

## Chapter 82: Renaissance in Indo-Pakistan (Continued): Iqbal

Muhammad Iqbal was born, in 1289/1873, at Sialkot. His ancestors were Kashmiri Brahmans of the Sapru caste. His great-grandfather migrated to the Punjab sometime in early thirteenth/nineteenth century and settled down in Sialkot, a historical town that has produced many great scholars. His father Nur Muhammad was a saintly man for whom religion was a matter of living experience.

As related by Iqbal himself, he had distinct tendency towards mysticism. Heredity and parental influence made Iqbal inherit and imbibe this tendency that continued to mature throughout his intellectual and spiritual development. The father used to earn his modest living by the labour and skill of his own hands and originally had the intention of giving the son some instruction in the mosque and then making him a helper in his own craft.

It has been reliably stated by many contemporaries of his father that it was Maulawi Mir Hasan who seeing great promise in this intelligent child persuaded his father to let him enter an ordinary public school which followed methods of teaching and curricula introduced by the British Indian system of education.

A ceremonious initiation into needlework proposed by the father was not approved by the learned Mir Hasan and the father accepted his advice. The boy started wielding the pen instead of the needle, a pen destined to exercise a marvellous creative influence.

Like many a person of sensitive mind and spiritual leanings, the father had faith in prophetic dreams. He related a dream that he had shortly before the birth of Iqbal.<sup>1</sup> He saw that there was a bird of exquisite plumage flying low in the air and hovering over the heads of a crowd of people who were jumping up and stretching their arms to catch it. While he stood looking and admiring the beauty of the bird, it dropped into his lap of its own accord.

When the genius in Iqbal began to sprout forth and receive early admiration from great scholars and

poets, the father was convinced that it was the spirit of Iqbal that had been symbolized in his dream as a beautiful bird. We find the same symbolism in the New Testament where it is related that the Holy Ghost descended in the shape of a dove.

The school that Iqbal attended still exists almost unchanged even after the lapse of three quarters of a century. Its curriculum consisted mostly of reading, writing, and arithmetic with an uninspiring emphasis on cramming, meant for passing examinations and moving from grade to grade. Shabby surroundings and poorly paid, under-educated teachers could have only cramping effects on the mental and moral growth of young pupils.

But Iqbal was rare type, which goes its own way and carves its own destiny under all systems, good, bad, or indifferent. Mir Hasan, a scholar of distinction and a man of sterling qualities of personality, was deeply impressed by the liberal cultural movement of the celebrated Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He was not a teacher in the school where Iqbal completed his secondary education, but it appears that Iqbal's spirit began to be nourished by him very early and his influence had a long, lasting effect on him.

When the British Crown proposed to confer Knighthood on Iqbal, he suggested that Mir Hasan, to whose scholarly influence he owed so much, had a better right to recognition by a title. For his graduate studies Iqbal came over to Lahore, which was then developing as a centre of higher learning. He chose philosophy as his major subject for which he had a particular bent of mind. He was fortunate in studying philosophy under Thomas Arnold who was no ordinary teacher. An intimate teacher-pupil relationship soon developed between the two to which Iqbal's poem on Arnold, included in the collection of *Bang-i Dara*, bears evidence.

Iqbal's grateful recognition of what he received from Arnold is also expressed by him in his dedication to him of his book, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*. It runs as follows: "This little book is the first-fruit of that literary and philosophical training which I have been receiving from you for the last ten years, and as an expression of gratitude I beg to dedicate it to your name. You have always judged me liberally; I hope you will judge these pages in the same spirit."

Arnold before coming to Lahore had been a Professor at Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh, where he had written his famous book, *The Preaching of Islam*. It was Sayyid Ahmad Khan to whom he owed his keen interest in Islamic studies. On his return to England he achieved distinction as a great scholar and was knighted.

When Iqbal went to England for higher studies in Western philosophy, he re-established his contact with him. Iqbal enriched his knowledge of Western philosophy under McTaggart who was his guide for his research thesis in philosophy.

Having saturated himself with whatever Western philosophy, past and present, had to offer, Iqbal went to Germany for a doctorate because the British universities at that time had nothing higher than Master's degree in philosophy. Having received the philosophical lore of the West, Iqbal decided to repay the debt

by acquainting the West with some currents of philosophical thought in pre-Islamic and post-Islamic Persia.

Even while Iqbal was completing his formal academic education his genius had already developed, a creative synthesis of the East and the West. Before Iqbal went to Europe for higher philosophical studies he had already become famous as a poet. The literary critics of his nation had acknowledged him as a new star on the firmament of Urdu poetry.

His poetry from the very beginning was rich in thought. In this respect among the Urdu poets only Ghalib could be considered to be his forerunner, but in the choice of themes his predecessors were also Azad and Hali who had revolted against the degenerate traditional trends and had introduced into Urdu poetry new forms as well as new content under the impact of English literature.

Azad had predicted in his book *Nairang-i Khayal* that the future development of Urdu literature would be brought about by those who would have in their hands keys of the East as well as of the West. Hali was also of the same opinion and in his *Muqaddimah*, a critique of poetry; he freely borrowed the tenets of literary criticism directly or indirectly from Western writers, although he took his illustrations also from Arabic, Persian, and Urdu literature.

The ideal thinker and literary genius that Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Azad, and Hali had visualized was embodied in Iqbal. The, Sayyid was a liberal rationalist, influenced by the Western naturalism that held its sway in the later half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century due to the rise and achievement of physical sciences. Convinced of the truth of Islam in embodying eternal verities, he felt no opposition between reason and revelation or science and religion and he aimed at a synthesis of them both.

Iqbal was a great admirer of this all-round reformer and in a poem, which belongs to a very early period of his poetic production, while paying a heartfelt tribute to him, he makes the spirit of the departed leader advise the young poet to inspire his nation with broad, liberal, and rejuvenating ideals, a task which Iqbal adopted as his divinely ordained mission and fulfilled in a manner that placed him in the galaxy of the great literary geniuses of all times.

