



Contents list available <http://www.kinnaird.edu.pk/>

## Journal of Research & Reviews in Social Sciences Pakistan

Journal homepage: <http://journal.kinnaird.edu.pk>



### A STUDY OF SIMILAR EPISTEMIC FEATURES IN MANSUR HALLAJ, MULLAH SADRA, AND ALLAMA IQBAL

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#### Abstract

Various philosophers contributed to the field of theology, epistemology and metaphysics either to highlight the complexities or the enormity of these concepts. This paper, however, will focus on drawing an analogy between Mansoor Hallaj, Mullah Sadra, and Allama Iqbal on the aforementioned notions. Regardless of their spatio-temporal differences and particular intellectual inclinations, their writings exhibit similar tropes not only in terms of their thematic concerns but also their methodology. As each of them carries a great intellectual legacy in their philosophical journey, this paper will try to highlight the hardships of these thinkers during the voyage and will endorse the point of similarities among them as they are of prime importance in maintaining an equilibrium for reconciliation of religion and philosophy. All three thinkers gave preference to knowledge by acquaintance over descriptive knowledge, because to know the real, intuitive experiences matter. In addition, they tend to have a similar approach in assigning a higher status to reason to acquire the truth. Since, philosophy and religion for them go hand in hand, they have regarded reason to be in harmony with revelation, sacred texts and intuitive experiences. They consider that rational discourse plays a vital role in human existence; without reason human beings may not be able to recognize the purpose of their existence, nonetheless, it is not the only source to seek the truth. Thus, this paper is concerned with outlining the points of similarity of method between the approach of these Muslim thinkers i.e., Hallaj, Sadra and Iqbal related to the concept of reality and epistemology.

#### Keywords

Philosophy, Ontology, Epistemology, Reason,

Revelation, Mysticism, Intuition



## **1. Introduction**

Muslim thought is fertile in that it has multiple ways of thinking. Neither all Muslim thought is Peripatetic, nor is all illuminationist. Within it, we also have streaks of Sufi and Kalam versions. Even in the system of Avicenna (the most celebrated and renowned of all Muslim philosophers), we have streaks of all the four versions as described which the latter thinkers have developed. Only owing to the attacks inflicted upon him by Ghazali (1058-1111) he is primarily known as a Peripatetic philosopher. Those who are aware of the stature and influence Ghazali has on the Muslim world generally and Sunni Islam specifically will make sense of it. The onslaught he imposed upon Philosophers by taking Avicenna as the representative of the tradition not only made Avicenna questionable in the religious arena but also permanently associated him with Peripatetic philosophy alone neglecting the completely oriental inclination of his later thought. On a larger scale, this fearsome attack on philosophers made it hard for philosophically inclined individuals to carry out any philosophical activity publicly. Rejection of philosophical activity was adopted as a religious incumbency as a question of any sort was deemed prohibited. With this background, very few found the courage to carry out the philosophical activity. Those who were involved in it despite its declared heretical status were doomed to criticism, alienation, and dejection. Their existence was considered a threat to the existing religious, political, and social status quo. In their movement against the flow, the masses unconsciously (owing to their existence in the

cave) always inflicted misery on them. Hallaj, Iqbal, and Sadra are representatives of such courageous individuals who stood against the flow. Within them, Hallaj (858-922 CE) is the representative of the Pre-Ghazalian intellectual's setup while Sadra (1571-1640) and Iqbal (1877-1938) are the paradigm cases of struggle in the Post-Ghazalian era. These three in their respective times stood against the prevalent stagnancy and unwillingness to think and question. They imposed questions on all the symbols of the corresponding status quo with courage, wisdom, and philosophical zeal. They, in their times, tried to keep the philosophy and philosophical tradition alive despite all odds. Testimony to that is the prevalent attitude of society towards them even to date owing to their unconsciousness. In the case of Hallaj, he is still considered a heretic by not only the masses but even the renowned scholars of the Muslim world. The verdict of his assassination was also signed by Junaid of Baghdad who is widely regarded as 'Sayid ut Taifa' by saying that it is the appearance on which legal injunctions are issued and not the inner realities (Rahman 1974, p.14). Historical sources declare him a wicked, liar and propagator of heresies and heretics. It is further declared that he was a propagator of a new religion alongside incarnation. Ibn Nadeem even declares that he only pretended to be a Sufi and Scholar which in reality he was not. Religious scholars like Ibn Jozi and Zehbi also have the same opinion about Hallaj. In recent times, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan wrote a full-length article to associate the heresies of Hallaj. Even in the case of Sadra, the

