



The Scientific Heritage of Shihobiddin Suhrawardi and His Role in Philosophy and Sufism

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47134/bai.v1i4.3295>

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Received: 11-08-2024
Accepted: 19-09-2024
Published: 29-10-2024



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Abstract: *In this article, the scientific legacy of the great Islamic scholar and philosopher Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, along with his unique position in the fields of philosophy and sufism, is analyzed, highlighting how his views had a profound impact on Eastern philosophy and Sufism. Additionally, the article examines Suhrawardi's major scholarly works, their content, and the main directions of his teachings, while also exploring his distinctive approaches to spiritual elevation and issues related to human spirituality through the philosophical system he developed.*

Keywords: Islam, Sufism, Sharia, Hadith, Faith, Spirituality, Maturity, Salvation, Morality, Interpretation, Jurisprudence, Society.

Introduction

Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi was one of the prominent scholars of the medieval period, and his spiritual legacy played an important role in finding answers to the most complex questions of his time. He also contributed to solving the social, religious, and worldly issues of his era. He received education and training from great masters, which he documented in his book "Avari al-Ma'arif".

In Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi's legacy, Sufism and its spiritual-ethical training methods, as well as the lifestyle and experiences of Sufis, are interpreted based on the Qur'an and Hadiths. He promoted these teachings in accordance with the creed of Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'ah. Building on this, Suhrawardi focused on the educational schools of the Sufis in guiding individuals toward spiritual perfection and developed the theoretical and practical foundations of the Suhrawardiyya Sufi order. His ethical views hold educational significance for every era.

Methodology

The scientific heritage of Shihobiddin Suhrawardi has been studied to a certain extent by scholars in the field. In particular, research focusing on the theoretical issues of the Suhrawardiyya order has been carried out by renowned Orientalist scholars such as A. Schimmel, J. Trimingham, I. Netton, C. Brockelmann, A. Rizvi, H. Algar, A. Arberry, H. Ritter, C. Addas, J. Baldick, H. Palmer, and A. Chittick.

Additionally, the translation of Shihobiddin Suhrawardi's works, their publication, and monographic studies like those of Clark Wilberforce ("Awarif al-Ma'arif") and R. Nicholson ("Mystics of Islam") have to some extent contributed to addressing the issues set before this dissertation and play an important role in revealing the essence of his epistemological views.

In the Commonwealth of Independent States, the research conducted by A. Krymsky, E. Bertels, A. Khismatulin, M. Stepanyants, and A. Knysh holds methodological significance in uncovering the development history of the Suhrawardiyya order.

In the works of scholars from our country – O. Fayzullaev, M. Khayrullaev, H. Aliqulov, A. Juzjani, R. Shodiev, S. Karimov, G. Navro'zova, A. Khuseynova, N. Safarova, G. Yunusova, O. Sharipova, F. Muzaffarov, and H. Rakhmatova – the history of Sufism and the Sufi orders, their role in human perfection, and their knowledge-related teachings have been analyzed.

Additionally, the following can be presented as the methodological foundations of the article:

- Identifying the influence of Sufi teachings and the socio-political and spiritual-enlightenment environment of the Muslim East in the 12th-13th centuries on the worldview of Shihobiddin Suhrawardi;
- Revealing the Sufi-philosophical heritage of Shihobiddin Suhrawardi and its unique characteristics;
- Conducting a comparative analysis of the ideas and views on the relationship between the world and humanity advanced in the Suhrawardiyya order;
- Substantiating the unique features of the epistemological teachings based on knowledge and enlightenment in Shihobiddin Suhrawardi's views;
- Disclosing the educational significance of the views on Sufi ethics and self-discipline presented in the work "Awarif al-Ma'arif" ("The Gnosis of Those Who Perceive");
- Justifying the role and significance of the moral-spiritual views of Shihobiddin Suhrawardi in "Awarif al-Ma'arif" in educating the younger generation to be enlightened.