Iqbal was an heir to a very rich literary and philosophical scholarship. He imbibed and assimilated all that was best in the Islamic and Oriental thought to which he added his extensive knowledge of Western literature, philosophy, and culture both of the past and the present. His range of interests covered religion, philosophy, art, politics, economics, nationalism, the revival of Muslim life, and the universal brotherhood of man.

He was capable of writing powerful prose not only in his own national language but also in English, which he could wield with a masterly pen; the language of his two books in English is that of a skilled English writer. But he continued to use poetry as his medium of expression because he was a born poet and everything that he thought or felt almost involuntarily shaped itself into verse.

Many poems flowed from his pen, which a protagonist of “art for art’s sake” could relish and admire, but he himself was a strong opponent of those who thought that art could or should be divorced from the stern realities of life. He traversed the whole gamut of the problems of human life, and a comprehensive survey of his thoughts, ideals, and sentiments could fill several volumes.

Books on exposition of his ideas have appeared during the last two decades and numerous articles in journals have assessed his contributions. The stream of appreciation and criticism is still flowing unabated and thesis after thesis is being offered in the universities as a dissertation for a doctorate degree.

The inspiring message of his poetry, responsible for his extensive and intensive influence, cannot be translated into a cold prosaic survey. His poetry throbs with soul stirring life and a prosaic paraphrase has the same poor relation to this pulsating life as postmortem has to a living organism. Goethe said that the tree of life is green but the theory about it is grey like autumn leaves.

A great Urdu poet, a friend of Iqbal and his co-eval, said that if the Quran had been revealed in the Urdu language, it would have been poured in the mould of Iqbal’s poetry. And about the Quran the great Western scholar of Arabic and Islamic studies, Sir Hamilton Gibb, observes that translating it into any other language is turning gold into mud.

Iqbal himself says in one of his verses that truth without feeling and pathos becomes philosophy but when it stirs the heart it becomes poetry; in this respect he compares a typical representative of the intellect, ibn Sina (Avicenna), with a typical mystical poet, Rumi, both pursuing a camel carrying a veiled beauty (the hidden truth); the former is enveloped and lost in the cloud of sand raised by the speeding camel but the latter leaps forward with uncalculating courage and unveils the veiled beauty.

Iqbal has persistently advocated his conviction that intuition is more basic than intellect, and that the intuitions about life if at all could be expressed better through arts than through other media. Among the arts Rumi considered music to be a more adequate medium to touch the essence of reality, and Schopenhauer is of the same view even though their conceptions of reality are diametrically opposed.

Iqbal might have endorsed this view of Rumi about music but human souls require communication not only with the Ultimate Reality but also between themselves; for this purpose there is no better medium than language, and language reaches its perfection in poetry which is thought tinged with emotion.

We have already said that nothing human was foreign to Iqbal; there is hardly any problem of human life that he did not grapple with to find a satisfactory solution. Let us pick up a few basic problems of life and note some of Iqbal’s ruling ideas.

In the early period of his poetic production we find him in general a free-lance poet, expressing in verse whatever impressed him; he poured out the stirrings of his heart freely, without concentrating on any particular mission or message as he did in the later decades of his life. We find in this early phase

stirring poems on territorial nationalism, and a burning desire for political freedom from the yoke of British imperialism that was at its height during this period.

He believed at that time that multi-communal and multi-credal conglomeration of the teeming masses of the Indian sub-continent, although riddled with caste and religious cleavages, could be welded into a nation of the Western type; the people could not be freed unless they felt a psychological unity based on a common love for the motherland.

He exhorted the polytheistic idolatrous Hindu masses to discard their old gods and worship the motherland instead, raising new temples wherein all the worshippers, irrespective of their creeds and castes, could join in a common worship. This phase of Iqbal ended when he went to Europe for the study of Western philosophy and culture.

Many a student during this period returned from Europe either completely denationalized, becoming by blind imitation a travesty of a Westerner, or fired with the idea of territorial nationalism. They came back Westernized in their whole mode of living. Overwhelmed by the achievements of the West in science and technology they belittled even the good aspects of their own cultural heritage. They desired their society to become dynamic and progressive, and the only way that they considered to be effective was to adopt Western attitudes uncritically.

Iqbal was one of those few observers of Western civilization who saw also the seamy side of it. It was a ruthlessly competitive society split up into antagonistic nations bent upon exploiting not only their own working classes, but also making all unorganized, technically backward people of Asia and Africa victims of economic imperialism.

Iqbal was convinced that Europe was heading towards a catastrophe, because of its purely materialistic outlook divorced from ethical and spiritual values. Jingoistic territorial nationalism had for long been hypocritically masquerading as patriotism. National lust for power had replaced the ethics of Jesus with the machinations of Machiavelli.

The worship of the State to which Hegel had given a philosophical grounding was producing thinkers like Nietzsche and Trotsky for whom the power of the superman or super-nation had become the ultimate goal of individuals as well as of nations. Iqbal was disillusioned by a closer study of the West and some of the poems that he wrote in Europe expressed dark prophecies about the fate of this hectic civilization.

He said that Western nations were building their nests on very slender and weak branches and were heading towards mass suicide. Carlyle had seen it much earlier than Iqbal when he prophesied about half a century before the First World War that if Britain persisted to move on the path that she had chosen for herself she was bound to plunge into hell within fifty years.

The period of Iqbal's stay in Europe almost coincided with the time when Spengler, an obscure school-teacher, was quietly engaged in a monumental historical survey of the rise and fall of cultures through

the millennia of civilized life to establish his thesis of the *Decline of the West* which was published shortly after the termination of the First World War.

Iqbal returned to his country in 1327/1908 with a new outlook that was neither Eastern nor Western. He came to the conclusion that as the lopsided material progress of the West was unethical and unspiritual so the religiosity of the East was a hollow and life-thwarting force. The realm of the spirit had to be rediscovered by the East as well as by the West.

