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The Source of Indian Spiritual Manifestations Upanishad

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Abstract

Upanishads¹, also called "Vedanta"² or "end of Veda", refers to the end of "Vedas"³. According to the classification of Hindu sacred works, Upanishads are supplementary writings attached to "Aranyaka"⁴. Based on Hindu traditions, the wise people and receivers of the Divine Commandments were the creators of Upanishads. These people, who were called "Caviya Satiya Sarvata"⁵, used to live deep in untouched and dark jungles of India where they meditated and studied their own self. They expressed the spiritual experiences inspired to them (by the Divine Source) and flowed within their souls, in the form of Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Existence), decorated them with the dressing of mysterious words, and formed them as compressed synthetic ideas. The era of jungle-life was started with the theses of "Aranyaka" and ended with Upanishads, a period which can metaphorically be called the education period in the depth of jungle.

According to Max Muller's theory, Upanishads are the oral teachings of masters (morshids) to their close followers. It must

be noted that most of the prominent theoretical schools in India and even in Buddhism have originated from Upanishads.

With regard to the main subject in "Upanishads", the present paper tries to establish the specific spirituality, self-purification and the unique truth of the ancient India.

Keywords: Upanishad, Spiritual manifestations, Internal truth, Atman, Brahman, self-knowledge.

Introduction

Upanishad sometimes means knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge and wisdom enables man to know himself better, and is to eradicate ignorance. The root "sad" and prefix "upa" together refer to the humbleness of the followers before their master (Joshi, 2006: 3).

At the present, there are more than 200 Upanishads, but the number of the official members in "Muktika- Upanishads"⁶ is said to be 108 (Naeeni, 2003: 100). During the reign of Shah Jahan (13th century A.H.), his son Darashokuh, assisted by Pandets or clerics of the temples, translated about 50 Upanishads into Persian. These translations were named "Sir-e Akbar".

In fact, Upanishad is a song of the truth which man has been able to recite at old ages. Upanishad says the truth lies within us. The mystic expression "Ahm Brahma Asami"⁷ reminds us of the Sufist saying "Ana al-Haq" uttered by the great Iranian mystic, Mansur Hallaj.

Upanishad, the Philosophy of knowledge of Self and Knowledge of God, Epistemology and pure knowledge in Upanishad

Upanishad is a legacy of old days of India; it's an instruction for shunning the transient mundane pleasures. Those trivial interests which, as a result of ignorance and selfishness, prevent man from

achieving knowledge and the objective of eternal life, and eventually from theism. These texts include Vedic religious rituals and ceremonies and a caste system. Sacrifice is not blind killing of humans before man-made gods, but it is self-devotion, praying, thinking and reflection about the truth beyond everything, within us.

Upanishad starts with an internal journey, but such journey needs moral preparations, Karam⁸ and virtuous deeds. To reach "Moksha"⁹ or freedom from daily habits and abominations of the transient world, one must direct his thinking toward self-knowledge. The main subject of Upanishad is Brahman, the one who is not influenced by time, place and people at all.

Higher Knowledge in Hinduism

As Hinduism is based on sacrifice and a caste system, Hindus do not care for philosophy and rational issues; they also have no interest in learning Upanishads. The teachings of Upanishads were taught by wise Brahmans and those who had understood the philosophy of self knowledge secretly and after passing hard tests for they feared that unauthorized people might get access to those teachings, which is like giving a sharp sword to a drunken Barbarian. The origin and essence of Upanishad is the absolute truth and noble existence, which is interpreted as "Brahman" or "Brahma"¹⁰. Brahman is the source of existence and the existence itself. Brahman is "existence", and Atman is its "manifestation", and everything will eventually return to it Shankar Acharya Acharj¹¹, the greatest philosopher and teacher of Veda School, says: "Brahman is neither general, nor partial; neither tall, nor short; neither wet, nor dry; neither shadow, nor dark; neither air, nor Akash (sky); it is not concrete; nothing is attached to it; it doesn't have any smell, any eye or any ear..." (Naeeni, 2003, Vol.1: 89). The main subject of Upanishad is unity of Brahman and Atman, that is Atman is Brahman, and Brahman is the unique absolute truth

which has no partner and peer; it is existence itself, and except for it everything else is nothing but a fantasy and dream.

According to Upanishad, piety is the criterion for human's superiority. Although history of this valuable work dates back to 800 B.C., its thought and reflection attracted all those intellectuals who were suffering from the caste system of their society and wished for pure truth to free them. Upanishad does not consider any position for old clerics. Many of the masters (Morshids) were not from the Brahmins' class, but from the Kshatriya (army) caste. In this religion there is no trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva or any other temple considered the home of God or deities .

Pure Knowledge in upanishad

Upanishad is a quest for truth, and seeks it from the path of logic and rationality. It does not ban anyone from following this path because of his/ her religion, color or caste. In fact, this blessing is not something allocated to certain peoples. Self knowledge and understanding of the truth is the due right of every human (Ibid: 306).

In Hinduism, regarding research issues and priority in reading the holy texts, Upanishads usually come last. As a general norm, Hindus start the reading with the four Vedas. Then in order to enter the scientific world of religion they go for Brahmana (some theses about the meanings and interpretation of sacrifice ritual and other religious ceremonies and traditions including explanations of Vedas actions) to use their instructions for conducting their own religious ceremonies.

Finally they read Upanishads. Despite Brahmins which are to be read during the youth, Upanishads' reading starts when a person approaches his/her death time, and takes refuge in the depth of jungles in order to reflect on the meaning of life and the secret of

existence. Upanishads eradicate ignorance, helps man get closer to God, and create links between man and the teacher. Such teachings and readings are exclusive to the elite (not from the caste view) who have moved up the hierarchy ladder. Mystics and Sufis pass the same road.

Now the question is how the Hindus, who believe in dualism, have accepted unity of the creator of the universe. What is the main challenge and problem regarding the nature of the relation between the self (Jira) and God (Brahman)? Some people like Madhova¹² believe in dualism (Davaita) which means the self and God are two separate things.

Cognition in Upanishad

Some others like Shankara¹³, believe that these two are absolutely similar and the same; the self is God and God is the self. This view is called Monism. Others like Ramanuja¹⁴ believe that the relation between self and God is the relation between parts to the whole. This viewpoint is called Qualified Monism (Visistadvaita).

Although Hindus have a long history of worshiping various gods and goddesses, like Agni (the goddess of fire) and Indra (the goddess of lightening), it has been mentioned in Rigveda that these deities are the different manifestations of one single truth.

The various types of Indian monism since the Vedic period up to the present believe in various manifestations of God, and the unity of all of the manifestations in God. Therefore Indian theism or monism has a special quality which distinguishes it from monism in Christianity or Islam. Neither Islam nor Christianity presents any symbol for God's anger and rage, while Hindus believe that God's anger and rage manifests in the form of Shiva's dance (Tandava)¹⁵ and opening of its third eye. The power and force comes with the appearance of Goddess Shakti¹⁶ in the form of a statue in temples .

Although it is stipulated in the Constitution of India that the government of the country is a secular one, religion has ever been alive and very active in India to the extent that the teachings and morality of Upanishads led to a religious awakening and reformation in the 19th century. The leaders of the reformist movements, who were proud of religious legacy and advanced philosophy of Upanishads and Vedas, founded the reformist movement of “Brahmo Samaj” in 1828 led by Ram Mohan Roy. Ram Mohan Roy was from the Bengali Brahman class. Having thoroughly studied the philosophy of east and west successfully and being influenced by the philosophy of Upanishads, he believed in one god independent of all religions and beliefs, the omnipotent God who is unidentifiable for His indescribable nature.

Ram Mohan rejected wrong habits and traditions like underage marriage and Seti (the burning of widows after the death of their husbands), none of which mentioned in Upanishads. He fought

such wrong traditions strictly, and condemned “Puranaha”¹⁷ and “Tantara”¹⁸ rituals, especially worship of a statue. He had no interest in the common religion, and believed in the Upanishad implication of God as an impersonal absolute power. He used Upanishad teachings to fight the bigot Hindus, who believed in a personal god as a significant part of their religious experiences. After Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) founded the second reformist movement called “Arya Samaj” in 1875. This movement fought with the Indian caste system on the basis of self knowledge and understanding of the truth, and propagated equality of classes not according to race, but according to Karam or virtuous deeds (Shattuck, 2002: 149).

This philosophy of monism and avoiding dualism and its teachings turned the first none- Muslim Persian speaking poet “Mirza Manuher Tusni” into a poet believing in Wahdat al- Wujud. He says:

For one glimpse of her look
The idol, idol house and idol worshiper are all drunken.

It must be mentioned that the 800 year influence of Persian language and Islamic thought paved the way for interaction of religions and Muslim Sufis with Hindus at the time of Akbar Shah (9th century A.H.), and inspired Brahmans like Biragi¹⁹ to say Persian poems regarding the unity of man and God. As Brahmans were the only people responsible for the religious aspects, it was hard for them to follow a philosophy other than Hinduism, but Biragi reports an event involving a radical Brahman named Shankar Acharya:

When Shankar was taking a bath in the river, a street-sweeper from a low caste of the society put his clothes next to his. It made Shankar so angry that he immediately put his clothes in the water to wash them. The man also does so at the same time. The Brahman becomes more angry, but regardless of their caste the river had cleaned their clothes both! Biragi,

who was aware of the teachings of Upanishad and Islamic Sufism, and knew Persian language and Iranian mystic poets, says from the street-sweeper's tongue:

Spirituality in Persian language and Upanishad

کافر و مومن فرنگی و یهود
ارمنی و گبر و ترسا و جهود
جلوه‌های ذات من هست ای جوان
غیر ذاتم کیست را کون و مکان
گر ببیند چشم صوفی سوی غیر
بازماند مرکب صوفی ز سیر
پاکی تن نیست مقبول خدا
پاکی دل هست پیش حق روا

Pagan and believer, foreigner and Jew,
Armenian and Gheber, Christian and Hebrew,
Are different manifestations of my nature, oh young man;

Other than me, who has the whole universe?
And in return speaks about himself:

خویشتن را این زمان بشناختم

سر به اوج معرفت افراختم

بیش از این چشم خرد بُد موج بین

بحر بین شد این زمان چشم از یقین

I came to know myself;
I raised my head to the pinnacle of knowledge;
Before this I just saw the wave,
But now for my faith I see the sea.

Biragi, using "Bi Gham" (without a sorrow) as his pen-name, links Islamic Sufism to Vedanta and the general principle of Wahdat al-Wujud (unity of existence) in his Masnavi:

O Bi Gham, do not talk about love with anyone except your
love;
It's a secret, do not talk about it just everywhere.
If the whole world ask you about the truth,
Beware! Speak only in confession, not rejection.
Oh man! If you see the face of that sweetheart,
You'll see the whole universe beautiful.
Look at the mirror less, lest you may become selfish;
You become a mirror yourself to see Him
(Abdullah, 1992: 1341)

A more interesting matter in ancient Indian traditions is that, how human mind in the preliminary steps of his culture has reached to a degree of intellectual growth to find self-knowledge and knowledge of God?!

There are examples of the old texts of Upanishads found in the 17th stanza of Yajurveda²⁰ (Naeeni, 2003. Vol.1: 425).

And you the owner of plants, Namaskar²¹ (thank you),
Namaskar.
And you the owner of all benefits and interests, Namaskar,
Namaskar.

And you the owner of land and sea, Namaskar,²⁶
Namaskar.
And you the extender of earth, Namaskar, Namaskar.
And you the giver of authority, Namaskar, Namaskar.
And you who are present everywhere and there's nowhere
you can't reach, Namashkar, Namashkar.
And...

In this stanza, more than 500 times the unique soul, who is the owner of everything and independent of everything, has been praised. This is the most beautiful manifestation of the elevated thinking of man in ancient India.

The sixth stanza of Apankhata Tij Bindu²² reads: and it has three eyes and three characteristics; and it is the place of everything and the owner of the three worlds; and it has no face, no movement and no doubt; It is self-existent (formless) and is not in need of anything (Ibid: 421).

The seventh stanza reads: And no characteristic or color affects Him, and He has all of the characteristics and colors. The tenth stanza reads: Ignorant people consider Him inexistent; inexistency does not reach Him, and He is ever-existent.

The first stanza of Apankhata Nrisingha²³ by Atharvaveda Khand I reads:

All of the angles told Parjapat²⁴: "Atma who is more delicate than any delicate thing, and is like Aum²⁵, tell us about it." Parjapat accepted and said: "This universe is Aum, whatever happened, is happening and will happen are all Aum. And whatever higher than these three times is Aum. And all of these are Brahm, and Jivatma is also Brahm. Aum, which is Brahm, becomes unified with Jivatma, and then that becomes unified with Brahm, which is Aum, and this one has no oldness and is immortal and eternal."

The eighth Priyata of Khand XII says, "Parjapat reads: "This body is mortal and death has confined it; Atma is immortal and the place of Atma is the body. When Atma is given to the body, it feels pleasure and pain. As long as Atma belongs to the body, there is no escape from pleasure or pain, and as it leaves the body then there will be no pleasure or pain. This Atma is named Jivatma because of its attachment to the body."

The 18th stanza of Apankhata Isha Bas²⁶ from Yajurveda reads: "Oh! AGNI , Oh! You who are in the form of light, guide us to the path of goodness, and give us wealth, greatness and salvation. Oh! You who are aware of our bad deeds, forgive our sins, to you we express our humbleness."

Anybody who attain Makt (freedom and release) and salvation, after death, all his delicate external and internal sensations vanish in hira-nyagarbh²⁷, and his Jivatma becomes unified with Atma. His dirty body turns into soil. The Gianian (wise men) and mystics ask their own deeds: Oh our deeds! will you remember us after death, and oh consequences of our deeds! Will you remember us? For we have never noticed the deeds and outcomes of them. And they tell the light of Nature that oh jyotisvarupa²⁸, that is oh you the nature who are in the form of light, direct us to the right path and give us wealth and greatness, for you are aware of our deeds, and forgive our sins. Thank you very much (Namaskar).²⁷

Conclusion

Upanishads with their advisory instructions and teachings have been the source of spiritual manifestations of India from ancient times. As there is a saying in Rigveda which stipulates that various deities are manifestations of a single truth; Tat Tvam Asi (Thou art thou), the natural identity, the firm base and foundation of all metaphysical issues of Upanishads. Despite diversity of goals and

differences in the resource, in all Upanishads there is a tendency toward originality of unity (monism).

All various forms of Indian monism since the Vedic period to the present believe in various manifestations of God and their unity in the single unique God. Therefore, Indian monism has a unique feature which differentiates it from that of Christianity or Islam.

Philosophy of Upanishad answers all of the questions that intellectuals and scholars used to have in mind in ancient periods.

These questions include: What is the truth? What does the universe symbolize? Does the existence have any truth by itself, or is it just a mental manifestation or fantasy? Are human's behaviors and deeds based on truth or fantasy? What is the meaning of human's life?

Generally speaking, Upanishads are persistent in one main premise: all things either material or spiritual including human, animal and plant, spatial things, intangible spirits and gods, are all floating in the sea of the truth of unity. That world is beyond tangibility; it is end of the material and the natural world; it is unlimited and self-existent; it is God and God only.

Endnotes

1. Upanishad: It is composed of the Sanskrit words "upa" (close), "ni" (down) and "sad"(to sit) which in fact refers to pupils sitting in a lower level before their teacher (master) to learn secret wisdom. Max Muller believes that this school has elevated human thought to its pinnacle.
2. Vedanta: End of Veda. Vedanta, in fact, is the only representative of Wahdat al-wujud religion in India at the present time. The founder of this school of thought is Vyasa, also called Badarayana. The great teacher of this philosophy was Shankar Acharya from Malabar (Naeeni, 1381: 609).
3. Veda: These books are the first source of Hindi philosophy. The word Veda in Sanskrit comes from the root of knowing and its expression meaning is the divine knowledge or wisdom. Veda is also called "Śruti", which refers to the "auditory science" as opposed to "Smriti" or "memorized science", the former means direct

science that has an origin apart from man, therefore, it is not achieved through thinking. The latter refers to the knowledge which has been transferred from generation to generation, and in fact it is the legacy of ancient teachers and leaders. For most of the Hindus, Vedas are divine revelations, eternal books, and the most sacred religious texts with comprehensive and understandable teachings. These teachings cover all aspects of individual's life, and define one's duties and responsibilities in all situations of life, from childhood, youth, education period, marriage and death. They are the reference for all individual and social regulations. All judicial and social rules must be based on Vedas. Religious ceremonies and rituals, prayers and sacrifices must follow Vedic instructions. And finally, they are the base of all schools of philosophical and ideological principles. Vedas consist of four books each containing lots of philosophic texts and theses or interpretations, which are divided into four groups:

1. Samhita, 2. Brahmana, 3. Aranyaka, 4. Upanishad.

The four Vedic books are:²⁸

a. Rig-Veda: It is composed of 1028 poetic pieces of worship. These pieces are songs for praising and worshipping gods. In fact, Rigveda is the poetic Veda.

b. Sama-Veda: It is mostly the repetition of the same poems of Rigveda, but consists of 75 more principal pieces which are specific for sacrificial ceremonies. Sama-Veda is the Veda of rhythms.

c. Yajur-Veda: composed of poems and prose for various sacrificial ceremonies. It is the Veda of sacrifice.

