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A Hermeneutic Approach to the Tomb Tower of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili's Shrine Ensemble and *Khānqāh*

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Abstract

Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili's Shrine Ensemble and *Khānqāh* are considered one of the most exquisite artworks of the Islamic world and the Safavid Dynasty. The Shrine had both a fundamental role in the development of Safavid architecture and was also the spiritual and temporal heart of the Safavid Empire. This work discusses the architecture and decoration of the shrine's tomb tower (Allah Allah Dome), both through a descriptive approach and an interpretative approach, through the application of hermeneutics. Although the shrine's architecture and decorations have been previously studied, this is the first time that a hermeneutic approach, as opposed to a descriptive one, has been applied, thus making this work unique.

Keywords: Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili, tomb tower, *Khānqāh*, Allah Allah Dome, Islamic art, Safavid art, hermeneutic, Islamic calligraphy, tilework.

Introduction

The Shrine Ensemble and *Khānqāh* of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili is considered one of the most exquisite artworks of the Islamic civilisation and Safavid Dynasty. It is both a symbol of the Safavid Empire and paradigm of Iranian architecture, as it includes many different art forms, such as tilework, silver and gold work, *muqarnas*, inscriptions, *tazhib* and brickwork. The Shrine had both a fundamental role in the development of Safavid architecture and was also the spiritual and temporal heart of the Safavid Empire. What is important in regards to the Shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din in Ardabil, as Hillenbrand argues, is that the art produced by the Early Safavids are “displayed side by side and medium to medium, to create an ensemble in which, for once, the decorative arts can be seen in context, enhancing each other and almost bandying themes across the space of the shrine.”¹

In this article, the hermeneutic approach, based on Sufism and philosophy of Islamic art, has been employed in order to discuss the architecture and decoration of Sheikh Safi al-Din’s tomb tower. Through the employment of the hermeneutic approach, the different elements of architecture and of decoration, which have been specifically chosen for each location, have been placed in the hermeneutic circle, and their interplay has been analysed, in order to unveil the deeper levels of meaning, which are embodied in the shrine.

It is important to note that in order to facilitate this research, I have conducted fieldwork on two separate occasions in Ardabil – Iran, in the summer and winter of 2012, studying and documenting the architecture and decoration of the Shrine, during which, I took over 2000 photographs of the different sections of the Shrine complex, and had extensive meetings with scholars working in Ardabil on the Sheikh Safi al-Din’s Shrine complex. I have personally taken all the photographs included in this work.

Decoration

Prophet Muhammad's Hadīth, which states "God is beautiful, and loves beauty", is an affirmation of the importance of art within Islam, as it provides the primary means for artistic expression. In contrast to other religions, the decorative art philosophy in Islamic art is related to Islamic ideology and spirituality. As Nasr states "Islamic art is based upon a knowledge which is itself of a spiritual nature, a knowledge referred to by traditional masters of Islamic art as *hikmah* or wisdom ... the *hikmah* upon which Islamic art is based is none other than the sapiential aspect of Islamic spirituality itself."² The use of different decorative art forms in the Shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din is a portrayal of one of the names of God in Islam, *al-Thānī*, which means Divine Artisan. With the use of different decorative materials and following Islamic spirituality, the artists created a spiritual environment.

One of the most important attributes of the Safavid Dynasty was the formation of a strong cultural and religious society; "where the production of art was directly connected to the religious, cultural, political and historical events of the time. The Safavids tendency towards culture and religion created a bond between art and religion."³ which resulted in a proliferation of art and architecture in Iran, which is the highest form of Islamic-Iranian art and architecture including the production of Sheikh Safi al-Din's shrine in Ardabil alongside the Shah Square in Isfahan and the many other great Safavid monuments. The decorative arts that were used to adorn the Shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din can be divided into two distinct categories, the calligraphic inscriptions and the non-calligraphic decorations, including: *mu'arraḡ* tiles, brickwork that is a combination of brick and tiles, plasterwork, *muḡarnas* and *tazhib* decoration, woodwork, stonework, metalwork and enamelwork.

Within Islamic art, calligraphy is perceived as the noblest art form due to its association with the Holy Qur'an. The use of calligraphic

inscriptions in Sheikh Safi al-Din's shrine is a testament to the artists unique approach to calligraphy, as they have incorporated various styles of the written word with different decorative material; and as Qadi Ahmad states, "Calligraphy is the geometry of the Spirit."⁴ As it "provides the external dress for the Word of God in the visible world but this art remains wedded to the world of the spirit."⁵ The calligraphic inscriptions of Sheikh Safi al-Din's Shrine are a product of a number of calligraphers such as, Mir Emad al-Hassani Qazvini, Muhammad Isma'il Afashar, Alireza al-Abbasi Tabrizi and Mir Asad Allah bin Agha Mir Ghavam al-Din Roze Khan. The passages that were used by the calligraphers were based on the location it would be inscribed on, in order to accentuate the fundamental purpose of the shrine.

The calligraphic inscriptions of the shrine consist of different styles of calligraphy, which portray various topics, such as Qur'anic verses, prayers, *ahadīth* (pl. *hadīth*), Persian poetry, Sheikh Safi al-Din's lineage and artists' names. The different styles of calligraphy include *thuluth*, *nasta'liq*, *riqā'*, *naskh*, *kufic* and geometric *kufic* also known as *bannā'ī kufic*.

In Christian decorative arts, images and paintings depicting religious imagery play a significant role, not only in setting the tone of the architecture, but also in narrating a story, which sets the mood and theme of the building, and the images are often derived from the text of the bible. We can refer to the Sistine Chapel's ceiling's artwork, as an example, which has the overall theme of salvation, and many of its scenes are derived from the Book of Genesis. The text, in Islamic art also plays a similar function in architecture and decorative arts, though this function is actualised through calligraphy and inscriptions rather than paintings, and is used to set the tone, mood, and context of the site. The Qur'an itself is the manifestation of the speech of God, which takes the written form of the word in the context of the Qur'an, and it is further transferred and manifested into the physical world by being inscribed on architectural monuments, thus adding a further element

of sanctity to the monument. As an early example we can refer to the Dome of the Rock, in which there are numerous instances of Qur'anic inscriptions that deal with the Islamic view of Jesus as a Messenger of God and not the Son of God, which are used because of the context of the Dome, which was the Muslim, Christian, Jewish relations in Jerusalem.

In the Bible, it says "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, as the Word was God" (John 1:1) and in the Qur'an, God tells Prophet Muhammad "Recite: and your Lord is the most Generous, Who taught by the pen" (96:3-4) whilst in another chapter of the Holy Qur'an it states "*NUN*. By the pen and what they inscribe" (68:1), meaning God swore on this pen and what it has written, portraying the importance of the written word in both Islam and Christianity. As Nasr states "Islamic calligraphy is the visual embodiment of the crystallization of the spiritual realities (*al-haqā'iq*) contained in the Islamic revelation."⁶, which follows the principles of Islamic philosophy and Sufism.

Within Islamic philosophy, the World is divided into three planes of Existence: the mental Existence, the objective Existence, and, most importantly, the words' Existence. In comparison, within Islamic Sufism, the World we live in is a manifestation of God's name, and according to Islam, there are ninety-nine names for God. One of God's names is *Al Musawwar*, which means 'Image Creator'; therefore, art and calligraphy are manifestations of this name of God. The calligrapher also represents the name of God *Al Khāliq*, meaning 'The Creator', as he is the one who writes the holy words of God and presents it to society. What is important to note is that all the Qur'anic calligraphic inscriptions of the Shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din start from the direction of the *Qibla* and begin with 'In the Name of God' in Arabic. It is important to note that all the calligraphic inscriptions of Sheikh Safi al-Din's monument had a purpose as they convey different meanings based on the location of the inscription.

The Tomb Tower is the Sheikh's burial site, making it the complex's focal point. Aside from a decorative point of view, the Allah, Allah inscription on the Tomb Tower is of great significance both in terms of implementation and its origin, which as previously mentioned, is the *dhikr* of Sheikh Safi al-Din.

Tomb Tower of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili (Allah Allah Dome)

The tomb of Sheikh Safi al-Din is located at the southern side of the main courtyard and southwest side of *Dār al-Huffāz*. The tomb is covered with a cylindrical tower and a dome, with the height being 17.5 meters and a 22 meters circumference, which stands on a stone plinth with a 1.5 meter height. The cylindrical tower is made of a combination of brick and tile, also known as *hazarbaf* design. According to Islamic spiritual art, the dome is what connects the earth and the Divine World with one another; as the base of the monument is a metaphor for earth, and the dome a metaphor for the Divine World. In other words, humanity's belonging to the earth is portrayed through the basic shape of the monument, which is a symbol of perseverance, and the association to the sky is illustrated through the circular dome, which is a symbol of annihilation in the Divine World. The exterior of the tower is decorated with turquoise blue glazed tiles on red brick with the name of God in Arabic, 'Allah' written 132 times in geometric or bannā'ī kufic calligraphy (figure 1). Each 'Allah' inscribed on the wall is written vertically and horizontally, and is one meter long so that it would be seen from a far distance, and, thus, it is famously known as the 'Allah Allah Dome'. This style of calligraphic inscription was mostly done in Ilkhanid and Timurid religious architecture. The builder of this structure is known through a small medallion attached to the drum (figure 2), which states "the servant, the *faqir*, the hopeful toward forgiveness of the Eternal Lord ('afu al-samad), 'Awz bin [inside circle] Muhammad al-Maraghi"⁷

The use of kufic calligraphy for the inscription of the word 'Allah' is important as kufic writing is said to have been created by Imam

Ali⁸ (the first Shi'a Imam), and, therefore, its usage is a confirmation of the spiritual connection of Sheikh Safi al-Din's Sufi Order with Imam Ali. The reason why the word 'Allah' has been inscribed on the exterior wall of the Tomb Tower of Sheikh Safi al-Din has different reasons. The word 'Allah' is God's unique name, and according to Islamic Sufism all other names and attributes of God manifest from this word. Consequently, 'Allah' is the most holy word used in the Qur'an, which has been repeated 3,027 times, and, therefore, it is the main dhikr of the Safaviyya Sufi Order. The horizontal representation of the word 'Allah' in turquoise blue glazed tiles on the tower wall is a symbol of multiplicity, whilst the vertical representation is the symbol of Unity. This represents the idea of 'Unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in Unity', which describes the relationship between God and world and world with God. Furthermore, within Islamic spiritual art, vertical representation is a symbol of the beauty aspect of God, which is complimentary to horizontal representation which is a symbol of God's glory. The use of turquoise and ultramarine in Islamic art is a symbol of the Divine World and inner peace, which is accompanied with the use of turquoise tiles on red brick, which are symbols of earth and the Divine World.

Between the drum and the body of the tower, there is a two-lined band of inscription, the top line in gold kufic calligraphy and the bottom line in white thuluth calligraphy, on a background adorned with light blue floral motif tile mosaics on an ultramarine surface (figure 3). The inscription band has a width of 95 cm, which is set between two bands with a width of 30 cm, decorated with three leaf palms and flower buds. The inscriptions on the exterior of the tower deal with the Oneness of God and other attributes that arise from this. The calligraphic inscription is from the Qur'an, stating:

In the Name of God, Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining His creation with justice; there is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise. Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam, and those to whom the Book had been given did not show

opposition but after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves; and whoever disbelieves in the communication of Allah then surely Allah is quick in reckoning. (3: 18 – 19)

These two verses of Chapter 3, '*Āli-Imrān* (The Family of Imrān) are famously known as verses that deal with the Unity of God, justice, prophecy, Day of Judgement and leadership. These verses were inscribed between the drum and the body of the tower to emphasise the spiritual meaning of Unity, by focusing on 'there is no God but He' and His Justice and All Knowingness. Furthermore the gold kufic and white thuluth calligraphy were positioned on the tower in order to be seen by pilgrims according to the Islamic world-view principles.

The calligraphic inscription continues with verse 65 of Chapter 40, *Al-Ghāfir* (The Forgiver), verse 102 and 103 of Chapter 6, *Al-An'ām* (The Cattle) and verse 19 of Chapter 42, *Al-Shūrā* (The Council):

He is the Living, there is no god but He, therefore call on Him, being sincere to Him in obedience; (all) praise is due to Allah, the lord of the worlds. (40: 65)

In this verse, there is further emphasis on the Unity of God as it also contains "there is no God but He". It deals with the Unity of Divine Essence, Unity of Divine Attributes and Unity of Divine Acts. Therefore, in continuation of the verse discussed above, this verse emphasises the Eternal Living of God, and, in reference to His servants, He has focused on those who are sincere to Him in their obedience. Consequently, from an Islamic artistic approach, the artist has presented a very deep Islamic philosophical principle at the transition point between the body of the tower and the drum.

"That is Allah, your Lord, there is no God but He; the Creator of all things, therefore serve Him. And He has charge of all things. Vision comprehends Him not, and He comprehends (all) vision; and He is

the Knower of subtleties, the Aware.” (6: 102-103) This verse also refers to the Unity of God, and discusses how He is Omniscient. It focuses on the Lordship aspect of God, and, in return, has invited humanity to worship Him, as He is the creator of the world. This refers to the move from multiplicity to Unity, and, is therefore, written on the body of the tower before its transition into the dome, which is symbolic of the Divine and Unity World.

“Allah is Benignant to His servants; He gives sustenance to whom He pleases; and He is the Strong, the Mighty.” (42: 19) This verse refers to how God the Almighty aids His creation and nothing can prevent Him from giving material and spiritual aid to His followers, as He is Powerful. By inscribing this verse, the artist is displaying God’s Merciful and Benevolent nature in an artistic and intricate manner.

On top of the calligraphic inscription, where the drum is formed is a narrow band of geometric turquoise tiles which act as a transition to the dome. The drum itself is decorated with geometric and diamond shaped turquoise tiles (figure 4).

The Qibla portal, famously known as *Qibla Qapūsī* (figure 5), is framed by “a narrow band of tile mosaic in blue, white and brown and has a series of hexagonal epigraphic medallions braided into the frame.”⁹ The portal is also framed with dark blue mu’arraḡ tiles with white thuluth inscription below and blue kufic inscription above. The colours used in the mu’arraḡ tiles create a heavenly atmosphere where the pilgrim could feel a sense of serenity. The use of positive and negative space in the decoration is a symbolic representation of one’s body and soul, which are connected and dependent on one another. Furthermore, the reason for the use of white thuluth inscription is to illustrate the victory of light over darkness, which is portrayed through increasing the use of whitespace on a dark background. The white thuluth inscriptions consist of verses 79, 162 – 163 of Chapter 6, *Al-An’ām* (The Cattle) and verse 80 of Chapter 17, *Al-‘Isrā’* (The Israelites), whilst the

blue kufic inscription consists of verse 95 of Chapter 4, *Al-Nisā'* (The Women) (figure 6). These verses deal with the Unity of God and how Prophet Muhammad's teachings are also based on Prophet Ibrahim's teachings. The inscription of these verses on the portal entrance of Sheikh Safi al-Din's tomb is to stress to the pilgrim that the subject of worship is solely God.

Above the Qibla Qapūsī portal door there is a rectangular tablet in mu'arraḡ tiles, which is decorated with white thuluth and yellow-gold kufic calligraphy (figure 7). A part of verse 19 of Chapter 47, *Muhammad* of the Qur'an is written at the top is inscribed in white thuluth "So know that there is no God save Allah" and the second part in yellow-gold kufic "and ask forgiveness for thy sin". Similar to the other inscriptions of Qibla Qapūsī, this verse deals with the singularity of God. The Islamic belief in the Unity of God is repeated across the Tomb Tower of Sheikh Safi al-Din to emphasise the understanding and acceptance of this belief by the pilgrim with not only his mind, but also with his spirit.

There are other thuluth and kufic inscriptions adorning the Qibla Qapūsī, an example being the two lined white thuluth epigraphy at the top and yellow-gold kufic epigraphy at the bottom which cover the segment above the meshed metal window. The thuluth and kufic Qur'anic calligraphy of verses 62, 63 and part of 64 of Chapter 10, *Yūnus* are adorned with turquoise and yellow arabesque (figure 8).

"Now surely the friends of Allah – they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve. Those who believe and guarded (against evil). They shall have good news in this world's life and in the hereafter." (10: 62-63) These verses describe that those who follow Divine values and commands will have no fear or sorrow in this life or the next. These people are those who have a deep belief in God, which affects their everyday deeds. It can be said that this verse has been used to denote the nature of Sheikh Safi al-Din's life in this world and the next, and the life of his followers. Consequently, Sheikh Safi al-Din is one of the 'friends of Allah' and the attributes of such

a person has been inscribed on the Qibla Qapūsī to illustrate the characteristics of a true practicing believer.

Underneath the above inscription, there are two rectangular tablets decorating the inner arch of Qibla Qapūsī, inscribed with the names of Allah, Muhammad and Ali in yellow-brown thuluth calligraphy on a dark blue background. The word ‘Allah’ is referring the Unity of God, and ‘Muhammad’ is referring to the prophecy of Prophet Muhammad, whilst ‘Ali’ is referring to the leadership of Imam Ali whom all Sufi orders begin their lineage with. The inscription of these names on the inner arch of Qibla Qapūsī is a reference to the founding roots of Sheikh Safi al-Din’s Sufi Order and how it leads back to Prophet Muhammad.

There are 8 hexagonal medallions decorating the borders of Qibla Qapūsī; with 3 medallions on the left border, 3 medallions on the right border, and 2 medallions on the top border framing the Qibla Qapūsī. The ahādīth that have been inscribed on the medallions are based on religious values, prayer, remembrance of God and humanistic values of Prophet Muhammad, in kufic calligraphy.

The inscription on the right medallion on the top border of Qibla Qapūsī (figure 9) is based on a hadīth from Prophet Muhammad “Prophet Muhammad said: prayer is worship.” The left medallion (figure 10) is inscribed with verse 25 of Chapter 10, *Yūnus* from the Qur’an “And Allah invites to the abode of peace and guides whom He pleases into the right path.” (10: 25) These two medallions are philosophically symmetrical with one another, as in the left medallion the artist has chosen the Arabic word *Du‘ā*’ which is also used in the above Qur’anic verse, with the difference that in this instance it is written on behalf of the Prophet. In the right medallion the word *Du‘a* is from the Worshipped i.e. Allah, and in the second medallion from the worshipper i.e. Prophet Muhammad. Recitation and prayer were the fundamental aspects of the Safaviyya Sufi Order, as Sheikh Safi al-Din believed that in order for a Sufi

disciple to have the capacity of learning from the Sufi *pīr* he must first chant the remembrance of God (dhikr).

The mu'arraq tile medallions on the right border of the Qibla Qapūsī are also inscribed in kufic. The medallion on the top (figure 11) is a hadīth from the Prophet saying “God, appoint me as a spiritual person in life, and let me die as a spiritual person and resurrect me as a spiritual person [on the Day of Judgment].” The second medallion (figure 12) is chosen wisely by the artist as it states “the best recitation is saying: there is no deity but Allah”, which corresponds with the first medallion and is based on Sufi doctrine. The third medallion (figure 13) is also a hadīth from Prophet Muhammad inviting people to do charity work, which is one of the most important attributes of a Sufi.

The inscriptions on the mu'arraq tile medallions decorating the left border of the Qibla Qapūsī include hadīth and Qur'anic verses. The inscription on the top medallion (figure 14) states, “nothing is more important than prayer to Allah”, whilst the middle medallion (figure 15) is inscribed with a part of verse 30 of Chapter 41, *Fuṣṣilat* (Explained in Detail) “receive good news of the garden which you were promised” (41: 30). The third medallion (figure 16) also states “Almighty God said: religion is an act of good deed, so follow it.” The inscriptions on these medallions address the importance of prayer in Islam, which correspond with the Qibla wall on which they are installed.

The Tomb Tower has an octagonal shape from the inside, even though it has a cylindrical body. What remains today of the decoration inside the Tomb Tower of Sheikh Safī al-Din are arabesque blue, white and ultramarine tilework on the pillar of the western wall. This is an example of the exquisite green, gold, ultramarine, turquoise and eggshell mu'arraq tilework that once covered the inner walls of the tower. The ceiling of the Tomb Tower is decorated with paintings on canvas and ornamental plasterwork in white, with the apex decorated with an elaborate

sunburst. At the transition point inside the tower, where the cylindrical body of the tower and the drum meet, there is a thuluth band of calligraphy of verses 1- 5 of Chapter 4, *Al-Fatḥ* (The Victory) of the Qur'an, which is adorned with floral motif plasterwork (figure 17).

Surely We have given to you a clear victory. That Allah may forgive your community their past faults and those to follow and complete His favour to you and keep you on a right way. And that Allah might help you with a mighty help. He is Who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers that they might have more of faith added to their faith – and Allah's are the host of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is Knowing, Wise. That He may cause the believing men and the believing women to enter gardens beneath which rivers flow to abide therein and remove from them their evil; and that is grand achievement with Allah. (48: 1-5)

The inscription of these verses at the transition point of the body and the drum is a symbol of the connecting point of heaven and earth with one another, and is a referral to mystical victory and one's dominance over one's soul (*nafs*). The portrayal of these verses on the interior of Sheikh Safi al-Din's tomb can also be seen as a metaphor for the mystic's spiritual level and his success at promoting God's commands and Prophet Muhammad's teachings.

Conclusion

The Shrine Ensemble and Khānqāh of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili , which have been protected since 1932 under Iranian legislation, became part of the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2010. The Shrine Ensemble of Sheikh Safi al-Din, a prototype of later Khānqāh and shrines that embodies the most important characteristics of Safavid architecture, is one of the most important sites in Iranian and Islamic history, both from an architectural and decorative perspective, and from a historical, religious, spiritual and political one.

Scant attention has been paid to the Shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din in western academia, while other Safavid and Islamic monuments have been the subjects of vigorous research. As such, this article, which is the result of fieldwork conducted over two trips to Ardabil, is a step forward to better understanding and exploring the different dimensions of the Shrine Ensemble and Khānqāh of Sheikh Safi al-Din. The Sheikh Safi al-Din shrine complex is one of the finest examples of Safavid and Iranian architecture and decoration.

Due to the spiritual nature of the site, which to this day is revered and visited by many from Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the Kurdistan of Iraq, I have discussed the theoretical significance and meaning of the calligraphic inscriptions, which are comprised from the names of Allah, Qur'anic verses and *ahadīth*, using the hermeneutic approach, based on philosophy of Islamic art and Sufism. This has been done in order to gain a better understanding of the spirit of the monument, and to bring to life the calligraphic inscriptions for those readers and visitors who are not able to divulge its meaning due to the language barrier; for the calligraphic inscriptions as discussed in detail before, in many ways play the same function as mural paintings in Christian architecture and aim at setting the mood of the site.

As the Shrine complex is immense in size and it would not have been possible to discuss in detail the complex as a whole, the Allah Allah Dome was chosen for further discussion as a part of the Shrine that best embody the nature of the complex as a whole, and, in many ways, form the heart of the complex. On the exterior of the Allah Allah Dome, under which the body of Sheikh Safi al-Din is buried, Allah is written 132 times in geometric or *bannā'ī* kufic calligraphy, and it is the artistic physical manifestation of the Sheikh's eternal invocation or *dhikr*, which was Allah, Allah. Furthermore, the calligraphic inscriptions of the Tomb Tower emphasise the fundamental Islamic beliefs of the Sufis.

The complexity of the Shrine complex is such, that there are many areas, such as the *Chīnīkhāna* or Porcelain Room and the *Dār al-Huffāz*, which can be the subject of further academic research.

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Figures

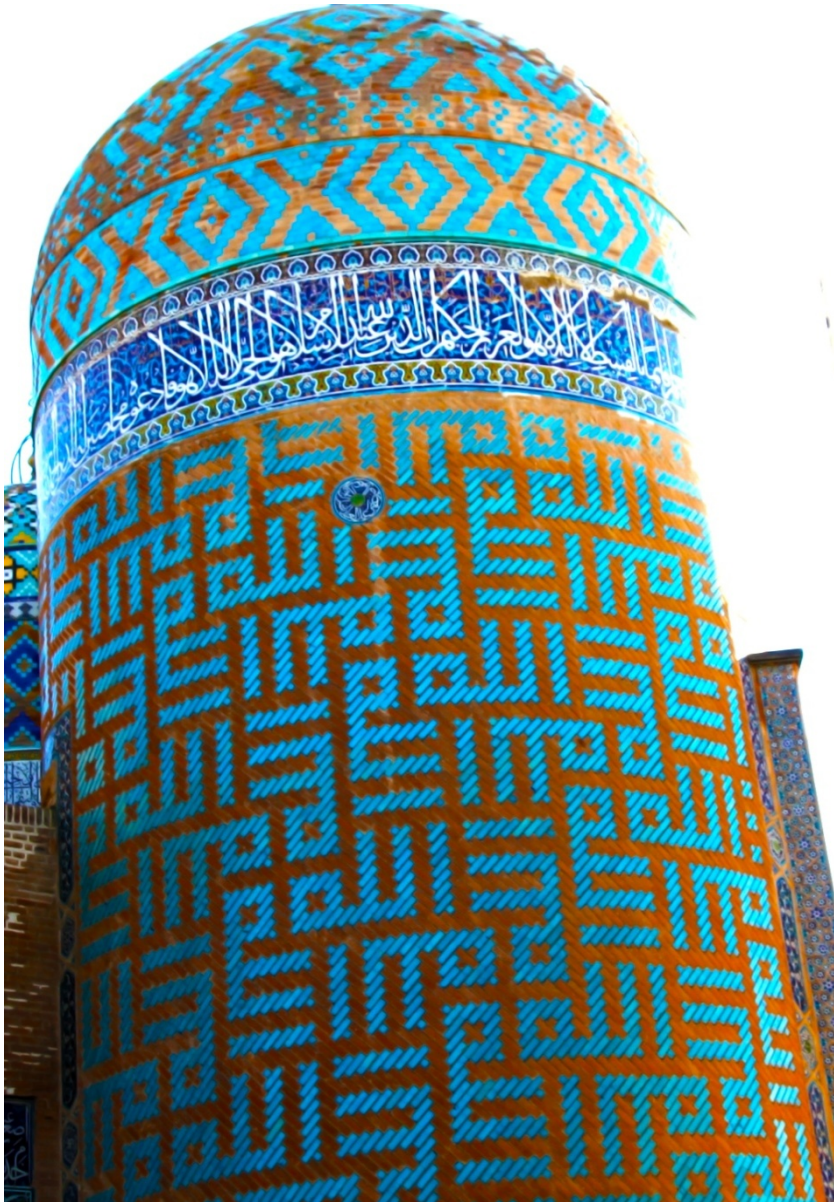


Figure 1 – Allah Allah Dome



Figure 2 – Allah Allah Dome Builder



Figure 3 – Two Lined Band of Inscription Between the Body of the Tower and the Drum



Figure 4 – Dome

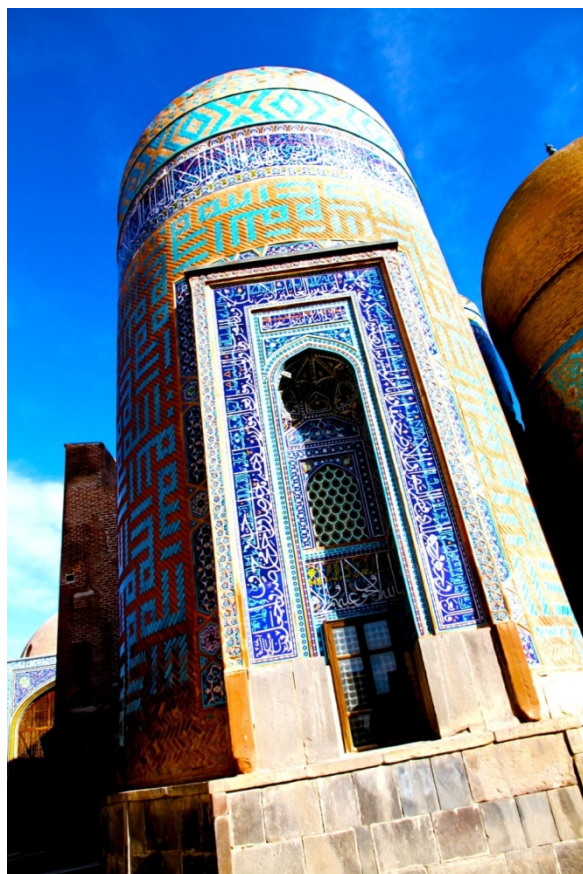


Figure 5 - Qibla Qapūsī



Figure 6 - Qibla Qapūsi Portal



Figure 7 – Tablet above the Qibla Qapūsī Portal Door



Figure 8 – Above the Meshed Metal Window of Qibla Qapūsī



Figure 9 – Right Medallion on the Top Border of Qibla Qapūsi



Figure 10 – Left Medallion on the Top Border of Qibla Qapūsi



Figure 11 – Top Medallion on the Right Border of Qibla Qapūsi



Figure 12 – Middle Medallion on the Right Border of Qibla Qapūsi



Figure 13 – Bottom Medallion on the Right Border of Qibla Qapūsī



Figure 14 – Top Medallion on the Left Border of Qibla Qapūsī



Figure 15 – Middle Medallion on the Left Border of Qibla Qapūsī



Figure 16 – Bottom Medallion on the Left Border of Qibla Qapūsī



Figure 17 – Ceiling of the Tomb Tower

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Humanity and Nature: A Comparative Study of the Confucian Concept of Harmony and the Islamic Concept of Unity

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Abstract

The advancement of modern science and technology has undoubtedly made human life on earth easier, more comfortable and convenient in innumerable ways. However, this modern day comfort and convenience are purchased at a great price: tremendous damage and destruction of the natural environment. Modern humanity has exploited nature's resources in a manner unprecedented in human history and civilization. This is due to the view that nature is humanity's possession to make use of and exploit without regard to the rights of other creatures or nature herself and accountability before God, the Creator. There is a growing awareness that this destructive relation between human beings and nature is no longer sustainable and humanity has to re-evaluate the ways in which we use natural resources and care for the natural environment. This paper will undertake a comparative study of the Confucian and Islamic views of the relation between human beings and nature, specifically, the Confucian concept of Harmony and the Islamic concept of Unity. This comparative study reveals that the values of respect, balance, moderation, harmony and accountability before God or Heaven are extremely important in humanity's relation with nature. These key values which are noticeably absent or non-operative in present day humanity's relation with nature need to

be re-cultivated if a more sustainable relation with nature is to be established.

Key words: Confucianism, Islam, comparative study, humanity and nature.

Introduction

The Earth Charter states:

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflicts are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable.¹

The environmental problems which the world faces are clearly described above. It impacts every nation and affects adversely the lives of human beings the world over. Critical situations require us to find immediate solutions. As the world becomes globalized, people cannot take care of their own country only; their concern should be worldwide. However, we should take note that human beings are not only the victims of this global environmental deterioration, but also the cause. Its historical reason is in the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries which marked “a major turning point in human history” in which “almost every aspect of human life is influenced in some way” as a result of tremendous changes in agriculture, manufacturing, transport and technology.²

Highly developed technology also strengthened human beings' abilities to exploit natural resources. Through modern science and technology human beings are able to predict, control and conquer nature and her resources. The tremendous success of modern science and technology spawned a spirit of scientism and anthropocentrism. Human beings no longer feel weak and afraid of nature and her forces.

Religions such as Islam and ancient philosophies such as Confucianism regard human beings as part of nature and taught human beings to take care of her while benefitting from her resources. However, this understanding has been replaced by an anthropocentric worldview which makes human beings look at themselves as the most important entity in the whole universe. Consequently, human beings began to look at nature as belonging to them which they can utilize and exploit without accountability to a higher authority or power. Thus, the scale of environmental degradation that we witness and experience today and which threatens both the safety and wellbeing of humanity and nature. If we do not take actions to save the earth now, there will be no hope for us or our future generation. The Earth Charter asserts:

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more.³

However, economic, political and cultural differences between countries are usually the obstacles to forming global partnerships. Confronted with energy or political issues, instead of being tolerant, conflicts and wars are often the solution between nations. The world being diverse, these differences will not disappear. Does it mean there is no hope to form global partnerships to overcome global problems that affect us all such as the environmental crisis? In order

to reduce conflicts and achieve global partnership, we must increase mutual understanding between nations and look for shared values and common goals to work together.

The era we live in today is called ‘the age of knowledge explosion’. Apart from advanced development in science and technology, what does the current knowledge explosion provide human beings in their understanding of living in the world? The current global situation gives us a negative answer. Will traditional wisdom which has supported human development for several thousand years be able to help present humanity to rediscover how to relate with nature and live in harmony with her?

The Confucian Concept of Harmony

The Confucian concept of ‘Harmony between Heaven and human beings’ has a very important place in Chinese traditional culture. Specifically, the concepts of ‘*Ren*’ (benevolence) and ‘*He*’ (harmony) are extremely important for Chinese traditional ethics and provide important ideological support for achieving harmony between human beings and nature.

The idea of ‘Harmony between Heaven and human beings’ originated in the beginning of Chinese culture. The term was used in the Han dynasty. Dong Zhongshu said: “The relation between Heaven and human beings is united as one.”⁴ In North Song dynasty, Zhang Zai, the Chinese Neo-Confucian moral philosopher and cosmologist, asserted that “Heaven and human beings are united as one; this is the law of nature.”⁵ Cheng Yi, the philosopher from the Song dynasty, also explained this idea. He said, “Heaven and human beings have always been one, there is no need to mention they are united.”⁶ These definitions show that there is a certain relationship between Heaven and human beings, and most of the Confucian scholars believe this relation should be harmonious.

Heaven and humanity are two very important elements with regards to the issue of harmony. The concept of Heaven has two different meanings. From the perspective of the natural environment, the concept of Heaven is physical. Modern science gives the definition of 'heaven' only in the field of astronomy and it means other cosmic objects in the atmosphere. The meaning of Heaven in traditional Chinese culture includes human beings' entire surroundings which includes outer space objects, as well as meteorological and geological phenomena on earth. It is more comprehensive and includes both the physical and spiritual universe. The modern Chinese philosopher, Fung Yu-lan, in his book, *History of Chinese Philosophy*⁷, identifies five different meanings for Heaven: 1. The sky in the physical universe; 2. An anthropomorphic emperor of Heaven; 3. Destiny or fate, such as Mencius' statement, "As to the accomplishment of a great deed, that is with Heaven "; 4. Nature, as employed by Xunzi; 5. The universe's moral order, as expressed in the Doctrine of the Mean when it opens with the observation that Heaven confers on us our nature.

The various meanings of Heaven above are important for Confucian environmental ethics. Heaven is connected with the spiritual and material dimensions. The mystical and powerful aspect of nature makes human beings look at Heaven as sacred power, especially when natural disasters make human beings feel powerless and helpless. Also, human beings need nature for material survival. Therefore, human beings need to control and make use of nature to ensure their continued survival.

In Chinese traditional culture, human nature is always an important element in the relation between Heaven and human beings. Mencius⁸ believed that human nature is good and if it is not influenced by material desire, every human being will be good. Gao Zi⁹ thought there is no good or evil in human nature. It all depends on social environment and education. Zhuang Zi¹⁰ believed that human nature is beyond good and evil, right and wrong, life and

death, others and self. Xun Zi¹¹ thought human nature is desire itself, only education can be the cure to change evil into good. Dong Zhongshu summarized human nature into three levels. The advanced level is good, the medium level is mixed with good and evil, and the lowest level is evil. Zhu Xi¹² believed that human nature is composed of celestial nature and terrestrial nature. The various opinions and definitions given by the different scholars show that the traditional Chinese understanding of human nature has two antithetical aspects: good and evil. Consequently, the relation between Heaven and human beings can be either harmonious or destructive.

Mencius was the student of Confucius. Like his teacher, Mencius looked at Heaven as a kind of mysterious power which is difficult to define and explain. He said:

No one asked, but it's done. It's Heaven's will; No one knows, but it happened. It's fate.¹³

For Confucius and Mencius, although Heaven is beyond human comprehension, the influence of Heaven in the world and human lives are evident. Confucius said:

What does Heaven ever say? Yet there are the four seasons going round and there are the hundred things coming into being. What does Heaven ever say?¹⁴

Confucius and Mencius accept Heaven's celestial nature and also anthropomorphized Heaven in certain respects. Thus, 'Heaven' in Confucius' and Mencius' understanding became a combination of nature and invisible power. There is a certain connection between Heaven and nature. Although Confucianism emphasizes on society, politics and morality, the natural environment cannot be ignored when speaking about human beings' harmonious living.

Ren (benevolence) is a fundamental concept or value in Confucianism. Confucius believed *Ren* as coming from Heaven.

Heaven not only has its terrestrial aspects but moral aspects as well. Nature is the original and material source for human beings to seek morality. However, human beings also need to seek *Ren* which is understood as the highest level of morality from Heaven. Human beings will learn the order from Heaven which is called *Tian Ming* (fate). Only by learning of fate from Heaven, human beings are able to achieve the level of great humanity. Therefore, Confucianism believes *Ren* includes both terrestrial and celestial aspects.

The basic meaning of *Ren* (benevolence) is love. Mencius thought that someone who has *Ren* will be full of love towards others and have great wisdom as well. He said:

Jun Zi (an exemplary person) is different from other human beings because of what he has in his heart. *Jun Zi* has *Ren* (benevolence) in his heart, and *Li* (rites) in his heart. The one who has *Ren* will love people, who has *Li* will respect people. The one who loves people, people will always love him; the one who respects people, people will always respect him.¹⁵

Confucius believed that only when someone has become a *Jun Zi* (an exemplary person) is able to administer a country properly, look after the people and protect their homes. Based on the love of *Ren*, Mencius created the idea of “care for all human beings and love for all creatures”. He said:

Jun Zi should firstly love his family, then towards other people, and then love all creatures.¹⁶

Obviously, the love of *Ren* is from that which is near and extends to that which is far. Confucianism believes that not only human beings are the objects of love but all creatures are also included. This would be the state of harmony between Heaven and humanity. It includes three kinds of harmony: between human beings, between society and individuals, and between nature and human beings. It was mentioned in the Doctrine of the Mean that the entire world would develop in its correct way when *He* (harmony) is achieved:

When joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure have not yet arisen, it is called *Zhong* (equilibrium, centrality, mean). When they arise to their appropriate levels, it is called *He* (harmony). *Zhong* is the great root of all-under-heaven. *He* is the penetration of the Way through all-under-heaven. When the mean and harmony are actualized, Heaven and Earth are in their proper positions, and the myriad things are nourished.¹⁷

Zhong (Centrality) is the fundamental state of stability of everything in the world; *He* (Harmony) is a general requirement of the world. When *Zhong* and *He* are reached, the entire world will be in its proper position and all creatures will grow properly, that is all will be in a state of harmony, and human beings and nature will live together peacefully.

