AL-SUHRAWARDI'S KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF ILLUMINATION, LIGHT, AND ISYRAQIYAH WISDOM

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Abstract
Suhrwardi's Isyraqiyah philosophy emerged as a critique of the perceived limitations within Aristotelian peripatetic philosophy. This study investigates the enduring significance of Suhrwardi's teachings and their relevance in contemporary philosophical discourse. Employing a qualitative research methodology and an extensive literature review, we analyze Suhrwardi's philosophical contributions towards understanding the complexities of existence. Our findings highlight how Isyraqiyah philosophy promotes tranquility and contemplation, offering a blend of philosophical and spiritual reasoning. This philosophy provides profound insights into the multifaceted nature of existence, guiding individuals in navigating contemporary challenges. Thus, Suhrwardi's Isyraqiyah philosophy remains a vital source of enlightenment and guidance, offering a robust framework for philosophical and spiritual contemplation in modern contexts.

Keywords: Philosophy, Illumination, Suhrwardi

Abstrak

Kata Kunci: Filsafat, Iluminasi, Suhrwardi
A. Introduction

Suhrawardi’s teachings did not vanish with his death. Many schools of philosophy have been influenced by Suhrawardi’s teachings. The spread of Suhrawardi’s philosophical influence can be found in various places. First, his teachings influenced various Persian thought traditions and are still studied today. This is because Suhrawardi's teachings possess formulas capable of explaining the esoteric aspects of Shiism. Second, some of his works have been translated into Sanskrit, attracting attention from various Zoroastrian communities in India. His teachings on Illumination also gained the attention of Sultan Muhammad Ibn Tughlug, who even propagated it as a school of thought. Third, in Syria and Anatolia (Turkey), there are indications that Suhrawardi's philosophy has been studied by some Turkish scholars, evidenced by the discovery of manuscripts on illuminationist philosophy in Turkish libraries.

Furthermore, in the West, in the early 20th century, Orientalists and historians of philosophy began to recognize and voice that Suhrawardi was an important figure after Avicenna (Ibn Sina)(Ma’rufi 2021). Intuition and inspiration (musyahadah) are deemed more important than logic and serve as the foundation for all discursive activities and as the first step in producing true knowledge. Suhrawardi believed that the most accurate, fundamental, and high-quality type of knowledge is the apocalyptic lights or the knowledge obtained through mystical experiences (Warno & Ud 2018 p. 2).

The idea of Suhrawardi's Isyraqiyah philosophy emerged as a reaction to the weaknesses of Aristotelian peripatetic philosophy. This is because, epistemologically, peripatetic philosophy cannot encompass all realities of existence. Second, ontologically, peripatetic philosophy views existence as more fundamental than essence. According to Suhrawardi, existence is merely a shadow of ideas in the mind (Khuhori Soleh et al. 2011 p. 2).

Thus, Suhrawardi’s Isyraqiyah concept offers an alternative view emphasizing the importance of a deeper understanding of the reality of existence and considering the significant role of ideas in shaping existence. In Suhrawardi's view, Isyraqiyah philosophy not only critiques peripatetic philosophy but also proposes a new, more holistic, and inclusive perspective in understanding the universe and the nature of existence.
B. Method

This article employs a qualitative research methodology, specifically utilizing a literature review approach, to investigate and examine the concepts included in Suhrawardi’s Isyraqiyah philosophy. Within this particular context, the utilization of the literature review methodology enables academics to thoroughly examine Suhrawardi’s documented ideas from a range of different sources. The data collecting method was conducted with great care and attention to detail, involving thorough searches and analysis of Suhrawardi’s works and related literature in multiple libraries. This methodology offers a robust structure for comprehending Suhrawardi’s contributions to the historical development of Islamic philosophical thought. During this procedure, a thorough collection of data pertaining to Al-Suhrawardi and his works was assembled. The analysis centered on different facets of Suhrawardi’s philosophy, including his theories on knowledge and existence, as well as the key notions he put out. Within the realm of philosophical analysis, the data underwent a thorough examination to investigate the philosophical implications of Suhrawardi’s views and their pertinence to both present-day philosophy and life. This paper intends to enhance comprehension of Suhrawardi’s Isyraqiyah philosophy and its contributions to Islamic philosophical thought.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Biography of Al-Suhrawardi

