

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL SPHERES OF
IQBAL'S MYSTICISM

Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Mysticism is based upon the recognition of a possibility of communion between man and God; either directly or through some channel that takes on for the mystic a conscious and active individuality. It is, therefore, an interaction between consciousness a mode of operation of Being, excluding everything that is not Being (Rahman, 1973, 212). Mysticism involves the practice of contemplation both in the philosophical sense of the contemplation of truth and in the 'supernatural' sense of having knowledge of God via a life of prayer. Nevertheless, the 'mystic way' is primarily practical, not theoretical, and is something in which the whole self is engaged; Sufism searches for a direct mystical knowledge of God and of his Love. Its goal was to progress beyond mere intellectual knowledge to a mystical (existential) experience that submerged limited man in the infinity of God. Sufism consists of a variety of mystical paths that are designed to ascertain the nature of humanity and of God and to facilitate the experience of the presence of divine love and wisdom in the world. For Iqbal love, intuition, religious experience and prophetic revelation are just the same in their very nature. This kind of knowledge is direct, immediate and will unveil to him new spheres of illumination, wherein there are vistas of reality, comprehending Divine presence itself (Anwar, 1996, 62). According to Iqbal, the religious experience is different from normal experience; the indispensable part of religious experience is its incommunicability. He says, "Strictly speaking, the experience, which leads to this discovery, is not a conceptually manageable intellectual fact; it is a vital fact, an attitude consequent on an inner biological transformation, which, cannot be captured in the net of logical categories" (Iqbal:1960:145). While reading, Iqbal one gets the general impression that his attitude towards mysticism was ambivalent. At one

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time times he seems to be a devotee of mysticism— regarding it as the sole way out of that desperate spiritual state but at other times he seems to condemn mysticism and the mystic institutions. We have to find out exactly what he admires or attach value to in the mystic doctrines and what he consistently condemns.

Iqbal had a deep understanding of Western thought, and yet he was a student of Islamic philosophy and mysticism. His poetry drew on the ideas of Sadru'ddin Shirazi (**Mulla Sadra, d. 1641**) and Jalalu'ddin Rumi (d. 1273). For Iqbal, mystic consciousness enables the self to interpret at a higher plane and is as valid as others methods of interpretation. He delineates the characteristics of the mystic experience and contends that there are intellectual and pragmatic tests to verify the knowledge gained through that experience”(**Iqbal:1960:21**). He says, “By the intellectual test I mean critical interpretation, without any presuppositions of human experience, generally with a view to discover whether our interpretation leads us ultimately to a reality of the same character as is revealed by religious experience. The pragmatic test judges it by its fruits. The former is applied by the philosopher, the latter by the prophet”(**Iqbal:1960:21-22**).

Iqbal says the epistemology, which holds “religious experience” as a source of knowledge, is in this referred to as the *Sufi* theory of knowledge. He devotes two lectures of the Reconstruction to an enthusiastic protection of *Sufi* theory of knowledge, which are at the commencement of the sequence; occupy prominent position in the book. The epistemology of Iqbal is in fact of the Qur'an, which makes full allowance for all kinds of experience, such as sense perception, reason, intuition (love), Prophetic revelation – all these sources are various means to acquire knowledge (**Anwar:1996:56**). The whole work of Iqbal is replete with three words corresponding to one and the same meaning. They are love, intuition and religious experience; some time these words are replaced “ego” pivot or key concept of his scientific-metaphysical philosophy (**Anwar:1996:75**).

For Iqbal “knowledge” is not a deterministic or limited concept, which would have had only one or two sources. He regards knowledge as a great boon. He starts from sense perception, passes through intellect, arrives at his destination, love. Thus his theory of knowledge can be categorized in term of knowledge as sense perception, reason, and love. This last word he understands in its broad sense of religious experience, intuition, and prophetic revelation

(Anwar:1996:56). Iqbal presents a plea for strengthening of the human personality, declaring

When the self is made strong by Love
Its power rules the whole world (Iqbal:1955:43)

The true form of mysticism, as represented by some of the great *Sufis*, was a wholesome revolt against dry-as-dust subtleties of theologians. It strove to emphasize the place of emotion in religion and thus saved the religious practices from falling into mere meaningless formalities (Dar:1971:236). Iqbal says in the Development of Metaphysics in Persia:

This extraordinary vitality of the *Sufi* restatement of Islam, however, is explained when we reflect on the all-embracing structure of *Sufism*. The Semitic formula of salvation can be briefly stated in the words, "Transform your will" - which signifies that the Semite looks upon will as the essence of the human soul. The Indian Vedantist, on the other hand, teaches that all pain is due to our mistaken attitude towards the Universe. He, therefore, commands us to transform our understanding implying thereby that the essential nature of man consists in thought, not activity or will. But the *Sufi* holds that the mere transformation of will or understanding will not bring peace; we should bring about the transformation of both by a complete transformation of feeling, of which will and understanding are only specialized forms. His message to the individual is - "Love all, and forget your own individuality in doing good to Says Rumi: "To win other people's hearts is the greatest pilgrimage; and one heart is worth more than a thousand Ka`bahs. Ka`bah is a mere cottage of Abraham; but the heart is the very home of God." But this formula demands a why and a how - a metaphysical justification of the ideal in order to satisfy the understanding; and rules of action in order to guide the will (Iqbal:1908:88).

Iqbal defines various aspects of *Sufi* Metaphysics in his book "The development of Metaphysics in Persia". He says a careful investigation of *Sufi* literature shows that *Sufism* has looked at the Ultimate Reality from three standpoints, which, in fact, do not exclude but complement each other. Some *Sufis* conceive the essential nature of reality as self-conscious will, others beauty, others again hold that Reality is essentially Thought, Light or Knowledge (Iqbal:1908:88). There are, therefore, three aspects of *Sufi* thought:

- A. Reality as Self-conscious Will
- B. Reality as Beauty
- C. Reality as Light or Thought (Iqbal:1908:87-94).

Iqbal tried to solve the problem of reason in his latter life but he did not succeed in it, as he clearly expresses in one of his writing: "I am solving the problems concerning reason in vain" (Anwar:1996:56). He never gave a separate importance to reason because it is based in phenomenal knowledge. In his rejection of mind as a guide of life and his acceptance of Love in the same role Iqbal shows himself a true follower of the mystic path (*tariqah*). The basic conflict between the two, symbolizing God and the Satan, has been so repeatedly pointed out in Iqbal's poetry that every aspect of life seems to finally resolved into a pattern that is made of the contrast between light and darkness, and the end of life seems to be its emergence from the shadows into the dazzling light of love. Here is the influence of Rumi seems to have been the deepest on Iqbal, which is also shown by his use of Rumi's metre pretty often, and quite frequently by the unconscious imitation of his rhythmic effect (Rahman:1973:218).

Iqbal did not deny the fact that reason as dynamic force has elevated man from his animal status to the "human being" status (Anwar: 1996:133). Iqbal further says, unaided reason is untrustworthy; it must always be supplemented by "*Dhauq*"—the mysterious perception of the essence of things which brings knowledge and peace to the restless soul and disarms Scepticism for ever. (Iqbal:1908:98) It is, then, by the union of knowledge and virtue that the soul frees itself from the world of darkness. As we know more and more of the nature of things, we are brought closer and closer to the world of light; and the love of that world becomes more and more intense. The stages of spiritual development are infinite, since the degrees of love are infinite (Iqbal:1908:112-113). The principal stages, however, are as follows:

(1) The stage of "I ". In this stage feeling of personality is most predominant, and the spring of human action is generally selfishness.

(2) The stage of "*Thou art not* complete absorption in one's own deep self to the entire forgetfulness of everything external.

(3) The stage of "*I am not*". This stage is the necessary result of the second.

(4) The stage of "*Thou art*" The absolute negation of "I", and the affirmation of "Thou", which means complete resignation to the will of God.

(5) The stage of "*I am not; and Thou art not*" The complete negation of both the terms of thought- the state of cosmic consciousness (Iqbal:1908:113).

Iqbal defined the three stages of the development of Pure Being. He holds that the Absolute existence or Pure Being, when it leaves its absoluteness undergoes three stages:-

- (1) Oneness.
- (2) He-ness.
- (3) I-ness (**Iqbal:1908:118**).

In the first stage there is an absence of all attributes and relations, yet it is called one, and, therefore, oneness marks one step away from the absoluteness. In the second stage Pure Being is set free from all manifestation, while the third stage, I-ness, is nothing but an external manifestation of the He-ness; or, as Hegel would say, it is the self-diremption of God. This third stage is the sphere of the name Allah; here the darkness of Pure Being is illuminated, nature comes to the front, the Absolute Being has become conscious. He says further that the name Allah is the stuff of all the perfections of the different phases of Divinity, and in the second stage of the progress of Pure Being, all that is the result of Divine self-diremption was potentially contained within the titanic grasp of this name which, in the third stage of the development, objectified itself, became a mirror in which God reflected Himself, and thus by its crystallisation dispelled all the gloom of the Absolute Being (**Iqbal:1908:118-119**).