situation is not much different. In addition to all the hardships he faced during his life due to the religious, political, and social stubbornness and orthodoxy of his age, the attacks on him continue even to this day. He was declared heretical by the orthodox Shiite theologians (Ulama in Isfahan). He had to live a major portion of his life in exile from the central areas and in alienation and isolation. His books were not allowed to be published and circulated. Even the publisher of the recent edition of Asfar divorces him from religion by saying that the views in the Asfar “have nothing to do with the essence of religion.” (Sadra 1942, p.9). The situation is not much different in the case of Iqbal as well. He had to face the music from the religious as well as social establishments criticizing Hafiz of Shiraz in *Asrar-i-Khudi*. Owing to the pressure from various factions he eventually withdrew it formally although not in spirit. Apart from this, his English lectures titled “Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam” are still not embraced by the religious clergy as well as the religious-minded masses who declare it to be an intellectual confusion of Iqbal. This is mainly due to the philosophical spirit of the lectures which consists in questioning whatever is taken for granted irrespective of the nature of the subject matter. All the rightists embrace the poetry of Iqbal with full zeal and spirit owing to the interpretative nature of poetry. Even though Iqbal has supplied his philosophical insights in his poetry as well those insights are falsely changed by the clergy in their favour.

## **2. Why Philosophy Matters**

Philosophy consists of asking questions in the pursuit of understanding reality. Socratic attitude on his trial shows the importance of questioning the status quo in favour of evolution. His stern belief in the importance of questioning is depicted with clarity in *Apology*. He even considers it necessary to analyse the statement of the Delphi Oracle which teaches us that not even the religious teachings should be followed blindly. Instead, they must be followed by being fully conscious of their hidden meanings (*Apology* 20e-21a). A blind follower by this standard is not a conscious individual as he is at the level where he is following the opinions of others and represents the cave mentality. The following statement from *Apology* not only relates philosophic activity with divinity but also describes the centrality of questioning to philosophy. “...when God appointed me, as I supposed and believed, to the duty of leading the philosophic life, examining myself and others, I were then through fear of death or any other danger to desert my post” (*Apology* 28e). This statement alongside others in *Apology* leads to the inference that philosophical life is a divine duty that must not be abandoned at any cost. Worldly fame, personal well-being, and passions are all secondary as only the examined life is worth living. Socrates even refuses any offer of acquittal at the cost of philosophical life by saying; “...I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living...” (*Apology* 38a).

In the same line, Hallaj also divides knowledge into two types only one of which is worth attaining as it leads to a good life worth living. The favourable knowledge guides humanity instead of inflicting harm on the human self. Hallaj says; “Knowledge is of two types, i.e., useful and useless. The useful knowledge resembles a peaceful ocean which guides and helps in reaching the destination as opposed to turbulent waters which inflict destruction” (Hallaj 1974, p.73). And useful knowledge involves an inquisitive spirit that questions and wonders in an urge to get to the underlying realities of all things. Even according to Sadra, since philosophy ‘is the knowledge of God and man’s density’ (Sadra 1975,p.11). It is the most desirable of all knowledge. Whoever has the capacity for this highest form of knowledge must not indulge in any other activity. Sadra condemns Avicenna for indulging in other arts as medicine and considers it a waste of philosophical potential (Sadra 1975, p. 11). As whatever is not related to the knowledge of reality is of lower order so even Hallaj rejects any such distraction by equating it with slavery of passions (Hallaj 1974, p. 74). He says that “whatever stems from lower interiority is not worth pursuing.” In a Hadith-qudsi Allah says, “I have no need of those whosoever does an action or connects other than Me, I abandon him and make him a mushrik”. Moreover, philosophy does not embrace any finality. It finds answers that give rise to new questions and even the answers it tries to supply tend to become irrelevant with time as the new facts and data are furnished. Both Sadra and Iqbal endorse this nature of philosophy. Sadra declares that ‘Truth cannot be confined to any

single (man’s) intelligence and cannot be measured by any single mind’ (Sadra 1975, p.12). Likewise, according to Iqbal ‘there is no such thing as finality in philosophical thinking’ (Iqbal, 2007). This implies that the reality is never stagnant, and the change is inevitable due to which taqlid is declared by Iqbal as suicidal.

