

Şūfī Orders and the Social Transformation of the Indian Subcontinent: A Theoretical Assessment

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Abstract

Şūfī orders played a central role in shaping popular religiosity in the Indian subcontinent, fostering social cohesion, and advancing the spread of Islam through peaceful means. This study analyzes the transformative contributions of the Chishtiyya, Suhrawardiyya, Qādiriyya, and Naqshbandiyya from a sociological perspective by combining Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority with Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, religious capital, and field. This research aims to reveal how orders constructed a distinctive religious habitus through interaction with local culture, generated social transformation through charismatic leadership and the accumulation of religious capital, and offered egalitarian discourses against the rigid caste hierarchy, thereby creating bridges between diverse religious communities. This study contributes to the literature by holistically evaluating the spiritual and social effects of orders, synthesizing the theoretical concepts of Weber and Bourdieu. Employing document analysis based on a comprehensive literature review, the research focuses primarily on the early period and the Mughal era (11th–16th centuries), while deliberately excluding the British colonial and modern contexts. The findings demonstrate that Şūfī orders were effective on three levels: first, they shaped popular religiosity by blending Islamic teachings with local cultural elements, producing a form of religiosity with mystical and practical dimensions; second, they developed egalitarian discourses against the rigid hierarchy of the caste system, thereby facilitating conversion to Islam among lower castes and assuming a unifying role among different religious groups; and third, they spread Islam through peaceful methods of da'wa based on exemplary conduct rather than coercion. The study concludes that Şūfī orders were not merely religious institutions but pivotal agents of social transformation. Their inclusive and tolerant approaches enabled the peaceful expansion of Islam in a multi-religious and multicultural environment. This process, grounded in charismatic leadership, religious capital, and the creation of a unique habitus, highlights the enduring significance of Şūfī traditions for understanding the dynamics of religion and society in the Indian subcontinent.

Keywords

Sociology of Religion, Indian Subcontinent, Şūfī Orders, Social Cohesion, Charisma and Religious Capital.

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Hint Alt Kıtası'nda Sufi Tarikatlar ve Toplumsal Dönüşüm: Kuramsal Bir Değerlendirme

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Öz

Sufi tarikatlar, Hint Alt Kıtası'nda halk dindarlığının biçimlenmesinde, toplumsal uyumun güçlendirilmesinde ve İslâm'ın barışçıl yollarla yayılmasında kurucu bir rol oynamıştır. Bu makale, Çiştîyye, Sühreverdiyye, Kâdiriyye ve Nakşibendiyye tarikatlarının halk dindarlığı üzerindeki dönüştürücü etkilerini, toplumsal uyuma katkılarını ve İslâm'ın yayılma dinamiklerini Max Weber'in karizmatik otorite kuramı ve Pierre Bourdieu'nün habitus, dinî sermaye ve alan kavramları çerçevesinde sosyolojik bir perspektifle analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, tarikatların yerel kültürle etkileşim yoluyla nasıl özgün bir dinî habitus oluşturduğunu, karizmatik liderlik ve dinî sermaye birikimi aracılığıyla toplumsal dönüşümü nasıl gerçekleştirdiklerini ve kast sistemine karşı eşitlikçi bir alternatif sunarak farklı dinî topluluklar arasında köprü işlevi gördüklerini ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir. Çalışma, Weber ve Bourdieu'nün teorik kavramlarını sentezleyerek tarikatların hem manevi hem de sosyal etkilerini bütüncül bir şekilde değerlendirme konusunda literatüre özgün bir katkı sunmaktadır. Çalışma, literatür taramasına dayalı doküman analizi yöntemini kullanmıştır. İnceleme, özellikle 11.-16. yüzyılları kapsayan erken dönem ve Babür dönemine odaklanmakta; İngiliz sömürge yönetimi ve modern dönem kapsam dışı bırakılmaktadır. Bulgular, sufi tarikatların üç temel düzlemde etkili olduğunu göstermektedir: Birincisi, halk dindarlığının şekillenmesinde yerel kültürel unsurlarla İslâmî öğretileri harmanlayarak mistik ve pratik boyutları olan bir dindarlık biçimi ortaya çıkarmışlardır. İkincisi, kast sisteminin katı hiyerarşisine karşı eşitlikçi söylemler geliştirerek alt kastlardan bireylerin İslâm'a geçişini kolaylaştırmış ve farklı dinî gruplar arasında birleştirici bir rol üstlenmişlerdir. Üçüncüsü, baskı yerine örnek olma temelli barışçıl tebliğ yöntemleriyle İslâm'ı yaymışlardır. Sonuç olarak çalışma, sufi tarikatların Hint Alt Kıtası'nda sadece dinî birer kurum olmadığını, aynı zamanda toplumsal dönüşümün güçlü aktörleri olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. İslâm'ın çok dinli ve çok kültürlü bir coğrafyada barışçıl yollarla yayılması, halk düzeyinde ilgi görmesi büyük ölçüde sufilerin kapsayıcı ve hoşgörülü yaklaşımının bir sonucudur. Bu durum karizmatik liderlik, dinî sermaye birikimi ve yerel kültürle etkileşim halinde gelişen özgün bir habitus inşasının ürünüdür.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Din Sosyolojisi, Hint Alt Kıtası, Sufi Tarikatlar, Toplumsal Uyum, Karizma ve Dinî Sermaye.

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Introduction

With its multi-religious and multicultural structure, the Indian subcontinent offers a unique historical case for understanding the role of Şüfî orders in the spread and institutionalization of Islam. Although previous academic studies have extensively documented the historical and theological aspects of these orders, their sociological roles, particularly their influence on the development of popular Islam, the establishment of social cohesion, and the negotiation of power dynamics within the religious sphere, have not been sufficiently explored.

It is widely accepted that the Indian subcontinent possesses a fundamentally mystical cultural character. Historically, belief systems that reached this region have often been influenced by this local mystical tradition. In this respect, there are strong academic arguments suggesting that one of the roots of Islamic mysticism (Sufism) might lie in India.¹ However, researchers such as Çardaklı and Yavuz argue that the similarities in ascetic lifestyle, moral purification, and mystical methods between Islam's Şüfî tradition and religions like Hinduism and Buddhism do not prove that Sufism has Indian origins. Instead, they suggest these similarities arise from universal human tendencies.²

This academic debate reveals that the spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent was not merely a one-sided transmission but a process of cultural interaction and mutual adaptation. If Sufism does have Indian roots, this could explain the region's inherent spiritual and cultural inclination toward the mystical dimension of Islam, potentially facilitating its integration into the local fabric. On the other hand, the view that similarities stem from universal human values highlights Sufism's universal nature (its ethical approach based on love and compassion for all beings) and how it resonates across different cultural contexts.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Max Weber's (1964-1920) theory, which classifies authority into three ideal types: traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic.³ Charismatic authority derives its legitimacy from the exceptional qualities and sacred traits of the leader.⁴ Leaders of Şüfî orders typically fall under this type of authority, as the loyalty of their followers is based on the belief in their transcendent and powerful spiritual presence. This charisma functions as a tool to inspire, unify, and mobilize people around a shared faith and purpose.⁵

Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) conceptual framework offers insights into the social dynamics of these religious formations.