The Confucian concept of harmony between Heaven and human beings is also reflected in the appropriate human response and activities to the changing seasons. Confucius asserts:

Logging one tree or hunting one animal not in its season is not *Xiao* (Filial piety).¹⁸

Zeng Zi, one of Confucius' students reiterated:

Trees should be logged in its season; animals should be hunted in its season.¹⁹

As one of the fundamental ideas in Confucianism, *Xiao* (Filial piety) is strictly observed in traditional Chinese culture. Having *Xiao* is basically regarded as a fundamental condition for reaching *Ren* and becoming a *Jun Zi*. Confucius put human beings and nature on the same level of being loved and cared which shows no difference between human beings and nature in the domain of ecology. Human responsibility encompasses both nature and human beings.

Confucius further stated:

Tian Dao (Heaven's rule) is not to kill those which are just born; seedlings should not be cut which is forgiveness. And forgiveness can help reach *Ren* (benevolence).²⁰

Confucius considered *Ren* as the main idea of caring for nature. It shows that he placed tremendous importance on the relation between nature and human beings. Confucius' goal was to achieve a harmonious relation between human beings and nature. For Confucius, it is obvious that nature is an integral part of the world and also of the lives of human beings. Therefore, it is absurd to think that human beings can survive in this world without establishing a harmonious relation with nature.

The Islamic Concept of Unity

Islam considers itself to be the religion of unity. Unity in Islam is an attribute of Allah who, according to the Qur'an, is both *al-Ahad* and *al-Wahid* meaning One. *Al-tawhid*, the oneness of God is conceived in Islam as a spiritual principle of the highest level. Following many scholars' understanding, *al-Tawhid* has two meanings. Firstly, its emphasis is upon the oneness of God. As it is mentioned in the Qur'an: "There is no God but He," Secondly, it means to integrate, because oneness does not imply only one divinity sitting on His throne in Heaven. It also means unity in creation. It has a very wide application to many different domains such as the integration of society, the integration of our soul within us, the integration with the community, with other human beings and even with all different creatures of God, the non-human world.

The two meanings of *al-Tawhid* reflect two of God's Qualities as stated in the Qur'an: Allah is both Transcendent and Immanent. The Qur'an states:

Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him.²¹

He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Immanent: and He has full knowledge of all things.²²

As a monotheistic religion, the transcendence of God is the first principle which a Muslim has to accept without compromise. If Muslims only regard God as the single transcendent God and outside of nature, then nature is a profane object, which human beings can dominate and manipulate. However, *al-Tawhid* embraces both divine transcendence and incomparability with creation as well as immanence in which God's Qualities are manifested in creation. The Qur'an teaches that God is neither similar to His creation nor is He totally separate from creation.

To Allah belong the East and the West: Wherever you turn, there is the presence of Allah. For Allah is all-Pervading, all-Knowing.²³

The presence of God in the natural world which is created by Him is confirmed by the above Qur'anic verse. Therefore, nature is sacred. Muslims should be aware of the sacred in nature and relate with nature with great care, respect and love.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a leading Muslim philosopher who has written a lot on the environment, believes that the environmental crisis is very much the result of human beings no longer viewing nature as sacred, possessing both spiritual and material values. In an interview with Marjorie Hope and James Young, Nasr states, "The spiritual value of nature is destroyed. We can't save the natural world except by rediscovering the sacred in nature."²⁴

The Qur'anic term '*ayat*' has two meanings: one basic meaning is the verses of the Qur'an and the other is the signs of nature. It is necessary to emphasize the word in order to comprehend the relationship between God and nature. The word appears in the Qur'an as indicating miracles of the prophets, the beings and phenomena of nature, the realities found in the human soul, major

historical events, and the verses of the Qur'an itself -- all of these are signs of God.²⁵ Nature provides innumerable signs or '*ayat*' which point towards God, the Ultimate Reality. As the Qur'an says:

Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, -- there are indeed signs for men of understanding,--²⁶

By regarding the natural world as signs of God, the Qur'an is asserting both the sacred quality and symbolic function of nature. By using the same word '*ayat*' for the verses of the Qur'an as well as natural beings and phenomena, the book of Nature is as sacred as the book of the Qur'an. Both of them function as signs of God to remind human beings of His existence and presence. Human beings in turn, have to love, honor and respect nature. The current environmental problems which threaten humanity's present and future survival prove the truth of the Qur'anic warnings, such as the following:

Mischiefs have appeared on land and sea because of (the meed) that the hands of men have earned, that (Allah) may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from Evil).²⁷

The Divine revelation of the Qur'an and natural phenomena assert the one same truth: *al-Tawhid* or the unity of the Ultimate Reality. Everything other than God is a pointer which signifies God. Many chapter headings in the Qur'an indicate the importance of nature, such as: 'The Thunder (*al-Ra'd*)', 'The Star (*al-Najm*)', 'The Moon (*al-Qamar*)', 'The Sun (*al-Shams*)', 'Dawn (*al-Fajr*)', 'The Ants (*al-Naml*)', 'The Bee (*al-Nahl*)', 'The Spider (*al-Ankabut*)', 'The Elephant (*al-Fil*)', 'The Fig (*al-Tin*)' and so on. The constant reference to the phenomena of nature inspires humanity to consider the relationship between God and nature which is connected but separate. As the Qur'an asserts:

Men who celebrate the praises of Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth,²⁸

The Qur'anic verse mentions that God always knows all of His creation and their behavior. Creation in its turn celebrates the praises of its Creator. Thus, there is an inter-relationship between God and creation. Human beings as Allah's vicegerents on earth (*khalifah Allah*) are entrusted with the responsibility of taking care and protecting nature which provides human beings with an inexhaustible reservoir of ways to see and know God.

Similarities and Differences between the Confucian and Islamic Views on Humanity and Nature

Islam and Confucianism both assert the importance of having a harmonious relation between human beings and nature. They also consider nature to be sacred. Therefore, in their teachings, human beings are not allowed to plunder nature. Human beings are responsible for taking care of and protecting nature and to live in harmony with her.

However, there are several differences between Islam and Confucianism. For example, the origin of the understanding of God is different between Islam and Confucianism. Muslims are taught that nature is the reflection of God's Qualities. Consequently, taking care of nature is a human responsibility placed by God upon human beings. In China, the awareness of the sacredness of nature stems from a sense of awe and fear of the mysterious power of Heaven and unpredictable natural phenomena, such as earthquakes, droughts and floods. Chinese believed that natural disasters are punishments from Heaven which is not satisfied with human conduct. They do not talk about God in definite terms such as the Names and Qualities of Allah present in the teachings of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an teaches that the real unity is the Unity of God, the Supreme Reality and Creator of creation. This entire creation includes human beings and nature. Nature as a manifestation of God's Qualities is sacred. This is not merely a human understanding but an instruction from God and God's command is obligatory. However, to carry out God's command, a proper understanding of the Unity of God and the relation between God and nature is required. Unfortunately, the current political and economic situation of the Muslim world does not speak well of the Muslims' understanding and practice of the Qur'anic teachings on the environment. Therefore, education is necessary.

The Confucian understanding of the sacredness of nature may not be founded on a divine Command but Confucianism always emphasizes on the harmony between Heaven and human beings and the importance of morality and education. Through education, human beings can be guided to realize the importance of nature and to maintain a harmonious relation with her. Confucius mentioned that only the *Jun Zi* or the exemplary person who has *Ren* (benevolence) and observes propriety can really carry out the responsibility of taking care of nature and other human beings properly.

In a similar vein, every human being is a *khalifah Allah* on earth who is entrusted with the responsibility of taking care and protecting nature. However, this responsibility can only be carried out by those who are fully aware and edified of their role and function on earth. The role of *khalifah Allah* like that of the *Jun Zi*, can only be executed by individuals who are fully cognizant of the Will of God or Heaven's decree.

Conclusion

Since the Muslim community and China like the rest of the world, do not have a good record of taking care of the environment, education on the environment is critical in order to make their

people understand the importance of respecting, caring for and protecting nature. In this way, the mutually shared values between Islam and Confucianism on nature and the harmonious relation to be cultivated and established between human beings and nature can aid in redressing the current environmental problems. It is not only environmental problems, but also other global issues, since mutual understanding can help mediate the differences between nations and reduce tensions and conflicts.

The Islamic concept of Unity and the Confucian concept of 'Harmony between Heaven and human beings' offer present day society a new way to look at its relation with nature. The 'new' way is not really new, but a rediscovery of religious and traditional values. The mutually shared values in Islam and Confucianism on the sacredness of nature and the importance of having a harmonious relation with her, indicate that by protecting nature and the environment, human beings are also protecting and caring for themselves and observing God's command and Heaven's rule on them.

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In 1987, the United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development issued a call for the creation of a charter that would set forth fundamental principles for sustainable development. An attempt to draft such a charter failed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. It began in 1994 and worked outside the United Nations. Several of the world's wealthiest and most powerful men crafted their own document, which they named the Earth Charter. According to its founders, the Earth Charter is "a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century." Superficially, the Charter appears to be a noble concept designed to end social and environmental tensions around the world.

² www.princeton.edu/Industrial_Revolution.html

³ The Earth Charter Initiative (2009). The Earth Charter. Retrieved from <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org>

⁴ Dong Zhongshu, Chun Qiu Fan Lu.

Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BC) was a Han Dynasty Chinese scholar. He is traditionally associated with the promotion of Confucianism as the official ideology of the Chinese imperial state.

⁵ Zhang Zai , Zheng Meng.

Zhang Zai (1020–1077) was a Chinese Neo-Confucian moral philosopher and cosmologist.

⁶ Cheng Yi: "Er Cheng Yi Shu"

Cheng Yi (1033–1107) was a Chinese philosopher born in Luoyang during the Song Dynasty.

⁷ Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 1, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1952.

⁸ Mencius (372 – 289 BC; other possible dates: 385 – 303/302 BC) was a Chinese philosopher who is the most famous Confucian after Confucius himself.

⁹ Gaozi (420-350 BCE) was a Chinese philosopher during the Warring States period. Gaozi's teachings are no longer extant, but he was a contemporary of Mencius (ca. 372-289 BCE).

¹⁰ Zhuangzi (Master Zhuang), was an influential Chinese philosopher who lived

around 4th century BC during the Warring States period; a period which saw the summit of Chinese philosophy, the Hundred Schools of Thought.

¹¹ Xunzi (312–230 BC) was a Chinese Confucian philosopher who lived during the Warring States period and contributed to one of the Hundred Schools of Thought.

¹² Zhu Xi or Chu Hsi (October 18, 1130 – April 23, 1200) was a Song Dynasty Confucian scholar who became the leading figure of the School of Principle and the most influential rationalist Neo-Confucian in China.

¹³ Mencius, “Wan Zhangshang”

¹⁴ *The Analects*. Yang Huo.

¹⁵ Mencius

¹⁶ Mencius: Zhu Xi annotated: creation (*wu*) means animals and plants.

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¹⁸ The Rites

¹⁹ The Rites

²⁰ The Rites

²¹ The Qur’an, 112. Trans. ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

²² The Qur’an, 57:3.

²³ The Qur’an, 2:115.

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²⁶ The Qur’an, 3:190

²⁷ The Qur’an, 30:41

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Habermas, Shariati and Religion: A Comparative Exploration

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ABSTRACT

This paper will assess the value and limitations of Jürgen Habermas's and Ali Shariati's work on religion in relation to three interrelated themes: reason and religion, modernity and tradition, and public life and religion. I believe that Shariati's projects of 'distinguishing the emancipatory religion from the historical one', 'returning to the Islamic roots', 'rejecting Zar, Zoor, and Tazvir', and 'protecting mysticism' have the potential to form a rival to Habermas's universal project, in Middle Eastern countries in particular. However, in other respects, such as 'negating the capitalism and scientism', and 'condemning the separation of science, religion and art from each other' Shariati's project can be considered as complementary to Habermas's critique of positivism in seeking the emancipation of human beings. A positive side of Habermas's and Shariati's approach is that they consider religion to be a direct link to social life, and believe that these two things join together at different points. It is through this focus on religion's importance within the lifeworld that Habermas and Shariati have sought to construct an image of a better society, grounded on peace, unity and human happiness. For this reason, they are important theorists for theologians and philosophers to engage with constructively and critically.

KEYWORDS: Habermas, Shariati, religion, modernity, Marx, Weber, communicative action, lifeworld, system, deliberative

democracy, tauhid, bazgasht beh khishtan, ideology, emancipatory religion and historical religion.

Introduction

Habermas (1929) obtained his doctorate in 1954 with a rather traditional dissertation on Schelling. He was Adorno's assistant at the Institute for Social Research in the Frankfurt School in 1954. He is considered one of the outstanding figures in contemporary German intellectualism, thought by many to be the most important sociologist and philosopher since Weber. He is perceived as a leader of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, and retired from his post there in 1994. In this paper, I have sought to explore aspects of Habermas's work in dialogue with that of Ali Shariati. Shariati (1933-1977) is known as one of the most conspicuous Iranian religious reformists. He demonstrated a creative, modern, and yet thoroughly traditional engagement with religious thought, and his discourse is unique in Iran for being welcomed by both intellectuals and popular religious groups and institutions. His various works still inspire Iranian religious intellectuals and other Islamic nations after three decades. For this reason, and given Iranian intellectuals' (both religious and secular) attraction towards Habermas's philosophical and social ideas, (in particular his way of challenging tradition and modernity), this paper has compared Habermas's thought with that of Shariati.

Although Habermas and Shariati criticise tradition and modernity, they use both to rebuild their own system of thought. Whereas Shariati embeds his ideas within a religious system, Habermas develops his views within a secular one. For Shariati, all ideas, all functions, and even all large and small economic, political, ethical, and social relationships are based on *tauhid* (monotheism). However, Habermas has demanded that all secular and religious people participate in running society through tolerance and communicative action: the pious are permitted to introduce their religious values in a customary language and turn them into laws if

they reach a mutual understanding. Nevertheless, both Shariati and Habermas have a positive opinion about the future of humanity.

This paper will assess the value and limitations of Habermas's and Shariati's work on religion in relation to three interrelated themes: reason and religion, modernity and tradition, and public life and religion.

1. Reason and Religion

Shariati did not engage with Habermas's thought directly. Nevertheless, a shared commitment to a radical critique of society and culture is evident in both their discourses. For instance, Shariati essentially constructed the critical approach in Iran, and has deeply influenced many Iranian religious reformists' views. Relying on his critical approach, Habermas assesses the views of many scholars, such as Marx, Weber, and earlier generations of the Frankfurt School. Shariati also utilises a critical methodology for challenging tradition and historical religion. Habermas criticises modernity, modern states, and their crises, while Shariati questions not only modernity, but also *Gharbzadegi* (Westernisation). However, these two scholars adopt fundamentally different approaches to modernity and tradition. Shariati's critical approach relies on *tauhid* and Islamic ideology, whereas Habermas believes in a self-building rationality. Habermas's critiques have attracted opposition from Western neo-Marxists, liberal democrats and the clergy, whilst Shariati's thought has attracted opposition from Marxists, secularists, and traditionalists in the East.

Habermas's greatest influence has come from the views of Marx, Weber and the Frankfurt School scholars. It is worth pointing out that, 'if Max Weber has been described as a bourgeois Marx, Habermas might be summarily characterized as a Marxist Weber' (Outhwaite, 1994: 3). However, Habermas's theories and approaches linking the social sciences with the concepts of rational consensus and human emancipation are far removed from the views of Marx, Weber and the Frankfurt School scholars. As Marx

comments, religion is the ‘opium of the people’: a reflection of human misery that gives illusory comfort and dissuades people from struggling for social equality. That is, religion does not heal any disease, but provides an interim relief that bestows a false happiness. Religion provokes people to avoid comprehending real life and estranges human beings from themselves. However, in his current works, Habermas has sought to recognise the importance of religion in the public sphere. Unlike Marx, he does not hold that religion is merely a secondary feature of economic production, but argues that it is an inseparable, basic and internal part of the lifeworld rather than a superstructure, and clearly declares that we cannot have lifeworld without its constitutive elements, of which religion is one of the most important. Indeed, the world could not make headway solely based on rationality and interaction without implying religious and metaphysical concepts that promised salvation for the masses. In other words, ‘this modern reason will learn to understand itself only when it clarifies its relation to a contemporary religious consciousness’ (Habermas, 2010: 17-18).

Habermas is certainly not as optimistic about the progress of science as Marx was. He is also less pessimistic than Horkheimer or Adorno were concerning positivism, modernity, and rationalisation. In his challenge to Materialism, he argues that by taking a non-critical approach to technological hegemony, Marx, along with the positivists, contributed to the suppression of any criticism of the Marxist regime. Marxism, like positivism, is a philosophy that does not make room for self-criticism. Habermas also considered metaphysical realism as a pre-critical philosophy that makes itself immune from critique. Likewise, Habermas challenges Weber and the Frankfurt School claiming that they cannot distinguish between instrumental rationality and communicative rationality. He argues that they entirely deny rationality and modernity, but that rationality cannot be equated with what Weber called instrumental rationality. Habermas believes that the project of modernity has not yet been fulfilled, and that this has caused contemporary social crises. However, if it could be developed and completed, it would

emancipate human beings from Weber's iron cage. Thus, Habermas (1984: 145) holds that the 'action concepts' that Marx, Weber, Horkheimer and Adorno held to be basic are not comprehensive enough, and are unable to cover all those aspects of social actions that come into being in societal rationalisation.

Shariati believes that it is possible to create a society based on both reason and religion. According to him, religion is neither a rival nor a successor to reason. Properly understood, religion does not antagonise or compete with reason, but in fact supplements it, and thus religious persons ought to understand both the mission of religion and the importance of reason and use them appropriately. Therefore, Shariati shows an interest in Western scientific and technological achievements. He holds that technology has placed the control of nature under the power of mankind, providing them with an ascendancy over it and an ability to shape it. Shariati describes technology and science as the liberator of humanity from the prisons of "nature" "heredity," and "history" – but this is possible only in a society which has achieved union with God. However, Mirsepassi (2000: 123) challenges Shariati's thought and argues that: 'without being explicit about what the purpose behind technology will be, he codes the idea of technology in Islamic language, as if this alone will improve its moral character'.

As a result of the French sociologist Gurvitch's influence on him, Shariati adopted a number of aspects of Marx and Weber's theories, such as the concept of revolutionary consciousness from Marx, and that of religious reformation from Weber. He explicitly puts Descartes' maxim: 'cogito ergo sum' aside, replacing it with Camus' dictum: 'I protest, and then I am': 'What Camus says is that contemporary man is alienated from everything. This alienated man feels closeness and familiarity more than ever and he needs to feel familiarity, yet his family and the world are more than ever alienated from him' (Shariati, 1974: 15).

However, by introducing a modern Islam, Shariati not only challenged Marxism, which had developed a strong following in intellectual circles in Iran, but also re-examined Islamic concepts and traditions. In other words, Shariati's works uses different scientific methodologies to illustrate modern Islam in the light of the critical approach. He understands Islam as a religion of protest against oppressive rules and rulers. This critical vision attempts to subvert governors that have deviated religion from its divine course.

2. Modernity and Tradition

Habermas and Shariati propose numerous criticisms of modernity with the hope of pushing human beings towards a deliverance from their present condition. Unlike the founders of the Frankfurt School, who lost hope in saving human beings from the bonds of technological and instrumental rationality, conceiving of modernity as an iron cage that has placed human beings in captivity, Habermas theorised that the lifeworld allows human beings to form a self-building sphere of communicative action beyond the power of capitalism. Thus, what Habermas means by communicative action is a proper type of social action and reaction within which participants expect one another to coordinate their different purposes and actions through a consensus that is produced by communication and mutual understanding (Habermas, 1990: 89). For Habermas, this presents a notable model for democratic structures in society, particularly with regard to the notions of 'deliberative democracy' and 'emancipation'. However, Ricoeur (1981: 97) challenges Habermas's ideas on the grounds that:

The interest in emancipation would be quite empty and abstract if it were not situated on the same plane as the historical-hermeneutic sciences, that is, on the plane of communicative action. But if that is so, can a critique of distortions be separated from the communicative experience itself, from the place where it begins, where it is real and where it is exemplary? The task of the hermeneutics of tradition is to remind the critique of ideology that man can project his emancipation and anticipate an

unlimited and unconstrained communication only on the basis of the creative reinterpretation of cultural heritage. If we had no experience of communication, however restricted and mutilated it was, how could we wish it to prevail for all men and at all institutional levels of the social nexus?

Separating lifeworld from system, Habermas tries to enable this self-building sphere to develop through the theory of communicative action. First, he is highly critical of what modernity has become, particularly with regard to what he calls the goal-directed rationality of the social 'system'. 'System', in his thought, refers to the instrumental rationality that produces economic and bureaucratic spheres within which social relations are controlled through money and power alone, since these become the key determinants of social action. Second, however, and in contrast to the goal-directed rationality of the social 'system', Habermas identifies the 'lifeworld'. The structural components of the lifeworld are culture, society and person. These principal elements of the lifeworld provide common beliefs for reaching an intersubjectivity of mutual understanding and finally overcoming their disputes. The lifeworld is an arena in which the modern project can reach its completion, even though it is increasingly threatened or colonised by the system. Put differently, Habermas (like Weber) holds that there are two species of rationality in modernity: positive and negative rationality. However, through the course of time, positive rationality is affected by negative rationality and loses its importance. Negative rationality is the sovereignty of bureaucracy and technocracy that leaves human beings in an iron cage. The difference between Habermas and Weber's conceptions of rationality, however, lies in the fact that Weber's positive rationality is in the sphere of system, while Habermas considers positive rationality to lie in the sphere of culture and lifeworld. According to Weber, positive rationality emancipated society from the dominance of some archaic influences at the beginning of the Enlightenment, such as those of metaphysics and religious superstitions. However, he holds that it was gradually replaced by negative rationality, with human beings themselves providing their means of self-alienation,

in so far as they allowed negative rationality to pervade and govern society. Similarly, according to Habermas, because of the location of communicative action within the lifeworld, its colonisation by the system prevents the realisation of a full, free and meaningful life for people, and undermines the structure of mutual understanding (which constitutes the foundation of democracy).

It is in the light of this that Habermas seeks to reconstruct the project of modernity, releasing it from the control of instrumental rationality and extending the jurisdiction of communicative action and the lifeworld. It is this desire to reconstruct modernity through the proper recognition of the nature and importance of the lifeworld that, in his later thought at least, allows Habermas to recognise the importance of religion, even within advanced modern societies. Interestingly, Habermas (2008: 108) notes that the thesis ‘that a religious orientation to a transcendent reality alone can show a contrite modernity the way out of its impasse is once again gaining adherents’. Moreover, even in his earlier studies, Habermas recognised that although modernity had brought some forms of development in the economic, political and cultural areas, it had left a vacuum in human identity and direction by removing the chains of tradition and the metaphysical element from the person. In fact, unlike Shariati, Habermas sees a secondary dynamism in modernity, and defends its feature of universal deliverance. However, it is impossible for modernity to provide a universal structure for the entire world, as it is unable to overcome its inner contradictions to provide such an approach. In other words, Habermas’s attempt to draw a unique prescription for the whole world is misguided, because he does not adequately allow for different cultures, civilisations, and pluralism.

In an interview in Tehran that I conducted with Manoochehri (Professor of politics at the University of ‘Tarbiat Modares’ who his doctorate is on Shariati’s thought in America) on Monday 8th of February 2010, he described Shariati as a modern thinker because of his attempts to introduce Islam as an emancipatory ideology but

not a 'modernist' one. Shariati does not try to adapt the Koran to the modern mind, but rather calls for an encounter between the two. Neither is he a traditionalist. His reliance on early Islamic experience is not based on his traditionalism as he refers to this experience as the real historical manifestation of a worldview that is not only antithetical to oppression, but also provides the basis for a theoretical development for the practical negation of oppression. His unceasingly questioning mind, however, led him to both learn from and be critical of contemporary Western thought. Manoochehri also notes that significant studies on how to compare Iranian scholars' ideas with those of Western thinkers have not yet been widely undertaken in Iran, and he expressed the view that providing a new discussion on the role of religion in public life through engaging with both Habermas's and Shariati's perspectives could bring very worthwhile results.

It appears that the different approaches that Habermas and Shariati adopt can be understood in terms of their specific experiences of modernity and their socio-political conditions. Habermas's criticism of modernity is influenced by particular features of German society, especially the problem of Nazism. He tries to analyse the conditions that resulted in the emergence of Nazism and to provide a set of conditions that will avoid any similar re-occurrence. Therefore, Habermas considers modernity as a universal structure or universalistic philosophy. However:

French critics of Habermas ready to abandon liberal politics in order to avoid universalistic philosophy, and Habermas trying to hang on to universalistic philosophy, with all its problems, in order to support liberal politics ... These critics doubt that studies of communicative competence can do what transcendental philosophy failed to do in the way of providing "universalistic" criteria (Rorty, 1985: 162, 164).

Habermas seeks to build this universal structure through interaction in order to realise communicative action: 'It is governed by binding *consensual norms*, which define reciprocal expectations about

behavior and which must be understood and recognized by at least two acting subjects. Social norms are enforced through sanctions. Their meaning is objectified in ordinary language communication' (Habermas, 1971: 92). For this reason, Habermas sees self-consciousness as freedom in the appearance of universal structures. He seeks a universal institution to safeguard the human rights of all people in the world, based on Western rationality. For instance, Habermas (1984: 44) holds that 'we are implicitly connecting a claim to *universality* with our *Occidental understanding of the world*. In determining the significance of this claim, it would be well to draw a comparison with the mythical understanding of the world'. Therefore, the analysis above is incomplete and one-sided. Furthermore, 'Habermas reconstructs historical materialism around *one* universal value: his own. But there are other universal values too. He overdetermines his theory in order to make us accept his own value as the exclusive or at least the highest one ... But those who are ready to create progress are confronted with different philosophies' (Heller, 1982: 41). In other words, Habermas tries to destabilise the notion of subjectivism and to make a new truth and consensus based on an emancipation that is embedded in the heart of interaction or communicative action.

Interaction, on the other hand, which Habermas equates with 'communicative action', 'is governed by binding *consensual norms*, which define reciprocal expectations about behaviour and which must be understood and recognized by at least two acting subjects' ... I would say that he himself makes a triple reduction within the notion of interaction itself: first, it is wrong to treat interaction as equivalent, or reducible, to action: second, it is wrong to treat action as equivalent, or reducible, to communicative action; and third, it is an error to suppose that communicative action can be examined solely on the level of norms (Giddens, 1982: 152,158).

Indeed, Habermas's philosophy seeks for an intersubjectivity of mutual understanding of social symbols that allows people to have an open discussion that is free from any type of coercion and

constraints. Thus, it seems that although the discussion takes place within idealised conditions, and no such form of mutual understanding ever actually occurs, its importance cannot be ignored. However, Habermas is unable to develop a universal ethics for human beings without using a superhuman or transcendental source.

Unlike Habermas, Shariati considers the specific situation of Iranian society before the Iranian revolution in 1978, which was situated within the triangle of a secularist domestic despotism, modernity, and constricted tradition. He describes it as a sinister triangle of *Zar*, *Zoor*, and *Tazvir* – the combined powers of wealth, oppression, and hypocrisy. In reality, modernity is the same as an iron cage – leading to human being's self-alienation, and the negation of nobility and diversity. In other words, for Shariati, modernity and globalisation involve casting human beings into a single 'talented' mould, destroying all their versatility, and turning them into one-dimensional creatures, as Marcuse argued. Whilst Habermas seeks to solve the crises of modernity using its own elements, Shariati holds that it is impossible to solve the difficulties of modernity from within its own mechanism. Shariati's solution for saving Muslims from the crises of modernity is '*bazgasht beh khishtan*', or rediscovery of our Islamic roots. This solution represents a typical form of particularism, the opposite to Habermas's universal modernisation. Shariati introduced his strategy to Muslim countries and 'has become an international Islamic personality whose ideas and writings are studied, debated and emulated far beyond the borders of Iran' (Esposito, 1986: ix). In an interview that I conducted in Tehran on 23/02/2010 with Alijani, Iranian scholar who has written many books on Shariati, he asserted that Shariati's ideology is based on general rules and regulations. Thus, according to him Shariati's ideology is genuinely applied all the time.

Projects aiming at human freedom, such as the Abrahamic religions dialogue, and the dialogues between civilisations that have been undertaken by great Iranian religious reformists and supported by

scholars from Iran and other world communities (such as the UN), are considered to be projects that have been built by Shariati.

In an interview that I conducted in Tehran with Ehsan Shariati (Ali Shariati's son) on Tuesday 23rd of February 2010, he explained that Ali Shariati criticises Western technocratic modernity in his socio-economic project, and draws on Nietzsche, observing a destructive nihilism in the process of modernity. In Shariati's view, ideology is a critical theory of the status quo, which separates religion from historical superstitions, returning it to its original foundations in the traditions of the Koran and the Prophet. On the other hand, Habermas is optimistic about modernity, considering it to be an unfinished project. Despite all the differences, Shariati and Habermas both appeal to discourse in the public sphere, both differentiate between the critical and traditional theories, and both have the underlying project of emancipation.

Shariati considers scientism to be a feature of modernity. He holds that scientism claims that the only authentic knowledge in science is based on experience, observation, and comparisons in relation to nature. Therefore, physics, chemistry, astronomy, and sociology are sciences, but philosophy and religion, which are not verifiable through experiment and comparison, cannot be numbered as sciences. In analysing the doctrine of scientism, Shariati (1990: 226) suggests that it consists of the following doctrines: 1-All ideas and meditations must be based on scientific laws and analyses; 2-Religion, God, the soul and many spiritualities are false, or do not exist, because they are beyond the scope of science; 3- Many instincts, ethical customs, and social relations are superstitions, as there is no scientific basis for them; 4- One must reject everything that is old and embrace everything that is novel; 5- One should apply the logical method to all concepts. Accordingly, science came to displace God for the first time, and undertook the role of directing human life – a mission that had, until then, been guided under the auspices of religion. In his two best-known works, *Knowledge and Human Interests* and *Theory and Practice*,

Habermas takes an extremely anti-positivistic position. He wants to attack a typical conception of science that is improper and arrogant, rather than attacking science itself. This scientism claims that the model of the natural sciences is the only valid approach, and that it is the proper measure for all scientific inquiry. The main reason for Habermas's attack on positivism is due to his antipathy to the positivists' claim that they are the only authors who hold rationally valid social knowledge.

In criticising modernity, Shariati (2007: 110-111), like Habermas, argues that the separation of science or knowledge, ethics or religion, and art was the catastrophe of modernity, because it caused these three spheres of human life to take different courses from one another. Influenced by the spirit of modernity, knowledge discharged itself from the responsibility of discovering truth and saving mankind and turned into a tool for capitalism, technology, and consumption. Habermas (1987: 329) also emphasises that 'capitalist modernization has always appeared with the stain of dissolving traditional life-forms without salvaging their communicative substance'. Capitalist modernisation destroys these forms of life rather than changing them in such a way that three forms of knowledge of – cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical and expressive – could be combined. Habermas (1981: 11), unlike Weber, believes that 'a reified everyday praxis can be cured only by creating unconstrained interaction of the cognitive with the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive elements'.

I believe that Shariati's projects of 'distinguishing the emancipatory religion from the historical one', 'returning to the Islamic roots', 'rejecting *Zar*, *Zoor*, and *Tazvir*', and 'protecting mysticism' have the potential to form a rival to Habermas's universal project, in Middle Eastern countries in particular. However, in other respects, such as 'negating the capitalism and scientism', and 'condemning the separation of science, religion and art from each other' Shariati's project can be considered as complementary to

Habermas's critique of positivism in seeking the emancipation of human beings. Like Shariati, Habermas (1971: 112) holds that:

Technocratic consciousness reflects not the sundering of an ethical situation but the repression of "ethics" as such as a category of life. The common, positivist way of thinking renders inert the frame of reference of interaction in ordinary language, in which domination and ideology both arise under conditions of distorted communication and can be reflectively detected and broken down.

Shariati introduces a third approach to Iranian society – *tauhid* – which is distinct from the abrupt revolutionary and conservative approaches. Indeed, the third alternative is an effective synthesis between historical Islam and Western-style modernity.

Habermas also proposes a third approach – communicative action for all layers of society – as a challenge to the radical thought of Marx's class conflict, and that of Western liberal democracy. Habermas's work offers a creative and potentially important attempt to move beyond the secular assumptions that have characterised much modern study of religion, wherein religion comes to occupy a central role in the mediation of the costs and benefits of modernity. Broadly understood, Habermas's work on the exchange of views and the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding between secular and religious groups and orientations, as well as on dialogues between religions and civilisations in the modern world, reflects his commitment to the importance of communication, dialogue and the need to prevent violence and war. This has not always been fully grasped by those who have engaged with his work on religion, and the limited reception of his work perhaps reflects the often abstract and technical nature of much of his writing, though the failure to fully understand his views of religion may also reflect the fact that his views on it have changed significantly over time.

Habermas held religion to be one of the sources of modernity's inner problems in his earlier work, but in his more recent work he

views religion as a principal source of the passions and motivations underpinning cultural life today. As he makes clear in his lecture on religiousness at Tehran University, Habermas (2002: 18) now believes that religion has not disappeared from the arena of the public sphere, and that it has an enormous effect on political public opinion. He leaves no doubt that he now wishes to engage constructively with the fact that religion is returning to the public sphere, and the fact that it is and will continue to have very significant effects on both social and political attitudes. Indeed, both Habermas and Shariati choose a policy of avoiding violence and increasing public consciousness.

3. Public Life and Religion

Habermas alleges that historical materialism cannot refuse to employ religious metaphysical concepts. In other words:

The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called "historical materialism" is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight (Benjamin, 1973: 255).

Habermas discusses the special power of religion and religious ethics to solve the susceptible forms of social life. Habermas holds that it is impossible to keep religion out of the public sphere. According to Habermas (2005: 20):

It would not be rational to reject out of hand the conjecture that religions – as the only surviving element among the constitutive building-blocks of the Ancient cultures – manage to continue and maintain a recognized place within in the differentiated edifice of Modernity because their cognitive substance has not yet been totally exhausted. There are at any rate no good reasons for denying the possibility that religions still bear a valuable semantic potential for inspiring other people beyond the limits of the particular community of faith.

In my view, four types of understanding about religion can be found in the views of both Habermas and Shariati. First, for Habermas, there is religion as a historical-social institution. When it is construed as a historical-social institution, it does not have an immutable, stable, and decisive position. This religion becomes liable to perfection and transmutation, and our understanding of religion becomes changeable. In fact, Habermas considers religion to have a direct link with social life. According to Shariati, religion has a socio-historical evolution, but this evolution has resulted in two different tendencies: emancipatory and historical religion. The characteristic feature of the emancipatory religion is its critique of the status quo, and thus its reference to human beings' deliverance. On the other hand, historical religion simply justifies the status quo, separating and alienating human beings from their own will and turning them into importunate beggars. However, Shariati construes the socio-historical evolution as a movement not as an institution. In institutionalisation, religion is a social organisation and a bureaucracy. It becomes genetic and hereditary. It is a tradition which is not consciously chosen by the individual. This is the type of religion that Marx and Habermas conceived of as the opium of the masses. Habermas was not able to sever the historical religion from the emancipatory one. Therefore, he fought the lofty values of the liberating religion at the same time as he contended the deviational tradition. However, while Marx considers religion as a superstructure, Shariati and Habermas, in his current work, conceive of it as a vital element of the lifeworld. In other words:

‘Modern man needs religion even more than past generations. For in the past ignorance, weakness, fear, and the material needs of man were mixed with religion. But now man is looking for an authentic religion, a religion which explains the world to him and gives meaning to life’ (Shariati, 1988: 20).

The second attitude towards religion is as an instrument of criticism. This criticism produces changes in both human beings’ relations and their surrounding environments. This attitude is not incompatible with religions through history, because the history of all Abrahamic religions indicates that they have mainly opposed and criticised the status quo. Shariati has included this attitude to religion within the emancipatory form of religion:

The prophets stood before a religion which, throughout history, has legitimated the oppressive and inhuman situation of the life of ancient societies from the economic, ethical as well as intellectual point of view and the worship of arrogant rulers who rebelled against God’s Commands, in a general sense and idolism, in a particular sense. It was these prophets who opposed the spread of multitheism (Shariati, 1988: 34).

However, Shariati’s above idea is protested in such a way that one must not object the status quo constantly and rise against power and sovereignty. It sometimes requires that one should sometimes reconcile himself with the power and rule or at least keeps silent from time to time.

The third attitude that Habermas and Shariati highlight is that of religion as a worldview. Habermas (2008: 111) holds that ‘every religion is originally a “worldview” or “comprehensive doctrine” also in the sense that it claims the authority to structure a form of life *as a whole*’. In fact, Habermas not only counts religion as a part of the lifeworld, but also regards it as a worldview. In this worldview, any vivid movement in the lifeworld is traced, interpreted, extracted, detected, and adjusted. Interestingly, he

considers religion as an inseparable part of the lifeworld. Therefore, Habermas (2005: 9) concludes that:

A devout person pursues her daily rounds by drawing on belief. Put differently, true belief is not only a doctrine, believed content, but a source of energy that the person who has a faith taps performatively and thus nurtures his or her entire life ... It [this mode of believing] belongs to the religious convictions of a good many religious people in our society that they ought to base their decisions concerning fundamental issues of justice on their religious convictions. They do not view it as an option whether or not to do it. Their religiously grounded concept of justice tells them what is politically correct or incorrect.

Shariati also conceives of religion as a worldview, stating that human beings' lives and actions are based on their worldviews. The portrait of existence that persons have in their memory affects their beliefs, behaviour, and social-political relations. Hence, 'as men we are what our world-visions are' (Shariati, 1981: 12). However, Shariati draws a geometric morphology that has *tauhid* as its base and ideology as its superstructure. *Tauhid* means all of creation is one empire in the hands of one Power, and that all human beings are one Source, guided through one Will, oriented one way, made of one type, and have one God. Put differently: '*Tauhid* represents a particular view of the world that demonstrates a universal unity in existence, a unity between three separate hypostases – God, nature, and man – because the origin of all three is the same. All have the same direction, the same will, the same spirit, the same motion, and the same life' (Shariati, 1979: 83). The ideology that is derived from this worldview has been generated from a social movement that is an outcrop of the necessities felt by a society. Therefore, 'to begin with, the individual feels the condition of his social class, as well as his economic, political, and social milieu. Since he is conscious of his condition, he is dissatisfied, he is suffering, he longs for change and transformation. Thus, ideology comes into being' (Shariati, 1981: 89). Both Habermas and Shariati hold that religion and its dimensions form an integral part of a social

evolution. This social evolution does not exclude religion from the public sphere, and also presents it as a critical discourse that provides a good background for opinions related to independence, validity, and legitimacy to grow.