Suhrawardi was one of the post-Avicennian Islamic philosophers who brought new dimensions to Islamic philosophical thought. Suhrawardi, whose full name is Sheikh Shihab al-Din Abu al-Futuh Yahya Ibn Habash Ibn Amarak Abu Futuh al-Suhrawardi, was born in 549 AH (1154 CE) in Suhraward, Zanjan, in northwestern Iran (Abdullah, 2020, p. 96). He is known worldwide as Sheikh al-Isyraq or the Master of Illuminationist (the Father of Enlightenment), Al-Hakim for his wisdom, and Al-Maqtul, describing his tragic death by execution (Husin, 2018, p. 65). This very intelligent thinker had to die at the gallows in 1191 CE at the relatively young age of 38 (Khuhori Soleh et al., 2011, p. 4). He was killed by envious fiqh scholars because his mystical-philosophical teachings were considered to deviate from the mainstream (Muslih, 2009, p. 33). Other sources say he died from being thrown into a ravine, forced to drink and eat until he died, killed with a sword, burned to death, starved in prison, and others (Ma’rufi, 2021, p. 57). However,
it is certain that he died as a result of a ruler's punishment (Arifin & Amiruddin, 2018, p. 6). The title Al-Maqtul or the killed one was given to him to distinguish him from two other figures with the same name, namely 'Abd Al Qahir Abu Najib Al Suhrawardi, the author of the book "Adab al-Muridin," and Abu Hafs Umar Shihab Ad Din Al Suhrawardi Al Baghdadi, known as an official Sufi teacher who authored the book Awarif al-Ma'arif (Dewi, 2015, p. 42).

Suhrawardi pursued his studies in Maraghah (a significant historical city and one of the civilization centers that survived Hulagu's attack) (Dewi, 2015, p. 43) and was a classmate of Fakhrudin Ar Razi. Majd Ad Din Jili was his mentor, guiding him in studying philosophy and theology (Izutsu & Ishraqiyah, 1987, p. 298). He then continued his philosophy studies in Isfahan with Fakhr Ad Din Al Mardini and Zahir Ad Din Al Qari Al Farsi. While studying there, he became a classmate of Fakhr Al Din Ar Razi, who later became a prominent Sunni philosopher. He also studied the book “Al Bashair Al Nashiriyah,” authored by Umar Ibn Sahlan Al Sawi, a commentator on Ibn Sina's Risalah Ath Thair (Ma’rufi, 2021, p. 56). From Isfahan, his journey continued to Anatolia, where he met the Seljuq family (Fathurrahman, 2018, p. 4).

After completing his formal education, Suhrawardi immediately embarked on a journey throughout Persia to seek knowledge from various Sufi sheikhs. During his travels, he spent his time contemplating and praying. He also traveled to Anatolia and Syria. In the cities he visited, he sought various teachers to deepen his understanding of gnosis. During his journey to Anatolia and Syria in 1183, he completed writing the book Al-Hikmah al-Isyraq. He then traveled to Aleppo and finally settled in Damascus, where he became a spiritual advisor at the court of Prince Malik Az Zahir Ghazi, known as Sultan Saladin, a great hero of the Crusades (Fathurrahman, 2018, p. 442).

In his youth, Suhrawardi mastered various philosophical and mystical knowledge and could explain these subjects well. Thabaqat Al-Athibba even mentioned him as one of the leading figures of his time, well-versed in wisdom (Khuhori Soleh et al., 2011, p. 4). Suhrawardi not only studied philosophy but also the teachings and doctrines of Sufism and mysticism. He then became an ascetic, dedicating his life to worship, contemplation, and philosophy. This lifestyle earned him a reputation as both a Sufi and a philosopher engaged in theosophy, an understanding of divine mysteries obtained through philosophical and mystical thought (Drajat, 2005, p. 31).
Suhrawardi’s thoughts were influenced by Platonism, Aristotelianism, Neoplatonism, and Hermeticism. The Hermetic tradition is evident in some of his works, where he frequently references Hermes as a philosopher who advocated illuminationist thought, describing him as the Father of Philosophers. Hermes, along with Pythagoras and Agamedes, was seen as possessing hidden knowledge. Besides Pythagoras and Agamedes, figures like Gamasp, Bazar Jamhir, Plato, Socrates, and several Persian and Greek philosophers were sources of his knowledge. He was also well-versed in Islamic philosophy, particularly Al-Farabi’s theory of emanation and Ibn Sina's ideas on human intellect. However, he criticized Al-Farabi’s emanation process, where the emergence of intellects stops at the tenth intellect, whereas Suhrawardi’s illumination process allows for continuous emergence of numerous intellects (Natsir, 2016, p. 202). Despite this, he idolized Al-Farabi alongside Plato, Pythagoras, and Hermes (Ahmad et al., 2006, p. 392).

