

## SPIRITUALITY AND STRUGGLE: THE TWO FACES OF SUFISM IN ABDUL QADIR AL-JILANI AND AL-JAZAIRI

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**Abstrak:** Tasawuf dalam sejarah Islam telah menunjukkan keragaman ekspresi yang tidak hanya terbatas pada laku spiritual, tetapi juga merespons tantangan sosial-politik. Namun demikian, banyak kajian yang masih memisahkan antara dimensi kontemplatif dan aksi sosial dalam memahami tasawuf. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menelusuri dan mengkaji dua wajah tasawuf dalam diri Syekh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani dan Syekh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi: wajah spiritualitas dan wajah perjuangan. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kepustakaan, memanfaatkan karya primer dan literatur sekunder yang relevan dengan pemikiran kedua tokoh tersebut. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa al-Jilani menekankan penyucian jiwa, kedekatan dengan Tuhan, dan pembinaan akhlak sebagai bentuk tasawuf klasik yang kontemplatif. Sebaliknya, al-Jazairi mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai tasawuf dalam perjuangan melawan kolonialisme dengan tetap menjunjung tinggi etika dan kemanusiaan. Keduanya sama-sama menjadikan tasawuf sebagai fondasi pembentukan karakter, meskipun dalam ekspresi dan konteks yang berbeda. Simpulan dari penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa tasawuf memiliki dua wajah yang saling melengkapi: membentuk kedalaman batin sekaligus menggerakkan keberanian sosial. Kontribusi utama artikel ini adalah memperluas perspektif mengenai tasawuf sebagai kekuatan spiritual sekaligus praksis dalam menghadapi realitas zaman.

**Kata kunci:** Tasawuf, Spiritualitas, Perjuangan, al-Jilani, al-Jazairi

**Abstract:** Sufism in Islamic history has demonstrated a diversity of expressions, encompassing not only spiritual practices but also responses to socio-political challenges. However, many studies still separate the contemplative and activist dimensions in analyzing Sufism. This article aims to explore and examine the two faces of Sufism embodied by Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani and Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi: spirituality and struggle. This study employs a qualitative approach using library research design, drawing from primary texts and relevant secondary literature concerning the thoughts of both figures.

*The findings indicate that al-Jilani emphasizes purification of the soul, closeness to God, and moral development as forms of classical, contemplative Sufism. In contrast, al-Jazairi integrates Sufi values into anti-colonial resistance, upholding ethics and humanity in the struggle. Both figures present Sufism as a foundation for character formation, albeit through different contexts and expressions. The conclusion affirms that Sufism has two complementary dimensions: deepening the inner self and inspiring moral-social engagement. The article's main contribution lies in broadening the perspective on Sufism as both a spiritual and transformative force in contemporary reality.*

**Keywords:** *Sufism, Spirituality, Struggle, al-Jilani, al-Jazairi*

## INTRODUCTION

Sufism represents one of the essential dimensions of the Islamic tradition, emphasizing inner experience, purification of the soul, and an intimate relationship with God. It is not merely individual in nature, but also exerts influence on the social and cultural order of Muslim communities. The teachings of Sufism shape an ethic of life that transcends ritual formalities by instilling values such as sincerity, patience, and divine love. For this reason, Sufism has become an integral part of Islamic spirituality throughout history.

Over time, Sufism evolved into a force that not only shaped the personal lives of its adherents but also played a significant role in the social dynamics of the Muslim community. Sufis were not only known as devout worshippers but also as educators, reformers, and even protectors of society during difficult times. In many historical contexts, they played an important role in easing social tensions and awakening collective consciousness. This demonstrates that Sufism possesses a transformative dimension that extends into wider spheres of life.

Within this context, many Sufi figures emerged as spiritual guides capable of inspiring peaceful social change. Their role was not confined to the mihrab or the madrasa, but extended to the broader society through service and exemplary conduct. Some were even directly engaged in defending truth and justice in the face of oppression and injustice. These figures proved that spirituality is not identical with passivism; rather, it can serve as a source of strength in moral and social struggle.

Among the prominent Sufi figures in Islamic history, Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani and Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi hold a significant position. Although they lived in different times and places—one in twelfth-century Baghdad and the other in nineteenth-century Algeria—both embodied a profound Sufi spirit. Al-Jilani is renowned as the founder of the Qadiriyya order and a reformer of classical Islamic spirituality, while al-Jazairi is remembered as a leader of resistance against French colonialism grounded in strong spiritual foundations. Together, they represent two dimensions of Sufism: contemplative and active.