Atharva-Veda: It is historically older than the other three books, and aims at satisfaction of demons and vicious ghosts.

4. Aranyaka: related to jungle, dwelling in jungle. It is the name of some of the religious and philosophic texts that expressed the meaning of religious ceremonies, and discuss the nature and characteristics of God. These writings are attachments to Brahmana, and refer to the fact that Brahmas retired to jungles. Some of Aranyakas were gradually destroyed, but there are still four Aranyakas:

- Brihad Aranyaka
- Taittiriya Aranyaka
- Aitareya Aranyaka
- Kaushitaki Aranyaka

Aranyakas are closely related to Upanishads, and sometimes the names Upanishad and Aranyaka are used interchangeably. Aranyaka texts were compiled for those classes of people who have devoted themselves to thinking and reflecting about philosophic and spiritual aspects. Historically, Aranyakas are the dawn of thinking (Naeeni, 2003, V. 2: 494)

5. Caviya Satiya Sarvata Upanishads: Referring to the poems memorized through hearing.

6. Muktika-Upanishads: One of the names of Upanishads which consists of 108 Upanishads itself. The date of compilation or writing of Muktika Upanishad is not exactly known (Ibid: 100).

7. Ahm Brahma Asami: I am Brahma: Ahm=I, Brahma= God, Asami= am.
8. Karam: Also referred to as Karman, means performance, behavior, deeds. According to Hinduism karam means the consequences of man's behaviors and good or bad deeds, which are transferred from one's present life to the next life, and its influence is apparent in the next life (Badiee, 1382: 48).
9. Moksha: Freedom, release. According to Hinduism (and most of native religions in India) when one dies and his/her spirit leaves the body, shortly after it comes back in a different body which is in accordance with what he/she has done. All of the sins he/she has committed in the former life affects the next life. Everybody gets the reward for his/her own behavior (karam). As long as the influence of one's good or bad behavior exists, one must pass through the life cycle, the birth and death cycle, and face the consequence of one's behaviors by these repeated comings and leavings. According to the beliefs of some people, life and death do not equal existence and mortality, but changing clothes or frame. As long as, through piety, diligence, chastity, and self-discipline, a person has not reached eternal salvation, he/she will not be released from the pain of repeated birth and death (Ibid: 581).
10. Brahman or Brahma: God of creation, the first of the three Hindu gods, and the elevated spirit who has appeared in the form of the creator of the Universe. He was created by the seed of universe which was the reason for all reasons. He is the same Parjapat, who is the father and creator of all creatures, especially the father other parjapats. According to Hindu mythology, when Brahma created the universe, it remained untouched for one Brahman day which is equal to 2160000000 years. Then when Brahma was asleep, the universe and whatever in it were set on fire. But the scientist (Rishis) and gods and elements endured, and Brahma created the world again after waking up. And this process repeats for 100 Brahman years. For more information look ²⁹
10. Wilkins, 2003: 43; Dowson, 2005: 58.
11. Shankar Acharya: The greatest teacher of the Vedant school.
12. Madhova: The Vedic philosopher of 14th Century.
13. A Vedic philosopher.
14. A Vedic philosopher.
15. Tandava-Tandu: one of siva's attendants he was killed in music, and invented the dance called by Tandova.
16. Shakti: The goddess of power.
17. Puranai: old hencean ancient legend or tale of olden time.
18. Tantra: Role, ritual; the title of a numerous class of religious and magical works, generally of later date than the puranas and representing a later development of religion although the worship of the female energy had its origine at an earlier period.
19. Biragi: A non-Muslim Persian speaking poet who said mystic poems about Wadat al-Wujud. His pen name was Bi Gham.
20. refer to endnote 3.

21. Appreciation with respect, greeting.
22. It means “a piece of light from Atharvaveda.”
23. Apankhat nirsingha: The last Upanishad, from Atharvaveda, translated by Dara Shokuh.
24. Parjapat: The god of creation, who is supervising all creatures and protector of life. The first god created with the absolute nature, (in Vedas) this name applied to refer to the elevated position of divinity, but later it was also used for Shiva.
25. Om (Aum): The great name. It is the holy name that is used at the beginning and end of prayers. The word Om has been written at the beginning of the Holy Book. It is like the Arabic word Hu. It is believed that this word is composed of three letters, each of which taken from one prayer (Ibid: 649).
26. Apankhat isha bas: It means the wisdom of the great creator .
27. Hiran garbh: The god of the whole creation and the keeper of earth and the sky, who gives everybody life and self (Ibid, 649).
28. The entity which is in the form of light; absolute light (Ibid: 519).

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***Tashbīh* and *Tanzīh* in the Worldview of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Critics¹**

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Abstract

God’s comparability/ similarity (*tashbīh*) and God’s incomparability/ transcendence (*tanzīh*), ought to be considered as focal concepts in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *weltanschauung*. This short article deals with analysis of the concepts of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* in the worldview of three main critics of the *Shaykh al-Akbar* Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638 CE/1240 H), i.e., the well-known *kubrawī master*, ‘Alā’ ad Dawlah Simnānī (d. 736/1337), the celebrated Naqshbandī master, Aḥmad Sirhindī (d.1033/1624), known as *Mujaddid Alf-Thānī* (“reviver of the second millennium”), and the Chishtī master, Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī Gisūdirāz (d.825/1422) of Delhi. I have dealt with their criticism of Ibn ‘Arabī’s worldview extensively, utilizing a detailed methodology, in my book, *Ibn ‘Arabī and Kubrawīs: The Reception of the School of Ibn ‘Arabī by Kubrawī Mystics* (KY: Fons Vitae, 2019). In the book, I have referred to these three figures by coining the term the “*shuhūdī triangle*.” Here, I attempt to provide a quick summary of their criticism, through a short analysis of the concepts of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*.

Keywords: *tashbīh*, *tanzīh*, Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī, ‘Alā’ ad Dawlah Simnānī, Aḥmad Sirhindī, Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī Gisūdirāz, *shuhūdī* school of Islamic mysticism

Introduction

In the worldview of Ibn ‘Arabī’s major critics in the *shuhūdī* school of Islamic mysticism², such as Simnānī, Sirhindī, and Gisūdirāz, emphasis on saving the *tanzīh* of the Absolute appears as the most central concern. These masters identified the idea of God’s transcendence as the essential “missing” element in the worldview of Ibn ‘Arabī and his school. By looking at the major works in the *wujūdī* school, one is able to view consistent efforts undertaken by Ibn ‘Arabī and his major cohorts to make the aspect of *tanzīh* (as the creed of God’s transcendence/inaccessibility/incomparability), the foremost embracing realm for the aspect of *tashbīh* (God’s accessibility/comparability or similarity).

“The Missing Element” in the View of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Critics

Although some of the contemporary scholars suggest that the “difference between the system of Ibn ul-‘Arabī and...Sirhindī is fundamental,”³ there are also others who do not find them in direct contrast, or have recognized common grounds between their views.⁴

Generally speaking, the “missing” element in approaching the concept of “transcendence,” one might claim, is “missing” the methodical and innate correlation between the concepts *tanzīh* and *tashbīh*. In other words, *no* affirmation or proof of the concept of *tanzīh*, be it *juz’ī* (“particular”) or *kullī* (“general/universal”), has

the capability of entering the human being’s mind, without at least one accessible or immediate ground for *tashbīh*.

In all occasions, any type or level of “transcendence,” necessitates the existence of a subject or concept (either mental or external) for *tashbīh* in the first place. The level and degree of accessibility or inaccessibility of a concept, subject, or an existent entity, will be always determined, proved, accepted or denied after the formation and function of *tashbīh*, and therefore, making a comparison between something *shabīh* (“accessible/similar”) and *munazzah* (“inaccessible/peerless”).

The worldview of the aforementioned critics (i.e., Simnānī, Sirhindī, and Gisūdirāz) must not be excluded from this general rule. The preferred terminologies, utilized by these masters, such as Simnānī’s *wujud al-Haqq* (“the Real Wujūd”), Sirhindī’s *wujūd al-zillī* (“shadowy existence”), and Gisūdirāz’s *warā’ al-warā’* (“beyond the beyond”)- as their chosen alternatives to Ibn ‘Arabī’s *wujud al-Mutlaq*, or the Absolute Existence- which represent the culmination of their understanding of the Absolute or a clearer *tanzīh* of God, were all the products of their evident moments of experiencing an *organic existential track*, which I call “*tashbīh*→*tanzīh* reciprocation/equilibrium.” In other words, without *tashbīh*, there would be no *tanzīh*, and every level of *tanzīh*, is the outcome of a precedent (or a priori) level of *tashbīh*.

This *badīhī* (“evident”), *fiṭrī* (“innate”), and *asāsī* (“basic”) aspect of correlation between the concepts of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* seems to receive no serious attention in the observations and assessments of Ibn ‘Arabī’s critics, or in most of the contemporary treatments of these cardinal concepts (i.e., *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*). As an evidence for functionality of this type of correlation (between *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*), which manifests itself in the gradual (and perhaps, subconscious) changes and discrepancies in the view of Ibn ‘Arabī’s critics regarding *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*, Sirhindī’s case might be a proper example.

By utilizing the term “*zill*” (shadow) to describe the idea of *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, Sirhindī attempts to differentiate between God Himself (i.e., His Essence) and the rest of existence or *mā-siwa Allāh* “(everything else”), while trying to describe their ties or relevance at the same time. But his approach to this term (i.e., *zill*) has gone through several revisions and reconsiderations:

At the first glance, the Mujaddid [Sirhindī] looks like using the term *zill* very much in the sense of ‘*aks* or *partaw*, i.e., *reflection*; implying the suggestion that it is, so to say, somehow a part of *aṣl*. While himself at the stage of *zilliyāt*, the Mujaddid tends to think of *zill* in this sense, though even there *zill* indicates for him a lower reality than ‘*aks* or *partaw* (M. [Sirhindī’s *Maktūbāt*] Vol, II, Ep. 1). Later we find that he uses the term *zill* to indicate the *Ghayriyyāt* or *otherness* of the multiplicity from the *aṣl* or God (...M., Vol. I, Ep. 160); and that the purpose of employing it is to express the *insignificance* of the multiplicity in contrast to the *aṣl* or God, as well as to show that the multiplicity *cannot exist* without the *aṣl* (...M., Vol. II, Eps. 1, 11). However, in the discussion of *takwīn* or creation the Mujaddid strongly tends to use the term only in the sense of an *effect* (M., Vol. II. Ep. 4). In the end the Mujaddid realizes the inadequacy of the term, discards it, and speaks, in its place, of the *acts of creation* which are incomprehensible to man (M., Vol. III, Ep. 122).⁵ [Emphasis added with some modifications]

Based on the foundational and existential correlation between the concepts of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*, as explained above, we might be able to trace the very reason for the appearance of these changes in Sirhindī’s approaches to the concept of *zill* and therefore, the idea of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* as a whole. The core motive for designing the idea of *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, was to save the transcendence of God; a factor which was considered by Sirhindī and his co-thinkers, to be “missing” from Ibn ‘Arabī’s idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. One of the major reasons for approaching *tanzīh*, as the missing element in Ibn ‘Arabī’s worldview, perhaps, was the extensive presence of the aspect of *tashbīh* in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought. But as mentioned above,

reaching any level of *tanzīh*, always begins by/from some level of *tashbīh*.

This is more evident in the case of proving the “absolute and perfect transcendence” of the Absolute (God), by the imperfect and non-absolute human being. The above-quoted Sirhindī’s approaches to the term *zill*, offers an example of a zealous seeker in a relentless yearning and endeavor to find the best possible representative formula for the absolute transcendence of God or *tanzīh*. Because of the absolute inaccessibility of the Absolute on the level of His Essence (*Aḥadiyyah*, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s term), which is the very source of His absolute transcendence, Sirhindī, in an effort to find the best description of this eminent level of *tanzīh*, needed to gradually and systematically change and modify the other side of this reciprocation (i.e. *tashbīh*).

Therefore, he constantly re-examined the meaning of the most accessible *tashbīhī* element of his theory (i.e., the concept of *zill*), in order to reach a better understanding of the ties between *zill* (either as reflection, multiplicity, or otherness, etc.), and the inaccessible Source of *tanzīh* or *aṣl*. The side of *tashbīh* is always the first considerable (or re-considerable) side (of *tashbīh*→*tanzīh* reciprocation), through which one is able to re-examine his understanding of God’s transcendence (i.e., *tanzīh*, the second side). Sirhindī, perhaps subconsciously, followed the same general rule, and defined the accessible side or *tashbīh* (i.e., existence, or *zill* in his term), first, as a shadow or reflection, and then as absolutely other (than God) or sheer insignificant multiplicity, and later, as an effect (compare to the Absolute Cause), and finally replaced it with the “incomprehensible acts of creation.” The “incomprehensible acts of creation,” described by Sirhindī, seems to manifest his description of the Absolute’s *tanzīh*. Although Sirhindī expresses this incomprehensibility, in relation to the (Absolute’s) acts of “creation,” and not the Absolute Himself, but because, the creation is the only existing source available to us (for *tashbīh*), Sirhindī, in order to describe the *tanzīh* of the Absolute, refers to His act of

creation, i.e., an evident move from *tashbīh* (the acts of creation) towards defining *tanzīh* (the Source of the acts).

By employing this concept (i.e., acts of creation, incomprehensible by human mind), Sirhindī seems to describe *tanzīh* on the level of *tawhīd-i af‘ālī* (“Oneness of God’s acts”), intermeshed with the sense of awe or bewilderment (*ḥayrah*/incomprehensibility). The stage of *ḥayrah*, is also considered by Ibn ‘Arabī as one of the highest stages of the Path of perfection and one of the characteristics of the spiritual elites.⁶ This sense of incomprehensibility, expressed by Sirhindī, reminds us of Gisūdirāz’s approach to the state of “dumbness” and *ḥayrah* (“bewilderment”) in the stage of *warā’al-warā’* (“beyond the beyond”), which represents his understanding of the absolute *tanzīh*.⁷ Expressing the “incomprehensibility of the acts of creation” as a move from the source of *tashbīh* (creation) to the Incomprehensible Source of the acts (i.e., *tanzīh*) by Sirhindī, also brings to mind the creative approach of the celebrated Kubrawī master and an advocate of Ibn ‘Arabī, ‘Azīz al-Dīn Nasafī (d. 700/1300), when stating: *Yekī rā yekī kardan muḥāl ast*.⁸ (making the One [Who is Essentially One,] One [again] is impossible).

In other words, understanding *Yekī* (i.e., the Absolute in the realm of absolute-perfect Oneness/*tanzīh* or *Aḥadiyyah*, or proving Oneness for the One – in the realm of His Oneness) is impossible. Based on Nasafī’s insightful remark, the Absolute in His Absolute *tanzīh* (i.e., *Aḥad* or the level of *Aḥadiyyah*) is incomprehensible, and one has to look for Him on the accessible level (of *Waḥid* or *wāḥidiyyah*) in order to reach a possible/limited level of comprehension of His attributes/acts. Therefore, the only pathway leading towards understanding some imperfect level of *tanzīh* begins with some level of *tashbīh*. As a result, a more elevated (or simply a new) understanding of God’s transcendence or *tanzīh*, – compared to one’s previous understanding of His *tanzīh* – will be reached only by re-considering, changing, and modifying or re-examining one’s available *tashbīhī* source, understanding or means.

This *tashbīhī* source is evidently nothing but “existence” in general. This process appears to define the very nature of the enduring *tashbīh*→*tanzīh* reciprocation/equilibrium, in traversing towards “Reality” in Islamic mysticism. Ibn ‘Arabī, and his critics, such as Simnānī, Sirhindī, and Gisūdirāz, all ventured along the path of *tashbīh*→*tanzīh* reciprocation through different methods. For members of the *shuhūdī* triangle, Simnānī, Sirhindī, and Gisūdirāz, this journey, mostly occurred subconsciously, and as a result, particularly, in the case of Simnānī and Gisūdirāz, the validity of *tashbīh* was undermined or denied, while both these mystics were employing it. On the other hand, Ibn ‘Arabī, from the beginning of his theoretical discourse, manifested the central role of *tashbīh* in experiencing a more unveiled *tanzīh* of the Absolute.

