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ISL4801

Study of Tasawwuf

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VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY OF PAKISTAN

ISL4801

Study of Tasawwuf

STUDY HANDOUT

Tasawwuf (Sufism) is the inward, spiritual dimension of Islam - the science of purifying the heart and attaining closeness to Allah. This handout covers its meaning and origins, Quranic and Prophetic basis, early sufis, the great silsilas, core concepts like tawakkul, fana and baqa, sufi literature and its role in South Asia, with key terms and exam pointers. 

Compiled as a structured study resource for VU students.

Covers the key topics, definitions, concepts and exam pointers of the course.

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Unit 1: Tasawwuf: Meaning and Origin

Learning Objectives

- Define tasawwuf and explain its subject matter
- Trace the origin of the word 'sufi'
- Explain tasawwuf's place within Islam: Shariah, Tariqah, Haqiqah
- Distinguish authentic tasawwuf from deviations

Tasawwuf (Sufism) is the science of purifying the heart (tazkiyat al-qalb) from blameworthy traits - pride, envy, greed - and adorning it with praiseworthy ones - sincerity, humility, love of Allah. Its goal is qurb (nearness to Allah) and ihsan - worshipping Allah as though you see Him. It is Islam's inward dimension, as fiqh is its outward one.

The word's origin is debated: from suf (wool - the coarse woolen cloak of early ascetics), from safa (purity), from suffah (the poor Companions who lived on the Prophet's mosque platform, devoted to worship), or from Greek sophia (wisdom - a minority view). The wool (suf) derivation is most widely accepted.

The classic schema: Shariah (the law - outward observance), Tariqah (the path - spiritual discipline under a guide), Haqiqah (the reality - experiential knowledge of Allah), and Ma'rifah (gnosis). They are stages, not rivals: Tariqah without Shariah is misguidance; Shariah without inward life is dry formalism.

Authentic tasawwuf is bound by Quran and Sunnah - every experience is weighed against the Shariah. Deviations condemned by scholars: abandoning obligations claiming 'arrival', ecstatic utterances taken as doctrine (shatahat), saint-worship, and innovations contradicting the Sunnah. The criterion is always the Prophet's example.

Key Terms

Tasawwuf	Science of heart-purification and attaining nearness to Allah.
Tazkiyat al-qalb	Purification of the heart; tasawwuf's core work.
Shariah / Tariqah / Haqiqah	Law / spiritual path / experiential reality - stages of the journey.
Suf (wool)	Most accepted root of 'sufi' - the ascetics' woolen cloak.
Shatahat	Ecstatic utterances; not taken as doctrine.

Example - inward/outward: Two people pray identically outwardly; the sufi's concern is the prayer's inward state - presence of heart (hudur), humility (khushu') - the dimension tasawwuf cultivates.

Example - criterion: A claimant to sainthood abandons Friday prayer saying he is 'beyond ritual' - judged by the Shariah criterion, this is deviation, not spirituality.

Summary

- ✓ Tasawwuf = purifying the heart to attain nearness to Allah (ihsan in practice).
- ✓ 'Sufi' most likely from suf (wool); stages: Shariah -> Tariqah -> Haqiqah/Ma'rifah.
- ✓ Authentic tasawwuf never contradicts Quran and Sunnah.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Define tasawwuf and state its goal.
- ★ Discuss the possible origins of the word 'sufi'.
- ★ Explain Shariah, Tariqah and Haqiqah and their relationship.

Unit 2: Quranic and Prophetic Basis of Tasawwuf

Learning Objectives

- Cite Quranic verses foundational to tasawwuf
- Cite ahadith foundational to tasawwuf
- Explain zuhd (asceticism) in the Prophetic example
- Show that tasawwuf is rooted in revelation, not foreign import

Tasawwuf claims Quranic roots: 'He who purifies it (the soul) succeeds' (Qad aflaha man zakkaha) - the mission statement of tazkiyah. 'Remember Me, I will remember you' - the basis of dhikr. 'Those who strive in Us, We guide them to Our paths' - spiritual striving (mujahadah). The Quran's praise of the God-fearing, the patient, the grateful is tasawwuf's character curriculum.

