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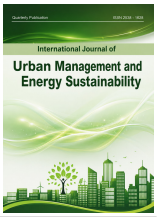

ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

A Qualitative Analysis of Light from the Perspectives of Illuminationist Philosophy and Transcendent Philosophy in the Mosques of the Isfahan School (Case Studies: Maqsud Beyk Mosque, Sorkhi Mosque, Imam Mosque and Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque)

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ABSTRACT

Light has long given historic mosques their sacred and spiritual character, and Islamic philosophers regarded it as a manifestation of the divine; in contemporary mosque architecture, however, this role has largely faded. This study examines how light is manifested in mosques of the Isfahan School from the perspectives of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist philosophy and Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy. A mixed qualitative–quantitative, descriptive–analytical and deductive design was used. Data came from documentary sources, field observation of four Safavid mosques (Maqsud Beyk, Sorkhi, Imam and Sheikh Lotfollah) and semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected experts in architecture and philosophy. The interviews were coded through open, axial and selective coding and the resulting components were ranked with a fuzzy normalized decision matrix. In line with Suhrawardi, light acts in these mosques as a symbol of absolute being: filtered through latticed windows, muqarnas and tilework, it mediates between the imaginal and the celestial worlds, most clearly in the dome chamber of Sheikh Lotfollah. In line with Mulla Sadra's gradation of being and substantial motion, the spatial sequence from a dark entrance to a bright courtyard and then to dim prayer halls and dome chambers enacts a graded journey from multiplicity to unity, as seen in the Imam and Maqsud Beyk mosques. Philosophical–architectural factors ranked first (CCi = 0.544) and aesthetic–artistic factors second (CCi = 0.530). Light in Isfahan School mosques thus functions as a symbolic language of being rather than mere illumination, which offers principles for the design of contemporary mosques.

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INTRODUCTION

In Iran, the architecture of today's mosques has undergone many changes, and what is built as mosque architecture no longer accords with the long-standing traditions of Iranian mosque building. Throughout history, the architecture of Iranian mosques was regarded as one of the most important features of Iranian architecture and identity; at present, however, this architecture has lost its continuity with historical architecture. This is because, in different periods of Iranian history, special attention was paid to physical elements and to the use of light as a symbol of the sanctity and spirituality of the mosque, whereas today the connection between past and present, as well as the aspects of wisdom (hikma) in mosque architecture, have decreased considerably. In the past, when building mosques, architects drew on their beliefs and ideas, which reflected their convictions and mental worlds. For this reason, mosques were shaped by religious and doctrinal frameworks as well as by the thinking of their architects. This helped them convey their intended concepts to visitors and audiences and, in a sense, give meaning to the environment (Mahdinejad et al., 2018). This important point is recognized in mosque architecture as one of the most valuable aspects of understanding, through the expression of meanings hidden in its outward appearance. It has made mosque architecture highly important for Iranians throughout history and rooted it in their thoughts and ideas (Dadfar et al., 2020). Iranian mosques are among the most important buildings to which architects have always paid special attention throughout history, because of the importance of these spaces and their effect on the manifestation of mystical beliefs in people (Rasouli et al., 2020). In the Safavid era, the mosque, as one of the most important urban elements and a place for worship and nearness to God, was considered the best space for the manifestation of thought and the expression of the deepest religious beliefs. In this context, a mosque designed within the framework of the Isfahan School in this period displays all the rites of the Hajj in its sacred structure and geometry (Zamani et al., 2021), because the mosques built in the Isfahan School and other Iranian mosques are known not only as the most important and prominent Islamic monuments but also as a way of understanding Islamic architecture (Hillenbrand, 2004). For this reason, the architects of Islamic mosques used various tools and elements to manifest God in people's minds, so that the mosque would not have an earthly appearance. One of the most important of these elements is light, which has conceptual, semantic and symbolic capacities. In mosque design, light has been used as an element beyond matter, and specific and varied patterns of light openings have been devised to guide it better in space. This is because light and its manifestation in the sacred space of the mosque strengthen the sense of spirituality and of the presence of God and convey a message of servitude before the absolute light, which is God Almighty. Indeed, in the space of Iranian mosques, light draws the attention of visitors to what lies beyond this world. This reality reveals the inner and outer aspects of things and the semantic, conceptual and symbolic capacities of light in the mosque, and it is a valuable tool for conveying a message and for travelling the path of spirituality (Mahdinejad & Sadeghi Habibabad, 2019). The architects of the mosques of the Safavid period and the Isfahan School, in accordance with their religious beliefs and principles, attached special importance to light and to the hierarchy of light in sacred spaces, including the Imam and Sheikh Lotfollah mosques in Isfahan and the Maqsud Beyk and Sorkhi mosques. The aim of the present research is to examine the manifestation of light in the mosques of the Isfahan School from the viewpoint of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, and in this regard the research questions are as follows:

1. How has light been manifested in the mosques of the Isfahan School from the viewpoint of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra?

2. In view of the perspectives of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, how does light in the Maqsud

Beyk, Sorkhi, Imam and Sheikh Lotfollah mosques affect visitors' sense of spirituality?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Numerous studies have been carried out in relation to the present research. Naseri et al. (2024), in their study entitled "Explaining and analysing the relationship between hierarchy and the sense of presence in the body of Islamic architecture of the mosques of the Isfahan School (case studies: Aqa Nour Mosque, Hakim Mosque and Imam Mosque of Isfahan)", using a survey method and a questionnaire, concluded that hierarchical design with various factors has a direct and positive effect on awareness and the prevention of heedlessness in space. Hence, today's architects can use the components proposed in that study, especially the material structure of architecture, to facilitate understanding and awareness in space. Among the factors affecting the creation and strengthening of the sense of presence, the hierarchy of natural light is recognized as the most important element in the design of mosque spaces. Arezoufar and Marasy (2022), in their study entitled "Analysis of the qualitative presence of light in historic Islamic mosques; case study: Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Selimiye Mosque and the Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba", using a descriptive–analytical and comparative method, concluded that the choice of location, number and shape of light openings has a considerable effect on the space of mosques, such that a balanced presence of light, or its emphasis in a particular direction for a specific purpose, affects these spaces. The outward form of this choice differs according to the environmental conditions of the site and the available architectural techniques, and consequently the amount of light received in the three mosques also differs. The ultimate goal in all three mosques is to create a spiritual space and to unite worshippers under divine light. This light is distributed uniformly in the space of the Selimiye Mosque, whereas in the dark spaces of the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque and the Mosque of Córdoba light reveals itself more through light effects than through its direct presence. Bani Asadi Baghmirani et al. (2022), in their study entitled "Explaining the perceptual journey in Safavid-era mosques, from matter to meaning, based on the views of Mulla Sadra (case studies: Imam Mosque and Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque)", using a descriptive–analytical and case-study method, concluded that, in view of the spiritual journey through Mulla Sadra's levels of perception, perception in Safavid mosques rests on four pillars: stillness, movement, connection and unity. After the pillar of stillness, each pillar, for a particular reason, prepares the ground for elevating the perception of the audience. In the pillar of movement, this elevation occurs through the association of meanings and substantial motion; in the pillar of connection, with the help of transparency and the presence of light; and finally, in the pillar of unity, through the union of the observer with space. By passing through these pillars, the observer gradually becomes ready to elevate perception from the sensory level to the imaginal and then to the intellectual level. Naseri et al. (2022), in their study entitled "Analysing the light hierarchy of the entrances of Isfahan School mosques in relation to urban public open spaces", using a simulation method, concluded that two main elements, separation from urban space and connection with the inner courtyard of the mosque, together with the portal decoration, materials and latticed openings, are factors effective in creating a light hierarchy at the entrances of mosques. The way these elements relate to the architectural space has a great effect on the entry of light into this space. Iraji and Zolfagharzadeh (2020), in their study entitled "A comparative study of daylight design in a Safavid mosque and a Renaissance church; case study: the Jame Abbasi Mosque of Isfahan and the Church of San Pietro in Rome", using comparative analysis, concluded that in the daylight design of the church, because ordinary worship does not require much illumination, the presence of light at the level of activities is not essential, and the attractive capabilities of daylight are used to draw more

attention to the higher world and to illuminate the "space". On the other hand, in the light design of the mosque, attention to the presence of daylight in the "space" is important, but a specific level of illumination is also needed at the "level" of activities. Moreover, the qibla is more important than light in mosque architecture, whereas in the church the qibla and light are considered simultaneously and in relation to each other, and churches are usually oriented towards sunrise and sunset. Finally, the technical similarities and differences in daylight design in the mosque and the church stem from their climatic, functional and formal characteristics, as well as from the different understanding of the metaphysics of light among Muslims and Christians. Mahdinejad and Sadeghi Habibabad (2019), in their study entitled "Analysis and hierarchical (ANP) prioritization of the components affecting the 'sense of spirituality' in the space of mosques with emphasis on the light component (case study: Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan)", using a quantitative method and analytic network analysis, concluded that in the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque an area with a turquoise colour and a light intensity of 300 lux (natural) creates the greatest sense of spirituality. The review of previous studies showed that research on the mosques of the Isfahan School and on light in mosques has addressed the hierarchy of the qualitative presence of light in relation to urban open space, its comparison with mosques and churches outside Iran, and the effect of light in Isfahan School mosques on the perception of the audience; to date, no study has examined light in the mosques of the Isfahan School from the viewpoint of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra with a qualitative–quantitative approach, and the present research is therefore novel.

