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The Axiological Essence Of Human Beauty In The Sufi Philosophy Of Central Asia: A Historical And Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract

This article examines the axiological essence of human beauty in the Sufi philosophy of Central Asia from a historical and philosophical perspective. It explores the views of medieval Eastern thinkers, particularly Aziziddin Nasafi, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Ahmad Yasawi, Bahauddin Naqshband, and Alisher Navoi, on the inner and outer beauty of the human being, moral perfection, the pursuit of knowledge, and self-awareness. The article substantiates the dialectical interconnection between the divine, moral, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions of beauty in Sufi teachings. It also elucidates the importance of disciplining the nafs, purity of heart, goodness, love, honesty, and knowledge as essential criteria of human perfection.

Keywords: Sufi philosophy, history of philosophy, human beauty, axiology, spiritual perfection, inner beauty, outer beauty, knowledge, the perfect human being, moral values.

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding the human being and human nature, defining the meaning of human perfection, and identifying the spiritual and moral criteria of beauty have been among the important theoretical problems throughout the history of philosophy. In Eastern philosophical thought in particular, the place of the human being in existence, the spiritual world, moral responsibility, and the possibilities of attaining perfection have been of particular scholarly and philosophical significance. These issues found a distinctive theoretical and practical expression in the Sufi teachings that developed in Central Asia.

Sufi philosophy interprets the human being as an integrated person capable of spiritual, moral, and intellectual development, rather than viewing a person solely in biological or social terms. From this perspective, the category of beauty in Sufism extends beyond the boundaries of a purely aesthetic concept and becomes an axiological criterion expressing a person's inner essence, purity of heart, moral virtues, and spiritual elevation.

Throughout the history of philosophy, the concept of beauty has been interpreted in different ways. In antiquity, Plato associated beauty with the world of Forms, whereas Aristotle explained it in terms of form, proportion, and harmony. Eastern thinkers, in turn, explored the spiritual, moral, and psychological dimensions of beauty in greater depth. In particular, Sufi thought emphasizes that the true value of outward beauty becomes apparent when it is harmonized with a person's inner world and moral perfection.

The Sufi thought that emerged and developed in Central Asia between the ninth and fifteenth centuries identified self-awareness, disciplining the nafs, purifying the heart, and attaining knowledge as essential conditions for human perfection. In the legacy of thinkers such as Ahmad Yasawi, Abdulkhaliq Ghijduwani, Najmuddin Kubra, Bahauddin Naqshband, and Aziziddin Nasafi, the spiritual and moral character of the human being and the aspiration towards beauty occupy an important place.

The relevance of this article lies in the fact that re-examining, from historical-philosophical and axiological perspectives, the views of human beauty developed within the Sufi heritage provides an important theoretical basis for understanding the spiritual needs, moral responsibility, and personal development of contemporary human beings.

This article explores the formation, historical development, and axiological content of the concept of human beauty in the Sufi philosophy of Central Asia, drawing on the views of Sufi thinkers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed the methods of historicism, logical analysis, comparative-historical analysis, a systems approach, hermeneutic analysis, and the axiological method.

Through the method of historicism, the formation and development of views on human beauty in Central Asian Sufi thought were examined in relation to their specific historical contexts. Comparative-historical analysis was used to identify both common and distinctive features in the views of Aziziddin Nasafi, al-Ghazali, Bahauddin Naqshband, and Alisher Navoi.

The axiological approach made it possible to investigate the value-based content of beauty and its moral, spiritual, and aesthetic criteria. Hermeneutic analysis, in turn, enabled the interpretation of the philosophical meanings of symbolic concepts used in the works of Sufi thinkers, including the heart, mirror, love, knowledge, nafs, and perfection.

The methodological foundation of the study consisted in examining the relationship between the outer and inner beauty of the human being as an integrated system. Accordingly, the divine-aesthetic, moral-spiritual, and socio-cultural dimensions of beauty in Sufi thought were analyzed in their interconnection.

RESULTS

The development of the concept of beauty in the Sufi philosophy of Central Asia is connected with a broad historical and philosophical process aimed at understanding human nature. In Sufi teachings, beauty is primarily interpreted as an expression of divine perfection. However, this concept is not limited to the glorification of the divine. It also encompasses created existence, nature, the human being, moral relations, and spiritual values.

In the Sufi worldview, human beauty is explained through the unity of two principal dimensions: outward and inward beauty. Outward beauty refers to a person's physical appearance, bodily proportions, and natural characteristics, whereas inward beauty is manifested in purity of heart, moral virtues, thought, knowledge, and good deeds. The harmony between these two dimensions forms an integrated aesthetic and spiritual image of the human being.