According to Bourdieu, habitus constitutes the foundation of social action, defined as a system of durable, transposable dispositions through which individuals perceive, judge,

1 Lütfi Sunar, "Giriş: Müslüman Hint Alt Kıtası'nda Çağdaş Düşüncenin Yönelimleri", *Müslüman Dünyada Çağdaş Düşünce*, ed. Lütfi Sunar (Ankara: Özel Ofset Basın Yayın, 2023), 4/26.

2 Nisa Nur Çardaklı - Salih Sabri Yavuz, "Hakikat Arayışında Hint Düşüncesi ile İslam Tasavvufu", *Rize İlahiyat Dergisi* 28 (2025), 214.

3 Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (University of California Press, 1978), 212-254.

4 Kamil Yılmaz, "Tasavvuf Geleneğinde Değişim", *Çağımızda Sosyal Değişme ve İslam*, ed. Mehmet Bulut - Hişam Çarâvî (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2007), 256-257.

5 Ramazan Bulut, "Dini Gruplarda Karizmatik Otoritenin Sosyal Temsilleri", *RUSUH Uşak Üniversitesi İslami İlimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 2/2 (2022), 246-254.

and act in the social world. These dispositions, produced and structured by objective social structures, ultimately contribute to those structures' reproduction.⁶ This concept is key to understanding the shared perceptions, judgments, and behavioral patterns that unite members of a Şūfī order, forming a collective religious habitus. Each social field has its own unique types of capital; in the religious field, religious capital is built through access to legitimizing knowledge, titles, and sources of authority.⁷ In Şūfī orders, religious capital accumulates through the spiritual influence of the shaykhs, their knowledge, attributed miracles, and their chain of spiritual transmission (silsila). The concept of habitus is also key to understanding the shared perceptions and behavioral patterns of order members regarding society and the world.⁸ Together, these concepts demonstrate that Şūfī orders are not only religious movements but also powerful agents of social transformation.

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the role of Şūfī orders in the dissemination and institutionalization of Islam in the Indian subcontinent from a sociological perspective. While the existing academic literature has extensively examined the historical and religious roles of these orders, studies that holistically address their sociological dimensions such as social cohesion, habitus transformation, and the accumulation of religious capital remain limited. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining four major Şūfī orders (the Chishtiyya Suhrawardiyya, Qādiriyya, and Naqşbandiyya) through a theoretical framework that combines Max Weber's concept of charismatic authority with Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus and capital. In doing so, the article provides a multidimensional analysis that positions Şūfī orders both as spiritual institutions and as dynamic agents of social transformation.

This study is guided by the following central research problem: How did Şūfī orders function as carriers of religious and social change in the Indian subcontinent, and how can this influence be explained through the interaction of charisma, habitus, and various forms of religious capital?

Numerous academic works have examined the historical and social roles of Şūfī orders in the Indian subcontinent. Cebecioğlu⁹ highlights how Şūfis accelerated the spread of Islam in the region through peaceful methods of religious communication. Similarly, Fuad¹⁰ notes that Şūfis such as Shaykh Ġalāl al-Dīn Tabrizī and Şāh Ġalāl carried Islam into rural areas of Bengal through social projects. On the other hand, scholars like Anjum¹¹ and Laraik¹² argue that Şūfī orders shaped popular Islam by interacting with local culture and that

6 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72-81.

7 Adem Palabıyık, "Pierre Bourdieu Sosyolojisinde 'Habitus', 'Sermaye' ve 'Alan' Üzerine", *Liberal Düşünce* 16/61-62 (2011), 124.

8 Ali Baltacı, "Habitus: Dini İnanç Habitusunun Oluşumu Üzerine Kavramsal Bir İnceleme", *Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 5/2 (2018), 1-24.

9 Ethem Cebecioğlu, "Güney Asyada İslamın Yayılmasında Süfîlerin Rolü", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 33/3-4 (1992), 157-178.

10 Abdur Rahman Fuad, *Bengal Bölgesinde İslâmîyet'in Yayılışı ve Sosyal Etkileri (1203-1757)* (Konya: Necmettin Erbakan University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master's Thesis, 2018).

11 Tanvir Anjum, "'Be Hell for Those Who Call Me Saiyyid': Social Stratification among the South Asian Muslims and the Sufi Worldview", *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 32/2 (2011), 43-64.

12 Javad Laraik, "Günümüz Güney Asya Müslüman Dünyasında Başlıca Tasavvuf Düşüncesi Akımları ve

syncretic practices such as qawwālī and dīkr supported social harmony. Sarkar¹³ and Pandey¹⁴ emphasize that the teachings of the Chishtiyya order based on tolerance and equality, played a unifying role in multi-religious societies.

While existing studies have predominantly focused on the religious and historical roles of Şūfī orders, their sociological dimensions including social cohesion, habitus transformation, and the accumulation of religious capital have often remained in the background. This article aims to address these gaps by offering a comprehensive analysis of the sociological impact of Şūfī orders.

The study adopts a qualitative document analysis approach, based on a systematic review of secondary sources published between 1990 and 2025, including peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, encyclopedia entries, and dissertations. This method has provided a solid foundation for systematically evaluating both historical and sociological data. The selection criteria are as follows: the sources must address at least one historical, cultural, or sociological aspect of Şūfī orders in the Indian subcontinent. Due to language accessibility, only works in English and Turkish have been included. The materials were thematically coded according to Weber's and Bourdieu's conceptual categories particularly charisma, the routinization of charisma, habitus, and religious capital. This thematic coding allowed for the identification of recurring patterns between historical narratives and sociological analyses.

The main limitations of this study are the unavailability of primary sources, the exclusive reliance on secondary materials, the exclusion of sources in local languages due to language barriers, and the focus on the early period (11th–16th centuries) and the Mughal era (16th–19th centuries). Moreover, the analysis centers on major Şūfī orders namely the Chishtiyya, Suhrawardiyya, Qādiriyya, and Naqşbandiyya while smaller orders are not examined in detail.