Result and Discussion

Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi's full name is Shihab al-Din Abu Hafs Umar al-Suhrawardi al-Baghdadi (Hijri 539–632), and he was a prominent intellectual scholar of his time. Sources highlight that he followed the creed of Ahl al-Sunna wa'l-Jama'ah, was a scholar of Sufism, the founder of the Suhrawardiyya Sufi order, as well as a diplomat and philosopher.

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi was born on the first day of Sha'ban in the year 539 Hijri, in the village of "Suhraward" in the Zanjan district of Jibal province, Iran. Historical

sources indicate that this corresponds to January 27, 1145, in the Gregorian calendar. After receiving his initial education in his homeland at the madrasas of Maragha, he traveled to Baghdad with his uncle, Abu Najib al-Suhrawardi, where he continued his studies. Later, he became renowned for teaching students and delivering sermons to the public. His contemporaries honored him with titles such as “Shaykh al-Shuyukh”, “Shaykh al-Islam” and “Shaykh al-Iraq”. Al-Dhahabi honored him with titles such as “Ash-Shaykh al-Imam al-‘Alam”, “Qudwat al-Zahid”, “Arif”, “Muhaddith”, “Shaykh al-Islam” and “Sufi”, while Ibn al-Najjar described him as “Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, a master of knowledge and truth, a mentor of disciples, and a promoter of Islam”. It is clear that Suhrawardi held a unique position in mastering and promoting the sciences of his time.

His life can be conditionally divided into the following stages:

The first stage spans from 1145 to 1160. During this period, Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi studied under his uncle Abu Najib Ziyad al-Din Abdulqadir al-Suhrawardi. The significance of his uncle and teacher, along with many other scholars, intellectuals, and representatives of Sufism, as well as the spiritual environment in which he matured, played an immense role in establishing Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi as “Shaykh al-Arifin”. This, in turn, greatly contributed to the expansion of the thinker’s knowledge, the thorough mastery of Islamic jurisprudence, and the development of his worldview.

The second stage spans from 1160 to 1194. This period marked a time of intellectual and spiritual maturity for the young Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi, who had already become highly skilled in the knowledge of Sharia. During this time, he continued his studies under his uncle, Najib al-Suhrawardi, while also learning from other renowned scholars of the era. Among the most famous was Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, from whom Umar al-Suhrawardi listened to Hadiths and studied Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). He also learned the path to uncovering esoteric knowledge (ilm al-ghayb). By this stage, Shihab al-Din was not only an expert in Sharia but also began to emerge as a Sufi scholar. It was during this period that he laid the foundations for the “Suhrawardiyya” Sufi order, marking a significant development in his spiritual journey.

The third stage spans from 1194 to 1225. During this period, Umar al-Suhrawardi developed a close friendship with Caliph al-Nasir li-Din Allah (who reigned from 1180 to 1225) and served him. He was entrusted with important diplomatic missions and was sent to various regions as the caliph’s envoy to carry out significant assignments.

During the time of Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi, various Sufi communities and orders, known as “silsila” or “tariqa”, emerged. These groups were renowned by the names of revered spiritual figures, and their teachings and legacies provided society with spiritual guidance and steadfastness. One of the largest orders was founded by Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (1077-1168), who was revered as the “Piri Piron” (the Saint of Saints). His followers established the “Qadiriyya” society, also known as the “Silsila-i Qadiriyya”. In addition to this, other orders such as Suhrawardiyya, Mawlawiyya, Chishtiyya, and Bektashiyya also existed during this period. All of them promoted devotion to Allah, unwavering trust in the spiritual master (pir), the salvation of individuals through faith, justice, and the pursuit of worldly and spiritual goals with dedication and energy. These orders played a significant

role in preserving people's faith, and while the emergence of such communities at that time might seem unusual, in reality, they greatly contributed to strengthening Islamic morals during those challenging times.

Taking into account that Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi's Sufi-philosophical views were shaped under the influence of the social, political, cultural, and spiritual life of his time, it is necessary to study his legacy and analyze the theoretical ideas presented in his works.