One of the renowned members of the school of Ibn ‘Arabī, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Karīm Jīlī (d. 824/1421), in his commentary (*sharḥ*) on the *Futūḥāt*, refers to a subtle point of view regarding the concept of *tanzīh*.⁹

Explaining the concept of *sirr al-tanzīh* (secret of [God’s] transcendence), Jīlī describes the Absolute *tanzīh* (of the Real Almighty "*Ḥaqq ta‘ālā*"), as considering (or understanding) His transcendence in the way He knows Himself (or His *tanzīh*) through His Essence. Then, Jīlī mentions that because this kind of (absolute) *tanzīh*, does not bear (any type) of *tashbīh* (*bal huwa munazzahun ‘an muqābilat-i tashbīh*), we have no means of knowing or understanding/rationalizing His *tanzīh* [in the absolute sense] (*fa tanzīhuhū lā na‘lamahu wa lā na‘qaluh*). He then concludes his remarks by referring to Ibn ‘Arabī’s saying, *al-tanzīh taḥdīd al-munazzah*, i.e., considering/applying transcendence means making limitations for the Transcendent.¹⁰

In other words, due to the impossibility of realizing the absolute *tanzīh* of the Absolute (i.e., in the realm of His Essence), any other type of *tanzīh* (i.e., at the level of His attributes and acts) requires a precedent level of *tashbīh* (which represents our limited/ partial

understating of the Absolute, which is, at the same time, the only way of approaching Him). A contemporary commentator on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ*, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Fāḍil Tūnī (d.1339 /1960), in his concise but remarkable commentary, *Ta’līqah bar Fuṣūṣ*, refers to the concepts of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*, in their relation to Ādam’s descent from Heaven.¹¹

He states that “although from the standpoint of [his elevated] spirituality (*bi-ḥasab-i rūḥānīyat*), Ādam was in the Heaven of Intellect (*jannat-i ‘aqlī*), and [therefore] reached the highest perfection (*kamāl-i atamm*), i.e., (being) the locus of the attributes of incomparability (*mazhariyyat-i ṣifāt-i tanzīhī*), but he lacked (the stage of being) the locus of the attributes of comparability (*mazhariyyat-i ṣifāt-i tashbīhī*).”¹²

Fāḍil Tūnī further mentions that “although the attributes of comparability are considered as imperfection (*naqs*) in relation to the attributes of incomparability, but [they are considered as] perfection, in relation to the stage of all-encompassing comprehensiveness (*jāmi ‘īyat wa akmalīyat*).”¹³

Attaining this stage of ultimate comprehensiveness, as Tūnī affirms, was absolutely necessary for Ādam, to become God’s *khalīfah* (“viceregent”). Therefore, as he explains, “the reason for Ādam’s descent (*hubūt-i Ādam*) was the actualization (*fi ‘īyat*) of every [potential] perfection [residing] in his pre-dispositional capability (*isti ‘dād*), and [in order to fulfill this essential task, he had to] also acquire the attributes of comparability (*ṣifāt-i tashbīh*), so that he could reach the stage of comprehensiveness and the merit of [God’s] viceregency (*istīḥqāq-i khalāfat*), because [achieving] the merit of God’s viceregency (*istīḥqāq-i khalāfat*) is impossible without [acquiring or considering] the stage of all-comprehensiveness [of God’s both attributes of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*].”¹⁴

Fāḍil Tūnī then refers to a well-known Qūr’ānic verse (2:30) regarding the creation of Ādam; “Therefore, God responded to the

angels who said [‘Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?’] whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?,’ by saying that ‘I know what ye know not.’”¹⁵

Fāḍil Tūnī’s final remarks remind us of the crucial place and significance of the perpetual functionality of both aspects of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*, in reaching a more comprehensive realization of God’s Existence, and in the very creation of *insān al-kāmil* (“the Perfect Human Being”) in Ibn ‘Arabī’s worldview. Therefore, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s conscious and doctrinal utilization of *tashbīh*→*tanzīh* reciprocation (which also plays a major role in characterization of the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*), the side of *lā huwa* (“not He,” or existence, or “*tashbīh*”) continuously leads to *huwa* (“He/the Absolute,” or “*tanzīh*”). One might be able to speculate that *ḥaḍrat al-khayāl* (i.e., the realm, faculty or Presence of Imagination) was designed by Ibn ‘Arabī, as a domain for testing the constant functionality of *tashbīh*→*tanzīh* reciprocation. This reciprocation, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach, ensures the constant and new currents of unveiling mystical experiences.

Concluding remarks

In Ibn ‘Arabī’s worldview the concepts of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* have been utilized in their methodological manifestations. Discovering these manifestations which are presented, in varieties of approaches, throughout Ibn ‘Arabī’s vast corpus as well as in the works of the members of his school, seems critically essential for a clearer realization of the cardinal elements in the *wujūdī* school. Discerning the constant and methodological reciprocation between the two core concepts of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* is a primary vehicle in realizing the ties between the Absolute and the seeker, and also plays a major role in the seeker’s realization of existence.

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Endnotes

¹ This article is largely based on my book, *Ibn ‘Arabī and Kubrawīs: The Reception of the School of Ibn ‘Arabī by Kubrawī Mystics* (KY: Fons Vitae, 2019).

² For a comparison between the two concepts of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (“unity of existence”) and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (“unity of witnessing”), see, for example, William C. Chittick, “*Waḥdat al-Shuhūd*,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Brill Online, 2014 Reference. University of Toronto (19 June 2014), http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/entries/encyclopedia-of-islam-2/wahdat-al-shuhud-SIM_7819.

³ ‘Abdul Ḥaq Ansārī, “Shāh Walīy Allāh Attempts to Revise Waḥdat al-Wujūd,” *Arabica* 35, no. 2 (1988), 198.

⁴ See Hamid Algar, “Reflections of Ibn ‘Arabī in Early Naqshbandī Tradition,” *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society* 10 (1991). See also, Mīr Valiuddīn, “Reconciliation between Ibn ‘Arabī’s Waḥdat-i Wujūd and the Mujaddid’s Waḥdat-i Shuhūd,” *Islamic Culture* XXV (1951), 50-51.

⁵ Burhān Aḥmad Fārūqī, *Mujaddid’s Conception of Tawḥīd: Study of Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī’s Doctrine of Unity* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989), 106-107, with some modifications.

⁶ See *Futūḥāt* II, cited in William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge : Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 296. Here, Ibn ‘Arabī mentions two kinds of human beings: “...and man is divided into two kinds: One kind does not receive perfection...A second kind of man receives perfection. Within him becomes manifest the preparedness for the Divine Presence in Its perfection and for all Its names. God appointed this kind a vicegerent and clothed him in robe of bewilderment (*ḥayra*) toward Him...So man’s perfection is through the preparedness for this specific self-disclosure.” (*The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 296).

⁷ See Syed Shāh Khusro Ḥussainī, “Shuhūd vs. Wujūd: A Study of Gisūdirāz,” *Islamic Culture* LIX, no. 4 (1985): 324.

⁸ See ‘Azīz ibn Muḥammad Nasafī, *Bayān al-Tanzīl* (Tehran: Anjoman-i Āthār wa Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 1379/2000), 163. 189.

⁹ See ‘Abd al-Karīm Jilī, *Sharḥ-i Mushkīlāt al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Dār al-Kutub wa’l Wathā’iq al-Qawmiyyah, 1424/2003), 127-128.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*

¹¹ See Muḥammad Ḥusayn Fāḍil Tūnī, *Talīqah bar Fuūṣ* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mowlā, 1386/2007), 99-100.

¹² *Ibid.*, 99.

¹³ See *ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 100

¹⁵ Ibid. For translation of the Qur'ānic verse (2:30), I have used its English translation by 'Abdullāh Yusuf 'Alī.

Ontological Indigence and Divine action in Nature

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Abstract

The most inclusive problem of the divine action, whose answer could clarify other sub-problems, is the God-nature relationship. Without a precise and accurate account of this issue, no entry point could be found for divine action in nature. This paper is aimed to reconstruct the Neo-Sadraian Islamic Philosophy's reaction to the problem of divine action in nature on the basis of Tabatabaie's viewpoint, one of the Neo-Sadraian Islamic philosophers. According to Tabatabaie, God's acts are not limited to the specific causal joint which scientific and indeterministic approaches imply. Instead, he suggests a more fundamental gap which is revealed by metaphysical analysis of contingent beings. This gap is the ontological indigence of contingent beings. God, as a Perfect and Necessary Being, treats their indigence with His perfection. Thus, nature has a permanent dependency on God. In Tabatabaie's view, as we argue, neither does divine action violates the laws of nature, nor do these laws render God "Hands-off" when it comes to nature.

Keywords: Neo-Sadraian Islamic philosophy, Divine action, Determinism, Causal joint, Ontological indigence.

Introduction

In our Age of Science, it is quite strange to attribute a simple everyday natural event, like the suspension of some flying bird at some point in the sky, to God's action. However, God explicitly and frequently has told us in the holy scripts like the Quran about divine action even in such trivial events.¹ How could a believer preserve her faith in the truth of sacred texts, while there are scientific explanations for such phenomena without any reference to God? This is the major concern of the problem of divine action in nature, which has baffled many philosophers, theologians, and scientists in the centuries following the triumphs of modern science.

One can trace back this line of investigation even to ancient philosophical debates. However, the development of natural science in the Modern Age has awarded humans an extraordinary explanatory power that puts God in a useless idle position and makes the problem more severe. Some scholars have used the term 'Locking divine action' (Dodds, 2012, p. 105) trying to address such a point.

Investigating recent endeavors for the reconciliation of divine action and new sciences shows that there are various challenges and questions in this regard. What is the relationship between God and nature in general? What is the relationship between God's actions and the Laws of nature in particular? What is the relationship between the divine agency and human agency? How could it be possible that a supernatural being influences a natural being? If one admits that God can perform actions in nature, then where exactly is the room for such divine action? In other words, where is *the causal joint* in which divine cause and natural cause meet each other? Is the concept of *God of the Gaps* scientifically and theologically

convincing? It should be noted that although all of these questions deserve attention, they are not at the same level of importance. Nonetheless, almost all of the solutions proposed in the literature so far tackle only a few of them and forego the rest.

The relationship between God and nature lies at the heart of the divine action problem. Indeed, without a precise and accurate account of the God-nature relationship, no entry point could be found for divine action. Consequently, the central theme of this paper is to clarify the relationship between God and nature, according to the viewpoint of Tabatabaie, a contemporary Islamic philosopher and one of the key figures of the Neo-Sadraian school².

In response to the scientific atmosphere haunting divine action discourse³ we resort to an argument established in Islamic philosophy to explain the God-nature relationship. The scientific approach argues that through the indeterministic view, which new sciences (especially quantum mechanics) imply, there are *ontological gaps* wherein God can act via, while the laws of nature remain untouched. This approach, known as *Non-Interventionism Objective Divine action* or NIODA. Against this view, our major claim is that there is a more radical and more fundamental gap, thereby one can justify the fundamental relationship between God and nature. This gap is the *ontological indigence of contingent beings*. God as a perfect, necessary, and entirely independent Being, who is the source and the origin of the existence, endows the existence to the contingent beings. Such an endowment represents a fundamental dependency which is established at the time of creation as well as in the state of continuance.

In the first section, we discuss the concept of God in Tabatabaie's view and evaluate it against different theses, namely Pantheism, Panentheism, and some versions of Classical Theism. Then, in the second section, we discuss the concept of nature and its characteristics. In the third section, we apply the primary argument

to the problem of divine action in order to confront the view of NIODA.

We argue that contingent beings, regardless of their physical properties, have essential indigence in their substance. Finally, in the last section, it would be illustrated how Tabatabaie, while accepted a necessary view of nature, explains the fundamental dependency of nature on God. Moreover, he does not encounter the challenge of *overdeterminism*⁴.

Tabatabaie on the Concept of God

According to the scholarly literature of divine action, the concept of God can be conceived through the relationship between God and nature. In this regard, Whitehead has suggested a distinction between *internal* and *external* relations. (Whitehead, 1967, pp. 147-201) However, we can extend this distinction and distinguish between three kinds of God-nature relation: *outside*, *inside*, and *coincide* which correspond respectively to *Classical Theism*, *Panentheism*, and *Pantheism*. (Frankenberry, 1993) Here, we will explore Tabatabaie's view on the concept of God, and argue that owing to his clear distinction between God and nature; he cannot admit Pantheism and Panentheism. Instead, he is inclined to the form of classical theism.

Tabatabaie and Sadra endorsed a principle, described as the *ontological priority of existence (Asalat Al-Vojud)*, as the most basic principle of their philosophy. This principle indicates that when one considers an entity, two aspects of that entity can be philosophically distinguished: first, its *existence*⁵ (*Vojud*) and then its *quiddity*⁶ (*Mahiyat*). The key point here is that *existence* has an ontological priority over other aspects and properties like *quiddity*. Moreover, everything that exists is actually one thing but in different grades and levels of *existence*. (Tabatabai S. M., 2003, pp. 19-27) At the top of this hierarchy, there is a Being whose

existence, unlike other beings, derives only from itself. As a result, He is entirely independent in His existence, and other things—without exception—are dependent on Him. Here, Some Islamic philosophers like Avicenna use the metaphor of the Sun and its rays, therein God is considered as the sun and everything as its ray. (Nasr, 1978, p. 202) In this regard, Tabatabaie describes God as *the necessary Being (Vajeb Al-Vojud)* and argues that *the necessary Being* is the absolute being which is the source of the existence.

Now after the clarification of the concept of God in Tabatabaie's view, we can tackle the major concern stated at the beginning of this section. In fact, we aim to compare Tabatabaie's view with Pantheism, Panentheism, and Classical Theism, to know whether he believes in God as something inside or outside nature or something that coincides with nature.

At least two reasons can be derived from Tabatabaie's words, in support of the distinction between God and other entities ("*Ma Seva Allah*"), including nature. First, he suggests that there is not any being except God whose existence is necessary; All of the entities—including natural and non-natural beings—are contingent. (Tabatabai S. M., 2003, p. 289) In other words, there is an ontological distinction between God—who is the absolute and *the necessary Being*—and other things which are contingent.

Second, Tabatabaie claims that the whole Universe has three realms: The Intellect realm (*Alam Al-Aql*), the Imaginal realm (*Alam Al-Misal*), and the Material realm (*Alam Al-Maddah*). The Intellect realm is immaterial and free of matter and does not have any material property. The Imaginal realm is also devoid of matter but is not devoid of material properties such as spatial dimension, shape, configuration, and the like. (Tabatabai S. M., 2003, p. 312) Tabatabaie has argued that since God does not have any limitation and His existence is absolute and necessary; He could not belong to the Imaginal and Material realms. By contrast, according to Tabatabaie, nature is placed inside the Material realm.

Because of these two reasons, Tabatabaie cannot be counted as a Pantheist or a Panentheist, both of whom deny the ontological distinction between God and nature. To make it more clear, we will explain what we mean by Pantheism and Panentheism.

Pantheism by definition contains two claims. (Levine, 1994, p. 25) First, everything that exists constitutes a unity. Second, this all-inclusive unity is divine. In short, one can argue that Pantheism is the view in which God is identical to the Universe. Although this proposition is not generally admitted, it is acceptable to most of those who see themselves as Pantheists. (Buckareff & Nagasawa, 2016, p. 65) Therefore, we may rationally conclude that God is nothing more than the cosmos and that He is limited by restrictions of nature such as temporality. Hence, Pantheism can be considered as a somewhat radical reaction to the Classical Theism which delineates God as a being utterly different and transcendent from nature.

Panentheism—which is less radical in reacting to Classical Theism—argues that nature exists *in* God and God is more than nature. God in this view is in permanent interaction with nature; He affects nature and is also affected by it constantly. Consequently, in the view of a Panentheist, the essence of God is not constant and is not invariable. Most Panentheists point to the mind-body correlation to explain God-nature relation. (Clayton, *God and world*, 2003, pp. 203-218) In this context, they argue that the “whole-part” relation provides an elegant conceptual framework to explain the God-nature relation (Peacocke, Arthur, 1995, pp. 263-288). This thesis, along with Process Metaphysics (in contrast with Substance Metaphysics) shows that Panentheism—like Pantheism—tends to eliminate the ontological distinction between God and nature. (Clayton, 2017)

Having these definitions of Pantheism and Panentheism in mind, one can criticize Tabatabaie’s view in a way very similar to criticizing Classical Theism because it seems that Tabatabaie

renders God as something entirely outside nature. This would lead, as a consequence, to overlooking of the relationship between God and nature which has a crucial role in Pantheism and Panentheism.⁷ However, Tabatabaie confirms the fundamental relationship between God and nature while making an ontological distinction between them. This issue will be explained by details in the third section, nevertheless, one reason is provided in this section.

Tabatabaie maintains that nature is dependent on God by referring to the principle of *ontological priority of existence*, which is explained earlier and the *principle of gradation of existence*. The latter principle implies that the existence is the gradation reality has various degrees. Therefore, it has been likened to the light. The existence (like light), is one reality which actualized with the different rates of strengths and weakness. Thus, existence is unit, because it is one reality which actualizes in the external world, and simultaneously, it is multitude, because it possesses a different degree. (Tabatabai S. M., 2003, pp. 26,27) Tabatabaie applies these principle to construct an argument to show the dependency of nature on God. We will explain this argument in the following.

Accordingly, Tabatabaie defines the concept of God in such a way that the main attributes of God—which theism has endorsed—are maintained. God has a fundamental relationship with nature while being distinct from it. In other words, Tabatabaie presents a *reformed* Classical Theism viewpoint in which God does not vanish after the creation—as Deism claims—and also has a permanent and necessary relation with what He creates.

Tabatabaie on explaining nature

Tabatabaie's view regarding nature has been seen with respect to the central approaches in the debate of divine action—namely *determinism* and *indeterminism*. In this section, we will try to show that Tabatabaie has a *deterministic* view of nature and can be

classified as an *essentialist*. It should be considered that what we call *determinism* in this paper is the concept which can be traced back to various philosophies with several names such as *the principle of causation* in ancient Greek and Islamic Philosophy, *the principle of sufficient reason* (PSR) in the works of Spinoza, *determinability of the future based on current conditions* in Laplace's words. Regardless of differences in their contexts and implications, all refer to a system or a *lawhood* in nature. The *lawhood* in this sense has a property of *necessity* rather than *regularity*, which leads to Nature's behaviour being fixed, inflexible, and inviolable.