### *2.1 Outlining the Similarity in Ontological and Epistemological Approach:*

The trio with which we are dealing in this paper although appears to be poles apart intellectually but still they have points of similarities. The similarities with which we are concerned are related to the method with which they approach reality to make sense of it. Possibly they diverge in the results that they achieve after employing the method but that is the very characteristic of any original thinker. Their similarities in method can be discussed in at least these three points;

- Knowledge by Presence
- Status of Reason
- Relevance of Revelation

#### *Knowledge by Presence:*

As opposed to descriptive knowledge, it is the knowledge by presence that is advocated by the thinkers under discussion to access the real. All our argumentative and descriptive endeavours are at best tools of rational analysis and nothing more. They are incapable of making sense of reality. It is only through lived inner experience (a kind of intuition about which Bergson talks about) that we can build any notion of reality. The superiority of the lived experience as a tool to understand reality lies in its immediacy. Through it, we are in direct contact with the reality without any mediation. It is

based on this direct awareness that Hallaj uttered 'I am the Truth' quite in line with the Cogito of Descartes as an expression of self-awareness as has been interpreted by Iqbal Zabur e Ajam . But Hallaj declares that only Gnostics have access to the reality, and it is not accessible through arguments or demonstrative proofs by saying that "Nothing is in between me and Haq. Neither argument, nor signs, nor demonstrative proofs." He further says that "whatever I know is known by the Gnostics" (Hallaj 1974, p. 67). Sadra also approaches the reality through intuition and lived experience as the only means to reality. A philosophy based upon purely rational methods is not satisfactory for him as he declares it superficial (Sadra 1975, p.10). Certainty can only be achieved through experiencing the real and not using logical arguments or by any other means. It is for the sake of purity of the lived experience that Sufism is employed by Sadra as a tool to supply sincerity, devotion, and faith (Sadra 1975, p.11). Rational and logical tools are employed only to analyse the contending views about the reality only. No philosophy is acceptable to Sadra that is not based upon this lived experience. Even in the system of Iqbal intuitive experience is given the primary status to approach reality. While advocating that only intuition has the sort of access to reality that is required Iqbal says that; "All intense religious experience-more than this , all experience in which transcendental feeling is involved appears to be accompanied by a marked slowing-down of consciousness, a retreat to some deeper levels of apprehension where reality is experienced not merely as a succession but as existence; a genuine

escape from the tyranny of 'clock-time' though not a transcendence of duration" (Iqbal 2007, p.62). Exact similar to this has been propounded by Sadra by affirming that knowledge results from the identity of the knower and the known. As a result of this identity whatever becomes an object of knowledge acquires 'an altogether new genre of existence' (Sadra 1975, p.176). Therefore, Sadra defines knowledge in the following manner; "Knowledge is neither a privation like abstraction from matter, nor a relation but a being (wujud). (It is) not every being but that which is an actual being, not potential." (Sadra 1975, p.178) Sadra's definition of knowledge as narrated above bears close resemblance with Iqbal's description of Intuitive experience as "a mode of dealing with Reality in which sensation, in the physiological sense of the word does not play any part." Resultantly, reason "grasps the reality piecemeal" while intuition "grasps it in its wholeness." (Iqbal 2007, p.2-3)