1. Sufism in the Indian Subcontinent

Şūfīs played a central role in spreading İslam and embedding it deeply within local communities in the Indian subcontinent. Although large parts of the region came under Muslim control during the Ghaznavid period, the widespread acceptance and internalization of İslam among the masses occurred primarily through Şūfī orders. Until the early 20th century, it was widely accepted that anyone wishing to benefit from İslamic knowledge and practice in India would undergo Şūfī training.¹⁵ By engaging directly with the local population, Şūfīs transformed not only religious life but also cultural and social spheres of interaction.¹⁶

The influence of Sufism in the Indian subcontinent expanded mainly during the 12th

Yolları", *Müslüman Dünyada Çağdaş Düşünce Hint Alt Kıtasında Düşünce*, ed. Lütfü Sunar (Özel Ofset Basın Yayın: Ankara, 2023), 4/223-260.

13 Ichhimuddin Sarkar, "Humanizing Elements of Sufism in India", *Insancita: Journal of Islamic Studies in Indonesia and Southeast Asia* (2017), 71-82.

14 Rajendra K.Pandey, "Syncretic Traditions and Peaceful Coexistence in India: The Case of Sufism" (2017).

15 Ömer Tay, "Hindistan Sûflerinden Muhammed Gîsûdrîz'ın Bazı Tasavvufî Görüşleri", *Tokat İlmiyat Dergisi* 9/2 (2021), 632-634.

16 M. Nur Pakdemirli, "Hint Alt Kıtasında Dini Ekoller ve Din Eğitimi", *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 62 (2015), 426.

and 13th centuries. Şūfī Muʿīn al-Dīn Čištī (d. 1235) settled in Ajmer in 1206 and established one of the first major Şūfī centers in the region.¹⁷ Historically, Sufism in the subcontinent has been represented on two main levels: the first is an urban, orthodox, and scholastic Sufism rooted in Sharīʿa; the second is a more popular, rural, and sometimes heterodox form that deviated from strict legal norms.¹⁸ This study focuses on four major orthodox Şūfī orders that maintained a strong presence in South Asia: the Chishtiyya, Suhrawardiyya, Qādiriyya, and Naqšbandiyya.

1.1. Chishtiyya Order

The Chishtiyya order developed deeply in India from the 13th century onwards and became one of the major branches of the Islamic Şūfī tradition.¹⁹ Through the efforts of Muʿīn al-Dīn Čištī (d. 1236) and his successors, the order had a profound impact on the region, blending with local culture and reaching large masses.²⁰

Within the framework of Max Weber's theory of charisma, the charismatic authority of Čištī shaykhs secured the absolute devotion of their followers and gradually became institutionalized. This charismatic leadership enabled the rapid expansion of the order and the growth of a large community of disciples. Practices such as musical dīkr (qawwālī) and samāʿ became central to the order's spiritual rituals, gaining especially strong acceptance in rural areas.²¹

From the perspective of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, the Chishtiyya tradition deeply influenced the religious perceptions and behavioral patterns of local people. The order's principle of avoiding political involvement and engaging directly with the public played a key role in the spread of Islam and in social transformation throughout the region.²² This apolitical stance increased the order's credibility among the people and reinforced its accumulation of religious capital.

1.2. Suhrawardiyya Order

The Suhrawardiyya order began to exert influence in the 13th century, particularly in the Sindh and Punjab regions. It was introduced into Indian territories through the lodge established by Bahāʾ al-Dīn Zakariyyā (d. 1267) in Multan, which became a vibrant hub for religious scholarship, moral instruction, and community service.²³

Unlike the Chishtiyya, Suhrawardī shaykhs maintained closer ties with the state elite

17 Farida Khanam, *Sufism an Introduction* (New Delhi, India: Goodword Books, 2009), 65.

18 Laraik, "Günümüz Güney Asya Müslüman Dünyasında Başlıca Tasavvuf Düşüncesi Akımları ve Yolları", 4/234; Eldiir Zhalilov, *Hint Alt Kıtası'nda Tasavvufi Hareketler: Tarikattan Cemaate Geçiş Sürecinde Tebliğ Cemaati* (Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master's Thesis, 2018), 5.

19 Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, "ÇİŞTİYYE-TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1993).

20 Musthafa Ujampady, "Hindistan'da Sufi Hareketler", *Tematik Tasavvuf Toplantıları*, ed. Ahmet Cahit Haksever (Ankara: Sonçağ Akademi Yayınları, 2019), 17-19.

21 Laraik, "Günümüz Güney Asya Müslüman Dünyasında Başlıca Tasavvuf Düşüncesi Akımları ve Yolları", 4/226.

22 İsa Çelik - Ömer Tay, "Çiştîye Tarikatının Semâ ve Mûsikîye Yaklaşımı", *Çukurova Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi (ÇÜİFD)* 21/1 (2021), 211-212.

23 Hamid Algar, "Bahâeddin Zekerîyyâ", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1991).

and local administrators, often acting as mediators between rulers and the populace, and at times becoming involved in political struggles.²⁴ This aligns with Weber's framework, indicating an interaction with traditional and rational-legal types of authority.

The order maintained a structured organization and reinforced religious education through khānqāhs. It remained loyal to orthodox Sunni teachings and emphasized adherence to Shari'a.²⁵ For instance, Bahā' al-Dīn Zakariyyā's khānqāh in Multan served as a center that systematized religious education and popularized moral teachings. His works, such as al-Awrād, integrated Shari'a with local cultural elements to strengthen social solidarity.²⁶ In summary, the Suhrawardiyya gained a broad following in regions like Punjab by emphasizing moral values and community service.²⁷

1.3. Qādiriyya Order

The Qādiriyya order rose to prominence in India during the 15th and 16th centuries, primarily through the efforts of the descendants and disciples of Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 1166). Lodges (khānqāhs) and networks of disciples were established in key regions such as Sindh, Punjab, Kashmir, the Deccan, and Bengal, serving not only as spiritual centers but also as hubs of education, charity, and community organization.²⁸

The role of Shāh Ḡalāl (who is believed to have lived between approximately 1271 and 1347) in the Islamization of Bengal can be better understood through Bourdieu's concept of religious capital. The prestige that Šūfī shaykhs acquired through their reputed miracles (karāmāt), spiritual guidance, and social welfare projects building mosques, developing irrigation systems, and supporting local economies significantly enhanced their religious authority. This accumulation of symbolic and social capital enabled them to shape communal norms, mediate local disputes, and foster social cohesion, thereby accelerating processes of religious and cultural transformation.²⁹

Remaining faithful to the spiritual legacy of Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, the Qādiriyya order disseminated teachings of moral discipline, spiritual refinement, and universal compassion to diverse audiences, including both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Through the establishment of khānqāhs, educational centers, and literary contributions in Persian and regional languages, the Qādiriyya played a crucial role in embedding Islamic values into the cultural fabric of the Indian subcontinent.³⁰ In doing so, it became a key actor not only in the spread of Islam but also in the shaping of a distinct Indo-Islamic identity.

