

AN EXISTENTIAL - ONTOLOGICAL STUDY Of Shaikh Al Ishraq Al Maqtul

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Shihab al Din Suhrawardi known as Shaikh al Ishraq was born in Suhraward a village in the present province of Zinjan in Northern Persia in 549/1153. He learnt philosophy from Majid Jili and after his formal studies he journeyed through Persia, Anatolia and Syria. During his travels, he met with the great scholars and sufis of the age. Not much is known about his life. The only reliable source is Nuzhat al Arwah of Shamsal Din Shehrzuri which throws light on his life history. According to this biography Shihab al Din Suhrawardi got some assignment in the court of Malik Zahir, the son of Salah al Din Ayyubi. Here some religious scholars of the city disagreed with him on some of his views and turned against him. They demanded for his punishment in the form of death. At last Shaikh al Ishraq was imprisoned and he died in prison at the age of 38 in the year 587/1191. According to Najaf Gholi Habibi Shaikh was assassinated.⁽¹⁾

According to Hosein Nasr about fifty titles of his works are known to us. Regarding his Philosophy Hikmat al Ishraq is very much important. Shaikh al Ishraq appeared to be a man of great intellect and vision. Influence of Plato, Aristotle; Ibn Sina, Ghazali and Mansoor Hallaj can clearly be found in his writings. But Allamah Dr. Iqbal Lahori maintains that he is different from Plato and Aristotle. Thus the salient feature of his thought is intellectual

freedom. His works has great influence on Sufi thought and literature. He is founder of Ishraqi school of thought in philosophical sufism. According to Dr. Iqbal Lahori Shihab al Din Suhrawardi is the first Persian philosopher who realizes the elements of truth in every field of Persian thought and he succeeded to organize all these elements of truth in his own philosophy. ⁽²⁾

Suhrawardi's works were translated by an eminent French orientalist Henry Corbin. "Being and Nothingness" the master piece of Sartre's philosophical works appeared in 1943 four years later after the introduction of Shaikh's doctrine of illumination by Henry Corbin in 1939. Had Jean Paul Sartre gone through Shaikh's works? No evidence is available. But this is a fact that French knew the Muslim traditions in philosophy.

Ishraqi wisdom is illuminating and intuitive in nature. This mode of thinking is achieved by *dhoq* and not by reason and logic. This is not a systematic philosophy. Ishraqi methodology in philosophy is existentialistic in its nature. Majority of the existentialists and particularly Soren Kierkegaard the father of modern existentialism opposed vehemently systematization in philosophy. Because truth is revealed.

Shihab al Din Suhrawardi is an existentialist when he criticizes Aristotelian logic declaring that things cannot be defined in logical terms. He is the first philosopher who reduced four categories of Aristotle to one category of relation *Nisbah* which also implies the meaning of modern concept of relativity. To Shaikh Al Maqtul categories cannot be limited.

Shihab al Din Suhrawardi maintains that existence is

not external reality. Existence is neither substance nor accident. It is intellectual. This means that existence is a possibility which can be chosen. Jean Paul Sartre says that in man existence precedes essence and according to Shaikh al Ishraq Mahiyyah (*essence*) is subordinate to existence. It is a degree of being. Both the existentialists and Shaikh al Ishraq agree that existence and being are difficult to be defined.

Symbols of light and darkness *Nur* and *Zulmah* are used by Shaikh for Being and Nothingness in broader sense. *Nur* in consciousness but *Zulmah* has no consciousness. *Consciousness* is an important concept of existentialism. Sartre says that consciousness is Being and Heidegger also agrees with him. According to Shaikh Al Maqtul, life is consciousness and self revealing. Only that being which is self aware is living. Despite God only man has self consciousness. Therefore, only man exists. Only man is alive. He is the life.

Some similarities can also be noted in the ontological study of Shaikh al Ishraq and French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre. According to Shaikh Al Maqtul the ultimate reality of existence is dominant light and nature of light is appearance. Light is of two kinds.

1. *Nur Mujarrad*
2. *Nur Ardi*.

1. **NUR MUJARRAD**

Incorporeal light. It knows itself by itself. It is not dependent on any other for its existence. Self consciousness or the knowledge of self is the essence of incorporeal light.

2. NUR ARDI

Accidental light. This is an attribute. This is capable of becoming the attribute of anything like the light of stars. Likewise non-light is abstract matter, substance which is darkness. In some other paragraph Shaikh al Ishraq explains that light is divided into Light-in-itself-for itself and Light - in - itself - for other. Light in itself for itself is simple light and light for other is accidental. Dark substance neither perceives itself nor others. ⁽³⁾

In his nihilism J.P. Sartre defined the world as Being in itself *en-soi*. *En-Soi* means being identical with itself. It is what it is and nothing more. The world for me is Being for itself. This world is the work of my consciousness. This is the uprising of for itself *pour-soi*. This is consciousness of world and this is Being for itself. According to Shaikh light is consciousness and darkness is without consciousness which is absolute matter. Here the similarity is very clear though Sartre in the detailed description of Being is quite different. Shaikh also resembles with heidegger when Heidegger says "I am the being by which there is being".⁽⁴⁾ In para 91 of Alal-wah, Shaikh al Ishraq says that everything which is living by itself is light incorporeal and incorporeal light is living by itself. The first is the light of lights *Nur al Anwar* because He is the bestower of life and light. All the beings are illumination of the Supreme Light, the Light of lights. ⁽⁵⁾

Now we come to the concept of man. Man is combination of body and soul. Soul is also illuminated. Man should try to achieve the perfection of soul. The imperfect soul will suffer pains. The perfection can be achieved by following the path of the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon Him. Prophet Muhammad Peace be upon Him is the perfect

man and his knowledge is perfect. *Miraj* is a journey to the Divine Self. Shaikh al Ashraq depicts the spiritual journey of man to God in symbolic and poetic language in other treatises like "Risalah fi Haqiqat al Ishq", "*Awaz-i-Par-i-Jiberail*" "Risalat al Tair" and etc. According to Shaikh spiritual man, a sufi, a saint, is a perfect man. He acquires perfection by following the way of the Prophet Muhammad Peace be upon him.

The idea of Super Man and Authentic Individual is popular among the existentialists. the Super man of Nietzsche is known to every student of philosophy. The prominent characteristic of his super man is will to power. The idea of authenticity is not clear. But according to Heidegger and Sartre real choice makes the existence authentic. A common man does never make a real choice. He does not have an authentic existence. Only the man who chooses freely to be himself can be said to exist. Authentic individual acts freely but with responsibility. Thus his act becomes a value in itself. I do not want to go into details. But this is a fact that Inson-e-Kamil of the Muslim thinkers and sufis like Ibn-e-Arabi, Abdul Karim Jili and Dr. Iqbal looks higher in his stature than the authentic individual of the existentialists. God looks his own reflection in him.

We find some resemblance of Shaikh's spiritual man & saint a sage in Christian Existentialism. According to Soren Kierkegaard God is a being in relation to Whose being we live. According to him there are three stages of life namely aesthetical, ethical and religious. Religious stage is the highest one. This stage is the good of man and this is the source of all authenticity for him. According to Kierkegaard, truth is subjectivity and subjectivity is truth. Man expresses his subjectivity in being religious. So religious man is an authentic individual. Man can attain

this stage through prayers. At this point Kiekegeard became nearer to Shaikh's thought.

This comparative study shows shaikh's creative mind and his prodigious works' significance in the perspective of modern thought.

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