According to the principle of *ontological priority of existence* (*Asalat Al-Vojud*), *nature* is the *Material realm* that is not separated from other levels of the universe. However, the Material realm is *naturalistic* part of the universe and has a different rank in the hierarchy of the universe. *nature*, or the Material realm, is generally characterized by permanent movement and eternal change. The movement, which is incorporated into the essence of nature and every material entity, is seen as a consequence of changing from *potentiality* to *actuality*. This change is the source of motion in nature and is considered by Tabatabaie, following Sadra, as *intrinsic* and *permanent*.⁸

To clarify, Tabatabaie conceptually divides the existence into *actuality* and *potentiality*. However, instead of two different things, in the external world, we have one *gradational existence*. For instance, water has the *potential* to change into vapor. Both water and vapor are of one existence and even one quiddity. Nevertheless, sometimes water is *actual*, and vapor is *potential*, and sometimes vapor is *actual*. (Tabatabai S. M., 2003, p. 204) The difference between water and vapor, hence, is a difference in the level of existence.

Given the fact that potentiality and actuality are a single being (with a single quiddity), but occupy different degrees of existence, we can

argue that the relationship between them is *necessary* and *essential*. To clarify and justify, let us focus on the relationship between oak seed and oak tree as the potential and actual moods of one thing. Oak seed and oak tree are two sides of the spectrum of a *single fluid reality*; However, this fluidity, and motion, derived from the essence of seed. Seed *inherently* has the disposition to become a tree. If it does not meet the obstacles, it will *necessarily* move to be a tree.

Such an essential approach which rises from the dispositional faculty of things is very similar to the *Aristotelian essentialism* that has been revived in recent years by *Sole Kripke*. Kripke acknowledged the *metaphysical necessitation* in nature, which for the case of natural kinds, is rooted in essence. (Kripke, 2001, pp. 84-96) In this view, relationship in nature is characterized by *dispositional properties* (rather than *categorical properties*.⁹) Dispositional properties (in the same conditions) are constant and have a single manifestation in all possible worlds. (Bird, 2007, p. 18)

Tabatabaie, by the same token, under the notion of *specific forms* (*Surat Al-Noiyeh*) indicates that natural entities are not *neutral* material objects. In fact, he does not believe that objects change according to *predetermined Laws*; on the contrary, he suggests that *specific forms* of objects are the primary sources of their *essential* properties. (Tabatabai S. , 1387 (2008a), pp. 107, 108)

As a result, the relationships between objects in nature is, in fact, the emergence of the hidden dispositions of the objects, which are being created at any moment by actualizing the potentialities. These relationships, as rooted in the essence of objects, are *metaphysically necessary*. since this kind *necessity* is *metaphysical*, rather than *natural*,¹⁰ laws of nature are unbreakable in principle.

Tabatabaie on the divine action in nature

In this section, it will be shown that although Tabatabaie does not believe in a specific *causal joint*, he points out that the essential neediness and indigence of contingent being is fulfilled by God. At first glance, it may seem crucial to provide a viable explanation about divine action in nature, if one embraces an essential *deterministic* view of nature.¹¹ Accordingly, the majority of the advocates of objective divine action can be found among those who avoid such a *deterministic* view and choose a counter viewpoint—namely *indeterminism*.¹² They have discovered more fertile ground in the *indeterministic* view about nature, to pave the way for divine action in nature.

One of the major proponents of this view is Robert Russell who accepts the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics and believes in an *ontological indeterminism*. (Russell, 2009, pp. 364-365) He provides some evidence—known as the *measurement problem*, which causes wave function collapse and shows indeterminacy in nature—for his belief. Relying on such indeterminacy, he takes God as the agent who acts collaboratively with nature to fulfil a natural event. To more clarification, Robert Russell underscores the following statement as his central theses: (Russell, 2008, p. 586)

‘God acts objectively and directly in and through (mediated by) quantum events to actualize one of several potential outcomes; in short, the collapse of the wave function occurs because of divine and natural causality working together even while God's action remains ontologically different from natural agency.’

In short, Russell assumes that divine action is incompatible with the Laws of nature;¹³ thus, he seeks for gaps which are not determined by the Laws of nature to interpret them as the *Causal Joint*, where divine cause and natural cause meet each other. Hence, he adopts *noninterventionist*¹⁴ and *incompatibilist* approach towards divine action by putting His actions at *ontological indeterministic* points.

However, the *indeterministic* picture of nature is completely rejected by Tabatabaie, because of his endorsement of the necessary and lawful relationship in nature. Confronting indeterministic interpretations of quantum mechanics, Tabatabaie refutes them by denying that there is any room for *chance* in nature. He is inclined to interpretations that claim we see these phenomena as a result of *chance* because of our lack of knowledge about the underlying causal relations, (Tabatabai S. M., 2003, p. 166) not because of the underlying *ontological indeterminism*.

In order to understand Tabatabaie's standpoint, one should consider *the principle of causation* thereby he claims, every contingent being is an *effect*, and every *effect* necessarily needs a *cause*. This principle is proven by Tabatabaie based on inherent essential *indigence* of contingent beings. (Tabatabai S. , 1387 (2008a), pp. 286-288) This indigence prevents contingent beings from coming into *existence* only by themselves; hence, they have to gain their *existence* from an external source known as the *cause*. (Tabatabai S. M., 2003, p. 79) Then we can argue, based on the principle of causation, that the *essential indigence* of contingent beings implies that there is a *permanent dependency* on causes, and the hierarchy of *causes* makes a nexus ending with the First cause. The First cause is a Perfect Being, pure of any need and defect, that is *the Necessary Being* and who is God.

As a comparison, Russell's view, claim that divine actions take place just within the points that science upholds as *ontological gaps*. However, Tabatabaie claims that there is a much greater and fundamental *gap* which includes all the contingent beings and hence the entire nature, which is *ontological indigence of contingent beings*.

A crucial point here is that effects or contingent beings need cause in a state of continuance, as well as it needs while coming into being. To illustrate, the essential indigence implies to the persistent need for cause. (Tabatabai S. , 1387 (2008a), p. 65) Therefore, the

whole universe in general and nature in particular, at every moment and always is dependent on God.

Tracy's Dilemma and Tabatabaie's solution

Thomas Tracy, one of the prominent scholars in the field of divine action, has prepared a dilemma for those who are following *determinism*, as: (Tracy T. , 2009)

'God will be able to affect the course of events in a deterministic world only by 1) setting the initial conditions and laws of nature which jointly determine each event in the world's history, and/or 2) interrupting this deterministic causal series to turn events in a new direction.'

Tracy's Dilemma asserts, in brief, by using a deterministic approach, we should either believe in something like Deism or adopt a theory in which laws of nature may be broken in favour of divine action. Despite the criticisms was mentioned, Russell and his colleagues have suggested a clear way to overcome this dilemma therein God neither hands-off in nature nor have to break the laws of nature. On the other hand, it may be a question of how can Tabatabaie believe in the necessary and inviolable view of the laws of nature, and yet confirm that the entire universe depends on God at any moment?

Tabatabaie could response to Tracey's dilemma that nature is surrounded by God through an existential and fundamental relationship but at the same time, nature is autonomous in its internal relations. In fact, nature involves a web of necessary *horizontal* and *autonomous* relationships, while simultaneously in an existential *vertical* relationship with God.¹⁵

Here, a question may arise as to whether this solution differs from that of Thomas Aquinas and his followers? The answer is

affirmative. Thomas's solution to this issue is based on the separation between the *Primary cause* (or the metaphysical cause) and the *Secondary cause*. (or the natural cause) He grasps this separation in order to avoid putting God beside natural cause and to maintain His Transcendence. The primary and secondary causes, are not at the same level. Thus, the primary cause does not compensate for the deficiencies of the secondary cause, because both of which are counted as the *sufficient cause* for a natural event. (Silva, 2014) Nonetheless, a decisive critique has been provided. According to which, if each of the primary and secondary causes, is sufficient for an event, is no longer required to another. This fact is known as *overdeterminism*.

Tabatabaie can solve this challenge by referring to the concept of *specific forms*, which is mentioned earlier. Regarding *four Aristotelian causes*, Tabatabaie considers *efficient cause* as the cause of giving existence to effect. For physical objects, efficient causes are functionally identical to *specific forms*. Thus specific form, actually, is the substance which gives existence to a physical object and, consequently, the intrinsic characteristics of that object depends on that substance. (Tabatabai S. , 1387 (2008a), p. 212) In short, Tabatabaie, according to the notion of specific forms, claims that we do not have two causes for a particular effect; rather, there is an efficient cause which works through a specific form alone.

Conclusion

To sum up, in this paper, we approached the problem of divine action from multiple aspects to understand Tabatabaie's solution. In the first section, we examined the concept of God in Tabatabaie's view. Based on the principle of *ontological priority of existence*, Tabatabaie places God as the *necessary Being* on the top of the hierarchy of existence. This concept of God distinguishes Tabatabaie's from the Panentheism which claims that God is *inside* nature, in one hand, and from the standard Classical Theism which

treats God as something *outside of nature*, on the other hand. The view that Tabatabaie embraces endorses primary attributes of God—such as transcendence—while maintaining that He is not absent from nature.

In the second section, we clarified the *deterministic* view of nature in Tabatabaie’s perspective. Based on the necessary relation between the *potentiality* and *actuality* of each being.

Drawing on these two results, we sought for the solution of Tabatabaie to the problem of divine action in the third section. Tabatabaie solves this problem by referring to the *indigence* of contingent beings and their permanent dependency on the perfect Being—namely God. This view, as we discussed, does not limit the agency of God to the specific points, or causal joints—a limitation posed on God by NIODA. Instead, this view extends the agency of God all-through nature. We have prepared a summary of the comparison of these two views in (table 1) below.

	View about nature	explanandum	Direction of God’s influence on nature	Intervention of God in the laws of nature	Compatibility of divine action with the laws of nature	divine cause in respect to the natural cause	The quality of divine action in nature
Russell	Indeterminism	Ontological Gaps in quantum level	Bottom-up	Non-interventionism	Incompatibilism	Lateral/participation	Determining one of several potential outcomes
Tabatabaie	Determinism	ontological indigence of contingent beings	Top-down	Non-interventionism	Compatibilism	Vertical	Endowing the existence to contingents

Table 1: The comparison of the view of Tabatabaie and Russell

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Endnotes

¹ “Have they not regarded the birds above them spreading and closing their wings? No one sustains them except the All-beneficent. Indeed, He watches all things” (Q.67:19.)

² Sayed Mohammad Hossein Tabatabaie (16 March 1903- 25 November 1981), was one of the most prominent Islamic philosophers and interpreter of Quran.

³ In the last three decades (since the 1990), most standpoints on Divine Action have shown a tendency towards scientific *indeterminism*. This tendency can be seen mainly in a long-term research program between 1990-2005, known as the Divine Action Project (DAP). The science-based approach, known as Non-interventionist Objective Divine Action (NIODA), has been promoted to the mainstream of Divine Action discourse. In recent years, however, some philosophers not satisfied by NIODA have tried to increase the share of other philosophical and theological approaches in Divine Action discourse, (Ritchie, 2017)

⁴ This challenge arises when the existence of an *effect* is explained by two *causes*, while one of them is enough for the explanation of that *effect*.

⁵ *Existence*, here, could be used to provide a simple answer to the question “is there anything?” In this regard, it does not matter *what* that thing is. For example, when we ask about something which is located very far away, we are not concerned with its details. Rather, we want to know if there is anything instead of nothing.

⁶ *Essence*, here, means the *nature* of things and it could be used as an answer to the question of “what is it?” Here, the questioner knows that there *is* something but want to know more about its details.

⁷ There is a big challenge related to this issue between Pantheism (as well as pantheism) and Classical Theism regarding *transcendent* and *immanence* God. It

can be seen in (Culp, 2017) Panentheism, as well as Pantheism, seems to neglect the importance of transcendent God (or at least define a very different kind of transcendence), which may be the inevitable effect of mere concentration on His immanence. In turn, they have blamed Classical Theism for not paying enough attention to the *immanence* of God in favour of His transcendence.

⁸ An important difference between Sadra (and his followers like Tabatabaie) and others lies in the fact that Sadra believes that this movement is rooted in the *substance* of Nature but others argue that motion is specified for accidental aspects of matter rather than substance. (Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, 1368 (1990), pp. 76-79)

⁹ *Dispositional* properties by definition are potentials or powers which are necessary for one object but might be manifested in a specific situation. In contrast, *categorical* properties are fixed properties and do not include any power or disposition. (Bird, 2007, p. 66) The distinction between *dispositional* and *categorical* properties and the priority of them over each other is a long discussion in contemporary analytic philosophy. While David Hume is considered to treat categorical properties as fundamental properties, Kripke and his followers believe dispositional properties are fundamental.

¹⁰ The *metaphysical necessity* means that necessary relation holds in all metaphysically possible worlds, although they are not a priori truths. In contrary, *nomical* or *natural necessity* holds that necessity is the characteristic of the *laws*, and it is not derived from the essence of the objects. Therefore, it is a *contingent necessity* and can be applied only in the actual world. (Kment, 2017)

¹¹ In this regard, we had a correspondence with Alexander Bird, a contemporary theorist of the essentialism view on the Laws of Nature. Here is his answer to the question of how compatibilism with dispositional conception of law could be: “My own view is that the best approach for compatibility is some kind of deism. That is, God sets the initial conditions - using divine foreknowledge God knows what the consequences will be. We think it is difficult to see how God could introduce law-breaking miracles in my view. My view makes the laws of Nature metaphysically necessary and so unbreakable.”

¹² *Indeterminism*, in general, has a background and history in theology as well as philosophy and science. In this paper, we have considered just the scientific background of indeterminism.

¹³ Plantinga argues that the majority of participants in DAP conferences, in spite of adopting quantum mechanics, have suspicions about compatibility of Divine Action with the laws of Nature This is because they seem to have a deterministic view of the laws of nature as a presumption. (Plantinga, 2006)

¹⁴ Noninterventionists hold that “there are objectively special divine acts that are neither interventions nor suspensions of the laws of nature.” (Russell, Introduction, 2000) In this view, natural causes are not enough to accomplish

natural event; thus nature is open to be affected by God while the laws of nature remain untouched.

¹⁵ The Lateral relationship is the relationship between objects that are placed at the same level of existence. Vertical relationship is defined in the causal hierarchy in which cause and effect have occupied different levels of existence. (Tabatabai S. , 1387 (2008a), pp. 317-322)

The Image of light in Quran and The Spiritual Phenomenology

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Abstract

The image of Light in the Quran is not merely an allegorical concept, but is a key term to talk about three concepts that cannot be expressed in the everyday language. This key term is used in a sacred and spiritual method we call spiritual phenomenology. Sacred interpretation of the light in the Quran, like many other traditions, has had enormous theological and philosophical results. In this article we aim to show the role of the concept of light in the Quran and its shaping of spiritual phenomenology in some commentaries.

Keywords: Light, Quran, Spiritual Phenomenology, Existence, Unity, Plurality

Introduction

In the Quran there is a magnificent metaphorical verse, which is the basis of our claim about spiritual phenomenology:

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche, wherein is a lantern. The lantern is in a glass. The glass is as a shining star kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West. Its oil would well-nigh shine forth, even if no fire had touched it. Light upon light. God guides unto His Light whomsoever He will, and God sets forth parables for mankind, and God is Knower of all things¹ (Al-Nūr: 35).

The *lantern*, which is called *misbah* in Arabic and *phanous* in Persian (or *phaeinós* in Greek), shows how the image of light has a Gnostic significance. Etymologically, *phanous* has the same Indo-European root with *phainesthai* in Greek meaning “to appear”, “to show”, “to shine” and “to manifest”. In the books VI and VII of Plato’s *Republic*, *phainesthai* means unveiling *alētheia* or truth (Republic: 489c). Truth here is a gradual disclosure; it can be “true, truer or the truest depending on the amount of *alētheia* they unveil” (Stavru, 2017: 4). The root of *phainesthai* stems from the word *phós* (φως) which means light, brightness, and anything emitting light (such as a lantern). It is said that *phós* often is used in poetic discourse, in metaphor, and in parable. Also, it refers to the pure and brilliant quality of light or a holy phenomenon like God (Grimm, 1886: 662). *Phós* even is used in the bible to refer to light and divine illumination (Genesis, 1: 3). And *phainó* is to bring to light or to cause to appear (Revelation 21:23, John, 1: 5). We know that later Greek philosophers used a derived term “phenomenon” to describe a thing which manifests itself. Philosophically, phenomenon is the appeared side of the thing in itself or noumenon. Aristotle uses phenomenon as an observable thing (Aristotle, Parts of Animals, 640a15ff).

From ancient Iran to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, and then up to Christian theology and Islamic illuminative philosophy, the metaphor of the *phós or* light has been synonymous with knowledge. This image of the phenomenon as "the thing in the light" has arguably been transmitted from the ancient Persian to Arabic literature and has shaped a Gnostic phenomenological interpretation of the being. According to Suhrawardi, this metaphore is originally from the worldview of ancient Iran (Zoroastrianism) (Suhrawardi, 2001, Vol. 4: 91). Suhrawardi believes in the antagonism between the good will of the cosmos, which is divine and originated from light, and bad will, which originates from evil and *darknesses*² (Avesta, 1992: 65). This Image of *light* in Zoroastrianism and Islam has created a spiritual phenomenology in which recognizing the light is at the center of its attention.