24 Nedim Tan, "Ebû Hafs Şehâbeddin Sühreverdî", *İslâm Düşünce Atlası* (2025).

25 Reşat Öngören, "Sühreverdîyye", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2010); "Müslüman Hint Alt Kıtası'nda Çağdaş Düşüncenin Yönelimleri", *Contemporary Muslim Thought* (Access 16 June 2025).

26 Ayşenur Aydın - Necdet Tosun, "Hind Alt Kıtası Sühreverdîyye Literatürü (XIII-XV. Yüzyıl)", *Tasavvuf İlmî ve Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 25/49 (2022), 58-61.

27 Khanam, *Sufism an Introduction*, 136.

28 Nihat Azamat, "Kādiriyye", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2001).

29 İsmail Hakkı Göksoy - Mohammad Abdur Rouf, "Bengalce Siyer Yazıcılığının Gelişimi ve İlk Örnekleri", *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 48 (2022), 39-62; Fuad, *Bengal Bölgesinde İslâmiyet'in Yayılışı ve Sosyal Etkileri (1203-1757)*.

30 Khanam, *Sufism an Introduction*, 109-110.

1.4. Naqşbandiyya Order

The Naqşbandiyya order began to gain significant influence in India in the 16th century. Originating from Central Asia, it was introduced through the successors of Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqşband, initially reaching the Mughal court and later spreading to the general population.³¹

The most prominent figure in this spread was Imām Rabbānī Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1624), known as the founder of the Mujaddidiyya branch. Referred to as the “Renewer of the Second Millennium,” Sirhindī strongly opposed syncretism between Islamic and Hindu beliefs and emphasized the protection of religious boundaries.³²

Although Bāqī Billāh (d. 1603) was one of the earliest representatives of the Naqşbandiyya in India, the order gained real momentum under Imām Rabbānī.³³ Distinct from other orders, the Naqşbandiyya is known for its practice of silent ḍikr and strict adherence to Sharīʿa.³⁴ These features became key characteristics of the order. Sirhindī’s famous work Maktūbāt further solidified this reformist and orthodox Şüfî approach within Indian-Islamic thought.³⁵

Table 1: The Four Major Şüfî Orders in the Indian Subcontinent³⁶

Order	Period of Establishment	Key Figures	Geographic Influence	Distinct Features
Chishtiyya	13 th century	Muʿīn al-Dīn Çiştī, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyāʾ	Ajmer, Delhi, Punjab	Musical ḍikr (qawwālī), egalitarian approach, strong integration with the public
Suhrawardiyya	13 th century	Bahāʾ al-Dīn Zakariyyā	Multan, Sindh, Punjab	Orthodox Sunni path, close ties to the state
Qādiriyya	15 th –16 th centuries	Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, Shāh Ḡalāl	Multan, Bengal, Sindh, Kashmir	Ḍikr of divine names, emphasis on social service, appeal to wide populations
Naqşbandiyya	16 th century	Imām Rabbānī	Delhi, Mughal centers, Punjab	Silent ḍikr, strict adherence to Sharīʿa, reformist religious approach

The Chishtiyya and Suhrawardiyya emerged in the 13th century, while the Qādiriyya and Naqşbandiyya became prominent in the 16th century as the main Şüfî schools in India.³⁷ This table presents a comparative overview of each order’s strategies, geographic reach, and

31 Hamid Algar, “Nakşibendiyye”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (TDV Yayınları: İstanbul, 2006).
32 Khanam, *Sufism an Introduction*, 173–177.
33 Algar, “Nakşibendiyye”; Mehmet Atalay, “İmâm Rabbânî’nin EHzaliyyeti Meselesi ve ‘Şehîd’ Kavramı Eksenli Çözümü”, *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 2/43 (2019), 41–53.
34 Tahir Dağcı, “Nakşibendiliğin Karakteristik Özellikleri ve Yayılma Süreci”, *Journal of Turkic Civilization Studies* 5/2 (2024), 401–402.
35 Atalay, “İmâm Rabbânî’nin EHzaliyyeti Meselesi ve ‘Şehîd’ Kavramı Eksenli Çözümü”.
36 This table focuses on early and Mughal period activities (11th–16th centuries). The British colonial era and beyond are not included.
37 Sunar, “Giriş: Müslüman Hint Alt Kıtası’nda Çağdaş Düşüncenin Yönelimleri”, 4/26.

religious orientations. For example, the Chishtiyya's emphasis on musical rituals and public engagement contrasts with the Naqşbandiyya's silent *dîkr* and strict legalism, reflecting different approaches to religious capital and positioning within the religious field.

Suhrawardiyya's close ties with political authorities show how they transformed political capital into religious legitimacy, while the Qādiriyya's focus on social services highlights a service-based accumulation of religious capital. These differences emphasize that the "religious field" is not a uniform structure but a multi-layered space where different actors compete using different types of capital and build their own distinct habitus. Ultimately, these Şūfî orders played a vital role in the adoption of Islam and the shaping of religious identity throughout the Indian subcontinent.³⁸

2. Methods Used by Şūfî Orders in Spreading Islam

The spread of Islam in the Indian subcontinent was shaped by the peaceful and integrative methods developed by Şūfî orders. This diffusion was not achieved through force or coercive conversion but rather through voluntary devotion and spiritual attraction.

The charismatic authority of Şūfî leaders formed the foundation of their ability to inspire, unite, and motivate masses toward the Islamic faith.³⁹ For instance, charismatic Şūfî saints such as Mu'in al-Dîn Čištî (d. 1236) and Nizām al-Dîn Awliyā' (d. 1325) attracted followers through personal exemplarity, sermons delivered in local languages, and inclusive practices. In Weberian terms, their authority was rooted less in law or tradition and more in the perception of divine grace cultivated by engaging with local communities in ways that honored their traditions and spoke their language.⁴⁰ This charisma was not only a personal attribute but also contributed to the growth and institutionalization of the Şūfî order as a social movement.