Despite their different backgrounds, Abdul Qadir al-Jilani and Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi illustrate that Sufism is not confined to inner spirituality but also shapes character and social struggle. Al-Jilani presented Sufism through moral teachings and spiritual education (Sofiatus Sholeha and Ainur Rofiq Sofa 2024), whereas al-Jazairi employed it as the foundation of his struggle to liberate his nation from colonialism (Bennison 2011). This study seeks to examine how both figures represent the two faces of Sufism—spirituality and struggle—and how this remains relevant in shaping the consciousness of contemporary Muslim society.

Research on Sufism has developed extensively, particularly in highlighting its theological, spiritual, and ethical dimensions. However, comparative approaches to Sufi figures from different times and contexts are still rare. Comparative studies of Sufi thought are often conducted within narrow and partial frameworks. Yet, through a more interconnected approach, the diversity of Sufi expressions can be more deeply understood in their proper context.

One notable gap is the lack of exploration into the relationship between Sufi spirituality and socio-political movements in the figure of Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi. Many studies portray al-Jazairi merely as an anti-colonial fighter without deeply engaging the spiritual and Sufi foundations of his struggle. This has led to a reductionist view of al-Jazairi as a purely historical-political figure, obscuring his crucial spiritual dimension. In reality, the Sufi values he upheld significantly shaped his leadership character (Ichwan et al. 2024).

Within Sufi discourse itself, there remains a tendency to separate its contemplative aspects from its social dimensions. Sufism is often perceived merely as a solitary path to God, detached from societal realities. Such a view oversimplifies the nature of Sufism, which is inherently multidimensional. This separation closes off the possibility of viewing Sufism as a moral and spiritual force capable of navigating social and political dynamics (Ahmad Syatori 2024).

Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani and Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi can, in fact, be seen as representing two complementary approaches to Sufism. Al-Jilani emerged as a spiritual reformer in the classical Islamic world, while al-Jazairi demonstrated how Sufi values could serve as a force of resistance against oppression. However, analyses that connect these two figures within a unified Sufi discourse remain limited. An integrative study of both can open new perspectives on Sufism as a response to the challenges of the times.

To this day, there has been no comprehensive study showing how al-Jilani and al-Jazairi embodied two faces of Sufism that addressed the spiritual and social contexts of their times. Both presented models of Sufism rooted not only in personal development

but also in the communal life of Muslims. The absence of a synthesis between the two has deprived Sufi discourse of its practical dimension in building civilization. Thus, tracing and linking the spirituality of al-Jilani with the struggle of al-Jazairi becomes an important step in revitalizing Sufism as a transformative force in modern life.

So far, studies on Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani have focused more on his spirituality and Sufi teachings within the framework of individual spiritual cultivation. Meanwhile, research on Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi has generally concentrated on his role as a leader of resistance against French colonialism, with emphasis on the historical and political dimensions. Such separate approaches make it seem as if each figure only represents one side of Sufism. In fact, both were grounded in strong spirituality and can be examined together within a comprehensive Sufi framework.

Filling this gap is essential, as Sufism is not confined to inner contemplation but also holds the power to shape character, struggle, and social transformation. In this sense, spirituality and struggle cannot be separated, for both are integral expressions of Sufi values. By connecting al-Jilani's spiritual teachings with al-Jazairi's resistance ethos, we can gain a more holistic understanding of Sufism's role in addressing the challenges of the age. This study also serves as a way to reactualize Sufi teachings in the dynamics of modern society.

Based on this rationale, this article aims to conduct a comparative examination of the two faces of Sufism embodied by Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani and Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi. It seeks to demonstrate that Sufism is not merely contemplative but also carries practical potential in shaping collective consciousness and social movements. By synthesizing these two models of Sufism, this study aspires to generate a new understanding that situates spirituality as the foundation of ethical and sustainable struggle. The central hypothesis is that both figures, despite differing contexts, equally revitalized Sufi values in ways relevant to the realities of their respective times.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design, focusing on the analysis of the thoughts of prominent figures. This approach was chosen because the object of study consists of classical texts and secondary literature that record the teachings and contributions of two major figures in the Sufi tradition, namely Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani and Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi. The research is directed toward an in-depth understanding of the spiritual values and dimensions of struggle embodied in the works and biographies of these figures. Thus, this study is both exploratory and interpretative, aiming to uncover the conceptual meanings behind the narratives of spirituality and resistance.