A good deal of science and technology of the West was valuable and the East was to learn it and adopt it to eliminate poverty, squalor, and disease, but the East must not repeat the mistake of worshipping material power as an end-in-itself. Physical sciences and the tremendous forces that they have unleashed must be harnessed to ethical and spiritual aims.

A religious outlook alone can save humanity but this outlook itself requires re-examination and reconstruction. Iqbal not only gave up writing inspiring songs about nationalism and patriotism but began to denounce these narrow urges of collective egoism that are idealized by patriotic songs.

He now decided to devote his philosophy and his art primarily to rejuvenating the dormant Muslim community. Territorial or racial nationalism is foreign to the spirit of Islam; it originated in the West. He was convinced now that it would be a tragically retrograde step if the Muslim world began to try to remedy its frustrations by replacing the global Islamic sentiment by aggressive nationalism of the Western type.

He conceived of Islam as a universal religion that envisaged all humanity as a unity. But the Islam of his time had become narrow, rigid and static. He conceived of life as evolutionary and dynamic. He came to the conclusion that a fossilized religious dogmatism could not generate an outlook that would lead to the self-realization of individuals and communities.

But it was not only the narrowness of religious dogmatism but also a mechanistic materialism that was responsible for a false view of reality. Iqbal became an iconoclast, bent upon demolishing all orthodoxies and idolatries. Religious dogmatism had debased religion, territorial or racial nationalism had split up humanity into hostile aggressive groups, and materialistic philosophy had made the spirit an epiphenomenal and evanescent manifestation of matter.

He continued developing an ideology the basic concepts and corollaries of which would purify and advance human life in every direction. It would be difficult to sum up his ideology in any one *ism*.

You could call him a spiritualist because he held the spirit to be the basic reality or you could call him an idealist. With greater definiteness one could hold him to be a creative evolutionist. As a staunch believer in a personal God, he was also a theist. Believing that all existence is constituted of egos or selves one could class him along with Rumi and Bergson as a monadologist.

A question is often raised about Iqbal's originality. Was he merely an eclectic bringing together various

trends of thought without any successful attempt at harmonizing them into an intellectually consistent organic system or did he succeed in removing the fragmentariness of different systems of thought and belief, dissolving half-truths into the unity of one great truth?

Here we have a thinker who, though a theist, could heartily appreciate a good deal even in the keen though incoherent utterances of an atheistic thinker like Nietzsche, about whom he said that he had the heart of a believer but the head of an infidel. He believes with Nietzsche that present day humanity must be transcended in a further evolutionary leap; but Nietzsche's superman appeared to him to be only a super beast because Nietzsche had drawn his speculative conclusions from Darwinian biology.

The concept of the superman had been developed by Muslim mystical metaphysicians like ibn Arabi, Rumi, and Jili but from quite different starting points and on quite different lines. In the development of his ideology we can see that he is indebted to many a great thinker of the past and the present but never does he submit wholeheartedly to any one of them. He goes a part of the way with one or the other but then suddenly stops and parts company with him.

For instance, he would feel exhilarated by Nietzsche's notion of power as an intrinsic value and end-in-itself but he would soon say that Nietzsche had a poor conception of the infinite potentialities of the human self, which, having originated in the Cosmic Self, progressively assimilates divine attributes.

Nor could he agree with Nietzsche in his view of existence as eternal recurrence. If life were eternally creative, it would never repeat itself. Nietzsche's superman is ruthless and loveless, riding roughshod over all tender emotions in his advance towards greater biological fitness.

Among his contemporary thinkers Iqbal felt a much keener kinship with Bergson who successfully demolished mechanistic materialism and Darwinian biological philosophy along with intellectualism that attempted to subject creative life to rigid moulds of syllogistic logic. Bergson had repudiated not only mechanism but also teleology.

According to Bergson, life does not create according to any eternally preconceived plan existing in the Cosmic Mind. Iqbal supports Bergson in this view and thus runs counter to the orthodox Muslim conception of *taqdir* or destiny, which envisages an eternal pre-ordination of all happenings in the universe, even to the minutest details.<sup>2</sup>

According to the orthodox conception, serial time only unfolds what was eternally present in the mind of God. But after complete agreement with many parts of Bergsonian philosophy he parts company with him. Bergson conceived of reality as creative duration. For him, at the centre of existence there is nothing that he could call a self.

For Iqbal, life, though not teleological in the sense of being implemented according to a preconceived plan, is purposive activity. The concept of self too implies purposiveness. In his lecture on "The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience," he criticizes Bergson as follows:

“Purposes colour not only our present states of consciousness, but also reveal its future direction. In fact, they constitute the forward push of our life, and thus in a way anticipate and influence the states that are yet to be.

To be determined by an end is to be determined by what ought to be. Thus past and future both operate in the present state of consciousness and the future is not wholly undetermined as Bergson’s analysis of our conscious experience shows. A state of attentive consciousness involves both memory and imagination as operating factors. On the analogy of our conscious experience, therefore, Reality is not a blind vital impulse wholly unilluminated by idea. Its nature is through and through teleological.”<sup>3</sup>

Iqbal summarizes his criticism of Bergson’s non-purposive vital in a few lines: “In Bergson’s view the forward rush of the vital impulse in its creative freedom is unilluminated by the light of an immediate or remote purpose. It is not aiming at a result; it is wholly arbitrary, undirected, chaotic, and unforeseeable in its behaviour.

It is mainly here that Bergson’s analysis of our conscious experience reveals its inadequacy. He regards conscious experience as the past moving along with and operating in the present. He ignores that the unity of consciousness has a forward aspect also. Life is only a series of acts of attention and an act of attention is inexplicable without reference to a purpose, conscious or unconscious.

