IQBAL ON RELIGION AND SCIENCE: A CRITIQUE

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This paper intends to highlight the salient features of Iqbal's thought regarding reconstruction of religious thought and its linkage with Science. He has reiterated his aim in these words,

"It may fairly be argued that in view of the more recent developments of science, such as the nature of matter as 'bottled-up light waves', the idea of the universe as an act of thought, finiteness of space and time and Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy in Nature, the case for a system of rational theology is not so bad as Kant was led to think."[1]

Iqbal seems to be in a vigorous and rigorous state of mind to institute and launch a new and fresh theology based on the findings of modern science. The above quoted passage reveals the following aspects of his thought or better to say his foundational principles on which he wants to build the edifice or superstructure of his theology:

i- Scientific progress of Europe is a continuation of Islamic intellectual tradition, heritage and culture;
ii- There is absolutely no matter of apprehension to derive benefit from European advancement in rationality and modern disciplines;
iii- Fresh interpretation of Islamic beliefs and even their reconstruction is quite justified in the light of European thought.

The approach of Iqbal is spirited and confident. Like very many theologians of his time he is not afraid of judging beliefs in the light of science. Either his vision was correct or erroneous, valid or fallacious, is a separate issue but his determination and resolve to break the intellectual deadlock and stagnation are, nonetheless, laudable. This paper has tried to cover the range of Iqbal's success in this endeavour.

Keywords: Mohammad Iqbal, Recenstruction of the religious thought in Islam, Science.

Introduction

19th century posited itself for the Muslim World in the form of complete colonization by the Western powers and the extreme tension between traditional faith and challenge of modernity. It was the time when Islam came openly under fire by the Western scholars and intellectuals for whom it stood not only as a symbol of backwardness but also the major reason for the same in the Muslim World. Ernest Renan (1832-1892) is one such major and influential example according to whom Islam was absolutely incompatible with both science and philosophy. In his doctoral thesis, *Averroes et l'Averroisme* (1852: 'Averroes and Averroism'), he upheld this view very audaciously. He, in his lecture "Islam and Science" given at Sorbonne and published in the *Journal des Débats*, March 29, 1883, attacked Islam and Arabs as innately incapable of doing philosophy and producing science. His ruthless attack was responded by a number of apologies one by Namik Kemal, the famous Ottoman writer, poet and activist.

Surprisingly enough, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhammad Abduh (1848-1905) responded defensively. They were of the view that backwardness of the Muslim World was not due to the Islam *per se*, rather because of the contemporary Muslim understanding of the Islam. Afghani, more or less submitted to Renan's opinion, however, he replaced the word "Islam" with "religion"; agreeing with Renan that almost all the religions exhibit such hostility or opposition towards reason. Perhaps it would not be out of context to quote his original words here. He writes in response to Renan,

> "If it is true that the Muslim religion is an obstacle to the development of sciences, can one affirm that this obstacle will not disappear someday? How does the Muslim religion differ on this point from other religions? All religions are intolerant, each one in its way. The Christian religion, I mean the society that follows its inspirations and its teachings and is formed in its image, has emerged from the first period to which I have just alluded; thenceforth free and independent, it seems to advance rapidly on the road of progress and science, whereas Muslim society has not yet freed itself from the tutelage of religion. Realizing, however, that the Christian religion preceded the Muslim religion in the world by many centuries, I cannot keep from hoping that Muhammadan society will succeed someday in breaking its bonds and marching resolutely in the path

> of civilization after the manner of Western society…No I cannot admit that this hope be denied to Islam." [2]

This hope of Afghani definitely came true and the Muslim World soon started its march towards this destination, that is, to bring religion (Islam) at par with science and modernization. The first visionary who was the herald and harbinger of this voyage was Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) of India. It was he who first of all felt the need of a new Islamic theology of modernity in the Muslim world to encounter the contemporary challenges faced by Islam especially with reference to science. He called for a *Jadid Ilm al-Kalam* (New Theology) in his address to *Anjuman-i- Himayat-i-Islam* at Lahore in 1884. Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), the philosopher, and famous as the Poet of the East, was the man who fulfilled this vision of Syedd Ahmad Khan with writing his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam.*
In the words of Mohammad Khalid Masud,

> "In our view the *Reconstruction* offers a new Islamic theology of modernity in continuation to Sayyid Ahmad Khan's call for *Jadid Ilm al-Kalam.* As evident from the publications still appearing in South Asia with the title *Jadid Ilm al-Kalam*, debate on the need for a new Islamic theology continues, although the objectifications of modernity keep changing in the formulations of these new theologies. (He offers a recent example of Muhammad Shahab al-Din Nadwi's *Jadid Ilm al-Kalam* published by *Majlis Nashriyat Islam*, Karachi, Pakistan in 1994). He further writes in the similar context, "Muhammad Iqbal's *Reconstruction* makes a major turning point in the growth of Islamic theology of modernity after Sayyid Ahmad Khan. This work consists of a series of lectures that he wrote and delivered in Lahore, Madras, Hyderabad, and Aligarh between 1924 and 1930. His theology of modernity differed from that of Muhammad Abduh (d.1905) the founder of Islamic modernism in Egypt who remained largely faithful to ancient Islamic theology. Iqbal observed that the "concepts of theological systems, draped in terminology of a practically dead metaphysics" could not help the reconstruction of religious thought. "The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us". Iqbal thus clearly endorsed Sayyid Ahmad