We borrowed the term of spiritual phenomenology from Henry Corbin. His close colleague, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, says Corbin "used to translate phenomenology...to the Persian speaking students as *kashf al-mahjub*, literally 'rending asunder of the veil to reveal the hidden essence', and considered his method...to be spiritual hermeneutics as understood in classical Sufi and Shi'ite thought" (Nasr, 1996: 19). *kashf al-mahjub* for him is a spiritual phenomenological method in which the truth of the things is brought to the light, since the light that Illuminative Philosophers are considering is divine, this phenomenology is essentially spiritual.

Science of Light

The image of *light* in the Quran has three meanings; *God, being* and, *knowledge*. The Quran says "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth" means Knowledge and being are inseparable from God. *Arifs* consider being the same as God, who unitarily exists in any existent things. Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji (died in 1662) an Iranian

philosopher believes “extended being in itself is neither substance nor accident, neither quantity nor quality, but is the light that enlightens what belongs to it” (Lahiji, 2010: 14). God is the one who brought creatures from “darkness of nonexistence” to “the light of existence”. In the *Jawshan Kabeer* (the great armor), which is of the most significant Shi’i prayer that includes one thousand names and attributes of God, He is called the concealer and illuminator of existence (Qumi, 2005: 44). God’s role as an illuminator is synonymous with his role as an originator of existence. For this, it is said in the Quran, “The earth will shine with the Light of its Lord”³ (al-Zumar; 69).

It is said from Ali, the first Imam of Shia, “follow the light that will never extinguish, and the face that will never get old, and obey him because with his obedience you will never stray” (Al-Tamimi, 2006: H. 8165). It is said as well in *The Book of Psalms*: “The Lord is my light and my rescue; whom should I fear? The Lord is my life’s stronghold; of whom should I be afraid?” (The Book of Psalms, 2009, 27)

This *light as being* is the same as *God*, yet, both are considered self-evident and immediate to perception. It is said in another prophetic Hadith: “about unity (al-tawhid); its outward is in its inward and its inward is in its outward. Its outward is that the glorified God is a hidden and invisible name, and its inward is that he is a being who will never conceal; while nowhere is devoid of him even in the twinkle of an eye! He is an unlimited present and unmissed absent who never lost” (Majlesi, 1982, Vol. 4: 264).

On the other hand, nonexistence is the same as darkness and ignorance. Being comes to the realization, by God’s revealing himself through the manifestation of the divine light. This light is that which God swears to in the Quran (al-Shams: 1). A mysterious relationship has been concealed between “light-being-knowledge”, which Henry Corbin briefly mentioned in his *Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis*. Corbin described ancient Iranian philosophers

believing that thinking about *Ahura Mazda* (God) is equivalent to *hastih* (Existence); the existence that has always been, and always is (Corbin, 1977: 2).

The main question is by who and how this sort of Gnostic knowledge can be achieved? Based on one of the most significant Islamic Hadiths, the place of this knowledge is the heart not the intellect:

Knowledge is the light that God throws into the heart of whomsoever he will⁴ (Mulla Sadra, 1981, Vol. 6: 93).

This Hadith is often taken beside another Gnostic Hadith that says:

My earth and my heaven can't contain me, but the heart of my servant believer contain me (Al-Ghazali, 2005, Vol. 3: 12, Maleki Tabrizi, 2005: 378).

According to this Hadiths, the believer is able to comprehend *existence*; because his heart is open (*maftuh*) to the source of existence. This is why Ibn al-Arabi titled his great book "*al-Futuh al-Makkiyyah*", which translates as "the Meccean Openings". The word *futuh* in Arabic is the plural form of *fatah*, which literary means to open and in his expression means achieving a Gnostic knowledge by openings to the divine light and being. So, true knowing requires ontological openings and wayfaring from darkneses to light. Knowledge is the light of existence. In other word, this kind of knowledge is the light of God shining in the heart (Al-Tamimi, 2006: H. 6320). This type of knowledge is never achievable through mere theoretical endeavor. As Ibn al-Arabi explains, the source of this kind of knowledge as unveiling (*kashf*) is divine effusion (*fayd*) and it is completely different from the knowledge that comes from reflection (*fikr*) (Chittick, 1989: 169). This knowledge is realized in your heart by the type of virtuous being in the world or strictly speaking by the spiritual wayfaring.

The knowledge that comes from reflection (*fikr*) often is propounded by peripatetic philosophers. For peripatetic philosophy, the philosopher could sit in a closed room and think about the identity and quiddity of things, because categorizing the things into logical categories does not need existential voyage. However, for a knower (*Arif*), discovering the broadest thing that is conceivable for the human intellect, i.e. existence, can be realized only by spiritual wayfaring and a voyage from darkneses toward light. So, the knower or true philosopher is a pilgrim. This is why Mulla Sadra (1572-1640), Iranian philosopher, describes his philosophy based on the four spiritual journeys that a philosopher or an *Arif* should pass (Mulla Sadra, 1981, Vol. 1: 13). A true philosopher for him never stops moving; because to stop means reaching a rigid and fanatic answer. This is the way even Suhrawardi is searching for. Suhrawardi believes a philosopher should begin a voyage from his occidental darkness toward his luminous orient. This voyage from the land of sunset and darkness toward the orient or the land where the sun and light rises from is not a geographical journey, but an existential wayfaring during which a philosopher leaves her darkneses toward the light and unity. As Qotb al-Din Shirazi (1236-1311) said “What is intended from the wisdom of illumination is a Gnostic wisdom that is in search of the being through presence and disclosure” (Shirazi, 2004: 10).

The wayfarer ontologically becomes luminous, by beginning the voyage toward the light. Since the source of existence and knowledge is same, this wayfaring toward the source of existence, simultaneously advances the wayfarer in epistemological levels. This is why ontology for Islamic existential philosophers is strictly overlapped by epistemology.

Recognizing the light

As mentioned, the Quranic words of *light*, *existence* and *God* are used synonymously. But, none is merely theoretically

apprehensible. The question is that how to recognize the light? As Suhrawardi asserts, both the terms *existence* and *light* are the most obvious of things that need no discussion to prove (Suhrawardi, 2001, Vol. 2: 106), but when we decide to prove them, they are the hardest. We recognize the being of everything, but when it comes to reasoning about existence, we are unable. Iranian philosopher Hajj Molla Hadi Sabzavari (1797-1873) has described the concept of existence in the following poem:

His concept is of the clearest things, but his depth is
extremely hidden⁵ (Motahari, 1981, Vol. 1: 23).

The light is what clarifies things to be seen. In other word, light bring out things from darkness of nonexistence to existence. The being of things depends on light, but light in itself in not visible. The light unveils itself only by giving light to other things; it's the hidden that brings things visibility. This is why the Quran says "God brings them out of the darknesses into the light" (*Al-Baqarah*: 257). Although this is an epistemological procedure, it is ontological too; the voyage toward light is the originating from nonexistence to existence.

In Illuminative thought, there has always been a relationship between path, light, sunrise and knowledge. This means that there has always been a relationship between the originating of the light (rising) and the beginning of knowledge.⁶ Some *arif*s and illuminative philosophers, such as Suhrawardi, believe we cannot argue about the Existence, but we could just recognize it as being present in the realm of existence; where light originates from. The imaginal world is where the light of existence will be conceivable. But, for being present there, a wayfarer needs to become an illuminative man. So, a relation will shape between understanding and the "mode of being in the world". Suhrawardi believes the way to recognizing God or the source of light is a way that needs spiritual approaching him by departing from yourself. Therefore, the *arif* first needs to recognize himself. This is the theme of the

Hadith “Whosoever recognizes himself certainly recognizes God” (Majlesi, 1982, Vol. 2: 32).

Since only the heart is the shrine of God, and God is light; recognizing God needs a spiritual phenomenological method that is based on the ontological voyage from the heart to God. But where is the Destination of this voyage? God has no place to be found. He is infinitely hidden, yet omnipresent. He is the hidden apparent, unveiled unveiler, concealed concealer, appearance of inward, inward of outward, and in his hiddenness in himself he is extreme light:

Oh, he who is disappeared of his being extremely luminous; who is outward of inward in his appearance⁷ (Sabzavari, 1990, Vol. 2: 44).

Khajih Muhammad Parsa (born in 1355) refers to a prophetic Hadith about God: “His veil is nothing but light, and his concealment is nothing but the manifestation”⁸ (Parsa, 1987: 51). Also Baba Rokna Shirazi (died in 1368) cited in his commentary on *al-Fusus* of Ibn al-Arabi this Hadith and believes this Hadith means that concealer (*hajib*) and concealed (*mahjub*), and knower (*arif*) and known (*maaruf*), are both Himself; there is here an indication of the essence of unity (*Tawhid*) (Baba Rokna, 1980: 130). Likewise, Shykh Ahmad al-Alawi (1869-1934) composed: “Outward Manifestation, wherein it doth appear; As Veil after Veil made to cover it’s Glory”⁹ (Lings, 1981: 220). Clearly, we are faced with a Gnostic ontology based on the science of light. If light is unity, how could we voyage toward unity from a material world full of plurality?

Unity, Plurality and Gnostic Commentaries

Throughout the Quran, the word “*light*” has come in singular form, but “*darkness*” is plural. Although, the word darkness in English is

used as an uncountable noun, in Arabic, “*dhulamat*” (darknesses) is the plural form of the noun “*dhulmah*” (darkness). It is said In the Quran:

God is the Protector of those who believe. He brings them out of the darknesses into the light. As for those who disbelieve, their protectors are the idols, bringing them out of the light into the darknesses (*Al-Baqarah* (2): 257).

Both instances of darknesses in the above verse are plural in Arabic (*dhulamat*), which shows plurality of darkness. In all of the Quran, plurality is synonym with falsehood and the truth is always uniquely an infinite.¹⁰ From the 167 times using of the term “Plural” (Akthar) which means “most of people”, and its derivatives, not even one instance has used this in a positive meaning; all of them are negative. For instance, two widespread phrases in the Quran are: “But most of mankind knows not” (Al-Rūm: 6), as well as “But most of them know not” (Al-Ṭūr: 47). And one of the utmost important verses comes in the form of a command to Prophet Muhammad:

Wert thou to follow most of those on earth, they would lead thee astray from the way of God; they follow naught but conjecture, and they do but surmise (Al-An‘ām: 116).

All these show that the way to *haq* or truth is unique, not plural. *Haq* is one of God’s names that is shown by the image of light in the Quran; as in the verse: “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth” (Al-Nūr: 35). For a Gnostic, all these show that the voyage from darkness toward light is a wayfaring from plurality toward unity, and from falsehood toward truth. But, the question is that if the heart is the origin of the voyage toward the truth, everybody has his own heart and this requires a plurality of ways toward the truth; and so, this could end up in a chaotic situation. To understand this issue, two Quranic terms refer to this in a way could be helpful: the first term is “*sirat*” which means the lifeline, main way and light way (Ibn Mandhur, 1984: 13). *Sirat* without exception is always

used as a single noun in the Quran. In the opening verses of the Quran we have: “guide us upon the straight path” (al-Fātiḥah: 6) *Sirat* is the main, straight and lit way toward the truth that is introduced by God. The second term is “*tariq*” which is the way that is traversed by each person and it is not necessarily right and straight and often is used in the plural form (al-Mu’minūn: 17). It is said in a popular Gnostic sentence that “the *tariqs* to reach God have the same number of all the people”¹¹ (Ashtiyani, 2005: 531). Since the *sirat* is the lifeline, all *tariqs* shall reach God; if they are in the *sirat* or straight way. In this way, unity in plurality would appear.

The true philosopher or Gnostic is one who can keep himself on the *sirat* of the voyage from plurality and falsehood toward unity and the truth. As already mentioned, truth or God is veiled and his unveiling comes true only as veils. The veils are numerous, but unveiling or disclosure is the only way toward him; for *kashf al-Mahjoub* (unveiling the veiled) there is no way but veils themselves. These veiled and unveiled aspects of God relate to his manifestation through *asmaa* (his names) and *sefaat* (his attributes); God is absolute beauty when the *jamal* (divine beauty) manifests in the real world and this aspect relates to the name of *al-dhahir* (the outward/manifest). And *Jalaal* (majesty) is his unveiling and concealment that relates to the name of *al-Dhahir* (the inward) (See to: Ibn Arabi, 1979: 54-55). As it is said in an Arabic poem:

Your divine beauty is flowing in every fact; and there is no veil for you but your divine glory¹² (Mulla Sadra, 1981, Vol. 6: 117).

Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240) refers to a well-known and amazing hadith by prophet Muhammad: “Indeed, God, glory be to him, has seventy thousand veils of light and darkness where he removes them from his face, certainly the divine splendorous of his face will burn whatever his eyesight perceives”¹³ (Ibn al-Arabi, *n. d.*, Vol. 2: 694).¹⁴

Based on this hadith, these veils of God are essential for the durability of the universe; if divine veils go away, the order of the universe will collapse. Accordingly, Ibn al-Arabi comments “the universe is the veil of itself, and never perceives God as the same as it perceived itself; therefore the universe, despite its awareness of this, will remain in veil ever” (Ibn Arabi, 1979: 55).

Ismaili's comment on this hadith is also worthy of mention. In their view, there is a relation between “spiritual state” and “veil”; some are able to unveil the veils, but nobody can reach the level of Prophet Muhammad, who has drawn the most of veils¹⁵ (Karimi Zanjani Asl, 2002: 539). According to the Quran at the *miraj* (ascension night) “he drew nigh and came close, till he was within two bows’ length or nearer” (al-Najm: 8-9) But, even the prophet cannot completely evanesce the distance between himself and God. The light of God (existence) can be analogized to the Sun’s radius, which, although it does make things clear, but it is a veil too; the veil that prevents you to see the Sun. Davoud Qeisari (died in 1175) of the greatest of Ibn al-Arabi’s commentators, believes “the truth of existence discloses from the inwards to the outwards, but the disclosing is the veil of the essence too” (Qeisari, 1978: 187). This is why the Quran says, “nobody can encompass God in knowledge” (Tāhā: 110) Qeisari believes to encompass something must be to determine and limite it. Since God is not determined, we never are able to encompass Him in knowledge (Qeisari, Ibid: 188).

The only way to know God is ontologically approaching him. However you move toward him, his light will be settled more in your heart. Islamic Gnostics believe the verse “My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!” in the Quran (Tāhā: 110), is interpreted by the Hadith “My Lord! Increase me in the bewilderment which is in you!”¹⁶ (Feidh Kashani, 1997: 101). God is concealed and unattainable, but at the same time He is the nearest thing to each person; as the Quran says, “nearer to him than his jugular vein” (Qāf: 16). God is in the worthiest part of the human body; the heart. According to the aforesaid divine Hadith, earth and heaven can’t

include God, but the heart of God's servant believer includes him. In the same vein, Ali bin Musa al-Ridha, the eighth Imam of Shias, said "the heart is the shrine of God" (Majlesi, 1982, Vol. 67: 25). But, as all Islamic *arifs* have said, not every heart is able to achieve the light of God; only the hearts which are already prepared for achieving the light of God are the shrines of God. Islamic *arifs* describe it by the allegory of polishing the mirror; they analogize the heart as a mirror that is rusted; the rusted mirror is not able to achieve the light of the Sun (God); you should polish it; as well as your heart, which you should clear and polish from the rust of sins to get prepared for achieving the divine lights. Suhrawardi describes the *arif* that after a while will be annihilated in the light; as well as Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922) claimed "I am the *haq*¹⁷". Suhrawardi believes Hallaj should have said "I am the mirror" instead of that slogan that means "I am the Sun" (Suhrawardi, 2001, Vol. 3: 309). By annihilation in God as fusion in the light, a wayfarer would pass the world of pluralities toward being united in being.

Conclusion

As the Quran says "nobody can encompass God in knowledge" because there is no limit for the infinity of God, humans will never achieve the whole light or existence. Therefore, nobody can reach the final knowledge, because there is no limit to it. This is why the true philosopher and *arif* should be always in search of knowledge by his/her heart. A true *arif* is in search of the lost heart; what Suhrawardi says about the voyage from occident to being toward orient, which requires the cleaning of the mirror of the heart. This action in itself is a Gnostic method for *unveiling the veiled* and achieving openness to *haq* (God). We should not imagine that Suhrawardi speaks about a purely theological theme; his claim has roots in a philosophical thinking that in the tradition can be called spiritual phenomenology. He first came to the conclusion that the origin of the universe, and being in the general sense, is nothing but

God. Suhrawardi called God *nur al-anwar* (light of all lights) instead of *wajib al-wujud* (necessary being). If existence is from light, so, all states of existence are different levels of light and darkness, such as mentioned before about Plato's idea about the true, the truer, and the truest, which depending on the amount of unveiling *alētheia*, the light has several gradations. All these levels of light, only reflect on the mirror of the heart.

The Gnostic epistemological aspect of this view is that the center of achieving lights is the heart, not pure reason. Through the heart, a philosopher would be upgraded ontologically and simultaneously able to epistemologically traverse the voyage toward the *light of all lights*. Rationalism here can be a veil itself; if a philosopher is not purified, he will wander from the way toward the center of being. This is why Suhrawardi at the beginning of his book, *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (The Wisdom of Illumination), advised the readers that they need first to fast and pray forty nights to comprehend his Book. Even Sayyid Haydar Amuli (1319-1385) an Iranian *arif*, refers to a Hadith by Imam Ali that, "I knew God by quitting thoughts"¹⁸ (Amuli, 1983: 161).