Even our acts of perception are determined by our immediate interests and purposes. The Persian poet Urfi has given a beautiful expression to this aspect of human perception (by pointing out that): ‘if your heart is not deceived by the mirage, be not proud of the sharpness of your understanding; for your freedom from this optical illusion is due to your imperfect thirst.’”<sup>4</sup>

Iqbal conceived of God or the Cosmic Self primarily as Creator and of the egos or the selves that He has created or that have emerged out of His eternally creative activity as potentially creative at various levels of consciousness. Even the poorest potter or craftsman is a creator but if he is shaping his material only according to a set plan or pattern his creativeness is of the lowest order.

The best example of a creative genius is the musical composer or the poet. When a Beethoven or a Mozart composes a symphony he has no chart before him; the creative urge or emotion creates its own body as it proceeds and the musical genius views his own creation objectively after it has assumed a visible or audible shape.

Others who play that symphony try to create that emotion by reproduction; they are not creating but re-creating. Iqbal was an extremely gifted poetic genius; he knew not how and from which source a great poem emerged. The poet cannot himself know in advance the words that his inspiration brings forth. He often wonders at the unforeseen beauty of his own creation.

In the book of *Genesis* in the Bible it is said that God after having created saw and appreciated His own creation. Iqbal could not attribute to the Cosmic Creative Genius anything less than what he had

experienced in the process of his own poetic creation. The embodiment of a genuine creative urge or inspiration must be unpredictable.

There are no eternal patterns or archetypal ideas such as we find in Plato's metaphysics. Plato's creator god, the Demiurge, is not a real creator; he materializes only the forms or ideas that were never created and were meant only to be imitated or partially assimilated. Iqbal could have considered Bergsonian ontology and epistemology a great and revolutionary advance on Plato's conception of a static Ultimate Reality.

Plato relegated all movement and change to the unholy alliance of Being with Non-Being. According to him, the Real does not move or create; movement results only from the effort of Non-Being at imperfect participation in the reality of eternally static archetypes.

Aristotle too likens God to a beautiful statue to which the appreciating people are drawn; there is no movement or volition in the statue itself. The first great revolt in Western philosophy against this classical and Greek conception of Ultimate Reality was Hegel's dialectic wherein nothing remains itself and every thing or process is moved by implicit and internal contradiction into its opposite to achieve a synthesis with it, which synthesis also cannot rest in itself but becomes in its turn a thesis which begins to develop an antithesis already inherent in it.

But Hegel's Absolute too is eternally what it is and is not a free creator in the sense in which theism conceives a Creator God. Hegel's Absolute is not a creative, purposive self, engaged in actualizing its infinite potentialities. Hegel's dynamic dialectic also follows an eternal pattern that is being unfolded in time.

This conception of God and the universe does not appeal to Iqbal. He does not follow either Plato or Hegel or Bergson. As William James, another great philosopher of creative life, said, the universe in which we live is not a block universe; reality is itself in the making and the truth about reality too must constantly conform to new manifestations of the reality that follows no logic.

Iqbal believed that the Quran supported him in this dynamic view of reality "To my mind," said he, "nothing is more alien to the Quranic outlook than the idea that the universe is the temporal working out of a pre-conceived plan.... The universe, according to the Quran, is liable to increase. It is a growing universe and not an already completed product which left the hand of its maker ages ago, and is now lying stretched in space as a dead mass of matter to which time does nothing, and consequently is nothing."<sup>5</sup>

If Iqbal had produced only philosophical poetry, it would have been a very difficult task to collect his scattered thoughts and weave them into a self-consistent philosophy. Fortunately, he undertook to perform that task himself in his lectures on the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. In these lectures he has done intensely concentrated thinking. These lectures are themselves a summary, and the attempt to summarize them further would leave out much that is essential for an intelligible

exposition. But, however inadequately, the attempt has to be made.

His first lecture deals with knowledge and religious experience. Iqbal is a poet as well as a philosopher, but temperamentally he is a religious man for whom religion is a vital experience as well as an intellectually establishable reality.

He holds that in human life religion is more central and vital than philosophy because, in the words of a great modern philosopher, Whitehead, whom Iqbal has quoted more than once in his support, religion is a system of general truths which have the effect of transforming character when they are sincerely held and vividly apprehended.

But man being a rational creature cannot be satisfied with faith unless he finds reason also to be in agreement with it. In view of its function religion is in greater need of a rational foundation than even the dogmas of science. Reconciliation of the oppositions of experience is an inescapable necessity for a man who is religious as well as rational.

Thought and intuition (or faith) need each other for mutual rejuvenation. Bergson, a great protagonist of intuition as more basic than intellect, has, nevertheless, expressed the view that intuition also is a higher kind of intellect.

The Greeks deified the logical intellect, despising the study of reason in nature. On the other hand, religions before Islam rooted themselves in faith not demanding its conformity with the logical intellect or reason in nature. Islam preached the basic conformity of reason and revelation.

Reason as informing the phenomena of physical nature as well as the mind of man has been presented by the Quran to be in complete agreement with faith in God. The Quran uses the same word for revelation granted to saints and prophets and the instincts of animals whose unconscious rationality appears to be miraculous; it sees in the humble bee a recipient of divine revelation and constantly calls upon the reader to observe the perpetual change of the winds, the alternation of day and night, the clouds, the starry heavens, and the planets swimming through infinite space.

Why should the intuitions of a prophet and a saint be less related to reality than the instincts of lower animals? Iqbal sees no unbridgeable gulf between intellectual knowledge and religious experience. Plato had despised sense-experience as a source of knowledge; the modern irrationalist has looked down upon the intellect as an instrument for the knowledge of reality.

Iqbal's view is integrative, considering sense perception, intellect, and intuition to be different modes of apprehension of the same reality. His outlook is unmistakably Quranic, not only appealing to reason in support of revelation and faith but also regarding hearing and sight as the most valuable divine gifts and declaring them to be accountable to God.