The primary sources of data include works attributed to Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, such as *Sirr al-Asrār* and *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*, along with historical documents and biographies detailing the role of Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi in the context of anti-colonial resistance in Algeria. Secondary data are drawn from previous studies, academic articles, and scholarly literature relevant to Sufism, spirituality, and social movements. Data collection techniques involve literature review, critical reading, and thematic note-taking of textual content. These procedures enable the researcher to identify key narratives and central values within the teachings of each figure.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic and comparative approaches. Key themes—such as the concept of spirituality, relationship with God, ethics of struggle, and social responsibility—were identified and compared between the two figures. The comparative approach is intended to reveal similarities and differences in perspectives as well as the application of Sufi teachings within two distinct contexts: twelfth-century classical Sufism and nineteenth-century resistance Sufism. Through this method, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of how Sufism not only shapes inner life but also serves as a transformative force in socio-political contexts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study finds that Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani placed spirituality as the central foundation of the Sufi teachings he developed. In his works, such as *Sirr al-Asrar* and *Futuh al-Ghayb*, al-Jilani emphasized the importance of purification of the heart, sincerity, and closeness to God. His teachings revolve around the concepts of *ma'rifah*, *ikhlas*, and *tawakkul*, which serve as the core of a disciple's inner transformation. Al-Jilani's thought asserts that the essence of Sufism lies in the sincere relationship between human beings and Allah (Hanifiyah 2019).

Al-Jilani also regarded spirituality as active rather than passive in shaping life. In his view, Sufism is a means to subdue the ego (*nafs*) and purify oneself from worldly attachments. Through this process, one attains inner tranquility, which becomes the foundation of noble character. Thus, Sufism functions as a path for the formation of character and moral integrity (Sofiatu Sholeha and Ainur Rofiq Sofa 2024).

In practice, al-Jilani placed strong emphasis on *adab* (proper conduct), *dhikr* (remembrance of God), and service to others as manifestations of closeness to God. His disciples were directed to live in simplicity, service, and compassion toward humanity. This indicates that the spirituality offered by al-Jilani was inseparable from social values. For him, personal piety must radiate into ethical social action (Najiburrohman and Mariatin 2023).

The Sufi teachings of al-Jilani did not remain confined to texts but became the foundation of the Qadiriyya order, which has had widespread influence across the Muslim world. Through this order, his spiritual values have been transmitted across generations. His influence transcended geographical boundaries, reaching Central Asia, Africa, and the Malay-Indonesian world (Bakhtiar 2004). This demonstrates that al-Jilani's spirituality possesses a universal quality and adaptability to various cultural contexts.

In contrast to al-Jilani, who is known as a classical spiritual master, Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi emerged as both a Sufi and a leader of resistance against French colonialism in Algeria. Nevertheless, al-Jazairi's spirit of struggle was firmly rooted in Sufi values. He was known as a practitioner of the Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya orders, which emphasize *jihad al-nafs* and self-control. Sufism served as the ethical foundation of his struggle, shaping his character as a wise and compassionate leader (Bennison 2011).

Al-Jazairi understood resistance against colonialism not merely as a political movement, but as a spiritual responsibility to oppose injustice. In his letters and speeches, he often referred to the importance of justice, patience, and *tawakkul* in facing foreign powers. He not only trained fighters physically but also educated them spiritually (Muedini 2015). This illustrates the integration of Sufism with socio-political activism.

Despite engaging in battle and armed conflict, al-Jazairi upheld Sufi ethical principles in his struggle. He prohibited looting, protected prisoners, and maintained humanitarian values even toward enemies. This reflects that his struggle was not driven by hatred but by values of justice and moral responsibility (Zhantiev 2023). It underscores that Sufism is not synonymous with withdrawal from the world but can be present in social and political arenas.

One of al-Jazairi's most prominent traits was his commitment to peace and reconciliation. After being captured and exiled by the French, he continued to demonstrate wisdom and forgiveness. During his exile, he remained active in preaching and engaging in interfaith and intercultural dialogue. This character made him respected as a Muslim leader both in the East and the West (Montoya Jordán 2023).

The findings of this study also show that although their contexts were very different, both al-Jilani and al-Jazairi made Sufism the foundation for shaping personality and social responsibility. Al-Jilani, with his contemplative approach, nurtured the human soul from within, while al-Jazairi projected spirituality into resistance movements. Both demonstrated that Sufism is not monolithic but flexible in expression.



Both figures shared a view on the importance of spiritual education as the basis of societal transformation. Al-Jilani established a network of disciples and the Qadiriyya order as centers of moral education, while al-Jazairi built social and military structures rooted in Sufi values. For both, education was the pathway toward individual and communal transformation.

Sufism in these two expressions illustrates that spirituality cannot be separated from social and historical contexts. Sufi teachings understood merely in mystical terms lose relevance if not connected to lived realities. The models of al-Jilani and al-Jazairi show that spiritual experience can serve as a concrete and transformative force.