> Khan's call for a new theology by clearly rejecting ancient metaphysics as a dead science."[3]

Iqbal on the Meaning of Religion and Modern Science

Before moving to Iqbal, it would be unfair, not to pay tribute to a personality, who is the first Islamic modernist in the true sense of the word. He is the man who braved the initial and ruthless blows of modernity directly but did not give in. He faced these attacks heroically not only academically and intellectually, but in almost all the fields of practical and political life. He fought the battle on multiple fronts and paved the way for the next generation of travelers. This man was no other but Syedd Ahmad Khan, who developed a new set of principles for the interpretation of Qur'ān. In his *Taqrir fi usul al –tafsir* (1892), he proposed 15 principles for the exegesis of Qur'ān. The ninth principle explains the relationship between the Qur'ān as the word of God and nature as the work of God. According to him, "There is no matter in Qur'ān disagreeing with the laws of nature."[4]

This is the main maxim which is carried forward by Iqbal and it has bestowed that strength on him with the help of which he has examined modern science without feeling any sense of inferiority or overwhelmingness.

Iqbal has paid extraordinary attention to the nature and laws of nature. It is interesting to note that he writes nature with capital N. He has laid emphasis on the Qur'ānic message to study laws of nature with a reflective attitude. Iqbal in his *Reconstruction* has specially and insistently highlighted the anti-Classical spirit of Islam and Qur'ān. He is of the view that Qur'ānic approach towards nature and reality is empirical, scientific and inductive. It believes in the particular and the concrete instead of the universals and abstracts. It would be fruitful to have a look on this passage of Iqbal's,

> "No doubt, the immediate purpose of the Qur'ān in the reflective observation of Nature is to awaken in man the consciousness of that of which Nature is regarded a symbol. But the point to note is the general empirical attitude of the Qur'ān which engendered in its followers a feeling of reverence for the actual and ultimately made them the founders of modern science…..The Qur'ān opens our eyes to the great fact of change, through the appreciation and

control of which alone it is possible to build a durable civilization."[5] [Emphasis added].

As per Iqbal's analysis, one of the reasons of the failure of Asian cultures was to approach reality exclusively from within and ignoring its outward aspect.[6]

For Iqbal there is practically no difference between science and prayer or worship. Since Nature is the outward manifestation of Reality and its observation or study is no less than prayer. Hence the scientist who is closely judging or investigating Nature is actually engaged in an act of worship. In his own lucid words,

"In fact prayer must be regarded as a necessary complement to the intellectual activity of the observer of Nature. The scientific observer of Nature keeps us in close contact with the behaviour of Reality, and thus sharpens our inner perception for a deeper vision of it……..The truth is that all search for knowledge is essentially a form of prayer. The scientific observer of Nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer.[7]

Perhaps Iqbal is more clear and categorical in the same outlook in the second lecture of the *Reconstruction*, when he applies the philosophical test on the revelations of the religious experience. He has almost identified therein nature with the self or "I-am-ness" of the Divine Being. Let us have an interesting read from his text,

"Now a self is unthinkable without a character, i.e. a uniform mode of behaviour. Nature as we have seen is not a mass of pure materiality occupying a void. It is a structure of events, a systematic mode of behaviour, and as such organic to the Ultimate Self. In the picturesque phrase of Qur'ān it is the habit of Allah…… Nature, then, must be understood as a living, ever-growing organism whose growth has no final external limits. Its only limit is internal, i.e. the **immanent** self which animates and sustains the whole……..Thus the view we have taken gives a fresh spiritual meaning to physical science. The knowledge of Nature is knowledge of **God's behaviour.** In our observation of Nature, we are virtually seeking a kind of intimacy with the Absolute Ego; and this is only another form of worship."[8] Nature is but God' Sunnah, the habit. For Iqbal, human body too, (just like nature) is the accumulated action or habit of the soul.[9] [Emphasis added].

(The underlined and highlighted as bold will be critically analyzed by the end of the section).

The fifth lecture of *Reconstruction,* Iqbal has exclusively devoted to the achievements of Islam in the domain of knowledge, say science.

