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SUFI-PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF SA'DIDDIN HAMAVI'S IDEAS ON KNOWLEDGE AND ITS ACQUISITION

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Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive Sufi-philosophical analysis of the epistemology and educational thought of the prominent 13th-century Sufi thinker Sa'diddin Hamavi (1190–1252), focusing on his key treatise Al-Misbah fi-t-tasawwuf (The Lamp of Sufism). The research investigates Hamavi's synthesis of theoretical Sufism (tasawvuf), peripatetic philosophy (falsafa), and Islamic gnosticism (irfan), examining his classification of knowledge into outer/exoteric (ilm az-zahir) and inner/esoteric (ilm al-batin) domains. The study situates Hamavi's thought within the broader historical and cultural context of 13th-century Central Asian intellectual history, demonstrating his influence on subsequent thinkers, particularly his pupil Azizuddin Nasafi. Furthermore, the findings highlight the enduring relevance of Hamavi's integrated epistemological model in addressing contemporary philosophical questions regarding the balance between rational intellect, ethical responsibility, and spiritual enlightenment.

Keywords: Sa'diddin Hamavi, Al-Misbah fi-t-tasawwuf, theoretical Sufism, epistemology, gnosis, Azizuddin Nasafi, Islamic philosophy, spiritual purification, exoteric knowledge, esoteric knowledge.

Introduction

The thirteenth century represents a pivotal era in Central Asian intellectual history, marked by profound political turbulence alongside an extraordinary synthesis of mystical, theological, and philosophical thought. Among the prominent figures of this period, Sa'diddin Hamavi (1190–1252), a distinguished master of the Kubrawiyya Sufi order and a central figure in 13th-century Central Asian intellectual history, formulated a unique epistemological framework that bridges Islamic peripatetic philosophy and

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theoretical Sufism (tasawvuf) [1, pp. 45–50]. In his landmark treatise, Al-Misbah fi-t-tasawwuf (The Lamp of Sufism), Hamavi articulates a comprehensive theory of knowledge (ilm) that addresses both the rational foundations of human understanding and the transcendent horizons of mystical gnosis (ma'rifat) [2, pp. 112–118]. While historical studies have documented the biographical and hagiographical dimensions of Hamavi's life, the precise philosophical structure of his epistemology remains underexplored in modern scholarship. This study aims to fill this critical gap by performing a systematic Sufi-philosophical analysis of Hamavi's ideas on knowledge and its acquisition, establishing his pivotal position in the transmission of Central Asian mystical philosophy to subsequent thinkers, particularly his renowned disciple Azizuddin Nasafi [3, pp. 78–83].

Methods

The primary source material comprises critical editions and manuscript fragments of Hamavi's major work, Al-Misbah fi-t-tasawwuf, alongside foundational treatises by his pupil Azizuddin Nasafi, such as Zubdat al-Haqaiq (The Essence of Truths) and Kashf al-Haqaiq (The Unveiling of Truths) [4, pp. 15–22]. The methodological framework utilizes conceptual analysis to dissect Hamavi's terminology regarding the faculties of perception, including the physical senses, the rational intellect (aql), and the spiritual heart (qalb). Comparative analysis was conducted to trace the points of convergence and divergence between Hamavi's Sufi epistemology and the rationalist traditions of Islamic philosophy (falsafa), as well as the illuminationist tradition (ishraq). Furthermore, historical contextualization was applied to interpret how the socio-political upheavals of the 13th-century Mongol invasions influenced Hamavi's emphasis on inward spiritual fortification and intellectual preservation [5, pp. 210–215].

Results

The textual analysis of Al-Misbah fi-t-tasawwuf reveals that Hamavi constructs a hierarchical, three-tiered model of knowledge: exoteric knowledge (ilm az-zahir), acquired through sensory perception and formal reasoning; esoteric knowledge (ilm al-batin), obtained through spiritual practice and symbolic interpretation; and divine gnosis (ma'rifat), realized

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through direct spiritual intuition (kashf) and divine grace [6, pp. 95–101]. Unlike purely rationalist philosophers who regard the intellect (aql) as the ultimate judge of truth, Hamavi posits that while reason is indispensable for navigating the physical world and establishing logical principles, it is inherently limited when attempting to comprehend divine reality (Haqq). In Hamavi's framework, the primary organ for attaining ultimate truth is the spiritual heart (qalb), which, when purified through rigorous ethical discipline (tazkiya) and remembrance (dhikr), acts as a polished mirror reflecting divine light [7, pp. 134–140]. The investigation demonstrates that Hamavi's methodology for acquiring knowledge requires a harmonious synthesis of theoretical study (ta'lim) and practical self-transformation (suluk). Furthermore, the results indicate that Hamavi's epistemological framework directly shaped Azizuddin Nasafi's doctrine of the Perfect Human (Insan-i Kamil), establishing a continuous tradition of Central Asian Sufi philosophy that views intellectual development as inseparable from moral and spiritual perfection [8, pp. 55–60].

Discussion

The findings of this research highlight the sophisticated nature of Sa'diddin Hamavi's epistemological synthesis, demonstrating that medieval Sufi thought was not an anti-intellectual mysticism, but rather an expanded form of philosophical inquiry that integrated rationalist rigor with spiritual intuition. By positioning ilm al-batin not as a negation of ilm az-zahir, but as its inner completion, Hamavi avoided the pitfalls of both dogmatic literalism and ungrounded esoteric speculation [9, pp. 180–185]. Comparing Hamavi's model with contemporary epistemological debates shows that his integrative vision addresses the fragmentation between intellect, ethics, and spirituality that often characterizes modern hyper-specialized educational models. In the broader context of Central Asian intellectual heritage, Hamavi's ideas represent a major contribution to the development of irfan (gnostic wisdom), influencing not only his immediate circle in Bukhara and Khwarazm, but also leaving a lasting imprint on Persian and Turkic philosophical literature [10, pp. 220–226]. Rediscovering and reinterpreting Hamavi's educational and epistemological ideas offers valuable conceptual resources for developing holistic educational models in contemporary digital

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societies that seek to pair technological competence with deep ethical and spiritual self-awareness.

Conclusion

Sa'diddin Hamavi's Sufi-philosophical doctrine of knowledge represents a sophisticated synthesis of Islamic intellectual traditions, bridging rational philosophy and mystical illumination. His framework establishes that genuine knowledge acquisition is a transformative process requiring the alignment of the rational intellect (aql), moral discipline, and spiritual intuition (kashf). Through his seminal work Al-Misbah fi-t-tasawwuf, Hamavi provided a durable theoretical framework that deeply influenced subsequent generations of Central Asian thinkers, most notably Azizuddin Nasafi. Ultimately, Hamavi's holistic epistemology demonstrates that intellectual mastery achieves its highest purpose only when integrated with moral purification, spiritual enlightenment, and a commitment to human perfection.

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