However, the most fundamental critique that has been delivered to Shariati's thoughts relates to his ideological concepts. In fact, some critics have reduced all ideologies to sheer idealism and admitted the following critiques into all ideologies: 1- Ideology may result in formalism, which is a set of fixed definitions that have been delivered once in the past and they must be used in present in the same way as applied in the past. 2- Ideology may result in dogmatism, which means one has dogmatic ideas over some specific values and this in turn makes him to not able to see beyond those values. 3- In practical terms, it is also possible that one single ideology may insinuate itself into all contexts and lead itself up to totalitarian in an obligatory way. These are termed as ideological plagues and pathologies.

In my interview with Alijani in Tehran on 23/02/2010, he believed that there is no single ideology, but there exists several ideologies. It is not that an ideology necessarily accompanies formalism, dogmatism and totalitarianism. Criticising the ideology, he asserted that a society without having an ideology is not imaginable. So far, human history has experienced and received many damages from religious, Marxist and liberalistic ideologies. However, ideology needs to be cared for and nurtured. If an ideology receives such damages as referred to above, it will be inclined to negative or closed properties. The ideology introduced by Shariati is of a reformatory or open that uses religious as well as human knowledge and time resources in order to establish human and social values. These two different ideologies elucidate a thesis of an 'ideology versus ideology'. Some open ideologies have been constructed in history with their common statuses of minority and weakness, but a vast majority of them are of dangerously closed kinds. An open ideology imparts vision rather than dogma, and orientation and

responsibility rather than system. However, closed ideology inherently exposed to plagues such as formalism, dogmatism and totalitarianism, which provides an undemocratic right for its adherents.

Shariati (1996: 32-33) asserts that all schools of thought, whether material or mystic, must each introduce a concept of a perfect and ideal human, otherwise, a social philosophy, ethical school of thought and careers of life shall lose their senses. No one can be trained properly without having an ideal model of human species. As far as human being is concerned, training in the sense of bringing human up to an ideal level is what each school of thought must offer. Otherwise, all efforts would fail and all human actions would get nowhere. Likewise, Shariati (1996: 34) emphasises that human or an idealist society always injures and brings down fixed rules and structures in course of people's lives. In his view, Islamic ideology includes a message, guidance, salvation and justice. From Shariati's point of view, this ideology does not remain merely within academic range of a theory or knowledge. The ideology consists of a series of thoughts, these thoughts are never left impartial or indifferent; they act as a critic of their own social conditions and situations; and they refer to practices and social changes.

Fourth, there is the attitude towards religion as a common language when it is translated. It is a language that is applied to the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding. That is, the language of religion must belong not only to the 'special people' but also to the 'commoners', especially in terms of ethical values. Unlike the languages of science, philosophy, art, and literature – which are exclusive – religious language can be comprehensible to all people. In other words, religion is a commonly intelligible language that has produced or pioneered the process of rationalisation. Put differently:

Religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of

communal life. In the event of the corresponding political debates, this potential makes religious speech a serious candidate to transporting possible truth contents, which can then be translated from the vocabulary of a particular religious community into a generally accessible language (Habermas, 2005: 11 and 2006: 10).

Furthermore, some of Shariati's ideas conform positively with Habermas's theories on deliberative democracy and the public sphere. For instance, Habermas (2005: 6-7) says that:

The democratic procedure is able to generate such a secular legitimation by virtue of two components – first the equal political participation of all citizens, which guarantees that the addressees of the laws can also understand themselves as the authors of these laws; – and second the epistemic dimension of a deliberation that grounds the presumption of rationally acceptable outcomes ... It is precisely the conditions for the successful participation in this practice of democratic self-determination that define the ethics of citizenship: for all their ongoing dissent on questions of world views and religious doctrines, citizens are meant to respect one another as free and equal members of their political community – this is the core of civic solidarity.

Shariati (1988: 39-40) holds that Islam addresses the people, and its aim is the establishment of justice and democracy in the public sphere. Islam is born of awareness and the need for love, worship, and consciousness in the people, as well as through a unified criticism of oppression throughout history. In the Koran, God and the people form one front and rank. In all verses of the Koran that deal with social, political and economic issues rather than philosophical and scientific ones, the term 'people' can be replaced with the term 'God', and *vice versa*. That is, colloquially, 'our Lord' is equivalent to 'people'. The first word of the Koran is Allah (God) and it ends with Naas (people). Thus, it is the people that are always addressed by Islam.

Conclusion

I have argued that both Habermas and Shariati have a critical approach, but whereas Shariati's methodology does not rely on the self-building mind and considers *tauhid* (monotheism) as the origin of reality, Habermas holds that reality is obtained in the public sphere, and an individual can achieve ethical norms by agreeing with other participants in a discourse. In other words, he considers morality, like reality, to be a phenomenon that occurs in a process of dialogue, and to be grounded in the intersubjectivity of action-orienting mutual understanding. Of course, both Habermas and Shariati have been influenced by Marx and Weber in their adoption of their critical approaches. However, unlike Weber, who considered modernity to be an 'iron cage', Habermas believes that there is a secondary dynamism within modernity, although he also criticises its current form very strongly. Habermas defends the universal emancipatory aspect of modernity, but Shariati radically criticises modernity. Habermas's and Shariati's different ideas of modernity seem to be a reaction to their personal experience of modernity in two widely differing environments: Habermas, coming from a European intellectual tradition, seeks to amend modernity and enhance its emancipatory potential; while Shariati, influenced by the modern history of Iran, considers the central concepts and problems of modernity to be insurmountable.

Like Habermas, Shariati holds that it is impossible to achieve democracy together with political and intellectual freedom and equality under the domination of capitalism, individual ownership and class exploitation. However, while Habermas emphasises only equality and freedom, Shariati also places importance in 'mysticism and superior knowledge'. He believes that human beings possess needs in all these areas, and that these needs produce the search for justice, the demand for freedom, and the love of God. From his point of view, these three natural dimensions oppose the historical triangle of *Zar* (the power of wealth), *Zoor* (physical force), and

Tazvir (religious hypocrisy), which are all features of historical religion.

While Habermas takes a negative view towards ideology, holding that it consists of ideas that veil arbitrary and illegitimate power, Shariati alleges that ideology and faith (rather than philosophy, science, industry, and literature) provide the foundations of civilisation and society. Unlike Habermas, Shariati holds that there are two types of religion: the first takes the form of ideology that comprises three stages: world-vision, critical evaluation of the problems and the environment, and finally suggestions and solutions in the form of ideals and aims. Each ideologue, then, is responsible to change the status quo relative to his ideals and convictions. The second takes the form of a social tradition or cultural religion that consists of an assembly of hereditary creeds, inculcated sensations, and imitated customs and rites that lead to a collapsed and reactionary creed. Unlike Habermas, Shariati proposes a 'return to ourselves' which implies discovering our identity and cultural-historical foundations, developing our self-awareness, and releasing ourselves from intellectual colonisation.

In my view, there are four attitudes towards religion in Habermas's and Shariati's thought: first, religion is a historical-social institution, which forms an integral part of the lifeworld; second, religion is a critical instrument to challenge the status quo; third, religion is a worldview that extracts and adjusts any activity in the lifeworld; and fourth, religion can be a common language.

Habermas's ways of thinking about the nature and existence of religion and its applications in the public sphere over the past decades are, for Shariati, grounded in an optimistic view of religion as a whole. His departure from Marxist dogmatism, with its highly negative view of all religion, is a welcome and significant aspect of his work, but it also risks encouraging a simplistically positive view of the role of religious institutions over time. An objection that can be raised to this attitude towards religion, in the light of Shariati's

work, is that it neglects the separation between emancipating religion and historical or cultural religion. These two forms of religion have been opposed to each other throughout human history, and neglecting this distinction precludes the idea that it is *historical* religion that has been the ‘opium for the masses’ over time, but that the emancipatory dimensions of religion have provided a productive and liberating force within different layers of societies, enabling them to acquire their social rights and freedoms.

A positive side of Habermas’s and Shariati’s approach is that they consider religion to be a direct link to social life, and believe that these two things join together at different points. It is through this focus on religion’s importance within the lifeworld that Habermas and Shariati have sought to construct an image of a better society, grounded on peace, unity and human happiness. For this reason, they are important theorists for theologians to engage with constructively and critically.

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Maxim Gorky and Allama Jafari on Conscience

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Abstract

One of the contemporary Iranian philosophers who have worked upon the relation between philosophical problematiques and literary insights is Allama Jafari. He engaged with literary thinkers in general and Russian Literary thinkers (RLT) such as Leo Tolstoy, Mikhail Lermontov, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky and Maxim Gorky, in particular. Very little has been researched by either Russian or Iranian on the importance of Russo-Iranian philosophical engagements. In this paper the author has focused on Allama Jafari's approach on Maxim Gorky in regard to the question of 'conscience' as one of the pivotal concepts within human sciences.

Keywords

Maxim Gorky, Russian Literature, Iran, Allama Jafari, Conscience

Introduction

Within the context of sociological theory, which is deeply intertwined with the parameters of the *sensate culture*, it seems the concept of conscience does not occupy a very significant position. (Sorokin, 1957) A cursory look at the themes published within

sociological journals would very quickly reveal that this concept is not very popular and, indeed, it is treated as an outcast among the caste of sociologists. One of the rare appearances of this concept within sociological journals is the article by Walter L. Sheldon in 1902 in *American Journal of Sociology* where the author looks at ‘Conscience’ –**The Evolution of Conscience as a Phase of Sociology**– as an intellectual problem and not only as a moral question. (1902. 360-81) Apart from this, the problem of conscience seems to be not very fashionable and the search in this regard would yield a very little result. On the contrary, we can see that within sociological context there are various debates on the methodological importance of ‘emphatic understanding’ without, however, any methodical connection to the question of conscience. Needless to state that the concept of ‘empathy’ has occupied a very significant position within human science discourses. For instance, one can discern a systematic distinction between ‘empathy’ and ‘sympathy’ in the context of ethics which is of dynamic importance and is, indeed, a challenging distinction. Some experts argue that the eighteenth century texts of David Hume and Adam Smith used the word ‘sympathy,’ but not ‘empathy,’ although the conceptual distinction marked by empathy was doing essential work in their writings. One can discern two schools of thought; the first is the Anglo-American tradition, and it extends from Hume and Smith to the work of Michael Slote in the twenty-first century; the second tradition is the Continental one. It extends from the spirituality of Johann Herder to the phenomenological movement of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler, and Edith Stein. The intentional analysis of empathy is directly relevant to the constitution of the social community in a broad, normative relationship with the “Other.” Empathy (*Einfühlung*) is *sui generis* an intentional (mental) act that starts out in the superstructure of intersubjectivity in Husserl and steadily migrates towards the foundation of community under the impact of Heidegger, Scheler, and Stein. The choice of which philosophers and thinkers to include is also determined by the contingent facts that those chosen are most likely to be encountered in current debates about empathy,

sympathy, and ethics. Stein, Husserl, and Heidegger are primarily epistemological, ontological, and post-onto-theological, and are in the background of any contemporary, formal engagement with ethical theories. Scheler turns his phenomenological intuition of essence (*wesenschau*) towards the moral sentiments; and his analysis of the diversity of sympathetic forms is a lasting contribution to the topic. Contemporary Continental thinkers such as Larry Hatab and Frederick Olafson associate empathy with Heideggerian *Mitsein* and *Mitdasein* (being in the world with others) as the existential foundation of ethics. The roles of Friedrich Nietzsche, and the ‘Other,’ particularly in Emmanuel Levinas, are distinctive marks of the ethical approach on the Continent. The role of psychoanalysis on debates on empathy should not be disregarded either.

Paradoxes of Humanities

By taking into consideration these debates one can discern that empathy as an instrument of conscience is not conceptualized either by philosophers, ethicists or social theorists in academia. However this is not the position which Allama Jafari adheres to as far as paradoxes of humanities are concerned. In a passage in his book on ‘Conscience’ Allama Jafari argues that if we follow the current academic paradigms on fundamental human questions then we should leave this problematique outside the domain of scientific paradigms of disciplinary rationalities as we have left untouched the heptafold enigmas of ‘matter and dunamis’, ‘motion’, ‘principle of life’, ‘physiology’, ‘emergence of sense and awareness’, ‘emergence of intellection and power of speaking’ and ‘free-will or *De Anima*’. (2009. 19)

Allama Jafari is, on the one hand, worried that the question of conscience would be relegated to unscientific domains and, on the other hand, the importance of ‘emphatic method’ would not be granted to cover issues such as conscience. Of course, he attempts

to “demonstrate the observable dimensions of this faculty by clarifying various forms of expressions that it may take” (2009. 19). But this is not the only fashion by which Allama Jafari approaches his subject of study. As we have demonstrated time and again in this study he relies on the expressive power of literature in elucidating his religious, ethical and philosophical concerns. He takes Maxim Gorky as a prime example in expressing one of the most fundamental questions in the context of human existence, i.e. altruism in relation to conscience as an engaging faculty. The search for the transcendent unity of cultures takes Allama Jafari to all corners of philosophical traditions and literary discourses of the globe and based on this theoretical approach he looks at a novel entitled ‘The Mother’ (*Мать*) by Maxim Gorky where, it reads

... and thus he (Tamerlane) lived thirty years while the gates of his heart were sealed off to any empathy and consolation. (Maxim Gorky cited by Jafari, 2009. 230)

Pondering upon this episode which demonstrates the pivotal role of ‘conscience’ in the constitution of self and its decisive impact upon societal configurations, Allama Jafari argues that we are faced

... with a vital question ... i.e. altruism. In other words, why should I treat the others as myself? ... or to put it more bluntly, why should I have sympathy towards other human beings? Why should I not use the others as means in order to achieve my own ends? There is only one truthful answer to this question and that is because this is what conscience commands (2009. 231)

By narrating Gorky, it seems that Allama Jafari was trying to emphasize the relation between empathy and conscience as

... it is conscience that is able to express empathy towards others by urging us to realize that others do share the same humanity as myself and ... it is wrong to assume that others are unable to feel

pain and joy and we can treat them in an inhuman fashion
(2009. 231)

In other words, when Maxim Gorky was talking about absence of sympathy in Tamerlane's heart, he was trying to argue that we should not underestimate, firstly, the pivotal position of heart in the constitution of human existence, and secondly, the hazards of neglecting the importance of empathy which is rooted in the soil of conscience in the overall scheme of human leben. (Walicki, 1979) Tamerlane lived for thirty years but a life without consolation or any sense of altruism. In other words, the gates of self-realization were sealed off and such a lifestyle should not be considered as a human life. This is a life-style which Allama Jafari considers it as 'survival' in contrast to 'living' –or using a Frommesque style (Fromm, 1955) of distinction, i.e. a necrophilic versus biophilic style of leben- which entails existential sojourn and attempts towards higher peaks of self-realization. (2009. 231)

On Philosophy of Education

One of the areas within humanities which attracted the attention of Allama Jafari was the field of education. Of course, this interest is rooted in the soil of hekmatic perspective which views human person as an unfolding reality that could be realized in the course of time. This primordial perspective on human being is intertwined with hekmatic interpretation of being which is conceptualized in a dualistic fashion, i.e. the ability to achieve either ascension or descent. In order to avoid the 'Fall' within the fallen state of existence, the human person is in dire need of luminous education. This education should be based on three different approaches depending on the existential capacity of the individual: a) rhetorical style, b) discursive style, and c) the style based on wisdom. Certainly each of these styles could be divided into various configurations and subdivisions and as a matter of fact within the history of educational ideas in the Iranian (and Islamic contexts) these models have been developed and institutionalized in various

centers of learning but here we are not concerned about the diversity of educational models. On the contrary, the main issue is how did Allama Jafari link the question of education based on hekmatic paradigm to the Russian literary discourse?

In the Preface to *Fundamentals of Education*, Allama Jafari makes a clear distinction between ‘disciplinary paradigm’ -which he terms as professional discourse- and ‘wisdom paradigm’ -which he terms as luminary discourse- and argues that

... thinkers such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky when looking at the question of being in the human configuration ... are incomparable to professional experts who take only an infinitesimal capacity of human reality as their scientific problem The difference between these two paradigms are so deep that one could use a metaphoric language by comparing a person who works on the knowledge of water with the one who creates the water as such. In other words, the difference is incomparable (2010. 17)

The context Allama Jafari mentions the Russian literary thinkers along with other luminary philosophers is of great significance as the question is ‘education’ and its complex problematique based on hekmatic approach but he does not confine himself to the Islamic tradition alone. On the contrary, he moves purposefully beyond the traditional territories in order to clarify hekmatic points. It is in the context of education that Allama Jafari turns towards maxim Gorky and puts him next to luminary thinkers such as Rumi, Hugo and Dostoevsky. In addition, he attempts to display that ‘hekmat’ is universal and it could be looked for anywhere in the world and any territorialization of gnosis would be futile and doomed to failure. Based on these background assumptions he argues that education is consisted of four dimensions and on the third dimension where he discusses the role of mentor he turns to the literary paradigm of Russian writer, i.e. Maxim Gorky. Allama Jafari argues that

... education is a lifetime project that one should never refrain from. The best mentor is the one who never stops educating

her/himself. In other words, education is an existential necessity which should be realized in the heart of the every single human person. To put it differently, the best mentor is the one who never forgets that one should educate her/himself all the way. (2008, Vol 1: 138)

Education is that which helps an individual to realize the best that he is capable of. In doing so education must help the individual to realize the ‘facticity’ (contingency) of his existence to face the categories of this facticity - dread, anguish, anxiety and fear - resolutely and courageously and finally prepare him to meet death with felicity. In short, the objective of education is to enable every individual to develop her/his unique qualities, to harness her/his potentialities and cultivate her/his individualities. It means one should behold human life as a unique and an emerging process. But the question is who could instill these elevated ideals within the soul of a human person and by extension in the fabric of society? Allama Jafari believes that only a mentor who has realized the tenets of ‘intelligible life’ is capable of achieving such a position. He refers to a maxim by the Russian literary thinker, i.e. Maxim Gorky who holds that “the best mentor is always the best disciple” (Gorky cited by Allama Jafari, 2009. 138). This is to argue that an individual, who is conscious of her /his destination, makes benevolent choices and realizes the possibilities of ‘being’ could be a good mentor, i.e. a mentor who is able to use rhetorical style, discursive reasoning approach, and demonstrate a lifestyle based on ideals of wisdom. Of course, the relation between wisdom philosophy and philosophical literature could be researched further, in general, and within the paradigm of Allama Jafari and the Russian literary thinkers, in particular. But here we wanted to open a new research field for all students of comparative philosophy, literature and social theory who are interested in the dialog among religions, civilizations and cultures by demonstrating that there are intellectual giants who have embarked upon these kinds of paths which one should reconstruct and revisit anew. In other words, other aspects of Gorky and how Allama Jafari has connected the Russian literary heritage to Rumi or the Iranian mystical heritage

are among issues which need to be rediscovered. Unfortunately today the relations between Russia and Iran are subsumed under political and security exigencies and the intellectuals across the Caspian Sea know little from each other. At best, at the back of Iranian public mind, we can see the specters of Turkmenchay, Gulestan and Akhal treaties or the Russian manipulations during the Communist era, on the one hand, and the colonialism or lack of factual knowledge among the Russian public about Iran, on the other hand. Of course both are inaccurate and passé and the new generation of scholars and philosophers should step in and transform the landscape between the two nations who have much in common. There is no doubt that Russia is not Europe and has never been a European state and there should be no illusion that Iran is not part of Arabian semi-continent and has never been an Arab state. Surely there are commonalities between Europe and Russia as there are between Iran and the Arab World but these commonalities are not to the extent that one could talk about homogeneity either about Russia and Europe or Iran and the Arab World. These two cases are hybrid civilizations and have multiple character-configurations and one should not delete or distort these distinctions when studying cases such as Russia and Iran. Of course, Allama Jafari and his approach towards the Russian literary thinkers could be one of the constructing steps to understand complexities of cultural interactions at literary and philosophical levels but this is not certainly the last step of its kind. On the contrary, we need to revisit Allama Jafari and thinkers like him on the both sides of the Caspian Sea as this area is one of the most fertile grounds for the birth of converging cultures which have not been studied in this fashion yet. What could one expect from these kinds of studies in practical terms? It depends on how we perceive the 'practical domain'. Could one conceptualize the realm of 'praxis' apart from the realm of 'theory'? The relation between praxis and theoria is not as empiricists would like us to believe. On the contrary, there is a dialectical relation between how we act and how we envision the gamut of realities. In other words, action is consisted of the reciprocal fusion of theoria and praxis. To put it differently, the

least one could expect from these kinds of studies is fusion of horizons or *horizontverschmelzung* in Gadamerian sense of the term.

Conclusion

Needless to argue that Allama Jafari was attempting to demonstrate that within all human cultures there are sets of ideas which are of universal nature and common to all humanity. In order to discover them we need to go beyond disciplinary boundaries as intellectual concerns could not be fathomed strictly within the limits of discursive rationality. In other words, dialog among civilizations would become an alternative mode of contemplation if those who are involved in the dialog are ready to discern the common cores of humanity in all its shapes, dimensions and faces. Art, literature, poetry, philosophy, and cinema are best mediums for bringing people of different origins closer to each other by creating amicable climates for dialog and authentic engagements.

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Symbolism in Persian Culture: From Pre-Islam to 14th Century CE

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Abstract

The present paper discusses symbolism in Iran, pre-Islam to 13th Century CE, focusing on both traditions, such as *Nowruz*, and literature. The topics covered during the pre-Islam era are Norouz, water and fire. The discussion shifts to Sufi and philosophical literature in the post-Islam era, with particular focus on thematic symbolism, symbolism of letters and numbers, Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Sana'i's poetry, Attar's *Conference of Birds*, the works of Niẓāmī and Shaykh Haydar Amuli. However, the main focus is placed on the six books of Rumi's *Mathnawi*.

Key words: symbolism, mythology, Iran, Sufism, Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Sana'i, Attar, Rumi's *Mathnaw*, Symbolism of letters and numbers.

Introduction

Etymologically, the word "symbol" is derived from the Greek word *symbolon* which means "together." A symbol is a sensory, concrete representation of an intangible idea or reality which creates a bridge between the immaterial and material worlds. Symbolism is the art of using symbols in order to express a thought, and is a universal

feature in the literary and artistic works of all nations. “Symbolism can, then, be finally said to be an attempt to penetrate beyond reality to a world of ideas, either the ideas within the poet, including his emotions, or the Ideas in the Platonic sense that constitute a perfect supernatural world towards which man aspires”¹.

In his composition of the *Mathnawī*, Rumi drew on a number of rich symbolic traditions from Ancient Persia, from Arabic and Persian literature and poetry, from Islamic philosophy, and perhaps most importantly, from the rich symbolic traditions of the Prophet of Islam and the Qur’an.

Symbolism in Perso-Islamic Culture **Symbolism in ancient Iran**

Nowruz is the greatest and most ancient national tradition of Iranians. However, scant information exists in regards to *Nowruz* during the Sassanid period. The twelve-day celebration of *Nowruz* symbolizes the twelve months of the year; each of the contents of the *haft-Sīn* symbolizes the rebirth of spring. Followers of Zoroastrianism place seven types of plants, seven types of pastry, bonbons and dried fruits, and seven types of fresh fruits on the *Nowruz* table. This adds up to 21, symbolizing the 21 books of Avesta. The green plants grown for the table of *Nowruz* are displayed in groups of 3, 7 or 12, which were considered as sacred numbers in ancient Iranian traditions. The following objects are also placed in the *haft-sīn*: water to symbolize “an illuminated heart,” a mirror to symbolize “the shining of light and illumination,” fish to symbolize “birth, freshness and succulence,” an egg to symbolize “creation, the fetus and fertility,” a candle to symbolize “warmth and fire,” a flower to symbolize “friendship,” wheat to symbolize “provision,” milk and bread to symbolize “blessing,” a pomegranate to symbolize “heavenly fruit” (its many seeds symbolize “abundance”), a sour orange floating in water to symbolize “the earth on water,” *espan*d (with its holy connotation) to represent the “distancer of the evil eye,” aloeswood to symbolize “wealth,” and a

book to symbolize “being knowledgeable” and “knowledge.” In Iranian mythology, *samanu* (a sweet wheat paste) was the symbol for “the rebirth of spring,” greenery, coins and vinegar were the symbol for good thoughts, good deeds, worshipping God, positivity, eternity, justice and benevolence, all of which are of the attributes of *Ahura Mazda*.

In the *haft-sin* of the Aryan Zoroastrian priests of Shūsh, a green plant was the symbol of “being verdant and new life,” vinegar was the symbol of “happiness” (because grape was the fruit of happiness), *samanu* was the symbol of “good and blessing,” apples were the symbol of “compassion and being compassionate,” garlic was the symbol of “the guardian and the table cloth” (against evil), *sumac* was the symbol of “the taste of life,” and oleaster was the symbol of “life and the seed of life.”

According to the mythological beliefs of ancient Iranians, the creation of water occurred after the creation of the sky, and before the creation of all the rest. Ancient Iranians considered water to be one of the holy gods and exalted it. In ancient Iran, *Tishter* and *Anahita* were the goddesses of water, pregnancy and life. *Tishter* was the goddess of rain, the origin of waters and the spring of fertility and pregnancy. *Anahita* was the goddess of life, resurrection, and of the springs of waters that flow upon the earth. Through her compassion, she expanded beyond the borders of ancient Iran, and through Mediterranean, she entered Rome. In the west, the worship of Anahita was amalgamated with the worship of the great mother of all gods. Water symbolized one of the gods for ancient Iranians, and it was considered holy. The *Avesta* makes reference to the role of water in creation, to its fertility, and to the importance of keeping it sacred.

In the mythology of ancient Iranians, the appearance of fire is attributed to Hushang, as Firdawsī mentions in his *Shāhnāmeḥ*. There are other myths from ancient Iran in which the creation of fire is attributed to the appearance of plants, and in which fire is

considered to be the symbol of the “spirit of life.” In the *Avesta*, fire is the son *Ahura Mazda* and *Sepandarmaz*, and the earth is their daughter. Fire was considered to be heavenly and sacred, and was the symbol of “the closest friend and relative,” “the most natural companion and aid of humanity,” and “a messenger between humanity and God.” In the Zoroastrian tradition, fire was the symbol of the presence of *Ahura Mazda* and his “true order.” As such, in ancient Iran, fire was considered to be the symbol of Divinity, and its flame was considered to be the symbol of Divine luminosity. Zoroastrians considered the flames of fire to be pure, and believed it to be the exalted and natural symbol of God, which itself was the light of eternity. When Zarathustra says: “by relying on and praying to your fire, I strive ‘till the moment when I gain *Isha* (knowledge of God, correct order)”; he refers to the symbol of the “beauty of eternity, the essence of God and absolute knowledge.”

Faravahar is the symbol of the Zoroastrian religion. The visage of *Faravahar*, like that of a wise elder, is the symbol of “gratefulness to the wise and the elders and learning from them.” One hand slightly faces up, symbolizing gratefulness to, and worship of, *Ahura Mazda*, and the “guidance of humanity to exaltedness, truth and righteousness.” In the other hand there is a ring, which symbolises “loyalty to one’s covenant and agreement” and “truthfulness and purity.” The two wings on the side (each with three feathers) symbolise “good thoughts, good words and good deeds,” and the “desire for transcendence.” A ring in the middle of the torso is the symbol of an eternal life and spirit (without beginning and without end). Two strings near the lower part of the body strive to bring humanity towards itself, symbolising orientation towards good and distance from evil. Feathers facing downward on the lower torso are the symbol of “lowly and unrighteous thoughts, words and deeds.”

Ancient Iranians believed in numerous goddesses, and each goddess was the symbol of one of the names of *Ahura Mazda*. These

goddesses were similar to the goddesses of Greece, with the difference that Iranians were monotheistic, and believed in one Supreme Deity (Ahura Mazada). The symbolism attributed to some of the goddesses are as follows: **1. Mitra:** the symbol of compassion, **2. Anahita:** the symbol of rain, **3. Khashatria:** the symbol of war, **4. Azar:** the symbol of heat and of the creator of warmth, **5. Indra:** the symbol of wrath and anger.

According to myths, ancient Iranian women and mothers were supported by goddesses. The statues of these goddesses have feminine characteristics that symbolise motherhood, fertility and birth. In ancient Iranian mythology, the attributes of these three divine powers are compassion, pure love, self-sacrifice, nurturing, and giving birth. These were the qualities identified with women and mothers in ancient Iranian thought and belief. As Zarathustra's influence spread, the supernatural power of the mythological goddesses Anahita and Ashi became prominent in the literature of that period. According to the writings of ancient Iranians, *Sepandarmaz*, *Harutat* and *Amrtat* were three divine feminine powers. *Sepandarmaz* (*Spand*) symbolized earth, compassion, peace, loyalty, patience and compromise, and *Harutat* (*Khordad*) was the symbol of the perfection of *Ahura Mazda*, who gave the blessing of salvation and peace to people of pure religion. *Harutat* was also the symbol of the clamour of water and springs. *Amrtat* (*Mordad*) was the symbol of the lack of death and eternity, the growth of plants and greenery. Amrtat was also the symbol of the duty of women in history for the survival of humanity.

The *Chalipa* sun cross was referred to as the "cross of compassion" in ancient Iran. The cross of compassion is the special symbol of ancient Iranians, and is also among the symbols of the tradition of compassion, or Mithraism, the tradition that was prominent in Iran before Zoroastrianism. After influencing Zoroastrianism around 100 BCE, it spread throughout Asia Minor and the Roman Empire. The cross of compassion in Mithraism was the symbol of the amalgamation of the four primary elements (water, wind, earth and

fire). This symbol is also present in decorations and architecture in Islamic Iran. The two minarets of the shrine of Shāh Ni'matu'llah Walī feature this symbol in its *chalipaic* form.

The *winged sphere* is another ancient Iranian symbol, commonly found in Persepolis. This form was the symbol of eternity and transcendence for ancient Iranians. The sphere is the symbol of the sun, immortality, eternity and the spring of life, and the wing of the phoenix or the eagle was the symbol of flying and transcendence. Although some refer to the human form and the winged sphere in Achaemenid art as the form of Ahura Mazda, this form is the symbol of divine and heavenly acceptance. It refers to the connection between the spiritual and the material worlds; as such, it was used in the decoration of buildings to bestowing blessing on architectural forms, and on other objects related to religion and governance.

The sun has multiple symbolic meanings in both Iranian and Islamic culture. In ancient Iran, the sun was the symbol of the shining of Divine light upon the earth. The symbolic presence of the sun between the two wings of *Faravahar* and *Ahura Mazda*, and their presence on top of stone columns (as a protector of the sky and a separator of the sky and the earth) in the surviving building of that era, are indicators of the symbolic importance of the sun at that time.

In ancient Iranian culture, the tree was the symbol of ascension, and its growth and blossoming were considered to symbolise the ascension from the earth towards God and Heaven. The tree was also the symbol of the fertility of knowledge and wisdom. Ancient Iranians considered the tree to be sacred; trees that are evergreen such as the palm and cypress tree were viewed as symbols of eternal life. From what we can deduce from the masonry in Persepolis, in ancient Iranian culture, the palm tree was the symbol of blessing and abundance, and the cypress tree was the symbol of eternity and life after death. The cypress tree, the palm tree and the water lily (or

nenuphar) were, respectively, the symbols of *Ahura Mazda*, compassion and *Anahita*.

The water lily had an important role in the ancient world of the East, and it is likely that in 800 BCE, the image of the water lily was transferred to Iran from Egypt, through Phoenicia and Assyria. In ancient Iranian culture, the water lily was the symbol of the sacred tree, perfection, and spiritual blossoming, for although its roots lie in a morass, it grows upwards. This flower can be seen in the raised engravings in Persepolis, from the Sassanid period. In the engravings of *Tāq-i Bustān*, the sun and the water lily are combined in one piece. In this engraving, compassion stands on a water lily with the rays of the sun around its head. The water lilies carved into the hands of kings in Persepolis symbolise peace and happiness. Due to its connection to water, the water lily was the symbol of *Anahita*, the goddess of flowing waters.

In architecture, symbols do not only have narrative role, but rather operate in space, and can change over time. For example, the dome was prominent in ancient Iranian architecture. But after the arrival of Islam, it gained a different meaning. In ancient Iran, the dome was the symbol of the sky, of ascension and of the heavens. The middle of the dome symbolized the fire temple. The majority of the surviving domes from the Sassanid period are the main halls of fire temples. In this design, the dome symbolized of the palace (the place of fire). The religious and symbolic similarity of both mosque and fire temple architectures, with their shared emphasis on Divine light, the heavenly vault, may have contributed to the dome's adoption as a major feature of mosque architecture as many fire temples were transformed into mosques.

The lion was the symbol of the history of ancient Iran, and of Iran in the era of Firdawsī, who wrote, “From the image of this Lion and sword and sun / Honour in Honour in Honour appeared.”²

In ancient Iran, the form of the lion was created in clay and metal and in masonry. This symbol appeared in various forms such as: Mythological and astronomical forms, winged lions or lions in combination with other animals, either attacking other animals or in conflict. The lion was the symbol of bravery, the power of the sun and light, and its mane was associated with the sun. Ancient Iranians considered the sun to be the symbol of compassion, and it seems they also associated it with death. On many of the graves of the *Bakhtiyārī* region, the form of a sitting or standing lion was often carved as a guardian for the dead.

In Iranian myths, the cow symbolizes of the conflict of light and darkness, and good and evil. The cow's role in Iranian mythology is a continuation of Indian, European and Aryan mythologies of the creation, in which the cow is the symbol of rainy clouds and storms, which provide the world with water. In the story of Fereydūn in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmeḥ*, a colourful cow symbolizes stormy clouds. Elsewhere in the epic, it is the symbolizes a wet nurse who raises Fereydūn in the absence of his parents, in the plains of Mount Damāvand. By the establishment of the Iranian empire, the cow had come to symbolise the renewed victory of light and good over darkness and evil. In ancient Iranian and Indian culture, the cow also symbolized the god of the moon. This symbolism has its roots in the Mithraic tradition. In the centuries before the spread of Zoroastrianism, people would sacrifice a sacred cow, and would throw its blood upon the earth as a symbol of fertility.

Mithra's sacrifice of the sacred cow, as shown in Sassanid carvings, has been transferred to Greek carvings in more or less the same form. Among other key representations is one in which the cow is being devoured by a lion. This image is present in Persepolis; it was an astronomical symbol depicting the appearance of spring and summer in the constellations. The mythological significance of the cow has persisted in Iranian culture, even after the advent of Islam. In the opinion of scholars of ethics, the sacrifice of a cow

symbolises the death of the carnal soul, and becoming free from the desires of the soul.

In ancient Iran, the bull was the symbol of fertility and the renewal of life. A bull with a human head and wings appears in Assyrian carvings, and another is found at the eastern gate of the palace of nations in Persepolis. These are symbols of protection and guardianship. Since ancient Iranians referred to the cow as the symbol of the moon, and to the lion as the symbol of the sun, they considered the victory of the lion over the cow to be the symbol of the victory of the sun over the moon, of day over night, and of light over darkness.

But it is the goat that appears most frequently in the stoneworks of ancient Iran. The abundance of this form is due to creation myth in which of a plant with two leaves, each of a different gender, is guarded by a mountain goat who nurtured the leaves with its milk. Thus, in ancient Iranian culture, the goat was considered to be the symbol of fertility and growth.

Symbolism in Persia after Islam

Religious symbols are formed over time, and as such they are not easily changed or transformed. Many symbols are derived directly from sacred texts, and are often used to represent the spiritual dimension of the human being – the state of his or her soul – as well as beings and events. Each symbol has specific characteristics, and denotes a particular meaning or meanings.

The placement of halos around the heads of those considered holy in different religious cultures indicates the importance of the sun as a symbol of divinity. In Islamic art, the sun (*shams*) is often used as a symbol in geometric forms, in inscriptions, in arabesques, and in other forms, including animals such as fish or birds. The sun appears in many Islamic art forms, whether religious (as in the decoration of domes and mosques), or otherwise (pottery, rugs and

other objects). In Islamic culture, the sun is sometimes used as the symbol of divinity and the light of Divine unity, as the Qur'an declares, "God is the light of the heavens and the earth."³ A number of Muslim artists have portrayed the concept of multiplicity in unity and unity in multiplicity through the sun and its rays. "Multiplicity" refers to the many different manifestations, names, and attributes of the light of the Divine essence. Mystics compare the beauty of the Beloved (the signs of Divine beauty with feminine characteristics) to the attributes of Divine majesty (the signs of Divine majesty with masculine characteristics).

Some consider the sun to be the symbol of the Prophet Muḥammad. The source of this idea is probably the verse of the Qur'an that reads, "O humanity! Certainly a proof has come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a manifest light."⁴ In this verse, in answer to the disbelievers who were asking Prophet Muḥammad for miracle, God identifies the Prophet himself as firm reason and an illuminating light. As Rumi says, "The proof of the sun is the sun [himself]: if thou require the proof, do not avert thy face from him!"⁵

In addition to its beauty and explicit significance, Islamic art possesses esoteric meanings that refer to the world of the unseen. The circle, the square and the triangle are, respectively, the symbols of water, earth, and fire. In Islamic art, the circle is the symbol of the unity of the universe, a perfection that contains the beginning and end of everything. The circle is the symbol of timelessness, as it has neither an end nor a beginning. Through the triangle, the circle is transformed into the square, which is the symbol of the world and creations. The centre of the circle symbolises the essence of Divine reality, which simultaneously preserves essential unity, and achieves multiplicity in beings: thus, unity is achieved through multiplicity. The circle is the symbol of the soul and the square is the symbol of the body. Its four sides reflect the four elements that give rise to matter. The dome is the passage through which the body attains to the world of the spirit. The circle is also the symbol of

dynamism, and of reaching perfection in different dimensions. The relationship between the circle and the square is the symbol of the connectedness of the sky and the earth. In Islamic architecture, the dome is created through the transformation of the square into a circle. Thus, through a shape that has a beginning and an end (the square), a shape without a beginning or an end (the circle) is created.

Symbolism in Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāme*

Abū'l-Qāsim ibn 'Alī Tūsī, known as Ferdowsī (940-1020 CE), is the most influential epic poet in Persian history. His great epic, the *Shāhnāme*, is one of the texts that have come to define the Persian people, and the Iranian nation, over many centuries. The *Shāhnāme* is also referred to as the Iranian book of wisdom. In the *Shāhnāme*, Ferdowsī uses the form of the epic poem to narrate the myths of ancient Iran: the battle between good and evil, light and darkness, and the opposition of the forces of Divinity and Evil. With this work, Ferdowsī preserved ancient Iranian mythology and facilitated its integration into the newly Islamic Persian culture.