The lecture no doubt carries some very original and famous assertions of Iqbal, for instance his claim which he has justified with apt examples, that "the birth of Islam is the birth of inductive intellect". Another very novel and worth-considering idea of Iqbal is regarding Prophet's unique position in history. He says,

> "The Prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new directions."[10]

Iqbal further unfolds the relation between Nature, Reason and Revelation in the fifth lecture and writes,

> "The Qur'ān sees the signs of Ultimate Reality in the 'sun', the 'moon', 'the lengthening out of shadows', 'the alternation of day and night', 'variety of human colours and tongues', 'the alternation of days of success and reverse among peoples', in fact in the whole nature as revealed to the sense perception of man……..This appeals to the concrete combined with the slow realization that, according to the teachings of the Qur'ān, the universe is dynamic in its origin, infinite and capable of increase, eventually brought Muslim thinkers into conflict with Greek thought".[11]

Iqbal says that,

> "This intellectual revolt against Greek philosophy manifests itself in all departments of thought. I am afraid; I am not competent enough to deal with it as it discloses itself in Mathematics, Astronomy and Medicine".[12]

However, this relation has been very beautifully elaborated by contemporary Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi:

> "Islam was founded on the model of identity between revelation, reason and nature. The identity between revelation and reason produced philosophy and mathematics: Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry and Music. The identity between Revelation and Nature produced

> natural sciences: Physics, Chemistry, Medicine, Pharmacology, Biology, Botanic, Mineralogy, and Geology. In this model there was no distinction between mathematical, physical and human sciences. This model is based on the harmony between the order of Revelation, the order of reason and the order of Nature"[13].

Iqbal, however, because of his love for the "concrete" quotes specific examples from Islamic history to prove the Muslims and the Arabs as the real precursors of Science. He very earnestly quotes from Briffault's *Making of Humanity*,

> "The debt of our science to that of Arabs does not consist in startling discoveries of revolutionary theories; science owes a great deal more to Arab culture, it owes its existence. The ancient world was, as we saw, pre scientific……..What we call science, arose in Europe as a result of a new spirit of inquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of Mathematics in a form unknown to Greeks. The spirit and those methods were introduced to the European world by the Arabs".[14]

Iqbal has given the credit of Theory of Evolution to Jahiz and Ibn-i-Maskwaih. Interested readers may see the fifth lecture of *Reconstruction* in detail, that is, "The Spirit of Muslim Culture".

The discussion above leaves a healthy, satisfying and refreshing effect on the mind of the reader/listener. He heaves a sigh of relief and thanks that the Muslim World has not only produced bigots, reactionary and anti-reason personalities who would declare sciences as witchcraft or condemn scientific progress as a warfare and conspiracy against religion. "After all" we have thinkers who are not afraid of this monster which has shaken the foundations of ancient/organized religion since its inception; because the very first and basic conflict of the conservatives and the moderns was founded on the premise that the discoveries of science were not in accordance with the religious beliefs (of any religion). However, the giant of modern and contemporary Muslim intellectual tradition appears very certain and convinced, and, finds absolutely no fissure and cleft between the two rivals. For him the nature, revelation and reason are but one and the same thing; these utterances are very pleasant and encouraging, and most definitely the Muslim World is direly

in need of this rational approach, since on this critical juncture of history the already enfeebled and debilitated Muslim World may not afford to have a conflict with science. Hence a reconciliatory vision is imperative. But here appears a very critical question of truth versus pragmatism. Can and should the truth be sacrificed for the sake of "doctrine of necessity"? This is a separate and debatable issue, verily beyond the scope of this paper for the primary reason of paucity of time. However, a few comments are essential here to make some points clear.

As far as the observation of the present author goes, Mohammad Iqbal is working with good intentions and as sincere thinker. He earnestly believes in his own systems of thought. However, his general scheme of ideas is based, rather on oversimplification of facts. Moreover, the great philosopher has viewed the picture exclusively from the one side and has ignored the opinion of opponents which deserves due appreciation as far as its intellectual merits are concerned.

Is it justified to say that there is no difference between religion and science, whereas both have different and mutually exclusive methods? One is based on faith, submission and revelation while the other is founded on observation, experimentation, modification, falsification and even on total rejection. Science never claims finality and absolute truth, whereas religion starts from a mighty and unchallengeable claim that, "This is the Book beyond any doubt, guidance for the fearing who believe in the *unseen*"[15]. A believer is not supposed to observe at first the visible and then by observation move towards the invisible. On the contrary, s/he has to believe first in the unseen as an article of faith, and then strengthen the pre-existing belief with the help of the "signs of Allah" prevalent in nature. For this too, the guidance is required from revelation and a Divine messenger, because left alone with reason, s/he may believe in anyother God or Creator not necessarily Allah. Moreover, s/he may believe in many equally potent, autonomous and mutually cooperating gods instead of the one, only, single and omnipotent God who has no rival or partner. This is a familiar case or fate of the Natural Theology.

This is a very serious point to ponder and to say alone that religion is not dogma and not enough to counter a weighty argument. Besides this, there are many other aspects of Iqbal which are in need of thorough deliberation. The main inspiration of Iqbal has come from the then, Modern Physics, which has today become a century old and innumerable new ground-breaking developments have taken place in it. A number of theories of Iqbal's time have been revised, modified, improved or rejected. His immense faith in Einstein's Theory of Relativity is astonishing and amazing,

he is overwhelmed with the results of Einstein and is fondly eager to interpret or see Qur'ānic text in its light. His famous line in the first lecture requires special attention,

> "The theory of Einstein has brought a new vision of universe and suggests new ways of looking at the problems common to both religion and philosophy,"

Strange, definitely strange!! Neither Einstein was a theologian nor does physics deal with religion at all. Sorry to say, the discoveries of Physics, especially those of modern Physics deny through and through the role of a wise creator behind the universe for whom some room could be made with the help of Classical Mechanics which believed in the concept of force, action from the distance and rigid laws of nature. Einstein, the exponent of the revolutionary theory which entirely changed the picture of the universe was himself a non-believer. His own theory could not convince him to testify the tenets of any religion including his own ancestral Judaism.

