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A Critique Of Ibn Al-Jawzi's Discourse On Some Sufi Themes In His Talibisu Iblis

Yusuph Dauda Gambari, Karatu Fatiu

University of Ilorin Nigeria, University of Ilorin Nigeria

Email: yusuph.dg@unilorin.edu.ng, fatiukaratu1@gmail.com

Abstract

Sufism is shrouded with many polemics which keep thickened by the day. The gap between the anti and pro-Sufi scholars continues to widen with time. As the former scholars intensified efforts to discredit Sufism, the latter strengthened moves to consolidate it in Islam. One of the scholars both sides relied on in their discussions is Ibn Al-Jawzī. *Talbīs Iblīs*, which forms the kernel of discussions in this paper, is one of his works on Sufism. It is often said that the work is an attack on Sufism, but the Sufis denied this, stating that it is just an appraisal of different groups that make up Islam. The effort here is to critique various mystical themes in the work vis-à-vis Sufis' renditions to determine their level of correlation or otherwise. Historical and exegetical methods are adopted. The former availed the opportunity to dig into relevant historical facts, while the latter assisted in analyzing his submissions on Sufism. It is discovered that Ibn Al-Jawzī was not particular about Sufism, but all groups of Muslims identified how Iblīs deluded each. Also, he did not entirely condemn Sufism but considered some doctrines and practices strange therein. His submissions were guided by his little practice of Sufism and observations of Sufis of his time. The paper concluded that Ibn Al-Jawzī's effort is not different from Ahmad Ibn Hanbalī's among his precursors and Ibn Taymiyyah among his successors.

Keywords: *ʿAqīdah*, Iblīs, Ibn Al-Jawzī, Sufism, *Raqs*, *Zuhd*

Abstrak

Tasawuf diselimuti banyak polemik yang semakin hari semakin menebal. Kesenjangan antara ulama yang anti dan pro-Sufi terus melebar seiring berjalannya waktu. Ketika para ulama terdahulu mengintensifkan upaya untuk mendiskreditkan tasawuf, ulama tersebut memperkuat gerakan untuk mengkonsolidasikannya dalam Islam. Salah satu ulama yang diandalkan oleh kedua belah pihak dalam diskusi mereka adalah Ibnu Al-Jawzi. *Talbīs Iblīs* yang menjadi inti pembahasan dalam tulisan ini adalah salah satu karyanya yang bertemakan tasawuf. Seringkali dikatakan bahwa karya tersebut merupakan serangan terhadap tasawuf, namun para sufi membantahnya, dengan menyatakan bahwa itu hanyalah penilaian terhadap berbagai kelompok

yang membentuk Islam. Upaya yang dilakukan adalah dengan mengkritisi berbagai tema mistik dalam karya tersebut dengan penafsiran para sufi untuk mengetahui tingkat korelasinya atau tidak. Metode historis dan eksegetis diadopsi. Yang pertama memanfaatkan kesempatan untuk menggali fakta-fakta sejarah yang relevan, sedangkan yang kedua membantu menganalisis masukannya tentang tasawuf. Diketahui bahwa Ibnu Al-Jawzī tidak terlalu khusus mengenai tasawuf, namun semua kelompok Muslim mengidentifikasi bagaimana Iblis menipu masing-masing kelompok. Selain itu, ia tidak sepenuhnya mengutuk tasawuf tetapi menganggap beberapa doktrin dan praktiknya aneh. Pengajuannya dipandu oleh sedikit praktik tasawuf dan pengamatan para sufi pada masanya. Makalah ini menyimpulkan bahwa upaya Ibnu Al-Jawzī tidak berbeda dengan upaya Ahmad Ibnu Hanbalī di kalangan pendahulunya dan Ibnu Taimiyyah di kalangan penerusnya.

Kata Kunci: Aqīdah, Iblīs, Ibnu Al-Jawzī, Tasawuf, Raqs, Zuhd

Introduction

Ibn Al-Jawzī (d.597AH/1201CE) is one of the scholars of the past with significant influence on contemporary Islamic thought and discourse. His primary interest is *‘aqīdah* (tenet), but he was a significant reference in many areas of Islamic studies. He dabbled into many contentious issues in Islam, and Sufism is one of them. There is no novelty in the fact that controversies have been trailing Sufism among Muslim scholars. Ibn Al-Jawzī is one of the scholars with a vested interest in the nature and existence of Sufism due to raging polemics on it, possibly to determine the legality or otherwise of it in Islam. He wrote extensively on Sufism, and *Talbis Iblīs* is one of those works. The book reflects his reactions to the prevailing circumstances in his society, primarily to address various issues that generated controversies among scholars. The choice of this book, among

other works, is predicated on the relevance of the polemics therein, especially Sufism, to the contemporary descants on Sufism. Also, *Talbis Iblīs* is one of the major references in contemporary times, which appeared to be misinterpreted by many as an anti-Sufi work. This study, therefore, mines various Sufi-related courses compared to Sufi scholars' submissions to ascertain their appropriateness. It will go a long way in correcting and reducing misconceptions among Muslim scholars about Sufism.

Ibn Al-Jawzī's Profile

His full name is Abdu 'r-Rahmān ibn 'Aliyy Abi'l-Hasan ibn Muhammad, Abu'l Faraj ibn Al-Jawzī Al Qurayshī At-Taymī Al Bakrī Al-Baghdādī Al Hanbalī. He is popularly known as Ibn Al-Jawzī.¹ He was a preacher, a polymath, and an author of many works on Islamic sciences, including *Tafsīr*, *Hadīth*, *Fiqh*, Sufism, History and Medicine. He was also a Hanbalī by *Madhhab* and *Athariyyah* by *‘aqīdah* (creed). It could be inferred from the above that Ibn

Al-Jawzī belongs to Quraysh (the Prophet's clan) by genealogy through Abu Bakr, the closest friend of the Prophet and the first *Khalifah* of Islam. Ibn Al-Jawzī, his famous name, was inherited from his ninth great-grandfather. The actual year of his birth seems unknown with certainty, as some sources put it between 508A.H/1114CE and 510A.H/1116CE, some other ones suggest 511A.H/1117CE as the year.² Though preponderant evidence establishes the last as most appropriate.

