H. Algar, "The Naqshbandī Order: A Preliminary Survey of its History and Significance," *Studia Islamica* 44 (1976), p. 139.

<sup>72</sup> Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 112.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>74</sup> These are cited by Ja'fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsat*, pp. 113–18. On the office of *Khalīfat al-khulafā'*, see Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, pp. 240–1.

efforts to eradicate Sufism from Persia were made when he massacred the Sufis of Qazwin.<sup>75</sup> ‘Abbās the Great (1587–1629) continued this anti-Sufi policy with the massacre in 1023/1614 of his Safavid Sufi followers in Qarājādāgh, accused of collaboration with the Ottomans. Just as Ismā‘īl II before him had massacred the Sufis in Qazwin, so he also destroyed their Sufi centres there after blinding his Sufi grand vizier (*Khalīfat al-khulafā’*), jealously apprehensive of the loyalty held to him by his Qizilbāsh Sufi followers.<sup>76</sup>

Although the beginning of the destruction of institutionalized Sufism was largely a political act by the early Safavid Shāhs, aimed at eradicating any opposition from their own folk Shī‘ite-*ghāzī* background, their initiative was largely supported by the Shī‘ite clerics from Iraq, Lebanon and Syria who were welcomed to Iran at the end of the sixteenth century when the Safavid state turned to consolidating Shī‘ism as the official religion. Aside from the actual historical factors, the survival of institutional Sufism in any Islamic society depends upon public opinion, which is susceptible to the vagaries of changing relations between the ruling authorities and the ‘*ulamā*’ with the mystics. The fundamentalist religious policies of the Safavid sovereigns combined with a bitter propaganda campaign carried out by the Shī‘ite clerics against Sufism effectively signalled the social obliteration of the *ṭarīqas* and their traditions from the frontiers of Persia. And even if “out of political expediency, Isma‘īl did compromise with some of the Sufi shaykhs – notably those of the Ni‘matullāhī order, there can be no doubt about his relentless hostility towards most rival Sufi orders, a policy continued by his successors.”<sup>77</sup>

It has been argued by one scholar that the main reason behind Shāh Ismā‘īl’s wish to eradicate Sufism was that “the *ghuluww* of the Qizilbash became equated with sufism partly because of the *ṭarīqat* tradition characteristic of the early phase of the Safavi brotherhood. This particular equation prompted the Safavis to foster the liquidation of sufism.”<sup>78</sup> (Partially) true as this may be, the cardinal cause of the purge of the rival orders was the animosity of the formalist ‘*ulamā*’, those pseudo-orthodox Shī‘ite clerics who viewed Sufism itself as a type of *ghuluww*, and whose bitter prejudice was thus largely responsible for its eradication.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See *Tārīkh-i khānaqāh dar Irān*, p. 239.

<sup>76</sup> Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 111.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112. The Safavids’ relationship with the Ni‘matu’llāhiyya is discussed by Terry Graham in this volume.

<sup>78</sup> Babayan, “The Waning of the Qizilbash,” p. 40.

<sup>79</sup> ‘The reason behind the shari’a-minded ulama’s attacks on *ghulāt* and sufism are clear’, Kathryn Babayan (“The Waning of the Qizilbash,” p. 69) underlines: “The ‘*ulamā*’ were attempting to convert the masses to Imamism. The religiosity of the masses and certainly that of the *oymāqs* was imbued with popular colorings of *ghulāt* and *ṭarīqat* sufism.” Both Zarrīnkūb (*Dunbāla*, p. 224) and Dhabīḥu’llāh Ṣafā (*Tārīkh*, V/I, pp. 201ff.), basing themselves on primary-source evidence, also convincingly argue this point.

III. THE RISE OF THE *MUJTAHID* CULT

The orthodox hierarchy of Persia have from the first made an open and violent war on this sect [of Sufis]; and though they have often failed to rouse the bigotry of the sovereign in their defence, then have always succeeded in convincing them that the established religion was necessary to the support of the state, and that nothing could be more dangerous than the progress of infidelity, which, by unsettling men's minds, was calculated to throw them into doubt and ferment.

Sir John Malcolm<sup>80</sup>

For he was of that stubborn crew  
Of errant saints whom all men grant  
To be the true church militant  
Such as do build their faith upon  
The holy text of pike and gun;  
Decide all controversy by  
Infallible artillery,  
And prove their doctrines orthodox  
By apostolic blows and knocks;  
Call fire sword and desolation  
A godly-thorough reformation  
Which always must be carried on,  
And still is doing but never done,  
As if Religion were intended  
For nothing else but being mended.  
A sect whose chief devotion lies  
In odd perverse antipathies,  
In falling out with that and this  
And finding something still amiss

Samuel Butler (1612–80)

There were no major centres of Shī'ite learning in pre-Safavid Iran, so clerics had to be imported by the new regime from Arabic Iraq, greater Baḥrayn and Jabal 'Āmil in the Lebanon.<sup>81</sup> As a consequence, the educational *madrasa*

<sup>80</sup> Sir John Malcolm, *History of Persia* (London 1829), II, p. 292.

<sup>81</sup> I am grateful to Andrew Newman for having brought to my attention the ongoing academic discussion about the relative demographic extent, social and theological importance of this migration. In his article on "The Myth of Clerical Migration to Safavid Iran," *Die Welt des Islams*, 23 (1993), pp. 66–112, Newman argues that the migration is mostly a myth and that there is little evidence to support the contention that any Arab Twelver scholars migrated in large numbers to Iran or, in fact, ever supported the Safavids. Devin J. Stewart re-examined Newman's thesis and evidence and came to slightly different conclusions, claiming the existence of a direct "influence of 'Āmilī scholars in government policies... even in the early sixteenth century ...," while pointing out that "it cannot be

system of seventeenth-century Persia became limited to two fields of learning: Shī'ite theology and the Arabic language, and all other fields "were consigned to the shelves of oblivion, or else only made use of when required for religious purposes."<sup>82</sup> Despite the institutionalization of Shī'ism in Iran, during Ismā'īl's reign at least, the Safavid state managed to keep a firm hand on the clerical class. During the reign of Shāh Ṭahmāsp (1524–76), however, religious policy was changed to allow the Shī'ite *mujtahids* to assume supreme spiritual authority, so that under his rule "the intellectual struggle of Shī'ite clerics with Sufism began."<sup>83</sup>

Ṭahmāsp "turned to the further strengthening of Twelver Shi'i institutions, forbidding art forms such as poetry and music which did not in some way praise 'Alī and the Twelve Imams."<sup>84</sup> He interrupted the Friday prayer in all mosques connected with the Sunni community, often replacing prayer with ritual cursing.<sup>85</sup> Eighteen-year-old Ṭahmāsp, son of demi-god Ismā'īl, had fallen prey to the priestcraft of 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd al-'Alī al-Karākī (d. 940/1533–4) whom he appointed to the post of "Deputy of the Hidden Imām" (*nā'ib al-imām*). To ensure that Karākī's word was considered infallible and incontrovertible in all matters of religion, Ṭahmāsp even issued the following decree:

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construed as an accident that the leading jurists in the Empire during its first 120 years were all 'Āmilīs' ("Notes on the Migration of 'Āmilī Scholars to Safavid Iran," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 55/2 [1996], p. 85 (see also p. 102, *infra*). However, Stewart agrees with Newman that very few 'Āmilī scholars emigrated to Iran during the first fifty years of Safavid rule and that "the main influx of Bahraini scholars did not occur until the seventeenth century, and most 'Āmilīs came during the latter half of the sixteenth century or later" (*ibid.*, p. 86). The same debate is also critically appraised, with some different conclusions, by Rula Abisaab, "The Ulama of Jabal 'Āmil in Safavid Iran, 1501–1736: Marginality, Migration and Social Change," *Iranian Studies*, 27/1–4 (1994, pp. 103–22). However, with all its uncertainties and questions, this debate remains mostly peripheral to the purview of this chapter, being only marginally relevant to my argument here, the basic point of which remains that, as Ja'fariyān succinctly puts it: "With the invitation extended by the Safavid shāhs to Shī'ite '*ulamā*' from Jabal-'Āmal [to come to Iran] and their acquisition of control over the populace's intellectual and religious life, Sufism was marginalized and the work of directing the intellectual development of society effectively taken out of their hands. Although in the beginning, some '*ulamā*' held the Sufis in esteem and addressed themselves to their needs, in the end through the power of the Shī'ite '*ulamā*', Sufism, thus degraded, was generally unable to act as an effective force in politics or society, the activities of its *khānaqāhs* and centres being curtailed" (*Dīn va siyāsat*, p. 77).

<sup>82</sup> Ṣafā, *Tārīkh*, V/1 p. 172.

<sup>83</sup> Ja'fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsat*, p. 225. See also Mangol Bayat's discussion, "The Rise of the Mujtahid to Power," in *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 1982), pp. 19–25; and Ṣafā, *Tārīkh*, V/1 pp. 174–6.

<sup>84</sup> Rosemary Stanfield Johnson, "Sunni Survival in Safavid Iran: Anti-Sunni Activities during the Reign of Tahmasp I," *Iranian Studies*, 27/1–4 (1994), p. 126. Ṭahmāsp, did, however, patronize calligraphy and painting, for which he had "a lively enthusiasm" as Ebadollah Bahari, *Bihzad: Master of Persian Painting* (London: I.B. Tauris 1996), p. 189, points out.

<sup>85</sup> Johnson, "Sunni Survival in Safavid Iran," p. 129.

It is clear and obvious that opposition to the rule of the *mujtahids* who are Protectors of the Canon Law (*sharḥ*) of the cardinal of the messengers (Muḥammad) is equivalent to polytheism (*shirk*). Therefore, whoever opposes the Seal of the *Mujtahids* [= Karakī] who is the heir of the knowledge of the cardinal of the messengers . . . and does not become his follower is without doubt accused and worthy to be denounced, and excommunicated from this blessed court.<sup>86</sup>

As the author of the first polemical tract against Sufism in Safavid Persia,<sup>87</sup> Karakī played an instrumental role in arousing the animosity of the orthodox to Sufism. He can thus be considered as the inaugurator of a genre of writings that was later popularized by other dogmatic religious professionals of his class; he was, at the same time, the reviver of the ancient feud with Sufi philosophy which Shī'ite divines had begun many centuries earlier.<sup>88</sup>

The doctrine of 'making legal exertion' (*ijtihād*) in Shī'ism<sup>89</sup> first obtained canonical acceptance in the writings of 'Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325) who defined it merely as the exertion by the jurist in obtaining a 'probably correct opinion' (*ẓann*) on specific matters in specific fields of law.<sup>90</sup> Under Karakī however, the decisive judgement was delivered that it was illegal to follow (*taqlīd*) a dead jurist (*mujtahid*). Although in theory this meant that tradition was being perpetually remade and renewed by living legal authorities, in practice a dynamic doctrine had become reified, creating a class of clerical hierocrats who assumed supreme religious authority to be their sole and exclusive property. It also assured "the continued transitivity of juristic authority and precluded its exclusive attribution to eminent jurists of the past

<sup>86</sup> Al-Khwānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt fī aḥwāl al-'ulamā' wa'l-sādāt* (Tehran: 1970), IV, pp. 362–3; cited by Ṣafā, *Tārīkh*, V/1, p. 176; this *firmān* and a similar *firmān* by Tahmāsp are also cited by Ja'fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsāt*, pp. 407–11. Although this post continued to be passed down patrimonially within the Karakī family for several generations, after Tahmāsp's death it declined in importance and was replaced by the *Ṣadr* function. See Arjomand, "The Mujtahid of the Age and the Mullā-bāshī," in *Authority and Political Culture in Shī'ism*, ed. S.A. Arjomand (Albany: SUNY Press 1988), pp. 82–3. For other relevant decrees concerning Karakī, see *idem*, "Two Decrees of Shāh Tahmāsp Concerning Statecraft and the Authority of Shaykh 'Alī al-Karakī," *Authority and Political Culture in Shī'ism*, pp. 250–62. The rise of the *mujtahid* cult coincided with a decline in public ethics, Ibn Karbalā'ī notes. Writing in 975/1567 during the reign of Shāh Tahmāsp, Ibn Karbalā'ī notes that he "has been wandering throughout Islamic countries for the past thirty years but I have not found one single judge (*qāḍī*) who is immune from these vices of fraud, bribery, mendacity and seizure of charitably endowed properties" (*Rawḍāt al-jinān va jannāt al-janān*, ed. Ja'far Sultān al-Qurrā'ī [Persian Texts Series no. 20; Tehran 1344 A.Hsh./1965], I, p. 128).

<sup>87</sup> Ja'fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsāt*, pp. 225–6; Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: from Qizilbash Islām to Imāmīte Shī'ism," *Iranian Studies*, 27/1–4 (1994), p. 144, n. 27.

<sup>88</sup> See Ṣafā's provocative and erudite discussion of this phenomenon, *Tārīkh*, V/1, p. 203ff.

<sup>89</sup> For the historical development of this doctrine, see Aron Zysow, "Ejtehād," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, VIII, pp. 281.

<sup>90</sup> Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 140.

as in Sunnism.”<sup>91</sup> Karakī was thus nicknamed the “inventor of Shī‘ism” by the Sunnis.<sup>92</sup> His central role in the institutionalization of the jurists’ hierocracy in Safavid Persia recalls the key position of Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān (d. 363/974) as codifier of Fātimīd legal theory and founding father of the Ismā‘īlī theory of the imāmate (professing that knowledge can only be derived from the rightful Imāms from the Prophet’s family).<sup>93</sup>

Space does not permit nor our subject allow anything but a brief discussion of the various currents in legal theory which flowed through the intellectual life of members of the school of Iṣfahān who were legatees of Karakī’s heritage.<sup>94</sup> When one considers the social classes relevant to this essay, it is important to note that during Shāh ‘Abbās’s reign (1588–1629), one finds several groups competing for power in Persian society: (1) the exoteric Imāmī *mujtahids*, usually of non-Iranian descent; (2) the Imāmī clerics of the Akhbārī school opposed to the *mujtahids*, usually of Persian descent; (3) the Qizilbāsh Safavid Sufis, and finally; (4) groups of Sufis who had survived the previous pogroms against their orders. In respect of the significant sectarian developments in Shī‘ite theology, by the mid-seventeenth century the first two groups of learned clerics in Safavid Iran had divided themselves into two distinct schools of thought.

The first of these was the Akhbārī school, the traditionalist ‘ulamā’ comprising *sayyids* who belonged to the Persian “clerical estate”<sup>95</sup> firmly rejected *ijtihād* and condemned all recourse to the so-called *mujtahids*. ‘Akhbārīs “believed that all major theological questions had already been answered by the Imāms in the canonical collections of traditions, and that ‘without the exegesis of the Imams the Koran would remain beyond human comprehension.’”<sup>96</sup> All believers who knew Arabic and studied these traditions might thus be considered independent *muqallidūn* (followers) of the rules previously established by authorities now dead (*taqlīd al-mayyit*).<sup>97</sup> Such clerics “tended to prefer philosophy and hermeneutics and devotional mysticism, centering around the figures of the Imams, to the syllogistic hairsplitting of the jurists.”<sup>98</sup> Amongst these one finds the central figure in this

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Shaibi, *Sufism and Shī‘ism*, p. 320.

<sup>93</sup> See Ismail Poonawala, “Al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān and Isma‘īli Jurisprudence,” in *Medieval Isma‘īli History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), pp. 117–43.

<sup>94</sup> Good discussions are provided by Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, chap. 5; Shaibi, *Sufism and Shī‘ism*, chap. 8.

<sup>95</sup> My analysis here is based on Arjomand’s interesting and provocative discussion, *The Shadow of God*, pp. 143–59.

<sup>96</sup> E. Kohlberg, “Akhbārīya,” *Elr*, I, p. 717.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* See also A. Newman, “The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran,” *BSOAS*, 55/1–2 (1992), part 1: 22–51; part 2: 250–61.

<sup>98</sup> Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 146.

essay, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī who, in his treatise devoted to the refutation of *ijtihād*, the *Safīnat al-najāt* (Ark of Salvation), as S.A. Arjomand points out, “adduces the ‘authority verse’ of the Qur’an to condemn all recourse to *mujtahids*. As obedience is due to God, the Prophet, the Imams, and none else, the norms of the sacred law can be directly obtained from the traditions (*akhbār*) of the infallible Imāms.”<sup>99</sup>

The second school of thought consisted of the exoteric Taqlīdī (later called *Uṣūlī*) school of formalist *mujtahids* who favoured the establishment of hierocratic authority in the person of the jurist rather than the individual believer. The main members and founders of this school were Mullā Aḥmad ‘Muqaddas’ Ardabīlī (d. 993/1585), better known for his politicization of the doctrine of imitative obedience (*taqlīd*) to the Shī‘ite bishop (*mujtahid*), pronouncing it “incumbent with the existence of proof upon the *ijtihād* of the *Mujtahid*”<sup>100</sup>. Many of the theosophers of the Iṣfahān school discussed in section IV below, such as Shaykh Bahā’ al-Dīn al-‘Āmilī (953/1547–1030–1/1621), who held the position of Shaykh al-Islām in Iṣfahān under Shāh ‘Abbās I (reg. 1588–1629), and Mīr Dāmād, were advocates of the *Uṣūlī* legal position.<sup>101</sup>

With the above discussion in mind, we can now turn back to the extremist religious milieu of late sixteenth-century Safavid Persia.

The four Safavid shāhs prior to ‘Abbās had been riding on a wave of messianic expectations harboured by their subject-disciples.<sup>102</sup> By clerical exertion (*ijtihād*) certain *ḥadīth* were discovered or concocted, and advocated to support claims by Safavid kings to be the Mahdī, or at the very least, his deputy.<sup>103</sup> Yet, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, “the messianic yearning remained unfulfilled for those disillusioned *qizilbāsh* whose ancestors had taken up arms to help Isma‘īl.”<sup>104</sup> Consequently, the primary domestic opposition with which Shāh ‘Abbās had to contend consisted of his own devoted followers, the *Qizilbāsh* Sufis who had brought his dynasty to power. Ismā‘īl II (reg. 1576–77), who systematically killed and/or blinded all members of his father’s original power elite,<sup>105</sup> had been murdered by the

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Cited from his *Zubdat al-biyān* by Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 138; for a translation and elaboration of his views on the matter in the *Zubdat al-biyān*, see John Cooper, “The Muqaddas al-Ardabīlī on *Taqlīd*” in Arjomand, *Authority and Political Culture in Shī‘ism*, pp. 263–6.

<sup>101</sup> For further discussion, see Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, pp. 139ff.

<sup>102</sup> As Kathlyn Babayan put it: “The mahdīst nature of Shāh Ismā‘īl I’s rise to power shaped the way in which Imāmī scholars initially legitimized Safāvi rule. ... [Thus] Imāmī clerics implied that Safāvi rule was legitimate on the basis of mahdīst rather than shar‘ī legitimacy” (“The Waning of the *Qizilbāsh*,” p. 38) cf. Shaibi, *Sufism and Shī‘ism*, p. 319

<sup>103</sup> Even Shaykh Bahā’ī tailored his narration of *ḥadīth* to fit the Safavid pretensions that Shāh Ismā‘īl was the Mahdī. See Babayan, “The Waning of the *Qizilbāsh*,” pp. 38–9.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>105</sup> Savory, *Iran Under the Safavids*, p. 69.

Qizilbāsh before he could murder his eldest brother: Muḥammad Khudābanda, father of ‘Abbās. Then, disillusioned with Ismā‘īl II as a king and spiritual master, the Qizilbāsh Sufis crowned Khudābanda king. He adopted the title of Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh (1577–88). Infighting between the Iranians and the Turcoman Qizilbāsh characterized his reign, and eventually the meddling Qizilbāsh under the leadership of Murshid Qulī Khān forced the Shāh to abdicate in favor of his son ‘Abbās.

Adept by virtue of birth – he was of noble Turcoman ancestry – in the courtly arts of intrigue, fratricide and assassination, from youth ‘Abbās had been privy to the barbarous stratagems of his clannish Qizilbāsh disciples; he was skilled in the politics of ethnic factionalism – which in the specific Qizilbāsh milieu meant understanding how to use the disguise of pious devotion to contest and undermine one’s opponents. As if reincarnating the vices of his grandfather, ‘Abbās killed four of his own sons, while in 1589, only a year after he assumed power, he assassinated Murshid Qulī Khān, his Qizilbāsh regent who had brought him to power,<sup>106</sup> before assuming absolute control himself.

Obviously, such a summary historical excursus cannot sufficiently illuminate the extent which Qizilbāsh extremist mystical devotionism had infected the social body of the Safavid state in particular and Persian culture in general. Only by suppressing the radical forces which had created, yet continued to challenge, the Safavid revolution could Shāh ‘Abbās unify his government.<sup>107</sup> In practice, this meant the betrayal of the Qizilbāsh Sufis. Thus, in the ‘Year of the Tiger’ (1023–4/1614–16) “‘Abbās massacred scores of the veteran Lāhijānī Sufis of Qarājādāgh,<sup>108</sup> an act which the court historian Iskandar Beg Munshī justified by explaining that ‘the Shah, by ordering this purge, wished to indicate that this group from now on was no longer to be included in within the circle of the Sufis, and to make a clear distinction between Sufis and non-Sufis.’”<sup>109</sup> Although the pretext used to launch the purge had been the Sufis’ collaboration with the Ottomans, in reality ‘Abbās merely intended to terrorize his own party into submission, thus indicating his disassociation from the politics of Qizilbāsh Sufi extremism.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Babayan, “The Waning of the Qizilbash,” p. 44.

<sup>107</sup> For an excellent discussion of the political forces at play, see *ibid.*, chapter 5.

<sup>108</sup> See Jean Aubin, “Révolution chiite et conservatisme: Les Soufis de Lahejan, 1500–14 (Études Safavides II),” *Moyen Orient et Océan Indien* (1984), pp. 2–9.

<sup>109</sup> Iskandar Beg Munshī, *Tārīkh-e ‘Ālamārā-ye ‘Abbāsī, History of Shah Abbas the Great*, trans. R. Savory (Colorado: Westview Press 1978), II, p. 1097.

<sup>110</sup> For an account of which, see Munshī, *Tārīkh* II, pp. 1096–7. Babayan points out (“The Waning of the Qizilbash,” p. 63) that “In classical Safavi usage the *sūfi* and the *sufesque ghulāt* (Qizilbash) were one. For ‘Abbās I to demonstrate the way in which he distinguished ‘the *sūfi* from the non-*sūfi*,’ he massacred the group that epitomized the classical meaning of the Safavi *sūfi*: those who gave Shāh Ismā‘īl shelter in times of trouble, who venerated him as a *pīr*/god, and who had precedence over other *sūfis* due to their particular devotion. That

Yet, in the process of unleashing Shī'ite orthodoxy and turning towards the *mujtahid* cult to rescue himself from his fanatical Safavid Qizilbāsh subjects, Shāh 'Abbās – applying Ḥāfiẓ's erotic metaphor to the political arena – fled the pit only to fall into the snare, suppressing *ghulāt* extremism by strengthening hardline Shī'ite dogmatism. As Kathlyn Babayan points out:

In supressing the *ghulāt* Shāh 'Abbās I came to divorce religion from politics, relying on orthodoxy in this process, for orthodoxy provided him with a forum through which to attack *ghuluww*. It also awarded him the legitimacy with which he could become an absolute shāh. The public image 'Abbās I was cultivating reflects his attempts to separate temporal from spiritual rule. . . . Publicly, 'Abbās I was not playing on his legitimacy as *pīr* of the Qizilbāsh. Although the chroniclers continue to refer to the shāh as the *murshid-i kāmīl* and to the Qizilbāsh as *sūfīs*, these titles were ceremonial, retaining perhaps only the element of obedience that was required of a disciple toward his spiritual guide.<sup>111</sup>

Contaminated with extremism, debilitated by its association with temporal party politics, Sufism in the second half of the seventeenth century – when the *mujtahid* cult reached the height of its power – became easy prey for the doctrinaire Shī'ite clerics for whom mysticism, illuminism, faith interiorized by divine love and contemplative vision have always been fuel for the fire of their Holy Inquisition.