Suhrawardi was a scholar who lived and worked during one of the most tumultuous periods in history, and he rose to prominence as a distinguished representative of Sufi teachings, which were a form of social thought in that era. He developed a deeply philosophical body of knowledge, and today, this knowledge can help humanity avoid losing its way or find the right path. From this perspective, his work "Awarif al-Ma'arif" ("The Gnosis of Those Who Perceive") holds significant importance, yet it remains understudied in our country.

This work is considered Suhrawardi's autobiographical piece, serving as the philosophical foundation of his Sufi views. The life stories of philosophers like Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi and Abu Walid Ibn Rushd, and the persecutions they faced during their time, show that Muslim philosophers were not always able to pursue their activities in a peaceful manner. During this period, Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi wrote several works, the most famous of which, "Awarif al-Ma'arif", brought him global recognition.

Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi's work "Awarif al-Ma'arif" is considered one of the earliest sources dedicated to Sufism, written during the initial period of the formation and development of Sufi orders. Before this book, there were several other works devoted to Sufism, including Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi's "At-Ta'arruf li-Madhhab Ahl at-Tasawwuf" ("Introduction to the Way of the Sufi People"), one of the earliest valuable works on Sufism. Additionally, Abu Talib al-Makki's "Qut al-Qulub" ("The Nourishment of Hearts"), al-Qushayri's "Risala al-Qushayriyya", and al-Ghazali's "Ihya Ulum ad-Din" ("The Revival of the Religious Sciences") were written with the aim of organizing and systematizing Islamic concepts of Sufism. In terms of style and topics, although Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's "Ihya Ulum ad-Din" is similar, it is not as comprehensive as "Awarif al-Ma'arif". If we examine al-Ghazali's autobiographical treatise "Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal" ("Deliverance from Error"), which reflects the philosophical foundations of his Sufi views, the Sufi establishes a basis for dividing truth-seekers into four groups:

1. **Mutakallimun** – They consider themselves to be people of contemplation and thought, as well as esteemed scholars (the scholars of opinion and interpretation).
2. **Batinis** – Their uniqueness lies in their claim to be the followers of the teachings derived from the infallible Imam.
3. **Philosophers** – They emphasize their identity as the scholars of logic and proof (evidence and demonstration).
4. **Sufis** – They claim to possess a special ability in discovering the truth and consider themselves to be practitioners of contemplation and spiritual unveiling.

Sufis are individuals who seek to attain Sharia, Tariqa, Ma'rifa, and Haqiqat through the path of Sufism. The science of Sufism stands in the outward expression of Sharia

etiquette, and it means seeing its rulings in the inner self. Likewise, it involves standing with the Sharia etiquette while perceiving its rulings in the outward sense. In this way, the one who practices etiquette can achieve perfection through two methods. Some scholars explain Sufism by stating, "It is a school of thought aimed at purifying the heart from anything other than Allah, worshipping the Divine with sincerity, and detaching the spirit from everything but the Sacred". From the explanations given about Sufism, it emerges that a "Sufi" is a person who places all religious etiquette in its rightful context, does not exceed the limits set by religion, and respects both the Divine and the people, embodying a beautiful status. Sufism is based on the framework established by Sharia. Furthermore, deviating from or neglecting its principles does not constitute Sufism. A person who has adequately mastered the religious sciences and then embarks on the path of Sufism can attain the true status of a Sufi.

According to Umar Suhra Wardi, "Awarif al-Ma'arif" was written by the grace of Allah. The purpose of this is to showcase the beautiful character and ethics of Sufis to the wider public, demonstrating that the actions of Sufis are indeed rooted in truth. It reveals that they have acted in accordance with clear knowledge throughout all times, as presented in this work.

However, during this time, there were others who resembled Sufis but followed different paths and engaged in different practices. These individuals disguised themselves under the guise of Sufism, but their actions were corrupt and deceived the people. Because the ordinary public was not well informed about the good deeds and character of past Sufis, negative and unpleasant thoughts about this group began to emerge. The common people perceived the actions and practices of Sufis merely as outward appearances, thinking that their distinction from the masses was simply based on their name. True Sufis found themselves unable to escape from this blame and slander.