Ibn Al-Jawzī grew up under his mother's and paternal aunt's care, losing his father tenderly. At six, he started his early education at the Abu al-Fadhil Ibn Nasir mosque in Baghdad. At a young age, he committed to the Qur'an to memory and learnt its various sciences, especially the art of recitation. He also studied *Fiqh*, *Hadith*, calligraphy and other aspects of Islam, all of which gave him the mastery of Islamic sciences. His dedication to learning and scholarship endeared him to many teachers from whom he learnt Islam. Ibn Al-Jawzī had many teachers, some of whom were women. He was taught *Hadith* by Abu al-Sa'adat al-Mutawakkil, who authorised him (*Ijāzah*) to transmit works from Al-Khatīb 'l-Baghdadī and Ibn Al-Husayn taught him *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad. Ibn Nasir taught him Shafi'i *fiqh* and Ash'arism, but he later converted to Hanbalism in

jurisprudence and *Athariyyah* in doctrine due to his convictions.

Ibn Al-Jawzī was both reputed and profound in erudition and prolific in writing. His works are voluminous, while his explanations, arguments and conclusions are painstakingly premised on sound grounds. He was blessed with a persuasive mind that made his preaching, which he started in his early days in the *Madrasah*, all-embracing, wielding socio-political and religious influences in Baghdad and other parts of the Muslim world. In the year 544AH/1149CE, Ibn Al-Jawzī was appointed by Ibn Hubayrah, a Hanbalī minister, to hold his sermons every Friday in the court of his palace, which was opened to the public. Also, *Khalifah* al-Mustanjid appointed him to deliver in the palace mosque, regularly attended by about 10,000 to 15,000 worshippers.³ Ibn Al-Jawzī used this opportunity to demonstrate his interest in *Sunnah* (tradition of the Prophet) and defend it against various forms of *Bid'ah* (innovation), fanaticism, Mu'tazilism, and Ash'arism.

Baghdad was regarded as the centre of Islamic scholarship and civilisation in his days. This is because the Islamic Golden Age, traditionally dated between the 8th and 14th centuries, was a period of cultural, economic, and scientific flourishing in the history of Islam, with Baghdad as the

coordinating centre. This period is traditionally understood to have begun during the reign of the Abbasid *Khalifah* Hārūn Ar-Rashīd (786 to 809 CE) with the inauguration of the House of Wisdom (*Baytul-Hikmah*) in Baghdad, the world's largest city by then, where Islamic scholars and polymaths from various parts of the world with different cultural backgrounds were mandated to gather and translate all classical works of Greek philosophers among others, into the Arabic language.⁴ This reveals the status of Baghdad in the early period as a citadel of knowledge.

One of the features of cosmopolitan cities is the proliferation of different ideas and ideologies that will affect the thoughts and deeds of the people. This was the state of Baghdad during the time of Ibn Al-Jawzī. It (Baghdad) was central to Islam in all ramifications, and it was from there that different ideologies, such as Khawarijism, Shi'ism, and Mu'tazilism, among others, spread across the Muslim land. It is essential to state that the recognised ideology by the leader of a place enjoys favour or superiority over others. Hence, the *Hanabilah* school of thought was mainly recognised during Ibn Al-Jawzī's time. As one of the advocates of this school, he was given an opportunity by *Khalifah* Al-Mustadhi to appraise various schools to harmonise or make *Hanabilah* the prime. This enlisted Ibn Al-Jawzī as one of

the most influential persons in Baghdad at that time.⁵

***Talbīs Iblīs* in Brief**

Scholars write with different motives, such as to express their opinions on a matter, expose a hidden fact about a concept, narrate past or predict future events, and some write to discuss ideological differences. The intent of Ibn Al-Jawzī to write *Talbīs Iblīs* is stated in the introductory aspect of the work, where he discloses that the reason for the work is to caution people against the prevalent misconceptions in the society, which he was afraid of. This is to be achieved by exposing their inherent dangers (those misconceptions) and highlighting how Muslims have fallen and are still falling into those errors.⁶ Therefore, he intends to liberate people from the shackles of erroneous beliefs and misapplication of Islamic rules, for which the devil is mainly responsible.

Therefore, *Talbīs Iblīs* is an exposition of ideological issues prevalent in the days of Ibn Al-Jawzī in Baghdad. He was a noted polemicist who often refuted the works of authors he considered heretical innovators in the religion. His criticisms of various schools of thought appeared most prominently in *Talbīs Iblīs* as he vehemently critiqued not only the groups that he considered as deviants, like Mutazilites and

Kharijites, but he also demonstrated his non-tolerance to schools of thought he believed had gone strayed from the right path.⁷ He used *Talbīs Iblīs* to examine scholars of his immediate society, including the Sufis, *Fuqahā'u*, the leaders and the led, among others and highlight how each of them had been deluded and accepted the whisperings and misguidance of the devil, hence the title of this work.

The contents and significant themes of *Talbīs Iblīs* are geared towards exposing how Shaytān deceives man. Ibn Al-Jawzī organises the information in the work based on the content of discussions. Hence, the work contains fourteen chapters, which start with understanding his intent by discussing the importance of adherence to the *Sunnah* and *Jamā'ah* while condemning *Bid'ah* (innovation) and *Mubtadi'ūn* (innovators). He warns the masses of the devil's seductions and cunningness while examining the meaning of *Talbīs* (deception) and its consequences. Having aroused the readers' consciousness about the devil and his deceptions, he highlighted Shatanic avenues through which he deceives man and those vulnerable to his deception. They include scholars, rulers, worshippers, ascetics, Sufis, and laymen.