Ismā'īl-Pūr, the great contemporary expert on Iranian Mythology, believes that the three 3,000 year periods in Zoroastrian Mythology correspond to the three symbolic millenia of the *Shāhnāme*. The first 1,000 years (from Kiyumārth to Jamshīd), corresponds to the first period of 3,000 years in ancient Iranian Mythology, during which the nation was created. The second 1,000 years is the period of the rule of Dhahhak, which corresponds to the second 3,000 years in ancient Iranian myths, in which evil was supposed to gain power, the seven countries were created, and the first kings reigned in the world. The third 1,000 years (from Fereydūn to Kay-Khosrow) corresponds to the third 3,000 years of ancient Iranian myths in which the world gained its freedom and salvation.

In the *Shāhnāme*, the stories of the champions begin with the white-haired Zāl, the god of time. He was one of the most ancient

gods, before Ahurā Mazda, who symbolised old age and the passage of time. Zāl was raised in the high mountains (which symbolize the supernatural) by the phoenix (a mythical bird, and the symbol of heavenly aid).

In the *Shāhnāmeḥ*, Rustam is the symbol of the perfect human. Like Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*, or like Rāmā in the *Rāmāyānā*, he is the embodiment of the ideals and hopes of his nation. As Ferdowsī told Sultān Maḥmūd, "the *Shāhnāmeḥ* is nothing itself, other than the tradition of Rustam."⁶

The battle of Rustam and Isfandiyār the Invincible is one of the greatest epic stories in the *Shāhnāmeḥ*. After successfully completing the Seven Labors, Isfandiyār lays claim to the throne of his father, Gashtāsb. However, Isfandiyār fails, and is ordered to be executed, for the crown and throne are symbols of the "material world," and do not deserve to be the subject of desire. The story of Isfandiyār is related to the Qur'anic verse which reads, "Wherever you are, death will find you even if you hide yourselves in firmly constructed towers"⁷ Isfandiyār becomes the prisoner of his soul (*nafs*) which desires power. His nature is transformed and, as a result, he seeks help from his mother, who symbolizes his previously pure nature. In order to help Isfandiyār return to his original nature, his mother urges him to be patient. However, Isfandiyār opposes his his mother, and his better nature, and goes after the throne. With the deception of Gorzam, who symbolizes Gashtāsb's carnal soul, Isfandiyār is imprisoned. After consulting Jāmāsb, the astronomer of the court, who symbolizes Gashtāsb's instrumental intellect, Gashtāsb sends Isfandiyār to Zābulistān to be killed by Rustam. This will fulfil his destiny, and allow Gashtāsb to maintain his throne. Using the excuse that Rustam does not accept Zoroastrianism and is disobedient, Gashtāsb urges Isfandiyār to subdue him. Isfandiyār's mother, the symbol of the reality and truth of religion, attempts to dissuade him; however, he does not listen and meets his doom at the hand of Rustam.

Thematic Symbolism **Symbolism in Nature**

Light and colour have always been used by mystics to describe different spiritual experiences and worlds. In the Qur'an, light symbolizes God, the Prophet of Islam, the Divine Book, belief, salvation, guidance and vision. In religious and mythological art, colours have profound significance. For example, In Islamic culture, the colour green is associated with the Prophet Khidr, who is referred to as the eternal wearer of green. In his Conference of the Birds (*Mantiq al-Tayr*), the 'Attār says this of the parrot, "I am the Khidr of the birds, as such I wear green / so that I may drink the water of Khidr."⁸ The colour red, the colour of blood, is the symbol of the renewal of life, as both anger and war are manifested through the language of blood.

The celebrated "Verse of Light," *Ayat al-Nūr*⁹, has been a constant source of inspiration for Muslim mystics and philosophers in their discussion of the theory of light. Mystics consider the manifestation of the light of the Absolute to be gradated. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī considers black light to be the light of Satan. He says that black light is to Divine light as moonlight is to the sun. Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Kubrā was one of the first Sufī authors to describe stages of spiritual attainment in terms of colours. He described darkness as a symbol of Divine wrath and the Divine Attributes of Majesty. In this scheme, the colour red symbolises Satan, while white symbolises purity, and green symbolises eternity and the search for perfection. In this framework, shadows and darkness are also symbols of light. The shadows of objects and beings symbolise their humility and humbleness in front of God, their exaltation of the Divine.

However it is in the writing of the great mystic/philosopher Shahāb al-dīn Suhrawardī that the metaphysical symbolism of light was given its fullest expression. Suhrawardī believed that the philosophical principle of light and darkness has been inherited

from the Pahlavi sages or from Khusrawiyūn. In his illuminationist philosophy, Suhrawardī describes light as the essence of perception and knowledge. The axis of Suhrawardī's ontology is the Light of lights (*nūr al-anwār*), which as the Absolute being, bestows existence on all other beings. In this illuminationist philosophy, the world of existence is divided into different degrees and stages of light and darkness. The hierarchy of beings is dependent upon their level of nearness or distance from the Light of lights – that is, the level of illumination and light which they receive from it. According to the Suhrawardī, this Supreme Light is the source of existence, and the world in all its degrees of reality is naught but different degrees of light and darkness. Suhrawardī takes the famous “Verse of Light” (verse 35 of *Surat al-Nūr*.¹⁰) as the Qur’anic foundation for his philosophy of the principality of light.

Light, and the opposition of light and darkness, ending in the eventual triumph of light over darkness, also played an important role in the philosophy of Zarathustra. According to Suhrawardī, God is the First and Absolute Light, whose light is constantly radiating. By the manifestation of His essence, He has created everything, and by the rays of His essence, He gives them light. In the Holy Qur’an, God is described to as “the Light of the heavens and the earth.”¹¹ Having established a connection between ancient Iranian and Islamic philosophy, Suhrawardi further posits that the Muḥammadan light is the flame that engulfs the world, and is the complete and perfect manifestation of the Divine Light. In his allegorical explanation for the ranks of the Divine saints, Rumi also considers light, and the power to receive light, to be gradated. In a manner reminiscent of Suhrawardī Rumi describes how the Divine saints (the heart of the world of possibility) receive their light directly from God.¹²

Rūzbihān Baqlī, another eminent Persian mystic, refers to the Prophet and to God as the majesty of the red-coloured flower. In his *Kashf al-Asrār*, he describes God’s manifestation in the language of light. He describes the hidden realms of the Angelic World

(*Malakūt*) and Archangelic World (*Jabarūt*) as illuminated worlds, coloured white, yellow and Gold. He considered colourful dreams as meaningful descriptions of the upper levels of the human psyche.

In Islamic mysticism, water is sometimes symbolizes life and is sometimes a symbol of death. It acts like a bridge between the earthly world and the supernatural world. In Islamic culture, water symbolizes life, heaven, purity, beauty and thriving. For the mystics, water symbolizes the light of existence, which is present and flows through the world at all times. The resurrection of the earth through water is one of the signs of Divine mercy in the Qur'an, "Have the faithless not regarded that the heavens and the earth were interwoven and We unravelled them, and We made every living thing out of water? Will they not then have faith?"¹³

Birds have long been important symbols in both West and East. Birds are important ancient Iranian and Islamic mystical texts such as the *Avesta*, Firdawsī's *Shāhnāmeḥ*, and in some of the works of Ibn Sīna, Suhrawardī, 'Aṭṭār and Rumi. In these mythical-spiritual narrations, the phoenix is the king of birds and the symbol of the Divine Essence. Gabriel is the angel of the emanation of life, and of guidance between human beings and God. Gabriel occupies a special position in Illuminationist philosophy and in the mysticism of the Middle Ages. The word "phoenix" first appears in the *Avesta* and the Pahlavi-Zoroastrian texts. The phoenix also has a high status in Iranian pre-Islamic national and religious myths. In Iranian myths, phoenix was the symbol of the god *Bahram*. In the literature of ancient Iran, the phoenix sometimes symbolizes the the sun, the unseen world, and the Divine Essence. Some scholars consider the phoenix to be the symbol of Absolute beauty, knowledge, and goodness.

The stories of Firdawsī's *Shāhnāmeḥ* have their roots in the myths of ancient Iran, and the era of the Zoroastrian priests and the Pahlavis. After the advent of Islam in Iran, the phoenix not only features in stories of chivalry but also in mystical texts. In the

Shāhnāmeḥ, the phoenix has the dual symbolism of the Divine phoenix (in the story of *Zāl*) and the satanic phoenix (in the *haft-khān* of *Isfandyār*).

Ibn Sīna appears to be the first Muslim author after Firdawsī to discuss the phoenix in his *Risālat al-Ṭayr*, where it appears as a symbol of God. In his *‘Ayniyyah*, Ibn Sīna refers to the bird as a symbol of the spirit. Zarrīnkūb writes, “for Ibn Sīna, the story of the bird describes the story of souls who are not capable of withstanding the pleasures and deceits of this world. The Shaykh likens these souls to birds who unconsciously fall into the trap of the hunter.”¹⁴

The symbol of the phoenix also has a wide range of significations in Suhrawardī’s work. In the *The Treatise of Gabriel’s Wing (Risālayeh Par-i Jibra’īl)*, the phoenix symbolizes the sun of the sensual world. In the *Risālayeh Safīr*, he refers to the phoenix as the symbol of the perfect human, and the mystic who has attained union. In the *Treatise of the Red Intellect (Risālayeh ‘Aql-i Surkh)*, he relates the phoenix to the mythical phoenix of Firdawsī’s *Shāhnāmeḥ*, while the Red Intellect symbolizes the archangel Gabriel. However, these symbols refer to the same reality. The tree described in the *Red Intellect* – the tree containing the phoenix’s nest – is similar to the tree described in the *Avesta*, which, along with its shadow, is a cure for all diseases.

In ‘Aṭṭār’s *Conference of the Birds*, all of the birds, led by the hoopoe, wish to meet and achieve union with the phoenix. Each bird symbolises a different group of people. The path taken by the birds is difficult, and many give up along the way. In the end, the birds pass through the seven valleys of love and the seven stages of spiritual wayfaring: desire, love, wisdom, self-sufficiency, Divine unity (*tawḥīd*), bewilderment, poverty and annihilation. When they reach the court of the phoenix, the remaining birds witness the reality of their existence in the being of the phoenix. In this manner, the thirty birds attain union with the sun, like the phoenix. They

transform into one being. As the creation of all beings occurs through the mediation of Gabriel (the symbolic angel associated with the phoenix), their perfection and transcendence becomes actualised.

Some of the stories of Rumi's *Mathnawī*, and particularly those inspired by the Qur'an, symbolise spiritual resurrection. In the story of the birds, Abraha, and the companions of the elephant (*Sūrah Fīl* of the Qur'an), the birds symbolize the domination of the absolute Divine Will in the universe. By presenting such stories, Rumi demonstrates that the Divine Will is not limited by causality. For example, in the story of Abraham being thrown into the fire, God prevents the fire from burning His prophet, although it is He Himself who has given fire this power. Rumi interprets the four birds that come back to life in the Qur'anic story of Abraham¹⁵ as symbols of the despicable traits of the soul. The birds presented in this story have the following symbolic meanings: the peacock symbolizes status, the rooster symbolizes lust, the duck symbolizes greed, and the raven symbolizes farfetched hopes. Rumi explains that by destroying these four characteristics in one's being, and through the death of the soul (*nafs*), one may be reborn in spiritual life, and ascend to the heights of Divine proximity. In the story of Bilqīs (the Queen of Sheba) and Solomon, Rumi describes the hoopoe as a symbol of the "Solomonic speech of the birds," and refers to the Queen of Sheba as the perception of perfection. Despite the small size of the hoopoe's body, the Queen comprehends the majesty and greatness of its message. In the story of the parrot and the merchant, the parrot (the symbol of a pure exalted spirit), by choosing death, is freed from the prison of the sensual world. Rumi refers to the Divine *pīr* as a "high flying phoenix," and likens it to spirit of the perfect human, "The home of the Sīmurghs [phoenixes] is beyond (Mt) Qāf: it is not (like) a hand – loom [easily accessible] to any imagination."¹⁶ Rumi also writes, "Come into the shade [protection] of the Sage / whom no conveyer can carry off from the Way. His shadow on the earth is like Mount Qāf, / his spirit is [like] the Sīmurgh that circles [soars] exceedingly high."¹⁷

Another important source of symbolism in Persian Islamic culture is Ta‘ziyah, the poetic religious theatre that re-enacts the events of Karbala. Ta‘ziyah is a mythological art that contains a sea of symbols, to the extent that it is referred to as the garden of symbols. One of the most important elements of Ta‘ziyah is the theme of the struggle between good and evil, and each object in the ritual drama is highly symbolic. Green symbolizes the virtuous and great (Imam Ḥusayn), while the colour red symbolizes the opposition to them and their torment. Yellow is the symbol of Ḥurr’s remorse, while black symbolizes of mourning. The green, red and black flags respectively symbolize the household of the prophet, Yazīd’s army, and mourning. The *‘alam* (flag) symbolizes the flag of Imam Ḥusayn’s army and the tub of water symbolizes the Euphrates. The palm branch symbolizes of the coffin of Imam Ḥusayn. The cane symbolizes experience and good counsel, and gesture of looking between two fingers of the hand symbolizes the power and ability of the Divine saints to see the future. Wearing a long white shirt represents approaching death, and placing straw on one’s head symbolizes mourning. The white riderless horse represents Imam Ḥusayn’s horse, and the martyrdom of its rider, while the red crib represents of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn’s infant son. The white dove represents the flight of the spirit, informing the viewers that a message or letter has been received and promoting the feeling of sympathy in them and the women of the household of the prophet sitting on palanquins is a symbol of their imprisonment.

Symbolism in the Persian Poetic Tradition Before Rumi

Rumi is said to have remarked, “Whoever reads ‘Aṭṭār’s sayings seriously, understands the secrets of Sanā’ī, and whoever reads the sayings of Sanā’ī with belief, understands what we say and benefits from it.”¹⁸ In composing the *Mathnawī* and his other works of poetry and prose, Rumi drew heavily on the rich tradition of mystical poetry in Persian, particularly from the works of Sanā’ī and ‘Aṭṭār. Sanā’ī (Ḥakīm Abū’l-Majd Majdūd ibn Adam Sanā’ī Ghaznawī (1080-1131 CE)) is considered to be one of the first poets

to use the poetic forms of the ghazal (love lyric) and *mathnawī* (rhymed couplets) to present the mystical ideas and symbols of Sufism. The main subject of his poetry was the Divine beloved. Through presenting mystical realities in the form of love poems, Sanā'ī established the genre of mystical poetry, which was continued by 'Aṭṭār, and reached its peak in Rumi's work. Through the allegorical presentation of divine wisdom in the *mathnawī* form, Sanā'ī inspired many poets to write mystical *Mathanwīs*, including Khāqāni, Nizāmī, 'Aṭṭār and Rumi. Sanā'ī developed and introduced many of the symbols found in Rumi's poetry including those relating to the theme of passionate love, the body as a veil, lust and greed as obstacles on the spiritual path, etc.

Rumi's other self-identified great influence, Farīd ad-Dīn Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad also known as 'Aṭṭār Nishapūrī (540-618), continued Sanā'ī's symbolic tradition. 'Aṭṭār's *Conference of the Birds (Manṭiq al-Ṭayr)* is one of the most important symbolic works in Persian literature. It is a symbolic reflection of the stages and stations of spiritual wayfaring, through the use of allegories. *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* is the story of the spiritual wayfaring of birds. Under the guidance of the hoopoe (which is the symbol of the *Murshid* – the guide of the path of wayfaring), these birds journey on a dangerous path in order to find the phoenix, which symbolizes God. Each of these birds symbolises the different states of the wayfarers on the path. The owl symbolizes the retreat of the mystics, the parrot is the symbol of the worshippers of appearance, the partridge is the symbol of the worshippers of material wealth, the duck symbolizes extreme asceticism, and the nightingale symbolizes worshipping beauty. These and other birds journey towards mount *Qāf*, which is the symbol of the pinnacle of greatness. The thirty birds pass through the seven stages of love, submersion in knowledge, *tawhīd*, bewilderment and annihilation. Finally they are able to meet and attain union with the phoenix, which is perhaps the real self in a unified body. In attaining perfection they attain union with God.

‘Attār’s influence can be clearly seen in the way Rumi employs diverse allegorical stories to illustrate different facets of a single topic, and there are many symbolic and thematic connection between the two poets.

Symbolism In the work of Niẓāmī

Niẓām ad-Dīn Abū Muḥammad Ilyās ibn-Yūsuf Niẓāmī, famously known as Ganjavī (537-608 AH, 1141-1209 CE), is one of the main links in the chain of Persian poets who perfected the symbolic and allegorical dimensions of the Persian language. Niẓāmī’s poetry can be divided into four categories: myths, narratives, history and poetry. In his famous Quinary, *Panj Ganj*, Niẓāmī begins with religion, continues on to the path of love, and leads to the attainment of union with God.

Each of Niẓāmī’s collections of poetry corresponds to an era of his life. During the period of asceticism in his youth, he composed *Makhzan al-Asrār*, in which he discusses asceticism and striving against the soul, and explains some spiritual secrets. After this period, he composed *Khusrow o Shirīn*. Then, in adulthood, he wrote *Laylī o Majnūn*, a beautiful work portraying the classic tale of unrequited love. In *Haft Paykar*, Niẓāmī outlines his elaborate cosmological symbolism. In this work, seven domes built on earth are related to the seven days, seven colours, seven countries and seven brides, all of which parallel the seven heavenly domes. In his old age, Niẓāmī composed the *Mathnawī* of *Iskandar Nāmeḥ* in two sections, titled *Sharaf Nāmeḥ* and *Iqbal Nāmeḥ*. In *Sharaf Nāmeḥ*, Niẓāmī portrays Alexander as a great conqueror, and in *Iqbal Nāmeḥ*, he portrays him as a wise man and prophet.

Symbolism in Rumi’s works

Jalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Husayn Husaynī Khātibī Bikhī Balkhī (604/1273-672/1207) famously known as Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, Jalal ad-Dīn Balkhī, Rumi, Mawlana and Maulawi,

born in the city of Balkh, was of the great mystics and poets of the seventh century. During his life time Rumi was known as “Jalal ad-Dīn”, “Khūdāvandgar”, “Mawlānā Khūdāvandgar” and afterwards became famously known as “Mawlāwī”. Rumi also used the pen-name “*Khamūsh*”, meaning “silent”. His works include the *Mathnawī Ma‘nawī*, *Kulliyāt Shams Tabrīzī*, “*Fīhi Mā Fīhi*, *Majālis Sab‘ah* and the *Maktūbāt*.

The *Mathnawī*, like the Qur’an, is a mirror of existence, nature, human life and history which shows God. The way in which the the Qur’an is interwoven with the *Mathnawī* shows the immersion of Rumi’s life and thought in the Qur’an. Rumi frequently weaves Qur’anic verses into the text of the *Mathnawī*, sometimes literally, and other times conceptually. For example:

Rumi alludes to the Qur’anic verse “*Do not be like those who forget about God. He will make them forget themselves*”¹⁹ In the following verse, “He (who is thus blind) thinks his horse is lost, though (all the while) he is obstinately speeding his horse on the road.”²⁰

Based on the verse “*He is the First, the Last, the Manifest and the Unseen*”²¹; the unity of the thirsty and water is like the union of love, lover and beloved, Rumi writes, “For the beauty of the heart is the lasting beauty: its lips give to drink of the Water of the Life. Truly, the water, the giver of drink, and the drinker: all three become one when your talisman is shattered.”²²

In the interpretation of the Qur’anic verse “*and I blew my spirit into him*”²³ he writes, “Since by the grace of God the (Divine) spirit was breathed into me, I am the breath of God (which is) kept apart from the narrowness of the body, So that the sound of His Breathing should not fall in this direction, and that that (spiritual) pearl should escape from the narrow (bodily) shell.”²⁴

Rumi refers to the body as the “mount of the spirit”, just as in the Holy Qur’an the human beings who are dominated by an animalistic nature are referred to as four legged animals (“*cattle*”)²⁵. He writes, “He (God), then, created in this composite fashion the goodly

animal and made him familiar with knowledge. That (bestial) class (of men) He named “*like the cattle*,” for where is the resemblance between waking and sleep?”²⁶

Based on the verse “(God) brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living”²⁷, Rumi explains that the person who has experienced voluntary death will gain eternal life: “(And) since He brings forth the dead from the living, the living (carnal) soul moves towards a state of death (self – mortification). Become dead, that the Lord *who brings forth the living* may bring forth a (spiritually) living one from this dead one. (If) thou become December (winter), thou wilt experience the bringing forth of Spring; (if) thou become night, thou wilt experience the advent of day.”²⁸

By referring to the Qur’anic verse 6:43, Rumi portrays Satan’s use of magic against humans: “He decks out the carcass so finely that (with it) he buys from them two hundred rose – gardens. By magic he produces such moonshine that by means of (his) magic he carries off from worthless folk a hundred purses (of money).”²⁹

Some of the symbols and allegories used by Rumi in the *Mathnawī* are as follows:

Symbolism in the Book One of the *Mathnawī*:

- The creation of multiplicity from unity and the return from multiplicity to unity:

“Simple were we and all one substance; we were all without head and without foot yonder.

We were one substance, like the Sun; we were knotless and pure, like water.

When that goodly Light took form, it became (many in) number like the shadows of a battlement.

Raise the battlement with the mangonel that difference may vanish from amidst this company (of shadows).”³⁰

- ***Lack of attraction due to not being of the same kind:***

“The delight of (every) kind is certainly in its own kind : the delight of the part,

Observe, is in its whole;

Or else, that (part) is surely capable of (attachment to) a (different) kind and, when it has attached itself thereto, becomes homogeneous with it,”³¹

“That which (only) bears a resemblance is a loan: a loan is impermanent in the end.”³²

The form and meaning of the symbol of the human being and God, the body and the spirit:

“Know that from spring from spirit (reality) as the lion from the jungle, or as voice and speech from thought.”³³

“The form was born of the Word and died again; the wave drew itself back into the sea.

The form came forth Formlessness and went back (thither), for *Verily unto Him are we returning.*”³⁴

- ***Freedom from incarceration from the prison of the body, resulting in spiritual life:***

“Oh, happy is the man who was freed from himself and united with the existence of a living one!”³⁵

“The spirits which have escaped from their cages are the prophets, (those) worthy guides.”³⁶

- ***The bird in the cage as the symbol of Divine spirit in the human body:***

“The parrot whose voice comes from (Divine) inspiration and whose beginning was before the beginning of existing –

That parrot is hidden within thee: thou hast seen the reflection of her upon this and that (the things of the phenomenal world).”³⁷

- ***Lover and beloved (the human being and God) both eager for each other:***

“The hearts of heart – ravishers are captivated by those who have lost their hearts (to them): all loved ones are the prey of (their) lovers.

Whomsoever thou didst deem to be a lover, regard (him) as the loved one, for relatively he is both this and that.

If they that are thirsty seek water from the world, (yet) water too seeks in the world them that are thirsty.”³⁸

- ***Voluntary death and escaping one’s self as the only means for liberation from the prison of the soul (nafs), the symbol of the need and destitution of the spiritual wayfarer and the beginning of a new life:***

“Meaning (to say), “O you who hast become a singer to high and low, become dead like me, that thou mayst gain release.”

If you are a grain, the little birds will peck you up; if you are a bud, the children will pluck you off.”³⁹

“The meaning of dying (as conveyed) by the parrot was supplication (self – abasement): make thyself dead in supplication and poverty (of spirit).”⁴⁰

“These trees are like the interred ones: they have lifted up their hands from the earth.”⁴¹

“Although He put them to death in winter, He received them by means of spring and gave (them) leaves.”⁴²

- ***Moses and the Pharaoh, Muslim and disbeliever, like the polo ball, are subject to divine predestination:***

“Before the (blows of the) bat of His decree, “*Be, and it was,*” we are running (like balls) in Space and beyond.”⁴³

- ***The symbol of sap and the tree, can appear to be to be different, are really the same:***

“And as for him that perceived the inner meaning in this outward form, the form is (both) near to the meaning and far (from it).

In regard to indication, they (the meaning and the form) are like the sap and the tree; (but) when you turn to the quiddity, they are very far (removed from each other).”⁴⁴

- *The jug and water, and sea as the symbol of the human body, worldly senses, and God:*

“What is that jug? Our confined body: within it is the briny water of our senses.

O Lord, accept this jar and jug of mine by the grace of “God hath purchased (from the believers their lives and wealth in return for Paradise).”⁴⁵

“That there may be from this jug a passage to the sea and that my jug may assume the nature of the sea.”⁴⁶

- *The beggars, the symbol of divine generosity:*

“Beggars, then, are the mirror of God’s bounty, and they that are with God are (united with) the Absolute Bounty;

And everyone except those two (types of beggar) is truly a dead man: he is not at this door (the Divine Court), he is (lifeless as) a picture (embroidered) on a curtain.”⁴⁷

- *Pond, sea water and the intellect as the symbols of God, king, and pīr, and the pipe as the symbol of Divine servants and spiritual wayfarers:*

“Regard the king as a reservoir with pipes in every direction, and water running from all (the pipes) like hoppers (in a mill).”⁴⁸

“How the grace of Reason, which is of goodly nature, of goodly lineage, brings the entire body into discipline.”⁴⁹

“The purity of the water of the Sea that is like Kawthar (is such that) all its pebbles are pearls and gems.”⁵⁰

- *The lion, symbolizing of the Perfect Man, is aware of the thoughts of the spiritual wayfarers:*

“Anyone that is the lion and prince of (spiritual) mysteries, he will know all that the conscience thinks.”⁵¹

- *Multiplicity in unity:*

“The thread has become single. Do not now fall into error in that thou see the letters ‘K’ and ‘N’ are two.”

“K and N are pulling like a noose, that they may draw non-existence into great affairs.

Hence the noose must be double in (the world of) forms, though those two (letters) are single in effect.”⁵²

- ***Unity in multiplicity:***

Every prophet and every saint hath a way (of religious doctrine and practice), but it leads to God: all (the ways) are (really) one.⁵³

- ***Egoism as a force that prevents the spiritual wayfarer from achieving absolute perfection:***

Whoever has seen and recognised his own deficiency has ridden post – haste (made rapid progress) in perfecting himself.

The reason why he (any one) is not flying towards the Lord of glory is that he supposes himself to be perfect.⁵⁴

- ***The People of Purifying, possessors of the state of ‘Ayn al-Yaqin:***

“They that burnish (their hearts) have escaped from (mere) scent and colour: they behold Beauty at every moment without tarrying.

They have relinquished the form and husk of knowledge; they have raised the banner of the eye of certainty.

Thought is gone, and they have gained light: they have gained the throat (core and essence) and the sea (ultimate source) of gnosis.”⁵⁵

Prominent Symbols in the Book Two of the *Mathnawī*:

The Pīrs who have attained union as the mirror or God’s being:

“What you see plainly in the mirror – the *Pīr* sees more than that in the brick.”⁵⁶

The Pīr as the symbol of the Perfect Man and the guide of spiritual wayfaring:

“The *Pīrs* are they whose spirits, before this world existed, were in the Sea of (Divine) bounty.”⁵⁷

“He (the *Pīr*) was acquainted with the (material) form of every existent being, before this Universal Soul became fettered (by materiality).”⁵⁸

“That immediate intuition (mystical knowledge) in relation to them is thought; but, in relation to those who are far (from God) it is vision.

Thought concerns the past and future; when it is emancipated from these two, the difficulty is solved.”⁵⁹

- ***Divine Pīrs as a united light (manifestation of the light of Ḥaqq):***

-

“When you see two of them met together as friends, they are one, and at the same time (they are) six hundred thousand.”⁶⁰

“Inasmuch as *God sprinkled His light upon them (mankind)*, (they are essentially one): His light never becomes separated (in reality).”⁶¹

- ***Distinguishing the original and the fake through the secret light of the Saints:***

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“In reality, then, day is the innermost consciousness of the saints, (though) beside their moon, day is (dim) as shadows.

Know that day is the reflection of the mystery (the illumined consciousness) of the man of God, while the eye-sealing night is the reflection of his occultation.”⁶²

- ***Absolute unity:***

“Truly, the water, the giver of drink and the drinker: all three become one when your talisman is shattered.”⁶³

- ***Reality results in lack of need:***

“Reality is that which seizes (enraptures) you and makes you independent of form.”⁶⁴

- ***Explaining the status of the Saints:***

“Therefore in every epoch (after Muḥammad) a saint arises (to act as his vicegerent): the trials (of the people) lasts until the Resurrection.”⁶⁵

“He is the *Mahdī* (the God – guided one) and the *Hādī* (the Guide), O seeker of the (right) way: he is both hidden (from you) and seated before your face.”⁶⁶

“The dervish, then, is he that has no intermediary: the flames have (direct) connection with his being.

Therefore he is the heart of the world, because by means of this heart, the body attains (its proper) art.”⁶⁷

- ***We (the martyr, Rumi and Shams) are manifestations of God:***

“I who am left behind (surpassed in eminence) by His motes am (nevertheless) in both worlds a sun without shadow.”⁶⁸

- ***Shams (The symbol of the Perfect Man being), the cause of spiritual creation and burning:***

“The sun is acquainted with (all secondary) causes; but at the same time, the cord of (all secondary) causes is severed from Him.”⁶⁹

- ***The spiritual and material world as opposing symbols: wind and dust, rider and horse, the light of God and the light of sense, hand and pen, bow and arrow, the spirit of spirit and spirit:***

“This (phenomenal) world of non–existence has become like (real) existence, while that world of (real) existence has become hidden.

The dust is on the wind: it is playing; it is making a false show and forming a veil.”⁷⁰

“A horse knows a horse, because it (one horse) is associated (similar to other horses); likewise, (only) a rider knows the things appertaining to a rider.

The sensory eye is the horse, and the Light of God is the rider: without the rider the horse itself is useless.”⁷¹

“The Light of God mounts (as a rider) on the sensory eye, and then the soul yearns after God.”⁷²

“The Light of God is an ornament to the light of sense: this is the meaning of *light upon light*.”⁷³

“See (how) the Hand (is) hidden, while the pen is writing; the horse (is) careening, while the Rider is invisible.

See the arrow flying, and the bow not in sight; the (individual) souls manifest, and the Soul of souls hidden.”⁷⁴

- ***Dhu'l-Nūn (The Perfect Man), the symbol of king, the child's pearl, sea and sun and the one who died at the hand of the authority of profligates:***

“The great king rides alone! Such a unique pearl in the hands of children!

What pearl? (Nay), the Sea hidden in a drop, a Sun concealed in a mote.

A Sun showed itself as a mote, and little by little uncovered its face.”⁷⁵

“When the pen (of authority) is in the hand of a traitor, unquestionably Manṣūr is on a gibbet.

When this affair (dominion) belongs to the foolish, the necessary consequence is (that) *they kill the prophets*.”⁷⁶

- ***The human being is symbolized by a jungle of contradictions:***

“The being of Man is a jungle: be on your guard against this being, if you are of that (Divine) Breath.

In your being there are thousands of wolves and hogs; (there are) goodly and ungodly and fair and foul.”⁷⁷

- ***Bilqīs as the symbol of the intellect’s eye and Abū Jahl the symbol of the eye of sense:***

“Her eye saw him as a hoopoe, (but) her spirit saw as the Anqā (phoenix); her senses saw him as a fleck of foam, (but) her heart saw him as the sea.

Because of these two-coloured (diverse) talismans (appearance and reality) the intellect is at war with the senses, like Muḥammad with the likes of Abū Jahl.

The friends regarded Aḥmad (Muḥammad) as (only) a man, since they did not see in him (the Prophetic name which was manifested by the miracle) *the moon was cleft asunder*.”⁷⁸

- ***The tangible manifestations of the power of God in nature are only comprehensible for those who understand signs:***

“Those graces are the signs of a Witness: they are the foot-prints of a man devoted to (God’s) service.

(None but) that person who has seen the King is gladdened by the sign; when one has not seen Him, there is no recognition.”⁷⁹

- ***The signs of the footsteps of the one who is lost on the Divine Path:***

“(At) one step, (he moves) like the rook (straight) from top to bottom (of the chessboard); (at) one step he goes diagonally, like the bishop;

Now lifting his crest like a wave; now going on his belly like a fish; Now writing (a description of) his state on some dust, like a geomancer who takes an omen by drawing lines (on earth or sand).”⁸⁰

- ***The presence of Divine human beings as the symbol of companionship with God:***

“Whoever wishes to sit with God, let him sit in the presence of the saints.

If you are broken off (divided) from the presence of the saints, you are in perdition, because you are a part without the whole.”⁸¹

- ***The seeker of knowledge with worldly goals, is like one who eats clay:***

“Do not eat clay, do not buy clay, do not seek clay, because the eater of clay is always pale-faced.

Eat your heart (in love of God), that you may be young always, (and that) your visage (may be rosy) with Divine illumination like the Judas tree.”⁸²

- ***Satan and the touchstone:***

“Iblīs said to him, “Unravel this knot (and apprehend the matter): I am the touchstone for the false coin and the true.

God hath made me the test of lion and cur, God hath made me the test of genuine coin and counterfeit.”⁸³

- ***The obedience and mistakes of those who seek union, are different from those of the masses:***

“The piety of the vulgar is sin in the elect; the unitive state of the vulgar is a veil.”⁸⁴

“When the King has called you from the threshold into His presence, and again has driven you back to the threshold, Know for sure that you have committed a sin and in folly have brought forward (pleaded) compulsion (as the cause).”⁸⁵

- ***Warning to those who seek out the faults of others:***

“You have not heard from God (the comforting words) *Do not fear*: why, then, have you deemed yourself secure and happy?”⁸⁶

“Until your (own) beard grows, my good man, do not jeer at another whose chin is smooth.”⁸⁷

- ***In describing some of the characteristics of the Pīr of the path:***

“Outwardly he is old, but within he is young. What thing, verily, is he? He is the saint and the prophet.”⁸⁸

“He (the prophet and the saint) smiles upon you, (but) do not deem him to be such (as he appears): in his inward consciousness are hidden a hundred Resurrections.

Hell and Paradise are entirely parts of him: he is beyond any thought that you may conceive.”⁸⁹

- ***The characteristics of the heart of the rebellious:***

“The house, namely, the heart that remains unlit by the beams of the sun of (Divine Majesty,

Neither has the radiance of the Sun shone into that heart, nor is there (in it any) spaciousness or opening of the door.

The tomb is better for thee than a heart like this. Come now, arise from the tomb which is the heart!”⁹⁰

- ***The states of the body, intellect and spirit in manifestation:***

“The body is manifest; the spirit is concealed: the body is like the sleeve, the spirit, like as the hand.

Again, the intellect is more concealed than the (vital) spirit: (your mental) perception makes its way to (apprehends) the (vital) spirit sooner (than it apprehends the intellect).

(If) you see a movement, you know that he (who moves) is alive; (but) this you do not know, that he is full of intellect.”⁹¹

“The spirit (that partakes) of Divine inspiration is more concealed than the intellect, because it is (of) the Unseen: it belongs to that side.”⁹²

- ***In describing the Shaykh:***

“Infidelity has a fixed limit and range – know (this for sure); (but) the Shaykh and the light of the Shaykh have no bound.

Before the infinite all that is finite is naught: everything except the Face of God is passing away.

Infidelity and faith do not exist in the place where he (the Shaykh) is, because he is the kernel, while these twain are (only) colour and husk.

These fleeting things have become a veil over the Face, like a lantern concealed beneath a bowl.”⁹³

Symbolism in the Book Three of the *Mathnawī*:

- ***Wayfaring on the path without the companionship of the Pīr results in misguidance and being led astray:***

“If anybody goes on the way without a leader, every two-day journey becomes one of a hundred years.

Whoever takes up a trade the Ka‘bah without a guide becomes contemptible, like these bewildered men.”⁹⁴

- ***The claimants who appear as Sufis:***

“O man without wisdom, do not be an inebriate of the sort that (when) he comes (back) to his wits he feels sorry;

Nay, be one of those inebriates on account of whom, whilst they are drinking the wine (of Divine Love), mature (strong) intellects suffer regret.”⁹⁵

“Thou sweeten thy palate with the savour of false imagination; thou blowest into the bag of selfhood and fillest it:

Then, at one prick of a needle thou art emptied of wind - may no intelligent man’s body be fat (swollen) like this!”⁹⁶

- ***Giving warning in regards to Pharaoh’s claim to divinity:***

“Ah, do not assume a virtue (which thou dost not possess), O Pharaoh: thou art a jackal, do not in any wise behave as a peacock. If thou appear in the direction of the peacocks, thou art incapable of (their) display and thou wilt be put to shame.

Moses and Aaron were as peacocks: they flapped the wings of display upon thy head and face.

Thy foulness and disgrace were exposed; thou didst fall head-long from thy height.”⁹⁷

- ***The intoxication of lust in contrast to the intoxication of Haqq:***

“Know, again, that this intoxication of lust in the (terrestrial) world is (to be) deemed of small account beside the intoxication of the angels.

The intoxication of that one (the angel) breaks (reduces to insignificance) the intoxication of this one (the human being): how should he (the angel) show any propensity to lust?”⁹⁸

- ***Inanimate objects gaining life in the light of the sun of resurrection:***

“The world is frozen: its name is *jamad* (inanimate): *jamad* is (means) “frozen,” O master.

Wait till the sun of the Resurrection shall become manifest, that thou mayst see the movement of the world’s body”.⁹⁹

- ***Imprisoning the dragon of the soul through asceticism:***

“The dragon is thy sensual: how is it dead? It is (only) frozen by grief and lack of means.”¹⁰⁰

“Mortify it and become safe from (spiritual) death; have no mercy: it is not one of them that deserve favours.”¹⁰¹

- ***The wakefulness of the spirit of the rousing sleeper, by the remembrance of God:***

“With us, one must needs be a waking sleeper, that in the state of wakefulness he may dream dreams.

Thought of created things is an enemy to this sweet (waking) sleep: until his (anyone’s) thought is asleep, his throat is shut.”¹⁰²

- ***The Divine Word is not “stories of the ancients,” rather it is beyond the bounds of time and space:***

“That (phrase) “*stories of the ancients*,” which the disobedient (infidels) applies to the words of the *Qur’an*, was a mark of (their) hypocrisy.

The man transcending space, in whom is the Light of God – whence (what concern of his) is the past, the future, or the presence?

His being past or future is (only) in relation to thee: both are one thing, and thou thinkest they are two.”¹⁰³

- ***The spirit, by becoming selfless and benefitting from the light of God, sees the hidden and journeys in the hidden world:***

“To the end that thou mayst become able, O Soul, to receive the Light, and that thou mayst behold without veils that which (now) is hidden,

And traverse the sky like a star; nay, (that thou mayst) journey unconditioned, without (any) sky.

