



**IS SPIRIT OF RUMI STILL WITH US?  
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH SUFISM**

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Executive Master in Consulting and Coaching for Change

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“Let the beauty we love be what we do.  
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.”

Rumi

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## **Abstract**

The research is an attempt to bring forth the teachings and practices of Sufism with special focus on Rumi, who has inspired millions across the globe. Rumi's teachings revolve around love which is an essential and central theme of all the fulfilment. These centuries old words of wisdom and teachings can still provide guidance to individuals and societies in search of happiness and well-being.

## **Key Words**

Sufism, spirituality, love, *Nafs*, soul, self-reflection.

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## **Introduction**

The world has witnessed unprecedented development in the last century. From a primitive agro-based economy, the world transformed to a complex industrial and services sector based economy. It continues to evolve and is now moving towards knowledge based economy. The capitalist economic model characterized by profit maximization lies at the heart of this transformation. The western economies, having pioneered and followed this model throughout recent history, have reached zenith of development. Resultantly, this ‘successful’ model is being replicated elsewhere too.

However, this transformation has not been without a cost which is being borne by the human resource that is at the forefront of this transformation. The fast pace of development and change that the modern world is passing through has put the top executives under extreme stress. This workplace stress is primarily arising out of intense professional competition, demanding jobs, personal and professional insecurities, high expectation for results and pressures to survive and excel in careers to name a few. The most apparent and disturbing consequence of this work-related stress being felt by modern executives is the imbalance between the personal and professional lives. The desire for a ‘successful’ professional career has taken precedence over all other aspects of human life. The pursuit of material things, which are generally considered a measure of success, lies at the center of modern life. The materialistic comforts of today blind the simplicity that our ancestors used to get by with. Every animate form and thing may it be technology, or a standard item of luxury tries to convince us that the existence of happiness lies with its possession. The more we possess however, the less fulfilled we are and hence the race towards happiness and wellbeing.

In order to cope with this ever increasing stress faced by modern executives, the subjects of ‘stress management’ and ‘change management’ have gained currency in recent times. However, despite all the academic research, the stress related issues still persist. Modern executives, especially in west, are constantly battling with these nerve-wrecking issues and trying to bring harmony in personal and professional lives by regaining the lost balance.

In contrast to western societies, the eastern culture maintained a strong connection with spirituality over a period of time. Every religion has a rich stream of spirituality and mysticism which has enriched the souls of its followers over centuries and that is still continuing as of today. These teachings are a complete code of life and have guided people in all areas of personal and professional lives. The fragrance of all those teachings is still in air and people in the east are knowingly and unknowingly reaping the benefits of practicing these virtues.

This thesis picks up Sufism, one of the prominent streams of spirituality, and attempts to explore the relevance of its teachings for modern executives working in highly competitive professional settings. The thesis especially focuses on identifying such values and approaches taught by Sufis like Rumi that can help modern executives in harmonizing their lives and regaining the lost balance in their personal and professional lives.

## **Purpose and Objective**

The purpose of this research is to explore and delve deep into the teachings of Rumi, a sufi saint, a poet and a mystic, and to ascertain its relevance in enabling modern executives to handle personal and professional challenges posed by the complex world of today.

The Sufi values are considered to be universal and timeless. The proponents of Sufism argue that it has not only sustained itself over centuries but has become even more relevant in today's complex environment. The paper attempts to explore the underlying reasons for the continuity and relevance of Sufism to the modern world. Equipped with the lenses acquired during my EMCCC journey, I would try to explore, if any, the hidden connections between the teachings and learning of Freud and Sufism as well.

## **Research Question**

The fundamental research question for this study is,

*Is the spirit of Rumi still with us and how can it help transform lives today?*

This question will be the central theme of this work and has been posed to elicit the fact as to whether the great teachings of the Sufi master can still garner the hidden treasures of happiness and whether it can still bring forth the transformation in the lives of executives and those in leadership roles.

## **Organization of Paper**

This research paper consists of six sections. Section-I deals with the review of relevant literature on the subject. In addition, this section explains some of the key concepts and practices of Sufism. It will also briefly touch upon the life of Mevlana Jalal ud Din Rumi as the thesis mainly revolves around his teachings. Section-II delineates the research methodology that has been adopted for this study. For this research, semi-structured interviews/discussions were held with a group of local executives. In addition, a modern day Sufi's practices were observed first-hand for developing an understanding of Sufi practices and teachings. Section-III explains the research settings of this Study. Section-IV deals with the main findings of this research which are drawn from researcher's interviews with the selected executives and his first-hand experience of interacting with a modern Sufi. The findings of the study build upon academic concepts acquired

by researcher during his course work at EMCCC. Section-V acknowledges limitations of this research study. Section-VI gives future researchers ideas about the certain areas and dimensions which can be explored further while doing research on this subject. This is followed by conclusion where the researcher also shares his insights and experiences while undertaking this research.

## **Section-I: Literature Review**

Sufism, as an offshoot of spirituality, has not only been a practice across religions but has also emerged as a focus of academic research. Since the practices of Sufis generally remained shrouded in mystery and for this reason, these have always triggered different emotions; it is pertinent to understand this concept. Hence, this chapter explores some of the relevant literature to bring forth key concepts and practices of Sufism. In addition, since Mevlana Jalal ud Din Rumi has, through his teachings and poetry, left an everlasting impression, it is therefore imperative to understand his transition from a religious scholar to a Sufi poet and mystic. The section examines this transformation to contextualize the concept of Sufism as discussed in this paper.

### **1.1. Review of academic works on Sufism**

‘The Essential Rumi’ is a translation of Rumi’s poetry and is written by Coleman Barks and John Moyne. Here, the translations from Persian into English from various renowned experts are rendered further by the Coleman Barks. Rumi has inspired millions through centuries and across faiths, may it be Abrahamic or Central Asian like Buddhism or Hinduism. His work has been brought forth impressively by Barks with over a decade of indulgent efforts. Rumi embraces everyone that comes across into the spiritual halo, there is nobody who is shunned or repulsed. On the other hand, the stories come with a lesson to be pondered upon for long time; mixing humour, drama and adventure at times. However, the central theme is always the longing for the beloved God. As an alchemist, Rumi keeps prescribing the antidotes for the broken heart, repeatedly forcing the reader to delve deep into the search of his soul. ‘The Essential Rumi’ is a book to behold for all readers, may they be looking for a path or just being inundated by the daily struggles of life.

In ‘Heart, Self and Soul: The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance and Harmony’, Robert Frager has presented a global view of Sufism and has highlighted the challenges which a person faces in his daily life. In addition, he has elaborated on the ways to transform the negative power to that of a positive one. He has advised the ways to attain union with the beloved God through the steps of the Sufi path and by catering to the needs of the broken-hearted and spirited. Frager has presented his work in shape of poems and also has recommended certain exercises with examples from daily life for the seekers of the path of Sufism. Not only he has untangled the mysteries of Sufism but has brought forward much deeper meanings from the subject. There are details on the opening of one’s heart with the discussions on the seven souls and the various in-depth practices of the Sufi faith. Also, it mentions stories of the Sufi masters of yesteryears with their teachings that have been reinterpreted to ensure that the message stays universal.

In 'Living Presence (Revised): A Sufi Way to Mindfulness and the Essential Self', Kabir Helminski transformed the magical unseen power of Sufi mysticism to a bouquet of fragrant phrases. Being a Sufi teacher himself, he is recognized to influence a generation of seekers of the path through his works and talks. With the core focus on being in the 'presence' and the real advantages it carries for a peaceful life, the 'Living Presence' is a step by step guide to the path towards the beloved God. He is of the view that the power of presence resides in some hidden corner of the mind that must be sought to bring in a healthy life and a sane lifestyle. Sufism cultivates a mindset that encourages this lifestyle and brings forth the joys of the presence. He has elaborated various techniques to achieve the 'presence'; a state that is sought after by so many throughout the ages. Utilizing the wisdom of the Mevlana, he has fused Sufi teachings with the modern life experiences. Indeed, it is a doorbell to ring and enter the world of the spiritual realm.

William C. Chittick in his book 'The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi' has prescribed antidote for the spiritual ills of the common man. This book is not only comprehensive but easily understandable as well. Chittick has taken up the works of Rumi and has provided the basic tenets of the practices while indulging man's role in the overall fabric of the universe. Various stages of annihilation, *Fa'na* are described in detail while removing the unnecessary complications that usually confuse the common reader. Detailed introductions of each chapter delves deep into the mind of the Sufi practitioners and literally act as a hand-holding exercise to take the blind on the path of higher spirituality. His work looks deep into the into the teachings of Islam and its role in the deeper attainment of spirituality through the lens of Mevlana.

