



Mysticism and Akhbarism in the Thought of Mirza Muhammad al-Akhbari

An Investigation of Relation Between Ijtihad, Sufism, and Akhbari Movements in the First Half of the 13th Century AH.

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Abstract

Mirza Mohammad Akhbari (d. 1232 AH) is one of the Akhbari scholars who is known for his numerous works containing sharp criticism of Mujtahids. In the present research, a less-explored aspect of Mirza Muhammad Akhbari's ideas and works, which includes his mystical tendency, has been studied. This research also study impact of the intellectual context of the time (the first decades of the 13th lunar century) on his ideas. That time was the era of conflict between the three discourses of Ijtihad, Sufi and Akhbari. The questions of this research are: How was Mirza Mohammad Akhbari's connection with Sufism and mysticism? How this kind of connection has been manifested in his works? and to what extent mystical aspect of his thought has been affected by his Akhbarism? The results of the research indicate that Mirza Mohammad Akhbari's positions on mysticism and Sufism were influenced by his hostile literature against the mujtahids. Mirza Mohammad Akhbari defends mysticism and criticizes Sufism, using the dualism of mysticism/sufism. He also wrote treatises on mystical wisdom and was in contact with Sufis. He likened Sufis to Mujtahids and mystics to Akhbarites and considered Sufis and Mujtahids to be similar to each other in their heresy and dependence on Sunnis. Furthermore, by defending Sufi figures that have been criticized by scholars, he has practically taken the side of Sufis in the debate between mujtahids and Sufis.

Keywords: Akhbarism, Ijtihad, Mysticism, Mirza Muhammad al-Akhbari, Sufism.

Introduction

At the first decades of the 13th century AH, three discourses in the field of Shi'ite thought (Akhbarism, Ijtihad and Sufism) were in conflict and competition to gain the position of religious authority, and especially Mujtahids strongly opposed Sufism. At the same time, Mirza Mohammad Akhbari (killed in 1232 AH), a passionate representative of Akhbari jurisprudence, wrote books against the mujtahids and the mujtahids do the same against him. Mirza Muhammad also criticized Sufism in his works, but at the same time, he defended mysticism and most of the Sufis who were criticized by the mujtahids. He also wrote treatises on mystical theoretical wisdom.



Mirza Mohammad's works in confronting *ijtihad* have been noticed by researchers, but the relationship of his ideas with Sufism and mysticism has been less explored. The present article examines the closeness and connection between Akhbarism and mysticism in the thought of Mirza Mohammad Akhbari. The questions of this article are as follows: 1. what was Mirza Mohammad Akhbari's relationship (in practice and thought) with Sufism and mysticism? 2. What was the impact of Akhbari thought on Mirza Muhammad's stance towards mysticism and Sufism?

After presenting some data related to the discussion's background and explaining the main concepts, the present research describes the historical context of the competition of three currents of *Ijtihad*, Akhbarism and Sufism, and finally by analyzing the remaining works of Mirza Mohammad Akhbari, it studies his relationship with mysticism and Sufism in three parts: Mirza Muhammad's relationship with Sufis, his mystical works and his way of reasoning in defense of mysticism.

Research Findings

The results of this research show that Mirza Mohammad Akhbari, not only had mystical tendencies and compose some works on mystical wisdom (e. g. *majāli al majāli*, *Ḥaqīqa al A'yān*, *Shams al Ḥaqīqa*), but also independently defended mysticism in some of his works (e.g. *Mīzan al Tamīz & Nafth al maṣḍūr*) and responded to critics of mysticism. His defense of mysticism was based on the Sufi/mystic dichotomy. The main difference between a Sufi and a mystic was whether or not they believed in Shi'ism. Sufi is the name of Sunni ascetics, and real mystics (*Ārefān*) are those alone who are Shi'ites and followers of Ahl al-Beiyt. He defends almost all famous Sufis and has included the main Sufi Orders (in Iran, India, Anatolia and Transoxiana) among the Shi'ites and those related to the imams, and therefore, among the mystics. Mirza Muhammad Akhbari likened Mujtahid to Sufi and mystic to Muhaddith (Akhbari). There are several similarities between Sufi and Mujtahid: Sufi and Mujtahid are both heretics who follow opinion (*Ra'y*) and suspicion (*Zann*) (against the narrations of imams) and believe in imitation (*Taqhlid*), and the primary origin of both methods is Sunni Islam.

Conclusion

Mirza Mohammad defended mysticism in a situation where there was a hostile alignment between two currents, on one side there were akhbaries and myctics and on the other side mujtahids. While the Mujtahids strongly rejected and denied Sufies, Mirza Mohammad Akhbari tried to show that the Mujtahids are most similar to them (Sufis). When Mujtahid and Sufi are in the same line, the opposite group will be Akhbaris and Mystics. In this way, Mirza Mohammad Akhbari used his pen to defend the mystics against the common enemy, the Mujtahids. On the other hand, he actually includes most of the followers of Shi'ite Sufi Orders among mystics. In this way, he took the side of the Sufis and the mystics in the wide-ranging conflict that were existed between the Mujtahids and the Sufis.



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