It is interesting to note that a philosopher of Iqbal's stature knew it well that physics deals with the physical things and has no link with religion, theology or spirituality etcetera, as he himself has acknowledged in the second lecture of the *Reconstruction*,

> "Thus physics studies the material world, that is to say, the world revealed by the senses. The mental processes involved in this study, and similarly religious and aesthetic experience, though part of the total range of experience, are excluded from the scope of physics for the obvious reason that physics is restricted to the study of material world, by which we mean the world of things we perceive"[16].

It is surprising that knowing all this so explicitly, he used physics as an apologetic method to prove the validity of religion. Iqbal insists zealously on Modern Physics of which the one foundational rule is Uncertainty Principle. Such an uncertain Nature may definitely not be equated with that God Who does not change His habits! Moreover, the laws of nature are indifferent to human needs and desires and at times yield untold suffering and pain to humanity. Should these be identified with the habits of God? Iqbal has almost ignored this side of the picture. He has treated the problem of evil in his third lecture briefly and then has associated it

with the legend of the Fall of Adam. He has tried to interpret the legend symbolically assigning new meanings to the old terms. His elucidation of the legend makes a very fabulous academic read but it is very difficult and incomprehensible for an ordinary believer and reader.

Mohammad Iqbal's reverence for science is not as deep and profound as it appears from the outset. At places he is more than harsh towards the poor discipline and has used a word as offensive as "vulture" for it. See the passage that follows,

> "But we must not forget that what is called science is not a single systematic view of Reality. It is a mass of sectional views of Reality fragments of a total experience which do not seem to fit together. Natural science deals with matter, with life, and with mind; but the moment you ask the question how matter, mind and life are mutually related, you begin to see the sectional character of the various sciences that deal with them and the inability of that science, taken singly, to furnish a complete answer to your question. In fact the various natural sciences are so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, each running away with the piece of its flesh.[17]

At another place his position is hundred percent pro-religion and anti-science as he writes,

> "It seems that the method of dealing with Reality by means of concepts is not at all a serious way of dealing with it. Science does not care whether its electron is a real entity or not. It may be a mere symbol, a mere convention. Religion, which is essentially a mode of actual living, is the only serious way of handling Reality."[18]

Most interesting to note is that he has torn the phenomena of life and consciousness completely out of the domain of sciences and declared them beyond the scope of mechanistic explanation. A very detailed discussion on the same may be seen in the second lecture of *Reconstruction*, wherein, Iqbal has quoted J. S. Haldane, Wildon Carr and Bergson in support of his argument; rather these are the results of heavy influence of Bergson. Bergson in his *Creative Evolution* has declared life as beyond the reach of Physics and Chemistry. Some passages from the same are worth quoting here:

> "Chemists have pointed out that even in the organic-not to go as far as organized-science has reconstructed hitherto nothing but waste products of vital activity; the peculiarly active plastic substances obstinately defy synthesis".[19]

> "To sum up those who are concerned only with the functional activity of the living being are inclined to believe that Physics and Chemistry will give us key to biological processes."[20]

> "The fact is, neither one nor the other of these two theories, neither that which affirms nor that which denies the possibility of chemically producing an elementary organism, can claim the authority of experiment. They are both unverifiable, the former because science has not yet advanced a step towards the chemical synthesis of a living substance, the second because there is no conceivable way of proving experimentally the impossibility of the fact"[21].

Bergson was quite right when he wrote these passages in 1907. Actually no living substance was chemically synthesized till his death (1941). So he left the world with strong belief in his theory. The case of Iqbal is also not different who passed away even three years earlier, that is, in 1938. However, the destination of the chemical production of life in the laboratory was not very far. This too, happened in 1952, when Stanley L. Miller and Harold C. Urey in their famous Urey-Miller Experiment produced 20 different amino acids in the laboratory. Amino acids are the building blocks of proteins.They tested the Alexander Oparin's and J.B. S. Haldane's hypothesis that life came into being through the chemical processes which took place under the primitive conditions of the earth. These conditions led to the formation of organic compounds through inorganic precursors. The epoch-making results of this experiment on the origin of life were published in 1953, which was conducted at the University of Chicago.[22]

Therefore, these ideas might have some value 90 years ago, but in the contemporary age of the very advanced Medicine, Biotechnology, Genetic Engineering, Cloning, Organ Transplantation and Stem-Cell Research, they appear nothing but immature. The recent advancements in Psychiatry and Neurology have almost replaced the obsolete ideas regarding mind and consciousness. Contrary to Iqbal's views, consciousness is not something over and above the Physics, Chemistry and mechanistic

explanations but is quite subject to their laws. Our thoughts, ideas, consciousness, emotions and all other mental phenomena respond to the psychiatric drugs. The flourishing discipline of Biochemistry has revolutionized the world of medicine. It explores the relationship between Chemistry and life or in the other words; it may be called Chemistry of life.