A firm believer and an authority on Sufism, Idries Shah in his Book 'The Way of Sufi' has presented his teachings, poetry, lectures and discussions. Hidden but obvious, present but absent, the dimensions of Sufism are many and are beautifully presented in the work by the author. The reflection and shade of Sufism casts a great impression on the inner dimensions of the religion by understanding the self and the often restless mind. This book demands the readers to understand Sufism as a way of life and not just an empty theory to be set aside after going through it. Current writers take the aspects of this wonderful work and blend it all together to formulate the images of peace and tranquility. This work is for the man of today, the man of the present and the man that goes around his work with love and dedication.

A not to be missed novel by Elif Shafak, 'The Forty Rules of Love', grows parallel in two different universes and accounts. One is the modern day- in current times and the other featured at the time of Rumi with his interactions with Shams of Tabrez. Shams, the wandering dervish, transformed the erstwhile and unknown religious leader Rumi to a mystic poet. Shams lived his

life defined around the forty rules of love which shrouds every aspect of one's life even today. The book lays out the ultimate recipe for happiness wrapped gently in the qualities of compassion, understanding and tolerance to the path of God. The book provides practical tips for self-reflection and to counter the barriers between the self and the enlightened heart. It can be considered as a work worth reading for the seekers of the path.

A living saint and a Sufi practitioner, Syed Sarfraz A Shah is among the leading names of spiritual order in Pakistan. '*Kahey Faqeer*' (Sayings of a Sufi), a series of books, is a collection of his answers to the various spiritual questions either asked in a privileged setting or by audience on a famous TV show. From personal to religious, the sessions cover the whole array of human thoughts and the struggles with the solutions provided by Mr. Shah. Selflessness and service to humanity are the essence of the books and his message. Most significant aspect of his teachings are that these are extremely relevant to the issues faced by modern world.

## **1.2. Overview of Sufism and its key concepts:**

### **1.2.1. Definition of Sufi**

At the outset, it is pertinent to define the term 'Sufi'. A renowned Sufi saint from 9<sup>th</sup> century Abu Hasan al-Nuri has defined it as, "The Sufi is he to whom nothing is attached, and who does not become attached to anything" (Frager & Fadiman, 1997, p. 246).

For the Sufi, the common man's daily wants and needs are nothing but a distraction from the real reason of life and real purpose behind human existence. A Sufi does not get attracted to the material aspects of life and he just takes what is only required for sustenance. For him, life is there for a sole reason which is to seek God. The treacherous journey of this life with its crevices and ditches are crossed over by the Sufi seeking the Truth. All this is done with full devotion and humility without a spec of complain or an afterthought.

### **1.2.2. Sufism a way of life**

Delving deep in oneself, Sufism is a continuous inner journey. It is a way of life which is lived and translated as a manifestation of the true self. This true self has the colours, identity, aroma, magic and love that is beyond comprehension to the outer world known as our physical self. Many a times, Sufism is confused with religion and a certain dogma to be adhered to prosper. However, in reality, it is merely an ever-blossoming inner experience and a way one lives his life. In fact, Sufism is not to be mixed with religion and at times, it is continuously at odds with the organized belief systems. As Rumi remarks, "Everyone has turned his face toward some direction, but the saints have turned in the direction without directions" (Chittick, 1983, p. 23). Sufism is a timeless truth that has been carried through thousands of years of tradition within various cultures and communities. Being dynamic, Sufism evolves and like water finds its way

through the sands of time and stays relevant. Sufism untangles the mysteries of the soul bringing forth a meaning of an otherwise unidirectional life. Renowned writer of Sufism, Amineh Pryor (2000) is of the view that core objective of a Sufi is to have knowledge about the reality of one's existence and that is only possible by knowing oneself.

The core foundation of Sufism is love. Sufis believe that God can only be reached if one has unconditional love for the Creator and Sufism paves way for that as it is all about boundless love. The lover is always in the presence of the beloved and never loses the sight, his actions are a manifest of the love and this is what he distributes generously to whomever he touches. For a Sufi, there is nothing that belongs to him, rather it is the Lord that presides over all his matters. Rumi has explained the philosophy of love by narrating story of *Mansoor Hillaj*, another Sufi Saint. He writes that “the saint has died to himself and becomes living through the Lord; hence God’s mysteries are upon his lips” (Chittick, 1983, p. 185).

Awareness and knowledge of the Absolute is the goal of the Sufis, they strive and struggle to elevate in the levels to achieve oneness with the divine. This is done in life and is achieved in death as death is a spectre of meeting the most beloved. Once the heart illuminates with the light of the Lord, only then do we achieve the meeting that we strive for all along.

### **1.3. Key concepts of Sufism**

In this sub-section, some of the key concepts of Sufism shall be explored for a better understanding of the sufi philosophy. If we look at the sufi renderings, purification of the soul or the *Nafs* has been emphasized again and again. The central theme is the cleansing of this component, so the light of the divine can shine in one’s own self. The core focus of this sub-section is, therefore, to define the *Nafs* and why is its transformation of absolute importance in the spiritual journey.

Sufism is “grounded in millions of hours of ‘clinical’ experience of spiritual guidance” (Pryor, 2000, p. 1) and the seekers of the truth have always emphasised on the importance of the *Nafs* (the human psyche). *Nafs*, a word from Arabic language, can be the equivalent of the soul or anima. As per Sufis, *Nafs* is our main component and it is a “psychological structure” of human beings” (Frager, 1999).

The struggles that the *Nafs* goes through, may it be through internal whisperings or outwards attractions, are manifested through *Muraqaba* (Introspection) where the seeker audits his past and present and brings to the fore the reality that is all too apparent yet invisible. Rumi says, “Its outward says, ‘I am this and no more’. Its inward says, ‘Look well, before and behind!’ Its outward denies, saying, ‘The inward is nothing’. The inward says, ‘We will show you. Wait!’”

(Chittick, 1983, p. 21).

With the awareness of the *Nafs* and the uphill battle it must fight to achieve its goals, we will strive to get to know its various levels. On journeying through the *Nafs* and making its way through tribulations, one reaches the desired destination, his own centre.

#### **1.4. The Seven Stages of Soul**

In words of Rumi; There is a Soul inside of your Soul. Search that Soul (Ergin, p. 45a) and there are seven levels to crossover for an individual on the journey towards personal enlightenment and excellence; eventually reaching the destination of the seekers. According to Amineh (Pryor, 2000) “different people are closer to or further away from knowing their own perfection. Through the process of transformation, we move by degrees or stages toward our perfect centre” (Pryor, 2000, p. 53).

The person on spiritual journey is the seeker of truth and is called *Salik*. Through regulating the self and strict personal discipline, *Salik* ascends to the levels according to the effort and patience he displays, the effort to reach his or her own center. The teacher is also required to ensure that the *Salik* goes through the enveloping experience of all stages before he or she is moved up to the next level. This is indeed a difficult journey. At times, the *Salik* may get stuck and stays at the same spiritual level for ages or he or she may be required to start the spiritual journey afresh. Through centuries, the various schools of Sufism have developed systems and teachings to guide the seekers of the path, *Saliks* to ensure that they are rightly guided in their journey. In ‘Heart, Sufi and Soul’ (Frager, 1999) has captured those learnings and has explained those stages as follow:

##### **1.4.1. The Tyrannical *Nafs***

This is also called as *Nafs-e-Ammara*. Although it is the first stage of *Nafs*, but it is so dominating and commanding that it administers strict control over the individual with the help of images of glory, exalted praise and adulation. It is a slave to pleasure and gratification through the accumulation of riches, power and ego and these become the sources of one’s satisfaction and one is always ready to pay any price for these (Frager, 1999). Resultantly, one ends up chained in shackles of extreme pleasure and pride and at times, he or she is not even aware of it. Sufis have further elaborated it as one of the greatest traps and it drowns *Salik* in its whims and desires.

##### **1.4.2. The Regretful *Nafs***

The *Nafs* here is also called the *Nafs-e-Lawama*. At this stage, *Salik* has reached that level of awareness where one becomes aware of one’s own weaknesses without having developed the ability to change any of those. Frager is of the view that by the time one reaches this level, one becomes aware of their own self-centric attitude and the negative effects it casts. Despite being

fully aware of it, he/she has still not developed the ability to alter them (Frager, 1999). At this stage, *Salik* is still engulfed by self-love and is characterized by pride, rigidity of beliefs, the lust for worldly and sensual pleasure and his Master helps him chain these monsters of his own soul.

#### **1.4.3. The Inspired *Nafs***

This *Nafs* at this stage is called *Nafs-e-Mulhama*. After successfully passing through the first two stages, the Master has ploughed the ground where *Salik* can sow seeds of love, not only for himself but for others as well. Generosity, humility and forgiveness are some of the salient characteristics which a soul exhibits at this stage.

(Frager, 1999) has explained another feature of this stage and that is called inspiration. He is of the view that it stems from the “inner voice of guidance” of the heart. At this stage a very strong emotional feeling of goodness surrounds *Salik*.