Some scholars disliked Suhrawardi’s ideas, considering them dangerous for the Muslim community. They accused Suhrawardi of being a heretic (zindiq) who corrupted religion. Another reason for his execution was his political doctrine revealed in his works on illuminationist philosophy. This occurred during a period of political and military turmoil, coinciding with battles between Muslims and Christians for the Holy Land. During the Crusades, substantial support from religious scholars was needed, leading Saladin to order his son's execution of Suhrawardi based on the demands of the religious authorities (Supriyadi, 2009, p. 178). He was imprisoned in 587 AH (1191 CE) and died at the age of 38 (Arifinsyah, 2008, p. 153).

Suhrawardi passed away at a relatively young age of thirty-eight. Despite his short life, he dedicated himself to knowledge. Many of Suhrawardi’s writings have survived to this day. Some works have been lost, others published, and some are preserved in libraries across Iran, Turkey, and India. Although his writings are not as renowned as those of Avicenna and Al-Ghazali in the West, his influence in the Eastern world rivals these two mystics.

Suhrawardi’s four main works are: (1) At Talwihat, (2) Al Muqawamat, (3) Al Masyari’ wa Al Mutarahat, and (4) Hikmah Al Isyraq (Sumadi et al., 2015, p. 281). His intellectual works are categorized into five groups (Sabri, 2010, p. 425):

1) Four major books on Suhrawardi’s doctrine. The first three books discuss modified Aristotelian (Peripatetic) philosophy, while the last book covers pure Isyraqiyah
doctrine, all written in Arabic: Talwihat, Muqawwamat, Mutharahat, and Hikmat al-Isyraqi.

2) Hayakil An Nur, Al Alwah Al 'Imadiyyah, Partau Nameh, I'tiqad Al Hukama', Al Lahamat, Yazdan Sinakh, and Bustan Al Qulub are concise books offering further elaboration on his doctrines, written in Arabic and Persian.

3) Short Persian books narrating the journey of a student seeking gnosis or illumination: 'Aql Asy Surkh, Awaz-i Par-i Jibra'il, Al Ghurbat Al Gharbiyyah (also in Arabic), Lugaht-i Muran, Risalah fi Halat At Tufuliyyah, Ruzi ba Jama'at-i Sufiyah, Risalah fi al-Mi'raj, and Safir-i Simurgh.

4) Commentaries and translations of philosophical and religious texts such as Ibn Sina's Risalat At Ta’ir into Persian, with commentaries on Ibn Sina's works in Persian, Isyarat wa Tanbihat, and Risalat fi Haqiqat al-'Isyq, based on Ibn Sina's Risalat al-Isyq and his interpretations of Quranic verses and hadiths.

5) Various prayers and meditations known as al waridat wa at taqisat.

Suhrawardi's intellectual works were significantly influenced by Zoroastrianism (Zulhelmi, 2019, p. 108), particularly regarding the doctrine of light and darkness symbolism. He considered ancient Zoroastrian wisdom, Hermetic teachings, and pre-Aristotelian Greek philosophy, especially Pythagoras and Plato. Eventually, he was directly influenced by Hermeticism, which merged philosophy with ancient Egyptian, Chaldean, and Sabian teachings, grounded in primordial symbolism (Sabri, 2010, p. 425).

2. Construct of Knowledge According to Al-Suhrawardi

Sheikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi was one of the Islamic philosophers of the Isyraqiyyah or illuminationist philosophy. This philosophy had a significant impact on Islam, particularly Shi‘ism, but it did not have much influence on the Western world during the Latin scholastic period (Arifinsyah, 2008, p. 51). This philosophy employs not only rational argumentation but also the purification of the soul, moral refinement, and spiritual exercises (riyadhah nafsani) to discover answers through mystical vision (musyahadah), intuition (syuhud), and other forms of inner perception (Abdullah, 2020, pp. 88–90).

Charges against Sufi figures like Ibn Al-‘Arabi, Al-Hallaj, and Al-Suhrawardi regarding the concept that all religions essentially aim for the same God, differing only
in names and worship methods, led ‘Abd Ar Rahman Al-Wakil to regard the Sufis as believing in the unity of religions (Arifinsyah, 2008, p. 52).

The term "illumination" or "isyraqiyah" is derived from the Arabic word "isyraq," meaning illumination or enlightenment, and "mashriq," meaning East. Linguistically, it stems from "syaraq," which means the rising of the sun. Ibn Sina mentioned the existence of Eastern wisdom (Hikmah Al-Isyraqiyyah), which he considered superior to Peripatetic philosophy. The union of meanings between light and the East in Isyraqiyah philosophy is associated with the symbol of the rising sun in the East, which illuminates everything, and light itself is synonymous with gnosis and illumination. The East symbolizes a land of knowledge united with purity, liberating humans from their own selves and the material world (Arifinsyah, 2008, p. 53).

