

THE CONCEPT OF INNER HUMAN BEAUTY IN SUFI PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

The article examines the concept of the inner beauty of man from the point of view of Sufi philosophy. The purpose of the study is to determine the essence of inner beauty, its place and importance in spiritual maturation and practical life. The article is based on historical, philosophical, analytical, hermeneutical and interdisciplinary approaches.

Keywords: Sufi philosophy, inner beauty of human, spiritual maturation, spirituality, moral principles.

Introduction

Although contemporary globalization, the rapid intensification of information flows, and technological progress create various external conveniences in human life, they simultaneously contribute to rising spiritual distress, inner emptiness, and the disruption of psychological balance. The increasing prevalence of stress, violence, and individualism in society, along with the erosion of moral and ethical orientation, further deepens the crisis of the human inner world. Under such circumstances, renewed attention to inner purity, spiritual beauty, and moral integrity becomes an urgent necessity.

Sufi philosophy places profound emphasis on the human inner realm, particularly through its principles of disciplining the nafs, purifying the heart, and elevating the soul toward perfection. The Sufi concept of “inner beauty” encourages evaluating a person not by outward appearance, but by the virtues of the heart honesty, love, patience, and receptivity to divine illumination. This idea retains its relevance today in fields such as moral education, spiritual development, psychology of personality, and pedagogy.

From this perspective, the study of inner human beauty in Sufi philosophy is significant not only theoretically but also practically. It offers scientifically grounded guidance for individuals striving toward moral and spiritual maturity and serves as an important foundation for strengthening the spiritual stability of society as a whole.

Methodology

This article examines the concept of inner beauty from the standpoint of Sufi philosophy. The main aim of the research is to elucidate the essence of “inner beauty” within the context of different Sufi traditions and to provide a detailed analysis of its place and significance in human psychology, spiritual maturation and everyday practical life. The topic also encompasses such issues as the individual’s interaction with personal and social environments and their moral development.



Within the article, a historical–philosophical approach is employed: the concept of inner beauty is analyzed in the context of different stages of the development of Sufism, as well as through the philosophical views and practical life experiences of Sufi poets and thinkers. In addition, by means of an analytical approach, various aspects of spiritual beauty in the human inner world are revealed through Sufi sources and their commentaries. The hermeneutic method makes it possible to identify the complex relationship between text and interpretation and to demonstrate how this concept can be understood within a contemporary context.

Furthermore, an interdisciplinary approach is used: the role and significance of inner beauty in the spiritual and moral development of the individual are examined in a comprehensive manner from the perspectives of philosophy, psychology, sociology and cultural studies.

Discussion

In Sufi philosophy, the concept of inner beauty is determined not by a person’s outward appearance, but by the state of their inner world, spiritual condition, and moral qualities. In Sufism, the essence of beauty does not reside in external form or physical features; rather, it is a kind of spiritual purity manifested through recognizing the Divine within the heart, restraining the nafs, and directing the soul toward perfection. For this reason, Sufi thinkers describe beauty as “the radiance of the heart,” asserting that a person’s true beauty lies in the inner light—the ability of the heart to reflect divine truth.

In Sufism, the primary source of inner beauty is a person’s love for God and spiritual enlightenment (maʿrifa). According to the Sufi tradition, the more the heart becomes filled with divine love, the more spiritual vices such as envy, arrogance, and hatred disappear, giving way to virtues such as patience, humility, justice, and gratitude. The embodiment of these virtues forms the foundation of inner beauty.

Thus, inner beauty is directly connected to spiritual elevation. This process becomes a reality only through continuous self-discipline, purification of the nafs, and the cultivation of moral character. In this sense, inner beauty is not a passive attribute but an active, transformative journey that requires constant effort and conscious moral striving.

In Sufism, another essential approach to understanding beauty is the harmony between the outer (zāhir) and inner (bāṭin) dimensions of the human being. For Sufi thinkers, a person’s outward conduct, interpersonal interactions and etiquette must reflect their inner beauty. True beauty, therefore, is not found in external appearance but is manifested through the alignment of the heart’s state with one’s actions. In this sense, inner beauty becomes visible in a person’s social relations, compassion toward others, sense of justice, and adherence to moral principles.