Obviously, this is never a negation of intellect, but the praise of intellect that is transcendent and has come to intuition. Islamic philosophers distinguish *al-Aql al-Munfasil* (disconnected intellect) that remains at the level of empirical affairs, from *al-Aql al-Mutasil* (connected intellect) which goes beyond empirical affairs. The intellect has several levels, which flourish by existential upgrading. This flourishing is realized by moving and wayfaring toward the light, but during this epistemological luminous wayfaring, the Gnostic or philosopher will be ontologically luminous himself. In Islamic Gnosticism, the one who is at the highest level of knowledge and has a luminous intellect is the *perfect man* or *luminous Man* (Corbin, 1971, Vol. 1: 294). All of this procedure is a type of Gnostic phenomenology (in the exact sense of the term from the root *Phós*) during which the true philosopher brings truth into

existence by himself. This Gnostic phenomenology in itself requires being on the voyage toward light.

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Endnotes

1. اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَبَصُرْتُ بِاللَّهِ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ.
2. In the subsequent, we will describe why we have to use the word "darknesses" in plural form.
3. و اشرفت الارض بنور ربها
4. العلم نور يقذفه الله في قلب من يشاء
5. مفهومه من اعرف الاشياء؛ و كنهه في غايه الخفاء
6. That's why in some Islamic Hadith, we find mysterious teachings which the most appropriate time for contemplation and meditation is considered to be the dawn of light (the sun) (Kulaini, nd: 226).
7. يا من هو اخفى لفرط نوره؛ الظاهر الباطن في ظهوره
8. ليس حجابها الا النور و لا خفائه الا الظهور
9. بطننت في ذا الظهور بدت في عينه؛ جعلت ليعزها حجباً تتوالى
10. “*Haq* (Truth) has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing” (Al-Isrā: 81).
11. الطرق الى الله بعدد نفوس الخلائق
12. جمالك في كل الحقايق سائر؛ و ليس له الا جلالك سائر
13. ان لله سبحانه تعالى سبعين الف حجاب من نور و ظلمه لو كشفها عن وجهه لاحتقرت سبحات وجهه ما أدركه بصره
14. Also see to: Amuli, 1969: 163
15. Based on this, Shia theologians believe after Prophet Muhammad, Twelve Imams are the torch holders of the divine luminous knowledge. By the absence of the last Imam (the twelfth Imam), not only a divine existence has been veiled, but also the genuine and final understanding has been veiled. Therefore, the being veiled of the last Imam is also being veiled of the final truth; and by his manifestation, truth will be unveiled and revealed. This is why Shia theologians call the last Imam “the revealer of truths” (Al-Tabarsi, N.d: 241) and resurrection day as “the day in which the truth will reveal”. (Feidh Kashani, 1989, Vol. 5: 314)

16. The original Arabic text is “رب زدني تحيراً فيك” which used the preposition “في” that means “in” and indicates the meaning of “overwhelming” in Arabic. This shows that the divine knowledge achieves only through being overwhelmed in God: this is why hadiths interpret the word “knowledge” in the Quran as a “perplexity”.

17. Of the names of God in Quran

18. In Arabic: عرفت الله بترك الافكار

Analysis of Muhtasham Kashani's Marthiya Poetry

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Abstract

This article examines Muhtasham's *Tarkib-band* by first looking at the historical context of his *Tarkib-band*, in Safavid Iran. A brief literature review of the some of the main research done on his *Tarkib-band* in Persian language is offered. The principles of Islamic mysticism which Kashani has employed in the *Tarkib-band* are analysed. The last section examines the structure of the *Tarkib-band* and the analysis of each of the twelve sections by looking at the keywords, metaphors, and primary message of the section.

Keywords: Muhtasham Kashani, *Tarkib-band*, religious poetry, Persian Language, Imam Hussain Ibn Ali, Islamic mysticism.

Introduction

Muhtasham Kashani lived between 1500 and 1588 CE in Kashan, Iran, during the reign of the Safavid dynasty. Muhtasham's masterpiece is his Tarkib-band or 12 Strophes, that cemented his place in Persian Literary history and had a great impact on future generations. His Tarkib-band, is perhaps the most widely recognised and admired poem in the expansive and important genre of religious poetry in the Persian Language.

Muhtasham's Tarkib band starts with the following verse:

باز این چه شورش است که در خلق عالم است
باز این چه نوحه و چه عزا و چه ماتم است

What is this uproar again amongst the creatures of the world?
What is this monody and lamentation and mourning again?

Muhtasham's Tarkib-band addresses the events and aftermath of the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet of Islam Hussain Ibn Ali (peace be upon him), who was the third Shia Imam, on the 10th of October 690 CE equivalent to 10th of Muharram 61 AH. The main themes of Muhtasham's Tarkib-Band are remembering and honouring the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his companions, highlighting the importance of the movement of Imam Hussein in the seen and unseen worlds, portraying the transcendent status of the Prophet's household and contextualising the movement of Imam Hussein as the continuation of the movement of the Divine saints and prophets before him.

In this article we present a conceptual analysis of the Tarkib-band of Muhtasham first from the aspect of principles of Islamic mysticism which have been utilised by Muhtasham in this poem, and second section by section by identifying the keywords, metaphors and analysing the primary message of each section.

Historical Context of Muhtasham's Tarkib-band: The Safavid Dynasty

The Safavids are the founders of modern Iran. They proclaimed Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran. This led to a migration of the Shi'a clergy from around the Muslim world to Iran. Further, it led to the cultural and artistic establishment of the Shi'a and Iranian identity within the borders of Iran. Muhtasham Kashani's *Marthiya* is of great significance in this regard.

Muhtasham Kashani, lived during the reign of Shah Tahmasb Safavi in Kashan. During this period, Kashan can be considered as the main centre of literature in Iran, with numerous important literary masters arising from there. Muhtasham Kashani grew to prominence in the court of Shah Tahmasb to the extent that Shah Tahmasb's daughter Pari Khan Khanom issued an edict requiring all poets of Kashan to send their poems, meant for the royal court, to Muhtasham for inspection first.

Contextually as mentioned earlier Kashani is situated in Safavid Iran during the reign of Shah Tahmasb. The intellectual context of the time is one which is deeply affected by Islamic gnosis or 'Irfan, as the Safavids before being a political entity, first and foremost have been and continue to be a Sufi Tariqah par excellence. As such it is only natural that a poet as accomplished as Muhtasham when writing on one of the central themes of Islamic and Iranian identity, i.e. the movement and martyrdom of Imam Hussein presents a multi-dimensional poem with the main dimension of the poem being the gnostic or 'Irfani interpretation of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his companions.

Literature review

Poetry is the main literary form in Persian language. The greater cultural Persia has produced great poets such as Ferdowsi, Attar,

Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi known as Rumi, Sa'di and Hafiz. Muhtasham's important role in this tradition is that he is considered the father of *Marthiya* poetry about Ashura.

Muhtasham's Tarkib-band about the events of Karbala, is epic in nature. It is comprised of 12 strophes each containing seven verses followed by a non-repetitive verse with double rhyme which makes up the connecting verse.

There has been several important works of research written on Muhtasham's Tarkib-band, each of which looks at the Tarkib-band from a different perspective. These works include:

1. Qoreishi¹ examines the aesthetics and literary devices used in the Tarkib-band such as allusion, symmetry, metaphor etc.
2. Salawati² analyses Muhtasham Kashani's Tarkib-band in three levels of language, literary devices and thought. In the section on language the author highlights the simplicity of the language and the use of epic words and phrases, in the literary section the author discusses the literary devices used in the Tarkib-band, and in the final section the objective of the movement of Imam Hussein and its aftermath are examined.
3. Muslemi-Zadeh³ examines the rhetorical aspects of the Tarkib-band.
4. Reza Shajari and Elham Arab-Shahi Kashi⁴ offers a formalist analysis Kashani's Tarkib-band.
5. Kourei and Mahyar⁵ examine the history of eulogies in Arabic and Persian, and their effect on Kashani's Tarkib-band, and further explore the effects of the works of Khaqani and Ravandi on Muhtasham's poetry.

Reflection of Islamic mysticism in Muhtasham's Tarkib-band

There are four main principles of Islamic gnosis that form the conceptual basis of Kashani's *Marthiya*. These are as follows.

The first principle is the interconnectedness of '*Alam al-Qayb* or the unseen world and '*Alam al-Shahadat* or the apparent world.

This is evident from the very first verse in which reference is made to *the creatures of the world*, which refers to all that is created and not just humanity. This point is continually stressed throughout the poem. For example, the second verse reads:

باز این چه رستخیز عظیم است کز زمین
بی نفخ صور خاسته تا عرش اعظم است

What great resurrection is this again that from the earth,
It has risen to the great throne without bellowing in the
trumpet.

Here reference is made to resurrection, the day of judgement, earth or the corporeal world, the divine throne and 'Israfil. The verse signifies that the movement of Imam Hussein is a spiritual movement. It is an awakening for the world, for in the Day of Resurrection the difference between light and darkness, between truth and falsehood is as clear as daylight without any grey areas of doubt or guess work. Hussein is eternally alive, Hussein is resurrection, the symbol of truth, the symbol of light, and the world or '*Alam Nasut*, is devoid of life, false, dead. As the Qur'anic verse states "and all perishes except His Visage" (Qur'an, 28:88).

Imam Hussein's movement is one that breathes life upon the dead dark corpse of the world and brings it to life and spiritual awakening. It further signifies as mentioned before, the interconnectedness between '*Alam al-Qayb* and '*Alam al-Shahadat* and portrays the movement of Imam Hussein as a cosmic movement.

The second conceptual principle is the intelligence and understanding of inanimate objects, vegetative beings, and the skies and heavens. The seventh strophe explores the theme in detail and there are abundant examples throughout the *Marthiya*.

روزی که شد به نیزه سر آن بزرگوار
خورشید سر برهنه برآمد ز کوهسار

The day that the head of that noble man was placed on a
sphere,
The sun, came out headless from the highlands.

موجی به جنبش آمد و برخاست کوه کوه
ابری به بارش آمد و بگریست زار زار

A wave came to motion, and took off mountain to mountain,
A cloud began down falling, and wept lamentingly.

The third principle is the exalted status of the Perfect Human Being in the causal world. For there can be no causal world, without the Perfect Human Being. Further, the importance of the movement and martyrdom of Imam Hussein as the continuation of the movement of the prophets and *'Uliya Allah* (friends of Allah) before him.

As Muhtasham writes:

در بارگاه قدس که جای ملال نیست
سرهای قدسیان همه بر زانوی غم است

In the Divine court in which there is no place for pain,
The heads of the Divine beings are all bowed upon their
knees in sorrow.

The fourth principle is that the martyrdom of Imam Hussein caused suffering, sorrow and pain in all realms of existence from the lowest world which is the human world or *'Alam Nasut*, to the world of Divinity or *'Alam Lahut*.

جن و ملک بر آدمیان نوحه می کنند
گویا عزای اشرف اولاد آدم است

The jinn and angels perform monody for humanity,
As if it is the mourning of the most honourable of Adam's
children.

Perhaps one of the most important elements in the longevity, effectiveness, and popularity of Muhtasham's Tarkib-band, is the use of a simple and easily accessible language for the masses. Which, with its powerful use of unique, innovative, beautiful and powerful metaphors made Muhtasham the flag bearer of the culture of 'Ashura.

The metaphoric aspect of Muhtasham's Tarkib-band is one of its dominant aspects. The metaphors used are unique, powerful, and emotive. But perhaps the most important aspects of Kashani's employment of metaphors is that through the use of metaphors he is able to create multi layered dimensions of meaning. The first layer is the outward which is accessible to all, but the second dimension is the inner dimension, which employs principles of Islamic gnosis, to situate the movement of Imam Hussein and the events of Karbala in the meta history of the movement of those chosen by God to be bearers of life, light and truth, the *'Uliya Allah*.

The movement of Imam Hussein and he and his companions struggle against injustice and darkness is portrayed by Muhtasham Kashani as one which continues to this day. Muhtasham writes:

زان تشنگان هنوز به عیوق می‌رسد
فریاد العطش ز بیابان کربلا

From those thirsty it still reaches Capella,
The outcry of thirst, from the desert of Karbala.

The word thirst and its synonyms and derivatives are utilised in this verse and other verses such as strophe 4 verse 5, strophe 5 verse 1 and strophe 9 verse 5 in a dual manner. On the one hand they denote real meaning and on the other hand they denote metaphorical meaning. This is one of the many examples available throughout the poem that portray the multiple layers of dimension in the poem. In the real sense one of the tragedies of Karbala, which is at the forefront of every Muslim's mindset in relation to this event is that Imam Hussein and his companions gave water to part of the enemy army when they first encountered them. Second that even though

the final battle took place close to the Euphrates they were denied water and experienced severe thirst. The highlighting of the severe thirst of Imam Hussein and his companions by Kashani not only points to a historic reality but also serves two other functions. Firstly, it has an emotive function and highlights the tragedy of the 'Ashura of Hussein. Secondly it has an interrelational function, as every Muslim, particularly those in warm climates experience high levels of thirst during the fasting of the holy month of Ramadan.

In the metaphorical sense the word thirst denotes desire for justice. The cry for thirst of the companions of Hussein is not a cry for physical water to quench physical thirst, rather it is a cry for thirst for justice, for Haqq or truth, and the establishment of justice and truth upon the earth. Which is not only the essence of Imam Hussein's movement but the essence of Islam, the Qur'an and the movement of all the prophets and Divine saints. As the Qur'anic verse in chapter 61 verse 9 and chapter 9 verse 33 state: *وَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ* وَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ (and the religion of Truth it shall prevail over all other religions.) this is the *bishara* or glad tiding of God, this is the mission of all of the aforementioned movements: The establishment of Truth, and the establishment of justice.

The structure of Muhtasham's Tarkib-band

Section 1	Introduction, reflection of the events of Karbala in the Cosmos
Connecting verse 1	Introduction of Imam Hussein
Section 2	Tragedy of Karbala,
Connecting verse 2	The pain of the tragedy, the relationship between the cosmos and the Family of Imam Hussein.
Section 3	The pain of the cosmos from the martyrdom of Imam Hussein
Connecting verse 3	The family of prophet seeking justice and its reflection in the cosmos
Section 4	The historic war between good and evil. The prophets, Divine saints, Imam Ali, Lady Fatima, Imam Hassan

	and Hussein, Qasim and six-month-old Ali Asghar all martyred.
Connecting verse 4	The relationship between the celestial and the material world. Reflection of the sorrow of the celestial world in the material world.
Section 5	The moment of Martyrdom of Imam Hussein and the sorrow of the unseen and seen worlds.
Connecting verse 5	The sorrow of God from the martyrdom of Imam Hussein
Section 6	Resurrection, Divine justice, and the penalty of oppressors.
Connecting verse 6	The obscenity of the oppressors in placing Imam Hussein's head on a spear, the exalted status of Imam Hussein in the cosmos, the contrast between the actions of oppressors and the actions of archangel Gabriel, contrast of light and dark.
Section 7	Mourning in the world due to the oppressors placing the head of Imam Hussein and companions on spears.
Connecting verse 7	The movement of the imprisoned household of Imam Hussein towards Damascus, the seat of the Umayyad throne.
Section 8	The family of Imam Hussein passing the battle ground and seeing the corpses of Imam Hussein and his companions. Introduction of Zeinab as the witness and messenger of Karbala.
Connecting verse 8	Lady Zeinab begins to address the Prophet
Section 9	Lady Zeinab describing the events of Karbala and the martyrdom of Imam Hussein to the Prophet.
Connecting verse 9	Lady Zeinab begins to address Lady Fatima
Section 10	Lady Zeinab taking her mother as witness for the events of Karbala.
Connecting verse 10	Lady Zeinab explaining the injustice of ibn Ziyad towards the family of the Prophet.
Section 11	The word silence repeated in the poem, but used in its antonym's sense "scream, for the tragedy is too great to bear. The pain of the cosmos, humanity, and Gabriel.
Connecting verse 11	Uniqueness of the extent of injustice in Karbala
Section 12	Conclusion. Wheel of power not destiny causing the oppression.
Connecting verse 12	Day of Resurrection

Section One

Keywords

Uproar, mourning, great resurrection, dark morning, sadness, The most noble of Adam's children, Hussein, The sun of the skies and earth, the Light of East.

Metaphors:

Great resurrection, Dark morning, Resurrection of the Lower world (*dunya*), general resurrection, the most noble of Adam's children, the Sun of the sky and earth, the Light of the easts.

Primary message

Section one's primary message is that Imam Hussein's martyrdom is a tragedy for all beings. Its ramifications are not limited to only the human realm, rather they are encompassing of all the realms of existence as it has caused turmoil in all the atoms of the world (verse 4). The connected nature of the seen and unseen worlds is highlighted throughout this section. The martyrdom is framed as a cause of sadness for all creatures from the most holy (verse 6) whose heads are bent on their knees in sorrow, to the Jinn and angels who are lamenting humanity (verse 7).