The architecture of Isfahan School mosques in the Safavid era and the role of light

The Safavid state, relying on the principles of Shi'ism, shaped national identity in a way different from what existed in the Islamic empire and was founded as the most distinctive Iranian state of the Islamic period after the mighty Sasanian state. In this period, all forms and types of art, from architecture to miniature painting and various textiles, were blended with Iranian taste and sensibility, and they were both unique and authentic. The most important achievement of the Safavids, however, was architecture, and its best example appeared in Isfahan. Owing to the attention of the Safavid kings and the creativity of architects, the Isfahan School flourished and became distinct from the architecture of earlier periods. In this period, architecture changed from an organic affair shaped only by natural needs to a rationalist architecture with philosophical, artistic and technical values. The thinkers of the Isfahan school of thought influenced the structures and decorations of religious architects and gave every part of a building a deep symbolic content, so that the face of Iranian architecture was completely transformed. This era is truly regarded as the peak and the last display of Islamic architecture (Zamani et al., 2021). Given the special importance of light in Islamic art and its direct relationship with philosophical concepts, the best reinterpretation of the manifestations of light can be made in spaces of worship. Light, as one of the key elements of Islamic architecture, plays an important role in the valorization of space and, as an immaterial element, has always been present in architectural design and is regarded as a symbol of the spiritual world and of an exalted space. Moreover, in Islamic architecture, especially in spaces of worship, special emphasis is placed on the importance of light and the hierarchy of light (Tabatabaeian & Khodabakhshian, 2022). The valuable characteristics of light in mosque architecture include: light as a source of illumination with a varied spectrum of intensities, from strong to weak, and the provision of natural heating through this element; the creation of attraction and beauty intertwined with spiritual values, through the conscious use of the transparency, reflection and radiance of light on the rigid and solid structure of architecture; the use of light as

a symbol of the lights of truth, mercy and divine spirituality and as a display of the sacred beauty of God; the play of light and shade and the brilliance of light, which varies with the intensity of its reflection on materials and architectural components; and finally, the use of natural light to express emotions and evoke concepts such as the sense of presence, movement, concentration and pause through the contrast of darkness and brightness without the need for words (Hooshyar et al., 2021).

Light in mosques from the viewpoint of Suhrawardi (Illuminationist philosophy)

Light has always been one of the key elements in creating a spiritual atmosphere in mosques, and its role emphasizes the manifestation of God in the world of existence. Indeed, light reveals the beauty of God in space and, as a sacred and spiritual element, acts as a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds. As one of the basic factors and components in shaping the spiritual atmosphere of mosques, this element has great importance and meaning. The architecture of the mosque, as a place for light and for the manifestation of God's light, shows the inner presence of light in this space. As Suhrawardi says: "Qamu fi hayakil al-qurubat al-zulumat" ("they stood in the temples of nearness [amid] the darknesses") (Suhrawardi, 1996). By this he means the mosque, which is a structure in the world of existence and darkness and which, as a spiritual space, connects the pure inner self to the source of light and knowledge through spiritual and psychic worship and illuminates the realities of things for it (Shafiei et al., 2014). The building of the mosque is the manifestation of a light that shines from within it; a heart which, like a Kaaba of light, illuminates its entire material body and hides the turbidity and heaviness of the material body from view. In Suhrawardi's view, the spirit of the meanings and concepts of the sacred world is depicted through symbols in the form of sensory shapes and, as representatives of those transcendent concepts that lie in his mystical perceptions and experiences, is breathed into the soul and body of stone, wood and glass (Suhrawardi, 1996).

With regard to light and its wisdom in mosques, Suhrawardi draws on Illuminationist philosophy, and in Illumination (ishraq) what is meant by light is the unveiling of "the initial manifestation of being". Hence, what is meant by light is the splendour of the morning and the brightness of "dawn", and the wisdom that arises in this illuminating East is called Illuminationist wisdom. For abstract knowledge, whose characteristic is acquisition through formal knowledge, leads the seeker to a direct and unmediated presence, an illuminating presence, which is nothing other than the rising (mashriq) of the soul. For this reason, Suhrawardi's Illuminationist philosophy is based on light. In the context of mosque architecture and its relationship with light, Suhrawardi refers to light and darkness as the principle of the East and considers it the legacy of the Persian sages of ancient Iran. He also mentions the names of three Persian sages (Ebrahimi Dinani, 2014). The presence of light in the architectural structure tends towards a reduction of mass, which in the Shaykh's thought is a symbol of darkness, and this appears through the increase and refinement of space. By adding to the number of openings, the possibility of light entering the building increases. All these factors help bring the material structure of the art of architecture closer to the spiritual and immaterial presence of light and spirituality (Aghaeimehr et al., 2018). Suhrawardi founded a particular system of light in which sensory and physical light is only a weak part of true light. In his Illuminationist philosophy, sensibles such as colours are simple and primary experiences. By denying the reality of non-sensible physical realities, Suhrawardi holds that real sensible beings must also be simple and primary. In various parts of his works he states that whiteness does not mean being luminous and that colour is different from light (Shamisi et al., 2023).

Light in mosques from the viewpoint of Mulla Sadra (Transcendent Philosophy)

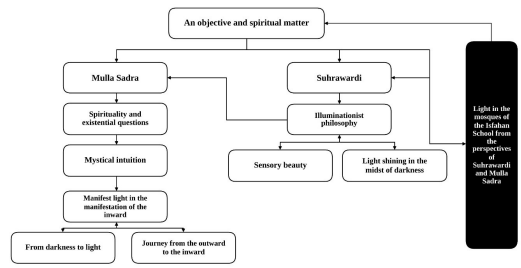
In his writings, especially in his glosses on the Commentary on Hikmat al-Ishraq, Mulla Sadra interprets the views of the Shaykh al-Ishraq on light in a way that accords with the teachings of his own school of thought, which emphasizes existential questions. One of the most important of these interpretations is the understanding of the luminosity of the soul or the "I" as "existence". Mulla Sadra's views in this kind of interpretation, which affects the interpretation of the luminosity of the soul, are based on the identification of light with existence (Babaei & Pourhassan, 2015). Mulla Sadra in fact states that manifest light is in reality itself and shows something other than itself. This statement precisely contains the description of existence, and light does not attach anything else to itself except on the basis of its concrete existence. If we disregard the existence of light, on which the author has based his statement, and the intellect attends to its concept, then existential light is recognized as the manifestation of another, and this other may be existence or quiddity and meaning (Mulla Sadra, 1981). It should be noted that, for Mulla Sadra, perception leads to a kind of union between matter and meaning, while he also regards material perception as one of the stages of knowledge (Amini, 2015). Nevertheless, he does not consider the material realm to be the end of perception and believes that the presence of the spiritual realm is a necessary condition for knowledge by presence. In the opposition between matter and meaning, Mulla Sadra holds that knowledge by presence is attained when one moves along a path from matter towards meaning, distances oneself from material perception and attends to meaning (Tamimi & Faramarz Gharamaleki, 2021). In the mosques of the Safavid era, body and meaning (which includes the perception and understanding of elements such as light) are inseparable. In these religious buildings, in addition to the visible body, there is a hidden meaning that can be perceived through the faculties of imagination and intellect. In the process of perception, by observing the body and material elements of these mosques, the observer gains an experience of a journey through the levels of perception which is at first confined to the material layers but does not stop at the material level and moves towards an ascending journey and a level higher than material things (Bani Asadi Baghmirani et al., 2022), and through light and its manifestation they are connected to the spiritual level. In this regard, according to Mulla Sadra's theory (substantial motion), the perception of light in Safavid mosques takes place gradually and continuously, so that there is no interruption in it. This process includes levels of perception and knowledge, of which imagination and intellect are the two highest. The spiritual journey and movement in the space of Safavid mosques takes place with the help of the faculty of imagination, through mental images and the association of meanings (Charkhchian, 2019), and through the intellect, which does not need the presence of matter (Mulla Sadra, 1981); rather, the condition of intellectual perception is nothing other than that perception be abstracted from any bodily existence.