#### IV. THE SCHOOL OF IṢFAHĀN: 'ABD AL-RAZZĀQ LĀHĪJĪ AND FAYḌ-I KĀSHĀNĪ ON THE RELATION OF TAṢAWWUF, ḤIKMAT AND 'IRFĀN

In the third volume of *The Venture of Islam*, Marshall Hodgson remarked that the sixteenth century “undeniably marks the peak of Muslim political power,” and opines that “the whole age from Biḥzād the painter (b. c. 1450) through Mullā Ṣadrā the philosopher (d. 1640), in which the cultural forms associated with the Persian language culminated, ranks as something of a golden age and may usefully be called the ‘Persianate flowering’.” The intellectual and literary fabric of this “flowering,” even when better studied, he remarked, will still remain difficult to define, since “if the age was a great age, its greatness lay largely in its finesse and subtlety, its culminations of refinement, rather than in feats more immediately obvious to a human being whatever his cultural background.”<sup>112</sup>

The philosophical aspect of this ‘flowering’ is the ‘school of Iṣfahān’ outlined by Professor Nasr in the introduction to this volume. Its members

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element of past loyalty and spiritual comradeship meant little in the politics of the Iṣfahānī age of Safavi rule.” For an excellent discussion of the political significance of the massacre, see Arjomand, *The Shadow of God*, p. 111.

<sup>111</sup> Babayan, “The Waning of the Qizilbash,” p. 52.

<sup>112</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, III, p. 49.

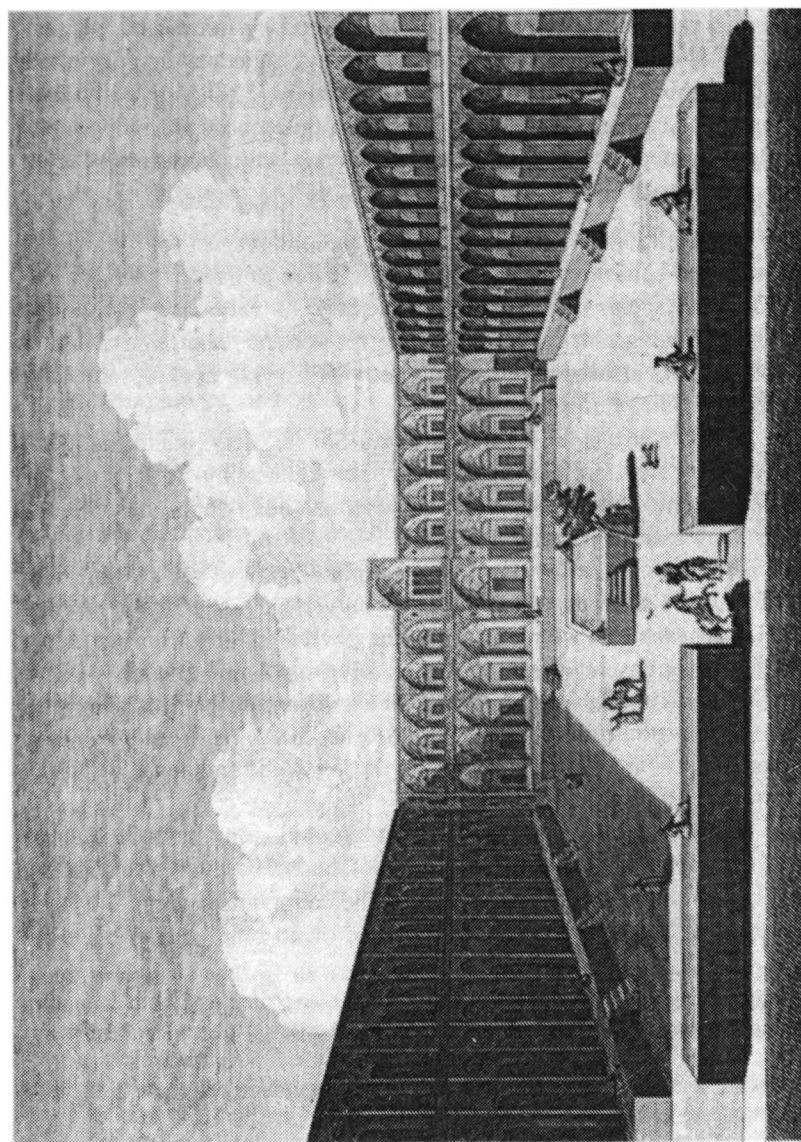


Plate 5: The Caravanserai of Kāshān. From Chardin, *Voyages*, Pl. 18.

comprised a group of theosophers who flourished in this city from the late sixteenth century down to the last three-quarters of the seventeenth century, and who created a unique synthesis of theological, mystical and philosophical thought which tolerated, or at least, interpreted Sufism's spiritual method (*ṭarīqa*) as integrally Islamic in the sense understood by traditional Islam.<sup>113</sup> The school of Iṣfahān counts as the most significant intellectual activity of the reigns of Shāh 'Abbās I, Shāh Ṣafī and Shāh 'Abbās II (1588–1666). Although the teachings of the theosophers who belonged to this school are individually distinct, they unite on common ground, justifying the definition of their collective views as a 'school' on four fronts.

1. *Sufism*. While all its members exhibited a profound respect for the ethical, intellectual and spiritual ideals of classical Persian Sufism,<sup>114</sup> few of them seem to have openly accepted the necessity of following the *ṭarīqa* discipline involving obedience to a living master (*pīr*, *murshid*). Most of these theosophers also wrote mystical poetry of varying quality, indicative of their devotion to Sufi literature.
2. *Shī'ism*. Their writings are permeated with Shī'ite piety, imāmology and theology. Where an ecumenical side of their theosophy does exist, the specificity of the Shī'ite social milieu wherein their works are situated, however, may tend to obscure this.
3. *Islamic Platonism*. On the other hand, the philosophy of the school often tended to stress what was "humanistically universal," as Hodgson pointed out.<sup>115</sup> Their teachings stemmed from the revival of the Illuminationist (Ishraqī) theosophy of Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), who had claimed his theosophy to be an Islamic synthesis of several ancient wisdom traditions: "the religion of the ancients adhered to by the Babylonians, the [Persian] Khusrawaniyyūn sages, the Indians, and all the ancients from Greece, as well as others."<sup>116</sup>
4. *Islamic Rationalism*. Philosophers in this school combined Peripatetic rationalism with Islamic Platonism. For the Iṣfahānī Safavid philosophers, "the term 'Peripatetic' does not have the same connotation which it has for us," Henry Corbin reveals, "if only because of no other reason than the

<sup>113</sup> Referring to S.H. Nasr's distinction here between traditional and non-traditional Islam in his *Traditional Islam in the Modern World* (London: Kegan Paul International 1987), prologue.

<sup>114</sup> The sole exception here is Mīr Dāmād, the founder of the school who had scant use for Sufism; on which, see section IV.2 below.

<sup>115</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, III, p. 51.

<sup>116</sup> See S.H. Nasr (ed.), *Shihaboddin Yahya Suhrawardi: oeuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, (Tehran: Institut Franco-Iranien 1970), I, p. 493. Cited by Hossein Ziai, "The Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of al-Suhrawardī's Illuminationist Political Doctrine," in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Charles Butterworth (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1992), p. 328.

fact that they cherished the *Theology* attributed Aristotle.<sup>117</sup> From another point of view, and for the same reason, it is quite exceptional to find a philosopher who is purely and solely Peripatetic among them, a philosopher not thoroughly absorbed in neo-Platonism and who is not *eo ipso* in one way or another somewhat of an Ishrāqī.<sup>118</sup>

This amalgam of Sufism, Shī'ism, Platonist Ishrāqī theosophy and Islamic rationalism produced the unique philosophical collegium of Iṣfahān. While scholars have generally devoted considerable study to the religious, juridical, theosophical and philosophical background of this school, the orientation of its members to traditional Sufism has been relegated to the footnotes rather than integrated into the text of such studies. One need not search far afield to find the reason why Sufism has been marginalized: it lies in the crisis of cultural identity experienced by Sufis in late seventeenth-century Iran when confronted by an evil even worse than the Qizilbāsh warriors<sup>119</sup> of Ismā'īl: the rise of the cult of the Uṣūlī *mujtahids*, creating a trend which, amongst its latter-day fundamentalist heirs, has carried on right down to the present day in Iran.<sup>120</sup>

As will be seen below, while most members of the school were inclined towards *irfān* and Sufism, owing to the politically charged anti-Qizilbāsh climate and 'Abbās's denigration of *ghulāt*-type folk-Sufism, institutionalized *khānaqāh* Sufism no longer held the same place in the hearts of mystically oriented intellectuals that, for instance, it had had with earlier Sufi theosophers

<sup>117</sup> Translated from Greek into Arabic, this work was actually Books 4–6 of the Enneads of Plotinus, but was attributed to Aristotle by Islamic thinkers down to modern times.

<sup>118</sup> Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris: Gallimard 1964), p. 463.

<sup>119</sup> On the origins and history of the Qizilbāsh, see Roemer, "The Qizilbash Turcomans," pp. 27–39.

<sup>120</sup> Nikki Keddie and Juan Cole have pointed out that while Uṣūlī clerics were initially "important agents in legitimizing Safavid rule throughout Iran," the very same Uṣūlī-*mujtahidī* arguments "were used to express the independence of the ulama in relation to the shahs. The doctrine of the need of laymen to emulate mujtahids had the potential of putting the claims of the mujtahids higher than those of the shah, and such claims are recorded in the late Safavid period. Few, if any, Shi'i mujtahids before Khomeini seriously proposed that the ulama should actually rule, but in some ways this stance is the logical (though not inevitable) development of the Usuli school of jurisprudence, which sees the ulama as the general representative of the twelfth imam" (Nikki Keddie and Juan Cole [eds.] *Shi'ism and Social Protest* [New Haven: Yale University Press 1986], introduction, p. 8). In his discussion, "Khumayni's Concept of the Guardianship of the Jurisconsult," (in *Islam in the Political Process*, ed. J. Picatori (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), p. 160, Hamid Enayat finds a direct historical antecedent to this doctrine in Karaki's position as Shaykh al-Islām (paramount religious leader) and conception of the role of the jurisprudents in the Safavid state under Shāh Ṭahmāsp. For further discussion and comparison of the contemporary Iranian with the Safavid *mujtahid* cult, see Martin Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in United States and Iran*, trans D. Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press 1993), pp. 100–75; Bayat, "The Rise of the Mujtahid," pp. 18–19.

such as 'Abdu'llāh Anṣārī, Abū'l-Qāsim Qushayrī or Abū Hāmid Ghazālī. A century and half of Sufism's embroilment in Qizilbāsh fanaticism and Shī'ite *ghuluww* had tarnished the intellectual creditability and smudged the moral reputation of the Persian dervish ethos; the image of the mystic *faqīr* had taken on a sinister *double entendre*: the dervish saint was also now a barbarous brute, the holy pauper's mantle concealing an arrogant, ambitious parvenu.<sup>121</sup>

Many of the prominent philosophical and mystical figures of the school of Iṣfahān have already been mentioned by Professor Nasr in his introduction to this volume, but there are six thinkers who directly concern our present study: Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631), Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), Bahā' al-Dīn 'Āmilī (d. 1030/1621), Mīr Abū al-Qāsim Findiriskī (d. 1050/1640–1), Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680), 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī (d. 1072/1661–2). Each of these philosophers had his own individually nuanced and distinct understanding of the relation of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), philosophy (*falsafa*), philosophical mysticism (*ḥikmat*) and theosophy (*'irfān*) to normative Islam.

Before entering into the main subject of discussion, an analysis of the thought of the mystical philosophers Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī and 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī, it will be useful to examine briefly the particular positions towards Sufism adopted by the four chronologically earlier figures mentioned above: Bahā' al-Dīn 'Āmilī, Mīr Dāmād, Mullā Ṣadrā and Mīr Abū al-Qāsim Findiriskī.

### 1. Bahā' al-Dīn 'Āmilī (d. 1030/1621)

Shaykh Bahā'ī's father, Ḥusayn al-'Āmilī, had emigrated from Lebanon to Iran where a student of Karakī introduced him to Shāh Tahmāsp, who later appointed him to the post of Shaykh al-Islām in Herāt.<sup>122</sup> When both his father and Tahmāsp died in 984/1576, Shaykh Bahā'ī inherited his father's position.<sup>123</sup> In theology, he supported the 'Uṣūlī school and advocated increasing the "growth in clerical authority with the secular state and supported the delegation of the Imām's power to the clergy,"<sup>124</sup> backing

<sup>121</sup> Babayan in this context cites an interesting story to illustrate the denigration of the dervish ideal: "The Waning of the Qizalbash," pp. 53ff.

<sup>122</sup> Andrew Newman, "Towards a Reconsideration of the 'Iṣfahān School of Philosophy:" Shaykh Bahā'ī and the Role of the Safawid 'Ulamā", *Studia Iranica*, 15/2 (1986), p. 169; Devin J. Stewart, "A Biographical Notice on Bahā' al-Dīn al-'Āmilī (d. 1030/1621)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 111/3 (July–Sept. 1991), p. 566.

<sup>123</sup> Under 'Abbās I, Shaykh Bahā'ī was made Shaykh al-Islām of Iṣfahān, the new capital of Persia, in which capacity he performed immeasurable services to the Safavid state, was one of the key architects of the new capital city, and was a constant companion and advisor to 'Abbās the Great. See Newman, "Towards a Reconsideration," pp. 176–8.

<sup>124</sup> Newman, "Towards a Reconsideration," p. 168.

Karakī's cause and views on *ijtihād*.<sup>125</sup> John Cooper has pointed out that 'it is difficult to classify him [Shaykh Bahā'ī] along the normal faqīh/ṣūfī/faylasūf lines.'<sup>126</sup> Although the studies of Andrew Newman and Devin Stewart which delineate Shaykh Bahā'ī's role as an 'Uṣūlī jurisconsult illuminate an important and neglected side of his personality, "his great leanings towards Sufism"<sup>127</sup> as exhibited in his Persian poetry, among other sources, are a no less significant aspect of his character and contribution to Islamic culture.<sup>128</sup>

The fact that Shaykh Bahā'ī affiliated himself, intellectually at least, with the Sufis is demonstrated at length by Edmund Bosworth.<sup>129</sup> Sa'īd Nafīsī presents reliable evidence to assert that "it is absolutely certain that he adopted Sufism as his theosophical persuasion (*mashrab-i taṣawwuf dāsht*), being by nature inclined to mystical thought and conduct (*'irfān u sulūk*)."<sup>130</sup> Numerous passages from his Persian *mathnawīyyāt* in which he addresses the relation of Sufism to the theological sciences, and in which makes the latter succumb to his bitter critique, leave no doubt regarding his sympathy to Sufism.<sup>131</sup> Although such passages have yet to be analysed and studied in relation to his Uṣūlī theological views – which obviously reveal the more nomocentric side of his personality – on their own they rank as some of the finest Persian Sufi *mathnawīs* of the post-Mongol period, being some of the best examples of the theosophical perspective and ethical ideals of Persian Sufism in the annals of Persian literature.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>125</sup> "In two essays written during the early years of 'Abbās" reign ... Bahā'ī supported the exercise of *ijtihād* by Īmāmī clerics, and in the second, actually misrepresented criticisms offered by his father and others of 'Alī al-Karakī's exercise of *ijtihād*, both to defend the exercise of *ijtihād* and stress his own solidarity with al-Karakī, who, like Bahā'ī's father and Bahā'ī himself, had served the Safawid court, practiced *ijtihād* on its behalf, and supported the growth in the authority of the 'ulamā' within the community" Newman, "Towards a Reconsideration," (pp. 179).

<sup>126</sup> John Cooper, "Rumi and *Hikmat*: Towards a Reading of Sabziwārī's Commentary on the *Mathnawī*" in Lewisohn, *The Heritage of Sufism*, I, p. 418.

<sup>127</sup> Al-Khwānsārī, *Rawḍāt al-jannāt*, VII, p. 56. These are the words of his student Ḥusayn ibn Ḥaydar al-Karakī, cited by Devin J. Stewart, "A Biographical Notice," p. 570.

<sup>128</sup> Concerning primary and secondary sources which discuss his Sufism and attitude to *taṣawwuf*, see *Kulliyāt-i ash'ār wa āthār-i fārsī Shaykh Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Āmilī* Ghulām Ḥusayn Jawāhirī, ed. (Tehran: n.d.), introduction, pp. 16–18.

<sup>129</sup> *Bahā' al-Dīn al-Āmilī and His Literary Anthologies* (Journal of Semitic Studies Monograph, no. 10 Manchester: Manchester University Press 1989), pp. 55–60, a work which presents the best summary of his Sufi affiliations to date. For other remarks see Devin J. Stewart, "A Biographical Notice," pp. 563–71. E. Kohlberg, "Bahā' al-Dīn 'Amelī," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, III, pp. 429–30; Newman, "Towards a Reconsideration," pp. 188–9.

<sup>130</sup> Cited by Jawāhirī (ed.), *Kulliyāt-i ash'ār*, introduction, p. 17.

<sup>131</sup> See the references in his three *mathnawīs* (*Shīr u shakar*, *Nān u panīr*, *Nān u ḥalwā*) published in *Kulliyāt-i ash'ār-i fārsī u mūsh u gurba-yi Shaykh Bahā'ī*, ed. Miḥdī Tawḥīdīpūr (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Kitābforūshī-yi Maḥmūdī 1336 A.Hsh./1957), on pp. 18–19; 41–4.

<sup>132</sup> For this reason I cannot agree with Ṣafā's damning opinion (*Tārīkh*, V/2, p. 1043) of the literary worth of his poems, which he describes as possessing "mystical taste (*dhawq-i*

2. *Mīr Dāmād* (d. 1041/1631)

Muḥammad Bāqir Astarābādī, popularly known as Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631–2) has been accounted by S.H. Nasr and Henry Corbin respectively “the central figure in the school of Iṣfahān,”<sup>133</sup> and “the name who heads the list [of thinkers] in the School of Iṣfahān.”<sup>134</sup> ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnkūb described him as the foremost “philosophical Sage (*ḥakīm*), transcendentalist (*mutā‘ala*) and jurisprudent (*faqīh*) of the Safavid era . . . [who] comprehensively combined in himself the legacy of transcendental theosophists (*hikmat-i muta‘allihīn*), the ascetical qualities (*zuhd*) ascribed to the Sufis with the legal rank of *ijtihād* in the affairs of the *Sharī‘a*.”<sup>135</sup> He was the author of some forty works in Persian and Arabic,<sup>136</sup> nearly all of them written in a particularly dense, impenetrable style, devoted mostly to Peripatetic and Ishrāqī philosophy, as well as Shī‘ite juridical issues. Occasionally, he expressed his metaphysics in poetry, as is evident from his *Dīwān* of Persian and Arabic poems, including the *mathnawī Mashāriq al-anwār* in which he uses ‘Ishrāq’ as his *takhalluṣ*. Mīr Dāmād’s works<sup>137</sup> on philosophical mysticism (*ḥikmat*) include *Qabasāt*, *Taqdīsāt*, *Jadhawāt* (in Persian), *Sidrat al-muntaha*, and *Khalsat al-malakūt*.

In his *Tārīkh-i ‘Alam-ārā-yi ‘Abbāsī*, Iskandar Beg Munshī sings his praises, exclaiming that “today the rays of his illuminations (*ishrāqāt*) of his enlightened learning and accomplishments casts its glory upon students of knowledge, and the flashes of light sparkling from the constellation of his sunlike nature shine down upon all terrestrial beings.”<sup>138</sup> Munshī also noted his deep erudition in the occult sciences and mathematics, while his attainment of *ijtihād* in the fields of *fiqh*, *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* was such that “the jurists of this day consider their legal decrees (*fatāwā-yi shar‘iyya*) legally valid only if

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‘*irfānī*),” but being “absolutely devoid of originality or freshness, their only importance lying in the fact that an influential legalist scholar has composed them with complete liberty during an age dominated by bigoted puritans and formalist Mullās.”

<sup>133</sup> S.H. Nasr, “The School of Iṣfahān,” in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M.M. Sharif (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1966), II, p. 909.

<sup>134</sup> Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, p. 463. See Hamid Dabashi, “Mīr Dāmād and the Founding of the ‘School of Iṣfahān,’” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. S.H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge 1996), I, pp. 597–634, which gives the best overall treatment of his position in this school.

<sup>135</sup> Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 246.

<sup>136</sup> See Andrew Newman’s article “Dāmād, Mīr . . .,” *Elr*, VI: 623–6 for a list of his works.

<sup>137</sup> For a general review of his works, see Nasr, ‘The School of Iṣfahān’, pp. 915–6; Dabashi “Mīr Dāmād and the Founding of the ‘School of Iṣfahān’.”

<sup>138</sup> From the notice on Mīr Dāmād by Iskandar Beg Munshī in his *Tārīkh-i ‘alam-ārā-yi ‘Abbāsī*, reproduced in the Persian introduction to the *Kitāb al-Qabasāt*, ed. with an introduction by Mehdi Mohaghegh; Toshiko Izutsu, ‘Alī Musawī Bihbahānī and Ibrāhīm Dībājī (Wisdom of Persia Series 7; Tehran–Montreal: Institute of Islamic Studies 1977), p. xxv.

he approves them.”<sup>139</sup> Belonging to the ‘Uṣūlī school and fully accepting the notion of the deputyship of the *faqīh*,<sup>140</sup> Mīr Dāmād himself was glad to second their praise, and in his *Mashriq al-anwār*, with hyperbole touching on the ridiculous and a mysticism melting into bathos, he boasts:

From my Canon of Medicine (*Shifā*) Aristotle’s learning has benefited;  
By way of my esoteric mysteries (*rumūz*),  
Plato sets foot in the realm of Ideas.  
... Without my word how could Reason instruct and teach?  
Without my reason around, how could the world spin round?<sup>141</sup>

Mīr Dāmād’s philosophy, like that of most of the other *hakāms* of the school of Iṣfahān consisted, as T. Izutsu points out, “in a kind of harmonious combination

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Newman, “Dāmād, Mīr,” *Elr*, p. 625.