In the Şūfî context, charisma did not vanish after the leader's death; rather, it was transferred into institutional forms through shrines, spiritual lineages (silsila), rituals, and hagiographies. Eaton's work on Bengal reflects this process, confirming Weber's idea of the "rationalization of charisma": many Şūfî pirs and their successors became landlords or administrative officials supported by the state, blending religious roles with bureaucratic authority. The construction of mosques and shrines, establishment of waqfs (endowments), and state-sanctioned tax exemptions solidified their religious authority and helped Islam take deep root in rural areas.⁴¹

Bourdieu's notion of religious capital offers a valuable framework for analyzing the control and transformation of religious authority.⁴² In the subcontinent, Şūfî orders accumulated religious capital through charismatic leadership and mystical practices, thereby

38 Pakdemirli, "Hint Alt Kıtasında Dini Ekoller ve Din Eğitimi", 426.

39 Fuad, *Bengal Bölgesinde İslâmiyet'in Yayılışı ve Sosyal Etkileri (1203-1757)*, 66-69.

40 Akaidar Kurmanbek et al, "Frontiers | The Roots of the Cultural Deviation of Sufism in the Ancient Turkic Nomadic Culture", *Frontiers in Communication* 10 (2025), 1-11.

41 Richard M Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (University of California Press, 1993), 125-152.

42 Guzel Yusupova, "The religious field in a Russian Muslim village: A Bourdieusian perspective on Islam", *Ethnicities* 20/4 (2020), 781.

challenging the dominance of the ‘ulamā’ and creating new normative systems within the religious field. Bourdieu defines the fundamental forms of capital, stating that it “can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital... as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital...”⁴³ In this framework, cultural capital can be understood as a form of accumulated wealth, distinct from but convertible to economic capital, often embodied in skills and knowledge or institutionalized in qualifications. In this context, Şūfī orders skillfully utilized their cultural capital particularly in its embodied form, such as mastery of language, poetry, and local artistic traditions to build strong communication with local populations.⁴⁴

Şūfī orders spread their message not through coercion but through profound social and embodied practices. They translated Islamic teachings into local idioms and engaged in public charitable activities, thereby accumulating “religious capital.” For example, missionaries prioritized education in local languages: Arabic and Persian texts were regularly translated, enabling rural Hindus to engage with the Qur’ān and dīkr traditions. Similarly, Şūfī orders established khānqāhs in lower-caste regions, where they provided free communal kitchens (langars) and spiritual guidance. The renowned langar of Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ in Delhi, for instance “provided food to thousands regardless of status”, fostering trust and goodwill among diverse communities.⁴⁵ This strategic use of cultural and linguistic capital allowed Şūfīs to bridge cultural divides and embed Islamic practices within local traditions.

Şūfī leaders attracted surrounding communities to Islam and helped disseminate new religious practices. Gradually these charismatic movements institutionalized their authority, often becoming hereditary and inheritable through spiritual lineage. In the Indian subcontinent, networks established by Şūfī shaykhs and pīrs played a critical role in the spread of Islam. From a historical-sociological perspective, the success of this spread is closely linked to the Şūfīs’ ability to integrate into local culture and embed Islam within the religious and social fabric of rural communities.

For instance, the spread of Islam in Bengal (including present-day Bangladesh) occurred largely through its integration into village communities.⁴⁶ In this context, Weber’s emphasis on charismatic leadership becomes particularly relevant: the shaykhs were highly respected as saintly figures for their miracles and ascetic lifestyles. From Bourdieu’s perspective,⁴⁷ these figures used forms of symbolic capital such as religious knowledge, spiritual lineage, and public reputation and transformed it into economic capital in the form of inheritance

43 Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital”, trans. Richard Nice, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J.G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 243.

44 Kashshaf Ghani, “Manifestations of Sufism in Medieval Bengal”, *Aitihasik Abdul Karim: Jibon o Karmo*, 2022, 5-12; Anjum, “Be Hell for Those Who Call Me Saiyyid”: Social Stratification among the South Asian Muslims and the Sufi Worldview”, 58-60.

45 Kurmanbek et al., “Frontiers | The Roots of the Cultural Deviation of Sufism in the Ancient Turkic Nomadic Culture”, 5-8.

46 Wahyuddin Halim, “Babür dönemi Bengal’inde Tarikat Şeyhleri ve İslamlaşmadaki Sosyo-Kültürel Roller (1526- 1858)”, trans. Burak Muhsin Akın, *Academic Platform Journal of Islamic Researches* 4/1 (2020), 86-92.

47 Yusupova, “The religious field in a Russian Muslim village: A Bourdieusian perspective on Islam”, 775-789.

rights, shrine revenues, and endowed properties.

Equally significant was the egalitarian discourse of Şūfī orders, which criticized the caste system and emphasized a universal and inclusive understanding of Islam. The Islamic ideals of brotherhood and tolerance offered a new sense of identity and hope to lower-caste groups who had long suffered from systemic discrimination.⁴⁸

Şūfīs strategically employed local symbols and terminology to express the message of Islam in ways that resonated with Hindu society. For example, referring to God as the “Supreme Lord” and to Prophet Muhammad as a “new Avatar” helped align Islamic teachings with the local worldview.⁴⁹ This cultural adaptation strategy reduced cognitive dissonance for potential converts and enabled the message of Islam to reach a broader audience.

However, this approach also carried the risk of religious boundary-blurring and the emergence of syncretic belief systems. Such developments require critical examination, as popularized religious understandings could sometimes diverge from orthodox norms. This tension was clearly evident in Emperor Akbar’s 16th-century attempt to merge various religious traditions into a “new religion” (Dīn-i Ilāhī).⁵⁰ Although partially inspired by Şūfī ideas, this initiative was sharply criticized and rejected by contemporary religious scholars especially Naqşbandī shaykhs. This episode illustrates that the religious field was not monolithic but rather a site of ongoing contestation over the legitimacy of Islamic beliefs and practices.⁵¹ Despite their widespread influence, Şūfī orders were sometimes subject to internal critiques from orthodox or reformist currents, and even external pressures.

Şūfī orders refrained from using coercion or violence in spreading Islam; instead, they adopted a strategy based on service and self-sacrifice. A notable example is Shaykh Ğalāl al-Dīn Tabrīzī’s addition of a langar (public kitchen) to his khānqāh in Pandua.⁵² Such concrete acts of social service providing food, medical assistance, and community support generated deep trust and goodwill among local people, significantly increasing the orders’ religious capital.