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The views of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali are particularly significant in this regard. In his philosophical and ethical legacy, human beauty is interpreted not in terms of outward appearance, but in close connection with purity of heart, beauty of character, and spiritual perfection. Al-Ghazali regards harmony between a person's outer and inner worlds as an essential condition of spiritual maturity. In this respect, his views give the concept of beauty an axiological meaning enriched by moral values (1, p. 36).

In his work Zubdat al-Haqayiq, Aziziddin Nasafi provides an in-depth philosophical analysis of human self-awareness and the attainment of spiritual perfection. The thinker interprets the human being as a microcosm and existence as a macrocosm, linking the relationship between them to the understanding of human nature. In Nasafi's view, by understanding both their inner and outward characteristics, human beings become capable of comprehending the essence of the world.

For Nasafi, perfection is not a fixed or unchanging state, but a continuous process of intellectual, spiritual, and moral development. Human fulfilment is not limited to the acquisition of knowledge; it also requires that knowledge be harmonized with moral virtues. The thinker's interpretation of the human being as a creature striving to understand their own essence demonstrates the close relationship between self-awareness and spiritual beauty in Sufi philosophy (2, p. 45).

In the works of Ahmad Yasawi, the spiritual beauty of the human being is manifested through such virtues as restraining the nafs, patience, humility, honesty, love, and humaneness. In his work Diwan-i Hikmat, the purification of the inner self, avoidance of excessive attachment to material interests, and aspiration towards spiritual elevation occupy a central place. In Yasawi's interpretation, true beauty is manifested in a person's ability to govern the nafs, show compassion to others, and live through good deeds.

An important feature of this approach is that a person's spiritual beauty does not remain merely an individual inner state; it is also manifested in relationships with other people. Thus, in Sufism, beauty begins in the individual's inner world and finds its practical expression within the system of social relations (3, p. 83).

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In the Naqshbandi teaching founded by Bahauddin Naqshband, awareness, diligence, and social engagement are particularly emphasized as important criteria of human perfection. The principle “Dil ba yor-u, dast ba kor” (“The heart with the Beloved, the hand at work”) expresses the need for a person to remain inwardly oriented towards spiritual values while being active in practical life.

The Naqshbandi principle of “Hush dar dam” embodies the ideas of being consciously aware of every breath, valuing time, and maintaining spiritual control over one's own actions. An axiological analysis of this principle reveals that human beauty is manifested in everyday activity, self-discipline, and spiritual responsibility. In this sense, the Naqshbandi teaching is significant as a philosophical and ethical system that harmonizes spiritual purification with socially useful work (4, pp. 171–173).

In the works of Alisher Navoi, the question of human beauty is illuminated through a synthesis of Sufi, ethical, and artistic-aesthetic perspectives. The thinker regards the human being as one of the highest values in existence and pays particular attention to intellect, knowledge, manners, and virtuous activity. Alongside artistic depictions of outward beauty, Navoi's works also portray the inner world, love, loyalty, and spiritual maturity of the human being with remarkable artistic skill.

In particular, Mahbub ul-Qulub examines a person's moral character, good and bad conduct, generosity, contentment, justice, and humility. In Navoi's interpretation, a person's true worth is determined not by social status or outward appearance, but by the benefit they bring to society, their spiritual virtues, and their human relationships. Therefore, in Navoi's legacy, beauty appears not only as an aesthetic category but also as a moral and social value (5, p. 56).

Another important aspect of human beauty in Sufi philosophy is manifested in the harmonious relationship between the human being and existence. The human being is an integral part of nature, and human beauty likewise develops through interaction with nature, society, and spiritual values. This approach makes it possible to interpret beauty not merely as subjective aesthetic pleasure, but as a phenomenon connected with objective existence and the spiritual relationships of human beings. Thus, the historical and philosophical analysis identifies the following interrelated components of human beauty in Central Asian Sufi thought:

- Divine-aesthetic dimension: understanding the supreme source of beauty and the harmony present in created existence.
- Inner-moral dimension: purity of heart, goodness, honesty, humility, patience, and disciplining the nafs.
- Educational-intellectual dimension: knowledge, thought, self-awareness, and the pursuit of truth.
- Social-practical dimension: humaneness, justice, diligence, and contributing to the well-being of society.
- Aesthetic-artistic dimension: understanding, experiencing, and creating beauty, and expressing it through artistic creativity. These components demonstrate that human beauty in Sufi philosophy has developed as an integrated axiological system.

DISCUSSION

An analysis of views on human beauty in the Sufi philosophy of Central Asia demonstrates that this issue is closely connected with the general patterns of development of Eastern philosophical thought. Sufi thinkers interpreted the relationship between a person's outward appearance and inner world not as a simple opposition, but as an integrated whole based on mutual influence and harmony.