#### **1.4.4. The Serene *Nafs***

The *Nafs* at this stage is called *Nafs-e-Mutmainna* or the *Nafs at-rest*. At this stage, *Salik* has successfully relieved himself from shackles of previous initial stages and now his spiritual journey has entered a different level. This stage has certain peculiar characteristics which include faith in divine, lowering ambivalence towards life and staying content with one’s life to name a few.

#### **1.4.5. The Pleased *Nafs***

This is also called as *Nafs-e-Raddiya*. *Salik*, at this stage, has reached the level where he happily accepts rather takes pleasure in all the atrocities which come across him in his daily life. This is a stage of moving towards wholeness, where dualities start to disappear and where people are “no longer split between our material desires and our desires for God” (Frager, 1999, p. 80). One of the most prominent characteristic that a *Salik* exhibits is his love for humanity.

#### **1.4.6. The Pleasing *Nafs***

*Nafs* at this stage is called *Nafs-e-Mardiyya*. *Salik*, at this stage, which is almost the last stage, has managed to reach the level where his soul becomes reflection of Divine. In words of Rumi, “the world appears to be a multiplicity, just as a shattered mirror reflects many different reflections of the same image. When we heal the cracks in the mirror, it becomes unbroken once again, [it] reflects only a single image” (Frager, 1999, p. 84). At this stage, *Salik* becomes an epitome of Divine and he is in no need for anything.

#### **1.4.7. The Pure *Nafs***

This stage is called as *Nafs-e-Safiya*. This is the final stage and *Salik* gets the ultimate reward of his spiritual journey which is a purified *Nafs*. At this stage, he has managed to conquer his *Nafs*

and is completely submerged in divine. This is the stage where complete oneness with Divine is attained and universe is open to *Salik*.

In the words of Rumi, “If you could get rid of yourself just once, the secret of secrets would open to you” (Frager, 1999, p. 87). The person at this stage is called *Insaan-e-Kamil* or the perfect human being.

## **1.5. Sufi Practices**

### **1.5.1. *Muraqabah* (self-reflection)**

One of the foremost practice of Sufis is *Muraqaba* and the English word for that is self-reflection. One has to have microscopic vision to look at every nook and corner of the self that has been muddied by the worldly thoughts. The seeker must look at all his past deeds and dominating thoughts. Diving deep into his recurring thoughts of fear and known desires, he becomes aware of his status and the challenges to avoid. Metaphorically speaking, the mirror of the heart has to be polished to reflect the divine light, so one must remove all the dirt and mist that has fogged it from the presence of the beloved. The seeker has to be in the “Now” at all times and must not drift at all; once focused he is there at the status of mindfulness and self-awareness. It does take time but with practice, serenity takes over anxiety and calm shadows the restlessness.

*Muraqaba* is a must for the Sufis and it increases with the rank; the higher the rank, the more intense it gets. As the intensity of the reflection becomes more glorious and dignified, the concentration must increase to travel within. Although journey to reach one's center is full of challenges but how sweet would the feeling be to finally able to touch one's own soul. It is said that the greatness of the journey is death before death.

### **1.5.2. *Dhikr* (rhythmic recitation)**

A seeker is never unaware of the constant presence of the beloved. In addition to the prescribed practices of religion, one must ensure that the regular and daily routine of the *Dhikr* or rhythmic recitation is never broken. Focus, breath control and various other techniques are usually used to avoid distractions. There comes a level where one is in state of *Dhikr* with an objective to feel beloved's presence, in his center, at all times.

### **1.5.3. *Hazari* (Visitation)**

Although considered blasphemous by orthodox school of thoughts, the visitations of the seekers to the graves and tombs of the Masters of the path is a regular practice. The mausoleums of Rumi and Shams Tabrez are a regular site of pilgrimage to many seekers.

### **1.5.4. *Sa'ma/Qawali* (Music)**

The thumping of one's feet to the ground, the swirling and raising one's hands to the heavens with music is a relic of Konya in Turkey. The dervish hits the ground, the earth and raises his

hands to the sky seeking the beloved while circling like the universe in a trance like state. The music is played to elevate the spirit and the words and melodies are mixed to create magic. Even if one doesn't understand the language, the music sets them to loose themselves in a ritualistic movement.

There is a format and a discipline to *Sa'ma*. There are intellectual and formal discussions, then prayer and *Dhikr* and then the music according to the regions would play, like *Qawali* in the sub-continent.

Not all Sufi traditions believe or accept the inclusion of music and even Rumi acknowledged that there could be other paths to God as well but his was destined to be through music. The Indian Sufi tradition also has a remarkable history of music inclusiveness. Death before death is the centrepiece of *Sa'ma* and once the shackles of the ego have been curtailed and broken, the seeker reaches for the skies. Rumi says that, “*Come, come do you hear the music? The Sa'ma has begun!*” (Mafi & Kolin, p. 91). At another place Rumi Says, “*O Lover of God, when you start whirling, you leave the two worlds. This world of whirling is out of the two worlds*” (Can, 2005, p. 211).

How the heart connects with the mind and the body is a clear goal of what *Sa'ma* eventually achieves. *Sa'ma* is meditation in motion, it is a universe within itself and a swirling galaxy in an expanding landscape.

## **1.6. Rumi's transition from a religious scholar to a Sufi**

Since the thesis revolves around the teachings and values of Mevlana Jalal ud Din Rumi, it is pertinent to briefly explore his life and circumstances that led to his transformation from a religious scholar to a mystic. Konya, being the seat of Jalal ud Din Rumi's tomb, is generally referred to his city of birth, however the sage was born in Balkh, Afghanistan in September 1207. Being from a lineage of mystics, his father was a theologian and a Sufi with a following in Balkh, Afghanistan. Upon the death of his father, Rumi took over the position of *Sheikh*, religious scholar in Konya and was engaged in teaching.

In 1244, a wandering dervish by the name of Shams came to Konya and being ascetic of a very high order, sought a companion to accompany him in his mission to union with the Beloved. It had been difficult for anyone to keep up with this sage and his eyes fell on Rumi to be the chosen one for his companionship. Various stories, from miracles performed by Shams to superhuman behaviours and the tales, regarding their first encounter hover around today. But one thing is for certain; the two of them had found the answers among themselves.

The religious community did not approve of this close association between the two and even the students of Rumi, being neglected, created an upheaval. Historians have quoted various reasons

for disliking of Shams in those circles. Sensing this discomfort in town, Shams disappeared with no trace at all about his whereabouts. And as per Annemarie Schimmel, a renowned author and scholar on Rumi, that disappearance was the beginning of Rumi's transformation to a sufi poet. Rumi said: "You are the light of my house, don't go away and leave me alone" (Iqbal, 1983, p. 120).

The second meeting came about when Rumi discovered that Shams had been residing in Damascus and he sent his son to bring him back to Konya. The two of them united again and reinitiated the long in-depth conversations about the mystical path. Shams was staying in Rumi's home. This restarted the gossip mill and the community as well as Rumi's family turned against both the seekers of truth.

There are various stories about the disappearance of Shams but it is generally believed that he was murdered. He was never seen again as his body or remains could not be found. It is strange that his grave is located near that of Rumi, but who is actually buried there is still a mystery. Shams and Rumi, the inseparable ones got to go on separate paths in the body, but in soul they had become one. Rumi was devastated by his friend's disappearance and he wandered looking for him everywhere. He went as far as Syria to locate him and unable to trace him, he fell upon the final realization beautifully encapsulated in the following poem:

"Why should I seek? I am the same as he. His essence speaks through me. I have been looking for myself!" (Barks, 1995).

They were finally one and they had amalgamated into a single unit burning in the furnace of the path. Who was the writer and who recited could not be described anymore? Shams was still dictating, and it was Rumi who was writing through the ink that was flowing through his soul. It was incomprehensible for the common man, the *Fa'na*, annihilation of one into another. Little does the man of the pulpit understand this whereas Rumi was the one who could dive deeper into this than anyone else during his times.

### **1.6.1. The Works**

Rumi is considered as the greatest spiritual master across the world and through many traditions, he is not just confined to that of Muslims. He has been known as one of the most popular poet in the United States and considered a legend in the Muslim world especially the ones with a strong Sufi inclination like Turks. As an acknowledgement of Rumi's contribution, UNESCO declared 2007 as the 'International Year of Rumi'.

Sufism is a path to self-understanding and through it one attains the love of God. Once reached at this stature, then there is no self and no beloved, everything turns into One. Rumi in his poem "The Tavern" is saying; "This poetry. I never know what I'm going to say. I don't plan it. When

I'm outside the saying of it, I get very quiet and rarely speak at all” (Barks, 1995, p. 2).

The most popular of Rumi’s works have been:

- i. Dewaan-e-Shams Tabrez
- ii. *Mathnawai*
- iii. *Fi Hi Ma Fi Hi* (In it what is in it)
- iv. *Majlis-e-Sabah* (The Seven Sittings)
- v. *Makatib* (Letters)

It is worth mentioning that according to Afzal Iqbal, the Mathnawai was called as ‘the Qur’an in the Persian.’ (Iqbal, 1983, p. 175).