Methodologically, both emphasized exemplary conduct in disseminating their teachings. Al-Jilani was known as a humble and simple saint, while al-Jazairi was recognized for his integrity and moral leadership. Their personal examples made them not merely teachers of doctrine but living figures who inspired movements of change. Sufism, as embodied in these two figures, is not merely a set of spiritual doctrines but a lived practice. Its teachings were manifested in real actions, whether in the form of instruction or resistance against injustice. In both, divine experience gave birth to strong social concern. Thus, Sufism becomes a bridge between heaven and earth, between piety and justice.

Another finding of this study is that Sufism has demonstrated remarkable adaptability to historical circumstances. Al-Jilani fostered spiritual civilization in the classical Islamic world, while al-Jazairi brought Sufi values to bear amid modern colonialism. This shows that Sufism can respond to different challenges across time and space. Such flexibility has ensured its enduring relevance throughout history. Therefore, this research affirms that spirituality and struggle are not opposites within Sufism but rather two sides of the same core value. Both reinforce each other in shaping the *insān kāmil* (perfect human)—connected with God while present for humanity. The Sufi models of al-Jilani and al-Jazairi provide essential lessons about integrating contemplation with action. Their legacy is not only to be studied but to be emulated.

These findings reinforce the perspective that Sufism is not an escape from worldly realities but a spiritual path that shapes social ethics. This aligns with Fazlur Rahman's (1982) view that Sufi ethics have a significant impact on public life (Mir and Anjum 2024). Al-Jilani and al-Jazairi exemplify how Sufism can be implemented differently depending on historical needs, rejecting the dichotomy between the spiritual and the social.

The Sufi model taught by al-Jilani is in line with the Qur'anic concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) as the path to closeness with God. This also resonates with Imam al-Ghazali's approach in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, which emphasizes the

importance of spirituality in shaping morality (Siregar and Wantini 2024). Al-Jilani continued this tradition systematically and contextually within the urban society of Baghdad. Sufism, in his perspective, became an instrument of self and societal reform. Conversely, the Sufism represented by al-Jazairi illustrates a strong correlation with the theory of “activist Sufism” developed by Annemarie Schimmel and Hamid Algar. In this theory, spiritual experience not only generates inner tranquility but also produces courage and commitment to justice (Schimmel, Trimingham, and Lings 1978). Al-Jazairi demonstrated that deep spiritual experience could serve as the foundation for a civilized liberation movement.

This study also emphasizes that the dichotomous approach between the “contemplative Sufi” and the “militant Sufi” is inadequate. These two figures demonstrate that Sufism encompasses a broad spectrum, from inner experience to public engagement. This supports Vincent Cornell’s (1998) argument that Islamic history abounds with Sufis who acted as agents of social transformation (Hoffman 2001). Hence, integrating both models in this study is essential for expanding our horizon of understanding Sufism.

Compared to previous research that focused only on one aspect of each figure, this study presents a more comprehensive synthesis. By examining both figures within a single framework, it contributes to constructing a more contextual and holistic narrative of Sufism. This creates room for the development of Sufi thought that is not stagnant but dynamic and responsive to the needs of the times.

Ultimately, the results and discussion of this study open new possibilities for positioning Sufism as the foundation for holistic civilizational development. The integration of contemplation and action, of inner enlightenment and social justice, constitutes the lasting legacy of al-Jilani and al-Jazairi. This study reaffirms that true spirituality is that which enlivens the conscience, cultivates morality, and struggles for humanity.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the spiritual philosophies of Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani and Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jazairi highlight the comprehensive and dynamic nature of Sufism. Al-Jilani emphasized inner purification, sincerity, and spiritual discipline grounded in tazkiyat al-nafs, positioning Sufism as a transformative path of deep personal cultivation. Meanwhile, al-Jazairi demonstrated that Sufism can be actively expressed in social and political arenas, where spiritual values inspire justice, resistance to oppression, and ethical leadership. Despite their different historical contexts



and expressions, both scholars proved that authentic spirituality must shape character, ethical conduct, and social engagement, making Sufism a bridge between divine devotion and human responsibility.

Furthermore, the findings affirm that Sufism is neither passive nor monolithic; rather, it adapts to historical needs and offers a universal moral framework for societal development. The synthesis of inner contemplation and outward action found in both figures challenges narrow perceptions of Sufism and supports the view that spiritual experience should translate into constructive participation in public life. By highlighting these complementary models, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of Sufism as a transformative force that nurtures the perfect human (*insān kāmil*)—spiritually conscious, morally upright, and socially committed. These insights open pathways for future scholarship to explore Sufism as a foundation for ethical leadership, peacebuilding, and holistic civilizational renewal.

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