The themes of *Talbīs Iblīs* are broadly three and are relatively interdependent. These include Steadfastness

in Islam, the deceptive nature of Iblīs, and man's vulnerability to deceptions. It can be submitted that Shaytān can deceive a person about what he engages in, except if one is better equipped with Islamic knowledge and a high level of sincerity. Also, man is naturally subjective and can be influenced by different things around him. So, to be deceived by Shaytān is easier, especially when he has made that primordial promise to make man derailed from the right path (Q.7:16 & 15:39).

Sufism in the Discourse of Ibn Al-Jawzī

It was gathered that Ibn Al-Jawzī practised Sufism in his days as a youth and was influenced by Abū Tālibu Al-Makkī's work on the subject. He had a strange experience as a Sufi novice, which made him abandon it.⁸ He was also confused about the relationship between Sufism and *Shar'ah*, culminating in his criticism of Sufism because he thought the former was given premium over the latter.⁹ His *Hanābilah* affiliation strengthened this because many scholars of the school were avowed enemies of Sufism. There are, however, some of them that are prominent Sufis, like Shaykh Abdul-Qādir Al-Jaylānī, whom he (Ibn Al-Jawzī) interacted with in his days.¹⁰ It should be noted that his criticism of Sufism was made during the early stage of his career. Nevertheless, later in life, when he grasped Sufism correctly, he wrote different works

on it, such as *Ṣifatu 'ṣ-Ṣafwah*, which is a biographical work on some prominent Sufis, wherein many of them (Sufis) were praised. He also later engaged in some practices, like *dhikr* (recollection), considered mystical. More so, he used *Talbīs Iblīs* to gauge different aspects of Islam, Sufism inclusive, to elicit their grey areas. As stated earlier in this study, Sufism is one of the significant discourses of Ibn Al-Jawzī in *Talbīs Iblīs*, particularly chapter ten (10), with about thirty-two (32) sub-chapters covering different aspects of Sufism.

Origin and Emergence of Sufism

Discussing the origin of Sufism to determine its legitimacy or otherwise, Ibn Al-Jawzī submits that Sufism came as a nomenclature after the demise of the Prophet. He argues that people were only known as either Muslims or *Mu'minūn* (believers), among other names, which Sufi is none of them, throughout the lifetime of the Prophet.¹¹ He explains further that affinity to Sufism metamorphosed from individuals who used to refer to themselves as *Zuhhād* (ascetics) and *ʿUbbād* (worshippers) as a result of their excessive indulgence in the acts of *ʿIbādah* and their detachment from worldliness. He submits that they were regarded as Sufis because they took after a pre-Islamic practice in the Arabian Peninsula where some individuals, known as Sufis, dedicated themselves to excessive

worship of God inside *Ka'abah*. Therefore, he identifies Al-Ghawth ibn Murr as one of the progenies of those who imitated them; hence, he was also popularly referred to as a Sufi.

Ibn Al-Jawzī continues that some Sufi scholars have identified *Aṣḥabu 'ṣ-Ṣuffah*, the pious Companions of the Prophet who lived inside his mosque in Madinah, as the possible source of Sufism. He, therefore, argues against it from a grammatical perspective, stating that there is no etymological correlation between Sufi and *Ṣuffah*.¹² The Companions of the Bench were poor individuals whom the Prophet sheltered inside his mosque because they lacked basics that could cater for their needs. Imam Al-Qurṭubī, in his *Tafsīr*, submits that Qur'ān 2:273 refers to them.¹³ They lived on charity from people and sometimes went to the Prophet's house for food.¹⁴ Their number was said to be above seventy (70), and Abu-Hurayrah, Abu Dhar Al-Ghifār, Ka'ab, and Irbād ibn Sariyyah, among other Companions, were among them.¹⁵ As they lived inside the mosque, the Prophet used to attend to them and give them special treatment and spiritual training, as reported by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad*,¹⁶ though the report is rated as *ḍa'īf* (weak) by Al-Bānī.¹⁷

Ibn Al-Jawzī further acknowledges the emergence of Sufism before the second

generation of Muslims and confirms the righteousness of the early Sufis and the correctness of their practices, which, according to him, were said to be a spiritual exercise for soul mortification to purge vices and instil virtues in themselves through asceticism, patience, perseverance, sincerity and truthfulness among other practices that promote praiseworthiness and eschew blameworthiness, just as it is defined by Al-Junayd and quoted by him (Ibn Al-Jawzī). He also strengthens this with another quotation from Khafif, whose definition describes the Sufis as the seekers of the truth through the path of *Shar'ah*.¹⁸

A cursory examination of the above submissions of Ibn Al-Jawzī on the appearance of Sufism after the demise of the Prophet but before the second generation of Muslims reveals that they are not far from the truth. They are in tandem with the historical account of the emergence of Sufism as narrated by Ibn Khalidūn in his *Muqaddimah*. He submits that Sufism surfaced during this period as a result of politico-religious problems that engulfed the Muslims of the early community, especially among the Companions and their successors (*Salaf*), where some individuals were referred to as Sufis as a result of their aloofness from the whole imbroglio, but concentrated on *'Ibadah* (worship) while downplaying worldliness.¹⁹ Another major

factor for the emergence of Sufism after the demise of the Prophet was the expansion of Islamic territories to different places outside Makkah and Madinah. It brought about cultural contacts, which led to the fusion of different sorts. One of the effects thereof is the birth of new thoughts and ideas among the Muslims, hence the emergence of different groups and sects, Sufism and Salafism inclusive, for different purposes.

Furthermore, the reference to Al-Ghawth ibn Murr by Ibn Al-Jawzī on the origin of Sufism may not stand because Sufis do not attribute themselves or their practices to any individual or practice in the *Jabiliyyah* days. It is not found in their works but in the works of non-Sufis, probably their detractors. The account of Ibn Hishām,²⁰ on Šūfah and Al-Ghawth ibn Murr, depicts them as individuals dedicated to the service of *Ka'abah* during the *Jabiliyyah* period. It does not identify them with a particular form of worship that the Sufis imitate. As pointed out by Ibn Khalidūn, among others, Sufism grew in the days of *Tabiūn*, and they have the likes of Uways Al-Qarnī (d.37AH), Hassan Al-Basrī (d.110AH) and Sufyānu't-Thawri (d.161AH)²¹ Among other students of Companions as their masters the earlier works on Sufism are replete with anecdotes. These are individuals who lived during the period of *Salaf*.