Theoretical framework of the research

In the present research, given the centrality of Illuminationist philosophy and Transcendent Philosophy in the views of Mulla Sadra and Suhrawardi, the reality of revelation and mystical intuition in mosques, which are sacred and mystical places, is addressed. One of the basic principles of Mulla Sadra's philosophy is the concept of substantial motion. He believes that, in the light of this motion, the human being travels an evolutionary path and passes through all the necessary stages to reach the ultimate truth. From Mulla Sadra's perspective, anyone who can perfect his theoretical and practical faculties is like a prophet immersed in the intuition of divine beauty, and nothing can prevent him from attending to the divine light. Mulla Sadra divides intuition into

different categories and devotes the last type to spiritual intuition, at which stage a person can receive the spirit of realities according to his spiritual capacity and without intermediary. In short, his view of revelation is that the soul of the Prophet is connected to the immaterial essences of the world of the intellect and observes all the realities of existence recorded in the Preserved Tablet and the Tablet of Effacement and Confirmation (Alimardi & Artidar, 2024). Mulla Sadra refers to infallibility and knowledge as two valuable aspects. That is, knowledge is a force that strengthens the human will to refrain from sin, and the stronger this knowledge, the greater the likelihood of avoiding sins; so that if this knowledge turns into certainty and the perception of the ugliness of sin is so deep that it is like seeing it, committing sin becomes impossible for the infallible; this impossibility, of course, is not an essential impossibility but an ordinary one (Tavakoli et al., 2020).

Suhrawardi's theory of Illuminationist philosophy is related to the concept of light. Illumination (ishraq) means the shining of light in the midst of darkness. In Illuminationist thought, all darknesses originate from light; in other words, light is the principle and foundation and darkness has a derivative existence. Suhrawardi's views and theories do not deal directly with the subject of art. In his thought, beauty is an objective and spiritual reality which, while preserving its celestial identity, entered the material world and was entrusted to Adam, the father of humankind, at the beginning of creation. Hence, sensory beauty is regarded as a sign of the beauty of the world of lights (Kamalizadeh, 2010). On this view, Illuminationist wisdom can be regarded as a kind of sensory beauty whose aim is to return to an exalted world entrusted to the human being by the Divine Essence. Art can be a suitable ground for realizing this true return, because art and wisdom are deeply intertwined. Suhrawardi regards every beauty and perfection as a gift from the Divine Essence and states that the First Essence becomes light, brings all beings into existence and gives them life with its rays, so that everything in this world is a ray of the light of His Essence (Emamifar, 2012). On this basis, it can be said that no option more fitting than light can be found for symbolizing Oneness (ahadiyya). Hence, the Muslim artist seeks, with whatever tool, to endow his work with a ray of light (Afshar, 2022). The present research addresses the question of light on the basis of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist philosophy and the reality of mystical intuition in the view of Mulla Sadra, and accordingly the theoretical framework of the research is presented in Figure 1. (Fig. 1)



Methodology

The research method is qualitative–quantitative, of the descriptive–analytical and deductive type. At the data-collection stage, using library research, notes were taken from written sources related to the problem and the dimensions of light in mosques of the Safavid period and the Isfahan School, and in the field study a semi-structured interview was used. The statistical population of this research is divided into two groups: (1) experts and (2) mosques of the Isfahan School. The population of experts consists of 10 specialists in architecture and philosophy familiar with the mosques of the Isfahan School, sampled purposively. The other group of the population consists of the mosques of the Isfahan School, namely the Maqsud Beyk, Sorkhi, Imam and Sheikh Lotfollah mosques of Isfahan, which were also sampled purposively. It should be noted that initially, in addition to these mosques, the Jame Mosque of Isfahan was also a focus of the research, but because of its many similarities with the Imam

and Sheikh Lotfollah mosques in terms of interior spaces, structure and the entry of light, it was removed from the research. The four mosques were selected because they are among the best-known examples of the Isfahan School and attract many domestic and foreign tourists and visitors every day. In addition, these four mosques were selected because of their differences in spatial structure, which makes it possible to examine the manifestation of light in their spaces from the perspectives of Illuminationist and Transcendent Philosophy in different ways. Open, axial and selective coding was used to analyse the data, in order to identify the key data derived from the theories in view of the research approach. Then the interview data and the experts' opinions were analysed with a fuzzy, dimensionless and normalized matrix, in order to extract the main components of the qualitative analysis of light in Isfahan School mosques according to the views of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, based on the rank of each component.

Introduction of the selected cases

Maqsud Beyk Mosque

The Maqsud Beyk Mosque was built in 1010 AH, during the reign of Shah Abbas I. It is located on Abdolrazzaq Street in Isfahan and has no iwan or portico. Its decoration includes white mosaic tiles and beautiful thuluth inscriptions, and the tomb of Mir Emad Hasani, the great Safavid calligrapher, is located in its eastern part. The Maqsud Beyk Mosque is designed as a dome-chamber prayer hall with a central courtyard. In this building, the ratio of the courtyard axis to the dome and the ratio of the dome to the entrance axis are arranged with a 90-degree rotation (Balali Oskoui et al., 2020).

Sorkhi Mosque, Isfahan

The Sorkhi Mosque of Isfahan was built in 1014 AH and is located on Lower Chaharbagh Street in the city. The mosque has no dome or minaret and is designed with two iwans. It also has a simple prayer-hall (shabestan) pattern consisting of two iwans on the southern and northern sides and a central courtyard. Interestingly, non-orthogonal angles can be observed in the prayer hall of this mosque (Balali Oskoui et al., 2020).

Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan

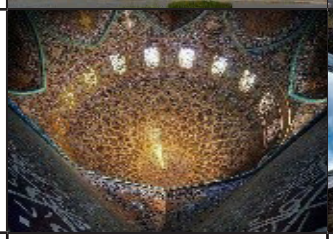
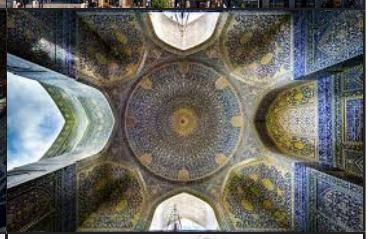
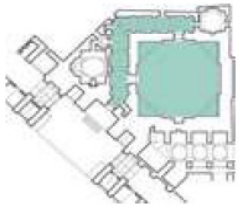
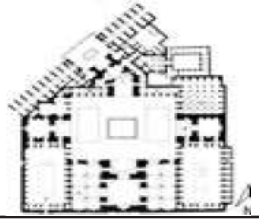
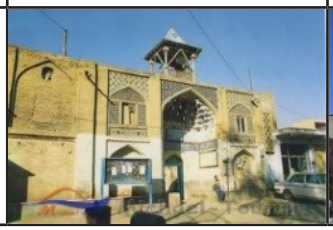
The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan is an outstanding example of the quality of light in Iranian architecture, displaying itself through the most varied and finest modes of architectural expression. Compared with other architectural works in Iran, these features have produced a unique and optimal result in terms of innovations and subtle methods of using light. The building belongs to the Isfahan School of the 11th century AH and is located on one side of the Imam Square of Isfahan. The mosque has no courtyard or minaret, and its high dome rests on eight arches and thirty-two niches. Although the mosque is precisely oriented towards Mecca, it is at an angle to the great Naqsh-e Jahan Square from which it is entered, and this angle is concealed by the iwan (Arezoufar & Marasy, 2022).