## **Section-II: Research Methodology**

This chapter elaborates the methodology adopted for this research. Because of the exploratory nature of the subject, qualitative research methodology has been adopted for this paper. This is important as Sufism is a complex subject with varying interpretations about its practices and concepts and qualitative research approach was considered most appropriate methodology to arrive at a logical conclusion.

### **2.1. Interviews**

There are various definitions of qualitative research interview. The focus of qualitative interviews is to explain predominant themes in lives of individuals and the foremost objective is to comprehend its essence (Kvale, 1996). Out of structured, semi-structured and unstructured interview formats, semi-structured interviews were conducted as it has components of both structured and unstructured interviews. In addition to already prepared questions, it gave researcher an opportunity to clarify and seek explanation at any point. While conducting interviews, a deliberate effort was made to avoid personal biases and to let the participants express their feelings and understanding freely. At times, the participants would digress from the main topic in the flow of discussion and bringing them back to topic was another challenge which researcher faced.

On the point of audio recording of interviews, people were generally reluctant. Hence, the researcher maintained notes of the discussions.

### **2.2. Questions**

The interviews were divided in parts. The sample questionnaire is appended at **Annex-1**. In addition to basic background questions, the discussion in the first part of the interview revolved around the following questions:

- i. What is Sufism?
- ii. What is the first image that springs to your mind when you hear the word Sufi?
- iii. Are you attached to any Sufi school of thought?
- iv. Who is Rumi and what are his teachings all about?

In the second part of the interviews, the views of participants were sought on the following question:

- i. What in your opinion is the main ingredient of a happy/successful personal & professional life?

This session helped researcher explore whether interviewees were aware that the characteristics/attributes they have just shared stem from teachings of Sufis and specially of Rumi.

In the third part of the interview, researcher provided an opportunity to interviewees if they wanted to share anything specific that has not been covered in the above questions.

Finally, in order to see people's perception regarding use of Sufism in promotion of harmony in today's Pakistani society, the following question was asked.

- i. Can Sufism/teachings of Rumi promote harmony in the ever increasing intolerant society of Pakistan?

### **2.3. Observing a Sufi**

In order to have a first-hand experience of Sufi teachings, researcher attended Q&A sessions which were conducted by a renowned spiritual personality based in Pakistan. It was kind of participatory session where questions of devotees and other attendees were being addressed. Researcher observed behaviour of Sufi and listened to his teachings while taking notes. Recordings of those sessions are available in CDs and transcripts of those are available in the form of books.

## Section-III: Research Settings

### 3.1. Place of Research

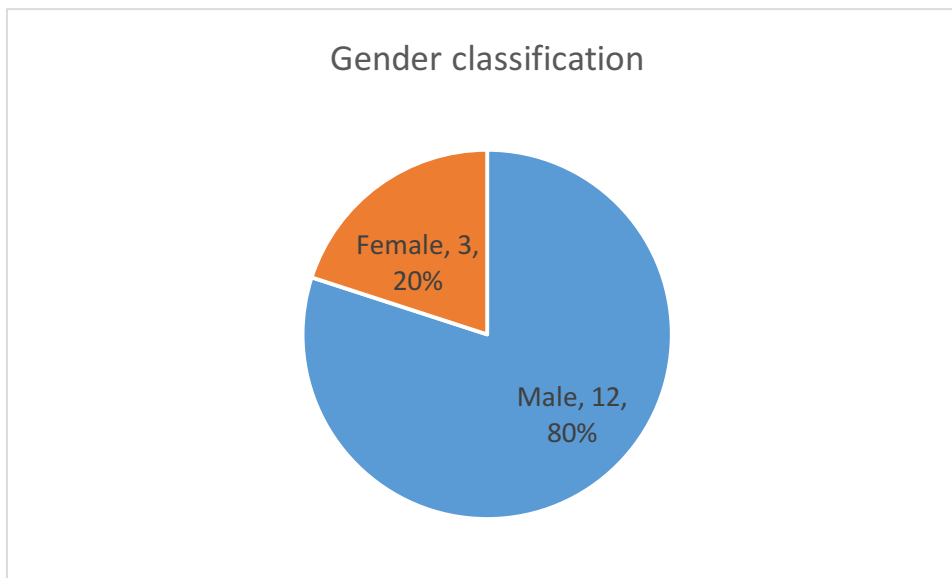
Research was conducted in Lahore, the second largest city of Pakistan, having a population of around 11 million as per National Census conducted in 2017. Pakistan is a country with a population of 207.75 million and area spanning 881,913 square kilometres. It has five administrative units, Sindh, Baluchistan, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan. State religion is pre-dominantly Islam (96%) but have people from other religions which include Christianity (1.5%), Hindu (1.5%), Other-Sikh, Zoroastrianism etc. (1%). (GOP, 2017)

### 3.2. Selection of Interviewees

For the purpose of this research and given the time available for field work, fifteen (15) people were selected for interviews. The detailed information about the selected group is at **Annex-2**. The primary selection criteria were their leadership positions in their respective organizations, educational qualifications as well as their ability to influence a large number of people in their respective sectors. These people are generally considered as role models in their industry or area of specialization which include both the corporate as well as public sector in Pakistan.

#### 3.2.1. Gender

Pakistan is primarily a male dominated society. This is generally reflected in the organizational hierarchies where the female representation is often minimal. Hence, out of 15 interviewees, 12 were male and only three were female executives.

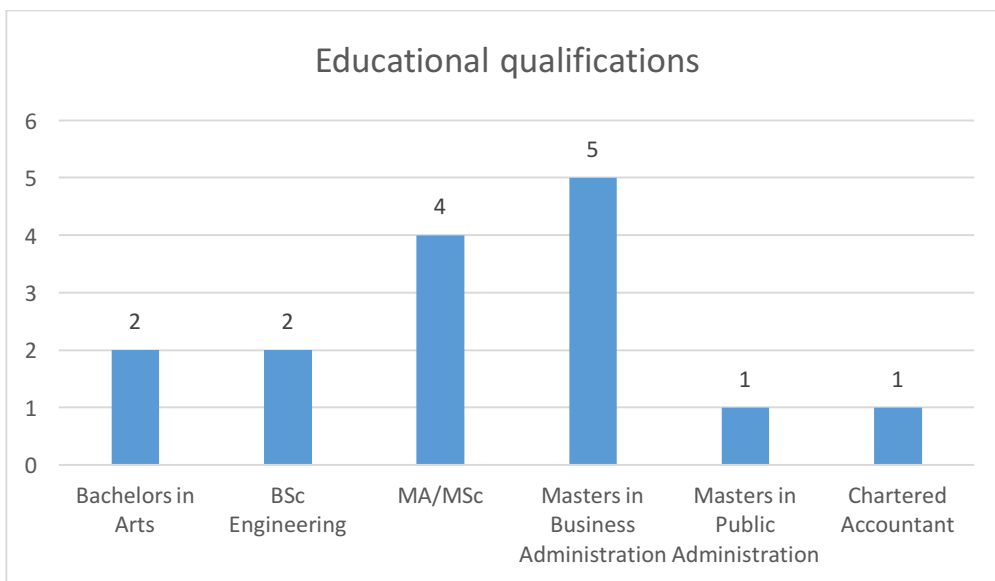


#### 3.2.2. Educational Qualifications

The educational qualifications of the interviewees are reflected in the following table:

**Table 1: Educational qualifications**

<b>Educational Qualifications</b>	<b>No. of Interviewees</b>
Bachelors in Arts	2
BSc Engineering	2
MA/MSc	6
Masters in Business Administration	3
Masters in Public Administration	1
Chartered Accountant	1