Bergson has a similar attitude towards Physics as well about which he opines,

> "The more Physics progresses, the more it shows the impossibility of representing the properties of ether or of electricity, the probable base of all bodies, on the model of the properties of the matter which we perceive".[23]

His disagreement with Kant is well known whom he has criticized rather vehemently. In the similar vein he has written,

> "He (Kant) did not consider in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, that science became less and less objective, more and more symbolical to the extent that it went from the physical to the vital, from the vital to the psychical. Experience does not move, to his view, in two different and perhaps opposite ways, the one conformable to the direction of the intellect, the other contrary to it. There is, for him, only one experience, and the intellect covers its whole ground. This is what Kant expresses by saying that all our intuitions are sensuous, or, in other words, infra-intellectual".[24]

What is the underlying current or logic of this approach? Why do Bergson and Iqbal harbour this attitude towards sciences? Why do they oppose Kant so intensely? Their position is clearly ambivalent which at times becomes openly hostile. The answer is that to accommodate freedom of will, human volition, mysticism and intuition they need a *non-mechanistic* explanation of the universe. They desire a world free from the categories of space, time and causality wherein human individuality may grow without any restriction. Bergson has concluded his *Creative Evolution* on the following passage which is the gist of his entire philosophical endeavours:

> "So understood, philosophy is not only the turning of the mind homeward, the coincidence of human consciousness with the living

> principle whence it emanates, a contact with the creative effort: it is the study of becoming in general, it is true evolutionism and consequently the true continuation of science provided that we understand by this word a set of truths neither experienced nor demonstrated, and not a certain new scholasticism that has grown up during the latter half of the nineteenth century around the physics of Galileo, as the old scholasticism grew up around Aristotle".[25]

He has warned philosophy against becoming physics in these words,

> "We must remember that philosophy, as we define it, has not yet become conscious of itself. Physics understands its role when it pushes matter in the direction of spatiality; but has metaphysics understood its role when it has simply trodden in the steps of physics, in the chimerical hope of going further in the same direction. Should not its own task be, on the contrary, to remount the incline that physics descends, to bring back matter to its origins, and to build up progressively a cosmology which would be so to speak , a reversed psychology?"[26]

While in the introduction of the same book he has expressed,

> "In fact, we do not indeed feel that not one of the categories of our thought unity, multiplicity, mechanical causality, intelligent finality, etc. applies exactly to the things of life: who can say where individuality begins and ends".[27]

Iqbal has written in the more or less similar spirit,

> "Modern Atomism is, however, unique. Its amazing mathematics, which sees the world as an elaborate differential equation; and its physics which, following its own methods has been led to smash some of the old gods of its own temple, have already brought us to the point of asking the question whether the causality-bound aspect of nature is the whole truth about it."[28]

Iqbal in the first lecture of *Reconstruction* has beautifully elucidated the empirical and scientific spirit of Qur'ān which does not abhor the world of senses like Greek philosophy. Qur'ān invites its reader again

and again to observe the order, purpose, regularity, uniformity and proportion of the material universe. The persistent, consistent and repetitive stress laid on its fascinating design, rivers, mountains, clouds, colours, rains, winds, weathers, days, nights, fruits, flowers, flavours, fragrances, ferries, oceans, plains, animals, birds, fish, light, shadows, sun, moon, stars, heavens, earth, institutions, men, women, creeds, languages, festivals, rites, rituals, and immense variety of objects is a hallmark feature of Qur'ān. Nature is definitely a premise from which to infer conclusion is the duty of a reflective and contemplative soul, according to Qur'ān. Hence the sentence of Iqbal that Nature is regarded as *symbol* is absolutely valid. Hitherto no one may have any difference of opinion with him. However, he follows a drastically different trajectory in the second chapter which is definitely startling for any theistic believer, for whom the world is a creation of God, Who had brought it into being out of nothing (*ex-nihilo*) by uttering the word *Kun* (Be)[29] as a result of His sheer sweet will without any internal or external compulsion.

Here in the second lecture, Iqbal takes a pantheistic position when he identifies the Nature and its manifestations with the Ultimate Self. The Ultimate Self which is unique and nothing may be compared with Him[30]; His unity is pure and un-analyzable into parts. How can He be declared identical with a universe so diverse and full of plurality and multiplicity? This is the stance neither of philosophy nor of science, rather of Mysticism and quite in contrast with the *Shari'āh*. This sort of pantheism has led to crude polytheism in various ancient religions. Moreover, to identify the theistic God with Nature and universe is an encroachment not only on His essence, which is pure and simple, but is also a tempering with His existence which is boundless. This is a sort of limitation imposed on Him.