Also, a careful look at the submission and description of *Ablu's-Suffab* by Ibn Al-Jawzī reveals that attributing Sufism to them is in line with the submissions of Sufis like Kalabadhi²² among other Sufi writers and scholars, rejecting the link between the two on grammatical grounds is inappropriate. Imam Al-Hākim in his *Al-Mustadrak*²³ and Ibn Hajar Al-Haythamī in his *Al-Fatāwā 'l-Hadīthiyyah*²⁴ have made similar submissions that Sufism is fashioned after the spiritual activities of the *Ablu's-Suffab*, known for *Zuhd* practice, which metamorphosed into Sufism. The description of Al-Hākim about *Ablu's-Suffab*, which highlights renunciation of worldliness, living in abject poverty and preoccupation with vigorous acts of worship, gives credence to how Sufis took inspiration from them.

Also, Ibn Al-Jawzī's rejection of the etymological nexus between *Ablu's-Suffab* and Sufi on a linguistic or grammatical basis, which translates to his rejection of Sufism as a whole, is erroneous. This is because Sufis downplayed grammatical or linguistic considerations in their estimation but emphasised the practice of the People of the Bench. Ibn Al-Jawzī also used the same grammatical tool to deny another possible etymological origin of Sufism as typical in Sufis' works, except *Ṣūf* (wool). He agrees that there is an etymological correlation

between *Ṣūf* and Sufi. In addition, he submits further that since it (*Ṣūf*) was the usual attire that Sufis adorned themselves with, the etymological nexus is appropriate.²⁵ This can also be strengthened by the fact that the wearing of *Ṣūf* by the Sufis is in imitation of many prophets, including Prophet Muhammad, as reported by Imam Bukhārī.²⁶ and Az-Zarqānī²⁷ In their respective works.

Ibn Al-Jawzī on Sources of Deception in Sufism

As stated above, Ibn Al-Jawzī confirms the righteousness of the early Sufis but not those of later generations who were said to be deluded by the devil. He argues that their deception is sourced from their trivialisation of knowledge and scholarship but emphasises deeds as the utmost. He postulates that these have accounted for their renunciation of worldly comfort by denying themselves what benefits their body while engaging in strange methods to train their soul for purification, among other practices.²⁸ Ibn Al-Jawzī is more than convinced that inadequate knowledge has led them to the use of weak and unfounded *aḥādīth* ignorantly. He (Ibn Al-Jawzī) argues further that the deceptions of Sufis became more streamlined with the coming of the like of Al-Hārith Al-Muḥāsibī (d.243AH/857CE), who introduced hunger and poverty, among others into Sufism and

authoring different works to that effect. He states further that Al-Ḥārith Al-Muḥāsibī, among others, is responsible for the definition of Sufism as a distinct practice characterised by ecstasy, music, dancing, and clapping, among others. He also states that Ahmad Ibn Hanbalī warned people against associating with Al-Muḥāsibī because he was an innovator and his books are filled with misguidance. To Ibn Al-Jawzī, the deception of the Sufis was capped up with the creation of gaps between esotericism (*Bāṭin*) and exotericism (*Zāhir*), which Sufis claim they possessed both; hence, they see themselves as most righteous. He further states that doctrines like *Maḥabbah* (love), *Hulūl* (spiritual transformation) and *itihād* (unison), among others, place Sufism between *Kufr* (infidelity) and *Biḍāh* (innovation), both of which are detrimental to their faith.

The argument of Ibn Al-Jawzī on ignorance as the source of deception by the Sufi lacks basis. This is because Sufis are known scholars of Islam, and their practices are based on evidence. The famous statement of Al-Junayd, which premised Sufi practices on sound knowledge of Al-Qurʾān and *Sunnah*²⁹ lends credence to this. His Submission of Al-Ḥārith Al-Muḥāsibī as one of the leading Sufis of the earlier time is, however, correct. Sufi writers like As-Sulami list him as one of the first Sufis (*Ṭabaqātul-*

Ula) in his *Ṭabaqātu 'ṣ-Ṣūfiyyah*. He (Al-Muḥāsibī) is described as the teacher of many Baghdadi scholars. He had a profound knowledge of *Sharʿah* and Sufism.³⁰ Furthermore, one of the earlier scholars to combine the two. One of the famous students of Al-Ḥārith is Abū-Qāsim Al-Junayd whom Ibn Al-Jawzī quotes frequently as a pious Sufi in *Talbīs Iblīs*. Junayd is a major authority in Sufism and the founder of the *Sahw* (sobriety) school in Sufism. Ibn Taymiyyah, among many other writers on Sufism, regarded him as a moderate Sufi who practised Sufism within the purview of *Sharʿah*. So, Sufi practices of Al-Muḥāsibī should be assessed through Al-Junayd. In other words, Al-Junayd practised what he learnt from Al-Muḥāsibī, thereby dismantling the outrageousness as alleged by Ibn Al-Jawzī.