Analysis

Section one functions as an introductory section which sets the theme and tone of the other 11 sections.

The primary themes in this section are bewilderment, mourning and uproar amongst all creatures of the world, the connected nature of the seen and the unseen world, the martyrdom of Imam Hussein being equivalent to the day of Judgement, his martyrdom being the cause of mourning and sadness for all creatures of the world from the Jinn to the angels and the connectedness of the seen and unseen

worlds. These are themes that are repeated throughout the poem and are present in every section.

Section one begins with bewilderment at the cause of the uproar and mourning of all creatures of the world and ends with the identification of the martyrdom of Hussein, pronounced as the "most noble of the children of Adam" as the cause of the uproar.

Section one's first verse, which is also the first verse of the poem begins with *bāz* or again. This is significant as it has two important functions in understanding the main theme, which is that of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and its ramifications. The first function of "again" is that it sets the time of the poem, as now, now being fluid in time and defined in relation to the reader. The second function is that the ramifications of the martyrdom of Hussein are a constant in time, they are eternal, the uproar, sadness and lamentation which have resulted from Hussein's martyrdom, are not a thing of the past, rather they continue and repeat eternally, as an echo that arises from the earth to the Great Divine throne (verse 2).

Muhtasham refers to the martyrdom of Hussein as Resurrection or Day of Judgement 3 times in section one. Most importantly he refers to it as a "general resurrection" in verse 5, and in doing so, when examined in relation to the use of the word "again" and the interconnectedness of the seen and unseen world which we are constantly reminded of, Muhtasham is portraying the martyrdom of Imam Hussein as a key incident in time that acts as a dividing line between good and evil, light and darkness.

"Dark morning" representing the mood of the day of Hussein's martyrdom (verse 3) is juxtaposed with Hussein as "the sun of the sky and earth and the light of the easts" (verse 8), for Hussein is the Perfect Human of the time, and the symbol of the Muhammadan light, and his martyrdom casts a shadow over the dawn of the physical sun.

Section 2

Keywords

Karbala, storm of Karbala, broken ship, eye of time, tears blood, Kufis, water, Capella, guest of Karbala, Solomon of Karbala, King of Karbala, Army of foes, thirst.

Metaphors

storm of Karbala, broken ship, eye of time, guest of Karbala, Solomon of Karbala, King of Karbala.

Primary message

While in section one the cosmic dimension of the events of Karbala are described by Muhtasham, in section 2 the historical and temporal aspects of the events of Karbala are explored. Karbala as the land in which the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his companions occurs, and his family becomes captive in, and the Kufi's as those who invited the Imam to come to Kufa in the first place and subsequently attacked him. Karbala and Kufa are located in modern day Iraq.

Analysis

The main theme of the second section is the introduction of Karbala and introducing four of the main aspects of the tragedy, which are the betrayal, thirst, denial of water and the initiation of the attack on Imam Hussain and his companions.

The section functions as an introduction to Karbala, Kufa and the main central themes of the tragedy of Imam Hussein's Martyrdom.

Section two presents the main themes of the tragedy of Hussein's martyrdom. Karbala, betrayal, thirst and blood are four of the primary keywords in the collective memory associated with the Martyrdom of Hussain. By referencing these keywords, Muhtasham

utilises them to highlight the primary aspects of the tragedy for the audience. After Hussein's martyrdom, the land of Karbala becomes a focal point in Shi'a consciousness and identity to the extent that its soil becomes sacred and Karbala becomes one of the main centres of Shi'a pilgrimage.

Section 3

Keywords

World burning sigh, Ark of the family of the Prophet, sea of blood.

Metaphors

World burning sigh, Ark of the family of the Prophet, sea of blood,

Analysis

In section 3 Muhtasham highlights the extent of the tragedy by wishing for the world to have ended instead of the events of Karbala, and martyrdom of Imam Hussein to have occurred. The "Ark of the family of the Prophet" is reference to the significance of the family of Prophet as it is comparable to the Ark of Noah, this is based on Prophet Muhammad's hadith of the ship which states "Behold! My Ahl al-Bayt are like the Ark of Noah. Whoever embarked in it was saved, and whoever turned away from it was perished."⁶

Section 4

Keywords

Lion of God, Gabriel, Best of Women, Hassan al-Mujtaba, Palm trees, Garden of people of the cloak, the thirsty throat of the descendant of Mortaza.

Metaphors

Lion of God (Imam Ali ibn Abi Tali, the successor of the Prophet who was martyred on the altar.), Best of women (Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet of Islam, who in Shi'ism is considered as one of the fourteen infallible. She was the mother of Lady Zeinab, Imam Hassan and Hussein, and the wife of Imam Ali.), Palm trees (The brave youth who were amongst the companions of Imam Hussein and were martyred in Karbala), Garden of People of the Cloak (the family of Prophet Muhammad, which according to the Hadith al-Kisa is comprised of, Prophet Muhammad, Lady Fatima, Imam Ali, Hassan and Hussain), the thirsty throat of the descendant of Murtaza (Ali Asghar, Imam Hussein's youngest son, who was six months old at the time of the battle of Karbala, and was martyred by an arrow to the throat).

Primary message

Justice and martyrdom on the path of God are the traditions of the household of the Prophet.

Analysis of Section 4

Section 4 portrays the historic tradition of martyrdom on the path of God and justice amongst the members of the household of the Prophet of Islam. Imam Hussein's martyrdom is placed by Muhtasham in the historic context of his predecessor's martyrdom.

Muhtasham uses metaphors and descriptive references to Islamic history and culture in order to establish on the one hand the bravery, self-sacrifice and steadfastness of the family of Prophet on the path of God, which results in their martyrdom, and on the other hand their enemy's oppression, injustice, brutality and disregard for the sacred.

Kashani does not examine the martyrdom's in chronological order, for example although the martyrdom of Lady Fatima occurs before

Imam Ali's martyrdom, Muhtasham first recounts the Martyrdom of Imam Ali.

Muhtasham beautifully portrays the tragedy of the martyrdom of Imam Ali, the cousin, son in law and successor of the Prophet, who according to the Shi'a tradition is the first Imam chosen by God to lead the Muslim Ummah after the Prophet of Islam. Muhtasham uses the term Lion of God to refer to Imam Ali, which is one of Imam Ali's most popular epithets referencing his bravery throughout his life during the formative years of Islam and his exalted status in Islamic history.

نوبت به اولیا چو رسید آسمان طپید
زان ضربتی که بر سر شیر خدا زدند

When it was the turn of the friends⁷ the sky shook
From the blow that they struck to the head of the lion of God.

In the next verse Muhtasham continues to contextualise the events of Karbala by beautifully portraying the attack on Lady Fatima and Imam Ali's home, in which the door was struck to Fatima's rib cage, which shortly after resulted in her martyrdom⁸. Fatima's exalted position is portrayed by using the familiar epithet of *Best of Women*, based on Islamic hadith, for her. The exalted status of the family of Prophet in the cosmos is portrayed by Muhtasham by saying that Archangel Gabriel was the guard of the door of Fatima and Ali's home. In this verse, which is one of the most emotionally provocative verses of the Tarkib-band, Muhtasham highlights the dark and oppressive nature of the enemies of the household of the Prophet, who disregard the sacred, by attacking a home protected by Gabriel, and their actions lead to the martyrdom of Lady Fatima. Muhtasham in this verse employs intertextuality between history, *hadith* and poetry.

آن در که جبرئیل امین بود خادمش
اهل ستم به پهلوی خیرالنسا زدند

That door which Gabriel the trusted was its servant,

The people of oppression struck to the side of the best of women.

The next verse discusses the martyrdom of Imam Hassan, the second Shi'a Imam by poison. He was the first child of Imam Ali and Lady Fatima, and the first grandchild of the Prophet of Islam. He is the second Imam according to the Shi'a tradition, and the period of his *Imamat* lasted 10 years from 40 AH to 50 AH, and for seven months he was the caliph of Muslims. Sunni's consider him as the last of the rightly guided caliphs. Imam Hassan's martyrdom by poison is referred to in many Shi'a and Sunni sources⁹.

The continuity of on the one hand the bravery and sacrifice and steadfastness of the family of the Prophet and on the other hand the oppression and brutality of their enemies is beautifully expressed in verse 5 of section four, which portrays the movement of the household of the Prophet from Medina to Karbala, in which the poet beautifully portrays their tent as the most sacred space that even angels do not have access to, highlighting the exalted status of the Family of the Prophet in the cosmos.

وانگه سرادقی که ملک محرمش نبود
کندند از مدینه و در کربلا زدند

Suddenly the tent that angels were not privy to,
They uprooted from Medina and placed in Karbala

Palm trees and *Garden of the people of the Cloak* are metaphors which are used in reference to the youth from the family of Imam Hussain who were martyred in the battle of Karbala. According to some historians, such as Khawrizmi and Sheikh Mufid more than 17 of Imam Hussein's family members were martyred on the Day of Ashura.

وز تیشه ستیزه در آن دشت کوفیان
بس نخلها ز گلشن آل عبا زدند

With the axe of enmity in that plain the Kufis,
Cut many palms from the garden of the people of the cloak.

The height of tragedy in this section is verse seven, in which the martyrdom of Ali Asghar, the six-month-old infant son of Imam Hussein is portrayed. The tragedy is described by Muhtasham as so great, that the heart of the Prophet breaks. The Prophet is referred to here as Mustafa, which means "the chosen", this is done to once more show the depravity of the enemies of Prophet's household and their disregard for the sacred. On the other hand,

Imam Ali is referred to as Mortaza here, which means "The one pleasing to God", to highlight the exalted status of the household of the Prophet with God, and to remind the audience that the battle of Karbala, is one between Light and darkness.

پس ضربتی کزان جگر مصطفی درید
بر حلق تشنه خلف مرتضی زدند

So a blow from which the heart of Mustafa was torn,
They struck to the thirsty throat of the descendant of
Mortaza.

Section 5

Keywords

Thirsty throat, house of belief, pillars of religion, tall palm, Messenger, Jesus, Gabriel

Metaphors

Exalted throne, house of belief, pillar of religion, Jesus sitting in heaven, the skirt of majesty of the world's Creator.

Primary message

The martyrdom of Hussein and news of the martyrdom travelling the cosmos and causing sadness in the seen and unseen worlds.

Analysis of Section 5

The fifth section reflects the cosmic effects of the moment of martyrdom of Imam Hussein. The blood spilled from the thirsty throat of Hussein, is portrayed as sacred. For when it reaches the earth, pain arises from the earth and reaches the Divine throne. Muhtasham once more highlights the interconnectedness of the seen and unseen world. The news of the martyrdom of Hussein, which is presented as an event that “nearly destroys the house of religion” due to the extent of “damage caused to the pillar of religion”,

travels throughout the cosmos reaching the Prophet of Islam, Jesus and the rest of prophets and continuing to Gabriel and God and causing uproar in the cosmos.

The tragedy of Hussein’s martyrdom is portrayed by Muhtasham, as a tragedy which is encompassing of all the cosmos.

Section 6

Keywords

Punishment, mercy, sin, Day of Resurrection, sin of creations, God’s rebuke, Household of the Prophet, People of Oppression, family of Imam Ali, the youth of the household of the Prophet, Arena of Resurrection, queue, ecstasy, Gabriel.

Metaphors

Flames of fire (the light of beauty and glory of the martyrs of the household of the Prophet in Karbala), hunt of sanctum (the martyrs of Karbala).

Primary message:

The power of intercession of the household of the prophet, which occurs from their benevolence and magnanimity, and the exalted status of the martyrs of Karbala in the day of resurrection.

Analysis of Section 6

Section six begins by the first two verses discussing the punishment of the killers of the martyrs of Karbala. Muhtasham voices his fear, that the martyrs of Karbala, might intercede with God on behalf of the killers, out of compassion. Here Muhtasham is portraying the exalted status and humanity of the household of the Prophet, that might even result in them forgiving an interceding with God on behalf of their own oppressors and he is referring to God's All-encompassing compassion.

ترسم جزای قاتل او چون رقم زنند
یک باره بر جریده رحمت قلم زنند

I fear that when they decide on the punishment of his killer,
Suddenly they write in the book of compassion.

ترسم کزین گناه شفیعیان روز حشر
دارند شرم کز گنه خلق دم زنند

I fear that from this sin, the intercessors of the Day of
Resurrection,
Have inhibition to speak of the sins of creatures.

In this section the poet has placed two "Ahl" (people) in front of one another. One is *Ahl al-Bayt* (People of the Household) which refers to the family of the Prophet, and the other is *ahl-e setam* (people of oppression). From a conceptual perspective, *Ahl al-Bayt* are representatives of good and justice and *ahl-e setam* are representatives of evil and injustice. *Al-e Ali* (Family of Ali) which is used in verse 4, is a subcategory of *Ahl al-Bayt* which includes the children of Ali and Fatima, and Ali's children from his other wives some of whom were present in the battle of Karbala as

companions of Imam Hussein and were martyred there such as Abbas ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib, Othman ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib, Abu Bakr ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib and Umar ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib.

In verses 5 and 6 of Section six the poet envisions that the martyrs of Karbala and the “people of oppression” will once more line up in opposing sides, however this time the location is the Desert of Resurrection in the presence of God. And there, it is the martyrs of Karbala who are victorious and the “people of oppression” who are defeated.

In the connecting verse Muhtasham beautifully visualises Gabriel who is the most important angel in the angelic world, washing the hair of Imam Hussein, whose head was placed on a spear by his enemies. Muhtasham uses the phrase water of Salsabil to describe the water with which Gabriel washes the hair of Imam Hussein with. Salsabil is a Qur’anic term denoting a lake in heaven (Qur’an, 76:18).

پس بر سنان کنند سری را که جبرئیل
شوید غبار گیسویش از آب سلسبیل

Thus, they place on spearheads the head that Gabriel,
Washes the dust of its hair with the water of Salsabil.

Section 7

Keywords

Spear, sun, headless, clouds, rainfall, crying, earthquake, the wheel of time stopped moving, divine throne, old universe, Day of Judgement, opposing wind, tent, hair of beautiful heavenly women, rope, Gabriel, nation of Prophet, Holy Spirit, spirit of Prophet, shame, Kufa, group of tribulation, Damascus, Intellect.

Metaphors

Old wheel (Movement of time in the temporal world), hair of beautiful heavenly women (the rope of the tents of Imam Hussein's family), Opposing wind (attack of the people of oppression), group of tribulation (The family of Imam Hussein who are taken prisoner)

Primary message

The sorrow of the cosmos and the angelic world from the martyrdom and imprisonment of the family of the Prophet.

Analysis of Section Seven

In section seven the cohesion of the essential elements of the causal world and their sorrow for the tragedy of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his companions and the imprisonment of his family is described. The essential elements are: Perfect human being, sun, Gabriel, intellect.

In verse 1 Muhtasham beautifully visualises the effect that the beheading of Imam Hussein has, not only on the human world but on all the cosmos. The sun, becomes headless, on the day Imam Hussein is beheaded and his head placed on a spear.

روزی که شد به نیزه سر آن بزرگوار
خورشید سر برهنه برآمد ز کوهسار

The day that the head of that noble was placed on a spear,
The sun came out headless from the highlands.

The following verses continue to describe the effect of the martyrdom and beheading of Imam Hussein and his companions on the cosmos. The seas became turbulent and the sky became cloudy and cried and rained from the tragedy. The rainfall is beautifully described as tears of the sky by Muhtasham. Kashani portrays the earth experiencing earthquakes due to the immensity of the tragedy and symmetrical to the sudden unnatural movement of the earth, he

says of the movement of time in the temporal world, that it stopped, for time thought that it is the time of the Day of Judgement.

Muhtasham visualises the sorrow reaching the Divine Throne, and the Divine Throne shaking. Then suddenly Muhtasham refocuses from the Divine throne, to the plains of Karbala, where now Hussein and his companions are martyred, their corpses mutilated, their heads beheaded and placed upon spears, and their tents in which their wives, daughters and children are seeking refuge in are attacked by their enemies. They, who Gabriel was the protector of their camel saddle stool, are taken prisoner and placed on camels without saddle stools, to torment them. The extent of depravity, crime and suffering is to such that Gabriel becomes ashamed from the spirit of the Prophet of Islam due to the tragedy inflicted on the Prophet's family by his own nation.

In Muhtasham's perspective the cosmos also have life, intellect and spirit. This points to an important philosophical issue that it is not only human beings who possess a spirit.

In the connecting verse Muhtasham portrays the movement of the caravan of prisoners towards Damascus, and describes it as a tragedy, which caused the first intellect to assume it is the Day of Judgement.

Section 8

Keywords

Battlefield, caravan, fear, lamentation, crying, angels of the seven heavens, deer, plain, bird, nest, horror, ecstasy of resurrection, the eyes of the Ahl al-Bayt, the slain, the bodies of martyrs, razors and spears, the eyes of Zahra's daughter, the noble body of the Imam of the time, the cry of "this is Hussein", fire, the world, the language full of discontent, piece of body of the Prophet, Medina, O Messenger.

Metaphors

Piece of body of the Prophet (Zeinab)

Primary Message

Zeinab is introduced as the witness and messenger of the events of Karbala, bearing the news of the tragedy to the Prophet of Islam.