Iqbal accuses the early Muslim scholastics of having missed the spirit of the Quran under the spell of

Greek speculation. Ghazali revolted against Greek intellectualism and moved to mystic experience as the sole avenue for the knowledge of Ultimate Reality. In spite of his deep appreciation of Ghazali, Iqbal disagrees with him about the relation of thought and intuition and says that Ghazali “failed to see that thought and intuition are organically related and that thought must necessarily simulate finitude and inconclusiveness because of its alliance with serial time.”<sup>6</sup>

Kant, who did splendid work in analysing the logical and scientific intellect establishing its limitations, could not rest in its inadequacies and was compelled to postulate reason as standing above the categories of understanding, pointing towards ultra logical realities like God and free will.

Long before Kant, Rumi had reached a similar conclusion in repudiating the claims of the logical intellect and spatio-temporal categories to be the sole determinants of reality. What Kant termed the intellect, Rumi called “particular reason” which he contrasted with universal reason, which latter is one with the intuition of total reality.

Iqbal’s view coincides entirely with Rumi’s. He recognizes the inadequacy of the logical understanding; it finds a multiplicity of mutually exclusive particulars with no prospect of their ultimate reduction to a unity and this makes him sceptical about the conclusiveness of thought. He is fully aware of the fact that the logical understanding is incapable of seeing this multiplicity as a coherent universe.

The generalizations of inductive logic are fictitious unities that do not affect the reality of concrete things. But human reason is not confined merely to discursive thinking and is not wholly exhausted by its processes of induction and deduction. “In its deeper movement thought is capable of reaching an immanent Infinite in whose self-unfolding movement the various finite concepts are only moments.”

Thought is potentially infinite and contains infinitude as the seed carries within itself the organic unity of the tree as a present fact. Thinking would not point towards its own limitations and inadequacies if it were not haunted by infinity, with which it implicitly compares every finite percept and concept. “It is the presence of the total infinite in the movement of knowledge that makes finite thinking possible.”

Iqbal says that “both Kant and Ghazali failed to see that thought, in the very act of knowledge, passes beyond its own finitude.”<sup>7</sup> Many creeds and philosophies created a cleavage between the ideal and the real and could not see the bridge that unites the two. The ideal and the real are as much interpenetrating as the finite and the infinite.

“It is the mysterious touch of the ideal that animates and sustains the real.... The life of the ideal consists, not in a total breach with the real, which would tend to shatter the organic wholeness of life in painful oppositions, but in the perpetual endeavour of the ideal to appropriate the real with a view eventually to absorb it, to convert it into itself and to illuminate its whole being.”<sup>8</sup>

Iqbal has an organic view of life and existence in which heaven embraces earth, intuition and faith are reconciled with universal reason, science ceases to be antagonistic to religion, and infinity informs and

animates finitude. His view of existence is based on a conception of the unity and continuity of all aspects of Being with no breaks, gulfs, or gaps.

He tries to point to the organic unity of all aspects of Being which creeds, philosophies, and sciences have sundered by analytic thinking. One can sum up his whole philosophy as a philosophy of universal integration. The Ultimate Reality reveals its symbols both within and without. The empirical, no less than the rational attitude, is an indispensable stage in the spiritual life of humanity.

Iqbal gets solid support from the Quranic verses for his philosophy of integration wherein senses, reasons, and intuition springing from what the Quran calls *fuad* or the heart, all offer valid and legitimate approaches to the Ultimate Reality which, being a self-consistent unity underlying all diversity, relates organically the findings of all the three sources of knowledge.

“God hath made everything which He hath created most good; and began the creation of man with clay; then ordained his progeny from germs of life, from sorry water; then shaped him (in due proportion), and breathed of His spirit unto him, gave you hearing and seeing and *heart*: what little thanks do ye return?’ (32:6–8).”<sup>9</sup>

Quoting Rumi, Iqbal says the “heart” is a kind of intuition or insight that feeds on the rays of a super-sensuous sun, and brings us into contact with aspects of reality other than those open to sense-perception or ratiocination. Primitive gropings of religious consciousness are as little indicative of the unreality of religions consciousness in its higher and purer forms as primitive views about the phenomena of physical nature are in proving the invalidity of all scientific thought.

Iqbal’s conception of God is a corollary of his view of the nature of the Ultimate Reality because he identifies God with the Ultimate Reality. But he is a theist and not a monist of any of the different types or a pantheist. It is not only God who is real but the egos created by God are also real and they share both the essence and the creative urge of the Cosmic Creator.

God is the Perfect Ego, the Perfect Self, or the Perfect Individual; for all created egos, individuality is an aim to be progressively realized. He agrees with Bergson that individuality is a matter of degrees and is not fully realized even in the case of an apparently closed-off unity as that of the human self.

The tendency to individuate is present everywhere in the organized world but it is always opposed by the tendency towards reproduction by which detached parts of the organism begin to live separately and independently. Says Bergson, “In this way individuality harbours its own enemy at home.”

Iqbal derives his conception of God from the Quran wherein God is immanent as well as transcendent, personal as well as impersonal. There are verses in the Quran which apparently lend support to a pantheistic view of reality; pantheistic Sufism has raised a magnificent superstructure on these foundations. For instance, it is said, “He is the beginning and He is the end, He is without and He is within.”<sup>10</sup>

In the famous Sarah *al-Nur* it is said that “God is the light of the heavens and the earth.”<sup>11</sup> This simile is developed further and it is said that this light emanates from a lamp in a niche and the lamp is encased in a glass as if it were a star that is selfluminous. The lamp is fed from the oil of a tree that is neither in the East nor in the West.

Iqbal says that the Quranic simile is meant to convey the idea that God is a spiritual reality which is not spatial and yet it is not a vague, undetermined infinite suffused in all existence as a selfless impersonal entity. The enclosed lamp in a niche is meant to point to God as an individual self.

God, the Ultimate Ego, is infinite but His infinitude is not temporal or spatial but consists in the infinite inner possibilities of His creative activity, of which the universe, as known to us, is only a partial expression. God’s infinity is intensive and not extensive; it involves an infinite series but is not that series.

Iqbal does not conceive of the world to have been created at a point of time, lying in infinite space outside the being of God as a manufactured article. It is in the nature of God to be eternally creative; the universe does not confront God as His “other”. Space, time, and matter are interpretations which thought puts on the free creative activity of God.