<sup>141</sup> Akbar Hādī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl-i Mīr Dāmād va Mīr Findariskī* (Iṣfahān: Intishārāt-i Mītham Tamār 1363 A.Hsh./1984), pp. 104, 105. Although his high self-esteem apparently did not shock his contemporaries, posterity has yet to confirm the probity of Mīr Dāmād’s smugness about the importance of his own compositions. In a letter to one of his associates who had asked him his opinion of one of his critics, Mīr Dāmād replied that he thought it strange how “idle souls whose individual character consists in base matter can allow themselves to boast and brag and lay senseless claims before holy minds and sacrosanct spirits [like mine]. Such folk do not even have the discrimination to realize that the mere *understanding* of my words is in itself an art, but *to quarrel* with me and call that ‘learned discussion’ (*baḥṭh*) is the utmost absurdity. For it’s obvious that apprehension of higher levels of spirituality and the mature understanding of subtle matters is not available to just any feeble-minded and poorly endowed person. Hence, to dispute with me in intellectual matters just exhibits the weakness of my critic’s nature – certainly, such a disputation cannot be undertaken by the analytical faculties of a bunch of folk who imagine, with their bat-like ambition, that sensual understanding is the height of wisdom and learning” (Hādī, *ibid.*, p. 36). In the exordium of one of his Mathnawī, *Mashriq al-anwār* (written in the same metre – of *baḥr-i sarī* – and in imitation of, Nizāmī’s *Makḥzan al-asrūt*, Mīr Dāmād boasts:

I am the lord of learning, the king of knowledge,  
reclining on a pillow of Reason and Wisdom:  
My reflections comprise the Canon of Art;  
My thoughts inscribe the mysteries of Fate.

Perhaps one of the reasons that Mīr Dāmād’s status in philosophy is so highlighted by Safavid-period chroniclers was his powerful political influence and connections. Henry Corbin notes: “In Iran his name is familiar to everyone who possesses even a minimum of philosophical and theological culture. Although there are certain currents of popular piety which equally venerate him as a saint, his notoriety ever hardly seems to have crossed the frontiers of the ‘Iranian world’ – understood in the wider sense of the word – as the totality of those regions where the Persian language predominated as the main language of culture (thus, one still finds numerous manuscripts of Mīr Dāmād’s works in libraries in Pakistan, while rarely elsewhere)” (*En islam iranien* [Paris: Gallimard 1972], IV, p. 17). The fact that he reportedly blessed the coronation of the 18-year-old Shāh Ṣafī I (1038/1628–1052/1642) in Iṣfahān in 1038/1628 (*Dīvān-i Fayyād Lāhijī*, Jalāl Misgarnizhād’s introduction, p. 25) and died while accompanying the Safavid monarch to the shrines in Iraq (Newman, “Dāmād, Mīr” *Elr*, p. 625), certainly indicates his influence and power in the Safavid hierarchy.

of rational thinking and visionary experience.”<sup>142</sup> Although he adhered to the Peripatetic tradition, beneath the surface of his dry rational approach lay something quite akin to mysticism where one witnesses:

the presence of swarming visions originating from an entirely different source, the living experience of a mystic. Mīr Dāmād was in this respect a perfect embodiment of the fundamental principle of philosophy as conceived by Ibn ‘Arabī and Suhrawarī, namely, thinker in whom the rational-philosophical analysis of reality and the spiritual perfection to be attained through contemplative discipline proceed hand in hand with each other – a characteristic shared by most of the leading philosophers of the Safavid period.<sup>143</sup>

Shāh ‘Abbās regarded him highly and, in fact was so in awe of his influence<sup>144</sup> that he tried to have him killed, according to the *Salāfat al-‘aṣr*,<sup>145</sup> and from such royal malice alone Zarrīnkūb deduces that “in addition to his rank in philosophy (*ḥikma*) and religious law, he was regarded by his disciples and devoted followers as possessing to a degree the rank of spiritual guidance (*irshād*).”<sup>146</sup> In the *Tadhkira-yi Naṣrābādī*<sup>147</sup> Mīr Dāmād is described as conscientious in his efforts at self-purification (*tazkiya-yi nafs*); he assiduously performed supererogatory prayers and for some forty years never slept on his side in a bed, a traditional picture which accords quite well with that of “venerable Sufi shaykh and master,” and yet, as Zarrīnkūb suggests:

Mīr Dāmād considered the rank of ‘Sufi master’ – which in that age of Sufism’s decline, in fact hardly befitted his spiritual and intellectual stature – to be beneath his dignity. His claim to philosophical mysticism (*ḥikmat*) and erudition in that field, led him to consider himself third in rank to Fārābī as a teacher, in actual fact, to call himself the “third (after Fārābī and Aristotle) teacher” (*mu‘allim-i thālith*). Although Mīr Dāmād followed the Peripatetic method in speculative philosophical mysticism, in his practical philosophical mysticism he tended to adopt the path of the Illuminationist school (*ishrāq*). In fact, Peripatetic philosophical mysticism combined with Illuminationist intuitionism in the teachings of the Iṣfahān school of Philosophy. The idea of attaining the goal of ‘disembodiment’ and ‘transcending the flesh’ (*khal‘-i badan*) which Shaykh Ishrāq had ascribed to Plotinus, is also expounded by Mīr Dāmād in his *Jadhawāt* where the idea is attributed to Pythagoras. However, from Mīr Dāmād’s standpoint, as is evident from both his *Qabasāt* and *Rawāshiḥ al-samāwiyya*, this is the principal condition for reaching the station of wisdom (*ḥikmat*). Of course, in the teachings of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā [d. 618/1221] and some of the masters of the Kubrawī order, this type of ‘disembodiment’ and abandonment of human corporeality was considered to be a necessary condition for realizing

<sup>142</sup> T. Izutsu, “Mīr Dāmād and his Metaphysics,” in *Kitāb al-Qabasāt*, introduction, p. 2.

<sup>143</sup> Izutsu, “Mīr Dāmād and his Metaphysics,” p. 3.

<sup>144</sup> Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, IV, p. 23.

<sup>145</sup> *Salāfat al-‘aṣr*, p. 477. Cited by Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 246

<sup>146</sup> Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 246.

<sup>147</sup> *Tadhkira-yi Naṣrābādī*, p. 149. Cited by Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 246.

contemplation of the world of invisible realities (*'ālam-i ghayb*), and thus Mīr Dāmād's ideas in this respect are related to Sufi teachings. In any case, what makes Mīr Dāmād's Ishrāqī methodology most resemble Sufism is his emphasis on pure Unity, rather than merely attaining union (*ittiḥād*) in the intermediary stages and process of spiritual wayfaring. This is because he did not consider the Sufis – apparently because of their refusal to involve themselves with dialectical mysticism (*ḥikmat-i baḥthī*) – worthy of his attention. Hence, he occasionally criticizes their expressions, in his *Qabasāt* and *Rawāshiḥ al-samāwiyya*, among other works, and accuses them of deficiency in understanding and lack of deep investigation into philosophical issues.<sup>148</sup>

One may wonder if it was due to Mīr Dāmād's disdainful attitude towards classical Sufism<sup>149</sup> that the famous anti-Sufi Shī'ite cleric Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1070/1699–1700) saw fit to consecrate a long notice in his *Bihār al-anwār* to him, mentioning him with many laudatory comments, and even transcribing the philosopher's *Risālat al-khal'īya*, his Diary of Visions, in which he reflected that this treatise indicates “the deformity (*ta'alluh*) of his innermost conscience.” When, apropos of Majlisī's remarks, Henry Corbin wondered how “the same theologian who was a vehement adversary of the Sufis, could have rendered homage to Mīr Dāmād the ecstatic,”<sup>150</sup> he resolved the question as follows:

If Majlisī voiced such an eulogy of Mīr Dāmād, it was because he had, in fact, opened up another horizon [of thought] beyond that of literal exoteric religion. Religious phenomenology must proceed here with extreme delicacy, in order to discover what is hidden (*bāṭin*) under the appearance (*zāhir*); thence certain oppositions resolve themselves which, on the level of the *zāhir* may appear insurmountable. It seems particularly necessary to let the spirit be presented with the nuance which reflects the theological usage current in Iran which distinguishes between *tasawwuf* and *'irfān*, between Sufism proper and mystical gnosis. The reserve with which Majlisī approached the former can also be found among the greatest spiritual and mystical figures in Shī'ism. The allusion here is essentially to a certain type of Sufism, the same type against which Mullā Ṣadrā, who himself might have easily passed for a Sufi, composed an entire treatise. We have already suggested the reasons for their opposition: the *ṭarīqat* organization, the role of the Shaykh, a certain sort of metaphysical monism interpreted in a sense least favourable for moral self-reformation, certain practices, etc. From

<sup>148</sup> *Dunbāla*, pp. 246–7.

<sup>149</sup> In a passage in his *Jadhawāt* concerning the imaginal realm he notes that while “the Sufi shaykhs have penetrated deeply into this matter,” their views are incorrect from a strictly logical point of view “though they seem sweet and pleasant from the standpoint of ordinary aesthetic taste, discursive sensibility and poetic logic” (*Muntakhabātī az āthār-i ḥukamā' ilāhī-yi Īrān az 'aṣr-i Mīr Dāmād u Mīr Findariskī tā zamān-i ḥādīr*, edited, introduced and annotated by Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī, French introduction by Henry Corbin [Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve/Tehran: Departement d'Iranologie de l'Institut Franco-Iranien de Recherche 1972], I, pp. 55–7).

<sup>150</sup> Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, IV, p. 22.

this, one may deduce that these spiritual figures were not in accord with the same paradox articulated by Haydar Āmulī: that Sufism is the true Shī'ism. However, if one could substitute the word '*irfān*' for the word Sufism, then one finds a general accord among all the '*urafā*'. Hence, important points of difference lie concealed even within lexical matters. In the West, one often adopts the habit of considering Islamic mysticism to be, purely and simply, Sufism. Doubtless that is true in Sunnism, where the spiritual aspirant must 'enter Sufism' in order to go beyond the level of literal religion. However, a similar parallel does not exist in Shī'ism, wherein it suffices to follow the teachings of the Imāms to the very end in order to 'enter '*irfān*'. Such is the type of Shī'ite mystic which Mīr Dāmād and his spiritual posterity exemplify quite perfectly.<sup>151</sup>

Granted that Mīr Dāmād was a singular, if not idiosyncratic, type of Shī'ite mystic, Corbin's views about the relationship of Sufism to '*irfān*' are, on several other counts, simply mistaken. Although both words vary in meaning, according to the context, from the point of view of traditional Persian Sufism *ma'rifat* or '*irfān*' (mystical knowledge), constitutes the supreme goal of the path of *taṣawwuf*; it cannot, however, constitute a separate path or methodology either above or independent of *taṣawwuf*.<sup>152</sup>

As we have seen from the discussion in parts I and II in this essay, Sufism had been debilitated and vulgarized by its association with the *dervichisme* of the Qizilbāsh. The mystics (see part III) were subjected to state-sponsored harassment at the beginning of the Safavid period, and then, at the end of the seventeenth century (see below), the Sufi tradition itself, succumbing to successive waves of polemics and persecution by the mullās, became discredited and ultimately marginalized in the intellectual milieu. Majlisī's "reserve" about Sufism, is thus less a trait held in common by "the greatest spiritual and mystical figures in Shī'ism" than a by-product of the anti-Sufi climate of his own epoch. His attitude is less infused with genuine Shī'ite spirituality than belched up by his own active participation in the low-life politico-theological debates raging in seventeenth-century Iṣfahān. Lastly, conceding the view that it sufficed merely "to follow the teachings of the

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Shaykh Bahā'ī, for example, had made this clear in his definition of *taṣawwuf* in the fifth book of his *Kashkūl*: "The science of Sufism deals with the One Essence and with Its names and Attributes inasmuch as they link the loci of their outward manifestation together with all related phenomena, to the Divine Essence. Thus, the subject of this science is the One Essence and its beginningless and eternal attributes. The questions it investigates include; 1) the emanation of multiplicity from the One Essence and its return thence, 2) the loci of manifestation a reflections of the divine Names and Attributes, 3) the return of God's people to him, 4) their wayfaring, spiritual warfare and ascetic practices, and 5) the fruits of each work and remembrance and the actual results in both this world and the next. Finally, the principles of this science are the knowledge of its definition and aim and the technical terminology of the Sufis." Cited by J. Nūrbakhsh, *Ma'ārif-i Ṣūfiyya* (London: Intishārāt-i Khāniqāh-i Ni'matullāhī 1983), pp. 43-4.

Imāms to the very end in order to “enter ‘*irfān*’”, is characteristic of a certain sectarian theosophical doctrine peculiar to the Safavid School of Iṣfahānī *‘irfān*, there is no prefiguring of this doctrine in the Sufism of pre-Safavid Persia, in which the role of a living master is, and has always been, unquestionably axiomatic.

In sum, if in Mīr Dāmād one finds the hubris of a Peripatetic philosopher who is infused with Shī‘ite *‘irfān* – the trunk of his visionary thought being grounded in Persian mystical *belles-lettres* in general and Ishrāqī Illuminationism in particular – it seems apparent that his spiritual roots received scant nourishment from the profound undercurrent of the Sufi tradition. Mīr Dāmād’s misunderstanding or misappreciation of traditional Sufism is apparent from the feeble satire he composed to belittle Rūmī<sup>153</sup> discussed by Professor Nasr in his introduction to this volume. While the tree of Mīr Dāmād’s philosophical *‘irfān* may have flourished in the arid hyper-orthodox Shī‘ite climate of seventeenth-century Iṣfahān, it was certainly never nourished by the same soil from which grew the Sufi schools of Khurāsān and Baghdad. Fortunately, his intellectual bias against Sufism was generally uncharacteristic of the school of Iṣfahān. It was Dāmād’s illuminationist mysticism, rather than his independence from Sufism, which was conveyed to his foremost student, Mulla Ṣadrā.

### 3. *Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640)*

The most important *ḥakīm* of the era of Shah ‘Abbās I was no doubt Mullā Ṣadrā (also known as ‘Foremost of the Theosophers’, Ṣadr al-Muta‘allihīn) whose place in the school of Iṣfahān has already been discussed in detail elsewhere in this volume.<sup>154</sup> However, since Mullā Ṣadrā was not only the physically related to (as father-in-law), but the main intellectual master of, the two main personages discussed in this essay, Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī and ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī, a few comments on his views about Sufism are required.

The ‘Foremost of the Theosophers’ treatise ‘Smashing the Idols of Paganism through Refutation of Contemporary Pseudo-Sufis’ (*Kasr aṣṇām al-jāhiliyya fī ‘l-radd ‘alā Mutasawwafa*) is one of the most important documents

<sup>153</sup> Cited by Hādī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl-i Mīr Dāmād*, p. 42. The great Dhahabī master Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī wrote an eloquent rebuttal of Mīr Dāmād’s critique in which he pointed out the errors in Dāmād’s critique of the *Mathnawī*, revealing the learning Mīr Dāmād lacked and the uninformed nature of his *‘irfān*.

<sup>154</sup> Works on Mullā Ṣadrā include S.H. Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his Transcendent Philosophy* (Tehran: Iranian Academy of Philosophy 1978); James Winston Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1981); Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany: SUNY Press 1975). John Cooper’s above-cited article “Rūmī and *Ḥikmat*” also contains some useful observations.

for the understanding of seventeenth-century Persian Sufism and the causes of the clerical persecution of Sufism during the period.<sup>155</sup> Composed in 1027/1617–18, *Kasr asnām*, contrary to the title's literal connotation, is not a tract against Sufism *per se* but only opposes certain corruptions in the Safavid *ghulāt* version of *taṣawwuf*. In fact, the first chapter of the book is devoted to commendation and praise of the genuine and traditional practices of Sufism, which he qualifies as being integrally 'Islamic'.<sup>156</sup> As Kathlyn Babayan reveals, *Kasr asnām* "attacks the darvish cultists who had pretensions to sufism. Mullā Šadrā had realized that mystically inclined 'alims like himself were in danger; for the shari'a-minded 'ulamā' who engaged in the production of polemics against these assumed sūfis did not distinguish between the sufesque *ghulāt* and philosophers."<sup>157</sup> In composing this treatise to defend himself against foes of Sufism and the pseudo-orthodox clericalism and hardline Shī'ite exclusivism that had manifested themselves in the early seventeenth-century,<sup>158</sup> as Corbin points out:

Mullā Šadrā had to confront a double category of 'ignoramuses': on the one part, he had to deal with the pious agnosticism of the *foqahā* of the legalitarian religion (cf. those addressed in the *Seh Asl*), on the other part, he had to face up to the obscurantism of certain Sufis who affected to scorn all books, education, intelligence, and knowledge as such. Mullā Šadrā's blame was not aimed at Sufism as such but at a certain degenerate sort of Sufism in his own time, without indicating precisely whom he had in mind.<sup>159</sup>

Perhaps for this reason, in the first volume of his monumental historico-philosophical work on Sufi orders, theosophy and traditions, the *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, the great nineteenth-century Sufi historian Ma'šūm 'Alī Shāh Shīrāzī (d. 1344/1926) pointed out that this work should be considered as penned in *praise* rather than in *condemnation* of the Sufis, as exemplifying a venerable tradition of criticism of vulgarized Sufism which also appeared in the *Kashf al-mahjūb* of Hujwīrī, the *Mathnawī* of Rūmī and the *Gulshan-i rāz* of Shabistarī.<sup>160</sup> To illustrate Mullā Šadrā's method of critical appraisal combined

<sup>155</sup> *Kasr asnām al-jāhiliyya fī al-radd 'alā Mutasawwafa*, ed. Muḥammad Taqī Dānishpaz-hūh (Tehran: Dānishkadīh-i 'ulūm-i ma'qūl va manqūl 1340 A.Hsh./1962).

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>157</sup> "The Waning of the Qizilbash," p. 138.

<sup>158</sup> Kathlyn Babayan notes that "The withdrawal to Kahak of Mullā Šadrā (1021/1612–13), a product of the Ishrāqī school of philosophy, signals the existence of an orthodox undercurrent that was beginning to gain credence. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the mainstream current among the Imāmī ulama in Isfahan considered all three paths toward the knowledge of God (Sharī'at, Haqīqat, and Tarīqat) as legitimate" (*ibid.*, p. 69).

<sup>159</sup> Mullā Šadrā, *Le Livre des pénétrations métaphysiques (Kitāb al-Mashā'ir)*, Arabic text edited with a Persian version and French translation and annotation by Henry Corbin (Tehran: Tahūrī, 2nd ed 1363 A.Hsh./1984), p. 33, n.16 (French text).

<sup>160</sup> *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, ed. M.J Mahjūb (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-i Bārānī 1345 A.Hsh./1966), I, pp. 182–3.

with informed praise of Sufism, Ma'şūm 'Alī Shāh cites the following passage from the *Kasr asnām*:

Whoever considers the circumstances of the present day and the living conditions of its people, regarding with scrutiny and insight with knowledge born of certitude [will know] concerning the 'people of God' (*ahl Allāh*) and the masters of Sufism (*arbāb al-taṣawwuf*) and those who are perfect in their spiritual state (*al-kamāl al-hāl*) will prevent any of them from giving verbal expression [to their condition] but rather, will require them to keep it hidden.

In brief, the 'Sufi' insofar as he is actually a 'Sufi' is concealed from [the apprehension of ordinary] human intelligence, and though he be visible in his bodily form, the rest of his states are hidden from public scrutiny... Those who are privy to His gnosis (*ahl 'irfānahu*), and who are His select servants and devotees are unknown to the people of the world, such that those who follow fleshly lusts cannot comprehend their states, and even if they did long to apprehend their rank, their degree is too lofty for benighted minds and the base natures to reach. Such adepts are becurtained within God's august Presence, and beneath the domes of His Majesty are hidden from the apprehension of villains and corrupt folk.<sup>161</sup>

The Sufi dimension of Mullā Ṣadrā's personality revealed by Ma'şūm 'Alī Shāh here becomes more pronounced in his Persian treatise entitled 'The Three Principles' (*Sih 'aṣl*),<sup>162</sup> where Mullā Ṣadrā introduces himself as *Khādim al-fuqarā'* – an obvious allusion to his affiliation to the Sufis.<sup>163</sup> This affiliation, or at least, sympathy for the Sufis is confirmed a few sentences later where he proceeds to cite a couplet from a ghazal of Ḥāfiẓ which states: "I do not travel this path through my own self-volition" – another indirect allusion to the need for spiritual direction and Mullā Ṣadrā's own probable affiliation to a Sufi master. Following this quotation of Ḥāfiẓ, Mullā Ṣadrā complains of the false scholars who "make repudiation of the *Dervishes* their motto in life, continually mocking the Path of divine wisdom (*ḥikmat*) and Unity (*tawḥīd*), and reviling the science of the Way to God and disengagement from

<sup>161</sup> Ma'şūm 'Alī Shāh, *Ṭarā 'iq al-ḥaqā' 'iq*, I, p. 182; for the original passage, see *Kasr asnām*, pp. 103–04. This definition of the state of the true Sufi seems to be based on Rūmī's discussion of the real dervish in the *Mathnawī* (ed. R.A. Nicholson, London: Luzac & Co. 1925–40, III: 3669ff.). For a good discussion of *Kasr asnām*, see Babayan, "The Waning of the Quzılbash," chap. 5, notes 156–62.

<sup>162</sup> *Risāla-yi Sih aṣl*, ed. by S.H. Nasr (Tehran: Tehran University Press 1340 A.Hsh./1961), p. 5, line 5.

<sup>163</sup> The phrase *Khādim al-fuqarā'* 'caretaker of the poor' has an implicitly Sufi connotation. Besides the socially deprived, the unemployed, and beggars, no other group in Islamic society beside the Sufis are usually ever specifically referred to as the *fuqarā'*. See the extended discussion of *faqr* and *faqīr* in Aḥmad 'Alī Rajā'ī Bukhārā'ī, *Farhang-i ash'ār-i Ḥāfiẓ* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī, n.d.), pp. 509–23, as well as J. Nurbakhsh's book on this subject, trans. by L. Lewisohn, *Spiritual Poverty in Sufism* (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications 1984).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6, lines 1–4. Italics mine. This complaint against '*ulamā'* who hate "the Dervishes" appears later in (and in fact, throughout) the treatise (cf. p. 93, lines 7–8).

materiality (*tajrīd*).<sup>164</sup> This same aversion to anti-Sufi scholars appears again later on in the same chapter, where he explicitly expresses his intense dislike for “those scholars (*‘ulamā*) who deny the spiritual wayfarers (*sālikān*) and the brethren of purity ... reviling divine wisdom (*ḥikmat*) and rejecting the truthful sages and the *Sufis*”.<sup>165</sup>

Examination of these pages (and other sections of the *Sih aṣl*) leads to only one conclusion: Mullā Ṣadrā, in this work at least, is an advocate of specifically *Sufi* philosophical mysticism (*ḥikmat*), rather than some independent Shī‘ite philosophical mysticism divorced from the Sufi tradition. His *ḥikmat* is thus undeniably the fruit of his philosophical affiliation with the Sufi gnostic tradition – both that of the Akbarian theosophical school and the purely lyrical Persian Sufism of Rūmī – a fact demonstrated by his continual citation of Rūmī’s *Mathnawī*<sup>166</sup> and Shabistārī’s ‘Garden of Mystery’ (*Gulshan-i rāz*)<sup>167</sup> to illustrate the key concepts and ideas in this treatise. Many passages in his treatise appear specifically written *by way of exegesis* on the *Mathnawī*, rather than merely to provide a pleasant poetic illustration of or background for his own ideas.<sup>168</sup> Aside from his frequent citation of certain Shī‘ite authorities such as Ja‘far Ṣādiq, who is equally respected by the Sufis, as a thinker and master,<sup>169</sup> and some of the famous Shī‘ite *ḥadīth* collections, such as Kulaynī’s *‘Uṣūl-kāfi*, there is little to distinguish the *Sih aṣl* from a classic Sufi tract on mystical psychology and spiritual discipline, composed after the fashion of a Jāmī or a Farghānī, cautioning the reader to abandon a life of passion and pursue a course of piety and religion. Having said this, though, it should be noted that Mulla Ṣadra explicitly denied his affiliation to any particular Sufi teacher.<sup>170</sup>

In brief, if his main mentor Mīr Dāmād distinguished, as Henry Corbin probably rightly maintained, between gnosis and Sufism, *‘irfān* and *taṣawwuf*, for Mullā Ṣadra, the one is the other and the other the One.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, lines 1–2. Italics mine.