Şūfī lodges (takiyya and zāwiya) functioned not only as places of worship but also as centers for social welfare and spiritual guidance. Through poetry, hymns (ilāhī), and musical ḍikr such as qawwālī, Şūfīs created a spiritual atmosphere that influenced both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.⁵³ These cultural and social activities reinforced the religious authority and social legitimacy of the orders, thereby increasing their symbolic capital in the form of charisma, knowledge, and ritual mastery.⁵⁴

In conclusion, these multifaceted and adaptable methods allowed Şūfī orders to deeply penetrate the social fabric of the Indian subcontinent. They transformed Islam from an abstract set of doctrines into a lived and experienced reality. This approach built a strong

48 Tay, “Hindistan Sūfīlerinden Muhammed Ğisūdrāz’ın Bazı Tasavvufi Görüşleri”, 633.

49 Cebecioğlu, “Güney Asyada İslamın Yayılmasında Sufilerin Rolü”, 163.

50 Sunar, “Giriş: Müslüman Hint Alt Kıtası’nda Çağdaş Düşüncenin Yönelimleri”, 4/27.

51 Pakdemirli, “Hint Alt Kıtasında Dini Ekoller ve Din Eğitimi”, 426.

52 Ghani, “Manifestations of Sufism in Medieval Bengal”, 8.

53 Ujampady, “Hindistan’da Sufi Hareketler”, 14-19.

54 Ali Kaya, “Bourdieu’nun Materyalist ve Siyasal Din Okuması Üzerine”, *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 15/2 (2014), 91.

foundation based on trust, loyalty, and organic integration.

3. Popular Islam and the Influence of Şūfī Orders

In the Indian subcontinent, Popular Islam developed as a form of faith and practice shaped by traditional Şūfī and mystical elements, blended with local cultural structures. Unlike the formal and orthodox teachings of Islam, this understanding is marked by beliefs, rituals, and religious habits rooted in everyday life.⁵⁵ Although many Muslims claimed adherence to orthodox Islamic doctrines, in practice, they often followed occult and animistic traditions. As Smith remarks, “*practically speaking, they are more concerned with magic than with Muhammad; they follow Allah, but fear demons.*”⁵⁶

From Bourdieu’s perspective of habitus, the teachings and lifestyles of Şūfī leaders profoundly influenced the belief systems and behavioral patterns of the masses. In particular, the inclusive and egalitarian approach of the Chishtiyya order played a transformative role in attracting lower-caste communities to Islam.⁵⁷ As Anjum notes, “the people could escape these otherwise considered inescapable identities by associating themselves with any of the Sufi Shaykhs”⁵⁸ highlighting the transformative function of Sufi orders on Popular Islam. Bourdieu’s theory further emphasizes how Şūfī communities generated a distinctive religious habitus: disciples internalized Şūfī rituals, language, and ethics, accumulating symbolic “religious capital.” these early orders began as charismatic movements but over generations, institutionalized into enduring Silsila.⁵⁹

A key feature of Popular Islam was the inclusive attitude of Şūfī shaykhs. Their tolerant stance toward different faith traditions, modest and humble lifestyle, and responsiveness to the needs of local society made Şūfī leaders particularly attractive to the rural population. Religious institutions such as mosques and shrines provided communal spaces where local people could practice their beliefs within an Islamic framework, thereby reinforcing the social legitimacy of Islam. Through the charismatic authority of Şūfī pīrs and their personal bonds with the local population, Islam was not adopted as a formal religion alone, but rather as a lived and integrated practice in daily life.⁶⁰

Şūfī orders contributed to the formation of “localized” forms of Islam by assigning Islamic meanings to local beliefs and ways of life. While some academic circles have dismissed this as a simplistic form of “folk Islam,” in reality, the religiosity shaped under Şūfī influence sustained the Islamic tradition within the social fabric and offered long-term religious continuity.⁶¹

55 R Marvin Smith, “Folk Islam in East Africa”, *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 18/2 (1999), 88–102.

56 Smith, “Folk Islam in East Africa”, 84.

57 Duygu Çağla Bayram, “Tasavvufun Hindistan’da Gelişimi ve Dini Senkretizm Üzerine”, *Independent Türkçe* (2025).

58 Anjum, “‘Be Hell for Those Who Call Me Saiyyid’: Social Stratification among the South Asian Muslims and the Sufi Worldview”, 63.

59 Kurmanbek et al., “Frontiers | The Roots of the Cultural Deviation of Sufism in the Ancient Turkic Nomadic Culture”, 6–8.

60 Halim, “Babür dönemi Bengal’inde Tarikat Şeyhleri ve İslamlaşmadaki Sosyo-Kültürel Roller (1526–1858)”, 90–91.

61 Tanvir Anjum, “Vernacularization of Islam and Sufism in South Asia: A study of the production of sufi literature in local languages”, *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 54/1 (2017), 209–212.

Rituals such as shrine visits, votive offerings, and seeking blessings from the shaykhs became central to the religious lives of the masses. Using Weber's terminology, Şüfî structures that initially emerged through charismatic leadership eventually evolved into institutions of traditional authority, producing enduring religious practices. In due course, the tombs of deceased Şüfî saints became not only places of remembrance but also centers of ritual and prayer. This is a clear case of routinization of charisma, where shrines and their surrounding religious domains became centers of institutionalized Popular Islam. Indian poet-saints like Guru Nānak explicitly drew on Sufi themes, forging strong bonds with multi-religious communities. In this way, Şüfî influences permeated the religious habits of the masses; even concepts like piety and purity acquired local interpretations (e.g., venerating saints as God-like figures or interpreting Islam through existing caste sensitivities). From Bourdieu's perspective, the "religious habitus" of ordinary Muslims was gradually reshaped by Şüfî norms embodied dispositions such as humility, love, and generosity passed down through each ʿarīqa. Those who could mobilize Şüfî religious capital (e.g., families with mystical lineage) shaped this Popular Islam.⁶²

In this process, the symbolic power of charismatic Şüfî leaders provided a strong basis of legitimacy, in line with Weber's theory of charisma. Concepts such as golden lineage (sil-sila), miracles (karāmāt), and prophetic descent (sayyid status) reinforced the leaders' authority and became forms of symbolic capital shaping the religious practices of the masses. Bulut's analysis echoes this view, showing that charismatic Sufi leadership created a strong sense of belonging among followers.⁶³

According to Bourdieu, habitus is defined as a system of "*durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures*"⁶⁴ It is through this conceptual lens that the profound impact of affiliating with a Şüfî order can be understood. In Bourdieu's terms, the religious field, with its own logic and stakes, produces the habitus which in turn reproduces the field.⁶⁵ Therefore, membership in a Şüfî order acts as a powerful social mechanism that generates a long-term transformation of the believer's habitus, thereby shaping their entire worldview.⁶⁶ By joining a ʿarīqa, individuals felt compelled to adopt Islamic norms to align with their social identity. This gave rise to a habitus that required integration into a community for sustained religious practice. In this transformative process, individuals acquired instructional capital from the orders (knowledge of dhikr, hagiographies, miracle stories) and used it as a resource in their personal life strategies.

In Bourdieu's view, the religious field functions as a social space governed by its own internal logic, where agents compete through the accumulation and deployment of religious capital. In his work "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field" Bourdieu elaborates

62 Kurmanbek et al., "Frontiers | The Roots of the Cultural Deviation of Sufism in the Ancient Turkic Nomadic Culture", 7-8.