The relation of God to His creation, if conceived under these categories, would lead to antinomies compelling the mind to accept both affirmations and denials, and be content with contradictions in the matter of faith about God and His relation to the creation, as was forcibly pointed out by Kant. If Iqbal refuses to accept the naive orthodox theistic view of creation in time, he, at the same time, cannot accept that the world of matter is co-eternal with God, operated upon by Him, as it were, from a distance.

With respect to God’s knowledge, Iqbal says that human thought is discursive but knowledge in the sense of discursive knowledge, however infinite, cannot be predicated of God because His knowledge is also creative of the objects that He knows. Iqbal does not conceive of God’s knowledge as omniscience in the sense of an immediate awareness of the entire sweep of history, past, present and future, regarded as an order of specific events in an eternal ever-present “now”.

It was thus that Jalal al-Din Dawwani, Iraqi, and Josiah Royce conceived God’s knowledge. Iqbal does not agree with them in this view. To him it appears that it suggests a closed universe, a fixed futurity, a predetermined, unalterable order of specific events, which, like a superior fate, has once and for all determined the direction of God’s creative activity. Iqbal is not a believer in the correspondence theory of knowledge for which truth is nothing but an exact mirroring of reality.

A thinker for whom the Ultimate Reality, which is phenomenal as well as noumenal, is a Creative Self, perpetually creating and objectifying ever-new possibilities, could not conceive of God, the Perfect Ego, as omniscient, as one that knows in details not only the past and the present but also the not-yet-happened future events. Such a static view of reality would nullify God’s creative activity that would no

longer be conceived of as free but as eternally determined.

God's knowledge is not a sort of mirror passively reflecting the details of an already finished structure of things that the finite consciousness reflects in fragments only. God's foreknowledge as conceived in orthodox theology could be conceded only by sacrificing His freedom.

We may repeat here that Iqbal, in thinking of God as an ego or self, has conceived of Him on the analogy of a creative human self, creative either in the realm of intellect or in that of aesthetics. He says that a fruitful idea pregnant with great wealth of its possible applications emerges in consciousness all at once but the intellectual working out of its numerous bearings is a process in time.

Sometimes it takes many generations before the possibilities that were inherent in it from the very beginning actualize themselves completely. The same is the case with poetry or musical composition; the pattern of verses or tones implicit in the creative genius becomes explicit by unfolding itself. For Iqbal God is an infinitely creative genius creating novelties at every moment.

The problem of free will in man offers no great difficulties to Iqbal. The difficulties are created by mathematically determined, mechanistic determinism that Iqbal repudiates, seeking support from the view of matter and material causation presented by philosophers of science like Einstein and Eddington.

Determinism has been advocated not only by mechanistic materialists but also by the theistic theologians. Further, the modern age has produced theories of physiological and psychological determinism. Theistic theology has not been able to reconcile God's infinite freedom and foreknowledge with human freedom. Iqbal solves the problem by denying foreknowledge to God and by making God grant freedom to human egos who are to share His creative activity.

He admits that the emergence of egos endowed with the power of spontaneous and hence unforeseeable action is in a sense a limitation of the freedom of the all-inclusive Ego, but this limitation is not externally imposed. It is born of God's own creative freedom whereby He has chosen finite egos to be participators in His life, power, and freedom.

Iqbal considers the prevalent idea of God's absolute omnipotence to be a misconception. According to him, all activity, creational or otherwise, is a kind of limitation without which it is impossible to conceive of God as a concrete operative Ego. Omnipotence, abstractly conceived, is a blind capricious power without limits. Omnipotence so conceived would make it impossible to think of God as possessing the attributes of reason, love, or justice.

As a theist, Iqbal has also to deal with the problem of evil. He realizes that if the rationally directed divine will is good, a serious problem arises, unless we close our eyes to the presence of physical and moral evil. We have before our eyes the tragic spectacle of universal suffering and wrongdoing. Pain is an inevitable concomitant not only of wrong actions but even of attempts to do what is right.

The course of evolution has involved endless ruthlessness. Iqbal is not an optimist of the type that says "whatever is, is right" and that from a cosmic viewpoint all is well with the world. Nor is he a pessimist of the Schopenhauerian type who, like many Indian philosophers, views life to be essentially an evil that must be ended because it cannot be mended.

God does not create evil; in the words of the Quran, "He holds all goodness in His hand." Existence or life could not be possible if it did not meet resistance, but the goodness of God lies in the fact that existence contains forces that can overcome evil. No evil is absolute; the alchemy of life is capable of converting evil into good. If the character of the ego can develop only by struggle against thwarting forces, the presence of resistance to the realization of goodness cannot be deplored.

Iqbal agrees with Fichte that life creates resistances in the interest of its own development. Whoever asks why there is evil in life wrongly imagines that there could have been life without pain and evil, resistance and frustration. If moral and spiritual development is good, how could anyone achieve it if there were no internal or external opposition to its realization?

Those who want life without its hurdles are, according to a simile used by Kant, like birds that would resent the resistance of the air as if they could fly in a vacuum. Flight is the result of the effort of the wings to overcome the resistance of the air. Iqbal is neither an optimist nor a pessimist of any extreme type; he is a meliorist.

It may be asked if Iqbal believes in an eventual victory of good over evil at any point of time in the future course of evolution. Consistent with his view of life as a perpetually creative activity his vision of life after death, even for the blessed, is not a paradise where all unfulfilled desires are eternally fulfilled.

For him the reward of goodness is not an epicurean paradise where all motivation for further development ceases in a bliss of eternal satisfaction. The reward of life is a higher life with higher actualities and deeper potentialities, and yet, according to his conception of life, the ego must meet resistance at every level and, therefore, pain must remain an eternal element of life.

Iqbal has produced very intriguing and exhilarating poems in praise of Satan, the personification of evil and resistance. In a dialogue between Satan and the archangel Gabriel, he seems to be the advocate of the former. In a verse he exhorts lovers of life not to aspire for life on any plane of existence where Satan, the principle of resistance, does not exist.