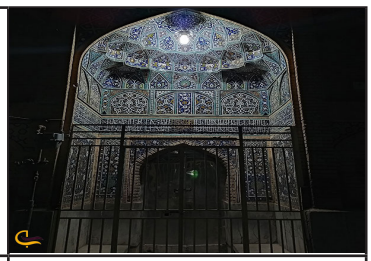
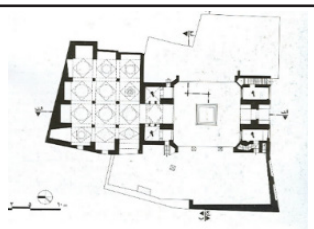
Imam Mosque, Isfahan

The Imam Mosque of Isfahan, formerly known as the Shah Mosque, the New Soltani Mosque and the Jame Abbasi Mosque, is located on the southern side of Naqsh-e Jahan Square. Its construction began in the third phase of the Naqsh-e Jahan Square project by order of Shah Abbas the Great and was completed during the reign of Shah Safi. As an Iranian mosque, the Imam Mosque of Isfahan has a large central courtyard measuring 70 × 70 m, with arcades on each side, an iwan at the centre of each arcade and minarets on both sides of the southern iwan. Through the doorway on the southern side of the iwan, one enters the southern dome chamber, measuring 22.5 × 22.5 m. The dome chamber is square in plan and rests on a cylindrical drum, which is transformed into a sixteen-sided polygon and then into a circle by means of squinches. The double-shell dome of the building, with a span of about 21 m, sits on top of it. The height of the dome is 38 m from the

inside and 54 m from the outside (Hatami Ansari et al., 2023). The characteristics of the selected mosques are presented below in Table 1. (Tab. 1)

Table 1: Characteristics of the selected mosques of the Isfahan School (Authors, adapted from Houmani Rad & Sharafinafar, 2014).

Mosque	Historic mosques	
	Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque	Imam Mosque, Isfahan
Location and date of construction	Isfahan, Naqsh-e Jahan Square 1012–1028 AH	Isfahan, Naqsh-e Jahan Square 1041–1021 AH
Façade		
Dome-chamber ceiling		
Plan		
Dimensions	19 × 19 m, height 32 m	22.5 × 23.5 m, maximum height 38 m
Mosque	Historic mosques	
	Sorkhi Mosque	Maqsud Beyk Mosque
Location and date of construction	Isfahan, Lower Chaharbagh, Sorkhi Alley 1014–1024 AH	Isfahan, Abdolrazzaq Street, north-east side of Naqsh-e Jahan Square 1010 AH
Façade		

Dome-chamber ceiling	-	
Plan		
Dimensions	17.6 × 12.3 m, height 15 m	16.8 × 14.9 m, maximum height 17 m

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Qualitative analysis of light in the courtyards of Isfahan School mosques

In the Imam Mosque of Isfahan and in the Sorkhi and Maqsud Beyk mosques, light and its manifestation can be seen as soon as the visitor enters the courtyard. In the courtyards of these mosques, light shows its true essence through the shining of the sun and falls fully on the courtyard and the visitor, bestowing complete brightness on the courtyard of these mosques, which is a sacred environment. It should be noted that in all three mosques, before entering the courtyard, the visitor faces a dark space at the entrance (the jelowkhan, which is in a state of stillness), from where he or she enters the courtyard directly (the place of full radiance), experiencing a kind of journey from darkness to light which, in accordance with Suhrawardi's statement, is Illuminationist wisdom itself, in which the sacred manifestation of light in space naturally displays the culmination of its ascent:

"If there is anything in the world of existence that needs no definition or explanation, it must necessarily be manifest by itself; and in the world of existence there is nothing more manifest and clearer than light, and nothing more self-sufficient than light" (Suhrawardi, 1996).

In fact, in view of these opinions of Suhrawardi regarding light and its radiance and reflection in the courtyards of Isfahan School mosques (Imam, Sorkhi and Maqsud Beyk), it can be acknowledged that the light in the courtyards of these mosques gives existence to sanctity and to the sacred and is the final and existential cause of these mosques and, given its direct radiance on the courtyard and the visitor, "encompasses the highest station in the edifice of existence, to the point that the rays of light shatter the structure of the dark isthmuses (barzakhs)" (Suhrawardi, 1996). Indeed, the full radiance of light in the space of mosques, which are regarded as sacred places, represents the identity and knowledge of the human being and of his essence from the world of the existence of God Almighty. Light in this space acts as an ordering and identity-giving element. In view of Suhrawardi's views on the worlds of the managing (mudabbira), isthmian (barzakhi), suspended (mu'allaqa) and victorial (qahira) lights, in the courtyards of these mosques light is regarded as the manifestation of the managing lights (human and celestial souls), the turning point of philosophical questions and the source of all artistic creativity, and in this way it sanctifies the space of the mosques and the visitors. Moreover, with the manifestation of

light and its direct radiance on the courtyard of the mosque, giving complete brightness to this space, the reality of revelation and revelatory knowledge in Mulla Sadra's sense goes beyond the realm of human sense. By passing through the high jelowkhan and entering the courtyards of these mosques, the visitor is constantly evolving and transforming in accordance with his or her substantial motion. This process of moving from darkness to light in the courtyards of mosques, in accordance with Mulla Sadra's views on light, shows the journey of the visitor and of his or her being from one level to another and from the outward (the darkness of the jelowkhan) to the existential inward (the complete brightness of the courtyard) until reaching the ultimate truth (pilgrimage in the dome chamber). For this reason, in this element of the mosque, the soul is connected with the immaterial essences of the world of the intellect and the existential reality of being is observed. (Fig. 2)

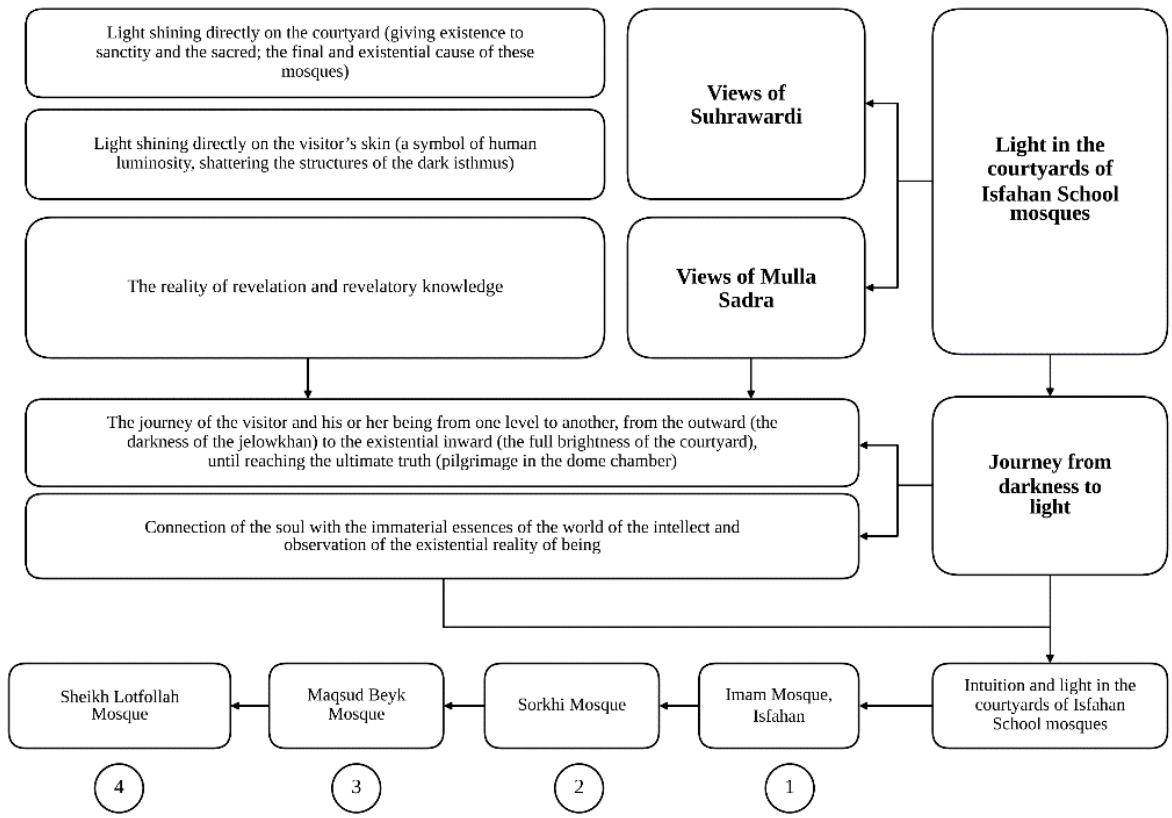


Figure 2: A model of light in the courtyards of Isfahan School mosques according to the views of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra (Source: Authors).