Sufi Personalities and Their Works

Ibn Al-Jawzī identifies many prominent Sufi personalities of earlier periods and their works, with enduring impacts on Sufism until the present time. He, however, states that they are responsible for the crystallisation of erroneous doctrines and practices in Sufism as contained in their works and reflected in their actions. They include Abdul-Rahman As-Sulami (d.73AH/692CE), the author of *Kitābu 'ṣ-Sunan* which is a masterpiece of Sufism in terms of *Tafsīru 'l-Qurʾān* and Abū-Nāsir As-

Sarraj (d.378AH/988CE) who authored *Kitabu 'l-Luma'*, and Al-Qushayri who authored *Risālatu 'l-Qushayriyyah*. Both are *Magnum opus* on the doctrines of Sufism. Others are Abū-Ṭālib Al-Makki (d.386AH/996CE) who wrote *Kitabu Qut 'l-Qulūb* and Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī who authored *Ihyā' Ulūm*. He remarks that both works are loaded with many misguidances courtesy of weak and unfounded *aḥādith*. Abū Nai'm Al-Iṣfihānī (d.430AH/1038CE), who authored *Ḥiyatu 'l-Anliyā'* wherein Sufism is linked to the four great companions of the Prophet, including Abūbakar, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī. Others are Ḥasan Al-Baṣrī, Sufyān At-Thawrī and Ahmad ibn Hambalī. Just as As-Sulami in his *Ṭabaqāt* established *Zuhd* as the connection between Sufism and the personalities like Fudayl Ibn Iyād, Ibrahim ibn Adhām, Maruf Al-Karakhi among others, Ibn Al-Jawzī considers attributing Sufism to all these personalities as mere assertions without an iota of truth because, to him, they did not have any Sufi attribute or affinity.³¹

The list of early Sufi personalities and their works as given above by Ibn Al-Jawzī and his opinions on them are undoubtedly realistic but one-sided. This is because he only states the weakness of those works without their strength. The works are primary references written during the

formative period of Sufism. It is not unreasonable to state that Sufism gets refined over time. This does not apply to Sufism alone but to every branch of Islamic sciences.

An instance can be cited from the history of the compilation of Hadith. The *Ṣaḥīḥ 'l-Bukhārī* and *Muslim* that are rated as the most reliable today because the duo contained the most authentic reports were written much later after several other compilations, like *Musannaf*, *Musnad* and even the famous *Muwatta'* of Imam Mālik. Time passage has necessitated the development of various sciences that enable verifications and authentication of Hadith. Also, reading through the books of Islamic history like *Al-Bidāyah Wa 'n-Nihāyah* of Ibn Kathīr and *Siyar 'Alām Nubalā'* of Ad-Dhahabī, among other non-Sufi works, on all those personalities which Ibn Al-Jawzī submits that Sufism was falsely attributed to them, reveals some anecdotes about them which serve as inspirations to Sufis, hence the affinity.

Sufi and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet

Ibn Al-Jawzī claims that ignorance about the *Sunnah* of the Prophet and the precepts of the Companions is the yardstick for increased acceptance of Sufism in the contemporary time because their worship is not guided by the traditions of the *Salaf* but

by their whims and caprices. This is deeply rooted in their reliance on esotericism as their source of knowledge. Therefore, they succeeded in getting many followers through music and dancing, which can appeal to the ordinary person. To Ibn Al-Jawzī, these make Sufism more appealing to the masses than practising Islam, according to the *Sunnah*. Therefore, he directs the Sufis to Sunnah's books, stating that they are enough for whoever wishes to be guided right. Ibn Al-Jawzī exonerates the early Sufis by stating that they were pious individuals who took inspiration from the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. He buttresses this by identifying some righteous Sufis who abide by the principles of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. They include, Abu Sulaymān Ad-Darānī, Abū Yazid Al-Bisṭāmī, Junayd Al-Baghdadi, Abū Ḥusayn An-Nūri, and Abū-Ja'far. He finally recommends mastering and applying their methods for whoever wants to be a Sufi.

The submission of Ibn Al-Jawzī on the claimed ignorance of the Sufis about *Sunnah* needs a second look. He had earlier submitted that Abū-Ṭālib Al-Makki and Al-Ghazali's works have weak and doubtful traditions. This confirms their awareness of the *Sunnah*, though with less emphasis on verification. Every principle and practice in Sufism has credence from the Qur'ān or and *Sunnah* of the Prophet. The bone of contentions is usually on the Sufis' manner

of interpretations of Qur'ān and their less emphasis on Hadith authentication, which makes their works laced with the weak *aḥādith*. It should be noted that the weak status of Hadith, according to scholars like An-Nawawī.³² and Ibn Al-Uthaymīn³³ Among others, it does not negate its admissibility and usability. Scholars have debated this in the past. They conclude that the weak Hadith should be limited to meritorious acts (*fada'il*), in which most Sufis' practices are found. Also, Ibn Al-Jawzī's positive submissions on some Sufis reflect his objectivity, and they are enough to dismantle the previously claimed ignorance of the Sufis about *Sunnah*.

Ibn Al-Jawzi and the Division of Sufis

It is observed that various submissions of Ibn Al-Jawzī in the preceding sections are familiar to most writers, especially the critics of Sufism. Perhaps most of those writers copied from Ibn Al-Jawzī and expanded his criticisms as he appears to be one of the notable pioneer critics of Sufism, as there is no clear evidence of criticism of Sufism before him. His submissions reflect his divisions between the early and later Sufis. He commends the early but condemns that later. Ibn Taymiyyah also divides Sufis but with clear proof on the yardsticks for his divisions. For instance, He (Ibn Taymiyyah) makes compliance with the rules of *Shariah*

and philosophical incursion the criteria for differentiating between the moderate and outrageous Sufis. To this end, Fudayl Ibn Iyād, Ibrahim Ibn Adhām, Ma'ruf Al-Kharakhi, Sulyman Ad-Darānī, Siri As-Saqatī and Abū Qāsim Al-Junayd among others that As-Sulami listed as the first set of Sufis, including Shaykh Abdul-Qādiri were described as moderate Sufis who practised Sufism according to the rules of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*.³⁴ On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyyah further declared only those who mixed philosophical thoughts with Sufism as deviants; hence, he mentioned Al-Ḥalāj and Ibn 'Arabī among others.³⁵

Also, the submissions of Ibn Al-Jawzī may be better analysed according to another submission of Ibn Taymiyyah on the classification of the Sufis. He identified and categorised Sufis according to their exhibited characteristics. He referred to some as *As-Ṣūfiyyah al-Ḥaqā'iq* (the real Sufis) in the first category. He described them as *Mujtahid*. These are individual Sufis who practised Sufism according to the rules and in compliance with the early Sufis that Ibn Al-Jawzī acknowledged their righteousness. They never got intoxicated with spirituality and lived within the provisions of *Shar'ah*. The second category consists of titular Sufis. They are called *As-Ṣūfiyyah 'l-Arẓāq* (the aspiring Sufis). They

are lower in status compared to those of the first group. He highlights three distinguished characteristics that differentiate them from the first-class Sufis. These are steadfastness in the observance of *Shar'ah*. They are closer to the first category of Sufis because they observe mystical rules, distance themselves from heretical innovation, and have little or no concern for worldliness. The third category is regarded as *As-Ṣūfiyyah ar-Rasm* (the nominal Sufis or impostors).³⁶ This is the category of some individuals who imitate the real Sufis, especially in dressing and appearance. They downplay scholarship and practise Sufism with ignorance, as reflected in their deeds and utterances.

