

Russian Academic Contributions to the Study of Islamic Psychology in Historical and Modern Contexts

N. Karimov

Independent researcher, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan

Abstract: This article explores the historical-philosophical foundations and conceptual approaches to the development of Islamic psychology within the Russian academic tradition. Particular attention is given to the works of O.S. Pavlova, who presents Islamic psychology as an independent scientific discipline encompassing spiritual development, moral formation, self-purification, and psychological stability. The paper analyzes theoretical and practical aspects of Sufi psychology, including the concepts of the heart (qalb), soul (nafs), patience (sabr), faith (iman), and forgiveness as a therapeutic method. It is emphasized that contemporary Russian research lays a solid groundwork for the advancement of Islamic psychology in both local and global contexts.

Keywords: Islamic psychology, Russian academic school, O.S. Pavlova, Sufi psychology, heart, soul, moral education, psychotherapy, sabr, iman, psychological resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic psychology is not only a system of mental states based on religion, but also a scientific discipline closely connected to spiritual development, the cultivation of the heart, the control of the nafs (lower self), and the deep psychological foundations of personal growth. In this field, Russian scholars have conducted research aimed at uncovering the philosophical, psychological, and anthropological layers of Islamic thought.

In Russia, Islamic psychology or closely related spiritual-psychological research began to take shape in the second half of the 20th century. One of the earliest academic pioneers in this direction is considered to be V. V. Bartold. Although he primarily analyzed the socio-philosophical foundations of Central Asian and Islamic culture, his ideas inspired a psychological understanding of the interrelations between the individual, the soul, and society within Islamic thought.

Later, S. M. Prozorov, through his works on Qur'anic studies, examined the epistemological theories of Islamic thought, as well as concepts of spiritual states and divine inspiration from philological and philosophical perspectives. His research is highly valued as a primary source in the study of the heart and soul concepts in the works of mystics such as Muhyiddin Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240), Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111), and others.

M. V. Sharifov is one of the leading researchers in Russia who has studied the formation of the human psyche and spiritual conditions based on Sufism and Islamic anthropology. His works, such

as "Sufi Anthropology" (Sharifov, M.V., 2005) and "Islamic Philosophy as a Doctrine of Man" (Sharifov, M.V., 2008), analyze concepts like heart, nafs, spiritual cognition, sainthood, and inner elevation in comparison with modern Western psychology. M. Sharifov, in particular, explores the psychological stages of spiritual journey—known as *suluk*—in the process of self-realization.

E. A. Frolova approaches the development of Arab-Muslim philosophy from a historical-philosophical perspective (Frolova, E.A., 2003). Her works provide deep analysis of cognition, heart, soul, and intellect in Islamic thought. She draws comparisons between the views of Imam al-Ghazali and Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna) on the soul, nafs, and heart with European psychological traditions.

E.T. Dubova has worked in the field of religious psychology, linking concepts such as the impact of religious experience on the human psyche, responsibility, forgiveness, sin, and repentance with principles of modern psychotherapy (Dubova, E.T., 1999). She analyzes Islamic spiritual experience from the standpoint of psychological methodology.

Contemporary researchers such as S.A. Samedov and M.T. Yakupov have explored issues of political Islam, religious identity, and the formation of consciousness through psychological and spiritual factors. They have attempted to substantiate Islam's internal spiritual-immunological potential as a means of countering radicalism and moral crisis in society (Samedov, S.A., 2009; Yakupov, M.T., 2011).

Research conducted in the field of education—particularly the dissertation defended by I.A.I. Khalil—emphasizes the cultivation of adolescents' psyche based on Islamic ethics. It focuses on developing traits such as patience, responsibility, honesty, and inner control to form psychological maturity (Khalil, I.A.I, 2009). This has marked a new phase in the study of the practical aspects of Islamic psychology.

