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## MYSTIC THOUGHTS OF “IBN ARABI”: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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### **Abstract**

This study endeavors to taste the mystic thoughts of a renowned “Sufi” Ibn Arabi. Ibn Arabi was an intellectual person who have expertise in Islamic sciences. He wrote a large number of books and trained many disciples during his sojourn to Mecca and o Damascus. He remained in travel to seek the knowledge. Ibn Arabi presented a mystic doctrine to the word through his attitude and thoughts and gained the title of “Great master” among the Sufi’s. He used sound phenomenological explanations to explain his thoughts to the world. He also used Quranic versed and Ahdit to explain the phenomena. His style of writings makes him unique; he used number of meanings of a single world in his writings. According to Ibn Arabi all things, creations, beauty, diversity, rooted in Allah. Ibn Arabi manifested his doctrine through “Wajud” (being) and presented the Logos originally and with the help of metaphors.

**Keywords:** Mystic; Ibn Arabi; Great master; Ultimate Being

Allah has the straight path which is manifest and unhidden among the common people. Its source exists in great and small, in those who are ignorant of matters and those who know (Ibn Arabi) <sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction of Ibn Arabi**

A stunning Sufi Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Arabi al-Hatimi al- tai (Known as Ibn Arabi) born on 26<sup>th</sup>

January 1165 (17 Ramdan) in Murica, a city of Spain. Al-Hatimi al-tai shows that he belonged to an ancient tribe Al- Tai. He was a great poet, writer, philosopher and mystic. His belongs to a renowned and pious family who already have Sufi trends. He has his own status in mysticism and known as “Shaykh Akbar: (A great mystic). His area of study was theology, philosophy, inner purification and mysticism. He himself provided the definition of mysticism and tended other to follow it. He studied Islamic law, Islamic philosophy and Islamic sciences from numerous teachers of Andalus and Africa. His curiosity for knowledge voyaged him extensively form Spain to Morocco to study all the branches of Islamic learning. In 1201 he travelled to Mecca for pilgrimage and stayed there for learning and teaching. He also traveled to other Arab countries and earned countless fame as a renowned teacher, thinker and saint. Ibn Arabi wrote most his book during his stay in Mecca and Damascus (Austin, 1980). There is not exact knowledge about his writings but he himself mentioned that he wrote about 300 books. Experts regarded 864 works with Ibn Arabi and from his numerous work 400 works considered original.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Arabi claimed that his work is the whisper of Allah or Prophet Muhammad (SAW).<sup>3</sup> Al Futahat al Makkiyyah, Fususul Hikam, Tarjuman al-Asywaqare, Tanazzulaat-ul-Mawsiliyya, Mishkaat-ul-Anwaar, Rooh-ul-quds, Al-Durrat-ul-Fakhirah, Jaami-ul-Ahkaam are some of his famous books. Among his hunderededs of books and treaties, Fasmus al Hikam and Fatuhat al Makkiya are considered true representators of his believes and teachings. He died in Damascus in November 1240 and buried there. He trained a number of disciples, among them Sadr- al- Din Qunawi (1210-1274) have most influential status as he elucidated the perspective of Ibn Arabi through his teachings.<sup>4</sup>

Ibn Arabi classified the human beings into three categories. In the first category he kept those ascetics who devoted themselves for “Ubdd” (Worship). The second higher category is related to the persons who not only have the characteristics of the 1<sup>st</sup> group but additionally have the revelations (Kashaf) and miracles, he called them “sufi” (a mystic). Third category encompassed to those people who observe all religious obligation but do not distance themselves from the common people. He called them “Malamiyah”.<sup>5</sup>

### **Mystic thoughts of Ibn Arabi**

Many Muslim philosophers, thinkers and mystics followed the path of Ibne Arabi to harmonize the reason, mystical intuition and revelations. He used a unique style in mysticism. He used Quranic verses and Ahadit mystically or orthodoxically to defend his adages, aphorisms and actions. Other than followers, he also had a number of opponents who criticized his mystical concepts. Ibn Taymiyya criticized him by saying unbeliever due to his concept of unity of being (Wahdat al Wujud) as he claimed that Ibn Arabi did not draw any distinction between Allah and the world by raising the notion.<sup>6</sup>

Ibn Arabi used a number of terms by borrowing from different sources to describe the concepts of his mysticisms that not only presented his intellectual abilities but also the depth of his knowledge. If he used one term as in real meaning simultaneously, he used it as a metaphor that completely altered the original meaning of the word.<sup>7</sup> He had to face criticism due to this style of writings. Critics considered that there is lack of coherence in the thoughts and writings of Ibn Arabi as he described one Logo (word) for multiple meanings and situations.