63 Bulut, "Dini Gruplarda Karizmatik Otoritenin Sosyal Temsilleri", 252-253.

64 Pierre Bourdieu, "Structures, Habitus, Practices", trans. Richard Nice, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

65 Pierre Bourdieu, "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field", *Comparative Social Research: Religious Institutions*, ed. Craig Calhoun (AI Press Inc, 1991), 1-44.

66 Baltacı, "Habitus", 19-21.

this perspective, interpreting religion as a domain of symbolic power struggles.⁶⁷ Within this framework, Şūfī shaykhs and dervishes emerge as key actors in the production, accumulation, and circulation of religious capital. For a shaykh, religious capital consists of all his knowledge and spiritual experiences.⁶⁸ The faith of a villager visiting the shrine in the saint's sacredness represents a reciprocal exchange of capital: the more offerings or sacrifices made, the more the visitor believes in sharing the baraka (spiritual blessing) of the saint. As time progresses, this symbolic capital translated into social status for the shaykh, giving rise to new local elites around the Şūfī order. At the same time, villagers hoped to receive spiritual benefits such as healing or agricultural prosperity. This mutual transaction aligns with Bourdieu's framework of religious capital: both actors (shaykhs and murīds) developed strategies based on their access to spiritual capital.

However, Popular Islam should not be viewed solely through the lens of populist religiosity. Reformist Şūfis such as Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1762) criticized the superstitions and innovations that had become widespread among the people. By advocating a Şūfī understanding grounded in the Qur'ān and Sunnah, he highlighted the role of taṣawwuf in moral purification and social transformation.⁶⁹ In his major work Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha, he argued that Sufism could play an important role in shaping both personal morality and social order. His idea of Tazkiyat al-Nafs (purification of the soul) aimed to differentiate between authentic Sufism and corrupted folk practices.⁷⁰

4. Social Harmony and the Role of Sufism

The Indian subcontinent's multi-religious, multicultural, and multi-caste structure has historically contained dynamics that could lead to social conflict. However, within this complex societal framework, Şūfī orders succeeded in cultivating a peaceful and inclusive cultural space that brought together different ethnic and religious groups.⁷¹ In this sense, Sufism should be regarded as a functional instrument in constructing social cohesion.

The influence of these orders in this process is multifaceted and can be explained through both Weber's concept of charismatic authority and Bourdieu's concepts of religious and cultural capital. Sufi sheikhs were not only religious leaders but also symbolic figures of social peace who gained acceptance across diverse segments of society.⁷² Orders like the Chishtiyya and Suhrawardiyya played an important role in the conversion of lower-caste Hindu communities by offering them a new sense of social belonging through messages of equality, justice, and tolerance.

Şūfī leaders, gained high esteem among both Hindu and Muslim populations due to

67 Bourdieu, "Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field", 6-12.

68 Baltacı, "Habitus", 11-12.

69 Saeyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury et al., "A Critical Analysis of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent", *Sufiyye* 15 (2023), 47.

70 Chowdury et al., "A Critical Analysis of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi's Sufi Influences in the Indian Subcontinent", 35-49.

71 Abdülhamit Birişik, "Hint Alt-Kitasında İslâm Araştırmalarının Dünü Bugünü: Kurumlar, İlmî Faaliyetler, Şahıslar, Eserler", *Divan: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 17 (2004), 58.

72 Ujampady, "Hindistan'da Sufi Hareketler", 18.

their central values of tolerance, humility, and generosity.⁷³ Within Weber's framework, such figures exceeded the status of ordinary clerics and fostered mystical relationships of loyalty. In the course of times, this loyalty became institutionalized around shrines and dar-gahs, eventually transforming into traditional authority and contributing to the formation of sustainable zones of peace.

Şūfī khānqāhs and lodges, particularly in rural areas, served not only as places of worship but also as centers for social solidarity and cultural integration.⁷⁴ Ganaie's research shows that Čishti khānqāhs provided an alternative to the caste system and built symbolic bridges between Hindu and Muslim communities.⁷⁵ These spaces also acted as arenas of popular cultural interaction. Events such as 'Urs celebrations, Melās, and qawwālī gatherings were not only religious rituals but also cultural practices that brought together members of different faiths. As Javed Laraik argues, these events elevated charismatic figures while creating shared identities across religious boundaries, thereby reinforcing interreligious peace.⁷⁶ By subsuming folk traditions into composite rituals, Şūfī orders helped forge a syncretic cultural identity: interfaith participation at shrines "became integral to local culture, regardless of one's original faith". In Weberian terms, a saint's charisma could momentarily suspend social divisions for instance, Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā's presence was believed to diffuse communal tensions.⁷⁷

Karagözoğlu⁷⁸ emphasizes that Dārā Shikōh, in his work *Majma'al-Baḥrayn* (The Meeting of the Two Oceans), compared Vedic philosophy with Islamic Şūfī understandings of truth, further underlining the unifying function of Sufi thought. Similarly, Çardaklı and Yavuz⁷⁹ suggest that while similarities between Sufism and religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism do not prove Indian origins of Sufism, they show how Şūfī orders could coexist harmoniously with local religious systems and serve as bridges between diverse traditions.

Especially significant were the discourses developed against the caste system, which strengthened the social transformative function of Şūfī orders. Many Şūfī sheikhs rejected inherited privileges and welcomed individuals from lower castes as equals, thereby offering classless religious spaces and alternative models of social integration. This contributed to a broader understanding of social justice⁸⁰ The sustainability of these structures rested on the charismatic authority of Şūfī leaders. According to Weberian theory, these leaders possessed exceptional spiritual qualities that inspired mystical devotion among their followers. In Bourdieu's terms, this relationship became symbolic capital, which helped generate

73 Sarkar, "Humanizing Elements of Sufism in India", 74-75.

74 Bayram, "Tasavvufun Hindistan'da Gelişimi ve Dini Senkretizm Üzerine".

75 Asif Hussain Ganaie, "Harmony and Devotion: Exploring the Socio-Cultural Fabric of Chishti Khanqahs", *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* 5/4 (2023), 4.

76 Laraik, "Günümüz Güney Asya Müslüman Dünyasında Başlıca Tasavvuf Düşüncesi Akımları ve Yolları", 4/223-225.

77 Kurmanbek et al., "Frontiers | The Roots of the Cultural Deviation of Sufism in the Ancient Turkic Nomadic Culture", 7.

78 Berna Karagözoğlu, "Hinduizm ve İslâm Tasavvufuna Yaklaşımı ile Hindistan'ın Ünlü Türk Bilgini Şehzade Dārā Şükūh", *Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi* IV/IV (2017), 113-114.