Ibn Al-Jawzī on *Zuhd* (Asceticism), *Sama'* (Song), and *Raqs* (Dance)

Ibn Al-Jawzī discusses many doctrines and practices of Sufism, such as the concept of love (*Mahabbah*), *Zuhd* (Asceticism), contentment (*Qana'*), reliance (*Tawakkul*), *Sama'* (Song), *Raqs* (Dance) and *Wajd* (Ecstasy) among others. He emphasises the importance of engagement in these doctrines in many of his works, especially *Talbīs Iblīs* that, this paper focuses on. Ibn Taymiyyah refers to them as foundations of faith (*Uṣūlu 'l-Imān*) and pillars of the religion (*Qawā'idu 'd-Dīn*). It, therefore, means that they are not peculiar to Sufism but the generality of Islam, only that Sufis lay more emphasis on them. This

paper however cannot cover every one of them as discussed by Ibn Al-Jawzī, but the few ones that are central to achieving the objectives of this paper.

***Az-Zuhd* (Asceticism)**

Different writers translate *Zuhd* as asceticism, renunciation, abandonment and abstinence. It means detaching oneself from whatever is dearer to people to avoid competing interests or attractions. Whoever renounces everything other than God and loves nothing except God is *Zāhid*.³⁷ It is an Islamic concept that the Sufis emphasise for a godly life. Renunciation means voluntarily giving up what gives physical comfort or enjoyment.³⁸ Balqies submitted that renunciation is of three stages: renouncing something which may bring name and fame; investigating what to be given up and what not to be given up; and lastly, neither possessing nor wishing to possess any worldly things.

Ibn Al-Jawzī is categorical in declaring the practice of *Zuhd* as a concept that stemmed from an erroneous understanding of the Qur'anic and *aḥādīth* directives on the ephemerality of the world and the need for the Muslims to live a simple but religious life. The Sufis believed that comforts constituted a barrier to godliness and clogs to spiritual progress.³⁹ This, therefore, engendered abandonment

of both mundane and spiritual activities, including seeking knowledge, observing congregational prayers, and seclusion in hidden places, all to do away with worldliness and concentrate on worshipping Allah alone. He states that the devil misleads the *Zuhhād*, courtesy of their ignorance of the religious principles and how to navigate between mundane and spiritual lives. Both are essential in submitting Ibn Al-Jawzī, and abandoning them puts one between sins and wrongdoing. He (Ibn Al-Jawzī) extols scholarship over asceticism, stating that an ascetic individual liberates only himself, while scholars liberate the masses from the shackles of perdition.

Ibn Al-Jawzī further discusses *Zuhd* as the source of Sufism and identifies its different aspects concerning Sufism and how Iblīs has deceived the Sufis about each of them. He starts with the practice of abandoning wealth by the Sufis, their lack of interest in gathering wealth, including their reactions to clothing. He also adds to his discussion on asceticism, the issue of food and drinks. Ibn Al-Jawzī did not displace the legality of *Zuhd* in Islam but differentiates between the early Sufis and those of his contemporaries regarding the practice of *Zuhd*. He, therefore, praises many early Sufis like As-Sulami, Ma'rūf Al Karkhi, Bishru'l Hāfi and Rābi'atu'l Adawiyah among others, because of their *Zuhd* in his work

Sifatul Sufwah. He recognises asceticism but in accordance with his definition of moderation. He, however, submits that the Sufis of his time were deceived by *Iblis*, who beclouded them from seeing the evil of wealth and its mischief because the Sufis of his time were found in an intense search for money and wasting same profusely.⁴⁰ In other words, they do not practise asceticism.

It can be submitted that Ibn Al-Jawzī does not have a grasp of *Zuhd* as a concept in Islam; hence, at first, he describes its practice as the effect of misapplication of Qur'ānic and *Sunnah* directives occasioned by ignorance, but he later affirms its legality while commending some Sufis for practising it. These are self-contradictory. Also, contrary to the views of Ibn Al-Jawzī, Sufis believe that enjoyment is of two kinds. The first is physical, connected to materiality, while the second is spiritual enjoyment. This is based on the Qur'ānic provisions (Q.57:20-21), where physical enjoyment is mentioned together with other natures and attributes of this life that are advisable for one to do away with. Both enjoyments are sought, but the Sufis emphasise the latter. They also acknowledge that nothing can be achieved without sustenance (physical). Therefore, they make provisions for only what is necessary to achieve spiritual enjoyment without recourse to excess. Also, they believe that the seeker

of physical enjoyment will indeed have little or no time to seek spiritual bliss, which is attached to different challenges and difficulties and also requires a total commitment and continuous striving in the course of Allah, in consonance with Q.29:69.

Regarding clothing, eating and drinking, Ibn Al-Jawzī clearly states that the Sufis aimed at emulating the Prophet, the companions, and those that followed them, like Uways Al-Qurani. However, they made the wrong comparison because the people of *Salaf* were poor individuals who dressed out of necessity, unlike many of the contemporary Sufis who dressed to show off and attract attention.⁴¹ The contemporary Sufis, therefore, got deluded by thinking that they imitated the early Sufis and the early Muslims. However, they only dance to the tune of their desires to deceive innocent individuals who may not know their status. This, therefore, drags many of them to put on woollen attires. Sufism, according to him, is philosophical and not physical appearance.

