



## International Journal of Social Sciences

ISSN: 2587-2591

DOI Number: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30830/tobider.sayi.5.3>

Volume 3/1 Spring

2019 p. 33-38

SAİDA'S SPIRITUAL EXPERIMENT: TASAVVUF (MYSTICISM)

AS THE MAIN KEY TO A MUSLIM IDENTITY

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### ABSTRACT

A human history is interesting with its experiments. This makes one think deep and take a pen to wrap that practice into the paper. This article is a conclusion of the spiritual life practice of Saida (me), who was born in the times of the Soviet Union, where the religious life was banned. Did an atheist system in the Soviet Union ban the way to God of people? What is that feeling which seeks the way to God? What is the Tasavvuf (Mysticism)? What is the spirituality? In order to respond to these questions, a spiritual practice of Saida, as well as Islamic Mysticism (Sufism), were conducted to examine.

**Keywords:** Mysticism, Spirit, Sufism, Tasavvuf

### 1. General Thoughts

The Soviet Union (The Union Of Soviet Socialist Republics-USSR) was a socialist federation in Eurasia in 1922-91 (O'zbekiston milliy ens., 2000-2005). Kirghiz SSR was one the USSR countries. After collapsing of the Soviet Union, Kirghizia became the independent country in 1991 (O'zbekiston milliy ens., 2000-2005). The Communist system

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has brought an Atheist regime which extremely banned the religious lives of people in the USSR. People were forbidden to practice their religious traditions. However, that condition did not make them forget their religious lifestyles. There are too many facts which prove it. And Tasavvuf is one of the aspects by which Muslim people of the Soviet Union had kept their religious tradition at atheistic regime times. It is not a secret that religion is one of the most important substances of a human being in his/her historical existence progress. One may live without an arm, one may live without an eye, but religion, being the source of the direction of a spirit to God, cannot be banned by a human spirit. This practice was lived by post-Soviet people. It is observed a religious reawakening in those people when they reached their independence<sup>2</sup>.

Islam in Central Asia and in the Caucasus has been under Communist rule since 1920, a long and unique experience, representing an attempt half a century long by a powerful administrative machine to destroy Islam completely as a religion, culture and way of life. Today, by a strange but logical paradox, in spite of, or because of, this official ideology of militant atheism, Sufism in the USSR appears more dynamic than sixty years ago and its probably stronger than in any other Muslim country (Chantal Lemerrier, 2007). Central Asia is considered to be a centre of Sufism. Sufism has played a significant role in fighting against Tsars of Russia and Soviet colonization. Here, Sufis and their different orders are the main religious sources. It is the common belief that in Sufism mundane activities such as politics, involvement in state business and fighting are abhorred and avoided but the history of Sufism in Central Asia tells the other story. Different Sufi orders came forward to safeguard Islam and interests of the Muslims. They not only fought for the Muslim cause but also took active part in the indigenous politics (Farhat Alvi).

## **2. Tasavvuf (Mysticism/Sufism)**

Before to explain about *Tasavvuf* it is logical to clarify about *Mysticism* because it holds a comprehensive, and deep meaning as well as *Tasavvuf*; *Mysticism* is that point of view which claims as its basis an intimate knowledge of the one source and substratum of all existence, a knowledge, which is obtained through a revelatory experience during a rare moment of clarity in contemplation. Those who claim to have actually experienced this direct revelation constitute an elite tradition, which transcends the boundary lines of individual religions, cultures, and languages, and which has existed, uninterrupted, since the beginning of time (S. Abhayananda, 2012). *Mysticism* is a very elusive concept. It covers an extremely numerous and diverse class of phenomena. First of all, we note that *mysticism* is a kind of religious life. Basically, *Mysticism* is not a teaching, nor faith or conventional

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<sup>2</sup> Religious reawakening in the post-Soviet countries did not seem to be in a positive way always, it has been seen as negative as well as positive. However, my article includes a positive perspective.

sense of the word, but it is an inner experience. In this case, the path of mystical life is quite rightly called the path of an experienced knowledge to God (P. M. Minin, 2017). Tasavvuf (Mysticism/Sufism) is a divine source. Tasavvuf in its basic is teaching divine wisdom to students by the teachers<sup>3</sup> (Hayrani Altıntaş, 1988). Sufism, Taşawwuf, which is the esoteric or inward (bāṭin) aspect of Islam, is to be distinguished from exoteric or “external” (zāhir) Islam just as direct contemplation of spiritual or divine realities is distinguishable from the fulfilling of the laws which translate them in the individual order in connection with the conditions of a particular phase of humanity (Titus Burckhardt, 2008). Islamic sufism emerged in the Arabian geography in the VIIIth century. Especially, being internal with the social and spiritual life of the Eastern countries, it has greatly influenced to their education and culture (Mahmad Hasaniy, 2003; Mairamkan Isabaeva, 2017). Sufis took the main role in Islamisation of people in the history. Because they fulfilled all the religious worships of Islam (Zamira Ahmedova, 2006).