Iqbal then defines in correspondence with these three stages of the absolute development; the perfect man has three stages of spiritual training. But in his case the process of development must be the reverse, because his is the process of ascent, while the Absolute Being had undergone essentially a process of descent. In the first stage of his spiritual progress he meditates on the name, studies nature on which it is sealed; in the second stage he steps into the sphere of the Attribute, and in the third stage enters the sphere of the Essence. It is here that he becomes the Perfect Man; his eye becomes the eye of God, his word the word of God and his life the life of God - participates in the general life of Nature and "sees into the life of things" (**Iqbal:1908:119**). In order to secure a complete vision of Reality, sense perception must be supplemented by 'direct association with Reality as it reveals itself within' by the perception of what the Qur'an describes as '*Fuad*' or *Qalb* (heart) (**Khan:1977:38**). Iqbal elaborates:

The 'heart' is a kind of inner intuition or insight, which, in the beautiful words of Rumi, feeds on the rays of the sun and brings us into contact with aspects of Reality other than those open to sense perception. It is, according to the Qur'an, something, which 'sees', and its reports, if properly interpreted, never false. We must not, however, regard it as a mysterious special faculty; it is rather a mode of dealing with Reality in which sensation, in the physiological sense of the word, does not play any part. Yet the vista of experience thus opened to us is as real and concrete as any other experience (**Iqbal:1960:13**).

It is claimed that religious experience is immediate, un-analyzable, transcending, intimate association with a unique, other Self, encompassing, and momentarily suppressing the private personality of the subject of experience. It resembles normal experience in so far as the state of religious experience soon fades away leaving behind a self enriched by a deep sense of authority (Khan, 1977, 39). Every man can become mystic or *Sufi*; still we should not forget that according to Iqbal these people are not perfect as the standard of Prophet Muhammad. This means that no body can become perfect, that everybody will be below the degree of perfect manhood (**Anwar:1996:212**). The ideal strengthened individual self is portrayed in the person of Prophet Muhammad, the model of his community, 'the soul of this society'. Such is the perfect man whom all Muslims should seek to emulate 'by the might of Love' and so become, in their turn, God's vicegerents (**Sirriyeh:1999:128**).

In *Jawid-nama* Iqbal says in honour of Prophet that Hallaj teaches Iqbal the secrets of Prophet-hood in the Heaven of Jupiter. In these verses it was clearly expressed the spiritual and mystical personality of Prophet Muhammad. That he has chosen Hallaj as interpreter of his idea is due to the fact that this mystic had made the first substantial contribution to the Muhammad-mysticism and some formulae of Iqbalian poems may be translated due to inspiration by Hallaj's *Tasin al-Siraj*. (**Rahman:1963:118**)

'His Slave' is higher than thy understanding,
Since he is both man and essence.
His essence is neither Arabic nor Persian,
He is man, and previous to Adam.
'His Slave' is painter of destinations,
In him is the repair of ruins.... (**Rahman:1963:119**)

According to Iqbal "the rise and growth of ascetic Sufism, which developed under the influence of non-Islamic character is to a large extent responsible for the downfall and stagnant view of Islam" (**Iqbal:1960:119**). Iqbal is anxious to place the conception of ego within the framework of true Islamic mysticism and to overthrow the inheritance of false mysticism: In condemning self-negation I am condemning those forms of conduct which lead to the extinction of the "I" as a metaphysical force, for its extinction would mean its dissolution, its incapacity for personal immortality. The ideal of Islamic Mysticism according to my understanding is not the extinction of the "I". The *fana* in the Islamic mysticism means not extinction but complete surrender of the human ego to the Divine Ego. The ideal of Islamic mysticism is a stage beyond the stage of *fana* i.e. *baqa* which from my point of view is the highest stage of self-affirmation (**Iqbal:1964:244**).