It is worth noting that, according to Mulla Sadra's theory of intuition and light, in the courtyards of these mosques the beauty of light and its sanctity are displayed in such a way that they can be observed without attention to other factors, and the audience can understand this through rational perception. In this regard, the manifestation of the sanctity of light along the spiritual path from darkness to absolute brightness is clearly visible in the Imam Mosque of Isfahan, which has a larger courtyard than the Sorkhi and Maqsud Beyk mosques. (Fig. 3) In the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque of Isfahan, however, which has no courtyard, there is no full manifestation of light

in a courtyard; passing through the jelowkhan and turning along the axis of movement, the visitor enters the dome chamber, which for him or her is regarded as the focus of tranquillity.

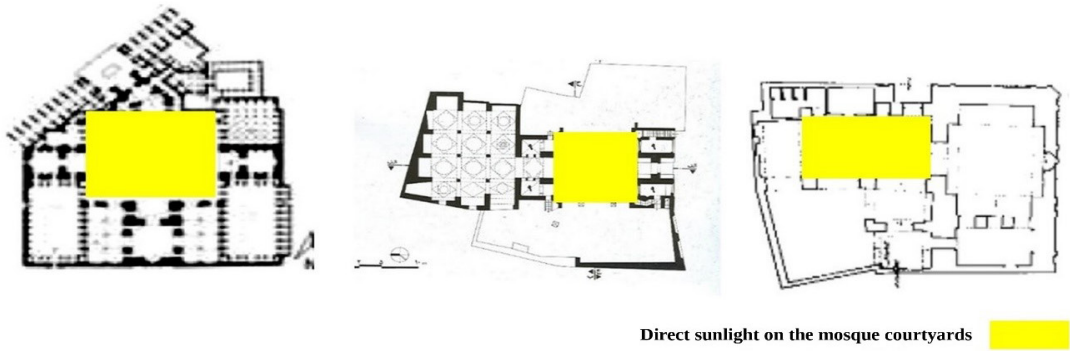


Figure 3: Radiance of light in the courtyards of the mosques (from right: Maqsud Beyk Mosque, Sorkhi Mosque and Imam Mosque of Isfahan) (Source: Authors).

Manifestation of light in the interior spaces of Isfahan School mosques

Light is beautifully manifested in the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque of Isfahan, and the visitor's entry into the entrance corridor of this mosque is designed so that, as the corridor turns, entry into the dome chamber becomes possible in line with the qibla and from opposite the mihrab. This particular spatial design, from the entrance to the mihrab of the mosque, also creates a kind of luminous hierarchy and a contrast between brightness and darkness. (Fig. 4)

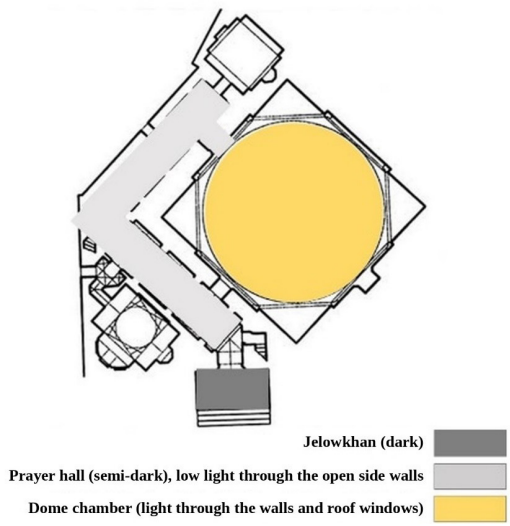


Figure 4: The course of light (from darkness to brightness) in the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque of Isfahan (Source: Authors).

As shown in Figure 4, the entrance corridor of the building is a dim and relatively dark space. Passing along this path, the visitor enters a brighter space (the dome chamber), which symbolizes a spiritual journey from darkness to light. Light enters this space through the geometric forms of the dome-chamber ceiling, by means of apertures and windows. Beneath the ceiling of the dome chamber, which is itself a dark space, the visitor sees the sunlight. Given his or her presence in the mosque and purification from sins, this light brings the visitor closer to the Divine Essence. This concept is in a sense related to what Mulla Sadra describes as the level from the outward to the inward for reaching the ultimate truth (the Truth of Truths, haqiqat al-haqa'iq), where he states: "the connection of the Prophet's soul with the immaterial essences of the world of the intellect and the observation of all the realities of existence written in the Preserved Tablet and the Tablet of Effacement and Confirmation" (Alimardi & Artidar, 2024). This point is clearly visible in the radiance of light in the dome chamber of the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque. This light displays the existential reality of the whole of existence, which is the Divine Essence itself, in the form of luminous shapes and the play of light. Thus, in accordance with Mulla Sadra's views, for the visitor "committing sin becomes impossible for the infalli-

ble; this impossibility, of course, is an ordinary impossibility, not an essential one" (Tavakoli et al., 2020). Passing through and falling on the solid and void forms of the space beneath the dome and the multicoloured tiles, this light is broken and, passing through the turquoise tiles, shines inside so as to prevent glare and direct penetration and to make the visitor aware of being present in the sacred space of this mosque. Indeed, this is where the mystery of Illuminationist light appears and gives this space of the mosque splendour and majesty, a splendour and majesty which, in Suhrawardi's view, "emphasizes the aesthetic manifestation of art, because light in Suhrawardi's wisdom is one with beauty and perfection" (Suhrawardi, 1996). It should be noted that the visitor in this environment is engaged in worship and, by closing his or her eyes to the world, separates the soul from the material body. The visitor observes a luminous world, formed by the radiance of this light of perfection and beauty, without needing to travel any distance. This transmission of natural light through the inner and outer arabesque lattices shows the presence of a sacred and transcendent essence and creates a spiritual space, and the visitor can, in accordance with Suhrawardi's view, "using the lights and meanings of the higher world, create in whatever form he wishes suspended images (muthul mu 'allaqa) that subsist by themselves" (Suhrawardi, 1996). In the Imam Mosque of Isfahan, after passing through its courtyard, the visitor enters a space with full light. In the prayer hall and portico (rawaq), however, there is no longer absolute light. These spaces, which have defined roofs and walls, are neither in absolute darkness nor in complete brightness. Indeed, light penetrates into the prayer hall and porticoes through the open walls and makes these spaces semi-dark and semi-bright. For this reason, the visitor is neither in the complete brightness of the courtyard nor in the absolute darkness ahead; rather, here the transition from the brightness of the courtyard to darkness and then again to brightness takes place for the visitor. It is worth noting that, despite the absence of absolute light, according to Mulla Sadra's views, detachment from worldly affairs is taking place in this place, and the visitor "purifies his inner self by detaching from worldly affairs, and it is no wonder that for him knowledge of God, the angels, the Book and the Hereafter is above every pleasure" (Mulla Sadra, 1981, p. 214). Hence the visitor seeks to pass more quickly through this intermediate space (darkness and brightness) and reach the dome chamber, which is the manifestation of the brightness of the Divine Essence through light.