Prophetic basis: the Hadith of Ihsan ('worship Allah as though you see Him') is tasawwuf's charter. 'Actions are by intentions' founds sincerity. The Prophet's own life - night prayers till his feet swelled, weeping in supplication, detachment from wealth - is the lived model of zuhd. Aisha reported: his character was the Quran.

Zuhd (asceticism/detachment) is not world-rejection but heart-detachment: using the world without being enslaved by it. The Prophet said: 'Be in this world as a stranger or a traveler' - engage, but hold lightly. The Companions' simplicity (Umar's patched cloak as caliph) modeled it.

This revelatory root answers the claim that tasawwuf is a foreign (Greek/Indian/Christian) import: while sufis later used philosophical vocabulary, the core - purification, dhikr, love, detachment - is Quranic and Prophetic. Foreign parallels are either coincidence or later coloring, not the foundation.

Key Terms

Tazkiyah	Purification of the soul; Quranic mandate (Qad aflaha man zakkaha).
Dhikr	Remembrance of Allah; the central sufi practice.
Mujahadah	Spiritual striving against the lower self.

Zuhd	Detachment: using the world without being enslaved by it.
Ihsan	Excellence in worship as though seeing Allah; tasawwuf's charter.

Example - dhikr: The Quranic 'remember Me, I will remember you' becomes the sufi's daily litany (wird) - morning and evening remembrances, the heart's constant occupation. 

Example - zuhd: A wealthy merchant who earns lawfully, spends generously, and whose heart is undisturbed by profit or loss practices zuhd better than a poor man consumed by envy.

Summary

- ✓ Quranic basis: purification verses, dhikr, striving, God-conscious character.
- ✓ Prophetic basis: Ihsan hadith, intentions, the Prophet's own detachment.
- ✓ Zuhd = heart-detachment, not world-rejection; tasawwuf is revelation-rooted.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Cite three Quranic verses foundational to tasawwuf and explain each.
- ★ How do the hadith of Ihsan and of intentions ground tasawwuf?
- ★ Define zuhd and distinguish it from world-rejection.

Unit 3: Early Sufis and the Formative Period

Learning Objectives

- Name key early sufis and their contributions
- Describe Hasan al-Basri's role
- Explain Rabia al-Adawiyya's doctrine of divine love
- Trace the shift from individual asceticism to organized orders

The formative period (1st-3rd centuries AH) was individual asceticism before organized orders. Hasan al-Basri (d. 110 AH) - the great preacher of Basra - warned against worldliness with unmatched eloquence; his sermons on death, the heart and sincerity shaped all later tasawwuf. He represents the ascetic-moral phase.

Rabia al-Adawiyya (d. 185 AH) of Basra introduced divine love (ishq/mahabbah) as the motive: she worshipped not from fear of Hell or hope of Paradise but from love of Allah alone - 'O Allah, if I worship You for Paradise, exclude me from it.' Her love-mysticism balanced the earlier fear-based asceticism and became tasawwuf's emotional core.

Others: Dhu al-Nun al-Misri (d. 246 AH) - systematized ma'rifah (gnosis); Bayazid Bastami (d. 261 AH) - ecstatic utterances (shatahat) like 'Glory be to me' (interpreted as annihilation of self, not heresy, by defenders); Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 298 AH) - the 'sober' school: tasawwuf strictly within Shariah, earning him the title 'Sayyid al-Ta'ifah'

(master of the group).

By the 4th-5th centuries, manuals systematized the science: Qushayri's Risalah, Hujwiri's Kashf al-Mahjub (the oldest Persian sufi manual - highly relevant for South Asia), Ghazali's Ihya Ulum al-Din - which reconciled tasawwuf with orthodox theology and law, making it mainstream.