In poetry Iqbal says, "If a devotee is free, his spiritual stations are self-restraint, self-respect and a shout of joy that "I am the creative truth". But if he is subjugated and enslaved, his pantheism shows that he is dead, he himself is a grave, and also a sudden death" (Iqbal:1990:152). He writes in harshly anti-*Sufis* tones of the dangers to Islam from 'a false Mysticism born of the heart and brain of Persia!', attacking it as symptomatic of current Muslim decadence (Iqbal:1964:80-83). It is for the same inherent dangers in *Sufism* as perceived in the modern age and time, which Iqbal speaks against self-satisfying fatalist mystic intoxications. For the same reason, he blamed the modern inaction of the young Muslims on the passive outlook of life preached in different ways by the mystic (McDonough:2002:87). Iqbal says:

The present-day Muslim prefers to roam about aimlessly in the dusky valleys of Hellenic-Persian Mysticism which teaches us to shut our eyes to hard Reality around, and to fix our gaze on what it describes as "Illuminations" –blue, red, and yellow reality springing up from the cells of an overworked brain (Iqbal:1964:80).

Iqbal frustration with his contemporaries is evident, as he lashes out against obscurantism and declares that there is nothing esoteric in the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad. He associates the greatness of early Islam to its readiness to observe a God-given system of law. Now the majority of Muslims were enslaved and supposedly cut off from enlightenment, forming a lower class and the *Sufi* shaykhs constituting a spiritual aristocracy, the whole system being quite alien to original Islam. He says:

On its purely religious side *Sufism* fostered a kind of revolt against the verbal quibbles of our early doctors. The case of Sufyan Thauri is an instance in point. He was one of the acutest legal minds of his time, and was nearly the founder of a school of law, but being also intensely spiritual, the dry-as-dust subtleties of contemporary legists drove him to ascetic *Sufism*. On its speculative side, which developed later, *Sufism* is a form of free thought and in alliance with Rationalism. The emphasis that it laid on the distinction of *zahir* and *batin* (Appearance and Reality) created an attitude of indifference to all that applies to Appearance and not to Reality.

This spirit of total other-worldliness in later *Sufism* obscured men's vision of a very important aspect of Islam as a social polity, and, offering the prospect of unrestrained thought on its speculative side, it attracted and finally absorbed the best minds in Islam. The Muslim state was thus left generally in the hands of intellectual mediocrities, and the unthinking masses of Islam, having no

personalities of a higher caliber to guide them, found their security only in blindly following the schools (Iqbal:1960:119-20).

• The nerve-racking attack on *Sufism* for the guidance of Muslims youth contrasts distinctly with Iqbal Philosophical writing, whether in poetry or prose, and its much more complex approach to the merits and demerits of *Sufism*. Addressing Muslim youth, Iqbal calls on them to return to the beginnings and cast off the *Sufi* noose from their necks:

The regeneration of Muslim world lies in the strong uncompromising, ethical Monotheism which was preached to the Arabs thirteen hundred years ago. Come, then, out of the fogs of Persianism and walk into the brilliant desert-sunshine of Arabia (Iqbal:1964:83)

It can be concluded that Iqbal's theory of knowledge which accepts 'religious experience' as a source of knowledge, is here referred to as the *Sufi* epistemology. For Iqbal, mystic consciousness enables the self to interpret at a higher plane and is as valid as others methods of interpretation. In mystic experience, the heart work as a medium for the acquisition of knowledge. The task of heart is mostly referred as religious experience. The mystical aspect is the most significant aspect of Iqbal's philosophy. The ultimate goal and object of mysticism is to achieve the highest perfection possible for man. Iqbal describe the positive role of mysticism and as way to reach the Ultimate Reality. He also describes the negative impact of mysticism on community such as, pacifist or non-activist attitude known as other-worldliness and predestinarianism, instead of preparing Muslims for active participation in life, it has taught the negation and passivity in life. It's the decline of life and nation to shut one's ears and eyes to the material world and to emphasize only the inward perception is a sign of stagnation and deterioration. Any philosophy or religious teaching that prevents the blossoming and maturing of the human personality is insignificant and worthless. With regard to mysticism, Iqbal states;

The more genuine schools of *Sufism* have, no doubt, done good work in shaping and directing the evolution of religious experience in Islam; but their latter-day representatives, owing to their ignorance of modern mind, have become absolutely incapable of receiving any inspiration from modern thought and experience. They are perpetuating methods which are created for generations possessing a cultural outlook differing, in important respect, from our own (Iqbal:1960:v).

This summarizes Iqbal's overall view, that mysticism had its genuine exponents in the early period, but the mystics of his own time are hopelessly out of touch with modern ideas to the point that can be of no assistance to the new generations. Such a view enables him to select facets of certain past mystics for admiration, while casting mystic developments which do not provide suitable role models for modern humanity.

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