<sup>166</sup> He cites Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* some nine times in the treatise, citing varying numbers of couplets on each occasion, on the following pages: 2, 12, 30, 37, 41, 71, 72, 96, 109.

<sup>167</sup> He cites the *Gulshan-i rāz* some eight times on the following pages: 9, 19, 46, 73, 76, 105, 111, 112, 113.

<sup>168</sup> See for example, *ibid.*, p. 96, lines 6–18.

<sup>169</sup> On which, see John Taylor, “Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, Spiritual Forbear of the Sūfīs,” *Islamic Culture*, 40/1 (1966), pp. 97–113.

<sup>170</sup> In his *‘Arshiyya*, the last work which Mullā Ṣadrā wrote (edited with a Persian translation by Ghulām Ḥusayn Āhanī, Iṣfahān: Kitāb-furūshī-yi Shahriyār 1341 A.Hsh./1962), often considered an abbreviation of the *Asfār*, the author claims to have received his teaching from “the lamp of prophecy and sainthood; its substance derived from the fountainheads of the celestial Scripture and the way of the Prophet without recourse to study or discussion and without the teaching of any teacher” (p. 2).

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Ṣafā’s (*Tārīkh*, V/1, pp. 215–16) provocative discussion of his relationship to *taṣawwuf*.

4. *Mīr Abū al-Qāsim Findiriskī (d. 1050/1640–1)*

Comparing the Platonists of Iṣfahān with their contemporaries, the Cambridge Platonists of England, Marshall Hodgson observed that Persian philosophy of the Safavid period “was alert to sources of pre-Islamic ‘pagan’ wisdom which might make it more humanistically universal.”<sup>172</sup> One of the most important representatives of this humanistic universalism in the school of Iṣfahān was Mīr Findiriskī, who had numbered Mullā Ṣadrā among his students.

The fact that he spent several years in India, where he frequented the company of Hindu yogis and ascetics, and composed a commentary on the Persian translation of the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* by Nizām al-Dīn Pānīpatī, is indicative of his wider ecumenical interests.<sup>173</sup> Findiriskī “tried to make peace in the war raging between the ‘seventy-two sects’, in which he achieved a measure of success through composition of a commentary on the work.”<sup>174</sup>

Although the eminent contemporary Persian theosopher Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī describes Mīr Findiriskī as essentially an Islamic Peripatetic of the school of Avicenna, professing himself in the dark as to whether or not he professed any particular “mystical method in his heart (*dar bāṭin dārā-yi mashrab-i ‘irfānī*),”<sup>175</sup> many scholars of Persian literature and philosophy have

<sup>172</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, III, p. 51.

<sup>173</sup> Nasr, “The School of Iṣfahān,” p. 922; Ṣafā, *Tārīkh*, V, p. 311.

<sup>174</sup> Hādī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl-i Mīr Dāmād* p. 57.

<sup>175</sup> *Muntakhabātī az āthār-i ḥukamā’i ilāhī-yi Īrān*, I, p. 62. Ashtiyānī apparently based his views on Mīr Findiriskī’s treatise on arts and sciences (*Risāla-yi Ṣanā’iyya*), in which the various types of professions and trades, and the metaphysical and moral reasons underlying the necessity for human employment are enumerated and delineated, and in which there is little or no trace of philosophical mysticism (*‘irfān*) and an entirely Islamic Peripatetic point of view prevails. For instance, the highest profession is that of the Prophet which is, in essence, good and beneficial, and the human profession which serves and benefits all the other professions is the blacksmith’s trade (*ibid.*, I, p. 67), a truth which finds its scriptural confirmation in the Koran (LVII: 25). It is interesting to note that the first of his twelve professions of which “the subject is universal and general felicity its main concern” is described as being either “prophethood (*payghambarī*), deputyship [of a prophet] (*imāmī*), the juridical (*mujtahidī*) or philosophical (*ḥikmī*) profession” (*ibid.*, p. 68). In this description he communicates his belief that the prophet, theologian, jurisprudent and philosopher share similar moral and social responsibilities. The sole distinction between philosophers and prophets is that the former sometimes fall into error through their use of human reason and reflection, whereas the prophet, whose knowledge is through revelation (*wahy*) and inspiration (*ilhām*), never errs. (*ibid.*, I, pp. 71–2). However, “when the philosopher reaches the farthest extent of his knowledge, this point is the generatrix (*mabda’*) of Prophecy.” Like Avicenna, Mīr Findiriskī maintained that the best example of such a philosopher is Aristotle (*ibid.*, p. 73). On Avicenna’s views, see Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (New York: Midway Reprint 1979), chap. 2. Despite these similarities in their function, Mīr Findiriskī is careful to note that there are serious differences and distinctions to be maintained between the abilities of the prophet and philosopher, making the latter but a pale reflection of the former.

remarked on Findiriskī's inclinations towards Sufism.<sup>176</sup> While E.G. Browne reflected that "while more a philosopher than a poet, and more a *darwīsh* than a philosopher, he does not exactly fall into any one of these three classes,"<sup>177</sup> Dhābiḥu'llāh Ṣafā, on the other hand, characterized Findiriskī as being "of a Sufi temperament (*Ṣūfī-manish*)."<sup>178</sup>

Whether apocryphal or not, the tales told of Mīr Findiriskī's habit of frequenting the meeting places of local dervishes in Iṣfahān became legendary in his own lifetime. Such stories, indeed, may be the basis of his reported affiliation with several of the orders in Safavid Iran.<sup>179</sup> Shāh 'Abbās once chided him, "I have heard it said that certain religious students, notables and scholars have been frequenting the company of rogues and listening to their rubbish." Without hesitation, Mīr Findiriskī retorted: "That's strange, because I spend most every day with jugglers and dervishes, yet never once noticed any seminary students or notables among them!"<sup>180</sup>

Mīr Findiriskī's alignment with Sufis in his daily life is reflected in his famous *qaṣīda* on the reality of gnosis,<sup>181</sup> in which he puts himself in an anti-philosophical, or at least an anti-Peripatetic camp in several verses, as, for example:

*in sukhan rā dar nayābad hīch fahm-i zāhiri*  
*gar Abū Naṣr-astī va'gar Bū 'Alī Sīnā'stī*

The gist of words such as these  
no mind bound by exterior sense  
can know, be you the greatest sage,  
be you a Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā.<sup>182</sup>

The doctrine of mystical gnosis found in this *qaṣīda*, which criticizes the Peripatetic use of philosophical logic and reason (*'aql*) as an insufficient

<sup>176</sup> Likewise Nasr points out ("The School of Iṣfahān," p. 922): "As a Sufi, in spite of his having advanced very far upon the Path and having reached the state of pure contemplation and illumination, he mingled with the common people and wore the coarsest wool, and yet he was one of the most respected men in the Ṣafawid court. His manner resembled that of the Hindu Yogīs with whom he had had so much contact. He was a real man among men and one of the most striking Sufis of his time. While completely detached from the world and even from purely formal learning, he composed several important treatises including one on motion (*al-ḥarakah*), another on the arts and sciences in society (*ṣanā'iyyah*) ... *Uṣūl al-fuṣūl* on Hindu wisdom, and a history of the Ṣafawids."

<sup>177</sup> *A Literary History of Persia*, IV, p. 258.

<sup>178</sup> *Tārīkh* V/1, p. 310.

<sup>179</sup> Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shīrāzī claims that he was affiliated to the Nūrbakhshī and Ni'matullāhī orders: *Ṭarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, I, p. 183.

<sup>180</sup> *Rayḥānat al-adab*, IV, p. 358.

<sup>181</sup> This poem is written in answer to *qaṣīdas* in the same metre by Nāṣir Khusraw and Shāh Ni'matullāh.

<sup>182</sup> See Hādī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl-i Mīr Dāmād*, p. 66; Ṣafā, *Tārīkh*, V, p. 312–13 and the abbreviated translation given by Nasr, "The School of Iṣfahān," pp. 923–4.

means to apprehend reality is propounded in exactly the same manner as in the celebrated classical Persian Sufi poets such as Rūmī. In his exegesis of this couplet, the nineteenth-century Ḥakīm and pupil of Sabzivārī, Shaykh Mīrzā ‘Abbās Dārābī, author of an important commentary on this *qaṣīda*, makes it quite clear that Findiriskī’s thought is unapproachable through modes of Peripatetic analysis: only the Ishrāqī ascetic method or Sufism offers insight.<sup>183</sup>

Ultimately however, the same tensions between speculative philosophy and mystical poetry present in Shaykh Bahā’ī also appear in the writings of Mīr Findiriskī; the wrangling between the contrasting methods ‘*irfān*, *taṣawwuf* and *falsafa*, apparently resolved in the realm of their Sufi gnostic lyricism, in his thought still remain problematic in the prose of the world.

### 5. ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī (d. 1072/1661–2)

‘Abd al-Razzāq b. ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn Lāhijī (d. 1072/1661–2)<sup>184</sup> was the son-in-law of Mullā Ṣadrā and brother-in-law of Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī (see section 6 below). In his Persian *Dīvān* one finds much interest in and reference to Sufism.<sup>185</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, whose pen-name ‘Fayyāḍ’ was given him by Mullā Ṣadrā, wrote several *qaṣā’id* celebrating his teacher Mullā Ṣadrā<sup>186</sup> and one in praise of Mīr Dāmād. However, he was not above writing occasional political panegyrics in praise of, among others, Shāh ‘Abbās II, Shāh Ṣafī Murtaḍa Qulī Khān (‘Abbās II’s commander-in-chief) as well as many religious *qaṣā’id* in praise of the Prophet and the Imāms. “His poetry,” Zarrīnkūb states, “although it follows the conventions of the period from a stylistic point of view, is not devoid of a passion for Sufism – ‘Sufism’, that is in the sense of speculative mysticism (‘*irfān-i naẓarī*) rather than spiritual practice or

<sup>183</sup> *Tuḥfat al-murād: sharḥ-i qaṣīda-yi Mīr Findiriskī*, ed. Muḥammad Akbarī Sāvī (Tehran: n.p., 1372 A.Hsh./1993), pp. 54–8.

<sup>184</sup> One of the best accounts of his life and works is given in Jalīl Misgarnizhād’s introduction to his edition of *Dīvān-i Fayyāḍ Lāhijī* (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i ‘Allāma ḥabātabā’ī 1373 A.Hsh./1994). Other accounts include Muḥammad ‘Alī Mudarris Tabrizī, *Rayḥānat al-adab* (Tehran 1331 A.Hsh./1952), IV, p. 361; Riḍā Qulī Khān Hidāyat, *Riyāz al-‘arīfīn*, ed. Mehr ‘Alī Gūrkanī, (Tehran: n.d.), p. 382; Mīrzā Muḥammad Bāqir al-Musavī al-Iṣfahānī, *Rawḍat al-jannat* (Qum: 1391/1971), IV, p. 196; Ādharbīgdilī, *Ātashkada*, ed. Hasan Sādāt Nāširī, (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr 1336 A.Hsh./1957), II, p. 846. (All the above sources are also utilized by Jalīl Misgarnizhād in his introduction.).

<sup>185</sup> Recently published by Jalīl Misgarnizhād with an extensive and valuable introduction on the historical and literary background of his poetic work (see note 184 above). There is also an excellent edition with a comprehensive introduction to the same *Dīvān-i Fayyāḍ Lāhijī* (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tīhrān 1372 A.Hsh./1993) edited by Amīr Bānū’ī Karīmī (references to Sufism are discussed on pp. 16–19).

<sup>186</sup> In a long *qaṣīda* entitled *Mu’jazat al-shawq* in reply to ‘Urfī Shīrāzī’s *qaṣīda Tarjumat al-shawq*, Fayyāḍ includes a panegyric to Mullā Ṣadrā, see *Dīvān-i Fayyāḍ*, pp. 423–4. He also wrote three other separate *qaṣīdas* in praise of Mullā Ṣadrā; pp. 458–60, 462–4, 465–8.

comportment (*sulūk-i ‘amālī*) particular to adherants of a *khānaqāh* – demonstrating his spiritual inclination towards the reality of Sufism (*ḥaqīqat-i taṣawwuf*).”<sup>187</sup>

Like most of his contemporaries he expressed his admiration for Mīr Dāmād’s spiritual and intellectual stature with unrestrained hyperbole, even claiming that “through you [Mīr Dāmād] the land of Iran is the universe’s summation; through you the city of Iṣfahān has become the best of all climes.”<sup>188</sup> “Just as on the Day of Judgement all human beings return to their Origin and Terminus, so to you they must refer in this world.”<sup>189</sup>

His panegyrics in praise of Mullā Ṣadrā provide some important details about their relationship; one learns, for instance, that he enjoyed Mullā Ṣadrā’s close personal company for many years and that he spent nearly every spring (Nawrūz is a sacred occasion for Persian extended family reunions) with him;<sup>190</sup> that his sense of physical separation from him was worse than being cast out of Heaven.<sup>191</sup> From the three lengthy panegyric *qaṣīdas* to Mullā Ṣadrā, his genuine love for this master are evident, and despite the flowery rhetoric, a characteristic of so much Safavid literature, his sincerity shines through. The following lines from a *qaṣīda* in praise of Mullā Ṣadrā recall the passionate love of Rūmī for Shams-i Tabrīzī:

If till Judgement Day I were to worship the earth on which he walked, that would thus be meet: he’s both teacher, father and spiritual Mentor . . . He’s master of all the world (*ṣadr-i jahān*); and Excellence itself his universe; a Universal Mind: Perfection itself to him is beholden. Learning itself through him is dear. . . His mind like Plato’s the solitude of mystical vision. In the company of academic debate his wit’s as sharp as Aristotle. The Peripatetics all walk on foot; among them he alone is mounted. The Ishraqīs are cast upon the earth and he alone left afoot.<sup>192</sup>

Even a superficial examination of such verses reveals Lāhijī’s advocacy of a kind of gnostic Sufism, albeit devoid of many elements of the classical tradition. In many of his other works direct references to classical Sufi authors, sources, and citation of mystical doctrines can be found. This is most obvious in his *Gawhar-i murād* (The Essence of Spiritual Intention or Crown Jewel of Desire) a general work on theology, *kalām*, ontology and mystical theology (*‘irfān*). Unfortunately, no critical edition of this work exists: the best copy in print is accompanied by an introduction which endeavours to manipulate the philosopher in political terms to meet the needs of “our [Islamic Republic’s]

<sup>187</sup> *Dunbāla Zarrīnkūb*, p. 254.

<sup>188</sup> *Dīvān-i Fayyād*, ed. Misgarnizhād, p. 462, v. 42.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 461, v. 29.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463, v. 23.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463, v. 25.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 467, vv. 50, 51, 52, 54, 59.

revolutionary spirit.”<sup>193</sup> Since the thought of ‘Abd al-Razzāq is prone to misinterpretation and distortion by both fundamentalist and modern ideological adversaries of Sufi mysticism, I shall try to rectify their bias in what follows.<sup>194</sup>

Avicenna is undoubtedly the most frequently cited and celebrated author in the *Gawhar-i murād*. Thus, if ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī appears at first sight to be nothing but an Islamic Peripatetic and follower of Ibn Sīnā – contrary to Madelung<sup>195</sup> – this is somewhat understandable, since he often terminates and confirms the validity of his own views and proofs by quoting what the “Shaykh in the *Shifā* states ...” However, on closer investigation, Fayyād’s personal rapport with Avicenna has nothing to do with a rationalist orientation: his delight in the works of the Shaykh al-Ra’īs rather reflects the devotion and *dhawq* of a mystic for the founder of Islamic *ḥikma* (making one recall, in a different historical context, the same high respect accorded by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadhānī to Avicenna in his *Tamhīdāt*). Fayyād’s Avicenna is an ‘*arīf*’ who – above and beyond all his great philosophical achievements – is primarily the author of the ninth chapter of the ‘Book of Philosophical Allusions’ (*Ishārāt*) entitled ‘Way Stations of the Gnostics’ (*Maqāmāt al-‘arīfīn*).

One passage in the *Gawhar-i murād*, devoted to “Exposition of the way of the spiritual scientists (*muhaqqiqān*) among the legal scholars (*‘ulamā’-yi shari’at*), who are the objective of the Sufis and the gnostics, whether or not this name be

<sup>193</sup> This is the edition edited by Z. Qurbānī Lāhijī (Tehran: 1372 A.Hsh./1993), which features an introduction heavily spiced with quotations from Khomeini and Rafsanjani (e.g. introduction, pp. 12ff.). Although pp. 8–10 of this introduction, for example, are devoted to ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s ‘*irfān*’, no reference is given to any of the (apparently politically incorrect) pro-Sufi passages in the *Gawhar-i murād* which I have discussed below. The same religious bias and partisanship is also evident in Jalīl Misgarnizhād’s introduction to Fayyād’s *Dīvān* in which one section (on pp. 30–3) devoted to Lāhijī’s *kalām*, ‘*irfān*’ and *taṣawwuf* utterly fails to deliver on the subtitle’s promise – neglecting to mention the latter subject at all!

<sup>194</sup> Most modern Shī’ite religious dons, following the Safavid *mujtahid* cultists who are their ideological forbears, still consider Sufism, as Yann Richard insightfully pointed out, “as nothing more than an illegitimate competitor in the marketplace of religious values” (*Shi’ite Islam*, trans. A. Nevill [London: I.B. Tauris 1995], p. 54). Carl Ernst’s analysis of the motivation of such biased selectivity is worth quoting in this regard: “Like the spin doctors who attempt to mold public opinion through commentary, fundamentalist spokesmen attempt through their rhetoric of total confrontation to claim representation of Islam. For this effort to succeed, they must discredit and disenfranchise all other claimants to the sources of authority in the Islamic tradition. There is no stronger rival claim on these sources than in Sufism” (Carl Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* [Boston: Shambhala 1997], pp. 212–13). Also cf. “Sufism and Fundamentalist Islam,” in *ibid.*, pp. 211–15.

<sup>195</sup> It is true, as he points out, that ‘Lāhijī’s thought appears, throughout his works, dominated by his conviction of the continued validity of the integral teaching of Ibn Sīnā as against later critics’, but this is not sufficient reason, as is shown below, to argue that the “internal evidence” that can be found in this works to show that he inclined to Sufism is “not convincing” (W. Madelung, “‘Abd al-Razzāq,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, I, p. 157).

ascribed to them,” reveals the true breadth of Lāhījī’s support for Sufism and advocacy of mystical Avicennanist. His introduction of Avicenna to defend the cause of philosophical mysticism (*‘irfān*) in this passage simultaneously furnishes us with the truest account of – what is for him – the reality of Sufism.<sup>196</sup>

In Peripatetic ethical teaching, Lāhījī initially declares, the chief virtue is “Justice: denoting a harmonious balance and equity in all acts and works so as to incline to no one extreme.” Lāhījī musters up a citation from Avicenna’s ‘Tract on Ethics’ in support of this idea, adding that “without a complete awakening and broad-based self-consciousness causing one to enter deeply into, and become aware of, one’s changing subjective humours, inner states, alterations experienced by the heart and the subtle minutiae of the soul’s passions” no application or attainment of ethical virtues is possible.<sup>197</sup> “Many of the spiritual scientists (*muḥaqqiqān*) among the legal scholars (*‘ulamā’-yi sharī‘at*),” in order to realize such an understanding, Lāhījī explains, have chosen to retire into seclusion, a practice which can be traced back to the followers of the Prophet (*tāba ‘īn*) who from the earliest days of Islam had chosen to isolate themselves for the purposes of devotion and worship of God. Since their day an entirely new phenomenon has come into play, such that:

in blind imitation of their practice, a group have established rites at variance with [the Prophet’s] custom, and have decked themselves out in a special costume, considered it necessary to give themselves a special name, enacting peculiar rituals and coining their own separate terminology. In this fashion, the [customs of] ‘masterhood and discipleship’ (*pīrī va murīdī*) have become prevalent, good is combined with evil and wet and dry compounded. However, in relation [to the spiritual life] the closest thing to rectitude is to content oneself with worshipping and serving God without presuming to adopt any but the most ordinary names and denominations such as ‘believers’, ‘sincere devotees’, ‘righteous servants’, and ‘pietists’ (*mu‘minīn va mukhlisīn va ṣāliḥīn va muttaqīn*) mentioned in the Koran and the sacred Tradition (*sunna*), such that one not presume to adopt any other apparel and appearance than that of [simple] spiritual poverty and self-denial (*faqr va fanā*), whatever its outer dress may be.<sup>198</sup>

<sup>196</sup> Contemporary Western scholars whose eyes are blinded by the dearly cherished orientalist fallacy that a *non-mystical* Islamic ‘orthodoxy’ actually exists – an entity no medieval Muslim ever subscribed to and which has largely been echoed by the modern media – are quite bewildered by the Sufi tendencies in a high-ranking Safavid theologian such as ‘Abd al-Razzāq. To such distortions one can only respond that Islamic Sufism is, as S.H. Nasr emphasizes, “the inner dimension or heart of the Islamic revelation ... The attitude of traditional Islam to Sufism reflects that which was current during the centuries prior to the advent of puritanical and modernist movements in the 12th/18th century” (“What is Traditional Islam” in Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, p. 15). The donnish partiality to legalistic Islam and tacit acceptance of fundamentalist denunciations of Sufism as marginal or foreign to Islam, to which many Islamicists still uncritically subscribe, is raised by Carl Ernst in his *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, pp. 8–18, 200.

<sup>197</sup> *Gawhar-i murād*, ed. Z. Qurbānī Lāhījī (Tehran 1372 A.Hsh./1993), p. 687.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 688.

This passage is a *locus classicus* for understanding, representing a key statement reflecting Fayyāḍ's sympathetic – yet not uncritical – approach to Islamic mysticism. That an ordained priest rails against priestcraft, or a monk assails the corruption of the clergy and their abuse of monastic ideals, does not imply that either priest or monk has repudiated the validity of the monastic way or has deserted his parish. Likewise, “if Fayyāḍ does not voice his approval of the master–disciple method (*ṭarīqa-yi pīr wa murīdī*) and the conventional Sufi discipline,” as Professor Zarrīnkūb underlines (perhaps referring to this same passage), “this cannot be interpreted in any case as a denial and refutation of Sufism itself.”<sup>199</sup> Criticism of Sufism *from within the tradition of Sufism*, in fact, has quite an ancient provenance.<sup>200</sup>

Having thus voiced his opinion about the corruption of the high ideals of Sufism, Fayyāḍ then briefly explains his view of what constitutes ‘authentic’ Islamic mysticism:

The spiritual scientists (*muḥaqqiqān*) belonging to this class<sup>201</sup> are lords of high aspiration whose sights are fixed exclusively on the Unique Divine Essence, and whose attention is directed to no other Aim than That ... In the path of their spiritual wayfaring to God (*sulūk-i rāh-i khudā*) this group have delineated certain spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*), the first of which, after awakening (to the Quest) is repentance (*tawba*) from abandoning devotional practices and indulgence in sin, and the last is forsaking everything other than God, and repenting from the real sin (*gunāh-i ḥaqīqī*) which is one's fictional self-existence (*wujūd-i majāzī*), for it has been said ‘Your existence is a sin worse than all other sin.’<sup>202</sup>

While in the first passage cited above, ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī appears critical of both traditional and contemporary *ṭarīqa* Sufism, he also hardly differs from classical Sufi authors such as Hujwīrī or Qushayrī in expounding the traditional

<sup>199</sup> *Dunbāla*, p. 254.