The second point to ponder is the use of word *Immanent* by Iqbal which is a through and through pantheistic term. It is the opposite of *Transcendent.* It would be fruitful to have a look on the definition and the etymology of the two. The literal meaning of immanent is "remaining within, indwelling, inherent, intrinsic, internal or subjective; hence limited in activity, agency or effect to the subject or associated acts. It is a derivative of Latin *immanens* which stands for to remain in or near. Philosophically speaking it is a term applied to a deity which is believed to exist in all things throughout the whole process of creation".[31] A brief explanation is going to be more helpful in appreciating the spirit of the point, "Immanence is the quality of any action which begins and ends

within the agent. Thus, vital action, as well in the physiological as in the intellectual and moral order, is called immanent, because it proceeds from that spontaneity which is essential to the living subject and has for its term the unfolding of the subject's constituent energies. It is initiated and is consummated in the interior of the same being, which may be considered as a closed system"[32].

Before elaborating the same a hurried glance on Transcendence is essential. It means surpassing others, pre-eminent or supreme, lying beyond the ordinary range of perception, being above and independent of material universe. "The term transcendence, from the Latin transcendere (to climb up), means to go beyond, surpass, or rise above, particularly what is given in personal experience. In theology, transcendence is associated with the beyond-ness and holiness of God, in the sense of the existence of God being prior to the physical cosmos and exalted above it. Referring to divine ascent beyond the world, transcendence is frequently contrasted with immanence, the presence of God in the world".[33]

Now the meaning of Iqbal's assertion that the study of Nature is actually the study of God's behaviour may be easily analyzed. There are two immediately relevant points here:

i- The study of God or His behaviour does not make the subject-matter of Science at all. This is the purview of Theology, and Science is verily not Theology. No scientist, no matter how devout believer he is, has ever claimed that he was studying either God or His behaviour. This is basically a category mistake, mixing two separate areas of inquiry which are mutually exclusive;

ii- To equate or identify God with the nature is clearly pantheism and in contrast with the theistic spirit of Semitic tradition including Islam. A theistic God is creator and may never ever be identical with His creature(s). On the other hand the pantheistic God is not a willful creator, rather the universe proceeds from His being, as is mentioned in the underlined statement above. This is known as Emanation. This procedure leads towards a closed as well as a highly deterministic system as a logical consequence. Whereas we have seen that Iqbal is a great critic of both ideas; he is a staunch exponent of freedom of will and of an open and growing universe.

Being a very keen and brilliant thinker, Iqbal himself was aware of his own bend of mind; therefore, he has acknowledged with great integrity

that the intellectual view of Reality is always pantheistic. When he defines in second lecture the Ultimate Reality as rationally directed creative life, he admits frankly,

> "The operation of thought which is essentially symbolic in character veils the true nature of life, and can picture it only as a kind of universal current flowing through all things. The result of an intellectual view of life, therefore, is necessarily pantheistic".[34]

There are some other passages in Iqbal which present a very patent and obvious picture of pantheism.

> "The question of creation once rose among the disciples of the well-known saint Bayazid of Bistam. One of the disciples very pointedly put the common sense view saying: 'There was a moment of time when God existed and nothing existed besides Him.' The saint's reply was equally pointed. 'It is just the same now', said he, 'as it was then'".[35]

> "Reality is, therefore, essentially spirit……I have conceived Ultimate Reality as an Ego; and I must add now that from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed. The creative energy of Ultimate Ego, in whom deed and thought are identical, functions as ego-unities. The world, in all its details, from the mechanical movement of what we call atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego, is the self-revelation of the 'Great I am'. Every atom of Divine energy, however low in the scale of existence, is an ego. But there are degrees in the expression of ego-hood……Like pearls do we live and move and have our being in the perpetual flow of Divine life."[36]

> "Finite minds regard Nature as a confronting 'other' existing per se, which the mind knows but does not make. We are thus apt to regard the act of creation as a specific past event, and the universe appears to us as a manufactured article which has no organic relation to the life of its maker, and of which the maker is nothing more than a mere spectator. All the meaningless theological controversies about the idea of creation arise from this narrow vision of finite mind. ……The real question which we are called

> upon to answer is this: Does the universe confront God as His 'other' with space intervening between Him and it? The answer is that from the Divine point of view, there is no creation in the sense of a specific event having a 'before' or 'after'. The universe cannot be regarded as an independent reality standing in opposition to Him. This view of matter will reduce both God and the world to two separate entities confronting each other in the empty receptacle of an infinite space."[37]

Here one thing must be made clear to be fair and just to the great thinker. When we say that he leans towards pantheism, it does not mean the monistic approach of Spinoza or *Wahdatal-Wajud* of Ibn Arabi, for whom the substance is one and singular. (Though some eminent scholars have identified him with Ibn Arabi too, see two last quotes of this section by Ali Abbas Jalalpuri and Altaf Ahmad Azami). For Iqbal Ultimate Reality is essentially spiritual and one but he is more in line with pluralistic Monadology of Leibniz. Though from the Ultimate Ego, only egos may proceed, but all these egos are individual and different from each other. Hence, Mohammad Iqbal in his approach is more akin to *Wahdatal-Shahud.*

Iqbal's combination of science, theology and philosophy makes a highly academic reading; it is impressive and represents a brilliant and scholarly personality with very vast and incredible study. Iqbal's approach is first of its kind in the Muslim World, hence very laudable and highly esteemed till date. However, the mix and blend of the various disciplines and areas of thought, he has presented could not avoid serious criticism on account of some inherent flaws, fallacies and inconsistencies.