According to Sufi's (mystics), to enter in the path of mysticism purification of soul and body is necessary. Ibne Arabi used the term "nafas, soul and spirit for purification of human beings. He used the Quranic reference to explain his thoughts as he said, "Allah prepared the clay of Adam with his hands and blow His own spirit in it to give him life. So, the domain of human soul is in between spirit and body. Thus, Ibn Arabi uses logos, nafs, soul, self and ruh to explain what comes when Allah combines body and spirit. Ibn Arabi assumed the Sufis into two categories i.e., in first category, those mystics fall who are truthful possessors of the truth and in second category there are those Sufis who make claims for truth without any understandings.<sup>8</sup> According to him, with other qualities of behaviour a mystic (sufi) should follow the high standards of ethical behaviour (Mukaram al Ikhlāq). Ibn Arabi's tried to expose out the possibilities to clarify the distinction between truth and falsehood (Haq and Batil), reality and unreality, good and bad, right and wrong, evil and truth to the readers towards the perfect human beings to the extent to human capacity (ala alqadar taqat al basar).

He also wants to involve in the process of realization. Realization is the process of actualizing Divine knowledge and bringing the soul with the Real (reality). It brings a harmony and transformation of the character to flow the virtue.<sup>9</sup>

Ibn Arabi divided the travelers those who are in search of metaphysical knowledge, into two groups. one group belong to those who travelling towards Allah with their thoughts and intellects. They remain stray from road because they think the only guide line they receive from their intellect and thinking is acceptable. The other type is the travelers are the messengers, prophets and chosen saints who finds the truth and absolute reality.<sup>10</sup> He said,

“If you speak of disconnection, you limit Him, and if you speak of connection, you define Him. If you speak of the two together, then you are free of error and you are an Imam and a master in knowledges of gnosis.”

Knowledge can be determined and described only when participate in it. It Since the matter is based on what we said about its manifestation in its form, Allah communicates to us knowledge of Himself through contemplation of the in-time. He tells us that He shows us His signs in the in-time, so we draw conclusions about Him through ourselves. (Fuss 1)<sup>11</sup>

### **Unity of Being**

Ibn Arabi's pathogenic doctrine, “unity of being” (wahdat al wajood) gained great importance in the philosophy and life of mystics in Islamic history. “Unity of being” Logos emphasize on the sense of unity of the existence of this nature and universal being. Thus, all the realities of the universe are the appearances (tajali) and shadow of the One (universal being) who have “Wujud”.<sup>11</sup>

It is said that Ibn Arabi is the founder of this slogan although he did not use even a single time this word in his writing. Ahmad Sirhindi credited Ibn Arabi as founder of Wahdat al wujud. He explicitly stated that Ibn Arabi formulated, analyzed and set down the idea of Oneness of being. (Aḥmad Sirhindī, *al-Maktūbāt*, 1/287). Ibn Arabi highlighted Tawhid as guiding principle and give prominent place to Wajud in his vocabulary. Thus, the term being

(wujud) used by Ibn Arabi refers to Allah because according to him the only Being is Allah; no entity other than Him. Ibn Arabi used the term "Being" metaphorically also that makes his thought ambiguous and open the doors for criticism.<sup>12</sup>

Before explain the concept of wujud of Ibn Arabi let introduce the term with its meaning. "Being" (Wujud) may use in two senses commonly;

- 1) it may Being or existence
- 2) it may "has being" or exist of subsists

On the other hand, the term ultimate being, universal being denote a reality which have ultimate grounds of all that exist.<sup>13</sup>

Abdul Haq Ansari (1999) explained in his article that term Wujud" can be defined through three categories of being;

1. Comprised concrete beings that exist out of the three worlds; physical world, spiritual world, intermediate between these two worlds.<sup>14</sup>
2. Real being consists of universals (knowledge, life, humanity, ideas)<sup>15</sup>
3. To Being as such or Being without qualification. (Referred as absolute being)<sup>16</sup>

Ibn Arabi used Al-wajud al -ayani to concrete existence and al jujud al zahir to phenomenol existence or external existence, subsistence and existence are two modes of wujud and are differen in respect to their properties. To defend the idea of unity of Being, Ibn Arabi quoted Quranic verse.

"Wherever you turn, the face of Allah is there."  
(2:115)<sup>17</sup>

Ibn Arabi presented mystical idea of Being by using phenology,

"He is all phenomenal being and He is the One (al-Wahid) who establishes my phenomenal being by His being, For that reason, I said that He is nourished. So, my existence is His food, and we imitate Him in Him from Him, if you look by the aspect of my taking refuge." (Fuss-10)<sup>18</sup>

As Allah has created universe and all its creatures so we are His, and by Him. One who sees Allah from him, in Him by His eyes is gnostic and who sees Allah from him, in Him by his won eyes is

not a gnostic. Ignorant are those who see Allah from Him nor in Him and tries to see Him by his won eye.