(‘Twas) thus thou camest into being from non-existence. Say now, how didst thou come? Thou camest drunken (un-conscious).”¹⁰⁴

- ***The pre-eternal beloved is beyond time and states of feeling:***

“(Real) beloved is that one who is single, who is thy beginning and end.”¹⁰⁵

“He is the Lord of states of feeling, not dependent on any state: month and year are slaves of that Moon.”¹⁰⁶

“The pure one is plunged in the Light of the Glorious (God); he is not the son of anyone, (he is) free from ‘times’ and ‘states’ – Plunged in the Light which is un-begotten: (the description) *He neither begetteth nor is He begotten* belongs to God (alone).”¹⁰⁷

- ***Being forgetful and ignorant of Divine command and decree is also part of the Divine decree:***

“This too is from the effect of the (Divine) ordinance and decree, (that) you see the pit and cannot take precaution.”¹⁰⁸

- ***The person who has annihilated the self is free of change and constriction:***

“It effaced itself entirely in the earth, so that no colour or scent or red or yellow (hue) remained to it.

After that effacement its constriction ceased: it opened its wings and expanded and sped on its way.

Inasmuch as it became selfless in the presence of its origin, the form departed (from it) and its real essence was displayed.”¹⁰⁹

- ***The symbolism of the different parts of canonical prayer:***

“O Imam, the (real) meaning of the *takbīr* is this: ‘We have become a sacrifice, O God, before Thee.’”¹¹⁰

“Standing in God’s presence and shedding tears, like one who rises erect on (the Day of) rising from the dead.”¹¹¹

“From shame the power of standing remains not, and from abasement he recites a litany of glorification while his knees are bowed.”¹¹²

“Again the (Divine) command comes to him, ‘Lift up thy head from the genuflexion and give an account of thy deeds.’

Once more the shamefaced one lifts up his head, and falls again on his face, (flat) as a snake.”¹¹³

“(Then) he (the worshipper) turns his face to the right hand in the salutation – towards the spirits of the prophets and those of the noble (saints).

Meaning to say, “O kings, (vouchsafe) intercession, for this vile one’s feet and mantle are stuck fast in the mire.”¹¹⁴

“(Then) he turns his face to the left hand towards his family and kinsfolk: they say to him, ‘Be silent.’”¹¹⁵

“No succour comes either from this side or from that: the soul of this desperate man is (torn into) a hundred pieces.

The wretched personage loses hope of all; then he lifts up both hands in supplication,

Crying, ‘O God, I have lost hope of all: Thou art the First and the Last and the Ultimate Bourn.’”¹¹⁶

- ***Receiving Divine certainty through choosing patience and silence:***

“Patience and silence attract the (Divine) mercy, whereas to seek this sign (evidence) is a sign of infirmity.

Accept (the Divine command), ‘*Be ye silent,*’ in order that the recompense of ‘*Be ye silent*’ may come to your soul from the Beloved.”¹¹⁷

- ***Divine Benevolence being bestowed upon the repentant sinner:***
“Many a time have you fallen into the snare of greed and given up your throat to be cut;

Again He that graciously disposes (hearts) to repentance hath set you free and accepted your repentance and made you glad.”¹¹⁸

- ***The Pirs who have attained union symbolized by a fish:***
“The fish of the deepest depth of the Sea of (Divine) Majesty: the Sea has taught them lawful magic;

Therefore through their illumination the (thing that was) absurd became a fact: the ill-starred one went thither and became auspicious.”¹¹⁹

- ***The soul and Satan as two sides of the same coin:***
“The fleshly soul and the Devil both have (ever) been one person (essentially); (but) they have manifested themselves in two forms, Like the angel and the intellect, which were (really) one. (But) became two forms for the sake of His (God’s) Wise Purposes.”¹²⁰

- ***Achieving spiritual life by passing the plant state and the animal death:***

“The existence of the animal arose from the death of the plant: (hence the command) “Slay me, O trusty friends” is right. Since there is such a victory for us after the checkmate (of death), (the words) ‘verily, in my being slain there is a life’ are true.”¹²¹

Symbolism in the Book Four of the *Mathnawi*:

- ***God’s vision of the souls of sinners:***
“To us, all the deceit and dissimulation that thou hast in thy heart are manifest and clear as day.

If we, in kindness to our servant, cover it up, why do thou carry shamelessness beyond the limit?"¹²²

- ***The saints cannot be judged:***

"For he (the novice) applies the scales of his own judgement and puts the man of God in the scales;

(But) since he (the Shaykh) is not contained by the scales of intellect, consequently he shatters the scales of intellect.

Know that to make trial (of him) is like exercising authority over him: do not seek to exercise authority over such a (spiritual) king."¹²³

- ***The Sun of suns is Divine light and the guide of the wayfarers of the path:***

"The light of this one who belongs to the Sun of suns is riding (in majesty): by day he is guarding high and low.

How should that glorious light, which brings thousands of suns into view, not be a guardian?

By his light do thou walk always in safety amidst dragons and scorpions?"¹²⁴

- ***How the Divine saints accept the spiritual wayfarer into their seclusion:***

"This is a royal gift devoid of any corruption: this is pure munificence (springing) from a (great) mercy."¹²⁵

- ***For believers, the sound of music is a reminder of the melodies of paradise:***

"(But) the true believers say that the influences of Paradise made every unpleasant sound to be beautiful.

We all have been parts of Adam; we have heard those melodies in Paradise.”¹²⁶

- ***The relationship of the Mathnawī to Ḥusam ad-dīn and its author:***

“Even so, in (composing) this *Mathnawī* thou, O Ḍiya a –Ḥaqq (Radiance of God) Ḥusam ad-dīn, art my object.

The whole *Mathnawi* in its branches and roots is thine: thou hast accepted (it).

In (all) its expressions my object is (to reveal) thy mystery; in composing it my object is (to hear) its voice.

To me thy voice is the voice of God: Heaven for fend that (I should say) the lover is separate from the Beloved.

There is a union beyond description or analogy between the Lord of Man and the spirit of Man.”¹²⁷

- ***The prickly nature of some Sufis:***

“Your outward (form) is wailing because of the darkness; your inward (spirit) is (like) roses within roses.

It (your outward form) is purposely like Sufis (who are) sour-faced (sad and mournful) in order that they may not mix with every one that quenches the (inner) light.

Like the hedgehog, the sour-faced knowers (of God) have hidden their (spiritual) pleasures in rough prickles (of austerity).

The orchard is hidden, (while) around the orchard those thorns are plainly seen, saying, ‘O thievish foe, keep far from this gate!’”¹²⁸

- ***Moses' cane; the symbol of the Perfect Human and Divine wrath:***

“I am the staff in the hand of my ‘Moses’: my ‘Moses’ is hidden, while I am visible in presence.

For the true believers I become a bridge across the sea; for Pharaoh, again, I become a dragon.

O son, do not regard this staff alone, for the staff would not be like this without the hand of God.”¹²⁹

- ***The distinction of the Prophets and Saints in all actions and states:***

“Their books are not as the books of others, nor their mosques, nor their means of livelihood nor their houses and homes,

Nor their observance of respect, nor their anger, nor their chastisement, nor their slumber, nor their reasoning, nor their discourse.

To each one of them belongs a different glory: (in each of them) the bird, their spirit, flies with a different wing.”¹³⁰

- ***The crow as the symbol of the ‘partial intellect and the human soul’ and the Phoenix as the symbol of the ‘heart’:***

“The Intellect whose sight does not rove is the light of the elect; the crow-intellect is the sexton for the (spiritually) dead.

The spirit that flies after crows – the crow carries it towards the graveyard.

Beware! Do not run in pursuit of the crow-like fleshly soul’ for it carries (thee) to the graveyard, not towards the orchard.

If thou go, go in pursuit of the Phoenix of the heart, towards Mt. Qāf and Farther Mosque of the heart.”¹³¹

- ***The heart as the Divine garden:***

“The (real) orchards and verdure are in the very essence of the soul: the reflection thereof upon (that which is) without is as (the reflection) in running water.”¹³²

“The (real) orchards and fruits are within the heart: the reflection of their beauty is (falling) upon this water and earth (the external world).

If it were not the reflection of that delectable cypress, then God would not have called it the abode of deception.”¹³³

- ***By transcending reason, lovers find their fulfilment in God:***

“Sell intelligence and buy bewilderment: intelligence is opinion, while bewilderment is (immediate) vision.

Sacrifice your understanding in the presence of Mustafa (Mohammed): say, ‘*ḥasbī Allah*’, for God sufficeth me.”¹³⁴

- ***Likening the Prophet’s being to the Day of Judgment and Resurrection:***

“Do thou arise and blow on the terrible trumpet, that thou sands of the dead may spring up from the earth.

Since thou art the upright-rising Israfil of the line, make a resurrection ere the Resurrection.”¹³⁵

- ***The world as the symbol of an apple with two worms:***

“Deem the skies and the earth to be an apple that appeared from the tree of Divine Power.

Thou art as a worm in the midst of the apple and art ignorant of the tree and the gardener.

Thou art as a worm too in the apple, but its spirit is outside, bearing the banner aloft.

Its (the worm's) movement splits the apple asunder: the apple cannot endure that shock.

Its movement has rent (all) veils: its form is (that of) a worm, but its reality is a dragon."¹³⁶

- ***The fool as the symbol of the 'enemy' and the intelligent is the symbol of the 'spirit':***

"The prophet said, 'Whosoever is foolish, he is our enemy and a ghouh who waylays (the traveler).

Whosoever is intelligent, he is (dear to us as) our soul: his breeze and wind is our sweet basil."¹³⁷

- ***Acquired knowledge results in egoism and becoming burdened by the tablet of recorded knowledge, while Divinely-bestowed knowledge is infinite and like the Protected Tablet:***

"Intelligence consists of two intelligences; the former is the acquired one which you learn, like a boy at school,

From book and teacher and reflexion and (committing to) memory, and from concepts, and from excellent and virgin (hitherto unstudied) sciences.

(By this means) your intelligence becomes superior to (that of) others; but through preserving (retaining in your mind) that (knowledge) you are heavily burdened.

You, (occupied) in wandering and going about (in search of knowledge), are a preserving (recording) tablet; the preserved tablet is he that has passed beyond this.

The other intelligence is the gift of God: its fountain is in the midst of the soul.

When the water of (God-given) knowledge gushes from the breast, it does not become fetid or old or yellow (impure).”¹³⁸

- ***Intelligence and folly as light and darkness:***

“If the intelligence displays its face in visible form, day will be dark beside its light;

And if the shape of foolishness becomes visible, beside it the darkness of night will be radiant.”¹³⁹

- ***Freeing the gem of the spirit from incarceration within the ruins of the body:***

“Demolish the house, for a hundred thousand houses may be made from the cornelian of this Yemen.

The treasure lies beneath the house, and there is no help (for it): do not be afraid of destroying the house and do not stand still.”¹⁴⁰

- ***The revolt of the soul is due to Satanic intoxication, and the felicity of the intellect is a result of Divine intoxication:***

“For the carnal soul there are the wines of damnation, which carry that ill – starred one out of the (right) way.

For the intellect there are the wines of felicity, so that it gains the abode whence is no departure.”¹⁴¹

- ***The person who has the power of distinction discovers God by her/his heart, whereas the one who negates, discovers Him through miracles:***

“That thou mayst know that with God there is discrimination between the sober (traveller) on the Way and the intoxicated.

The Nile has learned from God to discriminate, for it opened (the door) for these (Israelites) and shut fast (the door) against those (Egyptians).”¹⁴²

“How have not thou understood this from the prophets? They brought knowledge into stone and rod.”¹⁴³

- ***Describing the state of those who have attained union with God:***

“I desire no mercy but the blows of the king; I desire no refuge except that king.

I have aughted all besides the king for the reason that I have devoted myself to the king.

The king, if he beheads me in his wrath, with bestow on me sixty other lives.

‘Tis my business to hazard (and lose) me head and to be selfless; ‘tis the business of my sovereign king to give (me) a (new) head.’ Honour to the head that is severed by the King’s hand! Shame on the head that betakes itself to another!”¹⁴⁴

- ***Serving God results in glory, whereas revolt against Him causes disgrace:***

“To be His slave is better than being a sovereign, for ‘*I am better*’ is the word of Satan.”¹⁴⁵

“If thou go from this shade towards egoism, thou wilt soon become disobedient (to God) and lose the way.”¹⁴⁶

- ***The results of the attention and help of the Pīr for the disciple:***

“‘*Guide us*’, thou sadist, ‘*in the straight path*’: He took thy hand and led thee to the abode of bliss.

Thou wast fire: thou hast become light, O noble one; thou wast an unripe grape: thou hast become a (ripe) grape and raisin.

Thou wast a star: thou hast become the Sun. Rejoice! God best knoweth the right.”¹⁴⁷

- ***The disciple is part of the Pīr and his shadow:***

“The particular intelligence of this (disciple) is derived from that Universal Intelligence: the motion of this shadow is derived from that Rose-bough.

His (the disciple’s) shadow disappears at last in him (the Master); then he knows the secret of his inclination and search and seeking. How the shadow of the other should’s (the disciple’s) bough move, O fortunate one, if this Tree moves not?”¹⁴⁸

Symbolism in the Book Five of the *Mathnawi*:

- ***Four birds as jailers of the intellect:***

“The four immaterial birds which infest the Way have made their home in the hearts of the people.”¹⁴⁹

“Cut off the heads of these four live birds and make everlasting the creatures that are not enduring forever.

There is the duck and the peacock and the crow and the cock: these are a parable of the four (evil) dispositions in (human) souls.

The duck is greed, and the cock is lust; eminence is like the peacock, and the crow is (worldly) desire.”¹⁵⁰

- ***Freedom from the vestibule of this world through testifying and being witness to the oneness and unity of God and the Prophethood of Muḥammad:***

“In this court of the Judge who pronounces the Decree we are (present) for the purpose of (making good) our claim (to fulfil the covenant signified by the words) ‘*Am not I (your Lord)?*’ and ‘*Yea*’. For we said, ‘*Yea*’, and (since we are) on trial our acts and words are the (necessary) witnesses and evidence of that (assent).”¹⁵¹

“Until thou give not that testimony, O witness, how wilt thou escape from this court?”¹⁵²

- ***The flight of the spirit during prayer:***

“Whilst the body is standing (in the ritual prayer), the spirit is gone on its journey: hence at the moment of return it says, ‘*Salām*’!”¹⁵³

- ***Lvoe of this world compared to the wine of Divine Love:***

The devil is passionately in love with the world, blind and deaf; (but this) love, no doubt, may be cut off by another love.

When it tastes the wine from the cellar of clairvoyance, little by little it will transfer its love thither.”¹⁵⁴

- ***Describing the state of the person who sacrifices his/her existence:***

“I am the (devoted) slave of him who will not sell his existence save to that bounteous and munificent Sovereign,

(So that) when he weeps, heaven begins to weep, and when he moans (in supplication), the celestial sphere begins to cry, ‘O Lord!’”¹⁵⁵

- ***The candle as a symbol of annihilation and subsistence in the Divine:***

“When the candle is wholly naughted in the fire (of Divine illumination), you will not see any trace of the candle or rays (of its light).

Manifestly, in dispelling the darkness, the external (material) flame is maintained by a wax candle;

(But) the candle (which is) the body is contrary to the wax candle, since in proportion as that (the body) dwindles; the light of the spirit is increased.

This is the everlasting radiance, and that (bodily candle) is perishable: the candle of the spirit hath a Divine flame.

Since this tongue of fire was (really) light, 'twas far from it to become a perishable shadow.”¹⁵⁶

- ***The rise of the sun of existence from the East of non-existence, just as God creates existence from non-existence:***

“How, O brother is existence (contained) in non-existence? How is opposite concealed in opposite?

He brings forth the living from the dead: know that the hope of (His) worshippers is non-existence.”¹⁵⁷

“Non-existence, then, is God’s factory from which he continually produces gifts.

God is the Originator, and an originator is he who produces a branch (derivative) without root (fundamental principle) or support (model).”¹⁵⁸

- ***Justice and oppression:***

“What is justice? Giving water to the trees. What is injustice? To give water to the thorns.

Justice is (consists in) bestowing a bounty in its proper place, not on every root that will absorb water.

What is injustice? To bestow (it) in an improper place that can only be a source of calamity.”¹⁵⁹

- ***That spirit that is the servant of love is alive:***

“Whom shall I tell? Where in the village is any (spiritually) living one? Where is any one that runs towards the Water of Life?

Thou art fleeing from Love because of a single humiliation: what dost thou know of Love except the name?

Love hath a hundred disdains and prides: Love is gained by means of a hundred blandishments.”¹⁶⁰

- *The imitating disciples, who are ignorant of meaning, repeat the speech of the Divine saints like parrots:*

“Similarly, the disciple full (of egoism) sees himself in the mirror of the Shaykh’s body.

How should he see Universal Reason behind the mirror at the time of speech and discourse?

He supposes that a man is speaking; and the other (Universal Reason) is a mystery of which he is ignorant.

He learns the words, but the eternal mystery he cannot know, for he is a parrot, not a boon-companion.”¹⁶¹

- *God is the cause of causes, thus, everything occurs through causal relations:*

“He (God) hath established a (customary) law and causes and means for the sake of those who seek (Him) under this blue veil (of heaven).

Most happenings come to pass according to the (customary) law, (but) sometimes the (Divine) Power breaks the law.”¹⁶²

“When there is no cause, what way should the seeker pursue? Therefore he must have a visible cause in the way (that he is pursuing).”¹⁶³

“Everything good or evil comes from the Causer: causes and means, O father, are naught.”¹⁶⁴

- *Crying and complaining to the Divine court is a Divine blessing and results in the removal of afflictions:*

“He whom Thou wishest to make sorrow-stricken – Thou dost bar against his heart the way to lamentation.”¹⁶⁵

And (on the other hand) Thou dost lead to humble entreaty the spirit of him whom Thou wishest to redeem from affliction.”¹⁶⁶

- ***Allah creates everything as He wills and the created is subject to playing the role designated to it:***

“If He makes me a cup, I become a cup; and if He makes me a dagger, I become a dagger.

If He makes me a fountain, I give water; and if He makes me fire, I give heat.

If He makes rain of me, I give a cornstack; and if He makes an arrow of me, I dart into the body.

If He makes me a snake (*mār*), I emit venom; and if He makes me a friend (*yār*), I do (kindly) service.”¹⁶⁷

- ***The one who is patient in fasting, benefits from Divine bestowals:***

“Be patient and persistent in fasting: (be) always expecting the Food of God;

For God, who acts with goodness and is long-suffering, bestows (His) gifts (on them that are) in expectation.”¹⁶⁸

- ***Describing Divine benevolence for the servant who having lost hope in everyone considers Him as his/her only hope:***

“When he recounts his sins and trespasses, the Pure Bounty begins to show munificence.

Saying, ‘O angles, bring him back to Us, for his inward eye has (ever) been (turned) towards hope.

Like one who recks of naught, We will set him free and cancel all his trespasses.

(To say) 'I reckon not is permitted to that One (alone) who loses nothing by perfidy and (gains nothing) by probity.

We will kindle up a goodly fire of grace, in order that no sin and fault, great or small, may endure

Such a fire that the least spark of the flame thereof in consuming (all) sin and necessity and free-will.

We will set fire to the tenement of Man and make the thorns (in it) a spiritual garden of roses."¹⁶⁹

- ***The union of the lover and beloved:***

"If I give him a hundred stabs with my sword by way of trial, the union (concord) of that loving one (with me) will not be diminished. He knows I am wielding that sword against myself: I am he in reality and he is I."¹⁷⁰

- ***Another description of the union of lover and beloved:***

"Of my existence there is nothing (left) in me but the name: in my being there is naught but thee, O thou whose wishes are gratified. By that means I have become thus naughted, like vinegar, in thee (who art) an ocean of honey.

As the stone that is entirely turned into pure ruby: it is filled with the qualities of the sun.

That stony nature does not remain in it: back and front, it is filled with sunniness."¹⁷¹

- ***Comparing the "I am the truth" of Manṣūr with that of the Pharaoh:***

"A Pharaoh said 'I am God' and was laid low; a Manṣūr (Ḥallāj) said 'I am God' and was saved.

The former 'I' is followed by God's curse and the latter 'I' by God's mercy, O loving man;

For that one (Pharaoh) was a black stone, this one (Ḥallāj) a cornelian; that one was an enemy to the Light, and this one passionately enamored (of it).

This 'I' O presumptuous meddler, was 'He' (God) in the inmost consciousness, through oneness with the Light, not through (belief in) the doctrine of incarnation."¹⁷²

- *The union of the spirit with spirits through its freedom from the chains of the body:*

When his soul was freed from the disgrace of the body, it went rejoicing towards its Origin.

The soul is like a falcon, and the body is its fetter: ('tis) a foot-bound broken-winged creature;

(But) when its self-consciousness is gone and its foot untied, that falcon flies towards the King.

When the seas of Mercy begin to surge, even stones drink the Water of Life.

The frail mote becomes stout and strong, the carpet of earth becomes (like) satin and cloth of gold."¹⁷³

- *The fox and the donkey as the symbol of the one who works and the one who solely relies on God's provision without working:*

"The fox said, 'It is an (indispensable) obligation to seek lawful provision in obedience' (to the Divine command).

(This) is the world of means: nothing is obtained without a means: therefore it is important (necessary) to seek (provision)."¹⁷⁴

“He (the ass) replied, ‘that is (the result) of weak faith; else He who gave (us) life (also) gives (us) bread.’”¹⁷⁵

“The provider gives their daily bread to all: He lays before each one the portion allotted to him.”¹⁷⁶

- ***The false guide who is an imitator has no belief in his own sayings:***

“The imitator brings on to his tongue a hundred proofs and explanations, but he has no soul.

When the speaker has no soul and (spiritual) glory, how should his speech have leaves and fruit?

He boldly directs people in the Way (to salvation), (though) he is more tremulous (infirm) in soul than a blade of straw.

Therefore, though his discourse may be splendid, tremor (infirmity) is also latent in his discourse.”¹⁷⁷

- ***The one who is free from egoism is the friend of everyone and reflects all images:***

“In sooth any one who has becomes without ego is all ego: when he is not loved by himself he becomes loved by (them) all.

(When) a mirror becomes devoid of images, it gains splendour because (then) it is the reporter (reflector) of all images.”¹⁷⁸

- ***The difference of the servant and the lover:***

“The servant (of God) desires to be freed from Fortune; the lover (of God) nevermore desires to be free.

The servant is always seeking a robe of honour and a stipend; the entire lover’s robe of honour is his vision of the Beloved.”¹⁷⁹

- ***In describing love:***

“Love is not contained in speech and hearing: Love is an ocean whrereof the depth in invisible.

The drops of the sea cannot be numbered: the Seven Seas are petty in comparison with that Ocean.”¹⁸⁰

“Love makes the sea boil like a kettle; Love crumbles the mountain like sand;

Love cleaves the sky with ahundred clefts; Love unconscionably makes the earth to tremble.”¹⁸¹

- ***In describing those who see the Divine Essence:***

“Thou wilt say, ‘I am beholding it’; but there are many good signs of (really) beholding it.

When thou hast taken a summary view of the circling movement of the foam, look upon the Sea if thou wantest (to feel) bewilderment. He that regards the foam tells of the mystery, while he that regards the Sea is bewildered.

He that regards the foam forms intentions, while he that regards the Sea makes his heart (one with) the Sea.

He that regards the foam-flakes is (engaged) in reckoning (and calculation), while he that regards the Sea is without (conscious) volition.

He that regards the foam is in (continual) movement, while he that regards the Sea is devoid of hypocrisy.”¹⁸²

- ***Interpretation of “that which God wills comes to pass”:***

“The saying (of God’s) servant, ‘whatever God wills comes to pass’ does not signify be lazy (inactive) in that matter;

Nay, it is an incitement to entire self-devotion and exertion, meaning, ‘Make you exceedingly ready to perform that service.’¹⁸³

Ask the meaning of the *Qur’an* from the *Qur’an* alone, and from that one who has seen fire to (and extinguished) his idle fancy.¹⁸⁴

- ***In describing Ḥaqq:***

“Thou art the spring; we are fair as the verdant orchard: it (the spring) is hidden while its bounty is manifest.

Thou art as the spirit; we are like hand and foot: the closing and opening of the hand is due to the spirit.

Thou art as the reason, we are like this tongue: this tongue hath its (power of) expression from the reason.

Thou art like the joy, and we are the laughter, for we are the result of (Thy) blessed joy.¹⁸⁵

- ***Describing the state of the mystics drunk with Divine wine:***

“Bones vanish and become spirit entirely; throne and bench at that moment become alike.

They (the drinkers), when sober, are as water and oil; when intoxicated, they are as the spirit in the body.¹⁸⁶

- ***Sorrow is a guest from the unseen world:***

“If the thought of sorrow is waylaying (spoiling) joy, (yet) it is making preparation for joy.

It violently sweeps thy house clear of (all) else, in order that new joy from the source of good may enter in.

It scatters the yellow leaves from the bough of the heart, in order that incresant green leaves may grow.

It uproots the old joy, in order that new delight may march in from the Beyond.

Sorrow pulls up the crooked rotten (root), in order that it may disclose the root that is veiled from sight.

Whatsoever (things) sorrow may cause to be shed from the heart or may take away (from it), assuredly it will bring better in exchange,

Especially for him who knows with certainty (intuitively) that sorrow is the servant of the possessors of (intuitive) certainty.”¹⁸⁷

- ***In describing love:***

“Love is an (infinite) ocean, on which the heavens are (but) a flake of foam: (they are distraught) like Zulaykha in desire for a Joseph. Know that the wheeling heavens are turned by waves of Love: were it not for Love, the world would be frozen (inanimate).

How would an inorganic thing disappear (by change) into a plant? How would vegetive things sacrifice themselves to become (endowed with) spirit?

How would the spirit sacrifice itself for the sake of that Breath by the waft whereof a Mary was made pregnant?

Each one (of them) would be (as) stiff and immovable as ice: how should they be flying and seeking like locusts?

Every mote is in love with that Perfection and hastening upward like a sapling.”¹⁸⁸

- ***Laughter and tears and happiness and sorrow are all subject to the Divine Will:***

“Weeping and laughter and sorrow and joy of heart – know that each one (of them) has an independent source.

Each one has a (particular) store-house: know, O brother that the key thereof is in the hand of the Opener.”¹⁸⁹

- ***The bitterness of separation from God:***

“Have mercy on him that beheld thy face: how shall he endure the bitter separation from thee?

Thou art speaking of separation and banishment: do what thou wilt but do not this!

A hundred thousand bitter sixtyfold death is not like (comparable) to separation from thy face.”¹⁹⁰

“This sweet to die in hope of union with thee; the bitterness of banishment from thee is worse than fire.”¹⁹¹

- ***Only those who have annihilated themselves and have gained subsistence in God may say ‘I’:***

“The spirit was made glad by that “I” – hood without “I” and sprang away from the “I” – hood of the world.

Since it has been delivered from “I,” it has now become “I”: blessing on the “I” that is without affliction.”¹⁹²

Symbolism in the Book Six of the *Mathnawi*:

- ***Only those who have escaped their own captivity and have joined God are safe from contradiction:***

“The strife of the mote that has been effaced in the sun is beyond description and calculation.

Since the (individual) soul and breath have been effaced from the mote, its strife now is only the strife of the sun,

(Its) natural movement and rest have gone from it – by what (means)? By means of *Verily unto Him we are returning*.”¹⁹³

- ***The instrumental intellect hinders access to God:***

“The intellect is strong in the head but weak in the legs, because it is sick of heart (spiritually decayed) though sound of body (materially flourishing).

Their (the unspiritual men’s) intellect is deeply involved in the dessert (pleasures) of this world: never, never do they think of abandoning sensuality.

In the hour of pretension their breasts are (glowing) like the orient sun, (but) in the hour of pious devotion their endurance is (brief) as the lightning.

A learned man who shows self-conceit in (displaying) his talents is faithless as the world at the time for keeping faith.”¹⁹⁴

- ***Annihilation within God is a prologue to subsistence within God:***

“There is no way (admittance) for any one, till he become naughted, into the audience-chamber of (Divine) Majesty.

What is the means of ascension to Heaven? This is not-being. Not-being is the creed and religion of the Lovers (of God).”¹⁹⁵

- ***The path of reaching eternal subsistence through annihilation within God and willful death:***

“You have suffered much agony, but you are (still) in the veil, because dying (to self) was the fundamental principle, and you have not fulfilled it.

Your agony is not finished till you die: you cannot reach the roof without completing the ladder.”¹⁹⁶

- ***Prophet Muḥammad as an example of the manifest Resurrection and willful death:***

“Mohammed, then, was a hundred (spiritual) resurrections here and now, for he was dissolved (naughted) in dying to (temporal) loosing and binding.

Aḥmad (Muḥammad) is the twice-born in this world: he was manifestly a hundred resurrections.”¹⁹⁷

“Hence the Messenger of good tidings said, (speaking) symbolically, ‘Die before ye die, O nobles,

Even as I have died before death and brought from yonder this fame and renown.”¹⁹⁸

- ***Describing the lovers of God:***

“The lovers (of God) have fallen into a fierce torrent: they have set their hearts on (resigned themselves to) the ordinance of Love. (They are) like the millstone turning, day and night, in (continual) revolution and moaning incessantly.”¹⁹⁹

“Repentance is a worm, while Love is like a dragon: repentance is an attribute of Man, while that (other) is an attribute of God.

Love is (one) of the attributes of God who wants nothing: love for aught besides Him is unreal.”²⁰⁰

- ***Describing the state of the idolatrous world-worshippers:***

“It (the object of his worship) is like the tomb of iddle – full of smoke and fire (within), (while) on the outside it is decked with a hundred (beautiful) designs and ornaments;

(Or) like the wealth of tyrants – fair externally, (but) within it (intrinsically) the blood of the oppressed and (future) woe;

(Or) like the hypocrite (who) externally (is engaged in) fasting and prayer, (while) inwardly (he resembles) back loam without vegetation;

(Or) like a cloud empty (of rain), full of thunderclaps, wherein is neither benefit to the earth nor nourishment for the wheat;

(Or) like a promise (full) of guile and lying words, of which the end is shameful though its beginning is splendid.”²⁰¹

- ***Being of the same genus is a cause of belief:***

“That fierce (spiritual) lion scented the Prophet just as the scent of Josef was perceived by his father (Jacob).

Miracles are not the cause of religious faith; ‘tis the scent of homogeneity that attracts (to itself) qualities (of the same kind).”²⁰²

- ***The belief and certainty of the prophets and the Divine saints was the cause of their walking safely on air and water:***

“Aḥmad (Moḥammed) says, ‘Had (his) faith been greater, even the air would have carried him safely,

Like me, who rode upon the air on the night of the Ascension and sought communion.”²⁰³

- ***The union of the new-moon and the full-moon (the guide and the disciple):***

“The New-moon and the Full-moon have oneness (with each other): they are far from duality and from imperfection and corruption. The New-moon is inwardly free from imperfection: its apparent imperfection is (due to its) increasing gradually.”²⁰⁴

- ***Only the giving and generous God buys from those who have nothing:***

“(There) that Gracious One hath purchased the piece of goods that no people would look at on account of its shabbiness.

With Him no base coin is rejected, for His object in buying is not (to make a) profit.”²⁰⁵

- ***Only those who have attained union with God are aware of Him:***

“(If) you know not intoxication of the heart (and ask) where (it is), seek the description of it from the inebriated (languid) eye.

Since you are far from (knowing) the Essence of God, you may recognize the description of the Essence in the Prophet and (his) evidentiary miracles.

Certain secret miracles and graces (proceeding) from the elect (Sufi) Elders impress the heart (of the disciple).

For within them (those Elders) there are a hundred immediate (spiritual) resurrections, (of which) the least is this, that their neighbour becomes intoxicated.”²⁰⁶

- ***There are many benefits to farsightedness:***

“If you desire to be safe from harm, close your eye to the beginning and contemplate the end,

That you may regard all (apparent) nonentities as (really) existent and look upon (all) entities, (so far as they are) perceived by the senses, as of low degree.

At least consider this, that every one who possesses reason is daily and nightly in quest of the (relatively) non-existent.”²⁰⁷

They (the intelligent) have thrown the (actually) existent thing behind them and are seekers of, and devoted to, the (relatively) non-existent things,

Because the mine and treasury of God’s doing is not other than non-existence in (process of) being brought into manifestation.”²⁰⁸

- ***Having patience with a bad companion results in perfection:***

“(Yet) the bad associate is good (for you) because of the patience (which must show in overcoming its desires), for the exercise of patience expands the heart (with spiritual peace).”²⁰⁹

“The patience has shown by all the prophets to the unbelievers’ made them the elect of God and lords of the planetary conjunction.”²¹⁰

- ***For those spiritual wayfarers who have chosen death, each breath is new death and a new life:***

“The class (of men) who are headless (selfless) because of (their spiritual) poverty are in a hundred respects more naughted than those dead (and buried).

The dead man is naughted (only) from one point of view, (namely), as regards loss (of bodily life); the Sufis have been naughted in a hundred respects.”²¹¹

“Every one (of these martyrs) is inwardly like Jirjis (St George): they have been killed and brought to life (again) sixty times.”²¹²

- ***In regards to choosing silence in gatherings:***

“When you come into a company of friends, sit silent: do not make yourself the bezel in the ring.

At the Friday prayer-service look well and attentively: (you will see that) all are concentrated and possessed by a single thought and silent.

Direct your course towards silence: when you seek the marks (of the Way), do not make yourself a mark (for attention).”²¹³

- ***There is no opposite or condition in the essence of God:***

“Opposites and likes, in number as the leaves of the orchard, and (but) as a flake of foam on the Sea that hath no like or opposite.

Perceive that the victory and defeat of the Sea are unconditins: how, (then) should there be room for conditionality in the essence of the Sea?”²¹⁴

“Such a Sea, then, with every drop whereof the intellect and the spirit are more unfamiliar than the body –

How should it be contained in the narrow room of quantity and quality? There (even) Universal Reason is one of the ignorant.”²¹⁵

- ***The qiblah of each individual is relative to their intention and actions:***

“The Ka‘ba of Gabriel and the (celestial) spirits is a Lotus-tree; the *qibla* of the belly-slave is a table-cloth (covered with dishes of food).

The *qibla* of the genostic is the light of union (with God); the *qibla* of the philosopher’s intellect is phantasy.

The *qibla* of the ascetic is the Gracious God; the *qibla* os flatterer is a purse of gold.

The *qibla* of the spiritual is patience and long-suffering; the *qibla* of form-worshippers is the image of stone.

The *qibla* of those who dwell on the inward is the bounteous One; the *qibla* of those who worship the outward is a woman’s face.”²¹⁶

- ***In describing the lover who has surrendered his heart solely to God:***

“How should Reason wend the way of despair? This Love that runs on its head in that direction.

Love is reckless, not Reason: Reason seeks that from which it may get some profit.

(The lover is) fierce in onset and body-consuming and unabashed: in tribulation, like the nether millstone;

A hard-faced one that has no back; he has killed in himself the seeking of self-interest.

He gambles (everything) clean away, he seeks no reward, even as he receives (everything) clean (as a free gift) from Him (God).

God gives him his existence without any cause: he devoted (lover) yields it up again without cause.^{”217}

“Love hath none to help him in his torment: there is not in the village one inhabitant familiar with him.

None is madder than the lover, (yet) Reason is blind and deaf to his melancholia.^{”218}

- ***In regards to piety and wisdom:***

“The gnostic is the soul of religion and the soul of piety: gnosis is the result of past asceticism.

Asceticism is the labour of sowing; gnosis is the growth of the seed. Therefore the (ascetic's) hard struggle and his firm religious conviction are like the body, (while) the soul of this sowing is the growth (of the seed) and its harvesting.^{”219}

- ***The pure and sincere mystic is like a marble in the hand of God:***

“I am (like) Bactrain camels, (speeding) in advance (of the caravan), intoxicated and beside myself under the panniers of God.

I am not half-raw (imperfect) in (fulfilling) the (Divine) order and command, that i should take any thought of revilement by the public.

My public and my private (object) is His command: my spirit is running in its face in search of Him.

My being single or wedded is not on account of sensual desire: my spirit is like a die in the hand of God.”²²⁰

- ***Describing the fire of the love of God:***

“You have seen the fire that burns every (dry) sapling; (now) see the fire of the Spirit by which fantasy is burnt.

Neither of fantasy nor for reality is there any protection against a fire like this which flamed forth from the Spirit.

He is the adversary of every lion and every fox: *everything is perishing except His Face.*”²²¹

- ***Annihilation in the visage of God and subsistence in Allah:***

“Go into His aspects (attributes) and Face (Essence), become spent (emptied of self): go in, become enveloped (suppressed), like the *alif in bism.*

In *bism* the *alif* has stayed hidden: it is in *bism* and also it is not in *bism.*

Such is the case with all the letters that disappear when they are elided for the purpose of (effecting) conjunctions.

It (the suppressed *alif* in *bism*) is a *sila* (means of conjunction) and through it the *b* and the *s* have attained to union: the union of the *b* and the *s* could not bear the (external intervention of the) *alif.*

Since this union cannot bear (the intervention of) a single letter, it behoves me to cut short the discourse.

Since a single letter is the cause of separation between the *s* and the *b*, here silence is a most urgent duty.

When the *alif* has passed away from self (-existence), taking shelter (in self-abandonment), the *b* and the *s* say ‘*alif*’ without it.

(The words) *thou didst not throw when thou threwest* are (an utterance spoken) without him (the Prophet); likewise (the words) *God said* sprang from his silence.

So long as a drug exists (independently), it has no effect; it removes diseases (only) when it has perished (has been dissolved and assimilated).”²²²

- ***The subsistence of the world lies in the subsistence of those with intellect:***

“The who mounts highest in (the scale of) reason – his eating is (equivalent to) the eating of all (his inferiors).

His luminous spirit is supreme: ‘tis enough for the rest of them to tend (cherish) him.

Since those endowed with (perfect) reason endure for ever, in reality this world is enduring for ever-.”²²³

- ***Lover and beloved are one body:***

“In the heart of the beloved the lover is all: Wamiq is always in the heart of ‘Adrah.

In the lover’s heart is naught but the beloved: there is nothing to separate and divide them.”²²⁴

- ***Those who are deprived of the divine spirit turn their face away from the people of God:***

“Every piece of clay in the heart of which there is a pearl – its rearl can tell the secrets of another (piece of) clay.

While the clay that has not been illumined by God’s sprinkling (of light) cannot bear the companionship of the pieces of clay, that are filled with pearls.”²²⁵

- ***The beginning and end of all the universe is God:***

“Thou hast gone unto God, O venerated man: I too, therefore, will go unto God.

God is the assembly – place where the generations (of mankind) are mustered under His banner: all *are brought before Us*.

The pictures (phenomenal forms), whether unconscious or conscious (of it), are (always) present in the hand of the Painter.”²²⁶

- ***The righteous obey the Divine prohibitions while the people of worldly desires revolt:***

“Who is (to be found) that will refrain from the forbidden thing, since man longs eagerly for what is forbidden?