Ibn Al-Jawzī argues further that wearing woollen materials is customary to Arabs and is not known to them as cloth of fame.⁴² He also states that the Prophet wore it, but occasionally. All *ahādith* that command and commend the wearing of woollen garments are declared weak and

fabricated by him. He argues further that piety is not in dressing but in the mind. He also states how Sufyan At-Thawri, Abdullahi Ibn Mubarak and Abu Sulyman Ad-Darānī downplayed the wearing of woollen garments. He (Ibn Al-Jawzī) opines that the general practice of the *Salaf* is to wear moderate clothes that stand between riches and poverty while attending functions, including *Salat* and not arbitrarily wearing woollen garments.

From every indication, there is no doubt that what is outrightly condemned in Islam are clothes that depict arrogance and haughtiness. Sufis, therefore, have justification for wearing patches and woollen materials in demonstration of their piety and imitation of the *Salaf*, especially at a time when silks and brocades had become the fashion of the wealthy and the mundane-minded individuals, to signify their renunciation of worldly values and their abhorrence for physical comforts.⁴³ It is not uncommon to have some pseudo among them; there is no doubt that they imitate some Sufis whose original dress is *Suf*. Condemning Sufism based on contemporary practice, therefore, has no basis.

Another central point of discussion of Ibn Al-Jawzī vis-à-vis Zuhd as practised by Sufis is the matter of eating and drinking. He (Ibn Al-Jawzī) submitted that Iblīs

actively convinced the early Sufis to eat less and not drink cold water.⁴⁴ He explains further that some spent days without food, while some lived on a small amount of money that could not foot their bills. So, they refused to work to earn a better living conditions but locked themselves up for worship, among others. Some deny themselves food for days while some eat once a day or two days, even more as may be convenient for one. He further states that some would not drink except hot water without stating their reasons. This underscores the continual engagement of the Sufis in fasting, purposely to train their souls. Ibn Al-Jawzī condemns these, stating that eating and drinking give strength to the body and enable it to be spiritually influential. Above all, Allah in the glorious Qur’ān commands that anything lawful can be consumed. Q.2:168, 5:88, 16:114, and 20:81, among others. He subsequently stated that the Sufis of his time were opposite to the early Sufis because they ate and lived lavishly.

To eat a little food (*Qillatu’t-T’adam*) is one of the significant practices of Sufism; hence, the Sufis engage in constant fasting, especially *Sawmu Dawudi*, which the Prophet extolled in many traditions.⁴⁵ This is done by fasting one day and eating another day throughout one's life. It is thought that hunger is one of the primary purposes of

fasting, which Allah prescribes for many Prophets, and even Ramadan is made compulsory for the nation of Muhammad. It elevates the soul and aids spiritual elevation. Al-Ghazali identifies eating less as a potential killer of desires and lusts that constitute the barriers to spiritual progress. He further identifies various benefits of hunger and eating less, which include purity of the heart, constant remembrance of Allah, displacement of lustfulness, concentration on worship, healthiness of the body, absence of grief, and it brings about charity.⁴⁶ These are some of the benefits and virtues of hunger: eating less food and drinking less. Each of these virtues is commanded and commended in *Sharī'ah*, so the devil could not have deceived them, as stated by Ibn Al-Jawzī.

Listening to Songs and Dancing

The acts of listening to songs, dancing, and ecstasy are well known in Islam but mostly recognised and practised by the Sufis. Ibn Al-Jawzī discussed these two acts together because of their relationship. It is practically believed that when one listens to a voice with a contemplative mind, one would not be in his natural state as one may be dancing by shaking unconsciously. Ibn Al-Jawzī starts his discussions on listening to songs by stating two significant evil effects on the listeners. These are the prevention of

Tafakkur (deep thinking) and enabling lustfulness (*Shahawa*).⁴⁷ He likens the song to fornication, stating that both bring about satisfaction, though that of songs is spiritual while that of fornication is physical. The song, therefore, is described as the devil's deception on scholars to permeate musical instruments. He then enumerates various scholars' positions on the permissibility or otherwise of singing. He states that Sufi scholars are of three categories: those who forbid it, those who permit it and those who permit but dislike it.⁴⁸ It should be noted that scholars in each category have justifications for their various positions.

Ibn Al Jawzī objectively states that the true nature of something must be understood before judgment is passed on it, as many things are regarded as songs, but they are not. This is quite important to guide against falling into the pit of overgeneralisation. He categorically established that poems were recited during the time of the Prophet as some non-Arabs who went to Hajj sang poems describing the *Ka'bah*, *Zamzam*, and *Maqām*, among others, including the instance of Ā'ishah, his wife among others. Some also composed poems to praise the Prophet. Ibn Al-Jawzī goes further by establishing the permissibility of poems said by Ascetics, called "*Aḥ Zuhdiyyāt*" because they bring hearts closer to God. He cites many events to this effect.

One of them is the incident that happened between Ahmad ibn Hanbali and one of his students, who recited a poem about paradise and hell which made Ibn Hanbali weep and isolate himself while he continued reciting the poem himself.

Ibn Al-Jawzī states the permissibility of listening to songs like those mentioned above because they do not cause intoxication or exaltation, which is one of the reasons for scholars' condemnation of songs.⁴⁹ Ibn Al-Jawzī is particular about the content of a song and the objective of the composer. In other words, if the content and objective align with Islam's principles, then the song is permissible. Ibn Al-Jawzī, therefore, condemns songs that tend to misguidance, such as songs that describe liquor and feelings that spur exhilaration. He explains further that their principal objective is to make rhymes for songs that take the listener out of modesty and stimulate his passion for mirth. Arising from the strong submissions of the four Imams, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali, Ibn Al-Jawzī argues that songs should generally not be condemned. He likens song to wailing and states that both are between dislike and forbidden, citing several verses of the Glorious Qur'ān and *ahādith* of the Prophet to drive home his points.