Analysis of Section 8

Section 8 is of great importance in the Tarkib-band, as Zeinab the sister of Imam Hussein is introduced in this section. While the central figure in the previous sections was Hussein, the central figure in Sections 8, 9 and 10 is Zeinab. An important aspect of the Tarkib-band of Muhtasham, is highlighting the role of Zeinab, not only as the witness of the events of Karbala, but as the messenger of Karbala. It was Zeinab, who through her eloquence exposed the corruption of Yazid and the Umayyads and their divergence from the truth. Zeinab through the sermons she delivered in Damascus and Kufa, portrayed the clear distinction between the Muhammadan Islam, represented by the household of the Prophet and the path of the Umayyads and their supporters. Zeinab in Muhtasham's poem, does not simply function as the feminine voice utilised for emotive function. Zeinab's role is that of the reviver of Islam, for as Muhtasham masterfully writes about the possible outcome of the events of Karbala the "house of religion" was close to ruin because of the events of Karbala:

چون خون ز حلق تشنه او بر زمین رسید
جوش از زمین بذروه عرش برین رسید

As blood from his thirsty throat reached the earth,
Uproar from earth reached the summit of the exalted throne.

نزدیک شد که خانه ایمان شود خراب
از بس شکستها که به ارکان دین رسید

The house of belief, came close to ruin,

From the many fractures caused to the pillars of religion.

In section 8 the poet invites the audience to accompany Zeinab and the rest of the captives as they see the dismembered bodies of the martyrs of Karbala in the desert of Karbala on their way from Kufa to Damascus. Muhtasham masterfully transports the audience to the desert of Karbala with uniquely emotive metaphors. Verses 1 to 5 set the scene and describe what the caravan is seeing. Verse 6 introduces a sense of urgency and heart-breaking sorrow, for Zeinab's eyes in the midst of the chaos and carnage of the battlefield, fall upon the body of her slain brother, the Imam of the time, Hussein, beheaded. Muhtasham writes:

ناگاه چشم دختر زهرا در آن میان

بر پیکر شریف امام زمان فتاد

Suddenly the eyes of Zahra's daughter in that midst,
Fell upon the noble body of the Imam of the time.

بی اختیار نعره هذا حسین او

سر زد چنانکه آتش از او در جهان فتاد

Unintentionally her scream of "this is Hussein",
Arose, as fire filled the world from her.

In the connecting verse, Zeinab is mentioned by name for the first time, and her role as the witness, narrator and messenger of Karbala is introduced.

پس با زبان پر گله آن بضعة الرسول

رو در مدینه کرد که یا ایها الرسول

Thus, with a language full of discontent that piece of body of
the Messenger
Faced Medina [and said]: "Oh Messenger"

Section 9

Keywords

Slain of the battlefield, Your Hussein, fresh palm, heart rendering fire of thirst, prey, smoke has sent from the earth to the heavens, fish fallen in the sea of blood, more injuries on his body than a star, thirsty lips, king, wave of blood, Baqi', Zahra

Metaphors

Slain of the battlefield, prey, fish, thirsty lips, king, fresh palm (Hussein)

Primary Message

Zeinab as the witness of the battlefield of Karbala, stands witness in front of the Prophet and testifies to the events of the martyrdom of Hussein.

Analysis of Section 9

In section 9, Zeinab fills the role of the messenger and witness of the events of Karbala. The Day of Resurrection and Judgement Day are central themes in the Tarkib-band. Zeinab's testimony in sections 9 and 10, first to the prophet and then to her mother Fatimah is a testimony in the Divine court against the army of darkness she has slain her brother, the Imam of the time, Hussein.

The verses in section 9 are some of the most famous verses about the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, with a tragic internal rhythm and music. The phrase "your Hussein" which is repeated at the end of each verse in this section except for the connecting verse, is refrain from the aspect of form, however, from the aspect of meaning, it is repeated for emphasis, and to portray Zeinab's pride of and respect to her brother.

Metaphors play an important role in the structure of the poetic images of Muhtasham's poetry, and from an artistic perspective they are at a higher status than similes for the difference between two objects and their separation from each other which is evident in similes, is removed in metaphors and as a result in metaphor the objects reach unity.

Section 10

Keywords

Companion of the broken hearts, see our state, the people of injustice, tragedy, sedition,

Karbala, soil, and blood.

Metaphors

Companion of the broken hearts (Fatima), the people of injustice (Army of the enemy),

Primary Message

Zeinab delivers the news of the events of Karbala to her mother Fatimah al-Zahra and reveals the sedition of Ibn Ziyad.

Analysis of Section 10

Section 10 has an intimate mood as it represents the conversation of a daughter, who has witnessed the tragic killing of her brother and family, with her mother. The mood is set in the very first verse with the phrase "companion of the broken hearts" in reference to Lady Fatima, the mother of Zeinab and Hussein.

The contrast between the prophet's treatment of Imam Hussein (verse 6) who was nurtured and raised by Fatima (verse 7) and the treatment of Yazid as the ruler of the Muslim lands with Imam Hussein, who sent a savage army which martyred and beheaded Imam Hussein and his companions and took captive their family is to emphasis on the injustice and evil nature of Yazid and the Umayyads as a whole (verse 8).

Section 11

Keywords

Silence Muhtasham, the heart of stone became water, patience, ruined, heart-rendering words, blood dripping poem, tears, audience, pure blood, tear rising rhyme, heaven, sea, sun, burning, remembering the sorrow of Hussein, Gabriel becoming veiled, base universe, mistake, injustice

Metaphors

Silence Muhtasham, the heart of stone became water, blood dripping poem, tear rising rhyme, heaven, sea, sun, burning, remembering the sorrow of Hussein, Gabriel becoming veiled, base universe.

Primary Message

The epic tragedy of Imam Hussein is unique in history, and all the cosmos from the temporal world to the Divine Throne mourn this tragedy.

Analysis of Section 11

The word "silence" in the beginning of each verse is repeated to portray the immensity of the tragedy, however it is utilised in its opposite sense i.e. "shout". Muhtasham's poetry is the artistic shout

of Imam Hussein's tragedy. Muhtasham once more in this section continues his emphasis on the interconnectedness of the seen and unseen worlds and the effects of the tragedy of Imam Hussein's martyrdom on the cosmos.

In the connecting verse Muhtasham emphasises on the uniqueness of the tragedy of Karbala in history.

تا چرخ سفله بود خطائی چنین نکرد
بر هیچ آفریده جفائی چنین نکرد

Since the base universe has existed it has not committed such a transgression,
It has not perpetrated such an injustice upon any creation.

Section 12

Keywords

Universe, unaware, injustice, enmity, oppression, Children of Prophet, help, child of Ziyad, Nimrud, Shaddad, desire of Yazid, Mustafa and Haidar and their children, lip, dagger, throat, Day of resurrection.

Metaphors

Desire of Yazid, Inferior, fruit of the tree of cruelty, garden of religion, flower and Buxus.

Primary message

Section 12 which is the final section first addresses the universe and places blame on the universe for not stopping the enemies of Imam Hussein, and then addresses Ibn Ziyad and Yazid as the main perpetrators of the events of Karbala and describes their crime as unparalleled in history.

Analysis of Section 12

In section 12, Muhtasham first addresses the universe and then addresses Ibn Ziyad and Yazid. The first two verses reprimand the universe for aiding the killers of Imam Hussein.

Muhtasham contrasts the “family of the Prophet”, “Garden of religion” and “flower and Buxus” of the Garden of God with Ibn Ziyad and Yazid and their heinous crime. Ibn Ziyad and Yazid's crimes are described as worse than that of Nimrod and Shaddad, in order to emphasise the uniqueness of the crime. Nimrod and Shaddad are mentioned in the Qur'an as two symbols of corrupt temporal power. By employing this comparison between Ibn Ziyad and Yazid and Nimrod and Shaddad, Muhtasham has placed the events of Karbala in a historical context to show that the confrontation of the army of light and army of darkness is historic. The confrontation of Prophet Ibrahim with Nimrod, Shaddad with Prophet David and Yazid and Imam Hussein.

Conclusion

Muhtasham's Tarkib-band is considered as a poetic masterpiece that greatly influenced the genre of religious poetry particularly those on the subject of Ashura.

Muhtasham's Tarkib-band utilises a simple language, and a combination of unique emotive and powerful metaphors on the one hand and on the other common metaphors which in Shi'a culture are attributed to the events of Ashura.

The popularity of his Tarkib-band, which to this day is one of the most important and widely used poems about Imam Hussein is due to its multiple layers of meaning, the utilisation of principles of Islamic mysticism, and its great emotive power which arises from the utilisation of unique metaphors and an expansive imagination

that portrays the effects of the calamity of Ashura revibrating through the cosmos from the inanimate objects to the Divine throne. Muhtasham is able to address the different dimensions of the event of Karabla, from the crime of martyrdom and captivity, to Zeinab's role as the witness and messenger of Ashura, from its effects on the temporal world to its effects on the cosmic world, while contextualising the tragedy of Ashura as the continuation of the primordial battle of light against darkness.

Note:

To read Muhtasham Kashani's Marthiya in Persian visit:

<https://iranianstudies.org/fa/1399/07/12/muhtasham-kashanis-tarkib-band/>

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- ⁶ al-Mustadrak, by al-Hakim, v2, p343, v3, pp 150-151 on the authority of Abu Dharr. al-Hakim said this tradition is authentic (Sahih).
- ⁷ Uliya, which is short of Uliya Allah which means the friends of God, and refers to the Divine saints.
- ⁸ The report of the attack on Lady Fatima and Imam Ali's house is referred to in a number of Sunni and Shi'a sources. For example in the *history of Ya'qubi* by Ahmad bin abi Ya'qub ibn Wazih Ya'qubi and *al-milal va al-Nahal* of Shahrestani.
- ⁹ Refer to: Mufid, 1414AH, *Al-Irshad fi ma'rifat hujaj Allah 'ala l-'ibad*, Dar al-Mufid, vol. 2, p 15; and Masudi, Ali ibn Hussain, 1409, *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawahir*, Qom: Dar al-Hujrah, vol 2, p 427.

The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan

Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu

Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2014, PP. 167

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

“[B]lissfulness lies beyond the reach of words.”¹
Gettan Sōkō (1326–1389)

This landmark work examines the aesthetic foundations of classical and medieval Japan. It demonstrates the profound and intimate relationship between philosophy, art and the sacred that permeates the whole of Japanese culture. Beauty mirrors the supernatural or metaphysical order and, for this reason, is central to religion and its civilizations. In fact, life without beauty was inconceivable in traditional societies and its absence was considered tantamount to repudiating the Spirit (an outlook that is utterly foreign to the desacralized climate of the modern West). This aesthetic experience of beauty as known in the traditional world is something foreign

¹ Gettan Sōkō, quoted in Toshihiko and Toyo Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan* (Springer, 1981), p. 123.

and rather unknown to the desacralized and anti-spiritual outlook of the modern Western mentality. This book reminds us how essential this dimension is for the psychological health and well-being of the human being and society at large and can function as a seed to revive integral aesthetics. Providing a salutary reminder of the indispensable role that beauty plays in preserving our psychological health and spiritual well-being is one of the distinctive achievements of *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan*.

This important study aims to provide a clear understanding of the “metaphysical, ethical, and aesthetic experiences of the Japanese” (pp. ix–x). The Izutsus employ a method that traces phenomena back to their transpersonal source: “There is a peculiar kind of metaphysics, based on a realization of the simultaneous semantic articulation of consciousness and the external reality, dominating the whole functional domain of the Japanese sense of beauty” and, without an understanding of this sense, “the so-called ‘mystery’ of Japanese aesthetics would remain incomprehensible” (p. ix).

Essential Japanese artistic forms such as *haiku* and *waka* poetry, Noh plays, and the tea ceremony have given rise to the categories of *ushin* (depth of heart or intense feeling), *aware* (pathos or poignancy), *yūgen* (mysterious profundity) and *wabi* (subdued, austere beauty). However, as this work demonstrates, these notions require deep contemplation and do not lend themselves to superficial definitions.

The contemplative experience of the Japanese is “associative rather than logical, representational rather than linguistic, dimensional rather than linear, and non-temporal rather than successive” (p. 32). According to the traditional terminology, “Nothingness” (*mu*) is formless whereas “being” (*yū*) is the articulated aspect of existence. While Japanese arts are commonly spartan in their appearance, this should not be mistaken for lack of content or inspiration. On the contrary, this apparent emptiness conveys an unspeakable

dimension of Reality that reflects a multiplicity of meanings which serve to expand our appreciation of the aesthetic possibilities contained therein:

Thus Nature, actually envisaged by the poet, constitutes in itself a kind of Nature-‘field’ where the inner phenomenal activity of his Subjectivity finds its proper locus for externalisation. The Nature-‘field’ assumes the significance of an externalized form of his inner ‘field’ of contemplative Awareness, in which he is to encounter his own inner Self. (p. 22)

The Izutsus observe that “Nothingness [is] the non-articulated whole that is to be considered the sole Reality” (p. 31). This is to say, “Aesthetically, the supreme metaphysical value of Nothingness finds its own reflection as an aesthetic image in the representation of Nothingness” (p. 32). In this way, “a supreme metaphysical value is ascribed to Nothingness” (p. 31). Correspondingly, integral “aesthetics ... [is] based on a metaphysics having Nothingness as its ultimate goal” (p. 34). Therefore, the “being” that has emerged out of Nothingness is restored in the original Nothingness through the contemplative experience. “What is meant by this is that the subject, by completely identifying itself with its own articulating function, establishes itself as the Subject, i.e. the all-unifying consciousness comprising both the subject and object as ordinarily understood” (p. 30).

There is an inner dimension to our aesthetic experience that contains an “infinite possibility for growth and development” (p. 39). At a certain phase in its unfolding, the world of phenomena functions as a contemplative field, where the dialectic of subject and object or “being” (*yū*) and “Non-being” (*mu*) are reconciled in metaphysics:

The internal and the external, the subjective and the objective; the perceiver and the perceived, the field and the awareness of the field, the contained and the container: whichever of these pairs of opposing units we might posit as

the ultimate realms of articulation, we invariably witness primordial poles of reality, almost fused into one another, leaving, however, their faint traces of articulate boundaries, constituting between them a harmonious equilibrium.... Such is the whole reality and such is also the whole width of consciousness, and between the two is maintained a state of perfect equilibrium. (p. 41)

It is in this way that the following remark can be properly apprehended: “‘Being’ is in this way always expressed as ‘being’ immediately backed by ‘not-being’, while ‘not-being’ is expressed as ‘not-being’ pregnant and saturated with ‘being’” (p. 42).

This interplay contains the essence of Japanese aesthetics:

To the yearning seekers of blossoms
With pride, would I offer
A delight of the eye,
The green from under the snow
In a mountain village in springtide! (p. 50)

The distinct degrees of knowing correspond to levels of Reality that are discernable according to the mode of the knower:

When we observe through the filter of the teleological cognition inherent in our empirical consciousness the temporal aspect of the phenomenal world and the things and events that arise therein, we necessarily recognize numerous lines of causal relationship crossing each other between these things and events, each of them leaving behind it a trace of its own temporal development. Thus we obtain the image of reality in terms of the temporality of causal sequence. (p. 55)

Ultimate Reality transcends all verbal expressions and conceptual grasping as indicated by the following passage from a text of the Tendai school: “The inner state which is beyond the reach of all verbal expression, and in which there is no room for cogitation, and indeed which transcends all the activities of human mind.” (p. 112) This notion is also found in Zen Buddhism: “At dead of night, the

sun shines brilliantly in Shinra” (p. 43). In the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, “The sensible is Nothingness. Nothingness is the sensible” (p. 110) or, as we find in a celebrated Zen *kōan*, “All things that exist are reducible to One. To what is the One reducible? It is reducible to all things that exist” (p. 120).

Through our noetic faculty known as *buddhi* (Intellect) or *prajñā* (Wisdom), the transpersonal dimension of reality can be accessed directly. Accordingly, “Only after having probed the depth of one’s innate Mind-nature and attained the highest state of transcendental insight into it, could one possibly grasp this truth” (p. 127). When we undergo this transformation, there is a reintegration and abiding in the Absolute. Zen Buddhism conveys this understanding as follows: “Enlightenment after enlightenment, one finds oneself in the selfsame state as before enlightenment” (p. 124). Jitoku-Eki (d. 1083) once observed that “After the root of life has been eradicated, one is reborn variously in accordance with one’s intrinsic capacity” (p. 124). It is at this moment, having become what Rinzai Gigen (d. 866) described as a “true man without any rank” (p. 123), that we begin to understand the following Buddhist adage: “At no time are delusory thoughts to arise in the mind” (p. 22).

This illuminating analysis of classical and medieval Japanese aesthetics is full of insights that open a portal into the mysterious dimension of beauty in its metaphysical plenitude. Although largely dismissed by the secularized Western mindset, an integrated consideration of aesthetics is critical to a properly traditional understanding of beauty, which ought to infuse all domains of life. It is hoped that impressive works such as this can help awaken the Platonic *anamnesis* or ‘recollection’ of beauty as “the splendor of the true,” an insight that is confirmed in the sapiential doctrines of all humanity’s great spiritual traditions. Beauty mirrors the transpersonal order of Reality and allows us to become fully harmonized in our Spirit, soul and body. We conclude with Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), arguably one of the greatest of all *haiku* poets,

who remarked: “The evolvement of heaven and earth is the seed of aesthetic creativity” (p. 166).

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