The veto causes the devout to hate (that which is vetoed); the veto incites the sensual to covet it.”²²⁷

- ***Divine wrath results in the perfection of the possessor of heart:***

“And if a fire should dart its flames at the kernel, know that ‘tis in order to cook it, not to burn it.

So long as God is the Wise, know that this law is perpetual (both) in the past and in the time that has not (yet) come.

The pure kernels and (also) the husks are pardoned by Him: how, then, should He burn the kernel? Far (be it) from Him!”²²⁸

- ***The particular intellect in contrast to the intellect of Abdal (exalted saints):***

“The vulture is the particular (discursive) reason, O poor (-sprited) one: its wings are connected with the eating of carrion;

(But) the reason of the *Abdāl* (exalted saints) is like the wings of Gabriel; it soars, mile by mile, up to the shade of the lote-tree (in Paradise).”²²⁹

- ***Burning in the love of the Divine beloved is sweet:***

“The melting (wasting) away of lovers is (the cause of their spiritual) growth: like the moon, he (the lover) hath a fresh (shining) face whilst he is melting away.

All the sick hope to be cured, but this sick one sobs, crying, ‘increase any sickness!

I have found no drink sweeter than this poison: no state of health can be sweeter than this disease.

No act of piety can be better than this sin: years in comparison with this moment are (but) an hour.”²³⁰

- ***The effects of absolute surrender to God:***

“Happy is he whose (spiritual) food is this helplessness and bewilderment and who in both worlds is sleeping in the shadow (protection) of the Beloved.

He (such as one) is conscious of being helpless both in the stable (of the present life) and in the last (future) state: he is dead (to self), he has adopted ‘the old women’s religion.’

(He is) like *Zulaykha*, (who), when Joseph beamed upon her, found the way from decrepitude to youth.

Life depends on dying (to self) and on suffering tribulation: the Water of Life is in the (land) of Darkness.”²³¹

Symbolism in the *Kulliyat-i Diwān-i Shams-e Tabrīzī (Diwān-i Kabīr)*:

- ***Sīmurgh as the Captive of the Trap of Love:***

“Although Simurgh will fly to the Qāf Mountain / when he sees the trap of love, he will fall and fly no more.”²³²

- ***Treasure of Nonexistence / Hidden Treasure:***

“God said: “Oh World Spirit! I was a hidden treasure / I wanted to find that treasure of beneficence and generosity.”²³³

“I am the treasure of earth’s heart, why do you put your head on earth? / I am the qiblah of the Sky, why do you turn your face to the Sky?”²³⁴

- ***The Musician of Spirit:***

“Where is the Musician of Spirit that from warning yell / His breath put dream in thousand heads?”²³⁵

“That Divine Saqi comes from the Royal Feast / and that Musician of Meaning sings just now.”²³⁶

- ***The World as the Universal Book:***

“The World is like a Book containing all hidden rules / Thy spirit is its exordium, that understands this problem.”²³⁷

- ***The Lover as a Pen in the Beloved’s hand:***

“Like the pen, the Lover took a stroll on this path/ For him, clear lines you made on the Spirit’s notebook.”²³⁸

- ***The Spirit’s release from the Body’s Cage through obeying the Haqq’s Commandments:***

“In the age of Existence, to this sacred parrot / offer sugar as thanks before fly away he does.”²³⁹

“O parrot of Spirit, fly, eat from the sugar harvest /peck at the extended life, for escape from the cage you did.

Oh Spirit! Go towards the Beloved, go towards the human circle / go to the rose garden, for escape from your own existence you did.”²⁴⁰

- ***Preferring the Heart to Reason:***

“Although penniless I am, I do not accept negligible agate / for

dream I do, of the cheap rare agate.”²⁴¹

- ***The Lion as the symbol of Imam ‘Alī:***

“From God’s Lion, learn to groan / [you] did not sigh a blood sigh,
except into the well.”²⁴²

- ***The Camel, the symbol of the Lover:***

“From outside the food comes, from conscience the lover’s food
comes, / regurgitate the Lover does, for like a camel he is.”²⁴³

“The Lover is a camel, Love is atop that minaret is love / for
minarets are ephemeral and everlasting is this minaret.”²⁴⁴

- ***Almighty God as the Saqi of Union, Existence and Love:***

“Drink several cups from the hand of Saqi of Union / once you have
drunk, jump and dance around.”²⁴⁵

Pay attention! Go in silence towards the Existence Saqi / that He
gave you Pure Divine Wine from this evil cup.”²⁴⁶

He is the Saqi of Love and Lovers are overfilled / Accepted from
love it is and it is halal for us.”²⁴⁷

- ***The Shadow as the Symbol of Human Body:***

“The Body is like a shadow on earth and the pure spirits of Lovers /
are in the Paradise of Love, flowing under the trees, drunken.”²⁴⁸

- ***The Millstone and the Water that flows from:***

“One night I told a beloved that I will change your night to day /
like millstone, my spirit will spin around that message.”²⁴⁹

“Body is like a stone and its water is its thoughts / stone says: water
knows the story.”²⁵⁰

- ***The Madman of Love is beyond Reason and Sanity:***

“The madman of Love is better than one hundred thousand spheres

of Reason / Reason claims the head, while Love is headless and footless.”²⁵¹

- ***Bloody is the path of Love:***

“Where did you go that there is no sign? / Well done! Bloody is the path that you took this time.”²⁵²

- ***The Believer’s Heart is God’s throne:***

“As the Heart tightens with sorrow / the affable King is alone in it. The Heart is tight, no one is contained, but He / I am annoyance, I seek grace, I am impatience.”²⁵³

- ***The Thorn of the Heart:***

“Behold! Silence! Pick the Existence thorn from Heart’s foot / so you may see rose gardens within yourself.”²⁵⁴

- ***Love’s Thorn:***

“Whatever is other than the Beloved’s imagination / it is Love’s Thorn, even if it is the rose garden”²⁵⁵.

- ***The Pīr of Divine Path is like Blood in the Follower’s vein:***

“O Truthful Follower! Whereas the blood of Love is over your head / stroll gracefully under His protection.”²⁵⁶

- ***The Fountains of Material and Spiritual Senses:***

“These five senses which are flowing in your body / know them from spiritual insight of that Angel, sometimes open, sometimes close.

“And those five hidden senses, like illusion and like imagination / also know five fountains are flowing towards eight heavens.”²⁵⁷

- ***The Limitless Arena of Divine Love:***

“Seven skies of Love turn somersaults because of Him / they are overjoyed with His cheerful life-sustaining cup.”²⁵⁸

- ***The Sun as the Symbol of Human Spirit:***

“Spirit is the abodeless Lover, and this body the shadow of *Alast* / Dancing is the Spirit’s sun and stomping is this body.”²⁵⁹

- ***Spirit and Body, the Symbols of Sun and Shadow:***

“Although the Spirit’s sunshine is the principle / Man has not received that destiny without body.”²⁶⁰

Symbolism of letters and numbers

Almost from the inception of writing, letters and numbers have been symbolically related to each other. From the ancient Assyrians, to the ancient Greeks, to Islamic philosophers and mystics, letters and numbers have been understood as manifestations of transcendent spiritual meanings. As such, these traditions have understood words, numbers, and the natural world to be closely related through a system of correspondences since all three are simply manifestations of the same realities in three different domains. According to the influential early Muslim mystical/philosophical group, the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* (The Brethren of Purity), number is a spiritual reality which is generated through the repetition of unity in the human spirit. Inspired by the Pythagoreans, the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* heavily emphasized the symbolic nature of arithmetic as portraying the metaphysical continuity between unity and multiplicity.

The *Ikhwān* considered mathematics and the natural sciences to be a prerequisite for learning the esoteric and mystical secrets and realities, and considered the science of numbers as a Divine wisdom that transcended the physical world. They considered the science of the numbers to be the root of all sciences, the element of knowledge, the beginning of wisdom... the first elixir, the great alchemy and the path of union with ‘Divine unity’ (*tawḥīd*). Their primary work, the *Rasāʾil*, is a collection of 51 treatises, and this number is not coincidental, given that $17 \times 3 = 51$, and 17 is the number of treatise on natural bodies, and the *Ikhwān* divide their discussions, and the cosmos, into three levels: the natural/physical,

the psychological, and the Divine. Furthermore, the number **17** is the number of *rak'ahs* in the five canonical prayers. Jābir bin Hayyān, whose works are deeply related to those of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, considers the number **17** (the number of consonants in the Greek alphabet) to be the key to understanding nature. Following Pythagoras, the *Ikhwān* described the creation of the different levels of existence of the world by God as similar to the appearance of numbers from one number.

In this perspective, the world is connected to God (its origin) through four principles, namely existence, subsistence, completeness and perfection of the world. From a symbolic perspective the number four refers to the four parts of the world. In Islamic cosmology, the number four has the following meanings: the four main directions (North, South, East, West), the four elementals (Metal, Plant, Animal and Human), natural elements (Cold, Warm, Dry, Wet) and the four primary elements (Water, Air, Earth and Fire). The number four also plays an important role in Islamic astronomy, as the number of planets is **12**, which is **4 x 3**. According to the *Ikhwān*, God has ordered the world according to the fourfold division of nature, in such a way that the majority of the natural beings are categorized in the fourfold categories, such as the four natures, which are Warmth, Cold, Dryness and Wetness.

The number seven has been an important number for many ancient civilizations. The mathematicians of the classical period considered the square and triangle to be perfect geometrical objects, and considered the number **7** to be sacred due to it being the sum of **3** and **4**. Ancient Iranians also described *Ahura Mazda* as possessing **7** attributes. Further, the number **7** had an important place for the Egyptians and Babylonians in philosophy and astronomy, in the sense that father mother and child (three humans) are the foundation of life, and **4** is the total number of the four directions.

The Pythagoreans considered the numbers **7**, **9**, **12** and **28** (based on the number of skies, constellations, planets and lunar stations,

respectively) to be complete numbers; for on one hand $7 = 4 + 3$ and $12 = 4 \times 3$, and $28 = 7 \times 4 = 12 + 9 + 7$. On this basis, beings of virtue correlate with these numbers of virtue. In the Bible, the number 7 is considered to be a complete and perfect number; in the middle ages, Christians incorporated the number 7 into the architecture of sacred places. Muslims also consider the final station of Prophet Muḥammad's spiritual ascent to be the seventh heaven, and great Muslim mystics consider the stages of love and union to be 7, and the distance between existence and annihilation to be 5.

Shaykh Ḥaydar 'Amūlī writes, "based on the *aḥādīth* of the Shi'a Imams, the *Muḥammadan* truth is comprised on **14** beings of light, 14 infallibles and their illuminated beings. The Prophet is the outward manifestation of the *Muḥammadan* truth in relation to revelation and the twelve Imams are the esoteric dimension of the *Muḥammadan* truth and its *ta'wil* (hermeneutical interpretation / return to origin)."²⁶¹

According to the *Biḥār al-Anwār*, the world's beings are created from **5** lights. The prophet of Islam says in this regard, "when God willed to create the world, by splitting my light he created the throne, after that by the light of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib he created the angels; from the light of my daughter Fāṭimah he created the heavens and the earth, and from the light of Ḥassan he created the sun and the moon, and from that of Ḥusayn he created the paradise and *Hūr al-'Ayn* and the remainder of the Imams. (Sacred light = **14** = **5** + **9** (*number of the remaining Imams*))."²⁶²

Similarly, Shaykh Ḥaydar 'Amūlī writes, "Based on the **12** constellations, the great saints are **12**. For the world of meaning must correspond to the world of form and vice versa... just as for each of the 7 great prophets (Adam, Noah, Ibrahim, Moses, David, Jesus and Muḥammad, based on the 7 heavens) there are **12** successors."²⁶³

Based on their belief on the governance of numbers over the world, the Pythagoreans derived natural laws (such as harmony in music and the movement of stars), through numbers. The Pythagoreans believed that even numbers represent men and odd numbers (from 3 onwards) represent women, and the combination of the first number representing men, 2, with the first number representing women, 3, is 5, which symbolizes marriage. Further, they considered square numbers (the result of the multiplication of a number by itself) to represent justice, and the number 6 to represent perfection, for the number 6 is equal to the sum of its factors ($6 = 1 + 2 + 3$). Pythagoreans considered the number 10 as the most sacred number since it was the sum of the numbers that made up the tetrakys ($10 = 4+3+2+1$), the sacred diagram explaining the relationship of unity to multiplicity and the creation of the world. Thus number 4 also indirectly includes number 10, as the addition of 4 with the numbers before it results in 10. Although for Pythagoreans, the number 36 is more sacred than the number 4, as it was the sum of the first four even and first four odd numbers.

In the Arabic *Abjad* writing system a number is assigned to each of the 28 letters of the Arabic alphabet as seen in the table below.

ن	م	ل	ك	ي	ط	خ	ز	و	ه	د	ج	ب	ا
50	40	30	20	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
غ	ظ	ض	ذ	خ	ث	ت	ش	ر	ق	ص	ف	ع	س
900	800	700	600	500	400	300	200	100	90	80	70	60	50

There are two methods for calculating each of the letters based on the *abjad* writing system which are referred to as '*mujmal*' and '*mufsal*'. In the *mujmal* method the total sum of each given word is based on how the word is written. For example, the word "قدوس" (*Qoddus*) has 4 letters and the total sum of the numerical value of its letters 170. In the *mofsal* method first the value of each letter is calculated based on how that letter is pronounced, for example 'ق' is pronounced as 'قاف' (*QAF*), and once this has been done for each letter the values are added together in order arrive at the total sum.

Alif (الف) is the first letter of the Alphabet and is the descended form of a dot; the remainder of the 27 letters of the Arabic alphabet are the manifestations of the *Alif*. *Alif* is the first letter of the word “Allah” in Arabic, with a numerical value of 1, and it symbolizes God’s unity and uniqueness. As such, knowing *Alif* can be considered knowing God, and so it can be considered to contain the meaning of the Divine books. According to the *Ikhwan*, letters have a specific meaning and letters are not only connected to the book of nature but also the book of revelation and this relationship has been established due to the numerical value of the letters of the alphabet.

Shaykh Amīr Sayyid ‘Alī Hamadānī writes, “As *Alif* is formed through the extension of the dot, and all the alphabetical letters are formed from the *Alif*, the dot which is the first appointment of *Alif*, it is interpreted as the beginning of created manifestation in order of the degrees of the merciful soul for the appearance of realities, the nobilities of existence and different manifestations.”²⁶⁴

Muḥammad Waḥdat Hindī (Ṣufī and Poet of the 13th century) describes this process of creation through the symbolism of letters and numbers in the following poem:

First, the Unity of God became manifest
 The Dot came into existence from the length of Unity.
 As the Dot was overshadowed by the traveller
 The form of letter “*Alif*” became manifested from it.
 Through crossing its width, the form of letter “*Bā*”
 Through the vowel of the Unity, the dot became manifested.
 As this dot manifested repeatedly
 The letters “*Tā*” and “*Thā*” were clearly manifested.
 As the letter “*Alif*” reversed from both sides
 The letter “*Hā*” in the word “*Ḥaḳīqat*” (Truth) was made.
 As in prostration to Almighty God
 the letter “*Alif*” bowed and the letter “*Dāl*” appeared.
 At present, by the vowel of the dot of Unity
 the letter “*Daal*” was changed to the form of letter “*Dhaal*”.
 Every moment the letter “*Alef*” made such a movement,

another letter was manifested in writing.
I mean not even one letter out of letter “*Alif*”
but who is the confidant of this claim?
“*Alif*” is made manifest from Unity’s dot
for darkness is the Unity of Almighty God.
From the shadow of Unity, Names appear
Thus, these manifestations are just like Unity.

Prophet Muḥammad has said ‘whoever purifies his day for Allah, the springs of wisdom will flow from his heart to his tongue’.²⁶⁵

Sufis consider the letter *mīm* to be the symbol of Aḥmad²⁶⁶ as it is the only letter separating Aḥmad from *Aḥad* (The Divine Name of Unicity). As the numerical value of mim is **40**, Sufis believe that *mīm* symbolizes the level that separates the man from God. “The noble stage **40** from the stages of letters possesses a special characteristic and influence in the manifestation of talents and the completion of characters during wayfaring on the stations [of spiritual wayfaring].”²⁶⁷

Al-Wāḥid (The One) is of the names of Allah and is repeated **22** times in the Qur’an. Although mystics even negate numerical oneness in relation to Allah and believe in absolute Divine unity (*tawhīd*) which is beyond ordinary unity or oneness. The numbers **2, 6, 7, 9, 19, 30, 40, 70, 99** and **300** are amongst the numbers referred to in the Holy Qur’an. Some examples of these Qur’anic references are as follows:

- **2:**

“He (God) formed the seven heavens in two days .” . .²⁶⁸

- **3, 7, and 10:**

“Complete the Ḥajj and ‘Umrah in obedience to God. If you are prevented from completing the duty of Ḥajj ... You have to fast for three days during the days of the pilgrimage rituals and seven days at home to complete the required ten fasting days ...”²⁶⁹

- **7:**

“It is God who has created the seven heavens and a like number of earths...”²⁷⁰

“We have created seven heavens above you...”²⁷¹

“If all the trees in the earth were pens and the ocean, with seven more oceans, were ink still these could not suffice to record all the Words of God.”²⁷²

- **6:**

“God is the one who created the heavens and earth and all that is between them in six days...”²⁷³

- **9:**

“We gave to Moses nine illustrious miracles...”²⁷⁴

“There were nine tribes in the city spreading evil without any reform in the land”²⁷⁵

- **19:**

“And it has nineteen angelic keepers”²⁷⁶

- **30 and 40:**

“We told Moses to stay with Us for thirty nights but added ten nights more so his appointment with his Lord came to an end after forty nights...”²⁷⁷

“The period in which his mother bore him and weaned him lasted thirty months. When he grew to manhood and became forty years old...”²⁷⁸

- **70:**

“Moses selected seventy men from his people to attend Our appointment...”²⁷⁹

• **300:**

“In fact they stayed in the cave for three hundred plus nine further years.”²⁸⁰

In his preface to *Nuṣ al-Nuṣūṣ*, Henry Corbin writes about the number **19**, “Shaykh Ḥaydar ‘Amūlī, in the beginning of his mystical interpretation of the Qur’an, has written **7** introductions and **19** tables. In the same manner, his commentary of *Fuṣūṣ* also begins with **7** introductions which are divided into **3** *tamhīds*, **3** *rukns* and a number of tables. In each case the number **19** is of great significance, for it is the indicator of the world that is comprised of **7** great prophets and **12** Imams... the number **19** is the indicator of one of the most important laws of existence... and is the key number for all structures... In the same manner the third *tamhīd* speaks of specifying an absolute and concrete prophet, an absolute and concrete *walī* (guardian), the absolute and concrete seal of prophets, the absolute and complete seal of Divine saints and limiting the greatest and most knowledgeable of them in **19**, which is **7** prophets and **12** Imams, or in other words, **7** poles and **12** *walīs*... the collective of the prophets and Imams returns to this **19** and their primary ones are these **19**.”²⁸¹

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³ Holy Qur’an, 24: 35.

⁴ *Ibid*, 04: 174.

⁵ Rumi, *Mathnawī Ma‘nawī*, Nicholson, R.A. (ed.), (1925-1940), verse 116.

⁶ Zarrīnkūb ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn, *Bā Kāravān-i Helleh* (Tehran: ‘Elmi) 1998, p. 38.

⁷ Holy Quran, verse 04: 78.

⁸ ‘Attar Farīd al-Dīn, *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*, (Tehran: Hermes) 2003.

⁹ “Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. A metaphor for His light is a niche in which there is a lamp placed in a glass. The glass is like a shining star which is lit from blessed olive tree that is neither eastern nor western. Its oil almost lights up even though it has not been touched by the fire. It is light upon light. Allah guides to His light whomever He wants. Allah uses various metaphors. He has the knowledge of all things.” (Qur’an 24:35)

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² Rumi, *Mathnawī Ma‘nawī*, Nicholson, R.A. (ed.), (1925-1940), Book 2, Verses 821-840.

¹³ Holy Qur’an, verse 21:25.

¹⁴ Zarrīnkūb ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn, *Bā Kāravān-i Helleh* (Tehran: ‘Elmi) 1998, p. 212.

¹⁵ Holy Qur’an, verse 02:260.

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³⁵ *Ibid*, verse 1535.

³⁶ *Ibid*, verse 1542.

³⁷ *Ibid*, verses 1717-1718.

³⁸ *Ibid*, verses 1739-1741.

³⁹ *Ibid*, verses 1832-1833.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, verse 1909.

⁴¹ *Ibid* verse 2014.

⁴² *Ibid*, verse 2019.

⁴³ *Ibid*, verse 2466.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, verses 2640-2641.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, verses 2708-2709.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, verse 2711.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, verses 2750-2751.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, verse 2821.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, verse 2826.

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⁵¹ *Ibid*, verse 3028.

⁵² *Ibid*, verses 3078-3080.

^{۵۳} *Ibid*, verse 3086

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, verses 3212-3213.

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⁷⁸ *Ibid*, verses 1604-1606.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, verses 1665-1666.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, verses 1780-1782.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, verses 2163-2164.

⁸² *Ibid*, verses 2441-2442.

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⁸⁴ *Ibid*, verse 2816.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, verses 2821-2822.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, verse 3039.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, verse 3043.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, verse 3101.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, verses 3105-3106.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, verses 3129-3132.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, verses 3253-3255.

⁹² *Ibid*, verse 3258.

⁹³ *Ibid*, verses 3320-3323.

⁹⁴ Rumi, "*Mathnawi Ma'nawi*", edited by Nicholson, (Cambridge: E. J.W., Gibb Memorial trust), 1925-1940, Book 3, verses 588-589.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, verses 710-711.

- ⁹⁶ *Ibid*, verses 718-719.
⁹⁷ *Ibid*, verses 783-786.
⁹⁸ *Ibid*, verses 820-821.
⁹⁹ *Ibid*, verses 1008-1009.
¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, verse 1053.
¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, verse 1059.
¹⁰² *Ibid*, verses 1114-1115.
¹⁰³ *Ibid*, verses 1150-1152.
¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, verses 1287-1289.
^{١٠٥} *Ibid*, verse 1418.
¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, verse 1420.
¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, verses 1434-1435.
¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, verse 1646.
¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, verses 2068-2070.
¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, verse 2143.
¹¹¹ *Ibid*, verse 2148.
¹¹² *Ibid*, verse 2156.
¹¹³ *Ibid*, verses 2159-2160.
¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, verses 2165-2166.
¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, verse 2169.
¹¹⁶ *Ibid* verses 2171-2173.
¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, verses 2725-2726.
¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, verses 2870-2871.
¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, verses 3599-3600.
¹²⁰ *Ibid*, verses 4053-4054.
¹²¹ *Ibid*, verses 4186-4187.
¹²² Rumi, “*Mathnawi Ma’nawi*”, edited by Nicholson, (Cambridge: E .J.W., Gibb Memorial trust), 1925-1940, Book 4, verses 322-323.
¹²³ *Ibid*, verses 378-380.
¹²⁴ *Ibid*, verses 606-609.
¹²⁵ *Ibid*, verse 717.
¹²⁶ *Ibid*, verses 735-736.
¹²⁷ *Ibid*, verses 758-760.
¹²⁸ *Ibid*, verses 1024-1027.
¹²⁹ *Ibid*, verses 1069-1071.
¹³⁰ *Ibid*, verses 1140-1142.
¹³¹ *Ibid*, verses 1310-1313.
^{١٣٢} *Ibid*, verse 1363.
¹³³ *Ibid*, verses 1365-1366.
¹³⁴ *Ibid*, verses 1407-1408.
¹³⁵ *Ibid*, verses 1478-1479.

- ¹³⁶ *Ibid*, verses 1869-1873.
¹³⁷ *Ibid*, verses 1948-1949.
¹³⁸ *Ibid*, verses 1960-1965.
¹³⁹ *Ibid*, verses 2181-2182.
¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, verses 2540-2541.
¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, verses 2688-2689.
^{۱۳۲} *Ibid*, verse 2818-2819.
¹⁴³ *Ibid*, verse 2825.
¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, verses 2961-2965.
¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, verse 3342.
¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, verse 3347.
¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, verses 3420-3422.
¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, verses 3643-3645.
¹⁴⁹ Rumi, “*Mathnawi Ma’navi*”, edited by Nicholson, (Cambridge: E .J.W., Gibb Memorial trust), 1925-1940, Book Book 5, verse 40.
¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, verses 42-44.
¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, verses 174-175.
¹⁵² *Ibid*, verse 180.
¹⁵³ *Ibid*, verse 226.
¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, verses 291-292.
¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, verses 490-491.
¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, verses 678-682.
¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, verses 1018-1019.
¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, verses 1024-1025.
¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, verses 1089-1091.
¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, verses 1162-1164.
¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, verses 1437-1440.
¹⁶² *Ibid*, verses 1543-1544.
¹⁶³ *Ibid*, verses 1550.
¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, verse 1554.
¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, verse 1601.
¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, verse 1603.
¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, verses 1686-1689.
¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, verses 1749-1750.
¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, verses 1844-1850.
¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, verses 1997-1998.
¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, verses 2023-2026.
¹⁷² *Ibid*, verses 2035-2038.
¹⁷³ *Ibid*, verses 2279-2283.
¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, verses 2382-2383.
¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, verse 2388.

- ¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, verse 2391.
¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, verses 2480-2483.
¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, verses 2665-2666.
¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, verses 2729-2730.
¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, verses 2731-2732.
¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, verses 2735-2736.
¹⁸² *Ibid*, verses 2906-2911.
¹⁸³ *Ibid*, verses 3111-3112.
¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, verse 3128.
¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, verses 3312-3315.
¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, verses 3458-3459.
¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, verses 3678-3684.
¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, verses 3853-3858.
¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, verses 3952-3953.
¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, verses 4113-4115.
¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, verse 4117.
¹⁹² *Ibid*, verses 4139-4140.
¹⁹³ Rumi, “*Mathnawi Ma’nawi*”, edited by Nicholson, (Cambridge: E .J.W., Gibb Memorial trust), 1925-1940, Book 6, verses 40-42.
¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, verses 119-122.
¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, verses 232-233.
¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, verses 723-24.
¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, verses 750-751.
¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, verses 754-755.
¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, verses 910-911.
²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, verses 970-971.
²⁰¹ *Ibid*, verses 1054-1058.
²⁰² *Ibid*, verses 1175-1176.
²⁰³ *Ibid*, verses 1187-1188.
²⁰⁴ *Ibid*, verses 1208-1209.
²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, verses 1266-1267.
²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, verses 1298-1301.
²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, verses 1360-1362.
²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, verses 1366-1367.
²⁰⁹ *Ibid* verse 1407.
²¹⁰ *Ibid*, verse 1410.
²¹¹ *Ibid*, verses 1537-1538.
²¹² *Ibid*, verse 1541.
²¹³ *Ibid*, verses 1592-1594.
²¹⁴ *Ibid*, verses 1622-1623.
²¹⁵ *Ibid*, verses 1625-1626.

- ²¹⁶ *Ibid*, verses 1896-1900.
²¹⁷ *Ibid*, verses 1966-1971.
²¹⁸ *Ibid*, verses 1978-1979.
²¹⁹ *Ibid*, verses 2090-2092.
²²⁰ *Ibid*, verses 2139-2142.
²²¹ *Ibid*, verses 2236-2238.
²²² *Ibid*, verses 2239-2247.
²²³ *Ibid*, verses 2424-2426.
²²⁴ *Ibid*, verses 2679-2680.
²²⁵ *Ibid*, verses 2938-2939.
²²⁶ *Ibid*, verses 3330-3332.
²²⁷ *Ibid*, verses 3659-3660.
²²⁸ *Ibid*, verses 3929-3931.
²²⁹ *Ibid*, verses 4138-4139.
²³⁰ *Ibid*, verses 4597-4600.
²³¹ *Ibid*, verses 4827-4830.
²³² Rumi, “*Kulliyat-i Diwān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*”, edited by Badī‘ al-Zamān Furūzānfar, (Tehran: Tehran Unuversity) 1967, *Ghazal* 919.
²³³ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 3426.
²³⁴ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 2465.
²³⁵ *Ibid* *Ghazal* 223.
²³⁶ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 851.
²³⁷ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 40.
²³⁸ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 2433.
²³⁹ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 1876.
²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 2564.
²⁴¹ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 441.
²⁴² *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 2340.
²⁴³ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 576.
²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 1624.
²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 169.
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²⁴⁷ Rumi, “*Kulliyat-i Diwān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*”, edited by Badī‘ al-Zamān Furūzānfar, (Tehran: Tehran Unuversity) 1967, *Rubā’i* (Quatrial) 1084.
²⁴⁸ Rumi, “*Kulliyat-i Diwān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*”, edited by Badī‘ al-Zamān Furūzānfar, (Tehran: Tehran Unuversity) 1967, *Ghazal* 398.
²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 564.
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²⁵¹ *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 483.
²⁵² *Ibid*, *Ghazal* 2648.
²⁵³ *ibid*, *Ghazal* 371.

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- ²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, Tarji'at 3498.
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- ²⁶² Majlisī 'Allāmah Muḥammad Baqir, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 110 Volumes, (Tehran: Sazman-e Asnad wa Ketab khaneh Melli Iran), 1979.
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- ²⁶⁵ Kulaynī Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb, *Usūl-i Kāft*, (Tehran: Osveh) 2001, vol.. 2, p. 16.
- ²⁶⁶ One of the names of the Prophet Muḥammad.
- ²⁶⁷ Ṭabāṭabā'ī Seyyid Mahdī ibn Seyyed Murtaḍā, *Risālaye Sayr wa Sulūk mansub beh Baḥr al-'Ulūm*, (Mashhad: 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī') 1992, p. 29.
- ²⁶⁸ Holy Qur'an, verse 41: 12.
- ²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, verse 02: 196.
- ²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, verse 65: 12.
- ²⁷¹ *Ibid*, verse 23: 17.
- ²⁷² *Ibid*, verse 31: 27.
- ²⁷³ *Ibid*, verse 32: 04
- ²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, verse 17: 101.
- ²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, verse 27:48
- ²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, verse 74: 30.
- ²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, verse 07: 142.
- ²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, verse 46: 15.
- ²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, verse 07: 155.
- ²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, verse 18: 25.
- ²⁸¹ 'Amulī Shaykh Ḥaydar, *Al-Muqaddimah min Kitāb Nuṣ al-Nuṣūṣ*, Preface and edited by Henry Corbin & Isma'īl Yahyā, (Tehran: Tūs) 1989, pp. 16-17 and 23.

Samuel Beckett: A Traditionalist Appraisal

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Abstract

Samuel Beckett is not a philosopher in the academic sense of the term but he gives powerful expression to a set of beliefs and philosophical propositions inherited from certain philosophers, writers, and mystics. Most importantly he gives voice to modern disbelief and distrust of traditional narratives of religion and philosophy. He was more a critic of orthodoxies than a creator of some new or alternative philosophical viewpoint. It is difficult to ascribe this and that position or belief to him as he detested propositional thinking, beliefs and doctrines, and systems of whatever kind. But even this distrust itself constitutes a philosophical position.

Advocacy of silence itself is a philosophical position. Despite his abhorrence of systematic thinking we can identify, albeit loosely, certain beliefs and assertions that inform his vision. The paper attempts to approach these from a “mystical” perspective as formulated by the traditionalist metaphysical or perennialist camp and includes, among others, such scholars as Rene Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, Ananda Coomaraswamy, S.H.Nasr, Huston Smith and Gai Eaton. Assuming certain familiarity with both Beckett corpus and mystical traditions the paper proceeds to appraise important claims that Beckett implicates or echoes.

Introduction

Modern age is an age characterized by change in orientation towards transcendence. In theological terms it is inclined towards atheism or agnosticism and when it is theistic it is not metaphysically grounded but associated with religion and that too often with its exoteric dimension which in itself is a limited and relative plane of reality and quite susceptible to error/ deviation when looked from the broader perspective of metaphysics. We can hardly name any great figure in modern literature that could be called religious in strictly orthodox integral sense of the term. Our age has, most characteristically, treated the question of reality and God in a narrowly rationalistic perspective as it is generally ignorant of the traditional doctrine of God as Reality. It does away with a symbolic view of things and converts the world of wonder and meaning into brute gratuitous things. That is why in the God-forsaken world the problems of meaning and teleology are bound to occur and response could be some sort of absurdism.

Samuel Beckett, a key figure in the absurdist movement that depicts modern man's sorry state in a world without transcendence, has made, or rather echoed, certain important Nietzschean-Heideggerian-Sartrean arguments against both the traditional humanistic and God-centred worldviews. He has depicted a world of characters that show incredulity towards traditional theology and philosophy. He has vividly depicted modern disillusionment with rationalist progressivist worldview. He has not provided an alternative philosophy but problematized the case for both traditional and humanistic pictures of it and exposed futility and impotence of all substitutes of God that modernity has been worshipping. He has primarily made a case against Western philosophical and theological tradition and has not deeply engaged with the Eastern metaphysical and mystical thought. In this paper it is proposed to situate Beckett in traditional metaphysical (as understood by the traditionalist

perennialist metaphysicians) and mystical thought currents.

Key Themes of Beckett

Beckett scholarship is more or less agreed on these points that I list here for critical appraisal from the perennialist metaphysical perspective.

- The Self is unattainable.
- Life is punishment.
- Time lacerates and kills and nothing positive comes from it.
- Watching self is not utterly peaceful.
- There is no cure to the sickness called life.
- Civilizations are built upon great lies and delusions.
- The grand claims of philosophy to comprehend the world, to access the truth or resolve the contradictions that life presents are void.
- Life is absurd. It achieves nothing. Man rolls no mass.
- Different metanarratives, traditional and modern, are incredible.
- Darkness at the heart of existence can't be illumined.
- This world is not our home. We are exiles here and do what we may and nothing is able to reconcile us to it.
- Sciences clarify nothing.
- The myth of progress that modern man has upheld is a delusion.
- The world with all its beauty means nothing.
- Love that men indulge in as spouses, parents, neighbors is not something sacred, something divine, something that redeems or transports one out of time. It is not a reflection of the Love of God.
- Art points to transcendence.
- There is no way to move from phenomena to God, to transcend by means of symbolic vision the world of forms or phenomena.
- God or Self or Ultimate Reality appears as negative thing, as darkness rather than Bliss although must be encountered.

- Peace, harmony, contentment, beauty, love, health, and almost all positive things are not granted to us or justify life or make us reconcile to life.

In the following pages these propositions are subject to a critical appraisal in light of traditional metaphysics and aesthetics as enunciated in the writings of Rene Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, Ananda Coomaraswamy and other scholars of their school.

Beckett as a Seer?

To begin with we need to acknowledge Beckett's contribution in elucidating the perennial problems as faced by modern man at a critical moment in the history of consciousness. Beckett's greatness lies in insisting on the 'perpetual presence of existence, to make experience existence rather than theorize about it and label it or avoid it.' He isn't, like Joyce, 'writing about something but letting that something itself speak.' He distrusts all attempts that try to shape experience or subsume it in any narrative framework, philosophical or theological. He faithfully represents the chaos that experience is. He is neither didactic nor escapist. For him the only honest literature is what imposes no pattern on experience, and eschews all external meaning or transcendental signified. Nothing answers our metaphysical quest for centers, for anchors, for order and significance. We can't evade the utter dissolution that awaits everything. There is no permanence in any experiencable thing, in any existent. Nothingness at the heart of everything is there to stay and can't be evaded, do what we may, as all the evasions come to grief. We can invent numerous ways to kill time, to distract ourselves from time with theological or mathematical speculations but nothing can be done to avoid being ditched into the hole of death, the Inferno. As O'Hara would put it:

A lifetime becomes a perpetually incomplete process, diversified at first by learning, travel, sex, and the desire for love, but dwindling at length into the mere sex, and the desire for love,

but dwindling at length into the mere existence of a mind sick with thought and fastened to a dying animal.¹

Esslin called the theatre of the Absurd as holy theatre. Altizer sees in Beckett a modern seer. Indeed there is a sense in which these designations appear quite warranted. We indeed see him rejecting the most cherished beliefs and props of secular humanism. He shows how everything in the world is afflicted with the disease of existence and is in deep disequilibrium. It is only in silence, in nothingness that other dimension that transcends time and thus clots the bleeding wounds of existence is possible. Beckett's message is essentially mystical, at least, up to a certain limit. There is no salvation in the things of the world. Simone Weil's observations on finding no good in the world underscore the same point. However what distinguishes Beckett and Camus from Weil and Stace is belief in our access to this good or God at the end of the tunnel. Though Beckett seems to concede its reality but he seems to primarily focus on our failure to return to that silence. There are failures in the great adventure to the inner self. History of man is indeed primarily a history of failures. Most are condemned to "rebirth." But where traditions assert emphatically that rebirths will be ended and salvation is our destiny ultimately and in the end everything falls in perfect order, Beckett doesn't seem to be committed to such a belief though he affirms its possibility and some of his characters are quite close to some sort of nirvanic ideal. What distinguishes him from traditional mystics is his inability to provide a clearly articulated way out of the impasse in which modern man finds himself. There is *dukkha* and there is a way to end this *dukkha* according to Beckett. But what is this way he doesn't clearly state. Ascetic withdrawal is not the ideal mystical method to reach the end of the tunnel, at least not for the modern man. The popular critical appraisal of Beckett as a nihilist is not wide off the mark. However the accusation of nihilism is countered by certain critics by locating 'the screaming silence' of Beckett's 'No.' Beckett's denial is affirmative as it points to a dimension that can only be indicated by ridicule of accepted codes, be the traditional negative way that

describes what it is not. The Theatre of the Absurd performs precisely this job.

Doors of Perception: Hell and Heaven

Beckett darkens more than illumines the problems and dilemmas man faces. Obsessed with the failure he loses sight of the great vision that more adventurous explorers of consciousness called mystics have unearthed though starting from his assumptions and adopting thoroughgoing empiricism. He presents a worldview that must be interrogated for its grand claims regarding grand failures of man. It is existence that victimizes Beckett's characters and thus nothing can be done against its absurdity and injustice. Against this the mystics discover life as a festival of lights, a perpetual wonder, an expression of the great Beauty, something for which the giver of life needs to be praised and man needs to be eternally thankful. Developing a new way of perceiving life, a new method of tapping the fountains of joy that lie concealed in it, a reorientation of our habitual or ordinary modes of reacting and responding to the world, a changed attitude towards the revelations of experience, sharpening of our intelligence and strengthening of character, mysticism offers something that all those interested in life and its glories and joys and its mystery and wonder need to seriously consider, especially at the time when man finds himself defenceless against the corrosive effects of nihilism that modern thought has brought into the world through its questioning of traditional philosophy and religion. There is no such thing as ennui, boredom, frustration, alienation, no asylum, no schizophrenia, no crippled, maimed, shocked, people and sighs and tears in the mystic's view because they have got access to the *rasa*, the juice of life.