The difference between true and false shaykhs has become indistinguishable due to the increase in those who enter the path of Sufism without a good understanding of religious knowledge. Some of these individuals claim to be scholars of Sufism and guides-referring to themselves as "Shaykh", "Murshid" (teacher), or "Pir", while others follow their actions blindly, believing everything they say and becoming their "murids" (students). To understand the essence of anything, it is considered preferable to focus on its reality.

Sufism cannot be learned from just anyone; otherwise, a person risks deviating in their faith and facing dire consequences, as some false shaykhs can even lead individuals away from religion altogether. Due to a lack of proper understanding of a true murshid's qualities, some people become murids of false shaykhs and end up misled in their faith. As a result, they may not realize that they have also become false Sufis themselves. Such situations in the Middle Ages were reflected in the views of many Sufis. The renowned Sufi scholar and theorist of the 5th century, Abu Bakr Kalobodi, expressed his concerns about this in his famous work "At-Ta'arruf," stating: "The situation forced me to illustrate the paths of the Sufi community through this book, detailing their attributes and characteristics, as well as explaining the concepts of tawhid, qualities, and others, which seemed questionable to those who were unaware of their ways and had not served the shaykhs". Thus, the

commonality between the thoughts of Kalobodi and Suhrawardiy lies in the challenges of misinterpreting Sufism, viewing it merely as an act of imitation or a collection of rituals. This has led to a complex situation where Sufism is reduced to a vague perception. To clarify its essence and purpose, scholars have conducted numerous studies throughout the ages.

On this matter, Shihobiddin Suhrawardiy emphasized: "My goal is to illuminate the beauty of the paths of the earlier Sufis through this work, by following their way. This serves the important purpose of increasing the number of Sufi communities and organizing the understanding of the traditions of the master-disciple relationship and Sufi practices" .

In Sufism, it is essential to pay attention to several qualities of a true master (murshid) in order to choose a knowledgeable guide and avoid getting lost on this path. These qualities are as follows:

- 1) The murshid must have seen a living Shaykh, and it is important that the chain (silsila) of the master reaches our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Additionally, the master should have been granted permission by their Shaykh to spread this knowledge.
- 2) The murshid must have obtained religious knowledge through the same chain (silsila). In other words, the master should have been taught essential Islamic sciences such as belief (aqida), jurisprudence (fiqh), hadith, and interpretation (tafsir) by a teacher whose lineage ultimately leads back to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). For example, simply reading a hadith from collections like "Sahih al-Bukhari" or "Sahih Muslim" is not sufficient to explain it. One must also understand the science of deriving rulings (ahkam) from hadith. When quoting a hadith, the interpretation provided by the individual should not differ from the understanding of the narrators who transmitted it from the Prophet (peace be upon him). In other words, when the Prophet conveyed a hadith, others must grasp the same intention behind his words. Therefore, it is essential for the murshid to possess a solid understanding of shar'i (Islamic legal) sciences.
- 3) The murshid must follow one of the recognized paths of the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'a, specifically those of the esteemed imams such as Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari or Abu Mansur al-Maturidi. In terms of jurisprudence (mazhab), the murshid should belong to one of the established schools of thought recognized by the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'a, such as Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, or Hanbali.
- 4) The murshid should be someone who practices what they preach, living a life of piety and embodying good character and ethics in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

If a disciple (murid) follows a murshid who possesses the aforementioned qualities, they will be safeguarded from various forms of misguidance and excess in their beliefs and practices. Those who claim to be a shaykh but lack the necessary knowledge are false shaykhs, and those who follow them are considered false sufis as well. Such shaykhs, due to their lack of knowledge, will dictate what pleases their own desires to their disciples. They lead both themselves and their disciples astray from the right path. Among those who follow such false shaykhs, one can observe adherence to various innovations (bid'ah), an obsessive approach to a single practice, the veneration of individuals, grave worship, and numerous other actions that contradict Islamic teachings.