Key Terms

Hasan al-Basri	d. 110 AH; ascetic-moral preaching; formative influence.
Rabia al-Adawiyya	d. 185 AH; divine love as worship's motive.
Junayd al-Baghdadi	'Sober' school; tasawwuf within Shariah.
Shatahat	Ecstatic utterances (e.g. Bayazid's); controversial.
Kashf al-Mahjub	Hujwiri's Persian manual; foundational for South Asian tasawwuf.

Example - Rabia's prayer: 'O Allah, if I worship You from fear of Hell, burn me in it; if from hope of Paradise, exclude me; but if for Yourself alone, do not withhold Your eternal beauty.'

Example - Junayd's sobriety: Asked about a 'saint' who walked on water: 'Sticks and straws float too' - miracles don't prove sanctity; Shariah-compliance does.

Summary

- ✓ Hasan al-Basri: ascetic preaching; Rabia: divine love; Junayd: sober Shariah-bound tasawwuf.
- ✓ Dhu al-Nun systematized gnosis; Bayazid represents ecstatic expression.
- ✓ Manuals (Qushayri, Hujwiri, Ghazali) made tasawwuf a systematic science.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Describe the contributions of Hasan al-Basri and Rabia al-Adawiyya.
- ★ Contrast Bayazid's and Junayd's approaches to tasawwuf.
- ★ Name three classical sufi manuals and their significance.

Unit 4: The Great Silsilas (Sufi Orders)

Learning Objectives

- Explain what a silsila is: shaykh, murid, bay'ah
- Describe the Qadiriyyah, Chishtiyyah, Suhrawardiyyah, Naqshbandiyyah
- Compare the orders' distinctive practices and attitudes
- Explain the orders' role in spreading Islam

From the 6th century AH, tasawwuf organized into silsilas (orders/chains) - spiritual lineages traced to the Prophet through Ali or Abu Bakr. Structure: the shaykh/murshid (guide), the murid (disciple), bay'ah (pledge of allegiance), the khanqah (lodge) as training center, and a distinctive wird (litany) and method.

Qadiriyyah - Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 561 AH, Baghdad): the oldest widespread order; sober, Shariah-centered; Ghawth al-A'zam (the great helper) - immensely venerated across the Muslim world including South Asia.

Chishtiyyah - Mu'in al-Din Chishti (d. 633 AH, Ajmer): love, tolerance, service to humanity; sama' (spiritual music) as a practice; distance from rulers; open kitchens (langar) feeding all - the order that most deeply Indianized and spread Islam in South Asia (Nizam al-Din Awliya of Delhi, Baba Farid of Pakpattan).

Suhrawardiyyah - Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi (d. 632 AH, Baghdad): more engaged with politics and rulers (Baha al-Din Zakariya of Multan); structured khanqah discipline. Naqshbandiyyah - Baha al-Din Naqshband (d. 791 AH, Bukhara): silent dhikr (not vocal), strict Shariah observance, political engagement (Ahmad Sirhindi's reform against Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi; Shah Waliullah's lineage).

The orders were Islam's great missionaries: sufis carried the faith to Central Asia, India, Africa and Southeast Asia - often ahead of armies, winning hearts through character, service and spiritual power rather than conquest.

Key Terms

Silsila	Spiritual lineage/order; chain of transmission to the Prophet.
Murshid / Murid	Spiritual guide / disciple.
Bay'ah	Pledge of allegiance to the shaykh.
Khanqah	Sufi lodge; center of training and service.
Sama'	Spiritual audition/music (Chishti practice).

Example - Chishti service: Baba Farid's khanqah at Pakpattan fed travelers free (langar) - service as worship drew thousands to Islam in Punjab.

Example - Naqshbandi reform: Ahmad Sirhindi (Mujaddid Alf Thani) challenged Akbar's religious innovations from within the Naqshbandi tradition - tasawwuf as orthodoxy's guardian.