God is the Origin and the End and traditions are very clear on the point that everything returns to the End and judge everything from that End. The Last Day humbles every human pretension. Beckett in many works focuses on the End. Giving up pertains to foregrounding the End. Ordinarily man doesn't give up until death,

until severely crushed. But see the statements in Beckett's works. "Nothing to be done," "It is finished," "running out" and "can't be helped." It is only the self aware of itself, its atemporal life that can relinquishes hope and action and need not express or assert itself. This awareness is available to the self after it consents to be nothing, after it is lacerated by suffering and decreed. One can feel boredom of existence of life in time to which habit adjusts us, when one refuses petty distractions and vain illusions of ordinary social roles. Then one can work out one's salvation with diligence.

If there is nothing to express it could well be because there is nothing in the world that answers man's quest or man doesn't need to express, to talk in the presence of the Void. Saints don't talk or babble. They have nothing to express and no obligation to express except when they wish to share their joy abounding with others. There is nothing to be worried by the fact that language fails us. Our most beautiful experiences are not expressible in language. Language is a barrier between us and reality. Love and most beautiful things bloom in silence.

On the one hand we have the unanimous verdict of prophets and sages that God or Truth or Self is knowable, the real is knowable, there is an end to sorrow, time is conquerable, nothing really decays (all things in God are ever there), life ever moves while as for Beckett all these assertions are questionable on the other hand. According to traditionalists God has always spoken to men in all climes and all places and traditional man had no difficulty in communicating with heaven and accordingly in giving meaning to life. It is modern man's misfortune that he has chosen not to heed God and it is only God who can save him as Heidegger maintained.

Frustration, weariness, boredom, all mean that seeking self – security seeking self, rest seeking self – is still there. Mystics are on the other shore, free of all seeking. Nothing to be sought. A mystic is not time's slave (not attached to past or future although can't

escape certain kind of suffering that temporality and body necessarily imply). He has nothing to do.

Hardly any of Beckett's characters is heartily reconciled to the world or finds peace and joy. Love of God is understandable as the love of life. This love of life isn't the message of Beckett. The mystic goes on despite all the tragedies and pains that life offers. And he goes on serenely. There is no such thing as frustration, resentment, anger, lamentation. He has discovered the art of detachment from the sound and fury of the world. Beckett's characters don't move one step above the ground.

Beckett rightly recognizes that in order to find oneself, one has to situate oneself outside the game, outside the world or *samsara*. It is not easy to say however where this leads according to him, whether to the new world or to the destruction of the old and nothing more. One feels as if Beckett does only the first part of the job of the mystic which includes turning away from the illusory world of ego and desire. He sees *Maya* as *Maya* and abandons all hope of finding salvation in the world of time and space. He recognizes the necessity of non attachment, of *fana*, so to say. But he does not reach the other shore of nirvana or heaven and the Bliss Unspeakable that is only in the Infinite. Language gives no access to thing in itself or reality, to transcendence. No Beckettian hero or character is able to attain his essence or identity as access to reality is denied to thought. But the tragedy is that the demand for truth is the very *raison d'être* of man. Man is willy nilly a metaphysical animal. He is made for the Absolute and to know the Absolute as perennialists like Schuon would assert. He lives by it. But for Beckett the demand for truth becomes the more urgent the more clearly it appears incapable of fulfillment. It grows with the effort that wants to disprove it. Thus Beckett, with illusion of an arrival, at the same time destroys that other 'illusion' that the vain quest can end. He lacked that faith, that vision and that light of which mystics speak.

Work as Curse

The traditional conception of work as duty, as sacrifice to God (explicated by Coomaraswamy, among others, in his numerous works) so that one no longer feels its sting, its deadening or soul-destroying effect is not there in Beckett though occasionally he does approach it. Work is of the domain that Weil calls gravity. But in religion and mysticism we have the notion of grace to counter it. The Zen mystic doesn't feel anything as burden. He walks one step above earth so that no thorns on earth can bleed him. The wind of grace lifts a man to such heights where nothing, not even the severest affliction of body and mind, can disturb the detached consciousness.

Dark Night of the Soul

Some characters of Beckett detest and loathe the very natural phenomena of reproduction and birth. They resist the descent of soul into this phenomenal world. In contrast, mystics such as Whirling Dervishes would celebrate birth and death by singing and dancing in whirls on the occasions of birth and on the departure of human soul because the former event manifests God in the finite world while as the latter event reflects absolute freedom that God is. The Beloved playing hide and seek in this drama of birth and death, joy and suffering, escapes their gaze and they feel caught in a meaningless painful *samsara*. Mystics are not unfamiliar with these doubts and pains but thanks to faith and grace they cross the 'dark night of the soul' (purgation) and celebrate. Here is one instance from a Sufi who celebrates after crossing in the following verses:

Uncertainty,
Illusions, deceptions
Have all been burnt into ashes;
The mere name of the Other
Has been washed from my heart.
Eternal and eternal existence
Has made manifest itself to me.

Whether at home or whether on wayside
I can see Him now, see unchecked

.....
Now, Farid, every pain
Is a melody of soul to me.
The doctrine of "All is He"
Has opened new vistas
And given new life to me.²

The tragedy of Beckett lies in that he builds the prison of language and thought around him while missing the inexpressible that shows forth or that symbols symbolize. Krishnamurti shows how one escapes Beckett's prison of language:

Now a mind that seeks security surely can't find the real, the true. To understand that which is beyond time, the fabrications of mind must come to an end. Thought can't exist without words, symbols, images. And only when the mind is quiet, free of its own creations, is there a possibility of finding out what is real...To formulate opinions about God is really childish.

When the mind is empty, silent, when it is in a state of complete negation-which is not blankness, nor the opposite of being positive, but a totally different state in which all thought has ceased – only then is it possible for that which is unnamable to come into being.³

Rumi in his *Masnawi* says that he thought of rhymed couplets for communication with God, but He said that he wants him to think of nothing but vision of Him, and that "I [God] will throw word, sound and speech into confusion, so that without these three, I may converse with you."⁴ However in the Beckettian world we see only sound and confusion and no conversation with God. Richard N. Coe observes in this connection:

The essential self is timeless and deathless; But the "I," the "self" I know, is condemned to death, to unbelievable suffering, mutilation and absurdity, and this gratuitous futility and misery can only have been ordained by the cruel caprices of a "God"

who is himself of the same element – words – and who understands what he is inflicting. The “True God” can only be a macrocosmic equivalent of the microcosmic Void of the “True Self” ; The preacher’s “God” – a God who is conceivable, can be nothing but a malevolent and monstrous projection of the pseudo self, or, in Sartrean terms, either of the “In – Itself” or of the “Other.” If there is a total reality (all Beckett’s people realize there must be), it is the eternal *pour soi*, the Absolute unnamable.⁵

God and Salvation

Beckett’s scheme of salvation involves a perverted asceticism that denies or seeks an escape from senses and time rather than transcends them through detachment though sometimes we do see certain detachment in his characters but it is not quite the same as Eckhart’s disinterest and the Bhagvad Gita’s renunciation of the fruits of action. Detachment involves abandonment of action – the path of action to liberation is impossible in his scheme. *Bhakti* yoga too isn’t possible for he hardly finds love. *Jnan marg* alone is left for him but of this he has only a vague intuition. The knowledge of the Void is not uplifting or edifying. His *via negativa* is not the same as that of great Indian, Buddhist and certain Christian mystics. It is through and through negative and being exclusively so it ends not in some serene state as in the latter. It is annihilation but not subsistence which comes after annihilation. Purely negative view or annihilation is not the end of mystical path in any tradition. The end is nirvana, annihilation of all that obstructs pure perception or joyful contemplation of essences, the beatific vision, the celebration of life. He seems to deny the possibility of salvation though he does achieve in some of his works an impoverished version of traditional notion of salvation.

One important interpretation sees Godot as caricature of God. Caricatures of God and Christ in modern art and literature (as in the figure of Godot) show only the perverted modern sensibility. Man constructs God in his own image and that constitutes the supreme

idolatry against which all the prophets have warned. And idolatry translates itself as self-alienation. Not only perennialists but modern psychologists like Eric Fromm have argued this point. One hardly needs to prove that all the modern fads for dealienation have failed and Beckett is pessimistic like O'Neil primarily for this reason. Modern man isn't able to create new God to fill his spiritual void as Will and Ariel Durant eloquently testify in their study of great 20th century European writers *Interpretations of Lives*. He has killed only himself by killing God. He could be revived only if he makes himself a child again and unlearns huge mass of modern ignorance (so-called modern knowledge) that makes him scan or judge Absolute without judging himself in the light of the latter. This couldn't be done by reviving exoteric theology of the church but by traditional metaphysics, the perennial philosophy and it is the eclipse of metaphysics (understood not in Aristotelian sense but as the science of the Invisible, the Supraphenomenal, the Infinite by means of intellection or noetic vision) reflected in the eclipse of spirituality or mysticism in the modern age that is behind the eclipse of the Sun of the Spirit. This will be discussed later in detail. Man must be a light unto himself and not project his problems and guilt to some metaphysical entity. Salvation can't descend from above. It is man who has to win it. Waiting for the God of exoteric dualist theology is inauthentic approach not only for Beckett but also for all traditional religions. If modern man has gloriously misunderstood anything it is his God or religion and its intellectual content, its metaphysical basis. If he is ignorant of anything that is "one thing most needful," his ultimate concern, his ground of being i.e., God – God who is only the other pole, the ideal pole of his own self, his hearing and seeing, to use the Quranic phrase. Modern man's cardinal sin in his spiritual and metaphysical blindness and nothing could dispel this darkness except the coming of light.

What redeems the universe of certain post-Nietzschean writers like Iris Murdoch is their great ethic. Living in the shade of the Platonic Good the death of an image of God that Nietzsche talked about doesn't seem to lead to nihilism. The problem of ethic in the

Beckettian world complicates things and intensifies corrosive effect of nihilism. We see such vile things as the fantasy of Ham of the *Endgame* in which he refuses to give a man food to save his child because, as he passionately argues, life “on earth” is “beyond remedy.” Macmann, like Molly before him, is satisfied with having “eluded charity all his days,” and is stunned when it is forced upon him. However, Beckett, for all his deep sadness at the sorry and sordid state of affairs that fallen man’s life presents, doesn’t give up the search for life, for beauty, for eternity, for essences, for the timeless self. He isn’t an incurable obdurate pessimist. He doesn’t take sides; only mercilessly exposes, dissects. Metman’s conclusion that in Beckett’s plays, the carriers of life, future and wholeness prevail over those of negation, despair and defeat, does contain a grain of truth. Pessimism, as William James remarked in his famous essay “Is Life Worth Living?” is essentially a religious disease. Only a man who is unable to commit himself to absolute despair mourns over man’s inability to transcend his miserable state. Although Beckett doesn’t share religious man’s ultimate optimism regarding man’s destiny and his faith in salvation of all humans but there is a yearning for some sort of salvation. He occasionally approaches very close to religious ideal of nirvana, but on the whole he sees only bad eternity, “bad infinity.” Refusing to look towards the sky of transcendence, towards the Infinite, (key to which is contained in those doctrines or traditional metaphysical wisdom of Christianity which he dubbed as myths in true demythologizing rationalist humanist spirit) and pinning his vision on the realm of the finite, he could not obviously be granted the vision of God.

According to traditional metaphysics Truth is not Beckett’s nothing or something rather it *is*. It is the very ‘isness,’ the very nature (*svabhav*) of things; as distinguished from nothing it is ‘no-thing’ to ‘no-thingness.’ Anything (mental or material) can be either nothing (that which also exists) or something therefore finite. Whereas the truth is no-thingness therefore infinite and formless, “the word less Godhead,” “the nameless Nothing,” as Eckhart terms it. This point is argued with great force and beauty by Deepak Chopra in his

Power, Freedom and Grace. The Buddha said that *Nirvana* does not exist because it is beyond the human realm of binary opposition of what exists and what does not. This is why Stace calls it negative divine in his masterpiece of lucidly argued philosophical essay on mysticism *Time and Eternity*.

Religion squarely encounters limit situations in which Beckett was interested. It too has no faith in action or deed seeing it leading to bondage. *Jnana yoga* or *irfan* or *via contemplativa* does away with action. Its theory of time is also circular. Nobody comes and nobody goes in the mystic's desert when he encounters the Divine Darkness, the Abyss, as he delves deep into the nothingness within. But it isn't awful for him. A mystic delights in no-action, in choiceless awareness. He sees no "other" to complain to, to possess, to dominate or to conquer and then to suffer or make others suffer. He is as resigned as a tree or a stream. He doesn't desire to be. And that means he can't suffer nausea or *angst*. He has already committed suicide by killing the ego thus having solved the problem that perplexed Camus.

Like Camus Beckett will not qualify as a straight forward atheist and like the mystics Beckett's people can't reply to the question "does God exist?" This is because, as Richard N Coe says, if "that which exists" is positive, or finite, or definable, or in any way verbally to be differentiated from other existent or non-existent phenomena, then "God," void, infinite, undifferentiated and abstracted from the dimensions of time and space, is precisely "that which doesn't exist."⁶ Stace and others have formulated this argument in more convincing terms. Buddhism describes God as Nothing, as *Shunyata*, as nonbeing because no predicate, even the predicate of existence can't be attached to It. God can't be named, he can't be characterized. No words have defiled the Absolute as Ramakrishna used to say. Nothing answers the question what is It as al-Jili, a Muslim mystic, has said. It is utter darkness or the light that never was. It is the impossibility of all signification. God as Beyond-Being neither creates nor reveals nor saves. It doesn't exist

or it transcends the category of existence. To name God as does the Preacher in *All That Fall*, to define his attributes, to circumscribe his essential Non-Being or Beyond-Being as though it were a positive phenomenon which could be imprisoned in words and in the logic of time and space, is to defile (in Ramakrishna's phrase) or distort the Absolute into a false absolute, or pseudo-God. Beckett is unable to see any meaning in the concept of the God of conventional theology. For him that which is a lie (and all words are lies) is unendurable. The essential self is timeless and deathless; but the "I," the "self" I know, is condemned to death and suffering. It is heir to all the ills that constitute the fact of 'world-pain.' This "gratuitous futility and misery can only have been ordained by the cruel caprices of a 'God' who is himself of the same element – words."⁷ God identifiable with words is of course a lie. Beckett's can't deny pure being; he only has no trust in any positive image of it. Once phenomena and all the creations of language have been bracketed off from the truth of being we are left with pure abstraction or Void but due to absence of science of symbolism Beckett has nothing positive in his "theology."

It is not clear if Beckett's ontology has the room for the supernatural part of the soul that isn't affected by evil or time. There is vague groping approximation to such an ideal but most of his characters are not seeking to cultivate this uncreated timeless entity; they are hardly conscious of such a thing. Almost all the works portray the dark night of the soul and there are few hints that this night is over in few cases. Beckett's art is about our failure to be mystics, our failure to find the essences. If there is an uncreate part of soul of which mystics like Eckhart have spoken a great deal Beckett's anxiety gets liquidated. We need to also note that time's providential functions are appreciated in traditions so it too is not vilified. The soul-making endeavour is possible through the corrosive action of time. Time exposes the fillers of void that imagination contrives in order to escape confrontation with nothingness.

His exposure of the genteel and habitual in our behaviour patterns takes him closer to mystical diagnosis of contemporary afflictions. His uncovering of the mask of language that we put between reality and ourselves is also mystical. For him language is rather like a “bowtie around a throat cancer.” “This long sin [Language] against the silence that enfolds it.”⁸

God as conceived by man can't be the true God. Because Beckett has such a negative view of language and reason in approaching the Infinite he is skeptical of all theology except perhaps some apophatic version that is hardly of much use for traditional theology. To quote Coe's presentation of Beckett's thesis:

The “true God” can only be a macrocosmic equivalent of the microcosmic Void of the “true self”; the Preachers “God” – a God who is conceivable – can be nothing but a malevolent and monstrous projection of the pseudo-self, or, in Sartrean terms, either of the “In-Itself” or of the “Other.” If there is a total reality (as all Beckett's people realize there must be), it is the eternal *Pour-Soi*, the Absolute Unnamable; as soon as the Preacher calls on “God”, and says what he will or will not do, all he does is to create a corresponding *En Soi* (the Void's own pseudo-self or “vice-exister”), concocted out of human words and reflecting human evil.”⁹

What troubles Beckett is his wish to solve the problem of life, to capture in rational terms that which refuses such an approach or straitjacketing. He encounters impassés that blast his reason. Zen long ago encountered life's contradictions and dissolved them with a different approach. Beckett's characters try to solve the koans of life and are not able to do because they can't be solved with the means they employ for it. Explicating Zen use of Koans Gai Eaton observes:

The koan is the image of life itself, which, in terms of reason, must always present a completely insoluble problem. But because we are always cheating and trying to solve human

problems by some short cut... we need to be reminded that such problems are not given to us to solve, but to live through and live out, until the problem itself is shattered and falls away. C Jung has said that, in most cases, a neurosis cannot be cured; it can only be transcended. And the same applies to every problem of which the Koan is a representation in miniature. The mind, struggling to find a solution, rushes from one extreme to the other; it takes counsel from a confusion of voices; 'Murder would solve it! Forgetting one side of the matter would simplify life! Escape! Escape!' But the only real solution is to admit that there is none, within the term of the situation from which the problem arose...Between birth and death, human existence is a splitting of what is, in truth, whole and indivisible into fragments which the mind keeps asunder, but which experience re-unites...Self-consciousness is the book we are allowed to read only during the suspension of life; that is the tragedy of self-consciousness. We would catch ourselves, know ourselves in the moment of loving; but, so long as we watch, the moment does not come; and when it comes sight is eclipsed.¹⁰ (Eaton 113-114).

This shows that koans are employed only to dissolve the intellectual endeavour of the mind. So Beckett, being at heart a rationalist (though in the end a disillusioned one) does not/ cannot succeed in reaching the other shore.

Seeing God Everywhere

A person after experiencing Zen enlightenment has "nothing further to do." But how is his life after that? Quite unlike Beckettian heroes who have nothing to praise, nothing to live for, no motivation to live, nothing to glorify and nothing to worship in the spirit of gratitude. A Western Zen student after practicing it for seven years was asked to describe the kind of life that Zen training leads to. He answered: "No paranormal experiences that I can detect. But you wake up in the morning and the world seems so beautiful you can hardly stand it."¹¹ The world is now robed in new heavenly light. The most marvelous miracle of sitting quietly by oneself that

Beckettian characters seek in vain happens with Zen practice. As Huston Smith elaborates:

Simply to see things as they are, as they truly are in themselves, is life enough... Zen wears the air of divine ordinariness: "Have you eaten? Then wash your bowls." If you can't find the meaning of life in an act as simple as that of doing the dishes, you will not find it anywhere.¹²

A Zen mystic has thus expressed the knack of inviting grace and traveling light in the world.

My daily activities are not different,
Only I am naturally in harmony with them,
Taking nothing, renouncing nothing,
In every circumstance no hindrance, no conflict...
Drawing water, carrying firewood,
This is supernatural power, this the marvelous activity.¹³

Smith's comments here are again pertinent:

With this perception of the infinite in the finite there comes, finally, an attitude of generalized agreeableness. "Yesterday was fair, today it is raining"; the experiencer has passed beyond the opposites of preference and rejection. As both pulls are needed to keep the relative world turning, each is welcomed in its proper turn.¹⁴

To see God is to see the world bathed in eternal glory. Beckett's people have not mastered the art and science of perceiving God here and now, everywhere and nowhere. Love of God is the key to the metaphysical project that Beckett undertakes but to him this key is not given. One may quote Schuon to note the poverty of Beckett's people:

To see God everywhere and in everything, is to see infinity in things, whereas human animality sees only their surface and their relativity; and it is to see at the same time the relativity of

the categories in which man moves, believing them to be absolute. To see the infinite in the finite is to see that this flower before us is eternal, because an eternal spring is declared through its fragile smile; to see relativity is to grasp that this instant that we are living is not 'now', that it 'is past' even before it has arrived, and that, if time could be stopped, with all beings remaining fixed as in a river of ice, the human masquerade would appear in all its sinister unreality; all would seem absurd, save only the 'remembrance of God' which is situated in the immutable.

To see God everywhere is essentially this: to see that we are not, that He alone is. If, from a certain angle, humility can be called the greatest of the virtues this is because it implies in the last analysis the cessation of egoity, and for no other reason. With a small change of viewpoint one could say as much of each fundamental virtue: perfect charity is to lose oneself for God, for one cannot be lost in God without giving oneself, in addition, to men. If love of one's neighbor is capital, on the strictly human plane, it is not only because the 'neighbour' is in the final analysis 'Self' as are 'we' but also because this human charity – or this projection into the 'other' – is the sole means possible, for the majority of men, of being detached from the 'I'; it is less difficult to project the ego into 'the other' than to lose it for God, although the two things are indissolubly linked.¹⁵

What perennialists emphasize is the distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom consists in disinterested seeing without judging. It consists in seeing in God which implies just seeing and not imposing any mental or egoistic construction on it. This seeing is ordinarily available to mothers who see God in their children, to lovers who forget both the worlds in each other's embrace, to lovers of nature who see perpetual miracles in what appear to others as just natural phenomena, to artists who see with the eyes of imagination another world full of wonder and beauty and to craftsmen who are one with their work. Siddharta's search for Truth in Hermann Hesse's novel of the same title takes him on a chequered journey

and the maze of conventional philosophies and personal whims regarding truth which ultimately force him to shun all teachings and find truth in the world of phenomena or experiences including sense experiences. Nothing was ultimately to be shunned or subjugated.

I am telling you what I have discovered. Knowledge can be expressed, but not wisdom. One can discover it, one can live it, one can be born along by it, one can do miracles with it, but one cannot express and teach it... A truth can be expressed and cloaked in words only if it is one-sided. Everything that can be thought in thoughts and expressed in words is one sided, only a half. All such thoughts lack wholeness, fullness, unity. When the venerable Gotama taught and spoke of the world, he had to divide it into *samsara* and nirvana, deception and truth, suffering and liberation. There is no other possibility, no other way for those who would teach. But the world itself, existence around us and within us, is never one sided. Never is a person or an act wholly *samsara* or wholly nirvana; never is a person holy or sinful. That appears only to be the case because we are in the grips of the illusion that time is real... The sinner that I am and you are indeed is indeed a sinner, but in time he again be Brahma, in time he attain nirvana, be a Buddha. But see here, this 'in time' is an illusion, only a metaphor... The world is not imperfect or confined at a point somewhere along gradual pathway toward perfection. No, it is perfect every at moment... In the depths of meditation lies the possibility of cutting through time, of seeing the simultaneity of all past, present, and future life, and within that, everything is good, all is perfect, all is Brahman... It all only requires my consent, my willingness, my loving acceptance and it will be good for me, can never harm me... I needed sensual pleasure, striving for possessions, vanity, and extreme debasement and despair in order to learn to give up resisting, in order to learn to love world, in order to cease comparing it to some imagined world that I wished for, some form of perfection I had thought up, and let it be as it is and love it and be glad to be part of it.¹⁶

Godot, if interpreted as God, is here and now and the tree that lies on the Beckettian stage proclaims him loud. Every event is His message. Every smiling face, every beautiful object, every impulse in the heart for the unconditioned Good, every gesture of love, every act of gratitude and celebration is His messenger. Even the “accursed” time through which Eternity gradually forces its presence proclaims Him.

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Words and Silence

Beckett is desperate to decondition his people from words, from everything borrowed so that they encounter reality or self in all its nakedness and horror. However he doesn't recover in the debris of mind, at the far end of the road after excavation has been complete, the treasure of Spirit or Self. Krishnamurti does the same job but he discovers at the end of the journey into the self not horror but what Buddha discovered – peace that passeth all understanding and bliss infinite. Treasures of the Self are unimaginable. He too, like Beckett, refuses all consolations, all bad faith. He strips all the veils, peels all the layers of the onion of ego that hides our own essential nothingness.

For a perennialist Beckett is also unable to see the beauty of language opening into the infinite. He is only dimly aware of the Sacred that permeates whole of the phenomenal order that sanctifies it, that makes it a channel of grace. (Even such Buddhist metaphysicians and sages as Nagarjuna find *samsara* as essentially nirvana when looked from a nirvanic consciousness). He seems to

deny God's immanence in the world of things. Eternal order permeates the temporal order through and through and in fact can be tasted here and now, in time. This world though *Maya* from a certain perspective, reflects or mirrors *Atman* also. *Maya* is really not an illusion as ordinarily interpreted but creative energy or activity, the mode by which Brahman manifests. There is no illusion, nothing unreal, no falsehood ultimately from a nondualistic perspective. If the world were not enjoying reality even though derived it would not exist. So there is no real turning away, no real asceticism in the traditional religious worldviews. The world doesn't fail to reflect the perfection and goodness of the Source. The harmony, order and beauty of the cosmos are the imprint of the absoluteness of the Principle in manifestation. The traditional view of the negative divine is only a reflection of this sacred mystery and utter perfection of the Absolute. Religion binds this world to the other world, the relative to the Absolute and by virtue of that it delivers us from the finitude. The rationalist in Beckett as in Camus would like to appropriate this mystery, this "absurdity" in rational terms, in the net of words, although he is painfully made aware by encountering the limit situations that the impossible is there standing by itself about which nothing could be done.

Esotericism talks existence or God and not *about* existence or *about* God as Krishnamurti and others have been emphasizing time and again. God is Reality itself, *Al-Haqq* as the Quran calls it and as Sufis interpret it. Whatever is or whatever truth known and unknown is, is God. To God belong all beautiful names as the Quran says. Thus all things noble, all things grand and worthy of human pursuit are included when traditions speak about worshipping God. God as the Ground of being grounds all our endeavours. There is no space for escaping God. One can only lament at the impoverished or distorted construction of this most holy word in certain exoteric theological accounts or in the dialogue between Nell and Hamm or in Lucky's speech. What esotericism or Unitarian metaphysics understands by this term may be glimpsed in the following passage of Ibn Arabi.

If we gaze, it is upon Him; if we use our intelligence, it is towards Him; if we reflect, it is upon Him; if we know it is Him. For it is He who is revealed in every face, sought in every sign, worshipped in every object of worship, and pursued in the invisible and the visible. The whole world prays to Him, prostrates itself before Him and glorifies His praise; tongues speak of Him, hearts are enraptured by love for Him, minds are bewildered in Him.¹⁷

Creating Meaning

A vital point of distinction between religion and Beckettian approach may be noted here. Religion doesn't merely show how life can be worth living but makes it so. It creates meaning even if it isn't objectively there. What existentialists attempt (i.e., create meaning or values in a meaningless situation or valueless universe) has been very successfully done by religion. It has made life worth living for countless millions throughout history. Even the supposedly life-denying pessimistic religions have made life worth living. Buddhism, for instance, nurtured beautiful civilization that produced great art. Faith in transcendence signifies faith in meaning, not by virtue of some future life or heaven but by a changed attitude or perspective by virtue of which one sees eternity in this moment and consents to fate, to even eternal recurrence if that were the case. It makes life a celebration, a feast, a joy everlasting. It doesn't merely promise or postpone these things. They are realized here and now.

As God is understood in traditional metaphysics as Infinite and All-Possibility one can never exhaust contexts and thus meanings as God signifies precisely this impossibility of exhaustion and determination. Creation has no determined meaning and thus it has infinite signification. Each moment God is in new glory. He never repeats. Each moment is original in the life of God (and the life of universe). Because the universe has no given determinate meaning we can give it one. The deeper motivation for Sartre's whole project is to secure an indeterminate universe where there is room for

freedom or creativity and nothing is imposed from outside. I think we have ample room in perennialist metaphysics or ontology for accommodating the spirit of such a humanitarian project.

Meaning of the Fall

The traditions enunciate the doctrine of fall, i.e., that man has committed a crime (even if it is just an act of forgetfulness) that has necessitated his fall, led to man's being outside the Divine center and thus made him fragmentary and in a state of disequilibrium. To be born is to expiate for the sins committed during one's "former" life. We have forgotten that we are the children of immortal Bliss, that our ego isn't *atman* or self, that our home is Eden, that we are, by the very fact of being born in times severed from our timeless essence, that existence and thus becoming has condemned us to a state where essence is hard to be found, that we have usurped the divine privileges and tasted the forbidden fruit of knowledge, inductive knowledge and thus direct access of truth, pure intellection or the faculty of intuitive intellection has been lost (though not irretrievably according to perennialists). Beckett too recognizes this fallen state but doesn't believe that we originally were/are innocent, immortal, pure enjoying our abode in heaven. He has no metaphysics to tell him from where he has come; similarly he doesn't believe that we are ever going to regain the paradise as he doesn't know anything of the End either. He is resigned to the hell he is in. He has come from nowhere for no reason and has been condemned to hell by devils ("they" of *The Unnamable*). Because of his rejection of metaphysics or the knowledge of universal principles, of first and last things or of the Origin and the End, it is no wonder that he can't explain man's guilt consciousness, the unknown crime that he has committed and which has necessitated his suffering and why he is obliged to express nothingness of his life, why he is here to mourn his state of exile and expiate for the sins he hasn't committed. He can only see destruction brought by Time that in his view only inflicts wounds (and doesn't heal them) until the cup is full when one is no more to complain of its ravages.

Language and Truth

Search for Beckett abhors generalizations and abstractions and for him metaphysics is exactly these things. He is apparently committed to a sort of phenomenological analysis of experience. He wants to have no distorting spectacles of beliefs, ideologies while perceiving the truth of life. He wants to look at life naked stripped of all illusions. His thorough going empiricism leads him to despairing conclusions. But mystics have also shown great respect for the empirical. And in their quest for pure being they bracket off mental constructs, propositions, generalizations, abstractions and are thus committed to “pure” experience (one may, with most modern philosophers implicating linguistic turn in modern thought, concede involvement of language in all experience and the irreducible linguistic and thus cultural construction of all discourse.) However this doesn’t alter the validity of the phenomenological project or mysticism’s claim to pure experience as these are aimed at reducing the intrusion of linguistic or cultural constructs to minimum possible to let experience be perceived as it is. Irreducible elements including language and laws of thought that frame all experience can be construed as constituting what we here designate as what is or the Real. Husserl’s phenomenological project is only a crude approximation of mystical method. The mystic’s distrust of language and logic and thought doesn’t, however, lead to despairing conclusions.

Existence becomes a problem only when we approach it logically, linguistically, propositionally, or when we talk about it or approach it from the head. Problems of life, tensions of good and evil, of truth and ignorance, of God and devil, arise only when we approach it non-existentially. Language creates problems as Wittgenstein said. Mysticism has been pleading for transcendence of both language and mind. The mystic attempts to be silent and then on truth takes care of itself.

Art and Transcendence

Some observations on Beckett's views of art are in order as here we can see his salvific scheme in operation. His is a picture not quite unlike Joyce and Proust regarding the vacation of the artist. In fact religion's function has been increasingly usurped by art in the twentieth century as Arnold had prophesied. Nietzsche is the greatest champion of prophetic view of artist and salvific view of art. Moran finds peace in "another's ludicrous distress." His artistic vacation seems to be fulfilling his dharma; it is a call from the beyond or transcendence as he is harnessed to a task which transcends himself as well as the object of his endeavor. He is doing what he does for the sake of a cause, which, while having need of us to be accomplished, "is in essence anonymous, and would subsist, haunting the minds of men, when its miserable artisans should be no more."¹⁸ Thus the world is saved only through art "that pierces the outer turmoil's veil," and discerns our quarry and senses "what course to follow." Art, the Dionysian art in which like Nietzsche Beckett consumes himself, reveals the supra-individual and thus immortal essence of man. Music and not the Apollonian reason expresses this and Beckett's aesthetics emphasizes this point. Like Proust's protagonist and approximating in certain sense mystical purgatorial path, Beckett hero in the trilogy discovers his essence in the "inaccessible dungeon of our being to which Habit does not possess the key."¹⁹ (*Molloy* 18). As mystics are in search of the repose of being, the still centre at the heart of our being, Molly's quest for his mother is interpretable as quest for the Mothers of Being. Edith Kern sees a parallel to it in Goethe's and Nietzsche's journey to the Mothers of Being, the ultimate journey to our essence.²⁰ Both mysticism and art in the Nietzschean-Beckettian view break the spell of individuation and then only the Being, the universal, the essence, the timeless, the immortal, the unknown, the transcendent, is sensed. Reason, causality, time and the accident of individuality are all to be transcended. It is not the individual living in time and space that Moran is but the unmoulded, untamed, timeless essence of man that Molly is and in whose quest Molly

proceeds. In the theologian's hell nothing burns except the self will as the *Theologica Germanica* records. The mystics burn this self will here on earth. Beckett's Dionysian aesthetic also insists on the same thing. Deterioration of Molly's body and his advance towards anonymity speaks of the same process of decreation. Molly's world is a world without will, without causality, universal and nameless....the world of the macrocosm where individual existence shrinks into meaninglessness and human relations are reduced – or heightened – to the universal, the subconscious, the mythical. In such a world Molly has small belief in the power of language, the *logos*, to convey the essences of things.²¹

The mystic union with the universe which Nietzsche considered the prerogative of the Dionysian artist and which, for Proust, in the form of music, embodies the highest achievement of art is at times attained by Molloy in his mother's room, though the full splendour of beatific vision, the infinite awareness and infinite bliss that accompany it are still too far from this mystical experience. Of course there is sought an escape from time, habit and intelligence and Molloy is no longer that sealed jar to which he owed his cramped closed well preserved being, the state that is bestowed to a saint or a mystic is quite distant for him. Beckett has referred to himself in specifically Nietzschean and mystical terms as “non-knower” and “non-can-er.” His art, like much of twentieth century art, is a crude and quite inadequate approximation of traditional religious or mystical ideal.

Beckett characters don't have any clue of what is going on to them and can't be equated with conscious travelers on the path. The severe discipline that traditions have imposed on those desirous of salvation is recognized to have borne the results aimed at. All the gods are conquered and whole of the universe is appropriated in that vital moment of enlightenment. But about Beckett's people one wonders what good their extreme asceticism does to them. One is sure at least of the fact that they lose something (by denying the body, by denying the world, by denying the life – none of his

characters is able to affirm life passionately and sing its songs with that gay abandon unlike Camus, especially the youthful Camus, the author of *Nuptials*). None of the Beckettian characters is able to achieve complete transcendence of the finitude which is the curse of man as none of them has perfect intuition of the Infinite. The Transcendent Principle can't be caught in the net of finitude or immanence. Beckett doesn't follow the logic of the Infinite. Within the humanist frame (despite his devastating critique and exposure of its foundations he remains at bottom a rationalist and humanist and tries to speak from the vantage point of human, all too human plane and despite feeling utter disequilibrium in that fragmentary viewpoint) there is no true infinite and thus true transcendence. None of the major existential thinkers recognized fully accepted the traditional doctrine regarding locus of transcendence in The Transcendent Principle. For them human subjectivity was everything blocking their understanding of objectivity of the Absolute. Immanent transcendence that characterizes these philosophies – as Shahzad Qaisar, a Pakistani perennialists has noted²² – comes in the way of Beckett to achieve the logical solution to his dilemmas. This is especially evident in his aesthetic.

The East considers self knowledge to be the beginning of wisdom and unless man knows the self he is bound to wallow in misery and ignorance, knowledge of self brings the knowledge of God, the ground of Being or Existence and there is nothing else to know. Knowing the Self one knows everything as Vedanta puts it. The Self is truth and truth is the Self. All we need to know is this. Nietzsche said that man can't afford the look at whole truth, it being so painful. He must invent the lie of art to live. But the mystic who is a superman (in fact Ananda Coomaraswamy makes a very insightful comparative study of Buddhist ideal of *arhat* and Nietzschean superman and asserts that they are functionally one) finds nothing unpalatable. He still finds life a song, a celebration and dances like Rumi. Recognition of voidness of everything and of universal suffering doesn't make him despair of life. Only in truth does one become free as Christ said. And absurdist is not free

because he doesn't know the truth. In fact it is his utter failure to know and to be free that accounts for his pessimism.

Love is the Answer

The question is finding the love which is the principle of dealienation. The fundamental problem for man is to know love and in love is freedom and love is God. Finding love is salvation. Hell is inability to love due to inflated ego or what is called pride in scriptures. The principle of self transcendence is another name of love. Man's deepest quest is translatable as a quest for love. Now love is possible by self knowledge and this self knowledge is knowing the truth of *anatta* or denial of the self, or transcending the illusion of separate self and self-will. When ego isn't time is not. And all sorrow presupposes the reality of ego and time. The Kingdom of God is where time is not as Christ said. So Beckett's problem and quest too is for love or self knowledge. The mystics have found love and sung of it and that is enough proof of their finding the gnosis that delivers, their discovery of Bliss that God is. It is the inability of Beckett to find love that makes him pessimist. Eastern metaphysics with its nondualism that rejects 'self-other' dichotomy and identification of human consciousness with universal consciousness could well be described as the metaphysics of love. Gnosis consists in realizing the illusoriness of ego-directed attitudes and actions. The difference between the Traditional and Beckettian worlds is a product of their different visions – one born of love and renunciation of self will and the other born of one's inability to love and thus a state of loneliness that Beckett's heroes represent.

The mystic is best described as lover and not the one who has ecstatic experiences of superterrestrial beings. The mystics' realization of the One is simply translatable as universalization of love. Mystics sing the heavenly song of love, with gay abandon. There is nothing comparable to the following lines of Rumi (that show the discovery and celebration of love as a result of self-

transcendence or disidentification of one's consciousness with the ego) from his *Diwan-i- Shamsi Tabrez* in Beckett, in Camus and in Sartre:

I amn't of this world, nor of the next, nor of Paradise
nor of hell
I amn't of Adam, nor of Eve, nor of Eden and *Rizwan*
My place is the Placeless, my trace is the Traceless
It is neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the
Beloved.
I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one;
One I seek, one I know, one I see, One I call.²³

And "Pour out wine till I become wanderer from myself; for in selfhood and existence I have felt only fatigue."²⁴

The Sufis have sung of love, in fact Sufism is the path of love, song of love. The most beautiful poetry, the most passionate songs and lyricism are found in not any absurdist poetry but in Sufi poetry. One needn't argue this point, it being too obvious for any reader. To mystic is audible the music of the cosmos as the latter is his beloved. God is incarnate in cosmic dance. Beauty universal he sees in the dancing waves of the sea, in the waving of the forests, in the wilderness and the wild. He embraces all and excludes none as he is love. Love like light robes everything with heavenly splendours of light. So Beckett's skepticism regarding possibility or vivifying effect of love may be traced to his peculiar temperament or linked to his Cartesian background. Or is love disallowed in a capitalist individualist setting that Beckett represented? After having experienced the ravages of war one wonders how one's faith in love could be sustained. Beckett found around himself a landscape devoid of love. And if God is dead love too dies and is replaced by broken images of Love that is God.