And here we touch a spirituality; Spirituality involves the recognition of a feeling or sense or belief that there is something greater than myself, something more to being human than sensory experience, and that the greater whole of which we are part is cosmic or divine in nature. Spirituality means knowing that our lives have significance in a context beyond a mundane everyday existence at the level of biological needs that drive selfishness and aggression. It means knowing that we are a significant part of a purposeful unfolding of Life in our universe (Maya Spencer, 2012).

### 3. Saida’s Spiritual Experiment

Saida was born in the South Osh region of the republic of Kirghizia in the 80s. She was born in the family of government employees. Saida had no a chance to grow up in the hands of her grandparents because the only person whom she saw as a grandparent has died when Saida was 5. Saida grew up in the hands of her parents, kindergartens, and a school.

When Saida was born, it was continuing the Soviet Socialist regime where the religious practice for people or anything regarding religion was banned. However, Azan (a Muslim call for praying) was read for Saida in her babyhood times.<sup>4</sup> Saida has spent her early childhood mostly in the kindergarten. She has started to study at school at her 6. As well as a modern busyness, Saida’s parents let her to learn a national embroidery when the girl reached to 10-11 years old. These times of Saida are equal to the collapse of the Soviet Union which means, that the Unions of the Soviet Republic gain their independence and

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<sup>3</sup> *Usta (A Teacher) va Shogird (and a Student) –Uzbek; Usta (A Teacher) ve Çırak (and a Student) – Turkish.*

<sup>4</sup> Each newborn Muslim baby is brought to Mullah (a Muslim learned in Islamic theology and sacred law), and the Mullah reads Azan (Prayer) for a newborn baby.

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religious freedom arises. Kirghizia was one of the independent countries of Central Asia anymore.

Studying together with school friends and learning the new things from the environment, Saida has started to learn reading the Qur'an at Mullah's house together with her girlfriends. They all were wearing *lozim* (a special trouser for women under dress), and a scarf tied behind their neck. *Mahalla* culture (a district, especially one forming a community within a town or city) was dominant in the village where Saida lived. This means, that people were affected by each other quickly, in this way children too. The Mullah, usually, taught the young girls a good and polite manner and the Arabic letters. After some practices, girls began to read the Qur'an step by step. Thus Saida has started her way to learn the Qur'an.

Saida was interested in God since her childhood. Her spiritual feeling, thinking, and embracing the wisdom of God let her think deep and learn the aspects of religion. The second step for Saida in her spiritual way was going to the *Otincha* (the woman who teaches the Qur'an – look: Yaşar Bedirhan, Saida Saipova, 2018). Her teacher (Otincha) began teaching her the old Uzbek letters which usually called *Eskicha Yozuv* (the old type of the Uzbek writing which is similar with the Ottoman letter style). They together used the book which was brought by Saida's father from Uzbekistan. A colorful book included the pictures of the animals and their names in the old Uzbek letters. When the book was finished, the teacher has started to offer Saida reading the Qur'an. That procedure did not last long because the teacher has started to offer the new profession for her student, that is to say, a national embroidery *Popop/Suzani*<sup>5</sup> (the national embroidery which made by the machine or hands). As well as learning *Popop*, Saida was offered with pleasant manners from her teacher.

At her 18 years old Saida has gained the Faculty of Divinity being a freshman at the University. This journey awarded her many and colorful chances like going to Turkey, studying there as a guest student, learning religion, and Islamic subjects. Saida had a chance to be in many religious places, like *the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, and the tomb of Rumi* (and many others). Saida watched spiritual, religious practices of the Muslims of Russia, when she was translating the documentary *Muslims of Russia* ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), 2016). Most of Islamic religious practices and lifestyles of Muslims of Russia since the time of Communism till today was same as Saida has expected. For example, a man explains banning of Islam during the Communism ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), 2016). On the other hand, a man explains about national professions and their relationship to the religion, and their role in maintaining Islam during the Communism ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), 2016).

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about *Suzani* look: <https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/uzbek-suzani-1177497>.

Being a religious scholar, Saida is a modern girl. She prefers to wear usual trousers and a t-shirt outside. One day, in the street, an old woman greeted Saida: *Assalamu alaykum!*, Saida answered: *Va alaykumussalam, assalamu alaykum!* And one day, a man came out from the mosque, and greeted Saida: *Assalamu alaykum!*, Saida answered: *Va alaykumussalam, assalamu alaykum!*

The spiritual practice of Saida never comes to the end like the spiritual practices of most of the people of the Universe. A human spirit loves, misses, and struggles for the Supreme, inner peace, and tranquility always.

#### 4. Conclusion

A human spirit always lives striving for the Supreme Being. It is not in one's hand to limit the other's spiritual way to God, to Wisdom. A human spirit feels well thinking about Creator. The way of thanking God is praying for Him, begging from Him. *Tasavvuf* is the way of a spirit to God and wisdom. *Tasavvuf* keeps a person alive. *Tasavvuf* is the way of the human to God. *Tasavvuf* is the direction of religion, of Islam. *Tasavvuf* is the main key to a Muslim identity.

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