Summary

- ✓ Silsilas: lineages with shaykh, murid, bay'ah, khanqah, wird.
- ✓ Qadiri (sober, Jilani), Chishti (love/service, Ajmer-Delhi), Suhrawardi (Multan), Naqshbandi (silent dhikr, reform).
- ✓ Orders were the primary vehicle spreading Islam across Asia and Africa.

Exam Pointers

- ★ What is a silsila? Explain its key elements.

- ★ Compare the Chishtiyyah and Naqshbandiyyah orders.
- ★ How did sufi orders contribute to the spread of Islam?

Unit 5: Core Concepts I: Tawba, Zuhd, Tawakkul, Sabr

Learning Objectives

- Explain the stations (maqamat): tawba, zuhd, tawakkul, sabr, shukr
- Distinguish maqam (station) from hal (state)
- Apply these concepts to daily life
- Quote supporting texts for each

Sufis map the journey as maqamat (stations - earned by effort, permanent) and ahwal (states - gifts from Allah, fleeting). The classic stations: tawba (repentance - the first station: remorse, abandoning sin, resolving never to return), wara' (scrupulousness), zuhd (detachment), faqr (spiritual poverty - needing only Allah), sabr (patience), tawakkul (trust), rida (contentment with divine decree).

Tawakkul (trust in Allah) is often misunderstood as abandoning means: the Prophet's own formula - 'Tie your camel, then trust in Allah' - means take the means, trust the outcome. True tawakkul: the heart rests with Allah while the hands work. Its fruit is freedom from anxiety about provision.

Sabr (patience) has three forms: patience in obedience (persisting in worship), patience against disobedience (resisting temptation), and patience in trial (bearing hardship without complaint). Shukr (gratitude) - using blessings in obedience - is sabr's twin: the traveler alternates between them as life alternates between ease and hardship.

These are not monastic ideals but daily equipment: tawba for the sinner (everyone, daily), sabr for the student facing failure, tawakkul for the anxious, shukr for the blessed. Tasawwuf's genius is making theology livable.

Key Terms

Maqam / Hal	Station (earned, permanent) / state (gifted, fleeting).
Tawba	Repentance: remorse, abandonment, resolve - the first station.
Tawakkul	Trust in Allah with the means taken ('tie your camel').
Sabr / Shukr	Patience in trial and obedience / gratitude in blessing.

Example - tawakkul: A student prepares thoroughly for exams (tying the camel) then sleeps peacefully trusting Allah's decree - effort plus serenity, not anxiety or fatalism.

Example - sabr: Losing a job: sabr in trial (no despair, no haram shortcuts) + shukr for remaining blessings + tawakkul while job-hunting - the stations working together.

Summary

- ✓ Maqamat are earned stations; ahwal are gifted states.
- ✓ Tawba first; zuhd detaches; sabr endures; tawakkul trusts (with means taken); shukr thanks.
- ✓ These stations are daily-life equipment, not monastic theory.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Distinguish maqam from hal with examples.
- ★ Explain tawakkul and refute the 'abandon means' misunderstanding.
- ★ Describe the three forms of sabr.

Unit 6: Core Concepts II: Fana, Baqa, Ishq, Ma'rifah

Learning Objectives

- Explain fana and baqa
- Explain ishq (divine love) and its signs
- Explain ma'rifah (gnosis)
- Address controversies with scholarly balance

Fana (annihilation) is the passing-away of the ego/self-will in the consciousness of Allah: the traveler's own desires, pride and self-importance dissolve. Baqa (subsistence) follows: living on - but now by Allah, for Allah, with Allah. Fana without baqa is incomplete; the perfected return to serve creation (the Prophet's own pattern: retreat to Hira, return to guide).