In recent years, one of the leading contemporary scholars in Russia who has been seriously studying Islamic psychology is Olga Pavlova. Her research focuses on the psychological approach to Islamic concepts such as spiritual experience, moral and spiritual elevation, patience, muhasaba (self-reflection), self-control of the nafs, and the inner connection with Allah (Pavlova, O, 2015).

As Olga Pavlova emphasizes in her article, even during periods when the term “psychology” did not yet exist in its modern scientific form, Muslim scholars profoundly analyzed the human psyche on philosophical and religious grounds (Pavlova, O, 2015).

Prominent thinkers of the 9th–10th centuries such as Abu Zayd Ahmad ibn Sahl al-Balkhi (d. 934), Abu Yusuf Ya‘qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi (d. 873), Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi (d. 925), Abu Ali ibn Abdullah ibn Sina (Avicenna) (d. 1037), and Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali (d. 1111) authored works on the nature of the human psyche, mental balance and disorders, self-discipline of the nafs, and principles of healthy living. Al-Balkhi's method of “*ilaj bi al-did*” — علاج بالصدّة (treatment through opposites) — closely resembles the modern psychotherapeutic theory of reciprocal inhibition.

These historical facts indicate that Islamic psychology had taken shape well before the emergence of conventional Western psychological traditions.

Pavlova's article particularly highlights that ‘ilm al-nafs (science of the soul) was an independent discipline in medieval Islamic scientific schools. This field represented an integrated system combining knowledge from the Qur'an, Hadith, philosophy, and medicine. Therefore, studying Islamic psychology not only involves analyzing historical sources but also uncovering their ethical, religious, and social significance.

The article notes that at Baghdad's Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom), the translation of Greek

philosophy into Arabic — including the views of Aristotle, Galen, and Plato — enabled Muslim thinkers to interpret psychological phenomena within a philosophical framework. In this way, a model of Islamic-philosophical psychology emerged.

In Pavlova's article, the psychology of Sufism holds a special place. The Sufis conducted in-depth analyses of the states of the heart (*qalb*, *fu'ād*, *lubb*), soul (*ruh*), self (*nafs*), and intellect (*'aql*). This approach serves as a rich gnoseological source for contemporary socio-psychological research. Scholars such as Hakim Tirmidhi (d. 869), Imam al-Ghazali, and Ibn al-'Arabi interpreted the inner struggle on the path to spiritual perfection — that is, the victory over the nafs — as the primary tool of psychological and spiritual development.

From the 14th century onward, the closure of the gates of *ijtihad* — meaning the restriction of independent interpretation in religious matters — along with colonial policies and the dominance of Western paradigms, led to the stagnation of Islamic psychology. Pavlova describes this period as a stage of historical stagnation.

Contemporary Muslim psychologists such as Malik Badri, Amber Haque, Mona Amer, and others are striving to rediscover the medieval legacy, compare it with Western psychology, and develop new models of Islamic psychological practice. These efforts aim to connect the wisdom of historical generations with the modern-day psychological challenges.

Islamic psychology was not merely a product of religious thinking; it was a systematic science intricately linked to the advanced scientific and philosophical achievements of its time. In her article, Olga Pavlova analyzes this field through historical stages: the formative period (9th–12th centuries), the synthesis phase (13th–14th centuries), stagnation (14th–19th centuries), and renewal (20th–21st centuries).

In a subsequent article led by O. S. Pavlova, the theoretical aspects and practical applications of Islamic psychology are discussed. The study focuses on forgiveness therapy as a method of psychological healing. In this approach, developed by Indonesian psychologist Asyep Haerul Ghani, inner conflicts related to a person's inability to forgive are alleviated through group sessions. One of the techniques, called the “life line,” involves recalling significant events in one's life and

analyzing past emotional experiences to gain insight. Additionally, therapeutic assignments, informal conversations, creative expression, supplication (*du'ā*), and remembrance of God (*zikr*) are shown to contribute to emotional healing. Special emphasis is placed on practices from the Naqshbandi tradition — such as *dhikr* and calming supplications — which are noted to have a positive impact on mental well-being.