Renowned Pakistani intellectual, Ali Abbas Jalalpuri, has found Iqbal ambivalent towards pantheism, and Ibn Arabi. Moreover, his great reverence for pantheist poet Jalal al-Din Rumi and his notions regarding the Absolute Ego and the Ultimate Self clearly indicate his strong intellectual tendency towards pantheism.[38]

Similar objection, but in very strong words has been raised by eminent Indian scholar Altaf Ahmad Azami, whose critique on *Reconstruction* was published first time in 1977. His views may be summarized in the words as follows: Iqbal and Shaykh Muhy al-Din Ibn Arabi totally agree with each other regarding man, God and the state of certitude. In Iqbal's system there is no difference between man and God. He has three main points of disapproval with Iqbal's overall framework of thought:

i- He studied Islamic theology in the light of Western thought. Scientific discoveries may be used to support religious beliefs; however they do not provide light to reconstruct Islamic beliefs of which the source is God and they are changeless;
ii- Religious experience is a dubious source of knowledge and not a trustworthy means to perceive God;
iii- Iqbal has interpreted Qur'ānic verses arbitrarily and out of context.[39] Another very valid point here is selective approach of Iqbal while trying to prove his own favourite pre-conceived ideas. Iqbal has not deduced results from Qur'ān, rather has used Qur'ān in support of those ideas in which he already believes firmly. We may say that the intellectual endeavours of Iqbal in the field of reconciliation between science and religion may never be forgotten and will be remembered as a great contribution from a giant; but definitely they have flaws and weaknesses of their own which are not beyond criticism.

Concluding Remarks

The reconciliatory efforts of Iqbal between Science and religion are of great academic and intellectual merit. He enjoys a distinguished status in the modern and contemporary Muslim philosophical thought. He wishes to bring the holy scripture at par with science or vice versa. He sees no noticeable difference between the two, and if there is any, it may be removed with the help of proper interpretation or has arisen due to the literal use of the language etcetera. Iqbal, however, is one step ahead and has practically "deduced" scientific theories from the Qur'ān and has declared it the forerunner of science. His main motivation and inspiration have come from Modern Physics in general and the Theory of Relativity in particular. The constancy of speed of light has fascinated him exceptionally, and he has applied it on the famous Qur'ānic verse, "Allah is the light of the Heavens and of the earth" (*Al-Qur'ān*, XXIV:35). He opines, "Personally, I think the description of God as light, in the revealed literature of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, must now be interpreted differently". Why?

> "The teaching of modern physics is that the velocity of light cannot be exceeded and is the same for all observers whatever their own system of movement. Thus, in the world of change, light is the nearest approach to the Absolute."[40]

One of the underlying meanings of this interpretation is that the Almighty was aware of the Relativity Physics since the times immemorial and that is why He used the metaphor of light for Himself. In the other words, Qur'ān was already consistent with the revolutionary discoveries of Modern Physics and these could have been discovered out of it if somebody would have paid due attention. Here one may recall the familiar claims of the enthusiastic Muslims who after every new scientific discovery declare that Qur'ān has revealed the same fourteen hundred years ago. Had it been the case, why didn't they describe it before the science? Interestingly, this is the tendency of almost all the believers, no matter whatever is their religion. People of various religions prove the truth, modernity and scientific natures of their respective religions with the help of the same science. One of the verses of the Qur'ān has been used to prove Big Bang.

> "Do not the disbelievers see that the heaven and the earth were closed-up mass, and then we opened them out? And we made from water everything living. Will they not believe" (Al-Qur'ān, XXI:30).

Now the verse had been always there in the scripture, but no Muslim theologian or scientist inferred Big Bang out of this, until this theory was propounded by the (Western) scientists. This predilection is very dangerous not for the science but for the religion predominantly, because the scientific theories remain in the constant process of revision, modification and change. If one established theory is rejected, God forbidden, would you then say that the scripture was wrong? Hence the fundamental principle of Iqbal, that is, to reconstruct religious beliefs in the light of modern science is not only mistaken but also belittling for the religion because it gives edge to the science on religion. There are two points that need the attention of the reader:

i- Had there been no advancement in Modern Physics; had Einstein not propounded the Theory of Relativity, then would the Qur'ān have lost its "true" meaning? It shows its desperate dependency on science, especially on Physics.

ii- If the Theory of Relativity is amended, then Qur'ān should be amended or reinterpreted accordingly? If it is abandoned altogether the Qur'ān will also be abandoned?

Iqbal has given the credit of Theory of Evolution to Jahiz and Ibn Maskaweh; here two questions may be raised again:

i- If this theory was put-forward by the Muslim scientists, it means that it is not in contradiction with the Divine creation; then why the same theory by Darwin was so overwhelmingly rejected by the Muslim World? It is being resisted till date;
ii- Unfortunately no one knows that this great idea originated in the minds of the Muslim scientists, the world came to know it, when it was expounded by Darwin in 19th century.