Furthermore, Ibn Al-Jawzī condemns musical instruments, including

Duff (a drum) and flutes, among others, outrightly. He argues that it is forbidden songs that necessitate musical instruments. So, whatever that connects to it is forbidden when the song is forbidden. He, however, remains silent on the instances cited where musical instruments accompany some of the identified songs. Such as the case of Aisha, where Abubakar exclaimed: Musical instruments of Shaytan! Moreover, he attempted to stop them, but the Prophet halted it.⁵⁰ Other instances include when the Prophet got to Madinah for Hijrah and the annual visitations of the people of *Habashah*, who used to sing, dance and use musical instruments inside the mosque in the presence of the Prophet to celebrate him.⁵¹ Ibn Al-Jawzī only states that *Duff* in the early days was different from the present-day ones.⁵² He did not state whether or not the use of musical instruments is permissible if it is used together with the first category of songs.

The bone of contention in Ibn Al-Jawzī's argument on the permissibility or otherwise of listening to a song depends majorly on the contents of the song, which, according to him, are those that are in conformity with the divine law and are of positive benefit to the listener, Sufis have claimed that their motive of listening to a song is to aid and elevate their spiritual consciousness. To realise this, Al-Qushayri

sets the rules of engagement for song listening to include the exhibition of the desire to be obedient to Allah for the realisation of the lofty ranks Allah will grant such a servant. This would immune him from lapses and immediately bring divine presence into his heart. This is Islamic or *Shari'ah* compliant.⁵³

Ibn Al-Jawzī, contrary to his previous general condemnation of the Sufis regarding listening to the song, later states that the early Sufis condemned it. At the same time, his contemporaries permitted it as a form of enjoyment.⁵⁴ Therefore, he praised the Sufis who condemned listening to songs as amusement and rebuked those who listened to them for the same purpose. He then submits further, in addition to illicit acts attached to songs, that the Sufis permit the discussion of women's physical attributes. Al Ghazzālī presented detailed information about the song and its essence when he wrote;

The hearth is the seat of secret wealth and the invaluable mine of jewels. There lies on it the most valuable jewel, just as fire lies secretly in stone and iron. It lies hidden so that water lies at the lowest bottom of the earth. There is no means of waking it up from sleep without sweet sounds. There is no sound path entering the heart without the ear's door. Sweet, melodious and rhymed sounds bring out

feelings hidden in the heart. These do not come out of the heart without movement, as what is in the cauldron does not fall without being heated. The melodious song removes what is hidden in the heart and creates a beautiful feeling. When songs control the heart, they take out its qualities and guilt from it.⁵⁵

Similar to the submission of Ibn Al-Jawzī, Al Ghazzālī states that songs sometimes become lawful and sometimes unlawful according to the circumstances that warrant it. Sometimes, it becomes undesirable. It is unlawful for those with strong sexual passion, like youth, to listen to a song because of its negative effect, but it is permissible for people of high moral standards and those with divine love.

The submission of Ibn Al-Jawzī on dancing is related to his discussion on singing. As stated above, musical instruments are used with the type of songs condemned by Ibn Al-Jawzī, which made him condemn everything related to it, dancing inclusive. He starts his discussions by refuting various proofs advanced by pro-dancing scholars, ranging from Qur'ānic to *aḥādith* evidence. Some of them include Q.38:42 and Q.2:62. The two instances are related to Prophet Ayub when he was to be cured of ailment and Musa as a miracle. Therefore, They are irrelevant and cannot

be used to establish legitimacy for dancing. Also, Ibn Al-Jawzī mentions the case of Abyssinians (cited above), but without much discussion. He only describes *Zafn* as their usual way of tricking their enemies. This shows his non-interest in discussing the details of it. It is not in line with his motive. Imam Muslim reports how Aisha described the event she used to rest her head on the shoulder of the Prophet, watching the Abyssinians' display. Just like Abubakar in the case of Aisha, Umar, the second *Khalifah*, also wanted to stop the people of Habasha, but the Prophet denied him.⁵⁶

Ibn Al-Jawzī continues to state that the type of dancing that will be attributed to each song differs. Hence, shaking goes with the permitted type of song, which makes it also permissible, while dancing in a complex manner will surely be the output of the prohibited type of song because of the element of playfulness, which makes it (dancing) prohibited. He argues further that dancing is only meant for children as a form of play and exercise. It is also an exultant display and haughtiness that Q.31:18 and 19, among others, condemned.⁵⁷ He states that Iblīs deceived some Sufis with song, while others were deceived with musical instruments which induce dancing. He concluded that nothing moral, intellectually sound or modest is in someone who dances. Out of excitement, he can induce others to

join him, remove the cap from the head, and at the ecstatic level, remove his clothes and dance nakedly.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed Ibn Al-Jawzī's submissions on Sufism with particular reference to its origin and legitimacy. It also discussed *Zuhd* as the primary source which Sufism stemmed from. Since the discussions of Ibn Al-Jawzī in his assessment of Sufism covered many aspects, the two central ones are selected for discussion in this paper. From every indication, it is discovered that Ibn Al-Jawzī had a substantial knowledge of Islam in general and Sufism in particular, hence his reference to many works of Sufis of earlier times. It is also discovered that he was one of the scholars that pioneered criticism of Sufism. However, his examinations and submissions on Sufism are primarily guided by his personal experience of Sufism, when he practised it and his observations of Sufis of his time. These, however, affected his objectivity as his discussions often drifted away from the essence of Sufism but were judged by the practice of the Sufis; hence, he often differentiated between the early Sufis and his contemporaries. He acknowledged the early formation of Sufism in Islam and identified some early Sufis, though only Abu-Qasim Al-Junayd won his commendation in most cases. His

submissions on *Zuhd*, Song and Dance reflect his concern about practice rather than the essence. He, therefore, declined to use the former to judge the latter without recourse to the facts contained in Islam's sources.

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