

PHYSICAL WORLD AND THE PRINCIPLE OF COSMIC DYNAMICS

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We very well know that the most striking feature of Iqbal's philosophy is its emphasis on the dynamic character of everything around us. The principle of this change and dynamism is '*Ishq*'. For Iqbal, '*Ishq*' is the very soul of existence. It can be safely gathered from Iqbal's verses that '*Ishq*' is the principle of Cosmic Dynamics. Iqbal is quite emphatic on this point. For him every movement, constructive change, and all cases of development are manifestations of '*Ishq*'. Instances of this can be found in the spiritual as well as in the natural world.

Ishq demands breaking through every barrier that comes in one's way and in eternally striving after the Ideal. '*Ishq*' is opposed to the categories of reason and discursive thought. Reason and discursive thought aim at clarity and fixity at the expense of totality, unity and activity. Discursive thought never goes beyond analytic understanding.. It is finite and its categories are fixed. When these categories are applied to objects and things, they also become fixed and lifeless. The principle of Cosmic Dynamics is opposed to it and tries to break asunder the rigidity to which the discursive thought has reduced everything. Thus '*Ishq*' is the indwelling tendency for outward action by which the rigidity, fixity and lifelessness of rational categories are broken and reason is set to move along the road to continuous development. Because of this vital force reason moves, evolves, and develops. This movement is not found in thought alone, it is inherent also in its objective counterpart: *nature*.

Whatever is there in the world is finite. It is not stable and permanent but changeable and transient. Whatever appears as stable and 'fixed' is in the process of change and development. The whole world we live in is, thus, dynamic.

Now the question is 'What does it mean to say that the world is in a state of Change' ?

We can interpret this assertion in two ways. Either at every moment of history, a new thing is coming into being and going away. Once it has come into being it will or it will not, it may or may not, live another moment. Say, a thing 'X' came into being at time T_i then it is possible that it may live till time T_2 or till time T_n remaining the same all the time. Or X which came into being at time T_i 'remained' X till time T_n but at every phase of the movement from T_i to T_n it underwent a series of changes.

Thus:..... at time T_1 X.

" " T_2 X_1 .

„ T_3 X_2 .

" " T_n X_n .

Now, I think, it is precisely this second alternative which is acceptable to Iqbal. He regards the Cosmic Dynamics as involving each and every thing, and taking it to the higher planes of existence. It is besides the point to ask whether this whole process is teleological or mechanistic. This is also pretty irrelevant to talk about the nature of these higher planes of existence. Whether there are such realms of higher existence is a question I am not competent to answer. Possibly there are. But if there are and to which every thing is striving for, what do they imply? What does the whole talk amount to?

In the first place, it suggests us to view every existent as something in a process of change, as something moving and evolving, as something bursting out of itself with all its fury and energy — but not undirected —, as something not at rest any way. This simply means that the world of chairs and tables, of trees and rivers, of beasts and birds, of men and women, is not a dead slice of history. Every bit and chip of this dear old world is to be

regarded as a moving lava, as energy manifesting itself in new forms. Thus to talk about chairs and tables is in fact to talk about 'events' or about 'processes' or about 'energies'. These, so to say, are not things but *energies* or *events*.

But, I think, Iqbal would not have liked to use the word 'event' in this context. As we understand, things are 'energies' pure and simple. Words cannot do justice to their dynamic character. Not even the word 'event'. For, what is an event but an arrested movement? But can movement be thus arrested? Certainly not. To do this is to apply the categories of reason and consequently falsify the real nature of things. The nature of things, we are told, is perpetual change and movement. The world of physical and material objects is, consequently, not a world of objects and things but of 'energies' or 'processes'.