What ails Beckett is divine athambia and divine aphasia, a God who mysteriously punishes and loves in incomprehensible ways. But this is really an expression of man's – the Western dualist fragmented

absurdist man's – own impotence, his own distorted receptacle, his own blindness that can't receive grace. Man must accept total responsibility, the fact that he has to journey alone from alone to Alone. He must be a light unto himself. He must cure his own pain and end his sorrow by his own efforts (although that is actually the work of Spirit indwelling in him).

Altizer is one of the most important theologians who has explored Beckett's world for understanding the task ahead for theology. His approach helps us to put Beckett in proper perspective and ultimately in the service of man seeking a vision in these hard times of eclipse of transcendence. The following passages, I think, presents the essence of Beckett's vision regarding the props of self, love, etc. and the solution he suggests is not very different from Buddhism though it appears that he didn't envision clear way out of the nihilistic impasse but he did see clearly what is wrong with the secular humanistic culture.

For if the full reality of the love which we have known now appears to us in the form of a negative totality, then Buddhism can be a way to the dissolution or erasure of that totality, to the absolute stilling of all active expressions of love or desire. If it is the activity and the temporality of a Western and Faustian will which have led to the horror and chaos of the twentieth century, then Buddhism offers stilling of that will, to an absolute silence and calm in which neither will nor desire will be present. Buddhist discipline centers upon images of pain and suffering as a way to the dissolution of the activity and the individual identity of selfhood, for to know the self as pain and suffering is to be prepared for liberation from the illusion of selfhood. May we not regard modern Western vision as such a discipline, as a preparation for the dissolution of selfhood by way of a total immersion in the darkness and horror of life? And not only the darkness of life, but above all the darkness of love, the horror of our profoundest dream and hope. Is the dark emptiness of what has appeared to us as love a sign for us of the emptiness of everything which we have known as consciousness and experience,

and of the ultimate nothingness of all which has been present to us as reality and world? Is the dark negativity of our emptiness so overwhelming that no way is present to us of celebrating emptiness as a mask of total bliss.²⁵

The compassion of an apocalyptic Christ is inseparable from the advent of an actual disintegration of consciousness and experience. Accordingly, visions of a new apocalyptic compassion must inevitably appear in the form of madness or chaos to all those who can still find life or hope in an individual centre of consciousness.²⁶ Modern purgatory constituted by nihilistic atmosphere that negates and negates and shakes foundations amounts to dissolution of all individual and interior identity and meaning and without this “there can be no end of an actual center of consciousness, and thus no vision of the New Jerusalem.”²⁷ (Altizer 212). It is not surprising that mysticism has often been dubbed as madness. Disintegration of individual centre of consciousness and all that goes with the name of self necessarily will appear as madness to those who are still occupied with the world and the self.

The mystic sees things by the light of the Spirit, and to him therefore there is nothing outside him. The brighter and purer the light within, the brighter and purer everything appears. If there is darkness inside it is reflected in the outer world also. Ram Thirtha declared that red rays of the sun were his muscles. When anything came across his eyes, he robed it in God and then saw that there was nothing else but God. He thus addresses winds: “Blow, O breezes, mingle O winds, with these words whose purpose is the same as yours./O laughter! Laughter!/Inextinguishable joy and laughter.”²⁸

Beckett’s ‘Perhaps’

It is no virtue to qualify everything with a ‘perhaps’ as Beckett would. We can’t say we live perhaps. We need the certainty of the Absolute or we perish. The odyssey of life involves swimming in a turbulent river in which powerful waves toss us hither and thither.

Here mere thinking and brooding may lead to suffocation and drowning. Action and action in full faith in oneself and the universe is needed here. Beckett's desolate world has its origin in failure to respond as the situation demands.

At another place Tirtha says:

Live that life within you, live that Atman within you, feel that
you are
the light of lights, the
Lord of lords, the Arbiter of all justice, vigour and beauty,
And that all existence is due to god, feel that, feel
That! Try these spiritual experiments, and then see! ²⁹

The East has been trying these experiments for so long and found that they work; there is nothing mystical or irrational about all this. The East has been practicing the art of Bliss for centuries and it has practically defeated the absurdist's conclusions. By becoming a mirror to existence, by becoming a witness (*shahid*) through renunciation of desire and will and submission to God's will, one becomes a witness and conquers *dukkha* and realizes the splendor and bliss of pure consciousness.

Ultimately nothing is simpler than truth, nothing more natural to us than our theomorphic nature, nothing more closer to us than God. Nothing is to be done. Nothing needs to be believed. Nothing is at stake. Nothing is lost. No problem to be solved, no territory to be mapped, no quest to be undertaken. Everything is as it is and as it should be. All scriptures are vain and in fact ask for transcendence of all word games, theories, narratives. Man needs no salvation, no grace, no theology, no philosophy. There is no nothing at the heart of the doctrines of traditional metaphysics. Truth is not there at the end of the tunnel gettable someday. There is no search, no adventure, no truth really from a strictly nondualistic perspective. The metaphor of search or discovery is quite misleading. There is no seeker, no sought, no seeking really. To be liberated from truth is ultimate liberty. Nietzsche's rejection of slavery to truth has deeper

meaning. Religion aims not at truth but at freedom from every dualistic image or entity, everything that can only be conceived by its opposite. To speak of truth is to think of its opposite falsehood, error.

Ibn Arabi, amongst Muslim Sufi metaphysicians, has put forward this thesis in his *Fusus-al-Hikam*. Nondualistic philosophers have maintained this thesis always across traditions though common men and many philosophers have great difficulty in understanding this. The difficulty is that for a person caught in the dualities of *samsara* nirvanic consciousness is unimaginable. The difference between heaven and hell is because of different perceptions. The enlightened and the non-enlightened can't communicate because their perceptions, their worlds are different. One can refute nondualist philosophers and sages only by attempting to experientially verify or refute them. And no amount of philosophical analysis, no deconstructive strategy will be able to do it.

Conclusion

I conclude by restating traditionalist response to key assertions alluded to in the beginning.

Truth is to be realized and needs not communication. Need for communication is an inauthentic need. We should learn to be silent. Desire for communication is an escape from nothingness at the heart of the self. No need to communicate. Truth can't be communicated; it is experienced and not expressible in linguistic communicable terms. Only unimportant non existential things can be well communicated. All that is important and that which concerns us deeply, ultimately is necessarily and expectedly in the silence before the Word. We have no obligation to express anything. Our obligation consists in being rather than knowing or saying. There is no truth out there that you can communicate; all that can be communicated isn't truth. Just celebrate and listen to silence. The music that will be heard then in silence is what we need

to hear and communicate. There is no 'thou' to whom you can communicate and there is no 'I' who can communicate. To live in the symbolic order is to be dealienated from the Real as Lacan would remind us.

All temporal things are indeed vain. "There is no permanence except in the Permanent" asserts Islamic *shahadah*. Devoid of transcendence, the true world, to use Nietzsche's phrase, the apparent world, the world of scent and colour also loses its meaning. If we deny transcendence we deny everything worthwhile and then indeed there is no point in existence. No flowers bloom, no birds sing. No love justifies the world of pain. The fact of our temporality does not mean transcendence is not accessible. Time is not to be negated. It forces one to decreate and that paves way for subsistence in God. It shows we are creatures also and not only gods. One can detach from past and future anxieties and find the present moment and that takes much of the suffering that temporality implies. Ultimately it is only after death that *parinirvana* is possible.

Beckett's pessimistic conclusions don't necessarily follow from his premises. There is a Saviour who has many means at his disposal and he is not mocked and does succeed in his work. Descent into hell is needed to reach the kingdom of God and thus is one more *upaya* of the Saviour. Beckett is all about our descent into hell – a step in initiation universally recognized. This explains why his characters are situated in purgatory or hell and why there is no death in his world. There is only decay. Regeneration is in another dimension that is dimly perceived by Beckett. But he does prepare us for that perception as that demands taking full look at the worst and making peace with all our unconscious and overcoming the dark forces and obsessions that block our entry to the Kingdom of God. Man discovers and has to willy nilly discover at the pain of hell his divinity and original state of omniscience and bliss. The Saviour saves through beauty, virtues, art, Master's touch, love, wonder etc. Anything can act as an *upaya* for saving us. Then all

existence appears enlightened or blissful as the Buddha said that when he won nirvana he felt whole existence enlightened and flowers blooming everywhere. One has every reason to bless the existence or life as its original nature is blessedness. According to the Upanisads all creatures are born from bliss, after being born are sustained by bliss, and in the end enter into bliss. “We don’t understand,” says Father Zossima, “that life is a paradise [at present], for we have only to wish to understand this and it will immediately appear before us in all its beauty.” In the materials of *The Possessed* we find the intuition of mystics corroborated in these remarkable words: “Christ walked on earth to show mankind that even in its earthly nature the human spirit can manifest itself in heavenly radiance, in the flesh, and not merely in a dream or ideal – and that this is both natural and possible.” I recall the statement of Rabbi Herschel “Just to be is a blessing, just to live is holy.” This is what Beckett could not say and hardly could escape the desire to say it or cherish it in the heart of his hearts. And this is what Nietzsche meant in his plea for aesthetic justification of life. Life has to be converted to an art to be enduring and enjoyable. It is then possible that one can say with Eckhart that man needs only one prayer: Thank you God. Beckett could not say thank you and even not simply accept without thanking the fact that he has been gifted with life. Needless to say that its implacable grandeur escaped him and its stunning beauty that mystics can contemplate and assimilate escaped Camus.

The absurd is born of the encounter of the self with the incomprehensible world. Metaphysics drops both the individual and the reason as it encounters or discovers a grand new world where love alone reigns. The self or soul, so dear to Camus and many absurd characters of Camus and Beckett who are desperate on preserving identity of a pseudo-personality, is a curse for the perennialist. One is reminded of Coomaraswamy’s remark on Jung’s *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* that this very thing is what Easterners are supposed to lose so that the Spirit lives. However Beckett himself is convinced that what goes by the name of soul is a

compounded thing and thus transient or mutable. Camus is presupposing such a soul. Beckett pities men condemned to preserve what is illusory and presents the attempts at escaping from the painful truth with great force.

What Beckett shows is that the world with all its suffering and boredom compels man to go for another search or journey that traditions call journey to God. But then few are saved. Beckett focuses mainly on the story of failures. Moral and spiritual cripples that modern men are by virtue of living outside grace are shown with all their pathetic degradation in his works. He found mess only around him and presented it with great force. What is needed is to show that regeneration is still possible and we can recover the sacred from the ruins of a profaned world. And that is the task a perennialist undertakes.

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Environmental ethics paradigm according to Ibn Arabi's

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Abstract

Nowadays the studies regarding the theme of this article has become a part of the practical ethics in a sense that due to its vital importance the think tanks in this realm are trying more than usual to introduce models to establish the human-nature equilibrium. In the theosophic realm and order Ibn Arabi-though in an indirect form-through adherence to the principle of possession, that is the “pantheism” with other structural components derived from it and focusing on human function as the intermediate agent between nature and what lies beyond it can introduce a comprehensive paradigm for resolving the environmental crises to humanity. Under the light of Unity doctrine experience of all beings is the manifestation and a locus of theophany from the epiphomic forms endowed with all distinctive qualities and ontological perfections such as knowledge, apprehension and potential. The objective here is to retouch and make anew the environmental ethics through theosophic measures.

Keywords: Ibn Arabi, pantheism, environmental ethics, paradigm, nature, intermediate

Introduction

If we decided to have a comprehensive and precise look at the environmental ethics issue and evaluate the correlation between this issue and the theosophic components developed by Ibn Arabi in a proper manner, it is necessary to realize the three stages of science of ethics first, then enter the realm of practical ethics regarding environmental ethics.

The three stages of science of ethics are:

- 1- Meta ethics –is a division in ethics doctrine concerned with the fundamentals of ethics: good and bad and right and wrong
- 2- Descriptive ethics –in this context the scientific studies on ethics with the objective of gaining practical knowledge about ethics where the vantage points, psychological, sociological aspects and finding the historical sources of ethics are explained and described in this realm
- 3- Narrative ethics –is concerned with the actual ethical procedures, that is, which functions are rationally right and tenable and the opposite (Kagan,1998, pp1-11, feranekna,2000,pp25-26,poormohammadi,2009, 50-51).

Normative ethics is of two branches, General and Applied. The general ethics is the justification and explanation of an ethical framework that embodies the question as to what deeds could be regarded ethically right or wrong. In general, most of the classic ethical theories such as evaluation of essential goodness and badness that was carefully considered in the world of Islam especially among the speculative theologians are of this branch. The Applied ethics is concerned with specific ethical issue addressed and assessed in a specific realm.

In fact Bioethics is a sub-branch of Applied ethics practiced in the following three general, specific and practical domains:

A- In its general conception, according to Potter the socio-political issues are of concern, source of which are searched in the biologic sciences related to the level of human's manipulative level in a direct or indirect manner. Therefore, defined as such, the biologic ethics is a collection of ethical issues emerging from biologic, medical technologies, and human animal and environment interactions.

B- The biologic ethics in its obscure context deals with the medical ethics and other ethical issues ascended from socio-political even economical matters which are directly related to the post modernism era where the new technology prevails. Issues like abortion, immortalization, physician administered suicide are placed in this domain.

C- In its particular conception, the biologic ethics is concerned with the following four domains that have evolved after the recent technological advances:

- 1- Life protection/support technologies from being to the end of life cycle
- 2- Life enhancement technologies for life quality modification
- 3- Technologies involved in reproduction and cloning
- 4- Technologies involved in Genetic Engineering, Gene Treatment and human Geneom (Mohaqeq damad, sashadina, abasi, 2011, pp17-18).

Based on the above categorization this study concentrates on the General conception which is closely related to nature, environment and human.

With having the levels of biological ethics determined, it is possible to consider all the environmental ethical dimensions as an approach with the intent to make a bridge between human conduct and the natural codes. With no doubt the outcome of such approach must be an outstanding reality where nature is no more threatened by man

and a constructive interaction is established between human and the nature.

It is believed that such a purview would become feasible through the teachings of Ibn Arabi's theosophic order. This order is based on Ibn Arabi's pantheism and pure theosophic components which constitute the Islamic theosophic doctrine that could assist us to find the best pretext that would provide for a cohesive and practical paradigm in the environmental ethics realm. Attempt is made here to apply the teachings of Ibn Arabi's theosophic order by applying the Existence and Oneness of being issues' components available in Mohioldin Ibn Arab's order and making a distinction among the three levels of the issue that are the philosophical unity, the graded unity and the particular unity for the first time it is worth mentioning that this school of thought must be emphasized on human stance who is the intermediate agent between nature and what lies beyond for the purpose of evaluating the environmental ethics issue.

Now the purposed vital questions:

- Can the teachings of Ibn Arabi's theosophic order as a school of thought administer the evaluation of issues like the theme of this article
- What would be illustrated as the resultant of analysis conducted on Ibn Arabi's unity order

This study consists of three sections where the Ibn-Arabi components in the realm of his theosophy, which could contribute to environmental issues, in an effective manner are analyzed and the resultant consequences would be explained while the priority is given to the quality of the association between teachings of Ibn Arabi's theosophic order and the environmental ethics.

Quality of the association between teachings of Ibn Arabi's theosophic order and the environmental ethics

The quality of the association between teachings of Ibn Arabi's theosophic order and the environmental ethics must be explained before our discussion on the connecting bridge of the sections mentioned above being. In fact the exegetic approach to the constituent components and their numeration in rationalizing such an association in both realms would be the first step. Considering the subjective principles in both the realms and the fundamental common grounds that are evident provide the building blocks of this association. In Ibn Arabi's thoughts the focus is on the actual world (multiplicities). Perhaps based on immediate impression and a superficial view it is deduced as if he has ignored the principle issue of nature, which in fact is "instant externality" and has considered it nothing but a phantasm or an ambiguity. Such a notion is rejected in Ibn Arabi's theosophy since one of the subjective principles in theosophy order is the emphasis on multiplicity with all the codes of conduct in its circumference. The beings are not arbitrary or unreal concepts, since despite their inherent arbitration they exist whether in the realm of logic or otherwise.

According to ashtiani . (Ashtiani, 2002, p126)

The external reality of entity and its authenticity is an emphasized and accepted fact by Ibn Arabi. Mola Sadra Shirazi, as one of the many exegesists on Ibn Arabi's school of thought not only verifies this fact but has borrowed the Ibn Arabi's mind frame regarding "exalted theosophy" and the "principality of being" by nature (Hassanzadeh amoli, 1996, V2, 119). All scholars are in consent with the notion that entity to Ibn Arabi is unlike what other theosophists think as an independent issue where every object is innately attributed and differentiated with another. Ibn Arabi has illustrated the source of his thoughts on the mythical casual proof in his works, through similarities regarding the external entities.

Referring to similarities between light and mirror indicate the fact the he considers entity, the world of contingency and the nature with all its states (inanimate things, animal, plant) as manifestations of God (Ibn Arabi,v1,p304).

His concern to the specific, and of course incomparable form of human status as the intermediary agent between the two dimensions of being, the nature and what lies beyond it is one of the other principles that is of our concern in this study.

In his school of thought whatever is of essence with human esteem in connection with environmental ethics is not his primordial and eternal dimension (Ibn Arabi, 2011, p 152) but presenting human as the intermediary agent between nature what lies beyond it. The two most important components of defining environmental ethics are human and nature, the emphatic principle followed by Ibn Arabi. In order to present a vivid, comprehensive and systematic vision of his thoughts' fundamentals components regarding the environmental ethics should be discussed first. Any study on his intellectual set-up with no doubt makes contemplation and concentration the issue necessity. Before everything else, here the theological, philosophic and gnostic concepts of entity must be touched upon briefly.

The concept and the dicta about existence

The dicta attached to the concept of entity are numerous but the following four general ones prevail:

1- Conception of immediate existence is but the novel of novelties, first of the initiatory and peak of gnostic knowledge Even perception of this evidential is axiomatic. In other world existence as is means actual entity separate from exterior and subjective being. That the truth is made of exterior and subjective texture,

since each one of these that is exterior and subjective in being is the manifestation of existence and the true principle is not conditioned to any determining factor, it even resists the absolute condition. Another characteristic of this dictum is lack of qualification on the superfluous unity since its unity is particularized unity. In this sense such a truth is not even adjectival to multiplicity in the first place since the prevailing unity is particularized unity. (Jahangiri, 2005, p 240) Absolute qualification of generality, determination, inclusion, common and specific, and unity and multiplicity are the necessities of truth credited by the manifestation which is numerous in the hierarchies of individual essence (Ashtiani, 2002, p 111) Existence on its own differs from conceptual and outer existence, since these two elements are of existence texture, hence existence on its own is nothing but itself...

2- Among other notable dicta is what is introduced by Imam Fakh Razi regarding existence as an axiomatic conception (Fakhr –e-razi, VI, p11)

3- The third dictum is concerned with Asharites and its followers and gives evidence to the fact that existence is something the apprehension of which is speculative. The Asharites view the essence and existence as of substance and consider the apprehension of quiddities as feasible and speculative (Jahangiri, 2005, p 240)

4- Here existence is something the apprehension of which is impossible let alone its axiomatic nature.

The first dictum, the most appropriate one, is reserved for gnostics in the conception of existence realm. In this article the focal theme is Ibn Arabi's dictum with some indications on the authenticity regarding the existential dictum attributed to some arbitrators and gnostics.

The acknowledged dicta on existence The peripatetic dictum (Masha'in)

A number of peripatetic wise are of the opinion that on the subject of existence the external and individual essence like inanimate things, plant and human even the invisible beings like angels and corporal beings do not share any common grounds regarding the principle of reality but have common grounds in an abstract sense. Said otherwise, the wise insist on heterogeneousness that exists among beings and disregard the principle of “analogicality in a specialized sense”, with respect to this dictum (Ashtiani, 2002, p 115). In this respect Ibn Sina says “The meanings of existence, object and priori are imprinted in our thoughts in the first representation and these imprints are not of the kind that are observed due to high possessions since just like the subject of admissions they are the initial principles the admission of which without other medium is necessary and axiomatic and the admission of their other is through their medium”. Among the conceptions there exist some that are principle of conceptions and conceived without other medium as concepts the most deserving of these are axiomatic and are general principles like existence and object. (Ibn Sina, 2010,p 291).

Some adjectival dictum of existence The Moshaun victa

A group of Sufi sage believe that in the realm of real existence and other noumenal nothing exists but God and the world is the exclusivity of one entity, mere existence and indivisible in any direction and the multiplex exposed to the public view is nothing but illusion and fantasy that is God is nothing but the world and everything is God. Said otherwise phrase here emphasis on the unity of essence and entity; of course, the precondition of this dictum negate the religious laws and the dicta subject to Quran and Hadith and this makes the foundation of this theory lose. This notion refers to God and the world as being identical where essence

of unicity is not actualized in abstract and epiphany forms; therefore, God represents the complex of the apparent world. This is attributed to the "obscurantism of Sufism". The great Sufi gnostic reject, contradict and declare this notion as blasphemy. Mola Sadra considers this dictum as a disgrace and mere heterodoxy (Mola Sadra, V2, p 345 – Javadi amoli, 1997, V1, pp472-492).

Mahi eldin Ibn Arabi is among the great ones who in some of his passages completely negates multiplicity and considers what is, is virtual and says "existence is attributed to God". What he thinks of this attribution is the noble attribution and correlation from the kind pertaining to speech, acknowledged by many wise in this realm.

Ibn Arabi's dictum with respect to the existence concept could be described as: mere real existence and essence of reality is the necessity of transcendence which is an extension of conceptual gratification of existence like the rays of sun which are the effusion of light from the same sun and nothing else. The philosophers consider this categorical correlation as being of dualism type like the relation between the paint on the wall; nevertheless, His advent in possibilities become manifested and all begins and creations at any level of inanimate bodies, plants and animal that are in His essence of manifestations and their existence is mentally posited and consequential which are the accidental extension of existence. Hence, his essence is glorified by possibilities and creatures and is substantial to essence and respectus to all than God and is considered as His manifestation. The poet Rumi says:

O with attributions like love of the sun
And the subject to one rotational attribution
Sometimes you become the Sun, sometimes the Sea
Sometimes the Mount Qaf, sometimes the Phoenix
You are neither this nor that in your essence
O in excess of conjecture and more than over
(Moolana rumi, V2, p2)

Oneness of Existence

From his collections, especially *The precious stone-the Bezels of Wisdom* and *The Meccan Revolutions* it is revealed that he is with no doubt an “Oneness of the Essence” seeking gnostic, in a sense he is obsessed with the idea (Jahangiri, 2005, p 263).

In categorizing the different levels of Unity we encounter three levels worth mentioning for the purpose of accomplishing this study:

1- Unity and existential philosophy

Unity and existential philosophy is the “Spiritual homonymy of existence”. According to the wise and majority of the speculative theologians the concept of existence is a comprehensive modus including all creatures and a paradigm applied in all proposition of existence with the same meaning. For example: “human exists”, “plant exists”, “angel exists”, the term exists is *praedicatum*. The Spiritual homonymy of existence is a conceptual issue and is derived from subjective issue of existence while the allegation of unity of existence is associated with the “Extension” of existence. The gnostics of unity of existence realm believe that the concept of existence is a subjective consideration and is of secondary philosophic category (Baharnejad, 2008,p 46-47).

2- Unity and graduation of being

The unity refers to the reality of two hierarchies: the necessary reality and the possible. Ibn Arabi believes that the reality of existence is pure, the source of all impressions. It is extrinsic to the annihilation of pleasures, it is mere goodness. The gradation of being is of two general and specific branches and it should be noted that gradation exists in the reality of existence. This type of existence is crystalized in the view of Mola Sadra, and Ibn Arabi followers. According to him this type of unity is founded on the conceivability of the existence authenticity. When we see objects

two concepts come to our mind, one is the essence of existence, common in all beings and the other is the quiddity and essence attributed to a specific partition of objects, that is, our intellect determines the two modes of homonymy of existence and the difference of essence. This theory is interpreted as “Unity is similar to multiplicity and multiplicity is similar to unity”. Accordingly, although multiplicity is realized in existence of individuals, while multiplicity in existence type is not actualized and all typical beings are of unity. Unity of the same type is another interpretation of this type of unity. Mola Sadra, after accomplishing the authenticity of existence refers to the issue that: Is external existence like the conception of existence a unified issue or we have antagonistic entities in the extern? For example, the weak and strong light is associated in the principle of truth but they are different. This distinction is of the weakness and strength which are in the extern of the reality of light (Tabatabaei, V1, pp390-394). The beings are of the same faith and the issue is the unity of gradation (Molasadra, V1, p36).

3- Particular unity of existence

The particular unity of existence, similar to its multiplicity of “epiphanic forms” means that the only true existence is God and all else, though not a mirage or superstition are nothing but the epiphany of the most high necessity of existence attributed to His manifestations. In this meaning multiplicities are not null illusions, but are true by them and truth-apparent and the criterion of their reality is their appearance.

According to this theory, unity and existence are each other's circle and circuit fundamentally. Unity describes existence and existence, the presumption of unity. Reality is not a numerical unity to fit the multiplicity, but is a non-numerical attributive unity that embodies the multiplicity of appearance.

William Chittick writes “although the spiritual master, Ibn Arabi, never uses the interpretation of the unity of existence, he mostly uses statements that are similar to it and definitely he confirms the unity of existence in its real sense which is a justified claim, but it should not be claimed that unity of existence is the mere descriptive manner in ontology credited to him, since his emphasis on multiplicity is of the same intensity” (Chittick, 2006, p15). Since the Ibn Arabi’s thoughts the multiplicity of concrete entities is a real and accepted fact, the second part of Chittick idea is conflicting; consequently, Chittik has allowed for a confusion between multiplicity of epiphany forms with respect to their hierarchy.

The formal proposition regarding unity of existence made by Ibn Arabi

According to his theory on unity of existence, only one unique reality rules over the world and all creatures are viewed as the aspects, states and manifestations of this oneness, hence all of these constitute multiplicity and then the world comes into being. Consequently both the reality and creation are both the apparent and ascertained in the epiphanic forms; the unity is right, as well as the multiplicity, since the true essence of existence is right like the existence of all manifestations and epiphany. As mentioned before this multiplication of phenomena are not mentally posited, imaginative and surmised for elimination of the distinction between reality and creation, God and the world that would end up in incarnation, solidarity, anathema and paganism and put an end to the heavenly judgments and religious laws. Thus, the hierarchy of the transcendent essence has not descended to the level of creation and become similar, but reality is reality and creatio is creatio. In order to clarify the issue and make a connection among these theories and environmental ethics it is necessary to refer to a few of Ibn Arabi’s notions regarding the unity of existence extracted from his two famous works:

1- Reality as creation is not the creation

The reality of existence is Oneness. Despite what is sensed through our senses from that multiplicity of external beings and regardless of what celestial intellects achieve by Gods and the world's dichotomy, reality and creation are one in two aspects of Reality and Entity that is in the unity sense is reality and in multiplicity sense is creation. Consequently, cohesive nature of reality and creation and their distinction is reality contingent. That is the same truth exhibited in the theophany form is creation and the same creation that reunites with principle is reality.

2- When similarities and dissimilarities vanish the unity will appear and nothing remains but the reality

The reality of existence is One with no facsimile or contrariety; therefore, in Gnostic's intuition this potential generation that is the principle of heterogeneousness and source of multiplicity disappear and nothing is left but Divine Essence which is the Unity. Hence, there are no joins and no conjunctions, all are amortized in the real unique essence (Qeisari, p 208)

3- And the existence of anything is nothing but the existence of reality, God, exposed to us in the form of His own creatures

It is deduced that there is no other existence but His and possibilities and creatures are His essential self-manifestations and evidential and He is the essence of existence and Unity.

4- God Almighty is manifested in its creatures but this fact is beyond everybody's comprehension

The superior meaning extracted from the expression of Ibn Arabi refers to the point that God's manifestation in each one of His creatures is of a sort, but since the intelligentia of all self-manifestations and evidential are not absorbed, He is concealed from

the same intelligentia except the ones who know that it is the world of natural forms and the Logos, that is, the truth of the truth which is observed by them (Jahangiri, 2005, p 270-271). Ibn Arabi, has discussed this issue in both of his Bezels of wisdom and the Mythical Unveiling books

5- So in the circle of existence/essence there is nothing but God and if someone like Halaj claims “I am God” he means there is nothing and no one but God

The emphasis on this expression regarding the oneness of existence refers to the Absolute unity and the uniqueness of God in the realm of existence.

6- Therefore, there is nothing but Him, God the Mighty and we all are through Him

This expression reveals the consequentiality of potential entity, and in reality lack of their existence, since in the realm of existence circle of the society is Him, where entity and creatures are associated with His essence.

7- Finally, perhaps the most controversial expression of Ibn Arabi revealed in his Mythical Unveiling book to which many comments are addressed is “Glorified and Pure is the God that has made the objects appear and He is their transcendental object”

Finally, perhaps the most controversial expression of Ibn Arabi to which many comments are addressed in the following which is enriched with added couples:

Ibn Arabi in the poem says:
“my eyes have not seen anything
and my ears have not heard anything but His face and speech,
hence the existence of anything is in Him
and anybody’s welfare is in His calm realm”.

(Ibn Arabi, Fotoohat –e- Makieh, V2, p 459)

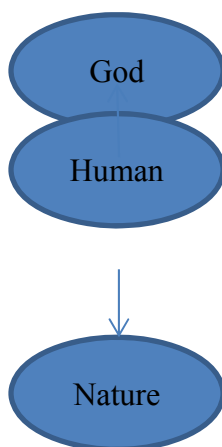
In fact his emphasis on effulgence and contingency of the external world and the nature therefore pulled the trigger in this author's mind to try to make a connection between the two realms: the theosophy (unity of existence) and the environmental ethics. The author believes that such procedure that in a sense respects the sanctity of the nature could construct the bridge between the intellect of both the realms that are distanced from each other, and cure the disease introduced by the post-modernism era. Now, if we suffice to the notion that human's-the most precious jewel of existence-role is considered as the most fundamental element in environmental ethics discussion and ignore its conception in Ibn Arabi's intellectual system it is obvious that we would not accomplish too much.

The human stance in Ibn Arabi's pantheist notion

Regarding human prestige, in his Bazels of Wisdom book he suggests "the world without human is like corpse and human was the anima of the world and it was creation of human that accomplished the world of being or the existence of the world's entirety" (Ibn Arabi, Adam-chapter, p 151). He ascribes human as the pupil of the eye or in another interpretation where he refers to human as the ring on the king's Finger by which the treasury box (all beings) is sealed and stamped by, without which the world cease to exist (Ibid). Ibn Arabi in paradoxical interpretations define human as aeternus temporal creator who fluctuates between God and subject spiritual states (Ibid, p 152). Human is the only creature that beat the divinity drum and claimed that he is God just like Pharaoh and yet the only creature that as a subject has degraded itself in slavery to God to a point lower than inanimate bodies and plant to a degree that has selected these elements as God and worshiped them as idols.

It is strange, then, that human who was once the circle and the circuit of world of being appointed by God as the sentinel of nature now destroys and robs the same; while we know that human is the intermediary between the nature and what lies beyond it and is God's agent to keep things in order since the beauty of nature is crystalized in the nature of such being.

Ibn Arab's theosophy order of existence, the diagram,



Whatever seems essential in this course is distinguishing human from other creatures. In this sense, Ibn Arabi has not divided the being in two creature and creature sectors in a manner where the most high Necessary existent is at the ascending arch and the world of possibilities is at the descend arch; on the contrary, he has put the intermediate element of the cognitive division of existence among the creatures, that is the prestigious agent for preservation of the infra world. At this point the truth that such a thought and cognitive relation could establish the valuable and unique paradigm in the bioethics and the determined characteristics of the environmental ethics occurs to one and the practitioners in this realm are invited to investigate the theosophical teachings of Ibn Arabi.

Ibn Arabi's opinion and contemplations on environmental ethics

His doctrine is based on "oneness of existence". His perception of the world differs from other sage and men of opinion regarding recognition of bioethics drastically. The doctrine of oneness of existence justifies the multiplicity of existence and even the gradation of being on one hand and presents the perspective of unity of existence on the other. From the particular unity angle, creation is the truth not in the sense that there is a creator and creature separate from it. The creator and creature are not separate beings. The world of existence is the radiation of His manifestation. In order to make this truth understood Ibn Arabi uses light as an example. Light in its essence is the unity, extensive and colorless while manifold in manifestations and is the sense of weakness/intensity and colors it differs. In another resemblance he considered the world of creation as the mirror where truth is looking at itself (Ibn Arabi, Adam-Chapter, p143). Once more, based on the pantheism God is the pure being and the rest of the creatures are subject to annihilation.

Consequently the whole world from God to human, animal and inanimate are not but one thing, that is existence and their distinction is merely in their hierarchical order of their status. This in fact that is pantheism, constitutes one of the principle arguments of Ibn Arabi with respect to environmental issues in depth. According to his global view there exists a world that makes a connection with its creator regarding the essence of homogeneity and reality and based on this fact, anything in the external world one of the necessities of which is the environment represent the essence of His emission, a shadow of absolute being with divine value. Now if we claim that, of course based on Ibn Arabi's interpretation and his unique ideology, the world is reality and creation is reality and creatures (the hierarchy of existence) are of the same substance and are one it will be not be considered as an exaggeration (Ibid).

Sadi writes:

I said I would reach the gratification marriage one day.
The answer was, look carefully, perhaps you are there
And somewhere else in his work he says:
Friend is closer to me than I am
More amazing that I am away from him
What am I to do in telling that the friend
Is not to me and I am abandoned
(Saadi, 2010, p 2)

Multiplicity, according to Ibn Arabi is not illusory and it is not subjective consideration but in reality is fact and world of existence is actual in its hierarchy.

Shabstari writes:

Look who does rain drop from the sea
Took so many forms and shapes
Wapor, cloud, rain and flower frost
Plant and animal, perfect human
All was a drop at the end of the beginning
So he made all these objects similitude
(Shabstari, 2007,p 220)

Mola Sadra, one of the greatest interpreters of Ibn Arabi in his work the "Evidence of precious stone" regarding entity and objectivity towards the properties-absorption of creator and creature or apparent and explicit term-announces that since the most illuminative object is existence and epiphany of anything is due to His manifestation and luminous nature; therefore, existence everywhere and in any creature is light and life (Mola Sadra,2007,p 290). This commentary on existence embodies all that is needed for evaluation: knowledge, conception, life, strength etc. This appraisal of existence is an essential and real fact, it is not subjective consideration or accidental; therefore, such a world where all elements are live, dynamic and percipient must be respected and honored by mankind meanwhile be considered as numinous. This

vision is vital since it is applied only on live beings; that are the speaking human and environment full of sounds not human and inanimate object.

Ibn Arabi does not suffice to this and he strictly insists on and highlights the idea that having or being endowed with is one side of the coin, while the other is its proper manipulation, protection and sustenance if the objective is to appreciate Godly phenomena with respect to Godly essence, the explicit term.(Ibn Arabi, Adam-Chapter, p 151) What is acquired from those formal propositions is the emphasis on the human prestige and status provided that his generosity is acknowledged and his mission towards protection of the environment that is deposited to him by God is respected through himself since nature and the environment are in his custody.

With no doubt as observed in Ibn Arabi's through nature is the manifestation of God as a deposit near a highly credited and honest being, the human. Through this notion it could be deduced that no one is allowed to launch an offensive or cause harm to nature and the environment. In this mental order the nature is a conscious and objective entity. According to Quran (Sureh dokhan,Ayeh29), the sky and the earth have sense and awareness and they are able to cry although human thinks otherwise. In Ibn Arabi's notion of order of unity of existence the whole world consists of a comprehensive unified harmony, with nature as a major part of it and all belong to Him, and human is obligated and responsible for the wellbeing of nature, environment and all that surrounds him.

Conclusion

It is Ibn Arabi's specific view towards the concept of existence that has encouraged the authors to resort to gnosis paradigm with respect to the contemporary issues regarding the environmental ethics. His views are in depth and holistic with superior respect towards notion of existence, which in reality puts everything on the ascending arc

but this ultra-vision has never rejected the descending arc. He has a comprehensive and systematic view on existence as a unity not a portion. He not only has not considered any borders between the nature as the attributes God and the metaphysics, but has proposed the objectivity of God almighty with all its attributes and phenomena. With all the consciousness towards the descending arc (the nature) his mystic gnosis has always been stationed of the ascending arc.

Considering Ibn Arab's mythical teachings and what surrounds them regarding environmental ethics we realized that he has apportioned the holism of existence into explicit term and epiphany form. The explicit form or God Almighty that is absolute and unconditional come in two layers, that is "world theophonism" which is of two sections: the jewel of existence, the human being and the shadow and manifestation of God and as Ibn Arabi would put it the "bowel that reflects God, the nature". Based on this procedure the pyramid of existence has three layers: the ascending arc, where He is the explicit term; the descending arc where nature is with all its aspects and the new layer that lies in between the first two, the human. According to Ibn Arabi human's cohesive agency and functionality, here human is facing his highest responsibility as the member of holism, the heaviest load on his shoulders. The most intriguing point is that Ibn Arabi does not consider nature as lifeless system but having features as light, life, power, filling... Nature exists with all its aspects and members that do not wait to be systemized and shaped or formed by human, the supper-being. Hence, according to Ibn Arabi human is the comprehensive total of His manifestations with respect to protection of nature, not the manipulator that enslaves the nature. What Eb Arabi sees in nature is divine singularity, a system full of individualities that he names it "individuality of nature", something not exactly but as of same dignity as human with all its plentitude. Here one is self-determined and active, the human, and the other is not self-determined but dynamic and troubled, the nature. Consequently, human perceives the nature guardianship. This is accomplished when Ibn Arabi's

“the sectarian objectivity of the correlative act (the nature and all its aspects) with reality” are considered and the sacredness of nature is observed by human Based on the concept of “Oneness” of existence, human as the intermediately layer of pyramid of the existence and as the guardian of both the arcs the nature as a mere natural resource is transformed into a “Divine and evident individual” in the realm of environmental ethics. Under these circumstances where the whole world from soil to the heaven is at His presence the nature would be considered as a sacred entity and free from all evil.

Endnotes:

- 1- Most linguists differentiate the terms Morals and Ethics. Ethics means morality with an emphasis on recognizing good and bad and right and wrong on certain acts in human conduct with respect to their skills in specific tasks. Morality in common sense has to do with spoken words regarding human features his conduct is general in all realms of life.(P7 1997 joycelyn)
- 2- Meta Ethics
- 3- Descriptive Ethics
- 4- Normative Ethics
- 5- General Normative Ethics
- 6- Applied Normative Ethics (For further information refer to Tom Beauchamp publication edited by contemporary issues in bioethics, nursing ethics journal, N.15, USA)
- 7- Bioethics
- 8- V.R Potter
- 9- In materialistic view, nature is a single motif and a material instrument with specific features; while according to Ibn Arabi nature is troublesome in nature.

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