<sup>200</sup> See Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, pp. 18–31. One has only to recall these lines by Sa’dī to realize that the criticism of Sufism lies itself within an entire tradition of criticism through which the mystics strove to purify their high ideals from vulgarization:

*Surat-i ḥāl-i ‘ārīfān dalq ast in qadar bas kay rū’ī dar khalq-ast*  
*dar ‘amal kūsh va har chih khwāhī pūsh tāj bar sar nay u ‘alam bar dūsh*  
*murād-i ahl-i ṭarīqat labās-i zāhir nīst kamar bih khidmat-i sulṭān biband*  
*u šūft bāsh*

I also doubt that few Sufis would disagree with Sa’dī's statement

*‘Ālim u ‘ābid u šūft hamah īflān-i rahand mard agar hast bijuz ‘ārīf-i*  
*rabānī nīst*

Yet, at the same time and in the same ghazal, Sa’dī enjoins the novice:

*dārū-yi tarbiyat az pīr-i ṭarīqat bisitān k’ādāmī rā batar az ‘illat-i nādānī*  
*nīst*

<sup>201</sup> *Ṭabaqa*: i.e. the class of scholars versed in *sharī‘a* learning as well as the lore of the *ḥaqīqa*.

<sup>202</sup> *Gawhar-i murād*, p. 688. The adage is ascribed to Rābī‘a.

Sufi categorization of the spiritual stations. The predominately Sufi orientation of his doctrine becomes evident in his next paragraph, in which he briefly describes the categorization of the spiritual stations given by ‘Abdu’līlāh Anṣārī’s in the *Manāzil al-sā’irīn* (Stations of the Wayfarers), an elaborate Islamic *Pilgrim’s Progress* upon which, as A.G. Ravān-Farhādī pointed out, “Anṣārī’s subsequent reputation in the annals of Sufism primarily rests.”<sup>203</sup> The penultimate station in Anṣārī’s categorization is the annihilation (*fanā’*) of the false Selfhood. In describing this concept, Lāhijī is careful to comment that at this station *fanā’* cannot be understood to properly “exist” in itself, “but rather this station implies an *annihilation from annihilation*. For at this level the utmost depths of divine Union become manifest and the wayfarer becomes endowed with all the divine Attributes, becoming eternal in God’s own Eternity.”<sup>204</sup>

To explain the highest reaches of Avicennan mysticism, Lāhijī takes a cue from Shaykh Abū ‘Alī bin Sīnā’s account of the “Waystations of the Gnostics,” the ninth chapter of his ‘Book of Philosophical Allusions’ referred to above, first citing with approval the commentary on this text by Imām Fakhr-i Rāzī, who, he states, praised “this chapter as having arranged the sciences of the Sufis in a far better manner than any of his forebears and, to tell the truth, better than anyone subsequent to him.” Interestingly enough, the approbation of the word ‘Sufī’ by the great Sunni theologian Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī in this passage causes Lāhijī no alarm. ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s evident veneration of Avicenna’s *Maqāmāt al-‘ārīfīn* renders him oblivious to both the anti-Sunni and anti-Sufi bias of his age. Neither Sunnism nor Shī’ism seem to matter in this context; what is of overall importance is the sublimity of the proper *philosophical presentation* of the Sufis’ spiritual stations, and despite the obvious theological divergence of *madhhab* between Avicenna and our author, there is no disagreement about the transcendental *reality* of ‘*irfān*. Fayyād’s own Shī’ism disappears in the overwhelming light of the mystico-philosophical tradition, dissolving all sectarian exclusivism in its transcendental wisdom (*hikmat*).

The next few pages of the concluding chapter of his ‘Crown Jewel of Desire’ are devoted to further commentary on Avicenna’s *Maqāmāt al-‘ārīfīn*. Quoting heavily from Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s *Sharh* of this work, he concludes that Avicenna and Ṭūsī are only expressing in “different words (*taqrīrī dīgar*) the notion of the ‘Unity of Being (*waḥdat-i wujūd*) which idea is the quintessence of the Gnostics’ objectives and fruit of the hearts of saints.” Lāhijī sums up his own opinion of the relation between philosophical mysticism (*hikmat*) and gnosticism (‘*irfān*) as follows:

From what has been mentioned above it is evident that the degree of gnosis (*ma’rifat*) is higher than that of philosophical mysticism (*hikmat*) and the Object

<sup>203</sup> See his article “The Hundred Grounds of ‘Abdu’līlāh Anṣārī (d. 448/1056) of Herāt,” in L. Lewisohn, *The Heritage of Sufism*, I, p. xxx.

<sup>204</sup> *Gawhar-i murād*, p. 688.

sought by the gnostics (*'urafā'*) is more dear than that of the philosophical mystics (*ḥukamā'*). For the latter aims to detach the rational soul from corporeality and attach it to the heavenly pleroma and the realm of pure immateriality. The aim of the gnostics, on the other hand, is severance of their attention from aught but God and realization of the station of annihilation (*fanā'*), merging into the World of Eternal Subsistence (*'ālām-i baqā'*).

Yet, the aims of both the gnostics and the philosophers are more exalted than those of the ascetics and religious devotees (*zuhād va 'ubbād*), for the latter group does not aim to transcend corporeality, but only strives to overcome physical pleasures in expectation of attaining joys hereafter.<sup>205</sup>

Lāhijī distinguishes in this passage between a lower Shī'ite philosophical mysticism divorced from the Sufi tradition and a 'higher' knowledge present in Avicennan gnosis. He places the theosophy of Ibn 'Arabī and the philosophical gnosis of Avicenna – which aim to denude the imagination of all but God – on a higher level than an *Ishrāqī* type of *ḥikmat* whose aim is primarily body-denying and ascetic. He concludes the chapter with further citations from the *Maqāmāt al-ārifīn*, noting with approval how Avicenna distinguished between three religious types: ascetics, devotees and gnostics. Every gnostic is necessarily an ascetic and a religious devotee, whereas many, if not most, ascetics and religious devotees lack gnosis. The highest rung of spiritual achievement, however, is that of the gnostic “whose inner being (*bātin*) is like a burnished mirror held up before the Almighty's visage whereupon is cast the image of divine manifestations, enlightening him with genuine spiritual pleasures such that he experiences a joy beyond all temporal things.”<sup>206</sup>

Gnosis (*ma'rifat*), in a word, is the 'Crown Jewel of Desire'. *Ma'rifat*, states 'Abd al-Razzāq, the mystical Peripatetic, is the supreme desire, the highest aim, the *Gawhar-i murād* of the sage, whether philosopher, ascetic or Sufi. This philosophical truth is understood only by the *'ārif* who transcends all sects and names.<sup>207</sup>

From the above summary, it is evident that if 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī did not subscribe to the practice of contemporary Sufis, his philosophical mysticism is quite Sufi in tenor.<sup>208</sup> Perhaps this is the reason that Mīrzā 'Abdullāh Afandī

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* p. 691.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* p. 693.

<sup>207</sup> Fayyāḍ's *Dīvān* is riddled with apophatic utterances which express this axiomatic mystical truth, of which the following couplets are a good example: “O Muslims, if being Muslim is merely this, then I'm a Jew, an infidel, a Zoroastrian: I am not a Muslim” (*Dīvān*, ed. Karīmī, p. 644, no. 516: 2); “If you have no taste to be a dervish, flee away, become a king; if you have no taste for inner peace then flee away into the *melée*. . . . The taste for people's praise turns poison into sugar: if you are a man, renounce holy piety and into monkhood flee” (*Ibid.*, p. 593, no. 452: 1, 5).

<sup>208</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī thus described 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī as “inclined to Sufism (*taṣawwuf*),” noting that “his principle method was that of the spiritual wayfarers (*ahl-i sulūk*) and that his spiritual attitude was exactly the same as that of his teacher” (*Muntakhabātī az āthār-i ḥukamā'ī ilāhī-yi Īrān*, I, p. 285).

described 'Abd al-Razzāq as "harboring a Sufi's theosophical sensibility (*kāna Ṣūfī al-mashrab*)"<sup>209</sup> and why Henry Corbin pointed out that it was evident from this work alone that "he certainly had realized a personal experience of Sufism."<sup>210</sup>

A look at the second part of the introduction to the *Gawhar-i murād*, in which he vigorously argues that the practical gnostic method of the Sufis constitutes the *only authentic path to God* in Islam, reveals the full extent of 'Abd al-Razzāq's sympathies with the theosophical ideals, if not with the actual practices of, *taṣawwuf*:

It should be understood that the *via mystica* which leads to God Almighty is a way upon which none should ever imagine any methodical progress (*sulūk*) can be made except by means of humble entreaty and self-abnegation ('*ajz va nīstī*). Indeed, what relation does a clod of dust and dirt have to the pure Creator?<sup>211</sup> What likeness does an earthborn being have with the Lord of Lords? For there is no kinship between the creature and the Creator, or between the possible and the Necessary Being, the temporally created and the Eternal Being and the perishing and the Everlasting One, such that by betaking oneself to the former one should be able to attend the latter's Court. The only way to that Court is through negation of all relationships (*ṣalb-i hama-yi nisbathā*), for when all relationships and ties are abolished and the veils of fantasy and imagination are removed from one's sight, such that one utterly despairs of all things, then the good tidings of hope in all things is issued. When the dust settles and the air is cleared, then the visible is clearly evident to the eye. Now, all beings, through their phenomenal contingency, are like a swirling cloud of dust polluting the atomosphere of thought. As long as it does not settle, nothing but dust can be seen.

Thus, the object of those who have personally verified the Truth among the Sufis (*muḥaqqīn az Ṣūfiyya*)<sup>212</sup> in professing the 'Unity of Being' (*waḥdat-i wujūd*) and complete self-annihilation (*fanā'-yi muṭlaq*) cannot be anything above and beyond the idea here alluded to. Whatever else you hear about this matter, beware, pay it no heed!

<sup>209</sup> *Riyāz al-'ulamā'*, p. 114.

<sup>210</sup> *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, p. 471.

<sup>211</sup> This sentence seems to be a direct paraphrase of Shabistārī's hemistich in *Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. Šamad Muwaḥḥid, *Majmū'a-i āthār-i Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabistārī* (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-i Ṭahūrī 1365 A.Hsh./1986) pp. 71–2, v. 125 "What relation does dust have to the pure realm: for apprehension is nothing but [to realize one's] incapacity to apprehend."

<sup>212</sup> The terminology adopted by Fayyād in this passage is indebted to the spiritual typology proposed in Šā'in al-Dīn Turkah Iṣfahānī's (d. 830/1427) *Risāla-yi Shaqq al-qamar*. After discussing the various intellectual groups in Islamic society (philosophers, jurists, etc.), Iṣfahānī describes the Sufis. To cite here Henry Corbin's précis of his argument, he writes, "Les soufis dont il s'agit ici ont une haute culture théosophique, ils sont imprégnés aussi bien de la spiritualité de Sohrawardī que de celle d'Ibn 'Arabī. Deus attributs les qualifient: ce sont des *Mohaqqiqān*, terme que indique une double *vérification personnelle* à la fois spéculative et expérimentale. Ce sont 'ceux qui ont compris' au sens propre du mot, correspondant à l'acception technique où nous prenons ici le mot *herméneutique*: un acte de 'comprendre' qui est acte de prendre conscience due fait *que* l'on 'implique' et de *ce que* l'on implique. ... D'où la seconde qualification de nos soufies: ce sont des *Ahl-i shohūd*, des témoins oculaires, des initiés admis à la contemplation du mystère" (*En Islam iranien*, III, p. 247).

In a word, the path to God (*rah-i khudā*) is a strait and narrow one; it can neither be discovered by oneself alone nor traversed solely with the aid of reason (*pāyimardī-yi 'aql*). One can only hope in divine grace, that in His Beneficent Mercy, He will open the way to his servants. Although he has sent the prophets to reveal this way, after they expounded and exposed it, one still must traverse the way which one is shown; and yet, despite the fact that one must proceed on the way oneself [by freewill], unless He conduct you, traversing it will be impossible.

It should be also understood that all men have two ways to approach God: an exoteric (*rāh-i zāhir*) and an esoteric way (*rāh-i bātin*). Although one only can reach God by the esoteric way, one may know God through the exoteric way – albeit a wide gap between [theoretically] knowing God and actually reaching Him exists. It is because of this that so many allusions have been made to the hardships of the esoteric way – in contrast to the exoteric way which involves much less hardship insofar as the latter is based on rational demonstrations within the intellectual reach of every intelligent person capable of discerning effect from cause.

The way of rational demonstration should proceed the way of spiritual conduct (*sulūk*).<sup>213</sup> for as long as a person does not know that there are posting houses on a road he never will make a journey to any destination.<sup>214</sup>

In part 3 of the introduction to the *Gawhar-i murād*, 'Abd al-Razzāq addresses the subject of the spiritual path (*taṣawwuf*) in a less oblique manner, noting that are basically only two divisions among Islamic scholars in theology (*ma'ārif-i ilāhī*): Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites. Such theological distinctions, however, don't appear in Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), where they are largely irrelevant, insofar as such scholastic differences:

exist only among those who pursue the exoteric way (*sulūk-i rāh-i zāhir*) and the path of rational speculation and demonstration (*ṭarīqa-yi naẓar va istidlāl*), whereas the reality of Sufism (*ḥaqīqat-i taṣawwuf*) relates to one's conduct on the esoteric way (*sulūk-i rāh-i bātin*) alone. Whereas the final objective of the former is knowledge, the ultimate aim of the latter is known to be Union with the divine Essence.

However, having said that, it should be added that the esoteric way is informed by the mode of conduct maintained upon the exoteric way (*masbūq-ast bar sulūk-i rāh-i zāhir*). Therefore, the Sufi must first be either a philosopher (*ḥakīm*) or a scholastic theologian (*mutakallim*). Making claims to Sufism (*ida'ā-yi taṣawwuf*) before being firmly grounded in mystical philosophy (*'ilm-i*

<sup>213</sup> *Sulūk* denotes methodical progress on the *via mystica* or *ṭarīqa*, the process of ascension and advancement – psychical, ethical and spiritual – which the Sufi 'wayfarer' (*sālik*) experiences in his pursuit (*talab*) of God. For further discussion of this term in Sufism, see L. Lewisohn, *EF*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. *sulūk*.

<sup>214</sup> *Muntakhabātī az āthār-i ḥukamā'ī ilāhī-yi Īrān*, I, pp. 285–6; *Gawhar-i murād*, pp. 33–4. Henry Corbin commented that this passage "ne laissent aucun doute sur l'inclination secrète et profonde de Mollā Abdorrazzāq pour le soufisme et sur conviction que les prophètes et les *awliyā'* ont été missionnés pour communiquer et expliquer le secret de cette voie *Muntakhabātī*, I, French introduction, p. 124).

*hikmat*), *kalām* and, generally speaking, before being perfectly accomplished in rational and theoretical methods (*ṭarīq-i naẓar*), whether this be according to the lexicon of the orthodox theologians (*‘ulamā’*) or not, is nothing but imposture and deliberately pulling the wool over the eyes of the common people.

Our discourse here does not concern either the term *taṣawwuf* or the word *ṣūfī*; rather, our purpose is ‘spiritual conduct’ (*sulūk-i ma’ nawī*), the quest for true union and the self-denying annihilation of all but Him, thus becoming eternal in His Eternity. The *ḥadīth* [where God declares that] “I am his ear . . . and eye”<sup>215</sup> alludes to this degree and in respect to the Holy Canon (*shar’*), this is what is referred to as true devotion and piety. Whatever the Sufis profess to have attained through interior intellectual revelations (*mukāshafāt-i ‘ilmiyya*), their intention is not the attainment of speculative knowledge (*‘ilm-i naẓarī*) without requiring proofs and demonstrations – since it is impossible to acquire speculative knowledge without certain intermediary means. Rather, the purpose of contemplative vision (*mushāhada*) is that it be the result of rational demonstration (*burhān*) without the interference of fantasy and delusive imagination.<sup>216</sup>

It is clear from this passage that ‘Abd al-Razzāq did not approve of mystics who lacked prior training in either theology or philosophy. At the same time, he maintained the pre-eminence of *taṣawwuf* and endorsed the probity and piety of the Sufi path among other Islamic intellectual and spiritual sciences. Several centuries earlier, a similar if not identical doctrine was clearly enunciated by the Kubrāwī Sufi Shaykh ‘Azīz Nasafī (d. between 1281 and 1300), who suggested that no good could come of a mystic without a prior theological education.<sup>217</sup> Thus it is clear that ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s opinion that the possession of a thorough philosophical or religious education is the *sine qua non* of practical Sufism was not by any means an independently developed doctrinal innovation original to the Safavid Shī‘ite theological milieu in which he flourished: the doctrine has definite resonances, if not its entire origin, in the classical Persian Sufi tradition itself.

Later on in this chapter, while comparing Ishrāqī theosophy with Sufism in order to underline their similarity, ‘Abd al-Razzāq clearly maintains the pre-eminence of the latter tradition. If Ishrāqī spirituality is not entirely spurious,

<sup>215</sup> “When I love a servant, I, the Lord, am his ear so that he hears by Me, I am his eye, so that he sees by Me, and I am his tongue so that he speaks by Me, and I am his hand, so that he takes by Me.” Cited by Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of N Carolina 1975), p. 43.

<sup>216</sup> *Muntakhabāt az āthār-i ḥukamā’i ilāhī-yi Īrān*, I, pp. 287–8; *Gawhar-i murād*, pp. 38–9.

<sup>217</sup> In the fifth treatise in his *Kitāb al-insān al-kāmil*, entitled *Risāla-yi dar biyān-i sulūk* (ed. Marjan Molé, Tehran–Paris 1962), p. 92, Nasafī states that the novice should “first go to the *madrasa* and acquire of Islamic legal knowledge (*‘ilm-i shari‘at*) what is necessary . . . Then, he should study beneficial knowledge so that he becomes quick-witted and fathoms subtle expressions, since the understanding of learned discourse which is acquired in the *madrasa* is an extremely important pillar of this subject. Then, he goes to the *khānaqāh* and affiliates himself as a disciple to a shaykh, devoting himself to his threshold, contenting himself with one shaykh alone, learning what is necessary of the ‘science of the mystical path’ (*‘ilm-i ṭarīqat*).”

he states, it is but a pale reflection of the major tradition in Islamic mysticism, which is *taṣawwuf*:

The difference between the Sufi and the Illuminationist philosopher (*hakīm-i ishrāqī*) is that the path of Sufism (*tarīqa-yi taṣawwuf*) is traversed only *after* becoming completely versed in the principles of philosophical theology (*qawā'id-i kalāmī*) and grounded in the science of the *sharī'a*. For this reason, the fundamental teachings found in the books of the [Sufi] gnostics (*'urafā'*) are more comprehensive than those of the Illuminationist sages.<sup>218</sup>

Ishrāqī and Sufi mysticism, however, are both considered to be species of "spiritual conduct on the esoteric path" (*sulūk-i rāh-i bāṭin*). The Ishrāqī path, he stresses, is not one which involves acquisition of exoteric knowledge (*taḥṣīl-i 'ilm*), but rather is only "informed by" one's "conduct on the exoteric path" (*sulūk-i rāh-i zāhir*).<sup>219</sup> For this reason:

There is no difference between Illuminationism and Sufism except that Sufism is juxtaposed to the discourse of the scholastic theologians (*takallum*) whereas Illuminationism (*ishrāq*) is juxtaposed to philosophical mysticism (*hikmat*). That is to say, whenever the mystic's spiritual conduct on the esoteric path *comes after* his conduct on the exoteric path – pursued according to the principles of philosophical mysticism (*hikmat*), it is known as the 'Path of Illuminationism' (*tarīqa-yi ishrāqī*); but if his conduct [on the esoteric path] *comes after* his conduct on the exoteric path – followed according to the principles of philosophical theology (*kalām*) – it is known as the 'Path of Sufism'.

Both the *Ishrāqī* sage's condemnation of the Peripatetics and the Sufi's censure of philosophical theologians and conventional religious scholars relate to the fact that both [those denounced] groups have limited themselves to formal conduct on the course of the exoteric way (*sulūk-i rāh-i zāhir*); and have based their studies on mere acquisition of intellectual concepts, disregarding and dismissing the essential goal – spiritual conduct on the esoteric path and quest for divine Union.

[On the other hand], the Peripatetic philosophers and the philosophical theologians' censure of the Ishrāqīs and Sufis relate to the fact that the latter groups have set foot on the esoteric path without the adequate acquisition of exoteric knowledge and in-depth inquiry according to methods based on logical inference (*tarīq-i burhān*). But in reality, both groups are right in what they say, for true universality (*kamāl-i haqiqī*) lies in the adornment of both one's inner and outer being, and, just as disregarding the inner being and contenting oneself with formal learning constitutes aberration and arrogance, so undertaking the interior journey without proper conduct in exoteric matters (*sulūk-i zāhir*) is a deviation and defect.<sup>220</sup>

'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī's sophisticated and subtle understanding of the relationship between *taṣawwuf*, *hikmat*, *falsafa* and *'irfān* in these passages

<sup>218</sup> *Muntakhabātī az āthār-i ḥukamā'ī ilāhī-yi Irān*, I, p. 289.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 289; *Gawhar-i murād*, p. 40.

<sup>220</sup> *Muntakhabātī az āthār-i ḥukamā'ī ilāhī-yi Irān*, I, pp. 289–90; *Gawhar-i murād*, p. 40.

reveals his deep sympathy and respect for Sufism, the foundation of which, however, he insists must be philosophically sound. He concludes:

Sufis and Qalandars who do not have a firm grounding in discursive theosophy (*hikmat-i bahthiyya*), who lack acquaintance with philosophical theology, traditional commentaries and exoteric knowledge concerning the ontological origin and end of creation (*mabda' u ma'ād*), while introducing themselves as masters (*murshid*) and spiritual guides of people – as do the *aqtāb* of our own period and [some in] previous epochs – are nothing but brigands who waylay the common folk. The supreme theosopher [Šadr al-Mutā'allihīn = Mullā Šadrā] in his treatise *Kasr aṣnām al-jāhiliyya* took such people to task and exposed the [un]learning of this group, revealing the extent of their decadence.<sup>221</sup>

Lāhijī's intellectual attitude is thus fundamentally that of a theosopher personally inclined to Sufism, as careful to observe respect for classical Sufism as he was to preserve his aloofness from certain benighted representatives of pseudo-Sufism in Safavid Iṣfahān, making his sympathy with the classical Sufi tradition as manifest as is his intellectual distance and independance from the vulgarized *dervichisme* of the Qizilbāsh.