## *2.2 Status of Reason*

The status of reason is a long-debated topic in the history of Muslim thought. The issue is of central significance for both Philosophy and Religion due to which both Philosophers and Theologians have presented their views on it. Philosophers have traditionally embraced reason as the only authority in the path of reality. Contrarily, mystics have denied it altogether in favour of mystic experience. Theologians, however, are divided on the issue as Mutazilites consider it a decisive authority to judge revelation while Asharites have adopted a middle path. The approach taken by Hallaj, Sadra, and Iqbal on the issue of the status of reason is quite

balanced. They recognize the central importance that reason plays in analysing the claims about the reality. However, they do not assign it the role of accessing reality. So, the status reason has in their system is well defined and limited yet of vital significance as without reason we are in no position to decide whether a reality claim is embraceable or not. In the absence of reason, we are prone to fall and be led astray by ignorance and superstitions. Even Hallaj whose utterance 'I am the Truth' is an expression of gnostic experience considers reason to be an evaluative tool for whatever he uttered in his works by saying "Whatever I am saying should be analysed rationally" (Hallaj 2016, p.55). At the same time, he defines the boundaries of reason by saying that reality does not fall within the realm of rationality by saying that "it is not sensible to (try to) know God through reason" (Hallaj 1974). The reason he gives for discouraging any effort to access reality through reason is that "whoever intends to reach the Reality (God) through reason yields bewilderment only", on another occasion he confesses that, 'even experiential or intuitive truth cannot claim to be "The Truth"' (Sadra 1975, p.12). Likewise, whatever is purely rational is only superficial for Sadra. Like Ibn Arabi he favours Theosophy but with reason as an aider. He rejects pure Sufism without a philosophic method (Sadra 1975, p.11). He believes that intuitive experience and rational proof, if correct, go together by saying that 'correct rational proofs cannot contradict intuitive experience' (Sadra 1975, p.12). Similarly, Sadra believes blind following of any sort even in religion leads to fanaticism. Reflection must be

done on whatever comes one's way. Anyone who is captive of his faith owing to blind following is destined to remain in the same station without any evolution. Anything to which anyone clings blindly without reflection and understanding becomes a veil for that person. Only that knowledge is light which comes from intellectual intuition. Even religion is a veil if followed blindly as it opens the doors for ignorance, superstitions, and dogmas for no good. Therefore, reason can never be divorced from any sphere of human existence as it is what guides human beings. Without it, we are destined to lead astray (Sadra 1975, p.77). The views of Iqbal on the status of reason are not much different. He also talks about the limited role of reason while giving a route to reality through intuitively lived experience. He limits the role of reason by saying that the path of reason must be denounced (Iqbal 2007, p.2-3). Even though reason is a light that brightens the path, but it is not an end in itself in the path of reality as the lamp is never aware of what is going on inside the house (Iqbal 2007, p.31-32.) But importantly, in being the light of the path we cannot even live without it because in a sense far from being opposite to each other both intuition and reason are organically related. What we can possibly infer from these metaphors is that reason at best can be considered a facilitator on the path to reality and not the sole tool for the path. The same line of reasoning with the same metaphors comes again in Bang-e-Dara with the title Reason and Intuition (Aql-o-Dil). What he adds there is the important notion that with reason we can only analyse and comprehend the reality while intuition comes in direct contact with the

reality and witnesses it in a lived experience, 'Since the quality of mystic experience is to be directly experienced' (Iqbal 2007, p.21). The reason he gives for it is that intuition unleashes the inner realities owing to its approach beyond time and space in contrast to the reason which can only realize the appearances due to its limitedness in time and space.

### **3. Relevance of Revelation**

Connected to the problem of the status of reason is the problem of the relevance of revelation in the religious arena. We have extreme views on this issue historically. At one extreme lie the scholars like Ibn Tamiya and others of the sort who declare that it is altogether prohibited religiously to go beyond the revealed text in any matter at all. Philosophical or any other rational activity is considered prohibited by them. Not only this, but they also declare any such activity as heretical. But the times have proved that this approach is too shallow and orthodox to stand the test of time as reason like sacred texts is also a bestowal of Almighty and is not bestowed without any purpose. Moreover, with the sort of evolution and advancement that the world has witnessed we are facing many such issues and questions about which we find no clear answer from the texts. Here comes the role of reason and the responsibility now is on human reason to find answers to them in line with whatever has been hinted at in sacred texts. This by no means undermines the status of these texts but hints towards the responsibility of the humans as we are here for a purpose and are not left without the appropriate tools. Quite contrary to this, we have others who declare it altogether unnecessary