Furthermore, in Sufi thought, inner beauty is interpreted as the reflection of God’s attribute of Jamāl (Divine Beauty) within the human heart. Every human being is created with an innate inclination toward beauty, yet the manifestation of this beauty requires spiritual cultivation and the purification of the heart. Sufi masters describe inner beauty not merely as a collection of virtues, but as a transformative process in which the soul becomes a mirror for divine light.

As one Sufi thinker notes: A human being, endowed with exalted material and spiritual blessings, ultimately returning to the earth as a decaying form of flesh —failing to grasp how tragic this is for a creature created in “the best of forms” (aḥsan-i taqwīm) — is itself a great



loss for anyone capable of reflection. To be unable to feel the grief of such misfortune, to remain indifferent to the spiritual ruin of the self, is an even greater deprivation for the human heart. [1.17.]

A human being contains within himself the forms of the entire universe, unifying opposites and thus emerging as a compact model of the macrocosm a microcosm reflecting the whole of existence. According to Sufi thought, the human body corresponds to the earth; the bones represent mountains; the marrow symbolizes minerals; the internal cavity resembles the sea; the intestines correspond to rivers; the soft tissues to wetlands; the veins are akin to irrigation channels; and the human inclination toward honor and prestige reflects culture and civilization. His capacity for cruelty mirrors destruction; his breath corresponds to the blowing of the wind; and his speech resonates like thunder.

Human beauty and perfection arise from the fact that the human being participates in the very essence and order of the universe. Perfection and beauty do not lie in physical form or material composition; rather, they reside in understanding ḥusn inner spiritual beauty. Grounded in the feeling of goodness, the human being recognizes the beauty of “Aḥsanu’l-Khāliqīn” (the Best of Creators), acknowledges absolute perfection through goodness, and rebels against moral corruption through virtuous conduct.

Human beings are born with this inherent consistency and capacity for spiritual recognition. Otherwise, from the perspective of external organs or physical form alone, the human being cannot be considered perfect.

A human being consists of substance, meaning, body, and soul. Philosophers describe the human being as a “rational animal” (haywān-i nāṭiq), whereas Sufi thinkers regard the human being primarily as a loving and spiritually receptive creature. In examining the question of human spiritual beauty, Sufi scholars emphasize four essential elements in the inner structure of the human being: the heart (qalb), the nafs, the soul (rūḥ), and the intellect (‘aql).

The first of these is the qalb, which signifies the inner essence. In addition, the word carries the meaning of “turning” or “transforming,” implying the heart’s capacity for change. Conceptually, it is used in two senses. The first refers to the physical organ located beneath the left side of the chest, resembling a pinecone considered the vessel and source of the spirit. The second meaning, as articulated by Ibn ‘Arabī, refers to “a luminous substance situated between the spirit and the heart; its inner dimension is spirit, and its outer layer is the animal spirit.” In the Qur’anic verses mentioning the qalb, such as: “It is not the eyes that grow blind, but the hearts within the breasts that grow blind,” and “In their hearts is a disease,” the term symbolizes the center of spiritual perception.

Likewise, in the Hadith it is stated: “There is a piece of flesh in the body; if it is sound, the whole body becomes sound, but if it is corrupted, the whole body is corrupted. Indeed, it is the heart.”

The concepts “qalb”, “yurak”, “dil” — all denote a theological and Sufi understanding. The word “qalb” appears 133 times in the Qur’an. It is described as the organ through which a human being perceives religious truths, endowed with the qualities of faith (īmān) and piety (taqwā). According to the Qur’an, God seals the hearts of sinners, unbelievers, and wrongdoers,



depriving them of His mercy and preventing them from recognizing the truth, condemning them to the punishment of Hell.