## 6. Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī

Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679–80), pupil and son-in-law of Mullā Šadrā was “one of the most eminent theologians, philosophers, jurists and mystics of the Safavid period, known for his prolific compositions in subjects ranging from Peripatetic philosophy to Ishrāqī ‘oriental’ theosophy, mysticism (*irfān*) and both speculative and practical Sufism (*taṣawwuf-i naẓarī wa ‘amalī*).”<sup>222</sup> One of the most important Shī'ite theosophers of seventeenth-century Persia, there was hardly any field of knowledge among the sciences of his day that he did not examine and discuss in his works.<sup>223</sup> Despite his fame and accomplishments, he preferred to live the life of a simple teacher in his home town of Kāshān, the ‘City of Faith’ (*Dār al-īmān*), and even turned down an invitation by Shāh ‘Abbās to assume the post of archbishop of Iṣfahān (*Shaykh al-Islām*).<sup>224</sup> This cautious avoidance of centres of political power probably played a key role in ensuring Fayḍ's success as a writer on philosophical and mystical subjects. Born into a highly literary family in Kāshān, where his father possessed a large library, he composed some 200 works over the 65 years of his life.<sup>225</sup>

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 290–1.

<sup>222</sup> *Muntakhabātī az āthār-i ḥukamā'ī ilāhī-yi Īrān az ‘aṣr-i Mīr Dāmād u Mīr Findariskī tā zamān-i ḥāḍir*, ed. II, p. 118 from Ashtiyānī's Persian introduction.

<sup>223</sup> Bertels, *Taṣawwuf wa adabiyāt-i taṣawwuf*, Persian trans. by Sīrūs Īzādī (Tehran: T Amīr Kabīr 1976), p. 664.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118–20.

<sup>225</sup> See Fayḍ's *Risāla-yi Mishwāq* (Tehran: 1348 A.Hsh./1969), Muṣṭafā'ī Fayḍī Kāshānī (ed.), introduction, p. 31.

In his autobiography written in 1065/1654 when he was 58, and appropriately titled 'The Heart's Tale' (*Sharḥ-i ṣadr*), Fayḍ related how he spent years wandering from city to city in Persia, in search of esoteric knowledge ('*ilm-i bāṭin*'). In Shīrāz he had studied theology and *ḥadīth*, initially under "the supreme jurisprudent of his age" Sayyid Majīd Baḥraynī, from whom he received a diploma,<sup>226</sup> before going on to Isfahān, where he then memorized *ḥadīth* under Bahā' al-Dīn 'Āmilī (see section 1 above), from whom he received another diploma. Following an ill-fated Ḥājj to Mecca, on the return journey of which his beloved younger brother was killed by brigands, he ended up in Qum where he encountered Mullā Ṣadrā, who became his main teacher. He soon became one of the most passionate followers of Mullā Ṣadrā's transcendentalist philosophy,<sup>227</sup> describing Ṣadrā as "cardinal among the theosophists (*ahl-i 'irfān*), a moon in the firmament of certitude [one] . . . who in the varieties of esoteric knowledge ('*ilm-i bāṭin*) was unique in his age, the supreme authority of his time."<sup>228</sup> Remaining in Qum eight years, he eventually married his teacher's daughter, from whom he received his *takhalluṣ* 'Fayḍ' (Grace), recalling that given to his brother-in-law, 'Fayyāḍ-i' (Overflowing grace, 'Abd al-Razzāq) Lāhījī.

Unfortunately, as with 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī, the study of the works Fayḍ-i Kāshānī has been dominated by *sharī'a*-minded Iranian Shī'ites who portray him as a foe of mysticism and Sufism:<sup>229</sup> a viewpoint which is both uninformed and inaccurate, belying his own quite powerful support for '*irfān* and respect for classical *taṣawwuf*. However, in one way, the disdain and distrust which Iranian theologians have shown towards Fayḍ-i Kāshānī's Sufi oeuvre is comprehensible; he was, after all, prodigiously active in the composition of

<sup>226</sup> *Sharḥ-i ṣadr*, in *Dah risālah-yi Muḥaqqiq-i Buzurg-i Fayḍ-i Kāshānī*, (Isfahān: Markaz-i taḥqīqāt-i 'ilmī va dīnī Imām Amīr al-Mū'minīn 'Alī 1371 A.Hsh./1992), ed. R. Ja'fariyān, p. 59.

<sup>227</sup> Bertels, *Taṣawwuf wa adabiyāt-i taṣawwuf*, p. 663.

<sup>228</sup> *Sharḥ-i ṣadr*, p. 61.

<sup>229</sup> A typical example of this intense anti-Sufi bias is found in a work on so-called 'Shī'ite Philosophy,' which claims that "Fayḍ often attacked the Sufis in his writings, calling them charlatans, cheats, liars, and heretical innovators. In any case, Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ was an eminently celebrated man of learning, philosophy, ethics and *ḥadīth* and devoted his whole life to knowledge . . . so it is extremely far-fetched to think that such a great mind could ever subscribe to such superstitious rubbish as Sufism and dervishism . . ." (Shaykh 'Abdu'llāh Ni'mat, *Falāsafat al-Shī'a*; cited from the Persian translation of this book entitled *Falāsafay-i Shī'a* by Sayyid Ja'far Ghaḍabān [Tabriz: n.d.], p. 557). For a similarly biased treatment see the introduction by Ḥusayn Qashāhī to Fayḍ's *Ḥaqā'iq dar sayr wa sulūk*, Persian trans. Muḥammad Bāqir Sā'idī Khurāsānī (Shīrāz: Intishārāt-i 'ilmiyya Islāmiyya 1340 A.Hsh./1961), pp. 1–35. The traditional clerical Shī'ite bias and wariness of Sufism is often reflected in scholarship of the Safavid period, in which regard Bertels' wise remarks (*Taṣawwuf*, p. 668) about the many *Pia fraud* or *durūgh-i maṣlaḥat-āmīz* written by Safavid historians such as Khwānsārī in the *Rawḍāt al-Jannāt* (who endeavoured to conceal Fayḍ's relation to the Sufis) are still worth bearing in mind. See also notes 193, 194, 196 above.

theological works, having virtually rewritten Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* from a Shī'ite standpoint. That the philosophical and theological bent and aspect of his character tends to be emphasized over his mysticism is not difficult to comprehend, therefore, even if he was generally well disposed, if not personally inclined to, Sufism (as his lesser-known writings discussed below demonstrate).

In what amounts to a small monograph devoted to the question of the relationship of Fayḍ-i Kāshānī's theology to Sufism, Zarrīnkūb draws attention to the resemblances between his intellectual orientation and that of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī:

Most of his works tend to support the fundamental principles of the Sufis, and thus gave credence and confirmation to the results of their doctrinal teachings. In his treatise on 'The Wayfarer's Sustenance' (*Zād al-sālik*) he cites the *exempla* and *dicta* of the Shī'ite Imāms which resemble those of the Sufis. He favourably interpreted such practices as the wearing of wool and the sitting in periods of retreat for forty days without involving himself in any juridical debate on the legality of such practices. Although the truth of the matter is that he did not look favourably upon conventional Sufism as practised by those who frequented *khānaqāhs* and disapproved of the Sufi tenets and disciplines as professed and propagated by the established mystics of his day, at the same time he did not share the same intense interest and preoccupation with philosophical mysticism (*ḥikmat*) and the peculiar issues in scholastic theology as 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī and Mullā Ṣadrā, who were attached to such debates. Despite the fact that he wrote a number of philosophical treatises, such as his commentary [on Mīr Dāmād's] *Ḥāshiyā bar rawāshih al-samāwīyya*, *Risāla al-imkān wa'l-wujūd*, *Anwār al-ḥikma*, *Risāla 'ayn al-yaqīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, as well as several other treatises on theology, ontology, the concept of perpetual creation in nature and the imagination, like Ghazālī he apparently was concerned with the examination of religious problems, matters related to spiritual conduct (*sulūk*) and theosophy (*'irfān*). Perhaps, one can say that his intellectual methodology and mode of spirituality in the Shī'itized climate of the Safavid era, is completely reminiscent of the figure of Ghazālī in the Sunni milieu of Seljuk Iran.<sup>230</sup>

However, unlike Ghazālī, who gave his total endorsement of the Sufi method in his *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī stopped short of fully committing himself to practising the *ṭarīqa* of the traditional Muslim mystics.<sup>231</sup> In many ways, he is the best example of the sober, highly intellectual and nomocentric Shī'ite Sufism of the Safavid period. He was, as

<sup>230</sup> Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 257.

<sup>231</sup> In one ghazal in which Fayḍ frankly records his spiritual achievement and realization, he concludes with this couplet: "A thousand thanks to God: my heart now rests from being pulled to and fro; for it, like Fayḍ is neither barrister, master or disciple" (*chūn Fayḍ nay pīr u nay faqīh u nay murīdīm*) (*Kulliyāt-i ash'ār-i Mawlānā Fayḍ-i Kāshānī*, ed. Muḥammad Paymān [Tehran: n.p. 1354 A.Hsh./1975], p. 260). Zarrīnkūb (*Dunbāla*, p. 251) notes that although both Fayḍ-i Kāshānī and Fayyād pursued their own intellectual odysseys, they did

Bertels judiciously put it, "without any doubt a Sufi, but not a dervish."<sup>232</sup> Aside from the obvious Sufi tendencies in his works which are analysed below, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī was considered by many historians contemporary with him to harbour serious inclinations towards, perhaps even practical affiliations with, Sufism. Thus, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Naṣrābādī opined that "in his intellectual method Fayḍ integrated philosophical mysticism (*ḥikmat*) and Sufism (*taṣawwuf*),"<sup>233</sup> while the author of the *'Abbās-nāma* noted how, on one occasion, when Shāh 'Abbās II wished to benefit from the society of the dervishes, "he ordered the chief *mujtahid* of the age Mawlānā Muḥammad Muḥsin Kāshī, who is 'a wayfarer on both paths' (*sālik-i ṭarīqayn*) and 'intoxicated in both realms' (*mast-i nashā'tayn*), to be summoned to his presence'.<sup>234</sup> Both the reigning monarch and the educated elite of the Safavid period, as these remarks indicate, considered Fayḍ to be a leading authority on Sufism. If the Nūrbakhshī Sufi affiliation<sup>235</sup> which the Sufi chronologer Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shīrāzī felt necessary to grant him remains unconfirmed in either his own writings or other contemporary sources, it is easy to understand how such an affiliation could be proposed. Let us then take a closer look at his views on Sufism, by examining his own writings.

In "The Heart's Tale"<sup>236</sup> Fayḍ-i Kāshānī's understanding and appreciation of Sufism is clearly manifest. At the beginning of the treatise he gives a stirring account of Shāh 'Abbās II's summoning of him to the royal court, his hesitation about accepting a position there and his aversion to the exoteric clerics controlling the court, who, while feuding amongst themselves, tried to make him the butt of their intrigues, culminating in his refusal to sacrifice his intellectual independence and accept any politico-religious posts (such as that

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follow in the footsteps of the Sufi theologian Abū Hāmid Ghazālī, "for whose works they had a great regard:" "However, in accordance with the needs of their own age, they were at variance with Ghazālī on one point, and that was that they did not subscribe to any of the contemporary Sufis. This was especially the case, since in contradistinction to the Sufis of Ghazālī's age, neither the spiritual states nor the ethical practices of Sufis of the Safavid era hardly merited either support or defence."

The contemporary Persian critic 'Abd al-Karīm Surūsh has written a profoundly illuminating study (in his *Qiṣṣa-yi arbāb-i ma'rifat* [Tehran: Mi'raj 1373 A.Hsh./1994], pp. 1–131) of Fayḍ's relationship to Ghazālī, highlighting his opposition to Ghazālī's Sufi tendencies and his differences of opinion with the great Ash'arite theologian on the subject of *taṣawwuf*.

<sup>232</sup> Bertels, *Taṣawwuf*, p. 673.

<sup>233</sup> *Tadhkira-yi Naṣrābādī*, ed. V. Dastgirdī (Tehran: Furūghī 1352 A.Hsh./1973), p. 155; cited by Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla-yi p.* 254.

<sup>234</sup> Mīrzā Muḥammad ḥāhir Vahīd Qazwīnī, *'Abbās-nāma*, ed. I. Dihgān (Tehran 1329 A.Hsh./1951), p. 255. Cited by Zarrīnkūb, *Dunbāla*, p. 254. I would interpret the terms "seeker in both paths" and "intoxicated in both realms" as denoting respectively the paths of *ḥikmat* and *taṣawwuf*, the two realms being this world and the next.

<sup>235</sup> Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh Shīrāzī, *Ṭarā'iq*, III, p. 115. This affiliation is often cited as historical fact, as in e.g. Al-Shaibi, *Sufism and Shī'ism*, p. 322.

<sup>236</sup> In *Dah risālah-yi Muḥaqqiq-i Buzurg-i Fayḍ-i Kāshānī*, pp. 47–73.

of Shaykh al-Islām) offered him by the Safavid regime.<sup>237</sup> He then situates the Sufis at the nexus of the Islamic tradition, describing them as the chief representatives of the Way of Muḥammad. Taking Koran II:269 as his text, he comments that the supreme goal of all human knowledge is “philosophical mysticism (*ḥikmat*)” through which “the reality of things is revealed, in particular, the apprehension of the workings of one’s own soul, itself the main resource in understanding all other divine truths and sciences.” Although the science of *ḥikmat* existed in the revealed traditions of other inspired prophets long before the appearance of the Prophet Muḥammad, it only attained its perfection following his demise, whereupon, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī explains:

A group of clever adepts from his noble community who felt it incumbent and required by conscience in their aspiration to follow him through the cherished traditions which remained after him, arrayed their inner and outer beings with contemplative vigilance and intimacy with God, and in this fashion became repositories of amazing types of wisdom (*badāyi’-yi ḥikmat*). From their blessed breaths occult modes of knowledge (*gharā’ib-i ‘ulūm*) were manifest. . . . And by the science of Sufism (*‘ilm-i taṣawwuf*) is meant precisely such marvellous types of wisdom (*badāyi’-yi ḥikmat*) and occult modes of knowledge (*gharā’ib-i ‘ulūm*) which are of so sublime a rank. And to this wisdom the Muḥammadean Sunna and the ordinances of the last Prophet bear witness.<sup>238</sup>

Exactly as in the works of Ghazālī, Sufism here is presented as the supreme Islamic science: *ḥikma* = *taṣawwuf*. Keeping in mind that in most of Fayḍ-i Kāshānī’s writings, and in particular, his poetry, ‘worldliness’ is depicted as the worst vice and pre-eminent mark of immorality, it is not surprising that at this point in “The Heart’s Tale” the Sufis’ notorious enemies the mullās are introduced and portrayed as worldly ignoramuses, asses in turbans,<sup>239</sup> not to mention several other unflattering epithets. The Sufis themselves, on the other hand, are described in glowing terms as perfect beings totally immersed in God; “folk of the hereafter and men of gnosis.”<sup>240</sup>

The wayfarers on this path are drowned in the ocean of certitude: in all they may hear or see, they audit and they perceive only God. The *tabula* of their apprehension is unblemished by association with ungodly matters . . . nor can the mirror of their hearts become tainted by rust; colourless the hue of the wine of divine unity they imbibe.

<sup>237</sup> See the introduction by Muṣṭafā’ī Fayḍ-i Kāshānī (ed.) to Fayḍ’s *Risāla-yi Mishwāq*, p. 30, n. 3.

<sup>238</sup> *Sharḥ-i ṣadr*, p. 49.

<sup>239</sup> The association of mullās with donkeys was proverbial in Persian culture of the Safavid period. Sir John Chardin notes that the mullās “are false, envious, avaricious, and untrustworthy, as the Persian proverb goes ‘Be careful of the front of a woman, the rear of a mule and all sides of a mollah.’” Cited by Ronald Ferrier, *A Journey to Persia: Jean Chardin’s Portrait of a Seventeenth-century Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris 1996), p. 105.

<sup>240</sup> *Sharḥ-i ṣadr*, p. 52.

I'm servant of that man's wilful mind  
 beneath heaven's azure-tinted dome  
 who's free of all that interest stains,  
 all designs, all hues attachment wears.<sup>241</sup>

... Yet such a "man" is quite rare, quite hard indeed to come by – in any given age there are never more than two or three such men alive.<sup>242</sup>

This Sufic knowledge is described as being "beyond the understanding of the base, above the apprehension of sensualists"<sup>243</sup> – i.e. the dull-witted common clerics characterized as the Sufis' "natural foes," who are, like "most men, creatures of this world, devotees of ignorance and passion." Fayḍ-i Kāshānī now provides a vivid description of the mulla–Sufi conflict, characterizing it as the innate and primordial battle in Islamic society between the forces of sophisticated enlightenment and fundamentalist obscurantism. While his remarks – certainly at least for the social historian – shed light on the uneasy relations between clerics and mystics in late seventeenth-century Persia, they also illuminate his own views on the generally high place of Sufism in the Iranian body politic and the devastating effect of the influence of the malevolent mullās on late medieval Persian culture:

Now because of these basic principles and natural hostility [i.e. between mullā and Sufi], from that time [i.e. since the Prophet's death] until today [i.e. 1654], the common folk in every age, and in particular, this troupe who've toggled themselves up in turban and headband (*ahl-i 'imāma va dastār*) – the worldly savants and the common religious scholars (*'ulamā-yi 'awām*) – in every age and time in keeping with their normal habit and character, have always taken up the sword of spiteful partiality, conspiring and intriguing among themselves. For the sake of factionalism and creating division, they have repudiated the divine scholars (*'ulamā-yi rabānī*), hurling abuses at the gnostics familiar with spiritual realities and mystical lore. For the knowledge which is inscribed of the pages of passing ages and derived from the works of the prophets and the mysteries of the saints cannot be understood by all and sundry, but only by those sagacious wisemen who are the folk of the hereafter, who have traversed this path by compliance with the holy Law (*sharī'at*) and pursuit of the Sufi Path (*tariqat*).<sup>244</sup>

Next is offered a glimpse into the worsening position of the Sufis in Safavid society in the face of the rising opposition to mysticism on the part of the corrupt and worldly Shī'ite clergy. Kāshānī continues his plaint that very success of the Sufis in Islamic society has caused them to become the butt of the envy of such pseudo-pietists:

<sup>241</sup> This verse is from *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. Parwīz Nātil Khanlarī (Tehran: Sahāmī 'ām 1362 A.Hsh./1983; 2nd ed), p. 90, no. 37:2.

<sup>242</sup> *Sharḥ-i ṣadr*, pp. 51–2.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

In any case, such worldly scholars ('*ulamā-yi dunyā*'), the leaders of the common herd, whose minds always have been, and still are, afflicted with rancour, drawing the blades of their tongues like swords, have cut up [the Sufis with] calumnies, scorn and abuse. In the meantime, the divine scholars ('*ulamā-yi rabāniyin*') have scored success on the field of fortune, vanquishing all their peers and contemporaries in both the practical and speculative arts, and hence they have been slandered, stigmatized and accused of heresy [by the mullās]. Refutations of their sublime compositions have even been composed:

If the fool and failure who's fortune's victim  
Find faults and holes in us, no wonder – since in  
His purse all he's got are flaws and faults.

By such conduct their sole purpose is to attain celebrity and gain prominence and renown among the common folk.<sup>245</sup>

In the second section of his "Heart's Tale," Fayḍ-i Kāshānī first introduces his own particular type of socio-spiritual anthropology, propounding a religious hierarchy grading humankind into three classes: (1) those exclusively versed in exoteric knowledge; (2) those exclusively versed in esoteric knowledge; and (3) those versed in both exoteric and esoteric knowledge. The first class are described as those "who while enlightening others, burn themselves up," being on the whole totally corrupted by worldliness: "they have sold the hereafter for the sake of this world since they have no comprehension of either realm. Why? Because both realms can be understood only through esoteric, not exoteric, knowledge."<sup>246</sup> This group "are unworthy to rule the people, and even if they crown themselves with turbans, are mostly such of a mediocre and base nature, so drowned in error ... and thus followed only by the common riff-raff and ruffians who seek to benefit from them out of ulterior motives."

The second class, however, resemble stars; they illumine their immediate surroundings and contemporaries, but since they have access only to esoteric knowledge, they are unable to guide people to perfection.

The third class cast sun-like illumination on the world; they alone are worthy to rule and guide people, such that "one such person may illumine both East and West and become the pole (*quṭb*) of his age."<sup>247</sup> From his description of the highest rung in the religious hierarchy, there can be no doubt that this group are the Sufis – since one of the characteristics of this group is their ecstatic disposition, a trait peculiar to the Sufis in Islamic society. "The

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55. It is interesting here to note that European travellers who visited Iran during this period echoed Kāshānī's sentiments. Jean Chardin thus notes: "The *Persians* are very civil and honest in manners of religion ... [yet] the clergy of the Country, who, as in all other places, hate to a furious degree, all those who differ from their opinion" (Sir John Chardin's *Travels in Persia*, a reprint of the edition of 1720 [London 1927], II, p. 185). Cited by Byron Porter Smith, *Islam in English Literature* [New York: Caravan Books 1977; 2nd ed], p. 24.

<sup>246</sup> *Sharḥ-i ṣadr*, p. 55.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

statements” of such esotericists, states Fayḍ, “which are spoken from a state of inspired enthusiasm (*dhawq*) and drunkenness (*mastī*) are of such a high level that, superficially understood, appear as heresy (*kufṛ*).” Hence, such utterances rouse the ire of common folk, so that:

A group of vain persons who have never risen above their animal natures, whose outer characters are tainted by sin and whose inner natures are full of various sorts of rancour, envy and malice, make these statements an excuse to declare that ‘All is God’ (may God forbid that they become infidels and heretics!) – thus thinking that the poetry and verse of the great masters have this meaning. When they claim that the masters followed their [heretical] sect, another group in all sincerity suppose them to speak correctly, because, of course, they have heard the exoteric jurists (*fuqahā-yi ṣāḥir*) already denounce them as infidels. So when they see this group behave in this manner, they of course repudiate them. And truth is on their side since the words of the great masters are extremely difficult to fathom, while the actions and character of this latter group, are extremely despicable and vile.<sup>248</sup>

In this classic description of the mullā-Sufi controversy which has characterized Islamic culture throughout the centuries it is clear that Fayḍ is on the side of the Sufis. However, perhaps echoing his brother-in-law Fayyāḍ’s views in the *Gawhar-i murād* cited above, equally reproachable in Fayḍ’s eyes are those who blindly imitate the Sufis, pretending to leadership of the common folk without any qualification or training in *taṣawwuf*.<sup>249</sup> Fayḍ’s opinion in this respect is very much in accord with the dictates of the Sufi tradition in which the necessity of combining contemplation with action, knowledge with spiritual practice, has always been axiomatic.<sup>250</sup>

It is relevant in this regard to point out that Fayḍ wrote a separate treatise, entitled ‘The Judgement’ (*al-Muḥākama*) in which he directly addressed the background of the conflict between the exoteric and esoteric authorities in Safavid Persia.<sup>251</sup> It may be recalled that almost all the major Shī‘ite clerics were engaged in writing refutations of Sufi mysticism, delivering sermons from their pulpits on the evil ways of the dervishes, at this time (the late

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>249</sup> As Rasūl Ja‘fariyān points out in his introduction to *al-Muḥākama*, in *Dah risālah*, p. 95, Fayḍ endeavoured to expose the faults of both groups; “while defending ‘*irfān*’, he did not hesitate to expose some of bad behaviour and misdemeanors of the Sufis as well.”