Ishq (intense divine love) is tasawwuf's driving force after Rabia: love that makes obedience joyful, sacrifice sweet, and separation unbearable. Its signs: preferring Allah's pleasure over self, constant remembrance, love of solitude with the Beloved, grief at disobedience. Critics warn love-language can blur Creator/creature lines; defenders reply that authentic ishq increases Shariah observance - the lover hastens to please the Beloved.

Ma'rifah (gnosis) is experiential knowledge of Allah - beyond book-learning, tasted through purification and struggle. 'He who knows himself knows his Lord' - self-knowledge (of one's weakness and need) opens God-knowledge. It is not new doctrine (the creed is fixed) but new depth in the same truths.

Controversies handled with balance: wahdat al-wujud (Ibn Arabi's 'unity of being') - interpreted by followers as unity of witness (nothing truly real but Allah), not pantheism; scholars differ, and students should know both the doctrine and the debate. The safe rule: judge all claims by Quran, Sunnah and the sober masters (Junayd, Ghazali).

Key Terms

Fana / Baqa	Annihilation of ego / subsistence through Allah.

Ishq	Intense divine love; tasawwuf's motive force.
Ma'rifah	Experiential gnosis of Allah; depth beyond book-knowledge.
Wahdat al-wujud	Ibn Arabi's unity of being; debated, not pantheism per defenders.

Example - fana/baqa: A philanthropist who gives millions but feels no pride, seeing the wealth as Allah's and himself as its distributor - ego annihilated (fana), service subsisting (baqa).

Example - ishq's sign: Waking for tahajjud joyfully, not dutifully - love making worship sweet rather than burdensome.

Summary

- ✓ Fana: ego's passing; baqa: living through Allah - then returning to serve.
- ✓ Ishq makes obedience joyful; ma'rifah is tasted, not just learned.
- ✓ Judge mystical claims by Quran, Sunnah and the sober masters.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Explain fana and baqa and their relationship.
- ★ What is ishq? Give three of its signs.
- ★ How should students approach controversial doctrines like wahdat al-wujud?

Unit 7: Sufi Literature

Learning Objectives

- Name the major sufi literary works and authors
- Explain Rumi's Mathnawi and its themes
- Describe the role of poetry in tasawwuf
- Note Urdu/Persian sufi literature of South Asia

Sufis wrote the most beloved literature in Muslim languages. Arabic: Qushayri's Risalah, Ghazali's Ihya, Ibn Arabi's Fusus. Persian (the great sufi tongue): Rumi's Mathnawi ('the Quran in Persian' - 26,000 verses of stories teaching divine love), Attar's Conference of the Birds (the soul's journey as birds seeking the Simurgh), Sa'di's Gulistan/Bustan (ethics in anecdote), Hafiz's Divan (love lyrics with layered meanings), Jami's works.

Rumi's Mathnawi teaches through tales: the merchant and the parrot (the soul caged in the body), Moses and the shepherd (sincerity over form), the elephant in the dark (partial truths). Its method: story -> bewilderment -> insight. Themes: love as the cosmic force, death as union, the shaykh as guide, the ego as the great idol.

Why poetry? Prose states; poetry moves. Love, longing and ecstasy resist definitions - metaphor carries what logic cannot. Sama' (listening to poetry/music) was the Chishtis' vehicle for spiritual arousal. Even critics of sama' acknowledged poetry's power - hence

the debate was about the means, not the verses.

South Asia: Amir Khusrau (Persian/Urdu, Nizam al-Din Awliya's disciple - qawwali's founder-figure), Baba Farid's Punjabi verses (in the Guru Granth Sahib), Shah Hussain, Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah (Punjabi kafis - divine love in folk idiom), Rahman Baba (Pashto), Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (Sindhi Risalo). Sufi poetry is South Asia's shared spiritual heritage across religions.

Key Terms

Mathnawi	Rumi's 26,000-verse Persian masterpiece; 'the Quran in Persian'.
Sama'	Spiritual listening (poetry/music); Chishti practice.
Kafi	Punjabi sufi verse form (Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain).
Risalo	Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's Sindhi sufi compendium.

