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Extended Abstract

Explanation of Attar's Theological System with Emphasis on *Mosibat-nameh* (Divine Names and Attributes)

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Introduction

The beliefs of most religions begin with a form of anthropomorphism of God (Shahrastani, 1421: 108). Consequently, various philosophical perspectives have emerged to justify divine names and attributes, leading to diverse conceptualizations of God. Additionally, political factors have historically influenced theological discussions concerning divine governance over human affairs (Armstrong, 1385: 261). The emergence of various theological schools, such as Mu'tazilism and Ash'arism, reflects the impact of these debates among intellectuals. Both Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites sought to reconcile religious experience with rational thought through different approaches. The implications of these theological discussions extended beyond scholars and jurists, influencing poets and Sufi mystics as well (Ghani, 1340: 492–493).

Attar is considered one of the influential figures in shaping certain major theological currents. Thus, examining the theological framework underlying his works is of particular significance. This study aims to analyze the theological themes in *Mosibat-nameh* and elucidate Attar's views regarding divine names, attributes, and actions.

Purpose, Methodology and Literature Review

Since many classical Persian poets were inclined toward either the Mu'tazilite or Ash'arite theological schools and explicitly expressed their doctrinal positions in their works, a substantial portion of classical Persian poetry incorporates Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite theological themes. Understanding these poems necessitates familiarity with the fundamental theological principles of both schools.

This research adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology, utilizing scholarly sources on Attar's works, divine names and attributes, and relevant academic articles. A review of previous studies indicates that while some fragmented research has been conducted on this topic, it remains an underexplored area. For instance, Jahani-Qadi et al. (2023) examined Attar's theological perspectives and concluded that some of his beliefs diverged from Ash'arism; Pashaei-Fakhri and Yans (2021) analyzed the content and structure of divine vision in Attar's poetry, asserting that he believed in the manifestation of divine attributes; and Mostafavi and Moazzeni (2016) investigated the symbolic and linguistic representation of divine names in Attar's works, concluding that he posited a complete correspondence between God's attributes and essence.

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Discussion

Attar asserts that the seeker must undergo spiritual purification and ascetic discipline to attain divine unity (*tawhid*). He views *fana fi-Allah* (annihilation in God) as the only path to this goal. For Attar, achieving *tawhid* equates attaining knowledge of God, indicating that his theological orientation aligns with the doctrine of *wahdat al-vujud* (unity of existence).

The way divine names (asma' Allah) are utilized in Attar's works demonstrates his belief in their exclusivity and suspension (tawqifi). This signifies that all of God's names manifest throughout the world and everything within it, reflecting the emanations of the one divine essence.

His poetry frequently illustrates the intimate, heartfelt connection between God and the spiritually enlightened, often portraying this relationship through metaphors of love and madness. The notion of divine madness (*junun*) arising from love serves as a transformative state, enabling the mystic to transcend self-awareness and attain union with the divine. Additionally, Attar employs the figure of the insane (*majnun*) as a vehicle for delivering sharp critiques of conventional religious thought.

Furthermore, Attar expresses skepticism toward rational speculation and philosophical argumentation in understanding divine truth, stating that even a hundred thousand intellects remain bewildered (Attar 1, 1386: 461). In his view, existence is confined to God's essence, and all phenomenal reality is but a manifestation of the divine. Attar maintains that true comprehension of divine unity is unattainable without mystical annihilation. It appears that Attar is less concerned with articulating theological doctrine and more focused on conveying mystical concepts in *Mosibat-nameh*.

The mystical perspective of Attar towards Iblis presents him as a sorrowful victim, waiting for God's mercy (Attar1, 1386: 337). Promoting the view of Iblis as a lover of God, hoping for the Lord's mercy, and also believing in inevitable destiny, might be the result of Attar's deterministic view. Another perspective of Attar on Iblis is his rebellious nature, which is less emphasized in *Mosibat-nameh*.

Although Attar frequently adopts a deterministic stance throughout his works—indicating an affinity with Ash'arite theology– his views on divine vision reveal inconsistencies. At times, he describes God as beyond sensory perception (*bīrūn az 'ayān*) (Attar, 2536: 10; Attar 1, 1386: 123), while elsewhere he affirms the direct visibility of the divine (*Khuda gashti 'ayānash*) (Attar, 1384: 251). This simultaneous presence of both Ash'arite and Mu'tazilite elements in his works complicates efforts to categorically assign him to a single theological tradition.

Conclusion

Based on *Mosibat-nameh*, it is possible to partially reconstruct Attar's theological system. However, Attar does not approach theological matters in a systematic and scholarly manner, and to fully understand his theological system, one must draw from the scattered concepts within his works. The findings of this research show that Attar's theological system in the *Mosibat-nameh* possesses eclectic characteristics, meaning that Ash'arite theological teachings are intertwined with the mystical teachings of Khurasan.

Attar's theology in the *Mosibat-nameh* clearly leans towards the Ash'arite theological school. The first hypothesis of this research, which posits that a coherent theological theory can be extracted from *Mosibat-nameh*, is critically challenged. However, the other hypotheses are confirmed: first, Attar's divine recognition system in *Mosibat-nameh* simultaneously incorporates both theological and mystical dimensions, and second, his theology is influenced by the Ash'arite school. In addition, Ash'arite leanings are sometimes observed in his works. Particularly in the issue of the vision of God, Attar holds a contradictory view, which makes it difficult to precisely categorize him within one of the theological schools.

Keywords: Divine Names and Attributes, Ash'ari theology, Mu'tazilite theology, Attar of Nishapur, *Mosibat-nameh*.

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