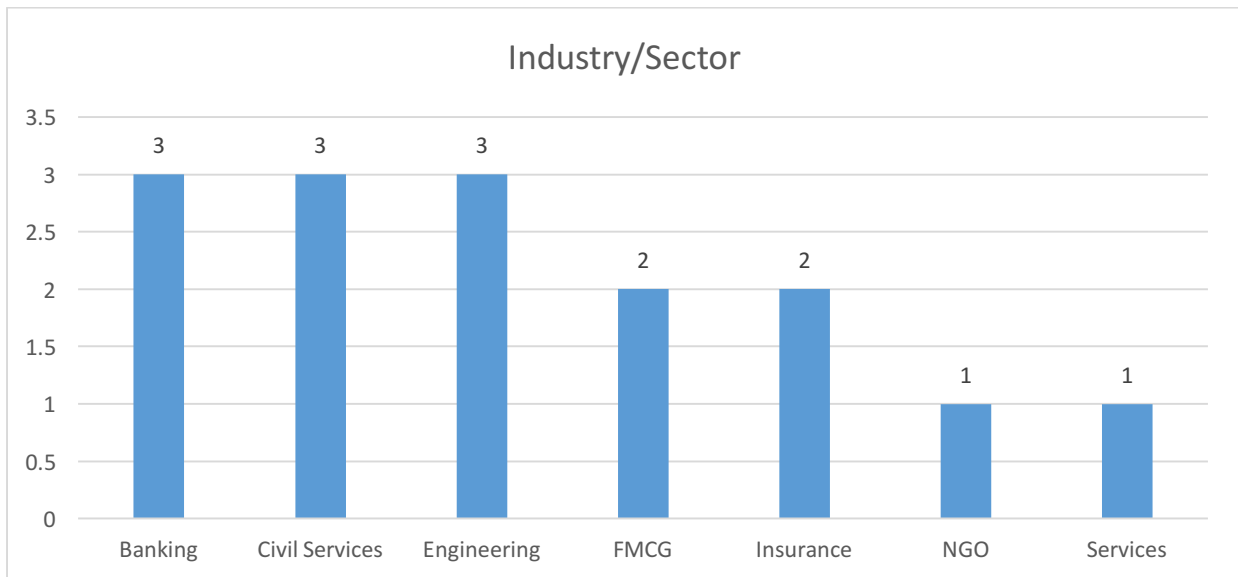


### **3.2.3. Employment status and profession**

As stated earlier, all the participants are working at senior to middle management levels in multinationals, local organizations and public sector. The employee strength ranged from 100 to 1000 employees in every organization. Out of 15 participants, 6 also had the opportunity to work in a foreign country at some time during their professional careers. While selecting participants, an effort was made to get representation from prominent sectors in Pakistan's economy and this is reflected in the following table:

**Table 2: Industry/sector classification of participants**

Industry/Sector	No. of Interviewees
Banking	3
Civil Services	3
Engineering	3
FMCG	2
Insurance	2
NGO	1
Services	1



#### **3.2.4. Dates and timings of interviews**

Interviews were conducted from May 10 to May 30, 2018. Participants were offered two time slots for interview: one between 0900 hrs. to 1030 hrs. and the other was after office hours which was between 1700 hrs. to 1830 hrs. Since the holy month of Ramadan, where Muslims observe fast during the day, started in mid of May this year, hence after office interview time was changed and some of interviews were conducted between 1330 hrs. to 1500 hrs.

#### **3.2.5. Place of interviews**

Interviews took place in the respective offices/workplaces of all interviewees.

#### **3.2.6. Confidentiality**

The participants were verbally assured of confidentiality. Although researcher offered that Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) could be provided to the interview; however, no one asked for it.

### **3.3. Venue for interaction with modern day sufi**

As part of research methodology adopted for this study, the researcher interacted with a renowned Sufi, Syed Sarfraz A. Shah as mentioned earlier also. Mr. Shah resides in Lahore and he holds weekly sessions at his residence. Q&A part of session takes place on every Saturday between 1100 hrs. till 1200 hrs. at 212-C, Jahanzaib Block, Allama Iqbal Town, Lahore and these sessions are open for all.

## **Section-IV: Findings and Discussions**

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this research is to explore relevance of Rumi's philosophy to the personal and professional life of a modern executive. The review of academic literature, interaction with modern sufi and discussions with people in the leadership role helped the researcher in developing this understanding. The section deals with the findings of the study.

In the prevailing global culture of illusory experiences and plaguing materialism, it is the work of Sufi poets that can bring back much needed harmony in the lives of the people. Sufism serves as an example of how there is so much more than that meets the eye, that there are things beyond what is in front of us. Sufism clarifies the real purpose of life and this is precisely what is required by today's materialistic world. Practices of Sufis and the knowledge of their teachings can help humans to steer through rough waters of life without losing sight of the real purpose of existence. Unfortunately, because of little knowledge, adherence to orthodox beliefs and at times, having heard various unauthentic mystical stories, people take a very narrow view of Sufism.

The most common misappropriations made of Sufi poetry are a product of unfamiliarity with the way poets and Sufis used metaphors in their poetry and works. These were really meant to be reminders about the Formless Being, from which every form exists. Sufi poetry was never about a fantasized escape through intoxication rather it is indeed one of the best ways to start the inward journey i.e. the journey to know thyself as inscribed on the Temple of Apollo in Delphi.

Rumi's poetry is considered a basis of many modern academic disciplines, psychology and sociology being two of them. These Sufi teachings, being universal and timeless, have influenced modern academic disciplines tremendously. During interviews, the participants were requested to identify characteristics and values that they considered essential for leading a balanced and fulfilled life despite challenging professional environment. The universality of sufi practices and teachings was clearly established when participants could identify almost similar values, traits and characteristics that Rumi had preached eight centuries ago as a recipe for a balanced and content life.

Before we proceed further and establish the connection between traits, attributes and characteristics of living a balanced life as described by interviewees with pearls of wisdom by Rumi, I would like to share a dialogue that took place between Rumi and one of his disciples. This will give readers an idea about the practicality, universality and timelessness of his teachings.

*Rumi was asked "What is Poison?" He replied with a beautiful answer; "Anything which is more than our necessity is Poison. It may be Power, Wealth, Hunger, Ego, Greed, Laziness, Love, Ambition, Hate or anything".*

*Question was asked, “What is fear?” The reply “Non acceptance of uncertainty. If we accept that uncertainty, it becomes adventure!”*

*To the question, “What is envy?”, Rumi replied, “Non acceptance of good in others. If we accept that good, it becomes inspiration!”.*

*In response to “What is Anger?”, Rumi stated, “Non acceptance of things which are beyond our control. If we accept, it becomes tolerance!”.*

*And to query on, “What is hatred?”, Rumi’s response was, “Non acceptance of person as he is. If we accept person unconditionally, it becomes love!” (Lucknowi, 2016).*

During interviews, self-reflection, gratitude, forgiveness, learning from setback, challenging fear, having faith, generosity and humility were attributed as many enablers of success and the reasons of living a happy life. Researcher looked into works of Rumi and found out that these secrets were unveiled by him eight centuries ago.

#### **4.1. Self-reflection**

At the very outset, all the participants shared that the habit of self-reflection is one the key success factors in their lives. They were of the view that the whirlwind routine of daily lives makes people forget about the most important of all factors, themselves. The daily running around is not helping people and the inclusion of technology in our lives has made things even worse as far as self-reflection is concerned.

The participants were generally of the view that if one requires serenity and peace in one’s life, then self-reflection is the right approach. The pitfalls and crevices that look so large and unsurmountable are all but a matter of thought. We see our issues as if no one has ever encountered these. Once, we reflect and act upon the conclusions, the path becomes all too clear and we chase the goal that once looked so far.

Another view regarding importance of self-reflection was that it helped them develop their skills and review their effectiveness. Some of the participants of research were of the view that they take self-reflection as positive questioning and took it as an important part of learning and progression.

“Is it easy?” “No it is not!” was the response of interviewees. To reap full benefits of it, one has to practise it like a ritual. Regarding the timing, it was observed that it varied from person to person, some would do it in the morning and some prefer it doing it in the evening before sleeping. Some of the participants shared that they have developed this habit of self-reflection during day time whenever they come across a critical situation.

From the treasures of Rumi, I found the following that explain the concept of self-reflection as explained by Sufis:

***“O, happy the soul that saw its own faults”***

(Society, 2016).

Sufis have, time and again advised, that self-reflection should be a way to ask some stern and tough questions of oneself, but one should be careful that it should not turn into a session of self-loathing or self-pity.

On the timing of self-reflection Rumi says:

***“The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.***

***Don't go back to sleep”***

(Barks, 1995).

For People who find self-reflection challenging, Rumi says;

***“If you start on the journey the road will be opened for you”***

(Ergin & Johnson, 2007, p. 115).

Sufis are of the view that self-reflection helps disciple eradicate negative feelings like fear, anxiety, blame, shame, guilt, lust, greed, and envy. These thoughts and emotions create negative ripples for a person at both personal and professional life.

## **4.2. Having Gratitude**

The second trait that the interviewees could identify was ‘gratitude’. Feelings of all the interviewees can be summed in one phrase that “gratitude is an attitude”. In every interview, invariably every one stressed upon the importance and significance of gratitude. Some of the interviewees were of the view that gratitude has done wonders in their personal and professional lives as it has helped them develop bonds and relations with their colleagues. Interviewees, irrespective of their profession, organizational culture, educational background and seniority shared emotional, social, personal and professional benefits and advantages of practicing gratitude.

Researcher looked into works of Rumi and came across following jewels

***“If every tip of every hair on me could speak,***

***I still couldn't say my gratitude.”***

(Barks, 1995, p. 164)

There is no better way to stress upon the importance of gratitude the way Rumi has emphasized. Without doubt, gratitude covers all the corners of human life. In this ever changing world, gratitude is one such trait that shall remain remain constant and relevant. In words of Rumi,

***“What is love?***

***Gratitude”***

(Barks, 1995, p. 92)

With the technological advancement that the world is witnessing today, it is imperative that we inculcate traits of gratitude and love in our future generations. This is important as artificial intelligence and technology is fast replacing human interaction at deeper emotional level.