<sup>250</sup> Thus, in the opening chapter of one of the earliest Persian Sufi manuals of Sufism (Hujwiri’s *Kashf al-mahjūb*) devoted to “the Affirmation of Knowledge” in Sufism, the author attacks “ignorant pretenders to Sufism who have never associated with a spiritual director (*pīr*), nor learned discipline from a shaykh, but without experience thrown themselves among the people” (Alī al-Hujwiri, trans. R.A. Nicholson, *Kashf al-mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism* [London: Luzac & Co. 1976], p. 17).

<sup>251</sup> See also another edition of this treatise entitled “*Muḥākama bayn al-mutaṣawwifa wa ghayrihim*,” *Nashriyya-yi Dānishkada-yi Adabiyāt-i Tabriz*, II/i (1336 A.Hsh./1957). Cited by Babayan, “Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas,” p. 137.

seventeenth century).<sup>252</sup> At the beginning of the treatise, he divides the Muslim community into two camps, one of those who “are renowned for knowledge and wisdom (*‘ilm u ma’rifat*), and the other of those characterized by asceticism and worship (*zuhd u ‘ibādat*).”<sup>253</sup> These two groups, as indications later in the treatise reveal,<sup>254</sup> are respectively the exoteric religious scholars and the esotericists/Sufis. However, if followed in the traditional manner, both ways advocate equally valid methods of approaching God, and both are in mutual need of the other, Fayḍ maintains.<sup>255</sup>

While the scholars (*ahl-i ‘ilm*) engage in psychological asceticism through contemplation (*fikr*), study (*ta’allum*) and humility (*khushū’*), the ascetics (*ahl-i zuhd*) undergo corporeal asceticism through invocation of God (*dhikr*), supererogatory acts of worship (*tahajjud*) and hunger (*jū’*). While the former group pursues the work of God, the latter group also turns to God, confessing their helplessness and need. “For at this court, the back of both are bent double in devotion to him.”<sup>256</sup>

Following this passage, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī gives a formidable defence and fascinating description of the tolerant face of Islam. Considering the backwardness of the mullocracy of his day and age, his views exhibit an extraordinary degree of religious inclusivism. Citing several *aḥādith* of the Shī’ite Imāms and commenting on certain Koranic passages, he interprets the Koranic imperative to “dissuade others from evil” as implying the *covering up* of faults, the conscious forgiving and forgetting of sins. The purpose of these remarks, he asserts, is to demonstrate that “those who have really perfected themselves in knowledge and wisdom have never laid any blame on the practitioners of asceticism and devotion. In the same way, those who have really perfected themselves in ascetic practices and devotion never reproach and always regard the scholars (*ahl-i ‘ilm*) with nothing but the greatest esteem.”<sup>257</sup> ‘Authentic Islam’ as practised by its fully committed believers, declares Fayḍ, has tolerance and respect for differing opinions at its foundation; in his view, backbiting, slander and infighting are abnormal

<sup>252</sup> See Babayan, “Sufis, Dervishes and Mullas,” pp. 117–39; and also Andrew Newman’s chapter in the present volume.

<sup>253</sup> *Al-Muḥākama*, p. 97.

<sup>254</sup> Fayḍ designates them as “dervishes,” and traces their practice back to the days of the *ahl-i ṣuffa*, who were dervishes of the Prophet’s day. This characterization of the Sufis as the modern-day representatives of the ancient *ahl-i ṣuffa* has a long genealogy in Sufi writings; cf. ‘Izz al-Dīn Maḥmūd Kāshānī (d. 735/1334) in his Persian textbook and manual of Sufi theosophy and practice, the *Miṣbāḥ al-ḥidāya*. Fayḍ also states clearly that “today the ascetics are the Sufis” (*al-Muḥākama*, p. 104).

<sup>255</sup> *Al-Muḥākama*, p. 98.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*; the last phrase is the second hemistich from a famous ghazal of Sa’dī: see Nūrullāh Īzād-parast (ed.), *Ghazalḥā-yi Sa’dī* (Tehran: Dānish 1362 A.Hsh./1993), p. 126, v. 2.

<sup>257</sup> *Al-Muḥākama*, pp. 101–2.

deviations from and perversions of both the intellectual and the spiritual traditions of Islam.

The problematic socio-political situation that now prevails, in which the ascetic-Sufi scorns the scholar, while the scholar in turn reviles the Sufi, stems from a vulgarization of the fundamental tenets of both movements. Among members of both groups, Fayḍ wisely reflects, one always finds those who wear their colours under false pretences:

Whenever people who are supposedly affiliated to a certain group are seen to misbehave, one should not automatically judge the entire group to be bad. In every group of people both good and bad exist. This is especially true of these two groups [religious scholars and Sufis]. Most of the people outwardly affiliated to either group do not, in truth, belong among them. Rather, most of them are merely impersonators seeking through their affiliation to acquire celebrity, wealth and social status. If one contemplates the situation deeply, one sees that the majority are not seeking spiritual perfection.

One group of people, because they've learned some rubbish, consider themselves to be 'perfect', even counting themselves as '*ulamā*'. In fact, although they are content with the bare name and hollow rites of the articles of faith and the principles of religion, they taunt each other, sometimes making others the target of their censure, spraying the venom of their wrath onto the wounded victims' chests. Day by day, they become more injurious in their repudiation, vituperation and denunciation, scratching the countenance of kind fraternity with the rough barbs of spiteful hostility, and just to be troublesome cast the dust of their baleful rancour over the face of fidelity.

Another group, wearing gowns of dissimulation and hypocrisy, have drunk the cup of pride from Satan's hand, and in following their sensual appetites and passions, contented themselves with a few idle cries and exclamations. Those who actually worship God among this group are few and far between. Few are those who find the path to Him, and yet – one must still irrigate a thousand thorns for the sake of a single rose.

Oftentimes in beggars' rags one finds enlightened men;  
Draped in felt and sackcloth are hid the men of heart.  
Amid the dervish crowd, one man alone is meant  
But do not scorn the rest – that they be ignorant.<sup>258</sup>

Fayḍ's fair-mindedness in this passage is remarkable, instilling, beyond the specific topicality of the issue, a trans-social timelessness into the Safavid Sufi–mullā conflict. What pre-Enlightenment European thinkers called 'religious superstition' and modern Western scholarship (and journalism) refers to as 'fundamentalism', Fayḍ outlines as the basic socio-spiritual malaise of religious man. For fundamentalism assumes multiple religious disguises: his poeticized depiction of the conflict is more of the order of the discovery of the spiritual archetype of religious obscurantism than what Owen

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102–3.

Chadwick calls 'stereotyping' (in which religious groups are pigeonholed by a reified perception of their beliefs).<sup>259</sup>

Fayḍ concludes the treatise with a shortlist of the some of the faults committed by both the pseudo-Sufis and the ignorant clergy,<sup>260</sup> citing Prophetic and Imāmite *ḥadīth*, while adducing Koranic references to prove that their practices have no basis in classical Islam. In sum:

It should be understood that although the abominable acts which issue from the ignorant people among both groups are numerous, none of their behaviour reaches the point that it may be considered as legally allowable that any of them be condemned as heretics (*takfīr*) or subjected to religious denunciation (*ta'n*). Slander of both groups is not permitted except regarding sins which they profess openly in public.<sup>261</sup>

Fayḍ-i Kāshānī's sober-minded temperance, his patient tolerance of the foibles of both the exoteric scholars and the Sufis in this treatise, has all the hallmarks of the traditional Islamic perspective of a religious tolerance which, as Mujtabā Mīnuvī<sup>262</sup> – and recently, an entire team of anthropologists<sup>263</sup> – pointed out, has always typified the Persian dervish ethos. As Rasūl Ja'fariyān has commented on this passage, "Fayḍ appears here as a herald of tolerance and unity – and that, at this particular period of Safavid history when sectarian divisions and conflicts were at their height."<sup>264</sup> While his critique of corruptions in Sufism (as in the reference to those clothed in "dissimulation and hypocrisy" in the last paragraph of the passage cited above), like that made by 'Abd al-Razzāq, is quite in accord with the classical Sufi tradition,<sup>265</sup> his dismissive attitude towards contemporary Sufism also echoes similar views of other clerics in the Safavid period.

<sup>259</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975) p. 44.

<sup>260</sup> The Sufis' faults include excessively loud *dhikr-i jallī* (vocal invocation); mixing their devotions with poetry devoid of cognitive value, misunderstood by the audience, or else repeated in blind ignorance (*taqlīd*). The faults of the '*ulamā*' include the denunciation and cursing of the Sufis and ascetics; rebuking them for recitation of strange and unconventional sayings which "may have a spiritual veridical meaning, and in particular poetry, the axis of which revolves on metaphor and simile, so to abuse Muslims [for their poetry] is a daunting task" (*al-Muḥākama*, p. 107).

<sup>261</sup> *Al-Muḥākama*, pp. 108–9.

<sup>262</sup> See his "Āzādigī va tasāmuḥ," *Iranshenasi*, 4/1 (1992), p. 179.

<sup>263</sup> See M.C. Bateson, J.W. Clinton, J.B.M. Kassarian, H.Safavi, M. Soraya, "Šafā-yi Bāṭin: A Study of a Set of Iranian Ideal Character Types," in *Psychological Dimensions of Near Eastern Studies*, ed. L.C. Brown and N. Itzkowitz, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1977), pp. 257–73.

<sup>264</sup> Ja'fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsat*, p. 291.

<sup>265</sup> In the two treatises on Sufi chivalry by Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, co-founder of the Suhrawardiyya *ṭarīqa*, for example, one finds the same tolerant perspective on "dissuading others from evil" and the forgiveness of sins. See my translation of several passages from

However, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī's harshest stricture is reserved for the religious inquisitions of Sufis conducted by Safavid mullās. As if to underline the intensity of his feelings, the following passage, devoted to exposing their corruption, was even reproduced verbatim by Fayḍ in two different essays:

They are a group who have cast off the halter of religious obedience (*taqlīd*) from their necks, having overturned their primordial natures, who excessively revile the saints and dervishes, and who reject everything which reaches their ear. Not contenting themselves with externalities and derivatives of Prophecy, they prefer to utilize absurd expressions of their own making. Neither do their passions allow them to engage themselves in obedience (*taqlīd*) nor has divine fortune favoured them with the scent of experimental verification (*taḥqīq*).

To debase and corrupt but one sect of poor men,  
For the sake of spite, discord, of conflict and war,  
On the Broadway of error, they've all gone lost, astray.  
So in college whatever the knowledge they'd saved  
It has been of no benefit, and to their detriment down in the grave.<sup>266</sup>

Over the following centuries, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī was celebrated among the Persian Sufis as a theologian supportive of and sympathetic towards Sufism. Thus, the Ni'matullāhī Sufi master Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh (d. 1238/1823) cited Fayḍ's *Al-inṣāf fi bayān al-firāq bayn al-ḥaqq wa 'l-i'tisāf* (A Fair Exposition of Religious Denominations and Differentiation of their Truth from Error), an autobiographical tract written half in Arabic and half in Persian, in his book 'The Mirror of Truth' (*Mīrāt al-ḥaqq*),<sup>267</sup> to articulate and buttress his own version of Shī'ite Sufism. It is apparent from certain essays and letters written by Fayḍ-i Kāshānī in his old age, and particularly from statements in *al-Inṣāf*, that he experienced considerable disillusionment with Sufism and was overtaken in later years by a more critical attitude towards both *taṣawwuf* and *'irfān*. In order to illustrate this change of mind, it is necessary to examine some of the important passages and doctrines found in *al-inṣāf*. This treatise,<sup>268</sup> a kind of confession or manifesto of personal faith, was composed near the end of his life, in 1083/1672 – seven years before his death in 1090/

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one of these treatises, in *Windows on the House of Islam: Muslim Sources on Spirituality and Religious Life*, ed. J. Renard (Berkeley: University of California Press 1998), pp. 235–44. Also cf. Ja'fariyān's comments, *Dīn va siyāsat*, p. 290. This aspect of Fayḍ's social views on mysticism is a central theme in his 'Tract on Friendship' (*Ulfat-nāma*), as well (in *Dah risālah*, pp. 203–19).

<sup>266</sup> The translation is from the Persian text in his *Rāh-i ṣawāb* (p. 134), although a nearly identical passage also occurs in his *al-Inṣāf*, p. 190.

<sup>267</sup> See chap. 9 of the *Mīrāt al-ḥaqq*, ed. Javād Nūrbakhsh (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Ni'matullāhī 1353 A.Hsh./1974), pp. 247–65.

<sup>268</sup> My analysis below makes use of both the recently published version edited by Rasūl Ja'fariyān: *Dah risālah*, pp. 183–99 as well as the version cited by Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh, *Mīrāt al-ḥaqq*, pp. 247–61.

1679. The author's purpose in composing this treatise, as Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh pointed out, was "to combine and summarize the key concepts of the philosophers and the Sufis (*mutafalasafa* and *mutaṣawwafa*)."<sup>269</sup>

*Al-Insāf* begins on an autobiographical note, apparently modelled after chapter 3 of Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*,<sup>270</sup> explaining that he had perfected his theological education to such a degree in his youth that "in no problem did I have the need to follow (*taqlīd*) anyone else other than the 'one who is free from error and sin' (*ma'ṣūm*)" – referring here to his devotion and faith in the books and lore of the Shī'ite Imāms. However, he still felt a need to acquire the deeper gnosis of the "secrets of religion (*asrār-i dīn*);" despite the fact that his passions were – he admitted – opposed to this mystical tendency, and his reason remained unable to grasp any of these mysteries by its own efforts. To "satisfy his curiosity," he examined the possibilities available in various fields of knowledge:

I spent a period of time absorbed in the disputations of the scholastic theologians, trying to remove my ignorance by the very means of ignorance. Another period of time I followed the discursive method of the philosophers (*mutafalsiffīn*), occupied in learning and pondering [their writings]. Another period I observed the high-flying exertions of the Sufis (*buland-parvāzihā-yi mutaṣawwafa*) through their sayings. For still another period, being swept up in a light-headed fashion from one to the other in order to explain the sayings of each of these four schools,<sup>271</sup> I composed books and tracts. Other times, in order to collect and systematize these sayings I intertwined them all together, neither verifying the truth of all of them nor being committed in heart to any of them on the whole. Rather, I descended to these matters only to obtain information, writing what I wrote as an exercise in criticism, finding neither in their symbolic allusions<sup>272</sup> anything to cure my ailment, nor in the clamour of their words any Bilāl [the Prophet's muezzin] who could quench my thirst. Then, at last my soul was relieved, since I saw that what was embodied in these things may be likened to what the adage says: "They deceived me, they plundered me, they seized me, they overwhelmed me, and they attacked me, they led me astray: so my lot was to suffer abuse."<sup>273</sup>

<sup>269</sup> *Mirāt al-ḥaqq*, p. 261.

<sup>270</sup> Ed. Farid Jabre (Beirut: Librairie Orientale 1969), p. 22. See also W. Montgomery Watt's translation of this treatise as *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī* (Oxford), where, on pp. xxff., Ghazālī describes his intellectual vacillations between the differing methodologies of the theologians (*Mutakallimūn*), Ismā'īlīs, philosophers and Sufis.

<sup>271</sup> I.e. the teachings of the Shī'ite Imāms, the scholastic theologians, the philosophers and Sufis.

<sup>272</sup> *Ishārātahum*: probably referring here to the symbolic allusions of the Sufis. "Sufism is the science *par excellence* of the Sufis ... The term 'allusion' is given to this science for this reason: the contemplations enjoyed by the heart," states Kalābādhī, *Al-Ta'arruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, trans. A.J. Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989), p. 76.

<sup>273</sup> *Dah risālah-yi Muḥaqqiq-i Buzurg-i Fayḍ-i Kāshānī*, pp. 183–4; *Mirāt al-ḥaqq*, p. 241.

Several pages are then devoted to giving the details of his disillusionment, enumerating the vanity of the various types of theological learning, criticizing the divisiveness and hypocrisy of the sects and the schools. At long last, Mullā Kāshānī takes safe refuge in the Koran and *ḥadīth*, concluding that the only truth that can be salvaged from all such studies, with faith intact and probity upheld, is following the directions of the Shī'ite Imāms. Here, Fayḍ succumbs to bewilderment, amazed at his philosophizing contemporaries "who have been sent the best of prophets for the sake of guidance, who have been given the best of religions, and who, by way of divine grace and kindness and this prophet, have been given a book and had wise successors (*khalīfa*) appointed for them, one after another to interpret it . . . and still they do not pay attention to its guidance, knocking on the doors of bygone nations in order to beg knowledge, seeking succour from the moisture still dribbling from their streams."<sup>274</sup> Summing up his attitude towards philosophy and Sufism vis-à-vis the teachings of the Koran, the Mullā of Kāshān now exclaims:

Thus, this group of people suppose that there are certain sciences of religion which cannot be found in the Koran and *ḥadīth* and yet can be known by studying the books of the philosophers or Sufis, and that we must seek them there. Wretches! Why, they can't even understand that there isn't any fault or shortcoming in the Koran or *ḥadīth* – rather the fault lies in their own understanding and deficiency in the degree of their faith! As God Almighty has said: "And We reveal the Scripture unto thee as an exposition of all things and a guidance and a mercy and good tidings for those who have surrendered to God."<sup>275</sup> If any deficiency or shortcoming arises in their understanding and faith, no study of the books of the philosophers and Sufis will be of any avail, since they will never understand such material as the truth really demands. "I could fill the world full of precious pearls, but if you're unfit, if it is not your lot, so what?"<sup>276</sup> "Oh you whose sleeves are too short, how long will you stretch out your hands."<sup>277</sup>

Furthermore, they should realize that even if they ascended to the heavens, they will understand no more about celestial matters than that which their capacity allows and their degree of faith permits. If they could but increase their capacity by strengthening their faith, perhaps they would be able to ascend higher "if they but knew."<sup>278</sup> Otherwise, however much they may investigate and ponder these subjects, they will only be that much more astray.

. . . O brother, strive to strengthen your faith and increase your certainty by means of ascetic self-restraint (*zuhd*) and godfearing piety (*taqwā*) so that your knowledge and wisdom (*ilm va hikmat*) increase. "And fear God; God is

<sup>274</sup> *Dah risālah-yi Muḥaqqiq-i Buzurg-i Fayḍ-i Kāshānī*, p. 187; *Mirāt al-ḥaqq*, p. 2.

<sup>275</sup> Koran XVI:89, Pickthall translation.

<sup>276</sup> Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, ed. Nicholson, I, 2390.

<sup>277</sup> *Dīwān-i Hāfiz*, ed. Khanlarī, p. 868, no. 426: 10.

<sup>278</sup> Koran II:102, 103. Two passages here relate to the occult sciences of the Jews which, according to the Koran, have neither profit nor harm, but "if they had but believed and been god-fearing, a recompense from God would be better, if they but knew."

teaching you."<sup>279</sup> But otherwise, do not push yourself forward so much nor attempt matters that are beyond your scope. "Since you are undeserving of the Beloved's regard, do not seek consummation. Not even Jamshid's holy grail<sup>280</sup> avails the blind."<sup>281</sup>

Fayḍ-i Kāshānī's diatribe peters on for a few more paragraphs, in the course of which he cites more verses from Ḥāfiz, his favourite poet<sup>282</sup> and Rūmī's *Mathnawī*. What is the gist of the above passage? Authentic spirituality, true religiousness, is obtained solely by strengthening piety, deepening the life of contemplation by means of prayer, religious study of the *ḥadīth* and reading the Koran. Only then, *after* exertions in works of piety will any benefit accrue from study of the works of the Sufis and reading the tracts of the philosophers.

Having given both the Sufis and philosophers short shrift, he now turns on the philosophical theologians, the *mutakallimūn*, attacking them in even stronger language.<sup>283</sup> His treatise concludes with some remarks summing up his own position, followed by a verse from Ḥāfiz, a beautiful ghazal of his own, and lastly an invocation in Arabic entreating God for guidance. At the end of the treatise he summarizes his own position as follows:

I am neither a scholastic theologian (*mutakallim*), philosopher (*mutafalassif*), Sufi (*mutaṣawwif*) nor formalist (*mutakallif*). Rather, I am a follower (*muqallid*) of the Koran, *ḥadīth* and the Prophet's family (*ahl-i bayt*). I am weary of the bewildering discourse of the four schools. I have forsworn them all. I am a stranger to all else except the Glorious Koran and the words of the Prophet and his Family; I am alien to all except whoever and whatever is conversant with them.

Whatever I have read I have now forgot  
Except for the words of the Friend I ever reiterate.

The reason for this is that during this period which I spent in academic discussions (*baḥth*), research and investigation into wide-ranging speculations and ideas, I personally tested out the paths of various schools, and penetrated into the quintessence of each of their doctrines. Then, with the eye of inner vision I saw that the eye of Reason is incapable of comprehending the august majesty of the Self-sufficient Eternal Being, and by the light of rational thought no one is able to penetrate into the court of the majestic all-encompassing divine Unity.<sup>284</sup>

<sup>279</sup> Koran II:282.

<sup>280</sup> *Jām-i Jam*: Jamshīd was a mythological Persian king of the Pishdadian line, who according to legend could behold all the affairs in his kingdom by gazing into his grail or cup.

<sup>281</sup> *Dah risālah-yi Muḥaqqiq-i Buzurg-i Fayḍ-i Kāshānī*, pp. 188–9; *Mīrāt al-ḥaqq*, pp. 251–2. This verse is from *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiz*, ed. Khanlarī, p. 902, ghazal 443, v. 2.

<sup>282</sup> In his *Dīwān*, Fayḍ devotes an entire ghazal in praise of Ḥāfiz, beginning: *Ay yār makhwān zay ash'ār ilā ghazal-i Ḥāfiz* (*Kulliyāt-i Fayḍ*, p. 220).

<sup>283</sup> *Dah risālah-yi Muḥaqqiq-i Buzurg-i Fayḍ-i Kāshānī*, pp. 190–5.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196–7.

While the spirituality of Fayḍ-i Kāshānī as expressed in this treatise is radically anti-traditional and anti-sectarian, the intellectual motivation behind his distancing himself from the Sufis near the end of his life remains an enigma. If his basic argument is that knowledge of God is too transcendent to be approached by the inferior means employed by any of the traditional Islamic philosophical, theological or mystical schools, this argument is ultimately unconvincing as a valid criticism of traditional Sufis, who, in fact, always maintained precisely the same thing!<sup>285</sup> It also appears rather hypocritical of him to cite passages from the various Sufi authors such as Sanā'ī, Sa'dī and Rūmī to illustrate his ideas while belittling the Sufism of those very same authors – who also held that reason is incapable of understanding the transcendental Nature of God! Willing, indeed, to use the poetry of Rūmī, whose Sufi affiliations none contests, to expound an idiosyncratic type of Islamic mysticism, but snobbishly disdaining to acknowledge the validity in Rūmī's Sufi methodology!<sup>286</sup> Regarded from the standpoint of this treatise alone, his 'mysticism' is that of a sober pietist whose sole consolation is the Muslim Scripture and the Shī'ite canon of *ḥadīth*.