Comparing this issue with certain views in the history of Western philosophy also yields important theoretical insights. Plato, for example, associated beauty with an ideal essence that transcends individual objects in the sensory world. In his theory, beauty appears as a means of directing the human soul towards the apprehension of ultimate truth. Aristotle, by contrast, explained beauty in terms of proportion, order, and wholeness. In his aesthetic views, the harmony of form and content is of great importance. This provides an important theoretical basis for a comparative study of the relationship between outward and inward beauty in Sufi thought.

The distinctive feature of Sufi philosophy, however, is that beauty is interpreted in connection with the process of a person's spiritual and moral development and the apprehension of divine truth. While ancient philosophy gave priority to the ideal, formal, and proportional aspects of beauty, Sufism places particular emphasis on its function in guiding the individual towards spiritual purification, love, knowledge, and perfection.

Contemporary studies of Sufism also put forward important theoretical conclusions in this regard. Najmiddin Komilov analyzes the Sufi heritage as a complex spiritual phenomenon associated with the purification of the human soul, moral education, and the aspiration towards perfection. His research highlights the struggle against the nafs, purification of the heart, and cultivation of elevated moral virtues as important substantive dimensions of Sufi teaching (6, p. 150).

On the basis of this analysis, it may be argued that the principal criterion of human beauty in Sufism is the capacity for self-awareness and self-improvement. A person's spiritual beauty is determined not merely by noble thoughts or good intentions, but by the manifestation of these qualities in everyday conduct, social relationships, and practical activity.

One of the important theoretical findings of this study is that the category of beauty in Sufi philosophy can be explained at three principal levels:

- Ontological level: the relationship of beauty with existence, nature, and the created world.
- Axiological level: the connection of beauty with goodness, justice, love, honesty, and spiritual values.
- Anthropological level: the human being's understanding of their own essence, development of the inner world, and aspiration towards perfection.

The harmony of these three levels constitutes the theoretical foundation of the concept of human beauty in the Sufi philosophy of Central Asia. Furthermore, in Sufi thought, the concepts of beauty and ugliness, good and evil, and elevation and baseness are understood in relation to one another. A person's spiritual beauty takes shape through the elimination of negative moral traits, control over the nafs, and the application of virtuous values in everyday life.

The significance of these views is increasing in the conditions of contemporary information society. Technological progress and expanded opportunities for information exchange do not, in themselves, ensure a person's spiritual maturity. Therefore, applying the principles of humaneness, self-awareness, purity of heart, compassion, and spiritual responsibility found in the Sufi heritage to contemporary educational processes has important scholarly and practical significance.

Thus, the views of Central Asian Sufi thinkers on human beauty should be regarded not only as historical heritage, but also as a theoretical value that contributes to the spiritual and moral improvement of relations between the individual and society.

CONCLUSION

The historical and philosophical study of the axiological essence of human beauty in the Sufi philosophy of Central Asia has made it possible to draw the following conclusions.

First, in Sufi teachings, beauty is not an aesthetic phenomenon in the narrow sense, but an integrated philosophical category combining ontological, axiological, ethical, and anthropological content. The divine source of beauty, its manifestation in nature and society, and its formation in the spiritual world of the human being are interpreted as interconnected dimensions.

Second, in the views of Aziziddin Nasafi, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Ahmad Yasawi, and Bahauddin Naqshband, the inner beauty of the human being is determined by purity of heart, the ability to control the nafs, knowledge, and moral virtues. This demonstrates that the principal criterion of human beauty in Sufi philosophy is not outward appearance, but inner spiritual perfection.

Third, in the works of Alisher Navoi, human beauty is expressed through the harmony of ethical, aesthetic, and social values. In the thinker's views, human dignity is determined by good deeds, justice, generosity, knowledge, and humaneness.

Fourth, in the Sufi philosophy of Central Asia, human beauty emerges as an integrated axiological system formed through the unity of inner-moral, educational-intellectual, social-practical, and aesthetic-artistic dimensions. This system presupposes self-awareness, the regulation of one's actions on the basis of spiritual values, and active participation in social life.

Fifth, the views on human beauty contained in the Sufi heritage continue to retain their scholarly, theoretical, and educational significance today. This historical and philosophical legacy serves as an important methodological source, particularly for fostering humaneness, spiritual responsibility, aesthetic taste, moral culture, and the aspiration towards perfection among the younger generation.

In general, in the Sufi philosophy of Central Asia, human beauty has developed as a dialectical unity of the individual's outer and inner worlds, spiritual values, and social activity. Therefore, an in-depth historical-philosophical and axiological study of Sufi thought makes a valuable contribution to understanding human nature, enriching the concept of spiritual perfection, and advancing contemporary aesthetic thought.

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