### **4.3. Practising Forgiveness**

The third universal trait for leading a peaceful and balanced life was identified by the participants as the ability to forgive. In professional settings, people with varying capacities and strengths are required to work together and there is always a possibility that a team member may falter, advertently or inadvertently. Participants of the discussions overwhelmingly agreed that ability to forgive is an important trait because carrying a burden for long is always tiresome, be it physical or emotional. A feeling of hurt and resentment is something that always labours the soul and for one to grow in stages, it is always advisable to forgive and forget. We are as much capable of making mistakes as anyone else in the world; so why carry these feelings; just look ahead. This was an overwhelming response of the interviewees. However, it was clarified that this act of forgiveness should be practiced with due care as in certain cases, where the overall peace and stability of a society is at stake, such an act of forgiveness may compromise the law of the land as well as social fabric of the society.

Searching the treasure of Mevlana, I came across the following advice;

*“Come, come, whoever you are.*

*Wanderer, worshipper, lover of living, it doesn't matter*

*Ours is not a caravan of despair.*

*Come even if you have broken your vow a thousand times,*

*Come, yet again, come, come.”*

(Citlak & Bingul, 2007, p. 8).

Rumi throughout his life, like all Sufis, has been a big proponent of forgiveness. He is of the view that it makes a person free from revenge, jealousy and the desire to hurt others and it enriches the life of that individual. And for traveller of spiritual path, this trait boosts his spiritual enlightenment and becomes one of the prime fuels of spiritual elevation. It is indeed a way of self-fulfilment and it creates an aura of positivity around the person who practices this trait.

### **4.4. Learnings from Failure and Setbacks.**

While explaining learnings from failures and setback, some of the participants got little emotional. No doubt reflecting on sad events of life triggers strong emotions. As human beings, the last thing we want life to present us is failure. However, everyone was of the view that during that moment of failure, they felt dejected and as if the world has come to an end. After passing through that time, failure turned out to be a guideline as against a stop sign which was perceived

in the beginning. All the interviewees commented that the opposite of failure is success and one of the major factors of success is the lessons one learns from reflecting on the failures and setback of life.

Rumi has given a crisp message to all of us in the form of following sayings.

***“If you are irritated by every rub, how will your mirror be polished?”***

(Quotes, 2017).

Rumi, in his teachings, has advised that taking every failure as an end or the beginning is in one's own hands. He is strongly of the view that one should take these setbacks with a positive frame of mind and treat them as opportunities of growth.

#### **4.5. Challenging Fear**

Interviewees were of the opinion that at one point in time, they were residing in their own “comfort zone” which was a psychological/emotional/ behavioural construct that defined the routine of their daily life. Being in one's comfort zone implied familiarity, safety, and security. At times creating a comfort zone is a healthy adaptation for much of our lives. But for growth and transformation, stepping out of comfort zone is mandatory. Everyone agreed that they faced challenges and stepping out of comfort zone was not easy. Upon reflection, they confirmed that they were pleasantly surprised on their ability to rise to the occasion.

Researcher searched works of Rumi and found a befitting quatrain which is as follows;

***“Why do you stay in prison,  
when the door is so wide open?***

***Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking.***

***Live in silence.”***

(Barks, 1995, p. 3)

Rumi in his teachings has advised us to be bold and challenge fear as staying in comfort zone is detrimental to one's progress. It is in the prison of one's comfort zone that the decay process starts and at times, one doesn't realize and becomes prisoners of one's own thoughts. Getting out of this appears to be difficult but in reality, it is just one challenging thought and a fearless step that can do the magic of lifting one's soul. In a nutshell, both at personal and professional levels, one grows only by embracing the unknown, by facing fears, by confronting the illusion with the light of the reality within. Rumi has hinted upon the effects which fear casts on one's personality as follows;

***“Don't let your throat tighten with fear.”***

(Barks, 1995, p. 52).

#### 4.6. Having Faith

Interviewees were of the view that being uncomfortable and in a state of optimal anxiety keeps one on the go always. Going through new experiences of adventures, taking up unknown tasks, personal and professional challenges define who we really are. In an ideal situation, one can take measured and manageable steps for change to take place and to move forward in life; but life is unpredictable and things do not work the way we may like these to be. In such a situation one needs to have faith and it is the ongoing fuel that keeps alight our desire to find new frontiers. Researcher looked at the works of Rumi to seek guidance and found the following quote;

***“The men of the path who know the secrets of the unknown”.***

(Shiva, 2000, p. 108).

Rumi, in his teachings, has pressed on the notion that the universe is abundant to those who tie themselves with it to achieve what their heart truly desires. Without faith, there will not be any mountains to climb or oceans to cross and we would just sit on the side lines and sulk. Rumi has advised his followers that until and unless they defeat fear through the power of faith, they will just stand still. At one of the places, Rumi has advised us in the following words;

***“A true Lover has no fear of the path. Be sure of that”.***

(Shiva, 2000, p. 66).

#### 4.7. Generosity

Participants of the interviews considered generosity as one of the significant traits and quoted different social, moral, emotional and religious reasons for being generous. They shared their experiences and were of the view that one of the biggest benefits of being generous and to help someone at the time of need is happiness. People were of the view that it enhanced their life satisfaction.

One of the participants, a follower of one of the Sufi school of thoughts, shared his personal story and he was of the view that it had a great positive impact on his physical and mental health. It reduced his stress, helped him come out of depression and provided him sense of purpose. Participants also quoted religious reasons for practicing generosity and commented that it will help them gain piety and closeness to God in addition to having hefty rewards in heaven. Researcher searched treasurers of Rumi and found following advice:

***“How to cure bad water? Send it back to the river.***

***How to cure bad habits? Send me back to you.”***

(Barks, 1995, p. 52)

At another place Rumi says:

***“In Generosity and Helping Others Be Like a River.”***

(Helminski & Ahmad, 2008, p. xxix)

Rumi in his teachings has metaphorically referred to the river being a generous form. The river is an epitome of how generosity should extend to everyone and it should always be unconditional. A river never ceases to flow, and that has a purpose to it too, it is because it must meet its source, which is the sea. And in the case of human beings, the journey of life, while being of service to humanity, ideally should culminate with proximity to Divine.

Sufis have always practised and preached that by only giving without pride and without expectation of any return, can one reach stage of selflessness and that is the stage when the feeling of happiness surrounds that person.

#### **4.8. Humility**

Humility was discussed in contrast to arrogance. Interviewees shared their personal experience where they acted arrogant and also when they came across an arrogant personality. Participants of the research were fully aware of the concept of humility and the benefits associated with being humble. Few of them mentioned that at times, being humble is considered a sign of weakness in today's social settings especially in rural areas of the country where dynamics of society are different as compared to urban area. All the interviewees were of the view that all the religions emphasize importance of living a simple life and being humble all the time. They regarded simplicity and humility as two greatest virtues of life as these would always keep them grounded and prevent them from being arrogant.

Rumi's words reach out to us from across the years, to tell us that we should be humble. Here is an example from the treasures of Mevlana;

***“It's not me that's glorified in acts of worship.***

***It's the worshipers! I don't hear the words  
they say. I look inside at the humility”.***

(Barks, 1995, p. 166)

Rumi in his works has referred earth to be symbol of humility and modesty and he goes like this:

***“There is a hidden treasure deep within the Earth.”***

(Shiva, p. 59)

The earth gives, without asking for anything in return, and at the same time, it accepts everything in silence, and absorbs what is bestowed upon it without a grudge despite the exploitations it faces. Rumi at another place has expressed the benefit of being humble as;

*“Humble living does not diminish. It fills.  
Going back to a simpler self gives wisdom.”*

(Barks, 1995, p. 146)

In a nutshell, once our soul becomes humble, the Divine opens our hearts to the oceans of wisdom which indeed is a wholesome path to follow in life.

#### **4.9. Can Sufism/teachings of Rumi promote harmony in the ever increasing intolerant society of Pakistan?**

As mentioned in methodology, at the end of every interview, researcher asked this question. In the first three interviews, researcher directly asked this question and people were reluctant to answer it as this touched a delicate and volatile boundary of religion and unfortunately any intriguing discussion about this subject is generally avoided by most of people. However, in subsequent interviews, this question was asked in different ways after proper priming and warming up of interviewees minds.