Life cannot rest in any of its achievements; every goal is the starting point of a new venture. He would have greatly appreciated the sentiment of Lessing which the latter expressed by saying that if God offered him truth in one hand, and search for truth in the other, he would accept the eternal search, saying, "O Lord, keep the truth for Thyself because only Thou canst have the truth and live; as for myself, only seeking can keep me alive."

Iqbal's paradise is neither the one from which Adam and Eve were driven out for an act of disobedience

nor the vision of unfulfilled earthly desires. He gives his own interpretation of the legend of the Fall of Man that he believes to be the true meaning of the Quranic version of this legend. He says, "The Quranic legend of the Fall has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience.

The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being."<sup>12</sup> There was a paradise that humanity left behind on its course of evolution and there is a paradise that awaits it which will unfold further possibilities in other dimensions of being, but at every stage it will be aspiration more than fulfilment; life is a perpetual revelation of the infinite possibilities of existence. Iqbal has no desire to come to a state of rest by merging the self in a static Absolute, because for him the static Absolute does not exist.

## Summing Up

There is no doubt that Iqbal is the most versatile genius that the modern Muslim world has produced. He is a well-cut diamond whose many facets reflect rays of truth from all directions. It will be difficult to find many who are his equals as poets in any language of the East or the West. He did not build any great system of philosophy like Kant or Hegel but his philosophic thinking was extensive as well as intensive.

He felt his kinship with some great geniuses of the past and the present. In one of his poems he compared himself with Goethe and deplored that he himself was sprung from an almost defunct culture, a solitary plant growing, as it were, by fluke from a dead earth, while Goethe was born in a nation pulsating with the throbs of a new life.

As his inner life was enriched by increasing knowledge and deepening intuition he began to feel, with ample justification, his kinship with Rumi, the creative evolutionist mystic poet of the seventh/thirteenth century. As Rumi's religious consciousness was paralleled with intellectual consciousness so was the case with Iqbal; both preached the gospel of a rich integrated life embracing matter, life, mind, and spirit, a life in which not only the individual and social selves are harmonized but in which the developing ego also makes an attempt to attune its finitude with the Cosmic Infinite Spirit.

For both of them the *elan vital* is essentially the urge of love that spreads in concentric circles to that Ultimate Reality which is the centre as well as the circumference of all existence. Rumi took up the Hellenistic instruments of intellectualism and wielded them to support an outlook that transcended all Hellenism.

Iqbal did the same with the rich heritage of ancient and modern philosophy. Many modern thinkers have been moving in the same direction, so we often find him in company with Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, William James, Whitehead, and Eddington; but these tributary streams seem to have

converged in his genius in a deep and broad river.

Malak al-Shuara Bahar, the great poet-laureate of modern Iran, said of Iqbal's poetry that it was the fruit of eight centuries of the development of Persian poetry and cultural heritage. During the last decade of his life Iqbal refused to be classed among the poets. He felt that he was using poetry only as a medium and a vehicle for a message.

He had become a teacher, a preacher, a critic of life, and a reformer with a vision of a new renaissance. This message was addressed directly to the Muslim nation, but what he conveyed was a matter of universal import. The broad universal religious outlook that he presented in his poetry as well as philosophical writing was meant for the whole of humanity. He made an attempt to revive the entire Muslim world by a liberal and dynamic view of Islam.

He deplored the geographical and racial divisions of humanity and attacked bitterly the jingoistic nationalism that had resulted in the suicide of a whole civilization. He was an enemy of Western economic and political imperialism and colonialism and a bitter critic of Western materialism and naturalism, which, overwhelmed by the achievement of physical science, has lost faith in the reality of the spirit.

He was equally critical of the religiosity of the East which has become rigid and empty and is worshipping the dead past. He wanted to give an ethical and spiritual basis to politics and economics that, left to themselves, become destructive forces. He preached the gospel of self-realization, but his concept of the self was no mystically transcendent concept.

His ideal man was a man of intuition as well as of intellect, wedding reason to revelation. If he had written philosophy like a professional philosopher only, as he was impelled to do in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he could not have stirred the souls of his readers to the extent that he has done by using poetry as his medium.

His critics are still disputing whether he was primarily a poet or a philosopher, a mystic, a preacher, or a reformer. But the fact is that he was an uncommon synthesis of all these. He was no mere eclectic. All the various trends were organically related in his rich personality; they did not lie in his mind unrelated in unharmonized juxtaposition. He sang of cosmic creative love that transcends and resolves the contradictions of natural and personal life. He was a genius of life and love and recognized no boundaries and considered no oppositions to be final. His message was a rich integrated life constantly actualizing its immense potentialities.

Most of Iqbal's thoughts and sentiments are expressed within the framework of Islam, and a substantial portion of his message is directly addressed to the Muslims, to whose regeneration and awakening he had dedicated his life. But there is nothing sectarian or parochial in his broad and liberal ideology. As Plato and Socrates, though dealing primarily with the intellectual, moral, and social problems of Athenian and Greek life, spread messages of universal import, so does Iqbal.

His *Javid Nameh*, in which in the realm beyond he meets the glorious and the inglorious souls of the departed who had influenced humanity for good or for evil, is certainly richer than Dante's *Divine Comedy* which reflects only medieval thoughts, beliefs, and prejudices. His criterion of judgment and criticism remains constant whether he is discussing metaphysics or religion, science or art, economics or politics.

He stands for the dignity of life and its perpetual creativeness and richness. Whatever strengthens and advances life in its various aspects is appreciated and whatever impoverishes or negates it is to be rejected. Throughout his thought and poetry there runs a mystic strain, but his mysticism is not quietistic and otherworldly.