In the dome chamber of the Imam Mosque of Isfahan, everything seems to leave its material aspect and, through the radiance of light from the four roof windows on the four sides of the roof, takes on a spiritual and heavenly state. This light brings not only the visitors but also the space of the dome chamber to a kind of perfection and growth. In this space, the manifestation and radiance of light act as an intermediary between the human being and the metaphysical world and establish a wondrous link between heaven and earth, drawing the visitor into a heavenly and spiritual state. In view of Suhrawardi's words, it can be said that light in the space of the Imam Mosque of Isfahan is recognized as "a narrator of the world of lights beyond bodies (dark substances, jawahir ghasiqa)" and is regarded as the artist of this space (Suhrawardi, 1996). This light, shining indirectly through the windows around the roof of the dome chamber, manifests "the absolute beauty of the Light of Lights" and helps the visitor forget the sorrow of exile in the material world. This experience gives him or her awareness of the higher world and of the spiritual path and enables him or her to attain sanctity by drawing closer to this world. In Suhrawardi's words, this light can "affect pure natures that do not understand his language" (Suhrawardi, 1996). In this space, light shines in turquoise and white colours and is reflected through them. One can refer to Suhrawardi's concept of light, according to

which this light is not visible in itself and its essential and bright radiance changes into colours. As the penetration and radiance of light on the colours of the tilework increase and decrease, its essence is not divided into degrees of light and darkness and suffers no deficiency. Indeed, this kind of radiance of light in the dome chamber of the Imam Mosque of Isfahan enables the visitor, in accordance with his or her spiritual intuition, to perceive realities without any intermediary, on the basis of his or her awareness and knowledge of the Divine Essence and of the unity of the reality of light; this is what Mulla Sadra referred to in relation to spiritual intuition: "at the stage of the intuitive spirit, a person receives the spirit of realities according to his spiritual capacity and without intermediary" (Mulla Sadra, 1981).

In the Maqsud Beyk and Sorkhi mosques, light appears in a different way in the interior space. In addition to the dome chamber, which does not exist in the Sorkhi Mosque, this difference also arises through the windows in the façade walls. In the Maqsud Beyk Mosque, there are two aspects to the manifestation of light. The first is that, passing through the courtyard, which is a space of complete and absolute light, the visitor reaches the prayer hall and side porticoes. Here there is no longer that absolute light, and the space lies between darkness and brightness. Similarly, in the prayer halls and porticoes of the Imam and Sheikh Lotfollah mosques of Isfahan, light penetrates into these spaces through open and vaulted walls, and only half of the space is bright. Therefore, given that light is not absolute and that darkness is present, the seeker and visitor experience spiritual intuition through unseen realities and their own perceptions. This is what Mulla Sadra expressed as follows: "Spiritual intuition means the appearance of meanings and unseen realities, which, if it appears in the faculty of thought without the need for premises and syllogism, is called intuition (hads)" (Mulla Sadra, 2004). The manifestation of this indirect and absolute light in part of the space of the prayer hall and porticoes of this mosque is such that it shows itself as other than its essence. In this essence, other elements whose appearance and manifestation go beyond the reality of this light become more visible. According to Mulla Sadra's views, this is expressed as follows: "the appearance of accidental lights is not through something beyond themselves, so that they remain hidden in their essence; rather, their appearance is the reality of their existence" (Mulla Sadra, 2004). (Fig. 5)

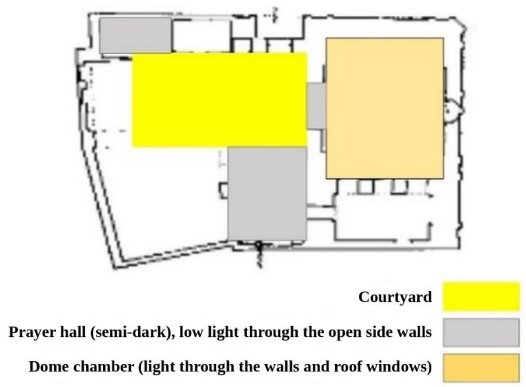


Figure 5: Manifestation of light in the plan of the Maqsud Beyk Mosque. (Source: Authors).

Another aspect of light in this mosque appears on passing from the bright courtyard to the semi-bright dome chamber. In this space, the wall windows are designed with apertures for the entry of light, which create plays of light and shadow (spots of light on the floor) in this part of the Maqsud Beyk Mosque (Fig. 6). This feature may distract the visitor during worship and pilgrimage. Nevertheless, the entry of light in this way takes this space out of absolute darkness and makes it semi-bright. In this way, the visitor can connect his or her being to the Divine Essence through worship and thereby attain the complete brightness of his or her being and soul. This concept refers, in a sense, to what Suhrawardi said about light: "Light will not be light in its essence and something else will manifest it; rather, the truth is that light manifests itself and its appearance means being light"

(Suhrawardi, 1996).

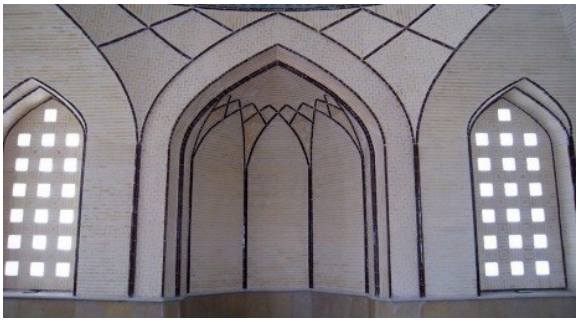


Figure 6: Manifestation of light in the dome chamber of the Maqsud Beyk Mosque (Source:https://www.touristgah.com).

In the Sorkhi Mosque, there are two iwans on the two sides of the courtyard. One of these iwans is the entrance of the mosque and lies in complete darkness. Passing through this iwan, the visitor enters the bright space of the courtyard (a journey from darkness to light). To enter the prayer hall, he or she must again pass through the dark space of the iwan to reach a prayer hall that receives semi-bright light through arched windows at the height of the roof. Here the visitor again experiences the journey from darkness to light, though not as intensely as in the bright space of the courtyard, and in this space engages in pilgrimage and worship and in the manifestation of his or her soul and its connection with the Divine Essence (Fig. 7). Here it can be said that, according to Mulla Sadra's views on light and the departure from thinghood, thinghood and outwardness originate from the space of the mosque. The reality and nature of the existence of light, which represents brightness and the connection of the human soul and being with God Almighty, appears in the absence of a negative matter that derives from absolute light. By being present in the prayer hall of this mosque and performing worship and pilgrimage, the visitor perceives his or her existential reality and essence and reaches the essence of absolute light, which is God. In other words, as Suhrawardi stated: "whoever perceives his own essence is pure light, and every pure light is manifest by its essence and perceived by its essence" (Suhrawardi, 1996).

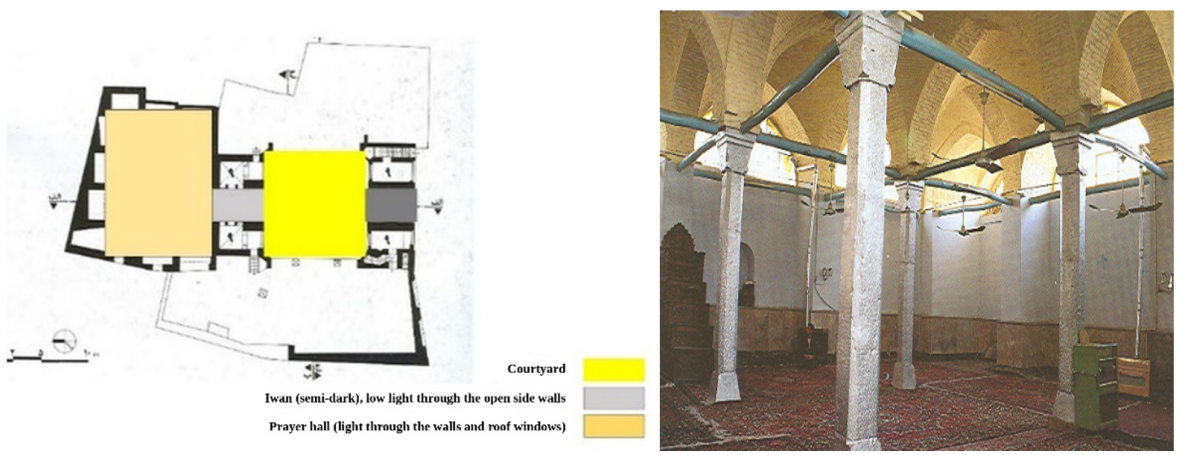


Figure 7: Manifestation of light in the plan and prayer hall of the Sorkhi Mosque. v

Based on the examination of light according to the views of Mulla Sadra and Suhrawardi in four mosques of the Isfahan School, namely the Imam Mosque of Isfahan, the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, the Sorkhi Mosque and the Maqsud Beyk Mosque, the findings of the research can be presented as in Table 2. (Tab. 2).