All the interviewees agreed that in the last three decades or so, Pakistani society has seen a huge polarization. The fabric of nation got destroyed primarily because of religious intolerance towards fellow countrymen and amongst various sects of Muslims. This was one of the most sensitive topics of the interviews as unfortunately, discussion on anything which is related to religion has become a taboo and people generally prefer to stay silent on it. In the past, country has witnessed extreme incidents based on these kinds of discussions. Nevertheless, some of the participants were bold enough to make a statement that religious intolerance in the country is attributed to fundamentalist mind-set which, because of their ulterior motives, has set whole nation onto this track of self-destruction. On the point of discussing way forward for coming out of this vicious cycle, interviewees were of the view that Sufism can again play an important role in this crucial time of history as it did centuries ago when Sufis were torch bearers of Islam in this region. It is worth mentioning that Sufis even at that time never preached religion; rather they spread message of love for humanity without any discrimination. Wherever those Sufis were based, they were spreading love; love for fellow human and through love, they were giving hope and promoting brotherhood and peace in society. They became role model for people of those areas and even now, after centuries, people from all religions visit their shrines to pay homage. The following poem of Rumi best explains the Sufi thought about universality of love and that all of us have come from God and we all are different branches of the same tree:

*“What is to be done, O Moslems? For I do not recognise myself.*

*I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Moslem.*

*I am not of the East, nor West, nor of the land,*

*nor of the sea;*  
*I am not of Nature's mint, nor of air, nor of fire;*  
*I am not of the emperean, nor of the dust, nor of existence, nor of entity. I am not of India,*  
*nor of China, nor of Bulgaria, nor of Saqsin;*  
*I am not of the kingdom of 'Iraqain, nor of the country of Khorasan. I Am not of this world,*  
*nor of the next, nor of Paradise,*  
*Nor of hell;*  
*I am not of Adam, nor of Eve, nor of Eden and Rizwan.*  
*My place is the Placeless;*  
(Nicholson, 2001, pp. 125-127).

Rumi is a role model as he admires all human beings irrespective whether they are followers of any religion, be it Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism or Hinduism. Rumi's teachings are transformative and are best suited not only for revival of any society which is showing signs of sickness but his message of love is timeless and universal to all the societies and to all human beings of today and tomorrow.

#### **4.10. Words of wisdom by modern-day Sufi**

A land of Sufis and Saints, the Indian Sub-continent had been blessed with the arrival of these great men who emancipated the struggling souls from the tyranny of the caste system. The legacy stayed and grew with the different *Tariqas* (Systems) of Sufism flourishing across the various parts.

Pakistani society like any other in the third world has quacks in every field and Sufism is no exception. With culprits being illiteracy and weakness of faith, certain individuals prey upon of the vulnerability of masses and has projected Sufism as a profitable business. People who visit these types of Sufis are looking for solace for their worldly problems. These fake Sufis play with the emotions and take advantage of the distressful situation of general masses. Newspapers, electronic and social media, every now and then, break a story where these fakes have made loads of money from there deception. It is very difficult to find an individual who can be referred to as a true Sufi nowadays. A real Sufi in line with traditions will always hide his identity and by appearance cannot be judged for his spiritual position.

I have always been fascinated by spirituality and in the hearts of my heart, I intended to explore this path of Sufism by walking through it but I had not been able to muster courage at all.

My search of a true Sufi ended when I luckily came across Syed Sarfraz A. Shah who can be termed a true Sufi. It is not out of love and respect that I have made this statement but in fact, I have closely observed and found him as someone who fulfils all the criteria that are mentioned

in various books about spirituality. To name a few, he has authentic knowledge of spirituality and modern sciences, he does not disclose his spiritual status, he is humble, generous, polite, compassionate, respectful and forgiving. Love for all and service to humanity are his core teachings and he is a living example of it. He holds two sessions in a week, one is *Dua* (Prayer) and the other is Question & Answer. As a part of the research, I have attended both sessions and a brief description of each along with few of his key messages are as follows.

*Dua* is a one to one session and is another Sufi tradition wherein distressed people from all walks of life, irrespective of their religious orientation, come to discuss and seek guidance for their personal issues. For the ease of readers, a Sufi who is at stage of pure *Nafs* by virtue of his closeness to the Divine, attains a spiritual level to advise people on their worldly matters. Not only this, those on the spiritual path are advised as well. Again, as per Sufi traditions, these sessions are of highly personal nature and it is next to impossible that you will ever hear from him what transpired in that session. I have personally experienced this and am witness to the vastness one experiences going through it.

In ‘Question and Answer’ session, he addresses queries of people regarding religion and spirituality. He has a God gifted ability to explain intricate concepts with such a clarity, logic and reasoning that it touches the hearts of audiences and satisfies his or her queries. The explanations given in a simple manner even enable a person, who has no prior knowledge of spirituality, to comprehend these concepts.

The Q & A sessions are available in the shape of books under the series titled “Kahey Faqeer” (Sayings of a Sufi). I will briefly present some of the key concepts here so the readers of this paper can imagine how in this materialistic time and age, Sufis are spreading the message of love, peace and tranquillity. These messages are universal and timeless. Following are some of his messages:

- i. Will, knowledge and love are three ways to reach God. Amongst them safest and quickest way is love. Get in love with God and you will get to God.
- ii. Anyone who claims that he has wisdom doesn’t have any and the person who alleges that he doesn’t have any, rest assured, has all the wisdom.
- iii. Be kind to others and God will be kind to you.
- iv. Only after clearing heart from malevolence, grudge, envy, hatred, arrogance and ego one can progress in spirituality.
- v. Generous is the person who while giving feels that he has given less and while taking he feels that he has taken more.

- vi. When a person doesn't grieve any loss and no achievement gives him pleasure and worldly things become immaterial, he becomes a *Qalandar*. For the ease of readers this is one of highest stages in the path of spirituality, only two men and one woman has ever reached this level.
- vii. We need to remove gluttony, lust, avarice, pride, wrath, backbiting and laziness from our hearts. Only then it will shine like diamond. that is the heart which is full of wisdom and is place of abode for God.
- viii. One swiftly moves away from the path of spirituality when he gives priority to his rights over the rights of others.
- ix. Prayer keeps one's hope alive and with this support, one can wait for good times to come.
- x. Once a person clears his heart, he starts loving everyone especially those who have hurt him in anyway. As a gift, by this act, he is granted spiritual elevation by God.
- xi. Person's reaction when he is furious speaks about his moral values and his behaviour in despair tell about his real nature.
- xii. Don't look down upon anything. By doing so we fall into a superiority trap from which arrogance stems out be it about knowledge, wealth or social status. One must be mindful that wisdom, which is very essence of God, will not be with an arrogant person.

Above are few of the key messages will give readers an idea about the methodology and teachings of a modern-day Sufi. It would not be out of place to state that in essence, the teachings of modern day Sufi convey the same meaning as what was taught by Rumi centuries ago. This similarity in the spirit and essence is itself testimony to the universality and timelessness of the Sufism's message.

#### **4.11. Similarities between Sufi teachings and Freud**

Great minds, though centuries and cultures apart, resonate well when playing the flute of destiny. A dervish lost in the galaxies of love and spirit and a scientist busy experimenting and testing his hypothesis have so much in common. Rumi and Freud are and have been a fruit of the same tree. Here are some key parallels between Sufism and teachings of Freud:

- a) Freud spoke of Psychoanalysis, an introspection of sorts through a journey of a lifetime to understand the workings of the human mind. The Sufi also travels within the self and tries and keeps elevating towards the highest level of the soul. Freud also used experimentation and various methods to discover and rediscover the secrets of the human mind. The Freudian sciences have a core on the inner spectrum of the human thought and behaviour and same is true for Sufism.
- b) Freud and Sufis both use symbolism, allegories and metaphors to express feelings,

emotions and experiences.

- c) Theories such as ultimate happiness, oneness with the Truth, moments of Nirvana developed in Sufi philosophy and the idea of quite happiness devised by Freud have stark similarities.
- d) The grand concepts of id, ego and superego that are generously used today in the psychological sciences have such a striking resemblance to Sufi concept of *Nafs*.
- e) Ghazali's concept of the mind as a mirror has a clear parallel to 'Defence Mechanism' defined by Freud.
- f) For Freud, human sexuality is the central theme as well as the cornerstone of all human thought, the similes and examples that are repetitive in his theories has an overwhelming sexual hue. Similarly, the Sufi thought, and imagery takes on the sensual direction as well in the form of poetry and prose both. The longing for the beloved at times takes on the images that would otherwise be considered boastfully sexual. The writings of Rumi use these parallels repeatedly especially in the Mathnawi.
- g) Freud had a detailed research and philosophy on dreams. He has laid great importance on dreams and calls them royal road to unconscious. Likewise, a whole dimension of dreams and their interpretations are a part of the Sufi teachings; the seeker of the truth is always using the dreams as signs to stay on the path.
- h) There are some core unchallengeable values at the centre of every human belief system and it is self-respect or dignity. Both psychoanalysis and sufism emphasize on this aspect of human behaviour.
- i) Teachings of Freud and Sufism have the ability to relieve the human soul from its various shackles which are holding back today human being from the pursuing true happiness.

#### **4.12. Sufism and Concepts learned at EMCCC**

There are strong parallels between the concepts learned at EMCCC and Sufism. Following are few of the similarities:

##### **4.12.1. Motivational Interviewing**

A practical concept having striking similarity with practice of Sufis and the seekers of the path. It helps subjects bring forth their deepest reservations without any coercion or force. Few statements heard in one of the modules "Meet the other person where they are" and "how to dance and not wrestle with the problem" also closely resonates with teachings of Sufis and the love they have to bring to the forth the reality of the individuals.