It is interesting, rather not interesting but painful that when the Classical Physics enjoyed a distinguished status in 19th century, Sayyid Ahmad Khan produced an exegesis of Qur'ān which was in accordance with the tenets of the Classical Mechanics and when it was replaced by Modern Physics, Qur'ān was immediately interpreted using its terminology! Here the comment of Abu-Zayd is very pertinent,

> "This automatically implies that Qur'ān is at the mercy of the ideology of its interpreter. For a communist, the Qur'ān would thus reveal communism, for a fundamentalist it would be a highly fundamentalist text, for a feminist it would be a feminist text, and so on."[41]

Similarly Iqbal, being a Bergsonian has sought his philosophy in Qur'ān too. He has traced not only the serial and non-serial time in the two verses of Qur'ān, but also has explained the simple verses of Qur'ān regarding coming of days and night in such a tedious manner that they have nonetheless lost their clear and unambiguous meaning.[42] Rahim Bakhsh Shaheen has written a very interesting sentence in his book regarding the incomprehensibility of these lectures when delivered in Lahore:

> "[Ghulam Jilani] Barq recalls that the language of these lectures was so complicated and the thought presented was so subtle that no one among the audience could understand these lectures."[43]

Same is the case with construal of *Barzakh* with Helmholtz's theory that nervous excitation takes time to reach consciousness. Here a curious

blend of mysticism and physiology has been applied on the Qur'ānic concept of immortality of the soul.[44]

A passage from Iqbal himself is going to be very interesting,

> "*But since Muslims have always sought the justification of their varying attitudes in Qur'ān, even though at the expense of its plain meaning*, the fatalistic interpretation has had very far-reaching effects on Muslim peoples. I could, in this connexion, quote several instances of obvious misinterpretation; but the subject requires special treatment, and it is time now to turn to the question of immortality".[45]

However, Iqbal himself did the same very liberally in the *Reconstruction*. An amusing point, here is that for Iqbal, the true religion of the world is Islam alone, therefore, he has found similarities with science in it. He might have chosen some other religion too, having a very scientific spirit, but did not. The Baha'i religion is quite scientific rather its fundamental principle is harmony between science and faith but it could not attract his attention. As the pre-Ghazali philosophers tried to *philosophize Islam*; Iqbal endeavoured to *Islamize philosophy and science*.

This leads to another tendency which has proved itself even more dangerous and harmful in results and consequences. This is known as *Islamization of knowledge,* which is based on the same idea that Qur'ān is the source of entire scientific knowledge. This has been very effectively explained by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd as he writes,

> "Methodologically speaking there is nothing new in Sayyid Ahmad Khan's presupposition. However, the difference between his interpretation and the classical commentaries lies in the domain of meaning the modern meaning which considers science specially the natural science, to be the new religion of secularism. Fascinated by the new world of science and discovery, he had to find a way to integrate it into the Holy Scripture. I propose here that the Sayyid Ahmad Khan's effort to open the meaning of Qur'ān to accept scientific findings is the embryo of what would later develop into seemingly opposite directions, namely an emphasis on the scientific supremacy of the Qur'ān (al-Iskandrani 1880; 1883; 1897; al-Jawahiri 1971, al-Sharafi 1990: 69-76), and an emphasis on the 'Islamization' of knowledge and science. The first direction shows

> that all scientific theories are implicitly alluded to in the Qur'ān. Accordingly, the miracle of the Qur'ān extends beyond the classical theory of stylistic supremacy and takes in scientific supremacy. The second, the Islamization of knowledge, seeks the Islamic roots of modern knowledge."[46]

Abu Zayd, also gives the reference of his own article regarding the scientific supremacy of the Qur'ān (*al-ijaz-al-ilmi*), published in the weekly supplement of *Al-Ahram* daily, 27th October, 2000, P. 2. According to the article, linking the Qur'ān to the scientific theory, which is changeable and subject to challenge apace with the development of human knowledge is actually tantamount to damaging the divinity and the eternity of the Qur'ān, the word of God.[47]

Unfortunately Iqbal has committed the same fallacy in his respective efforts to harmonize the two. Hassan Hanafi has discouraged this attitude in the following words which should be quoted here to be fair and honest to the author:

> "In modern times, reformed interpretations appeared to cope with new circumstances and the modern state of human knowledge and science. The scientific interpretation began to cope with modern scientific discoveries, showing that the Qur'ān had already referred to them, if not directly, such as theory of evolution, at least indirectly, such as theory of relativity. This interpretation began with the scientific discoveries of others, by external scientific knowledge, known by reason and experimentation. Divine revelation followed human knowledge and was conditioned by it. Since human knowledge is partial and changing, Divine revelation became likewise. This interpretation gives Muslims the false certitude that the Qur'ān already includes all scientific discoveries. Therefore, they do not need Western science. The West has science without faith, while Muslims have science and faith. Transfer of scientific knowledge does not necessarily imply the adoption of the scientific outlook."[48]

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