79 Çardaklı - Yavuz, "Hakikat Arayışında Hint Düşüncesi ile İslam Tasavvufu", 204-214.

80 "Sufism and Social Stratification | Political Economy | Thenews.Com.Pk" (Access 19 June 2025).

collective religious identity.⁸¹

Rituals such as shrine visitation, communal kitchens (langar), dhikr gatherings, and ghazal recitations went beyond individual worship and contributed to the formation of strong social bonds. For example, the Bahā' al-Dīn Zakariyyā Shrine in Multān, Pakistan, hosts camel sacrifices, qawwālī sessions, and dhamāl rituals, all of which foster communal identity and solidarity.⁸² These practices provide both spiritual connection and sanctify everyday life, thereby strengthening social cohesion.⁸³ From a Bourdieu's habitus perspective, these intergenerational practices have shaped the religious inclinations of Indian Muslims. Participation in a Şūfī order thus became a key social factor reinforcing this habitus.

Riaz Hassan notes that during the Mughal era, nearly 2,000 tekkes and khanqahs operated in Delhi, which quickly integrated into local cultures and helped overcome societal distrust, creating new models of coexistence.⁸⁴ These institutions, situated at the intersection of the religious and social spheres, functioned as unifying forces in a fragmented society.

Dissatisfied with the rigid Hindu caste system, rural populations began turning to Islam through the influence of Sufi teachings. Especially with the arrival of Şūfis from the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen, the institutional spread of Islam into India's interior regions intensified through the construction of khānqāhs. During this period, mass conversions significantly increased the Muslim population, which had previously been a minority.⁸⁵

Şūfī orders played a vital role in reconstructing the social order of the Indian subcontinent. A major aspect of their impact was offering an alternative social structure that transcended caste-based discrimination and social exclusion.⁸⁶ Through spiritual leadership grounded in equality, Şūfī leaders provided a new platform for social belonging, producing a form of "counter-habitus" that opposed the caste hierarchy and created a framework in which different religious and cultural groups could coexist peacefully.

Conclusion

This study has examined, from a sociological perspective, the role of Şūfī orders in shaping popular Islam in the Indian subcontinent, their contributions to social harmony, and the methods through which they facilitated the spread of Islam. Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and religious capital have provided the theoretical foundation for this analysis. In light of the findings, three main conclusions can be drawn in relation to the research questions.

First, by developing an interpretation of Islam integrated with local languages and cultures, Şūfī orders removed religious life from the monopoly of the elite and disseminated

81 Kaya, "Bourdieu'nun Materyalist ve Siyasal Din Okuması Üzerine", 91.

82 Hafiza Sana Mansoor et al., "Healing the Spirit: The Social and Religious Impact of Sufi Shrine Practices in Pakistan", *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies* 8/2 (2025), 225-226.

83 Mansoor et al., "Healing the Spirit: The Social and Religious Impact of Sufi Shrine Practices in Pakistan", 223-226; Laleh-Naz, "The Scattered Legacies of Bengal's Sufis", *The Daily Star* (2023).

84 K.Pandey, "Syncretic Traditions and Peaceful Coexistence in India" (2017).

85 Ujampady, "Hindistan'da Sufi Hareketler", 12-13.

86 Anjum, "'Be Hell for Those Who Call Me Saiyyid': Social Stratification among the South Asian Muslims and the Sufi Worldview", 48-61.

it among the lower strata of society. This process created a lasting habitus in the religious perceptions and practices of the followers; Islam was experienced not as a religion of rigid rules, but as one of love, service, and tolerance.

Second, Şūfī leaders, using their charismatic authority, created spaces where different religious and caste groups could live together peacefully. Their messages of equality helped reduce caste divisions and supported social harmony. However, when they sometimes got involved with political authorities or had conflicts with other religious groups, it showed that religion could not be completely separated from politics.

Third, in spreading Islam, Şūfis employed peaceful preaching, exemplary conduct, social service, and spiritual self-discipline, while also using miracle and wonder narratives to reinforce their charisma as a form of religious capital. As time passed, this capital was transferred into institutional structures; although charisma became routinized, the emergence of new leaders ensured the continued vitality of the movement.

Overall, Şūfī orders sustained their presence in the region by striking a balance between charismatic and traditional forms of religious authority. In Weberian terms, while charisma dominated the early generations, it eventually became routinized and institutionalized. However, in the case of Sufism, this routinization did not degenerate into bureaucratic stagnation. Instead, new charismatic figures continued to emerge, revitalizing the movement within their historical contexts.

All these conclusions support the general assessment that Şūfī orders were central actors in the socialization of Islam in the Indian subcontinent. They played a vital role in embedding Islam into daily life and the hearts of the people. Sufism left a profound imprint on key processes such as the formation of Popular Islam, the development of a culture of coexistence, and the spread of the religion. Behind this impact lies not only the principles of love, tolerance, service, and spirituality adopted by the orders, but also the charismatic leadership emphasized by Weber and the accumulation of symbolic capital described by Bourdieu.

Through these mechanisms, Şūfī orders transformed religious authority into social capital, offering not only spiritual guidance but also establishing networks of social solidarity. Within the methodological and scope limitations of this study, it can be concluded that Şūfī orders did not merely shape the content of Popular Islam, but also its very form, as they intertwined deeply with local cultures. This contributed to the mass adoption of Islam not through elite transmission but through the agency of the lower strata of society.

The research has shown that Şūfī orders helped construct a new social network centered on guidance (irshād) and service (khidmat), which stood in contrast to caste-based exclusion. Within this framework, Şūfī orders created a space of alternative social capital and became essential to religious and social transformation in the region.

This study focused on the major Şūfī orders (Chishtiyya, Suhrawardiyya, Qādiriyya, and Naqshbandiyya) while smaller or heterodox groups were not examined in detail. Likewise, the British colonial era (post-1857) and the modern period were excluded. However, these later periods witnessed Şūfī orders developing strategies of either resistance or adaptation

in response to missionary activities, Western educational models, and the formation of the nation-state. These gaps in our view, must be addressed in future research to fully comprehend the evolution of Sufism in the subcontinent.

Finally, because modern religious movements and politicized forms of Sufism were not included in the scope of this study, the conclusions are limited to the classical period and its social functions. Therefore, how the historical roles of Şūfī orders in promoting social peace, challenging caste systems, and integrating with local cultures are reflected in the modern era should be explored in future research. More specific studies such as monographic analyses of individual orders, the influence of Sufism on literature, or the role of female Şūfī saints could deepen the framework presented here. In summary, without understanding Sufism and its orders, it is not possible to fully comprehend the history and society of Islam in the Indian subcontinent.

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