Like the ethical monism of Fichte, his mysticism is dynamic. Long before Bergson came to this conclusion Iqbal had identified the creative urge of life with love, which is a matter of intuition and ruling passion with saints and prophets. He was a great artist, yet he did not believe in art for art's sake, nor did he believe in knowledge for the sake of knowledge like the great Greek philosophers for whom the contemplation of eternally static ideas was the acme of wellbeing, making God Himself a Self-thinking Thought.

His basic conception is life, not thought; thought is only one of the many useful instruments of life, and as such must never be segregated from the life it is meant to serve and advance. There is more healthy dynamism in his thought and poetry than could be found in any poet of the past or the present. Whenever he talks of self-abnegation it is always in the interest of a richer self-realization. His deepest thoughts and intuitions are of immortal significance; he belongs to all times and to the entire humanity, because he imbibed the best that humanity could offer and pointed to goals towards which all creation moves.

Below is given a free rendering in English of some of the poems of Iqbal.

### Reason and Heart: A Dialogue

“Once Reason made this claim before the Heart: ‘I am a guide for those who have lost their way. Though working on this lowly earth, all heavens do I survey. Look, how far-reaching is my vision. Guidance is my mission like that of *Khidr* (the Prophet Elias), the immortal sage. I write a commentary on the Book of Life, and the glory of Love do I manifest. Thou art only a drop of blood, but priceless diamonds envy my effulgence.’

“The Heart replied, ‘Thy claim I don't contest but look more closely into my nature too. Thou probest by thought the mystery of existence, but I *see* directly what thou only *knowest*; is not seeing more revealing than mere knowing? In the realm of appearances dost thou roam, but I contact the reality behind. Thou art only a seeker of God, but I reveal Him. Mine is knowledge *of* reality, thine is only knowledge *about* it. Thy knowledge ends only in restlessness; for this malaise I am the sovereign cure. If thou lightest the

hall of truth, I am the illumination of Eternal Beauty. Thou beatest thy wings like a captive bird against the cage of space and time, but my flight in eternity is free and unrestrained. I am the Exalted Throne of the Glorious Lord, placed above all creation.”[13](#)

## The Odyssey of Man

“Forgetting my eternal covenant with my Lord I wandered away from Him. The heady wine of consciousness made me restless even in the Garden of Eden and drove me away from that abode of bliss. Heaven–surveying thought urged me to pry into the secret of existence. My lore of change afforded me no rest in any state. I filled the temples with idols of gods of my own creation, but then in disgust ousted them from the Kabah, the place of worship of the Only God.

Desirous of conversing with Him, face to face, I ascended Mount Sinai; and the hand illumined with light divine I hid in my sleeve. My fellow beings nailed me on the cross; so leaving the ungrateful world I went to heaven again. Coming down I hid myself for years in the cave of Hira till I was commissioned to deliver a final message to mankind. Sometimes a song celestial did I chant in the land of Hind and I also resorted to wisdom–loving Greece. When Hind paid no heed to my message I was welcomed in China and Japan.

Contrary to the spirit of all true religions, I also ventured to construct a universe with mindless atoms. I take the blame of starting a ruthless strife between reason and faith reddening the earth with the blood of humanity. I spent many sleepless nights as a stargazer to wrest from the shining orbs the secret of existence.

The sword of the Church militant could not make one desist from teaching that the earth moves round the sun. My telescopic reason discerned the Law of Universal Gravitation. I captured rays of light and waves of magnetism making impetuous lightning an obedient slave; I converted the earth into a paradise by controlling the powers of nature. But alas! Though I had subdued the world of nature, nothing could reveal the meaning of existence to me.

“Finally returning into myself and turning my eyes inward I found Him there in the sanctuary of my own heart, Him who is the Source and Meaning of all that exists.”[14](#)

## The Nature of Life

“The motionless bank of the river said, ‘In my long existence I have contemplated much to know what I am, but the meaning of my existence has not been revealed to me.’ Hearing this the fast–moving and tumbling wave replied, ‘The secret of life and the essence of it is movement; I exist so long as I move; when I cease to move I shall cease to be.’”[15](#)

“The love that paints with charming colours the leaves of the tulip creates a painful turmoil in my heart; even in the veins of this pale earth, the red life–blood of love doth flow.”[16](#)

“Man is an instrument for the melodies of love; God created the world and man improves on it. Is not man, then, a partner in creation?”<sup>17</sup>

“If the heart too had been only clever like reason, no spark would have been kindled in our clay; and in the tavern of life deadly silence would have reigned if love had not been there with its turmoil.”<sup>18</sup>

“It is the fire of pathos that lights my heart; the tears of blood in the eyes make their sight keen to survey existence; he who calls Love madness, remains estranged from the secret of life.”<sup>19</sup>

“In the garden, breezes in spring are the gifts of love; and in the fields, love brings up buds like stars. The rays of love’s light penetrate the deep sea and make the fish see their way in the dark.”<sup>20</sup>

## The Birth of Man

“Love exclaimed, ‘Lo! The lover is there who will welcome my painful shafts,’ and a tremor passed through Beauty that a great appreciator is born. In the closed sanctuary of the mysteries of being, the warning went round that eternal secrets are going to be unveiled. Nature got perturbed that the dust of an unfree world has brought forth a being who shall freely make and break himself, a self-knowing and self-determining being. The unconscious urge that slept in the lap of life has opened its eyes thereby heading to a new vista of existence. Life said, ‘Long was I immured in a closed dome of clay, restless to venture out; but now I see the door that offers a chance to escape.’”<sup>21</sup>

“Our body is an old vessel of clay but is brimful of the wine of life; life pulsates secretly even in what seems to be death. When, in autumn, leaves from the branches fall, it is like the dropping of toys from the grip of infant hands loosened by sweet and restful sleep.”<sup>22</sup>

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1. Khalifah Abdul Hakim states that Iqbal's father personally related this dream to him.
2. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1958, p. 49.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
10. Quran (57:3).
11. *Ibid.*, (24:35).
12. Iqbal, op. cit., p. 35.
13. *Bang-i Dara*, Lahore, 1949, p. 28.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

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