The article also addresses depression. It analyzes the three types of *nafs* described in the Qur'an: *ammārah* (inciting to evil), *lawwāmah* (self-reproaching), and *muṭma'innah* (serene and content) — as stages of the human soul. According to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350), spiritual well-being is directly connected to the health of the heart. In this approach, depression is interpreted not only as a psychological illness but also as a manifestation of spiritual crisis.

The article also recalls the psychological diagnosis and treatment system proposed in the 9th century by Abu Zayd al-Balkhi. He classified depression into two types: exogenous depression, resulting from external factors, and endogenous depression, arising from internal emotional suffering. This classification remains significant in contemporary psychology. The study also recommends forms of cognitive-behavioral therapy adapted to Islamic values. For instance, in order to provide psychological relief to clients, counseling is based on *du'a* (supplication), patience, gratitude, hope, and trust in God (*tawakkul*). It is suggested that such forms of mental support may be more appropriate for Muslim societies and may reduce internal resistance.

The article further emphasizes the importance of incorporating cultural and religious values in psychological counseling. This reinforces the role of religion as both a source and a psychological resource in achieving emotional stability.

The article is based on both scientific and practical experience, and it serves to highlight the role of religiously-based mental support within contemporary psychology. Although it does not provide a fully comparative analysis with Western psychological approaches, it is considered significant in introducing new therapeutic models within the framework of Islamic psychology. The article would have gained further academic weight if its practice-based arguments were supported by more detailed clinical results.

In our opinion, this research is theoretically and practically valuable for specialists working in the field of Islamic psychology, as it integrates new methodological approaches and practical insights.

Below is a final and well-grounded conclusion on the emerging field of Islamic psychology in Russia, based on the works of Olga Pavlova and other leading researchers.

The research conducted within the Russian scientific school on Islamic psychology today possesses profound theoretical and practical foundations. Historically, this field has evolved on the basis of Arab-Muslim thought, Sufi philosophy, the concepts of the heart and the *nafs*, spiritual experience, and the psychology of inner transformation. At the same time, it is steadily developing toward becoming an independent school, engaging in scholarly dialogue with modern Western psychological approaches.

During the 20th and 21st centuries, scholars such as V. V. Bartold, S. M. Prozorov, M. V. Sharifov, E. A. Frolova, and E. T. Dubova have studied the spiritual dimensions of classical Islamic thought from historical and philosophical perspectives, laying the groundwork for uncovering its psychological foundations. Notably, Sharifov's works on Sufi anthropology and Frolova's analyses of epistemological concepts have revealed with clarity how the Islamic system of the heart, soul, and *nafs* fundamentally differs from Western psychology.

At the current stage, Olga Sergeevna Pavlova holds a leading position in shaping the methodological and conceptual foundations of Islamic psychology. In her 2018 article ("Islamic Psychology Abroad: Current State and Development Prospects") and other works, Islamic psychology is recognized as an independent science, and its core categories—patience (*sabr*), faith (*iman*), self-discipline of the *nafs*, trust in God (*tawakkul*), and self-reflection (*muhāsaba*)—are systematically analyzed through psychological methods. Pavlova is also advancing a solid academic platform for the development of both Sufi psychology and modern Islamic psychotherapy.

Her research is based not only on historical and philosophical approaches but also on experimental and psychodiagnostic methods, demonstrating the relevance of Islamic psychology in today's social context. She introduces into the academic discourse such issues as self-regulation of the

personality, psychophysiological balance, mental hygiene, and religious identity. These approaches are of fundamental importance in fostering moral education, social stability, and psychological well-being in Muslim societies.

Thus, Islamic psychology within the Russian scientific school is today emerging as a new academic discipline—deeply rooted in historical traditions, harmonized with contemporary psychological methodology, and grounded in its own philosophical and practical values. This field is developing not only as a relevant science for Muslim communities but also as a universal scientific model capable of addressing questions of human spirituality and mental health on a global scale.

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