Quantitative analysis of the findings of the expert interviews

According to Table 3, which was prepared on the basis of selective codes and through open and

Table 2: Findings. (Source: Authors)

Isfahan School mosques	Manifestation of light	
	Views of Suhrawardi (Illuminationist philosophy)	Views of Mulla Sadra (Transcendent Philosophy)
Sorkhi Mosque	The sacred manifestation of light in space naturally displays the culmination of its ascent. Illuminationist wisdom Giver of existence to sanctity and the sacred; final and existential cause Represents human identity and knowledge, and human essence, from the world of God's existence Ordering and identity-giving A manifestation of the managing lights (human and celestial souls) and the turning point of philosophical questions One with beauty and perfection Creation of self-subsistent suspended images (muthul mu'allaqa) The self is pure light through self-perception. Narrator of the world of lights beyond bodies (dark substances) Effect of light on pure natures	Connection of the soul with the immaterial essences of the world of the intellect and observation of the existential reality of being Observation of the beauty of light and its sanctity without attention to anything else Connected to intellectual perception From the outward to the inward level until reaching the ultimate truth (Truth of Truths) Detachment from worldly affairs and purification of the inner self Connection of the human soul and being to God. Spiritual intuition Appearance of accidental lights The visitor at the stage of the intuitive spirit
Maqsud Beyk Mosque		
Imam Mosque, Isfahan		
Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque		

axial coding in line with the characteristics of the studied cases, it can be stated that the qualitative manifestation of light in the mosques of the Isfahan School, according to the views of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, depends on the importance of, and attention to, those philosophical–functional and aesthetic characteristics that are linked with the mentality and experience of visitors. The indicators for the qualitative examination of light from the perspective of Illuminationist and Transcendent Philosophy in the mosques of the Isfahan School, in the comparison of theoretical studies and field observations, are presented in Table 3. (Tab. 3)

Table 3: Indicators for the qualitative examination of light from the perspective of Illuminationist and Transcendent Philosophy in the mosques of the Isfahan School, in the comparison of theoretical studies and field observations. (Source: Authors).

Open coding		Axial coding		Selective coding	Codes related to observations and events recorded in each selected mosque	Final code
Illuminationist philosophy	Light shining in the midst of darkness	Objective–subjective aspects of light	Light is the principle and foundation; darkness is derivative. Interaction of shadow and light	Light as a sign of the beauty of the world of lights Time-dependent light Battle of darkness and light	– Given the radiance of light in the courtyard and in the semi-dark interior spaces of the mosques, light appears as the principle in the courtyard and as a symbol of existential darkness in the interior spaces. Change in the angle of incident light during the day	Philosophical–architectural

	Beauty		Objective beauty	Use of geometric lattices and muqarnas Water pool (reflection of light) Double-shell dome to regulate the quality of light	– Radiance on the courtyard and on decorated walls enhances the effect of the decoration and the sanctity of the mosque spaces.	Beauty and art
			Spiritual beauty	Sense of celestial identity	– A familiar symbol and sign of the manifestation of God's light in the sacred space of mosques	
			Sensory beauty			
Mulla Sadra	Mystical intuition	Spirituality and existential questions	Substantial motion	Travelling an evolutionary path and reaching the ultimate truth (God Almighty) Light as an intermediary between unity and multiplicity Connection to the world of the intellect Journey from the outward to the inward	– Following the hierarchy of movement in the mosques from the courtyard to the dome chamber, evolutionary paths based on the hierarchical entry of light are travelled, so that the visitor, by avoiding sin, comes to know his or her existential reality and God. - Passage from the courtyard with absolute light to interior spaces, where light enters at low intensity through the walls or roof windows.	Philosophical–architectural Manifestation of Mulla Sadra's gradation (tashkik)
	Manifest light in the manifestation of the inward		Spiritual (intuitive) witnessing			

Based on the coding carried out and the final selection of codes, at this step the opinions of the expert specialists on the qualitative analysis of light in the space of Isfahan School mosques based on the views of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra were examined. As the coding showed, philosophical–architectural features and beauty and art are the main components assessed as important in the qualitative analysis of light in the mosques of the Isfahan School based on the theories of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, and visitors, through their perception of these factors, arrive at spiritual perceptions of light in these sacred spaces. The indicators proposed are classified in Tables 4, 5 and 6. In the view of the research experts, one of the most important of these factors is the set of indicators proposed as sub-components of the philosophical–architectural component, which improve the quality of the manifestation of light and of the sacred in the mosques of the Isfahan School. (Tab. 4)

Table 4: Factors related to the philosophical–architectural and beauty-and-art components in the qualitative analysis of light in the mosques of the Isfahan School according to the views of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, in the opinion of the research experts. (Source: Authors).

Components	Codes	Factors and components	Objective	Subjective
Philosophical–architectural	A1	Direct radiance of light in the courtyard	-	*
	A2	Entry of light through the walls	-	*
	A3	Light as an intermediary between unity and multiplicity	-	*

	A4	Interaction of light and shadow	-	*
	A5	Time-dependent light	-	*
	A6	Multiplicity in unity	-	*
	A7	Spatial hierarchy	*	*
Beauty and art	B1	Radiance of light on wall decoration	*	*
	B2	Radiance and refraction of light in muqarnas	*	*
	B3	Use of the double-shell dome	*	*
	B4	Water pool in the courtyard to reflect light	*	*
	B5	Radiance of light through the walls and openings of interior spaces	*	*

Next, this process is described for the components affecting the qualitative analysis of light in the mosques of the Isfahan School according to the views of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, in the opinion of the research experts. Table 5 presents the fuzzy dimensionless (normalized) matrix for the philosophical–architectural and beauty-and-art components affecting this matter. (Tab. 5)

Table 5: Fuzzy dimensionless matrix of the philosophical–architectural and beauty-and-art components in the mosques of the Isfahan School according to the views of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, in the opinion of the research experts. (Source: Authors).

Component	Fuzzy WS	Min	mod	max	Component	Fuzzy WS	Min	mod	max
Philosophical–architectural	A1	0.21	0.336	0.9	Beauty and art	B1	0.07	0.336	0.9
	A2	0.14	0.332	0.9		B2	0.07	0.328	0.9
	A3	0.21	0.324	0.9		B3	0.07	0.324	0.9
	A4	0.07	0.324	0.9		B4	0.07	0.34	0.9
	A5	0.21	0.316	0.9		B5	0.07	0.328	0.9
	A6	0.07	0.312	0.9					
	A7	0.21	0.34	0.9					

After describing the fuzzy dimensionless matrix for the indicators explaining the two identified components, the distances from the positive ideal (S+) and the negative ideal (S−) and the final fuzzy similarity index (CCi) for each of these components are presented in Table 6. According to this table, the analysis of the priorities of the factors of the qualitative analysis of light in the space of Isfahan School mosques according to the views of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra shows that the philosophical–architectural factors have the first priority and the beauty-and-art component ranks next. (Tab. 6)

Table 6: Calculation of the distance indices and similarity to the final ideal option for the two components, philosophical–architectural and beauty and art, of the qualitative analysis of light in the space of Isfahan School mosques according to the views of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra. (Source: Authors).

Components	S+	S-	CCi	Rank
Philosophical–functional	6.2814	7.5024	0.5443	1
Beauty and art	8.3002	9.3432	0.5296	2

In addition to the items and components presented in the tables above (Tables 4–6), some of the research experts raised further points regarding the qualitative analysis of light in the space of Isfahan School mosques such as the Sorkhi, Maqsud Beyk, Sheikh Lotfollah and Imam mosques. In the mosques of the Isfahan School, features such as the entry of light through the walls and its direct radiance in the courtyard reflect Suhrawardi's theories in Illuminationist philosophy, which regard light as "the essence of existence" and as manifestations of sacred lights. Direct light in the courtyard of mosques such as the Imam Mosque symbolizes the "Light of Lights", which radiates existence from the higher world onto the earth. In contrast, light filtered through latticed windows and coloured glass (as in the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque) is interpreted as "enamoured light" (nur-e mu'ashshaq), which passes from outward multiplicity to inward unity. This spatial hierarchy, from the brightly lit courtyard to the dimly lit prayer halls, embodies the journey of the soul from the material world (multiplicity) to the celestial realm (unity). From Suhrawardi's perspective, the interaction of light and shadow in these spaces is a scene of the symbolic battle between light (the active intellect) and darkness (ignorance), just as light overcomes darkness in arabesque decorations.