My personal opinion is that this treatise represents the unfortunate – but fortunately momentary – disillusionment of an old man who despairs of all friends but the Friend, who, while struggling to shed all ties but the eternal bond with the divine, allowed himself to charge visionaries with deceiving; conceiving saints to be fools, he called men wise for not believing.<sup>287</sup> Quoting some of the same passages from this treatise, Bertels also points out that his statement cited above, that he merely wished to intertwine the writings of various groups together – “neither verifying the truth of all of them nor being committed in heart to any of them on the whole,” is refuted by his own poetry,

<sup>285</sup> Fayḍ's statement, for example, about the transcendence of divine knowledge, and the incapacity of human reason to access it is echoed exactly by Hujwīrī's comment: “The perfection of human knowledge is ignorance of divine knowledge” (*Kashf*, p. 18). The theosophical doctrine of mystical agnosis is repeated endlessly by most later Sufis: cf., for instance, Muḥammad Lāhijī, *Mafātīḥ al-'ijāz fī sharḥ-i Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. R. Khāliqī and I. Karbāsī (Tehran: Zawwār 1371 A.Hsh./1992), p. 66.

<sup>286</sup> Fayḍ was in fact, deeply devoted to Rūmī, and frequently modelled his ghazals on the *Dīvān-i Shams* (e.g. his *Kulliyāt*, p. 260, *infra*).

<sup>287</sup> This would be a mistake repeated by too many of his clerical compatriots over the next 200 years, until under the leadership of some the late nineteenth-century Ni'matullāhī masters such as Mast 'Alī Shāh and Ṣafī 'Alī Shāh, the Persian Sufis regained some of their bygone glory. Fayḍ composed another essay similar to this one, entitled *al-Kalamāt al-ṭarīqa fī manshā' iktilāf al-ummat al-marḥūmat* (summarized by Ja'ariyān, *Dīn vasiyāsāt*, pp. 357–65), in which he criticizes all the various schools in Islam, including the Sufis, for their extravagant claims, the tenor of which is echoed in his *Dīvān* almost exactly (see *Kulliyāt*, p. 107).

which venerates and celebrates the Sufi tradition and reflects a heartfelt admiration for its masters.<sup>288</sup>

It is interesting to note that later Persian Sufis such as Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh, while recognizing the apparent sincerity of Fayḍ-i Kāshānī's convictions in this treatise, clearly hesitated to condone them. In a postscript to chapter 9 of the *Mīrāt al-ḥaqq* (added for the reader's sake after citing the treatise in full), Majdhūb 'Alī Shāh penned a mildly critical note about Fayḍ-i Kāshānī's religious position, stating that "while one can appreciate that some of the matters (which he discussed) cannot to be taken absolutely seriously, neither should its author be anathematized or condemned for his opinions." But, pronounces Majdhūb, there is a strong mystical dimension in Fayḍ-i Kāshānī's works which must not be ignored, a dimension which is best revealed in his poetic works: "It is clear from a ghazal included at the end of the treatise that this venerable master had realized some very high degrees in his flight of spiritual vision and methodical progression (*sayr u sulūk*) [on the Path], for his *Dīvān* of ghazals and his *mathnawīs* contain many gnostic adages and truthful verities (*ma'ārif u ḥaqā'iq-i ḥaqīqiyya*), bearing witness to his advancement to the stages of divine closeness."<sup>289</sup>

In support of Majdhūb's contention, it should also be noted that Fayḍ wrote eight ghazals concluding with the rhyme-word 'love' (*ishq*), all devoted to Sufi themes.<sup>290</sup> Although he confessed that in Rūmī's<sup>291</sup> poetry, "many mysteries lie hidden," he personally professed to follow the style (*tatabu'*) of, and prefer above all other poetry, the "ghazals of Ḥāfiẓ."<sup>292</sup> His appreciation and advocacy of Sufi poetic hermeneutics is clearly evident in his *Risāla-yi Mishwāq*, a treatise devoted to defending the mystical aesthetics and poetic symbolism of the Sufis. This treatise is a commentary on certain sections of Maḥmūd Shabistarī's famous 1,000-line mystical epic *Gulshan-i*

<sup>288</sup> Bertels, *Taṣawwuf*, p. 671. The fact that Fayḍ's pronouncements in this treatise stand in complete opposition to opinions expressed in his *Dīvān* concerning the Sufis is demonstrated by this ghazal confessing that the various great classical Persian Sufi poets all spoke of the mysteries in their own distinct manner:

kashf-i asrār-i ḥaqā'iq rā bih qadr-i fahm-i khwud  
har kasī dar parda-yi ash'ār mīgūyad sukhān  
gāh Mawlānā u gah 'Aṭṭār un gāhī Maghribī  
gah zi shawqish Qāsim-i Anwār mīgūyad sukhān  
man ki bāsham ar zanam dam az thanā-yi kardigār?  
dar thanā-yish Aḥmad-i Mukhtar mīgūyad sukhān  
Guft "Lā-aḥṣā," Muḥammad. Kīst dīgar dam zanad  
līk qadr-i khwīsh har hushyār mīgūyad sukhān.

(*Kulliyāt-i ash'ār-i Mawlānā Fayḍ-i Kāshānī*, p. 318)

<sup>289</sup> *Mīrāt al-ḥaqq*, p. 261.

<sup>290</sup> *Kulliyāt*, pp. 228–33.

<sup>291</sup> S.H. Nasr cites a commentary on the *Mathnawī* by Fayḍ, which, however, remains unpublished. "The School of Isfahan," p. 927.

<sup>292</sup> See n. 283 above.

rāz,<sup>293</sup> drawing heavily on the brilliant exegesis of this work by the Kubrawī master Muḥammad Lāhijī. *Risāla-yi Mishwāq* is, in fact, an elegant and eloquent précis of the *Gulshan-i rāz*'s contents, revealing Fayḍ's deep absorption in the classical Persian Sufi tradition.<sup>294</sup> Following in the footsteps of the classical Persian Sufis of the school of Ibn 'Arabī such as Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d. 688/1289) and 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d. 730/1329) who wrote tracts in defence of the Sufis' use of mystical terminology (*iṣtilāḥāt*),<sup>295</sup> Fayḍ-i Kāshānī in this work also firmly defends the traditional view that each of the Sufis' occult poetic images has a symbolic correspondance to an archetypal meaning in the imaginal realm. Thus, in the introduction to the *Mishwāq* he notes that "words (*sukhan*) are but a form and their meaning (*ma'nā*) is as their spirit. In other words, words are like a cup and their meaning like wine; or, to use a different simile, words are like musk and their meaning like their fragrance."<sup>296</sup> Since the contents of a word's meaning far exceeds its phonic form – the literal letter – the Sufi poets "in giving the veiled ladies of these archetypal meanings (*ma'ānī*) verbal expressions, have employed subtle devices to interpret each reality, matching sensate forms and shapes with appropriately corresponding words to express 'that' through 'this'. In this manner, those with insight into the spiritual meanings (*ahl-i ma'nā*) delight in the realities so illustrated while those who solely perceive the figurative form (*ahl-i ṣūrat*) will suffer no ill."<sup>297</sup>

As Bertels points out, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī was favourably inclined to audition-with-music of Sufi poetry (*samā'*) and his positive views on this practice became the subject of controversy after he was attacked by a certain Mullā 'Alī al-Shahīdī al-Āmulī who condemned his opinions as "smacking of blasphemy."<sup>298</sup> There are several passages in his *Dīvān* alluding to the practice of *samā'*,<sup>299</sup> and his ghazals are steeped in a melopoeia which Bertels finds unique in the history of Persian literature.<sup>300</sup> It would seem that Fayḍ was

<sup>293</sup> On which, see my *Beyond Faith and Infidelity*.

<sup>294</sup> Thus, the gnostic theosophy and the *Garden of Mysteries* of Shabistarī – a follower of Ibn 'Arabī and a Sunni Sufi who belonged to the Sunni Ash'arite *madhhab*, whose influence also pervades many of Fayḍ's other works – is the main inspiration throughout his *Risāla-yi Mishwāq*. See also Fayḍ's *Ḥaqā'iq dar sayr wa sulūk*, Persian trans. Muḥammad Bāqir Sā'idī Khurāsānī (Shīrāz: Intishārāt-i 'ilmīyya Islāmiyya 1340 A.Hsh./1961), pp. 585–6 where he cites long passages from the *Gulshan-i rāz* to illustrate certain matters concerning the meditation of the spiritual heart.

<sup>295</sup> See 'Irāqī's *Risāla-yi lamā'at wa risāla-yi iṣtilāḥāt*, ed. J. Nūrbakhsh (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Ni'matu'llāhī 1353 A.Hsh./1974); and Kāshānī's *Iṣtilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. M. K. Ibrāhīm Ja'far (Egypt 1981).

<sup>296</sup> *Risāla-yi Mishwāq*, pp. 36–7.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>298</sup> Bertels, *Taṣawwuf*, p. 665.

<sup>299</sup> *Kulliyāt*, p. 324, *infra.*, where he describes Sufis dancing in *samā'*.

<sup>300</sup> Cf. Bertels' fascinating discussion of this, *Taṣawwuf*, pp. 676–83.

also not completely opposed to having his poetry sung in Sufi gatherings during the audition/music ceremonies and his lyrics were thus set to music to concentrate the faculties of the soul. One of his ghazals even begins by heralding his spiritual mission with Sufi music:

*bāz āmadam bā nuql u may, sar-mast az jām-i alast*  
*bāz āmadam bā chang u nay, sar-mast az jām-i alast.*

I have returned again with wine and sweets  
 Drunk from the cup of Pre-eternity.  
 I have returned again with harp and flute  
 Drunk from the cup of Pre-eternity.

In another ghazal, whose rhyme-word is *ḥarf* (speech, letter, word), he states:

*ṣāḥib-i dīl rā-st fahm-i rāzhā az sāzhā ṣāḥib-i dīl shū, shinū az nāy u mūsīqār ḥarf*

Men of heart comprehend mysteries by instruments of music.  
 Be a man of heart then and hear the words of the organ.<sup>301</sup>

In fact, most of his life, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī, exactly like Ghazālī, had struggled to defend the tenets of classical Sufism from its foes among religious formalists and exoteric jurists, and the dominant tenor of his thought seems to be that found in his Persian *Dīvān*, *Sharḥ-i ṣadr*, *Risāla-yi Mishwāq*, *al-Muḥākamat*, *Rāh-i ṣawāb* and *Alfat-nāma*<sup>302</sup> rather than the world-wearied and disillusioned voice of the author of *al-Inṣāf*. Rasūl Ja'fariyān's remarks about the environmental causes underlying Fayḍ's disillusionment with Sufism merit citation in this regard:

In the first few decades of his mature life, and even up to 60 years of age, Fayḍ displayed passionate enthusiasm for '*irfān* and *taṣawwuf*. Afterwards, however, he considerably distanced himself from these intellectual movements. In one respect, his Akhbārī religious inclinations had an adverse effect upon his effort to interpret Shī'ite traditions and *ḥadīth* in a light favourable to '*irfān*, ultimately inducing him to turn his attention to exoteric subjects. The academico-intellectual climate of his day cannot have been without its influence on this intellectual transformation, insofar as the last two decades of his life coincided with the peaking of the anti-Sufi movement that featured personages such as Mullā Muḥammad Ṭāhir Qumī and 'Allāma Majlisī as its leaders.<sup>303</sup>

In sum, in his approach to Sufism, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī maintained an intellectual independence; he is perhaps best described as an a *ḥakīm* who expoused an

<sup>301</sup> *Kulliyāt*, p. 227, *infra*. For a good discussion of Fayḍ's critical, yet not unfavourable, attitude to *samā'*, see 'Abd al-Karīm Surūsh, *Qīṣṣa-yi arbāb-i ma'rifat* (Tehran: Mi'raj 1373/A.Hsh./1994), pp. 26–7.

<sup>302</sup> These treatises, which for reasons of space cannot be discussed here, are found in Ja'fariyān's edition of *Dah risālah*.

<sup>303</sup> Ja'fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsat*, p. 276.

unconventional type of philosophical mysticism, which was also, paradoxically, *au courant* with his age.

## V. CONCLUSION

In religion,  
What damnèd error but some sober brow  
Will bless it and approve it with a text,  
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?

*Merchant of Venice*, III.ii

*Zay Iblīs bih Bū'l-bashar chih inkār rasīd?*  
"Ḥaqq", guft Ḥusayn – bar sar-i dār rasīd.  
*Az shūmi 'ī-yi sharr nafs-i mullāyān-ast*  
*bā har nabī u walī kay āzar rasīd.*

Dārā Shikūh

If the discussion above (sections IV. 5 and 6) has established that both Fayḍ-i Kāshānī and 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī, who – after their father-in-law Mullā Ṣadrā – can be considered the foremost theosophers of the late Safavid school of Isfahān, did both harbour definite inclinations towards Sufism, the question remains as to why their contribution to late classical Persian Sufism has been so consistently ignored. The best answer to this enigma still remains these remarks penned by Y.E. Bertels:

One need not search far afield to find the reason why such a highly celebrated author [Fayḍ-i Kāshānī], whose works deserve an independent monograph, suddenly passed into oblivion. The reason lies hidden in the severe opposition to him on the part of most of the '*ulamā*'. The central, most visible pretext for their antagonism to Mullā Muḥsin lay in his inclination to Sufism, a philosophy which in this period was subject to the harassment and persecution by the jurists (*faqīh*). Shaykh Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Baḥraynī, author of the biographical work *Lū'lū' al-Baḥrayn*, states that "Mullā Muḥsin had inclinations towards Sufism and approved to the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Now, since Persians always have had a great passion and attachment to the doctrines of Sufism, and achieved enormous progress by means of their passion and enthusiasm for Sufism, the works of Mullā Muḥsin thus enjoyed wide diffusion and brought him great popularity." Baḥraynī also adds that his popularity was brought to a sudden end through the efforts of Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1111/1699–1700).

From the above, it is evident that the '*ulamā*' used all the formidable powers which they had at their disposal to bar the publication of his works, which makes it quite clear why his works are now so rare. The ascendancy of the '*ulamā*' has always been one of the most important political factors in Iranian political life, and so many other affairs are dependent for success on their will.<sup>304</sup>

<sup>304</sup> Bertels, *Taṣawwuf*, pp. 667–8.

Considering the policy of forced conversions and persecution of religious minorities at the end of the seventeenth century,<sup>305</sup> the gag-orders and *fatwās* issued by the late Safavid *mujtahids* against the Sufis<sup>306</sup> and the general ascendancy of religious conservatives in the political landscape, it is not surprising if we should return here to a theme recurring throughout this essay, a theme which features as the tonic note of a dirge on the demise of religious tolerance and the consequent suppression of the Sufi mystical vision in Persia, namely the baleful influence of the *mujtahid* cult and the ideologization of religion to suit their particular political agenda – the same doleful tone which remains, unfortunately, the dominant characteristic of the Safavid dynasty (as it does also – not incidentally – of the contemporary Islamic [*sic*] Republic of Iran<sup>307</sup>).

As Bertels' comments above inform us, the ascendancy of the hardline Shī'ite clergy in the late seventeenth century no doubt has had much to do with both past- and present-day neglect of the Sufi literature of the Safavid period. In fact, it was less than a decade after Fayḍ's death in 1679 that Sufism in Iran was dealt a deadly blow, when, in 1098/1687, Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (1037/1627–1111/1700) was appointed Shaykh al-Islām in Iṣfahān.<sup>308</sup> Majlisī's exclusivist Shī'ism and puritanical policies during his tenure of this post when

<sup>305</sup> Walter Fischel's article "The Jews in Mediæval Iran from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries: Political, Economic, and Communal Aspects," *Irano-Judaica* (1982), pp. 265–96, provides an account of the persecution of Jews both from the mid-seventeenth century onwards and Christians.

<sup>306</sup> See Babayan, "The Waning of the Qizilbash," chap. 4; Ja'farīyān, *Dīn va siyāsat*, pp. 221–60. A good account of the persecution of Sufis in late Safavid Persia is given by the last master of the Dhahabī Order under this dynasty, Quṭb al-Dīn Nayrīzī (1100/1688–1173/1759), in the introduction to the fourth section of his celebrated Arabic poem *Faṣl al-khiṭāb*, in which he assails the corruption of the Safavid clerical establishment, recording in detail the persecution endured by the Sufis and the destruction of their *khānaqāhs* at the hands of the '*ulamā*'-yi *zāhir*. The relevant passages are cited by Iḥṣānu'llāh 'Alī Istakhrī, *Uṣūl-i taṣawwuf* (Tehran: Kānūn-i Ma'rifat 1338 A.Hsh.1959), pp. 433–9.

<sup>307</sup> Cf. Arjomand's epilogue to *The Shadow of God*, pp. 269–70, in which he observes that while "the mahdistic principle enabled the founder of the Safavid empire to conquer Iran and establish Shī'ism ... in the long run it clashed with the juristic principle of authority, ... [producing] a crisis of legitimacy. ... Khumaynī's followers have reacted by coining the phrase, highly reminiscent of early Safavid legitimacy motifs, 'O God, keep Khumaynī until the revolution of the Mahdi.'" In his *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988), the same author points out that the millenarian tenet of "the belief in the appearance of the Twelfth Imam as the Mahdi to redeem the world ... was most convenient for Khomeini's revolutionary purpose, as it had been for the founder of the Safavid Empire in 1501." For other interesting parallels between the current Iranian *hizbollah* and Safavid hierocracies, see Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press 1993), pp. 111, 119, 296, 389–90, 492.

<sup>308</sup> Although Majlisī was the main instigator of anti-Sufi polemics in late Safavid Persia, his writing merely continued a tradition of attacks which can be traced back to Karakī, and are,

he effectively controlled the religious policy of Persia<sup>309</sup> – during the final years of the reign of Shāh Sulaymān (1077/1667–1105/1694) and under the reign of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn (1105/1694–1135/1722) until his death in 1111/1699–70 – marked “the beginning of the decline of good relations between Shī‘ism and Sufism.”

In this respect Majlisī’s role in the suppression of Sufism in late Safavid Persia can be compared to that of Henry VIII’s vicar-general Thomas Cromwell (1485–1540) in the dissolution of the monasteries in medieval England. “It is interesting to note how Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi fulfilled his programme of turning against Sufism,” Kamil M. al-Shaibi observed: “first he denied that his father was a Sufi at all; then he attacked the chiefs of Asceticism and Sufism, deplored the wearing of woollen clothes and considered the Sufis disbelievers. . . . The government persecuted the Sufis so violently that they were driven out of the capital Isfahan.”<sup>310</sup> Majlisī established a religious trend that can at best be called a “vulgarization of Shī‘ite faith (*tashayyu‘-i ‘ammā-girā*),”<sup>311</sup> in which endeavour he enlisted the support of the state, “not only to destroy to eradicate and murder the Sufis and destroy the *khānaqāhs*, but also to attack the learned traditions of the Sufis and their presence in Persian society.”<sup>312</sup> In his *Jawāhir al-‘uqūl*, Majlisī pronounced the murder of one Sufi to be equivalent to the performance of a ‘righteous deed’ (*ḥusna*).<sup>313</sup>

Thus, Fayḍ-i Kāshānī’s rather derogatory attitude towards the classical Sufism in *al-Inṣāf* may be seen to echo the governing party’s line and reflect

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as Rasūl Ja‘fariyān points out, in essence “nothing particularly original” (*Dīn va siyāsāt*, p. 254) to him. However, this does not mitigate the fact that Majlisī was the Sufis’ most formidable opponent, whose polemics, notes, “bore the prosaic stamp of Shari‘ah-mindedness” (*The Venture of Islam*, III, p. 54), based on an innate spleen and bigotry animating his theological crusade against Sufis and philosophers. He articulated his mission to be the sole authentic custodian of the Islamic tradition as an attempt to confront, discredit and refute the rival claims of Sufism: “When I saw that the common people were occupied with the heretical innovations of the Sufis and blasphemous philosophers, in face of them I diffused and propagated the works of the Shī‘ites (*imāmām*) amongst them, even though I have heard that my enemies and opponents refer to me as being but ‘periphrastic marginalia.” (*Fihrist-i Nuskahā-yi Kitābkhāna-yi Dānishgāh*, III, p. 126, as cited in Ja‘fariyān, *Dīn va siyāsāt*, p. 256).

<sup>309</sup> See W.C. Chittick’s introduction to his translation of Fayḍ’s “The Imperial Mirror,” *Ā‘īna-yi shāhī* in Arjomand, *Authority and Political Culture in Shi‘ism*, p. 268.

<sup>310</sup> Al-Shaibi, *Sufism and Shi‘ism*, pp. 322–3.

<sup>311</sup> Aḥmad Kāzīmī Musavī, “Jāyigāh-i ‘ulamā’ dar ḥukūmat-i Qājār,” *Iran Nameh*, 15/2 (1997), p. 200.

<sup>312</sup> Musavī, *ibid.*, p. 202; see also Mehdi Keyvani, *Artisans and Guild Life in the later Safavid Period* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag 1982), pp. 205–11 for a good discussion of the persecution of the Sufis.

<sup>313</sup> Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī, *Jawāhir al-‘uqūl* (Tehran: lithograph edition, n.p. 1303 A.Hsh./1885), p. 9. cited in *ibid.*, p. 223 n. 6; also cf. Ja‘fariyān’s discussion of Majlisī’s anti-Sufi activities, *Dīn va siyāsāt*, pp. 254–8.

the unpopularity of the Sufi movement in late seventeenth-century Persia.<sup>314</sup> Whether his disillusionment with Sufism at the end of his life was merely a way to blow with the political wind of his age and to survive the fundamentalist Shī'ite despotism raging around him by self-censorship, or whether it represented a genuine change in his intellectual orientation, is hard to know. Nonetheless, despite his criticism of all classes of the religious hierarchy – dervishes included – his harshest criticism is directed at the popular preachers.

\* \* \*

In sum, the Safavid state was born in a climate of Shī'ite extremism, using Sufism as a facade to build up a cult of personality around the monarch as supreme Sophy, *murshid-i kāmīl*. Given this betrayal of principles and profound political inversion of spiritual values, it is understandable that Sufism, despite its glorious history, featuring the richest poetic literature in the entire history of Islamic culture, should have been marginalized by philosophers such as Mīr Dāmād, and hardly acknowledged in many of the prose writings of the philosophers of the period (even when utilized in the poetic works of Mīr Findiriskī, for instance).

However, that *taṣawwuf* remained, despite the dominant cult of 'Uṣūlī *mujtahids* who opposed Sufism and the Turcoman Qizilbāsh factionalism which had corrupted it, a – if not *the* – fundamental intellectual current of late classical Persian culture is evident when we consider the mystical persuasion of most of those gnostics from whom the school of Iṣfahān derives its principal name and fame: Bahā' al-Dīn 'Āmilī, Mullā Ṣadrā and his two sons-in-law, 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī and Muḥsin Fayḍ-i Kāshānī. *Taṣawwuf* in their works remains the fundamental element. Extract Sufism from their theosophy ('*irfān*) and the entire Persian intellectual tradition will be seriously lacking in both 'wisdom' (*ḥikmat*) and 'philosophy' (*falsafa*).

<sup>314</sup> Cf. Ṣafā's discussion (*Tārīkh* V/1, pp. 207ff.) of Fayḍ's relationship with the anti-Sufi polemics conducted by theologians during his later years.

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*The Safavid & Mughal Period*

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Front cover: Episode in a Mosque, by Shaykh-zāda,  
from a *Divān* of Ḥāfiẓ. Safavid period, Tabriz, c. 1527.

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