Sufi masters such as Tustarī, Bakhli, Nūrī, Termizī, and Ghazālī argue that the heart is the divine secret (sirr) within the human being, and for this reason, the human being surpasses even the angels in rank.

The concept of the qalb is inseparably connected with dhikr (remembrance of God). In dhikr, not only the tongue but all the limbs of the human being participate. Yet the heart is considered the most important of all. Through dhikr, God establishes His presence within the Sufi's heart, and gradually this presence becomes the driving force behind all the Sufi's actions, intentions, and spiritual movements.”. [2.235.]

Al-Gazali, in the section titled “**The Meanings of the Nafs, the Spirit (Soul), the Heart, and the Intellect, and What Is Intended by These Terms**” in his work *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn (The Book of the Heart)*, writes:

“The spirit which our Lord has bestowed upon His servants is a metaphysical entity that is connected to the physical heart. This divine gift constitutes the essence and true reality of the human being. It is the faculty through which a person perceives, understands, and knows. It is this spirit that is addressed, rewarded, punished, admonished, and held accountable.

Its relationship with the physical heart is intimate and profound, yet many people fail to comprehend the nature of this connection. The attachment of the spiritual heart to the physical heart resembles the relation of accidents (such as shape and color) to bodies, or the relation of qualities to their bearers, or the relation of a craftsman to his tool, or a person to the place in which he resides.” [3.3.]

The second element is the **nafs**, which denotes the self or the inner ego. It is entrusted to the bodily form and considered the locus of harmful habits. According to the Sufis, the negative traits belonging to the nafs are a person's immoral habits and wrongful actions. Human faults fall into two categories:

1. sins and disobedience committed through one's own will;
2. the evil qualities of the nafs, such as arrogance, anger, resentment, and envy.

One of the most difficult principles in spiritual training is the nafs's capacity to mistakenly perceive its own vices as virtues. It becomes pleased with its ugly deeds and imagines itself to possess worth. In Sufism, this is considered a form of **hidden shirk** (subtle idolatry), for the nafs elevates its desires as though they were worthy of devotion.

Purifying the nafs and abandoning these selfish inclinations is possible only through disciplined spiritual training. As the saying goes: “*Your greatest enemy is the self that dwells between your two sides.*” Another famous narration states: “*We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad the struggle against the nafs.*”

According to the Qur'anic verse, “*Indeed, the nafs commands much evil,*” the nafs is the central source of negative traits.

The first meaning of the **nafs** refers to the faculty within the human being that encompasses anger and desire the impulses of aggression and appetite. This is the definition accepted by the Sufi tradition, according to which the nafs is the root and locus of all negative qualities within a person. Sufi masters maintain: “*There is no remedy for the nafs except striving against it and*



constantly subduing it.” The saying of the Prophet Muhammad also indicates this: “*The nafs within you is your worst enemy*” (reported by al-Bayhaqī, though the chain of transmission includes transmitters associated with fabricated reports, such as Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān).

The second meaning of the nafs refers to a divine gift, as mentioned earlier. In this sense, a person’s nafs is their very self. However, depending on its state and level of development, it is described in various ways. If the nafs is obedient to the command of God and capable of overcoming sensual impulses, it is known as **al-nafs al-muṭma’innah**, the “tranquil” or “contented soul.”; [3.4.]

The third element is the spirit (rūḥ), which signifies life and vitality. It is a divine gift entrusted to the bodily form. When the spirit is present within the body, God the Exalted grants life to the physical frame that serves as its vessel. A human being is not alive by virtue of the spirit itself, but through the life force imparted by God. During sleep, the spirit is raised, departs from the body, and then returns again.

The divine origin of the spirit is indicated in the Qur’anic verse: “When I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My spirit ...”