to take guidance from sacred texts and take revelation to be not from the divine but a human effort. This view overestimates the human potential to move without any divine aid only based on human reason. They see no need for any religion or religious text in any human affair and make all these a matter of personal and subjective value alone. No philosophical activity should depend upon or be guided by religion and philosophy alone suffices according to this approach. Both the sides are on extremity and a balance is a must between the two approaches as the middle path is what is necessitated and admired by Divinity in the Text. In addition, the balanced approach is also in line with the empirical evidence and has stood the test of time. It is the balance between the two extremes that can cater to all human needs starting from faith to reason. Whatever the intellectuals under consideration have said about the importance and place of intuitive experience and reason has already been outlined above. Nonetheless, whether they consider religion to be of any importance is yet to be stated. Hallaj states the centrality of religion and sacred texts in addition to reason and intuitive experience in these words; "What matters the most for humanity is whatever is uttered in the Quran as it is the word of God and He Himself bears witness to it. The Book must be read and understood." (Hallaj 1974, p.83). The reason he advances for this is that the Prophet-hood which is the highest of all stations and is a paradigm of wisdom 'is connected to the Light of God through Revelation' (Iqbal 2007, p. 65-66). Sadra also believes in the harmony between reason and revelation. He believes that reason is an inbuilt

proof of God in man while revelation is an external proof of that. In the same manner, reason is the divine law within man while revelation is an intellect external to man. This harmony instead of opposition of revelation to human reason is expressed by Sadra as; “The Quranic revelation is the light that causes one to ‘see’. Intellect is the eye that sees and that contemplates this light. For the phenomenon of vision to be produced, there must be light, but it is necessary to have eyes to see. If you suppress this light, your eyes will not see anything; if you obstinately close your eyes, as do the literalists and the jurists, you will not see anything either. In both cases, there is a triumph of darkness. But to contemplate the divine revelation with the intellect is to have ‘light upon light’, as the Light Verse of the Quran (24:35) says.” In the case of Iqbal, his lectures alongside his poetic verses bear testimony to his association with the Religion as a whole including the Sacred Text and the Personality of the Prophet of Islam. He does not see any philosophy beyond religion and considers religion to be superior to Philosophy owing to its closer contact with reality. To achieve intimacy with reality the formula he offers is as follows; “To achieve this intimacy thought must rise higher than itself and find its fulfilment in an attitude of mind which religion describes as prayer – one of the last words on the lips of the Prophet of Islam.” (Iqbal 2007, 63) But it is vital to know that religion does not stand for any dogma, priesthood, or ritual for Iqbal. Instead, religion must stand on rational grounds and philosophy has the authority to judge religion and religious claims. However, irrespective of the context the two verses of

Armaghan-e-Hijaz can be considered representative of Iqbal’s position on religion and its centrality via the wisdom of the Prophet of Islam. In those verses, Iqbal says that; “Surrender yourself to the Prophet (Muhammad) for he alone is the embodiment of Religion. The inability to do so leads to utter ignorance.” (Iqbal Armaghan-e-Hijaz, p.674) Sadra also highlighted the greatness of prophethood by describing that; “Prophet had all the three experiences- intellectual, purely imaginative and sensory” (Sadra 1975, 158), on another occasion he interprets a Quranic verse related to the revelation on prophet that; “It is not up to a human that God should speak to him expect through inspiration or from behind a veil, or He sends a prophet who inspires him by God’s permission” (Quran, 8:51).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Owing to the courage, clarity, and service to epistemic evolution we must be indebted to the trio under discussion. During hard times, they kept philosophy and philosophical questions alive. The questions they addressed, countered, and faced were not easy. They were analysed to the core of their existence and every effort was made to knock them down by hook or by crook. But they all stood the test of time only because they stood with the truth and balance. On the level of methodology, they appear similar on multiple fronts described in the preceding sections. The kind of synthesis that they appear to have achieved makes them relevant to all factions of the intellectual arena. The most beautiful, however, is their equilibrium due to which they were successful in giving every aspect of human consciousness its proper place. How they



have balanced the equation between Intuitive experience, Reason, and Revelation by incorporating them into an organic hierarchy is some achievement. This hierarchy is common to them all with the same ingredients.

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