The aforementioned ideas demonstrate that Suhrawardi, when emphasizing that he wrote his work to protect Sufis from false practices, mentioned the increasing demand for the Sufi path as a secondary reason. He stressed in his work “*Awarif al-Ma’arif*” the growth in the number of adherents to this group, underlining his intention to guide them and promote the spread of genuine Sufi teachings through the text.

Thus, it should be noted that Suhrawardi’s “*Awarif al-Ma’arif*” has been widely read and appreciated in our region as well. Today, numerous copies of this work exist around the world, and these books are preserved in libraries in various countries such as Turkey, Iran, Egypt, India, and Pakistan.

The work is primarily dedicated to the practice of Sufi gnoseology, ethics, and psychology, containing valuable information on the history, theory, and practice of Sufism. Structurally and in terms of content, the book is focused on Sufi theory. Upon scholarly analysis, it becomes clear from the number and naming of its chapters that Umar Suhrawardi based his spiritual legacy on the Qur’an and Islamic Sharia. From this, it can be inferred that the fact the book contains 63 chapters may symbolically reference the age of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as Shihabuddin Suhrawardi’s devotion and deep reverence for the Prophet were profound.

The 63 chapters of the work can be divided into the following six groups:

1. **Chapters 1-9:** These chapters focus on explaining the essence of concepts such as Sufi, Sufism (*tasawwuf*), *mutasawwif* (one who engages in Sufism), *mutashabbih* (one who imitates mystics), and *malāmatīyah* (the blameworthy path).
2. **Chapters 10-28:** These include stories about special places and practices where Sufis gather, such as the residences of Sufi masters, lodges (*ribat*), *adab* (etiquette) for travel, the concept of *murid* (disciple), the opening of spiritual secrets (*fath*), spiritual retreat (*chilla*), and the state of entering trance through sound (*sima’*).
3. **Chapters 29-30:** These chapters analyze moral concepts related to humility, honesty, and other ethical virtues.
4. **Chapters 31-55:** This is the largest section of the work, covering topics on Sufi ethics and etiquette, including worship practices, prayer, fasting, food, purification, as well as the etiquette of the relationship between *murid* and *shaykh*, and brotherhood among Sufis.
5. **Chapters 56-57:** These focus on understanding the self, the nature of sufistical unveiling (*mukāshafah*), and deep reflection on thoughts and inner experiences of Sufis.
6. **Chapters 58-63:** These final chapters discuss spiritual states (*hal*) and stations (*maqām*), spiritual gestures (*ishārah*), and the beginning and end of the spiritual path.

Omonulla Fayzullayev on this matter emphasized: “The work consists of 63 chapters and is dedicated to the gnoseology of Sufism, ethics, moral conduct, and the practice of spiritual training. The author cites excerpts from earlier scholars such as al-Makki, Kushayri, and other sages, while also presenting his own new ideas. In this book, Suhrawardi’s teachings evolve into a comprehensive Sufi doctrine. It is recognized in Eastern countries. Interestingly, while other works on Sufism have been subject to criticism, this work has never faced any criticism” .

At the same time, Abu Hafs Suhrawardi authored several other books and treatises, including “Nug’batul-bayan fiy tafsiril-Qur’an”, “Jazbul-qulub ila muvosalatil-mahbub” and “Rashfun-nasoih al-iymaniyya va kashful-fazoih al-yunaniyya” (dedicated to criticizing Aristotelian Peripateticism).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this Sufi scholar dedicated his entire life to the advancement of the teachings of “tariqat” (the Sufi path) and “haqiqat” (ultimate truth), as well as the study of Hadith sciences. His scholarly work focused on one of the most significant and pressing issues of his time—deeply exploring the historical and theoretical aspects of Sufi doctrine, the experiences of Sufis, the paths to truth, and the understanding of divine knowledge (“Haq ma’rifat”). Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, as a prominent scholar of his era and an active participant in social life, authored the work “Avorif-ul-Ma’arif”, which served as a guide for Sufis and their followers both in his time and in subsequent generations.

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