Another explanation describes the rūḥ as follows:

“The spirit is a pleasant breeze that grants life to the body; it is a warm breath the source of movement, tranquility, and desire. The spirit (the soul) is that which enters and animates the human being.” [4.291]

Likewise, in another narration it is stated: “O Adam, peace be upon him! You are the father of humankind. God the Exalted created you with His own (powerful) hand and infused into your body something of His spirit.” [4.293]

And when the companions asked about the spirit, the Prophet (peace be upon him) recited the verse: “They ask you concerning the spirit. Say: ‘The spirit is of the command of my Lord, and of knowledge you have been given but little.’” [5.176]

The fourth element is the **intellect (‘aql)**, one of the most noble qualities bestowed upon the human being by God. Replacing the term “aql” with the modern notions of “mind” or “consciousness” is closer to its true meaning. Consciousness refers to the perception of reality within the human brain, whereas the intellect constitutes one of the essential components of consciousness.

In Sufi thought, the intellect is, first, the very first creation of God, and second, the faculty by which truth is learned and understood. Sufis often use the term heart (qalb) in place of intellect, for there is an intrinsic connection between the two. When the nafs is subdued, when the spirit overcomes forbidden desires, the inner essence takes the name qalb, becoming endowed with the qualities of intellect and faith.

Like the other elements of human spiritual structure, the intellect appears in various meanings:

1. The first meaning of intellect refers to understanding the essence and reality of things knowledge that resides in the heart.
2. The second meaning refers to the faculty through which knowledge is perceived. In this sense, it is identified with the heart itself, which is a divine endowment.



It is clear that the inner self of every knower possesses an independent reality within which essential truths are grasped. Knowledge is a quality that resides within that inner domain distinct from the self yet inseparable from it. Thus, the term intellect may sometimes refer to the knower, and at other times to the faculty of perception.

A well-known narration states: “God said to the intellect: ‘Come forward,’ and it came forward. Then He said, ‘Go back,’ and it went back.”

When considered as manifestations of the human spiritual structure, the spirit, heart, and intellect represent the innate dimensions of inner beauty that form the central subject of Sufi education and moral refinement.

“The spirit has no shadow, yet it is in constant motion. You cannot see it, yet you cannot live without it. It cannot be grasped, yet it never lets you go. There is no death for the heart, nor rest for the soul. The stillness of the body is its death, whereas the stillness of the heart is the beginning of eternal life. One who endures calamities with serenity becomes capable of appreciating moments of clarity and peace. Gratitude is the act of seeing abundance where others see scarcity. Gratitude is the beautiful conduct of a human being who is free of envy and greed.” [6.156]

Results

It may be stated, first, that Sufism consistent with its aspiration toward eternal peace and ultimate felicity aims at purifying the soul from vices, attaining a certain level of moral refinement, freeing the heart from negative thoughts, and acquiring knowledge of oneself and one’s inner reality through the most virtuous path. In its broadest sense, *ṭarīqa* represents the systematized form of Sufi practice.

Second, from the Sufi viewpoint, human beauty is intrinsically linked to the inner world of the individual. The degree to which the heart, *nafs*, spirit, and intellect are cultivated determines the person’s spiritual perfection. Our ancestors not only developed this structure central to human spiritual elevation but also offered numerous interpretations concerning its essence, existence, and methods of formation.

Third, Sufi philosophy thoroughly explains the immanent factors (elements, “soldiers” of the heart) that contribute to the purity of the heart and spiritual elevation. These include both the internal and external faculties of the human being such as the hands, feet, eyes, ears, and tongue which are all considered instruments subservient to the heart. Their obedience to the heart is so fundamental that some Sufi thinkers liken them to “angels” in their functional role.

Fourth, Sufism also explores the destructive forces that hinder human spiritual development such as anger and desire and, in contrast, identifies the qualities that lead to spiritual ascent, including knowledge, wisdom, reflection, and the higher beauties inherent in human nature.

Conclusion

Thus, in Sufi philosophy, the inner beauty of the human being is a lofty spiritual state formed through moral purity, spiritual maturity, and the aspiration toward divine truth surpassing all forms of outward beauty. Its distinctiveness lies in its transformative nature: it is the path that



leads a person to perfection, realized through the purification of the heart, the elevation of the soul, and the embodiment of virtue in every aspect of life.

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