The term "East" does not refer to a specific location but is a metaphor for an area within the human soul where knowledge and enlightenment reside, known as pure intellect (naf's al kulliyah) by Ibn Sina and Imam al-Ghazali. To reach this point of enlightenment, one must engage in inner contemplation (musyâhadah) and intellectual intuition (dzauq) (Fathurrahman, 2018, p. 445).

Suhrawardi's epistemology consists of three elements: definition, understanding, and innate ideas. Definitions are necessary for important concepts, but they have weak support in Suhrawardi's epistemology. Understanding is more significant because indefinable objects can be known through comprehension. Knowing and being aware of activities are tasks of understanding. Innate ideas provide a crucial connection between Suhrawardi's views on knowledge, definitions, and understanding, enabling him to present a coherent and consistent theory of knowledge. The key to the validity of Suhrawardi's philosophical epistemology is light. Therefore, Suhrawardi's epistemology is based on the view that various cognitive and epistemological approaches are needed in some domains, but certainty ultimately comes through illumination or direct knowledge (Arifinsyah, 2008, p. 56).

Knowledge is not only oriented towards the validity of understanding but also balances the inner and rational aspects (Abraham et al., 2021, p. 267). Suhrawardi used intuition for valid conclusions. This intuition stems from ordinary intellect and sacred intellect, crucial for receiving knowledge quickly without a teacher. Knowledge is gained by seeing light directly (Arifinsyah, 2008, pp. 57–59). The process of gaining this
knowledge involves several stages. The first stage requires a philosopher to prepare by "leaving the world" to facilitate the "experience." The second stage, the illumination stage, is where the philosopher attains a vision or sees the divine light (an nur al ilahi) or the light of all lights (nur al anwar) (Ahmad et al., 2006, p. 396). This divine light enters the human being as apocalyptic light (al anwar as sonifah), forming the basis of true knowledge (Al ‘Ulum Al Haqiqiyah).

The third stage, often called the construction stage, involves acquiring and achieving unlimited knowledge, or illuminationist knowledge (al-‘ilm al-israqi) itself. This stage includes the process of constructing true knowledge (‘Ilm Shahih). The fourth and final stage is documenting or expressing the visionary experience. A part of the "divine light" resides within the philosopher with intuitive abilities. Isyraqiyyah philosophy combines logic with dzauq, obtained from the divine light through spiritual dreams, musyahadah, mukasyafah, or the ability to perceive what the senses cannot. Logic articulates this in a rational and understandable language. By undergoing activities in the first stage, philosophers can receive reality through "personal inspiration" and "visions" (musyahadah wa mukasyafah), recognizing their existence and the truth of their intuition (Fathurrahman, 2018, pp. 451–452).

Suhrawardi, influenced by the rationalist-philosophical discourse tradition of Hellenistic, Ancient Persian, and Islamic philosophy, as well as Islamic Sufism, Zoroastrianism, and Neoplatonism, blended various elements into an eclectic philosophy. Suhrawardi sought to maintain his beliefs while following logical sequences. His philosophy cannot be taught indiscriminately to those who have not undergone rigorous philosophical training and spiritual purification (Ridwan, 1998, p. 87).

D. Conclusion

Suhrawardi’s Isyraqiyyah philosophy has demonstrated its continuity to this day by significantly contributing to the understanding of life and existence. By applying its philosophical and spiritual principles, Isyraqiyyah philosophy has positively impacted creating a peaceful atmosphere amidst the hustle and complexity of modern life. Offering a holistic and inclusive perspective, this philosophy guides individuals in making sense of every aspect of their lives.
Moreover, the continuity of Suhrawardi's Isyraqiyah philosophy is reflected in its ability to provide a relevant and sustainable intellectual foundation in facing the challenges and changes of the times. By continuously integrating philosophical and spiritual values into human understanding of existence, Isyraqiyah philosophy has become a source of inspiration and guidance for individuals to live with peace and deeper understanding. Therefore, this conclusion asserts that Suhrawardi’s Isyraqiyah philosophy is not merely a historical legacy but also a relevant and valuable framework for living in the contemporary era. By focusing on the development of philosophical and spiritual reasoning, this philosophy continues to inspire individuals to live meaningful and harmonious lives despite the ever-changing complexities of the modern world.

References