##### **4.12.2. CCRT**

It helps an individual to explore his/her inner theatre to understand his emotions, thoughts and

behaviour. Sufis also stress to look into oneself rather this is the starting point of their spiritual journey. It is a journey to conquer one's own self and the objective is to attain the selflessness.

#### **4.12.3. Moving from dance floor to balcony.**

In Sufism, the Practice of taming the *Nafs* helps an individual to detach his ego and self-interests and view his life and soul from a different perspective. This clinical paradigm also suggests distancing oneself from the fray to have better and bigger view of things.

#### **4.12.4. Emotional Intelligence**

Impulse control, reflective space, mentalizing, empathizing and reality testing etc. are the concepts learnt during my EMCCC journey and these concepts are also the at the core of all the teachings of Sufism. Practising all these is a must for a Sufi irrespective of his spiritual status.

## **Section-V: Limitations**

The research focused on concepts of Sufism and the philosophy/teachings of Rumi. Majority of Rumi's work is in Persian and researcher being unaware of Persian language had no option except to depend on the available translations in Urdu and English. Researcher is of the view that translator, despite his skills and knowledge, at times struggle to produce the exact meanings of original work and there is a great possibility that the reader might miss out certain cultural and social aspects of original work.

There is a misconception among masses that some of the practices of Sufism are against the fundamentals of religion Islam and hence at times, they tend to avoid an open discussion about it. Hence, there is a possibility that some of the participants might have given neutral answers to avoid emotionally stressful conversation.

Interviews were conducted in local language i.e. Urdu; hence, there is a possibility that some of essence of those interviews might have gotten lost in translation.

Pakistan being a conservative society is still sceptical on techniques like market research and analysis. Even the educated lot is wary of the consequences that the study might bring forth in an atmosphere of hatred and lack of discord.

## **Section-VI: Future Research**

Sufism is all about love and wisdom. It transforms its follower and leaves a deep impression on the personality of its readers. People who have attained a certain high level in this path, as per their training and traditions, have concealed and disguised their identity and are not known to the masses. It is a research area for every serious researcher to look for these personalities and bring them to limelight so that people can seek wisdom and enrich their souls.

During the course of research, it was observed that at times Sufism is confused with religion and also with mysticism. There is an opportunity for future researcher to work in this area and enlighten people about its neutrality and universality. Also, Sufism is considered to be opposed to orthodox religious belief systems. This is because of lack of proper understanding of the concept of Sufism. This may be another area for in-depth research to remove the misconceptions between the two.

Unfortunately, as observed in our day to day life, extremism in Pakistani society is on the rise and exploring the reasons and finding remedial measures for it can be another rich area of research. Future researcher should get in touch with religious fundamentalists and see what is the reason of their mind-set and see the possibility of bringing in the paradigm shift by adding flavour of Sufism into their hearts. Since the nature of subject is sensitive hence research should be careful while venturing into it.

## **Conclusion**

This research was primarily aimed at exploring the relevance of Rumi's teachings to the personal and professional lives of modern executive who face unsurmountable pressures and work related stress poised by corporate environment. This continuous stress has serious repercussions for both the personal and professional lives of individuals.

The discussions with the modern executives and people in leadership positions brought forth a very interesting findings. All the participants identified values, traits and characteristics which they considered important for balancing private and professional lives in the cutting edge environment as well as to lead a content and fulfilled life. Interestingly, these were essentially similar in essence and spirit to the centuries old teachings and practices of Sufis like Rumi; however, the executives had not been able to identify this similarity. This led the researcher to try to understand the reason behind the universality and timelessness of these sufi teachings. It can be concluded that the message of Sufism is for human souls as it helps people in understanding their spiritual needs and moves people closer to their centers. This is the eternal truth and since this message aims at purifying Nafs, the inner self; this is bound to withstand time. Sufis are of the view that being away from this center has been one of the main reasons of emotional stress and the feeling of purposelessness in life also stems out of it. Followers of Sufism live an authentic life as it provides them a framework for each and every stage and it integrates completely into their daily lives. As a result, the person's heart is filled with happiness and he radiates peace and happiness by his word and actions. This is precisely the reason for universality and timelessness of Sufism.

In today's world, technology is changing at rapid pace and as a result, seeing through the clutter becomes difficult for a mind that has become addicted to information rather than the thought process. It is only through these timeless wisdom that one can get rid of one's biases and detox every negative and unnecessary noise through a guided process for them to reveal their true selves. It will not be out of place to state that unless we achieve this crucial feat at this stage, we are at a danger of having an unguided next generation and unprepared leaders who would be no better than the AI controlled robots.

To sum it up, the research leads to the conclusion that the fragrance of the Sufi learnings is still fresh even after centuries and it continues to intoxicate the seekers of the path. People who are living successful and happy lives have preserved that fragrance in their hearts and are reaping full benefits of it in the shape of living a happy life.

Researcher would also like to share that during his journey through EMCCC, the research and indulging in deep thoughts about this thesis has offered an incredible fulfilment and personal

growth. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the valuable insights I have gained from this experience. In the first place, a dimension opened, like walking into the abyss, and little did I know that I would be turning into an accidental gypsy being tossed and turned in a grinder. There was laughter, smiles, tense moments and as expected deadlines but little did I expect tears and revolting thoughts; I went through it all and survived.

I would also like to share that during my journey of “knowing myself”, Rumi appealed to my heart as a true guide. Rumi is all about love and the story of Rumi and his footsteps are nothing but love, grace and gratitude. The love that holds and binds the precipices of our mutual bonds. Sufism is about sharing and creating bonds within God’s creations; humans, animals, plants, the seen and the unseen. The imagination of Rumi is beyond time and space and takes on an angle that is an unknown dimension. There are tales and poetry, makes us laugh and cry and at times leaving us dumbfounded, all in a continuous spinning wheel eventually connecting us with our inner us. His narrations are as relevant today as these were a millennium ago and even beyond. An evergreen tree bringing forth the fruits of wisdom and it is up to us how to keep cultivating it and spreading the wisdom across.

As per Rumi;

***“When we are dead, seek not our tomb in the earth, but find it in the hearts of men.”***

(Shah I. , 1968, p. 110)

Now coming to the main question of the thesis;

***Is spirit of Rumi still with us? Transforming lives through Sufism***

And certainly the answer to this question is

***Yes, Rumi is still with us and Sufism is the philosophy that can transform lives.***

This sparks another thought and it is

***Are we still with Rumi? Are we still receptive to sufi philosophy?***

And in the end, with respect and love

***Thank you, Rumi, for being with us.***

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# Annex-1

## Interview Questionnaire

Interview No:

Title: Is spirit of Rumi still with us ?

Name:

Date:

Time:

Organization:

Title:

Place of interview:

### Question 1:

What is Sufism in your opinion?

<b>Answer:</b>

### Question 2:

What is the first image that springs to your mind when you hear the word Sufi?

<b>Answer:</b>

### Question 3:

Are you attached to any Sufi school of thought?

<b>Answer:</b>

**Question 4:**

Who is Rumi and what are his teachings all about?

<b>Answer:</b>

**Question 5:**

What in your opinion is the main ingredient of a happy/successful personal & professional life?

<b>Answer:</b>

**Question 6:**

Can Sufism bring harmony and peace to society?

<b>Answer:</b>

Remarks/comments of Interviewee:


Personal Observations:


## Annex-2

S.No	Name	Designation/Position	Organization	Sector
1	Mr. Abdul Hayee	Executive Director Sales	Alfalah Insurance	Insurance
2	Mr. Abdul Majeed Ramay	General Manager HR	Tara Pakistan	FMCG
3	Mr. Ahmad Imran Ul Haq	Director Commercial	Coke Pakistan	FMCG
4	Mr. Atif Ibrahim	MD	AEPL	Engineering
5	Mr. Muhammad Ali Zeb	MD/CEO	Adamjee Insurance	Insurance
6	Mr. Muhammad Kamaran Khan	Additional Inspector General, Police	Government of Punjab	Civil Services
7	Mr. Muhammad Rehan	Director	IKAN	Engineering
8	Mr. Muhammad Shafique	Business Head	Bank Alfalah	Banking
9	Ms. Sidra Youins	Deputy Secretary	Government of Punjab	Civil Services
10	Mr. Qaiser Majeed	Director	Bombay Zaree	Services
11	Mr. Rashid Ahmad	Branch Manager	Habib Metropolitan Bank	Banking
12	Ms. Sadaf Sethi	General Manager Admin	Ghar Residency	NGO
13	Ms. Sara Khuram	Director	TW	Engineering
14	Syed Muhammad Asif	Business Head	Bank Alfalah	Banking
15	Mr. Usman Ahmad Chaudhry	Special Secretary Finance	Government of Pakistan	Civil Services