### **Journey of Man**

Ibn Arabi considered the man in journey since his birth and He claimed that man is in state of journey since Allah has brought him from non being to the being. He further described that its only possible for man to sojourn in the fifth abode which he called “Mawtin” (Paradise or Hell). He also provided an order of man’s journey towards six abodes.<sup>19</sup> He considered the man traveler ontologically and expecting from a “Salik” (Mystic) to know this fact of traveler. He should consider himself like a traveler. He advised to the “Salik” that in the journey of six “Mawtin” (Abodes/Ranks) there is no guarantee or security of the journey.<sup>20</sup> In journey of annihilation (Fanna) to subsistence (Baqa) a mystic move gradually from one station to the other. Ibn Arabi’s legacy provided a map of inner journey for a mystic (Sufi) through the names of Allah and His manifestations in real world. A seeker can use these signs as milestones in to move from one abode to the next. For Ibn Arabi to understand the names of Allah and His manifestations, prayers and dhikar are constant companions of a mystic. It brings internal upheaval through a mystic can undergo towards the process of realization of Allah’s insight.<sup>21</sup>

### **Barzakh**

Ibn Arabi used barzakh as a barrier between man and fifth abode. He referred from Quran that Barzakh stands between the sweet and salty seas and prevents the deceased soul from returning to the world. (25:53, 23:100).

Generally, it is understood as the location of the soul after death and before resurrection. Ibn Arabi used the term supreme “Barzakh” as a synonym for nondelimited imagination. The real is sheer light and the impossible is sheer darkness, both darkness and light never turns into one another. Barzakh is the realm in between light and darkness, it is the middle, having the properties of both sides light and darknes, not qualified either darkness or light. Here again Ibn Arabi defended himself with the reference of Quranic verse,

“Allah appointed” for man “two eyes and guided him on the two highways” (90:8).

Since one eye and one path insist man to light and one path and eye force to accept darkness, it's up to man which eye and path he chose to look forward.<sup>22</sup> Husaini (1996) presented in this discussion about the concept of Barzak presented by Ibn Arabi in following words,

“The Barzak is a reality which is only inferred. It has no objective reality. It is like the imaginary line between light and darkness. It is the imaginary demarcation between being and non-being, between good and evil, between the known and the unknown. It has no objective reality; it is wholly subjective. It is into such reality that man relapses in his sleep and after his death.” (Husaini, 1979, p.127)<sup>23</sup>

### **Nature of Love**

Most important characteristics of Ibn Arabic mystic thought is, universality of “ultimate being” of all existence. Fundamental factor of this manifestation of one reality is Divine love. Ibn Arabi defined three types of love; natural, spiritual and divine love. The natural and spiritual live are the species of divine love. Divine love means essential love of the One; the eternal love which is the source of all other kinds of love. Spiritual love is the mystical love that is ultimately realization of essential unity of the lover and the beloved. According to Ibn Arabi human love does not bring the Sufi near to Allah but the divine love fulfills this responsibility. This is the most perfect kind of love, which is love of the whole as a whole that mystics want to essence. He further said that ultimate goal of the love is to find the reality of love and the reality of love leads towards the Allah's essence. Ibn Arabi take the love as an un limited and endless object that have no intrinsic value. He considered beauty as cause and base of love, but this beauty is ultimate and perfect. Here beauty refereed to Allah, as he says Allah love is beautiful, he loved all his creation, he loved beautiful, Allah's is beauty is the source and base of all beauties.<sup>24</sup>

### **Fana**

According to Ibn Arabi *fana* is a gradual process that lasts from seven stages that a mystic can know with his intuition.

1. the first stage is passing away from things like other mystics considered. Ibn Arabi considered that in the first stage a mystic realizes that all actions are right, since all actions are ALLH's. he said that in this stage mystic not find any criteria to distinguish.
2. In the second stage mystic realizes that only Allah is absolute and only agent in the universe.
3. In this stage a mystic realizes that the attributes and qualities of contingent being belong to Allah only.
4. Non existence of phenomenal self and endurance of the unchangeable unperishable substance is essence of this stage.
5. Passing away from the whole world. The cessation of contemplating the phenomenal aspect of the world.
6. Passing away from all that is other than Allah.
7. Passing away from all the attributed of Allah and their relation. At this stage mystic does not regard the universe as an effect of cause but as a Reality in appearance.<sup>25</sup>

When mystic achieve the level of fanna he can find the tajjali, said by Ibn Arabi,

By this aspect, Allah is creature, so interpret! And by this aspect, He is not creature, so remember! The inner sight of whoever understands what I have said is not confused, and only the one who perceives it possesses sight. The source of joining and separating is the same, and it is multiplicity which never remains or departs.<sup>26</sup>

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