Example - Rumi's parrot: A caged parrot feigns death to learn freedom - the soul must 'die' to the ego (fana) to fly free. One story teaches a whole doctrine.

Example - Bulleh Shah: 'Masjid dha de, mandir dha de, dha de jo kuchh dainda' - tear down what divides; the beloved is within - folk idiom carrying wahdat's fragrance.

Summary

- ✓ Sufi literature: Arabic manuals, Persian masterpieces (Rumi, Attar, Hafiz), South Asian folk classics.
- ✓ Poetry moves where prose states; stories teach doctrines.
- ✓ Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto sufi verse is the region's shared heritage.

Exam Pointers

- ★ Describe Rumi's Mathnawi: its method and three themes.
- ★ Why did sufis prefer poetry over prose?
- ★ Name four South Asian sufi poets with their languages.

Unit 8: Tasawwuf in South Asia and Today

Learning Objectives

- Explain tasawwuf's role in spreading Islam in South Asia
- Describe the shrine culture: urs, langar, qawwali
- Discuss contemporary issues: commercialization, reform
- Assess tasawwuf's relevance for modern Muslims

Islam came to South Asia largely through sufis: Mu'in al-Din Chishti (Ajmer), Baba Farid (Pakpattan), Baha al-Din Zakariya (Multan), Nizam al-Din Awliya (Delhi), Ali Hujwiri/Data

Ganj Bakhsh (Lahore). They converted through character, service and spiritual charisma - centuries before and beyond political power. Punjab, Sindh and Bengal - the Muslim-majority zones - are precisely the sufi zones.

Shrine culture grew around them: the urs (death-anniversary - 'wedding' with the Divine), qawwali (devotional music), langar (free kitchen), chadar offerings. At its best, the shrine is a center of remembrance, charity and intercommunal harmony; at its worst, a site of superstition, exploitation by custodians (sajjada-nashins), and un-Islamic practices - the reformers' legitimate target.

Contemporary debates: reformers (from Shah Waliullah to modern scholars) call for Quran-Sunnah purification of shrine practices; defenders distinguish the saints' teachings from later accretions. Commercialization - shrines as business, 'spiritual tourism' - and fake pirs exploiting the gullible are widely condemned across the spectrum. The state's Auqaf management is itself controversial.

Relevance today: in an age of materialism, anxiety and identity crisis, tasawwuf offers the inward life - dhikr for restless hearts ('in Allah's remembrance do hearts find rest'), ethics for public life, and a peaceful, pluralist Islamic idiom countering extremism. The need is for authentic, Shariah-bound tasawwuf - Junayd's, Ghazali's, not superstition's.

Key Terms

Urs	Saint's death-anniversary; 'wedding' with the Divine.
Langar / Qawwali	Free kitchen / devotional music of shrine culture.
Sajjada-nashin	Shrine custodian; often criticized for exploitation.
Data Ganj Bakhsh	Ali Hujwiri of Lahore; author of Kashf al-Mahjub.

Example - spread: Bengal's Muslims: converted largely by sufis' egalitarian message against caste hierarchy - character, not conquest.

Example - reform vs accretions: Baba Farid taught detachment and service; a later 'urs' featuring fortune-tellers at his shrine is accretion, not his teaching - the reformers' distinction.

Summary

- ✓ Sufis brought Islam to South Asia through character and service.
- ✓ Shrine culture: urs, qawwali, langar - beautiful at best, superstitious at worst.
- ✓ Need: authentic Shariah-bound tasawwuf; reject exploitation and fabrications.
- ✓ Tasawwuf answers modern materialism and anxiety with the inward life.

Exam Pointers

- ★ How did tasawwuf spread Islam in South Asia? Give three sufi names and regions.
- ★ Distinguish the saints' teachings from later shrine accretions.
- ★ Argue for tasawwuf's relevance to a modern Muslim student.