Light in the Maqsud Beyk and Sorkhi mosques is not static but dynamic and fluid, and it shifts the shadows over time; it is as if the architecture has a fluid existence that undergoes transformation in "perpetual origination" (huduth dahri). This dynamism accords with Mulla Sadra's theory, which regards existence as having levels and as constantly changing. Moreover, light, as an intermediary between unity and multiplicity, is manifested in the domes of the mosques through the reflection of rays on mirror work and muqarnas: a single source of light (unity) turns into thousands of broken rays (multiplicity), yet all originate from one sun. This design is in line with the principle "from the One only one can proceed" (al-wahid la yasduru 'anhu illa al-wahid), which preserves unity amid multiplicity. Therefore, light in these mosques is not only illumination but a symbolic language for expressing the philosophy of existence.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Light in the mosques of the Isfahan School and in their design begins from the moment the visitor enters the dark space of the entrance jelowkhan. Moving in a turning path and passing through the various spaces of mosques such as the Imam Mosque of Isfahan, the Maqsud Beyk Mosque and the Sorkhi Mosque, after passing the entrance doorway the visitor enters the courtyard of these mosques and faces absolute light. This absolute light prepares him or her for the spiritual journey and separates him or her from the material world and the self. Indeed, the light in the courtyards of these mosques, according to Mulla Sadra's theories, attains a deeper meaning and, like the presence of light in the transparency of the pillar of connection within the pillar of unity, brings about the union of the visitor with the hidden meaning of absolute light in the courtyards of these mosques. This union can bring the intellect, the intelligible and intuition in the observer to a degree of perfection and raise his or her level to perfection and beauty. Indeed, Mulla Sadra's mystical intuition in the space of mosques, through the five senses of the visitors and through the radiance of light and new luminous effects, displays the manifestation of the existence of the Divine Essence in the body and sacred space of the mosque. This experience is observable for the visitors. Moreover, according to Mulla Sadra's theories on the essence of motion and perception, in the empty space of the courtyard of the mosque, by means of absolute light, the visitor's faculty of intellect is activated and he or she attains intellectual perceptions. This helps the visitor set aside his or her material dimension and attain transcendence in the spiritual realm. However, this process of the course of absolute light and the manifestation of meanings

does not exist in the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, which has no courtyard. In general, according to the views of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra on light in the mosques of the Isfahan School, it can be said that the presence of absolute light in the courtyards of these mosques brings the visitor closer to the truth and sanctity of the mosque. This light helps the visitor, according to his or her existential capacity and breadth, to experience the journey from darkness to light and the departure from the material world towards spirituality. This process of the manifestation of light, which begins in the courtyard and reaches the prayer halls, iwans and porticoes of the Imam, Sheikh Lotfollah, Maqsud Beyk and Sorkhi mosques, appears as semi-bright or semi-dark. According to the views of Mulla Sadra and Suhrawardi, these changes show the hierarchy of movement from brightness to darkness and vice versa. This process depicts the passage of time and the active presence of the visitor and turns the faculty of sense into the faculty of imagination, so that it leads the visitor to perceive the inner meanings of this space. Here there is no complete light, and this can be a symbol of the human soul and essence mixed with the world and desires. This process, however, is transformed on entering the dome chamber and with the radiance of light through apertures and windows. Given the height of the windows and their placement in the wall below the roof of the dome chamber and in the walls of this space, according to Suhrawardi's theories this place is the locus of the manifestation of the spiritual identity and spirituality of Muslims, and in this space of the mosque it is present as the Light of Lights, showing that all beings in the world of existence originate from the divine light and the Divine Essence. It is this light that can guide the human being along the spiritual path. In this spiritual space, the visitor is entirely engaged in worship and is separated from his or her material body. Through the lights that enter this space, not dazzling but reflective and guiding, he or she is able to acquire the power of imagery and the creation of forms and, on leaving the mosque, to preserve and record these images. In general, according to the views of Mulla Sadra and Suhrawardi on light in the mosques of the Isfahan School, such as the Imam, Sorkhi, Maqsud Beyk and Sheikh Lotfollah mosques, it can be said that light in these mosques exists in two forms, dynamic and static. Dynamic light can be seen in the interior space and static light in the courtyard (except in the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque). This shows the passage from darkness to brightness and then from semi-darkness to semi-brightness. Passing through the various spaces of these mosques, the visitor encounters this experience and, through his or her intuitive and rational power, can perceive and reflect on the Divine Essence. Indeed, the sense of spirituality arises through the power of intuition and the radiance of absolute light (in the courtyard) and semi-absolute light (in the interior space). This radiance of light within the darkness of the visitor, which stems from the material world, helps him or her to be freed from this darkness and to experience sensory beauty in himself or herself and in the mosque with its particular architecture. In general, it can be said that the foundation of the philosophy of the Shaykh al-Ishraq rests on the concept of light and the basis of Mulla Sadra's philosophy on existence. From Mulla Sadra's perspective, the existence he refers to is equivalent to Illuminationist light, whereas the Shaykh al-Ishraq does not regard certain ordinary existents, especially bodies, as light and believes only in the luminosity of sensory light. This difference in outlook creates many challenges in equating Illuminationist light with Sadrian existence. For this reason, Mulla Sadra tries to take a position on both aspects of the Shaykh al-Ishraq's views and offers solutions for aligning them with his own view. Mulla Sadra's conclusion in criticizing the view of the Shaykh al-Ishraq is that either all bodies are luminous or material light is in fact not light. Nevertheless, according to Illuminationist and Transcendent Philosophy, the relationship of light in the mosques of the Isfahan School is such that in the courtyard light exists fully, at 100%,

and expresses the immaterial light that does not occur as an accident to another. Therefore, the relationship of light in the courtyards of the selected Isfahan School mosques is directly related to Illuminationist philosophy and the Transcendent view, such that light and its manifestation on its own essence have no meaning because of the limitation of the level of realization. But on passing from the courtyard and the bright space and entering the dome chamber, which is no longer in complete brightness, the relationship of light in this space refers to the dark aspects of Illuminationist philosophy and the Transcendent view. Thus, the relationship of light in the mosques of the Isfahan School, especially in the interior spaces, in line with not regarding bodies as light and recognizing material and artificial light as light, refers to the connection of the human being with his or her existential reality.

In the Isfahan School, light, as a symbol of absolute existence and a manifestation of divine wisdom, has been used in the design of mosques with a mystical and philosophical approach. According to Suhrawardi's Illuminationist philosophy, light is regarded as the essence of existence, and a hierarchy of lights (from the Light of Lights to material lights) shapes the world. This view is depicted in mosques such as Sheikh Lotfollah through intelligent light openings, the reflection of sunlight on the dome and the rhythmic play of light and shadow. In this space, light is not merely a source of illumination but is also interpreted as an intermediary connecting the imaginal world with the celestial world (malakut). Latticed windows and coloured glass turn light into "purified light", recalling the stages of the soul's ascent in the Illuminationist spiritual path.

From the perspective of Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy, light is the manifestation of the "gradation of being" and of substantial motion, meaning that existence has different levels and is in a state of change and transformation. This concept is clearly visible in mosques of the Isfahan School, such as the Imam and Maqsud Beyk mosques, through the spatial hierarchy of lighting. The gradual entry of light from the outer iwans into the dimly lit prayer halls symbolizes the journey from the material world (multiplicity) to the world of unity. In these mosques, light filtered through muqarnas and mirror work acts as "fluid being", which contains both unity and multiplicity at the same time. This design accords with Mulla Sadra's theory of the unity of the intellect and the intelligible, in which architectural light and the light of knowledge merge. On the other hand, the contrast of light and darkness in these mosques is the manifestation of the duality of "manifestation and concealment" (zuhur wa butun) in Illuminationist mysticism, just as Suhrawardi regarded the world as a scene of the battle between light and darkness. In general, light in the Isfahan School is not merely an aesthetic element but a symbolic language for expressing the levels of existence and the journey of the soul from dark veils towards sacred lights.

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