Now the question is, Did Iqbal want to deny that there are things in the world? By "things" we mean all these colourful objects which populate our world. All these tables and chairs, and flowers and buds, and many more things which inhabit the world. Did Iqbal deny all these beautiful things? Did he want to say that chairs and tables do not exist? If Iqbal denied the existence of these things, then our propositions about them would be false like our proposition about non-existent things, asserting their existence. Thus the proposition: 'The cat is sitting on the mat' will be as false (even though the cat *is* sitting on the mat) as the proposition 'Gandhi is the King of Russia' or 'I have a dinner date with an Unicorn in the Taj to-day.'

But then, did Iqbal deny the reality of the physical object? Does it mean to say that Iqbal wanted to follow in the footsteps of the Irish Bishop who wanted to clear the world of material objects? Of course not! Iqbal did not belong to those tender-hearted philosophers who could not leave the fire burning 'alone' in the other room lest it may vanish. Not only that Iqbal believed in the existence of material objects but he criticised the attempts at depopulating the world of physical and material objects. He criticised

Socrates and his able pupil Plato for taking refuge in the world of Ideas. Iqbal was quite confident that there is a lot to be learnt from the Sun and the Stars, from Rocks and Rivers. Nay, even the least important of things has a message for those who care to look and see. The world which we see, smell and touch does exist. It is not an illusion. The mistake we commit is while we believe that 'things' exist what really exist are not things but 'energies' or 'processes'. The illusion is that we regard these 'processes' as inert things.

Now let us see what all this amounts to: firstly, it tells us that the propositions, "The cat is sitting on the mat", and, "The Taj is white" should not be accepted at their face value. Either (i) they are false or (ii) they assert partially and not completely what they are supposed to assert — only that they are not suited to describe what they are describing and should now be replaced by some other mode of description.

Secondly, it suggests that people wrongly 'believe' that physical things are dead and inert but, if they 'knew' they would have found that they were living — they were processes.

Now we have seen that the propositions about physical objects are not false in the sense that they do not assert the existence of nonexistent things. 'Things' do exist. What we have now to discuss is (i) whether natural language is inadequate to describe the physical world — and, whether we should coin a new language, and (ii) do people '*believe*' that things exist and do not '*know*' that they (things) exist?

I will take up the second point first. Let us look at these two statements:

1. 'Common-sense *believes* that the earth is flat' and 'common-sense does not *know* that the earth is round'; 'The common-sense *believes* that the earth is flat but the geographer very well *knows* that it is round'.
2. 'People believe that Comet III is a jet aircraft but the physicist knows that it is a bundle of electrical energy.'

In the first statement what the common-sense believes is not something false which ought to be corrected or contradicted by the geographer. In fact

when a farmer goes out in the field and throwing his hands out he exclaims, "There, that flat stretch of land, that is mine" he is not saying something completely nonsense or something which ought to be corrected by a scientist.

The farmer very well *knows* what he is saying and the listener correctly understands what he is being told. The earth is flat as far as it goes. What is incorrect is the deductions which the farmer draws from his observation. But as far as the second statement is concerned it does not involve any deduction. The man who believes that Comet III is a jet aircraft does not *merely* believe what is the case but knows that such is the case. He *knows* that Comet III is a jet aircraft the way he knows: 'this is my right hand and this is my left hand', when he uses his hands at the supper table. It would be perfectly ridiculous if somebody came up and told the poor man that he had a pair of 'energies' hanging along his right and left shoulders. And certainly Iqbal never thought of anything so simple.

What Iqbal believed and what the commonsense believes is this: when anybody says, "This is a book", or "This is a locomotive," or "This is Comet III", he is using these words correctly and not ambiguously or incorrectly. He knows and does not merely believe that when he pointed to his right hand and said, "This is my right hand", he was using these words very correctly. He also knows that it would have been silly to say, "This is a store of atomic particles" or "This is a bundle of energy". The man also knows that it is incorrect to use words like 'processes' or 'energies' for human hands, or for locomotives, or for books. And isn't it just that to know at all, *i.e.*, being disposed to use certain words correctly?

This brings us to our second point, *viz.*, do we have to coin a new language? We have seen that the commonsense *knows* that things exist and when he says "Things exist" (This is my right hand and pointing towards it) he knows perfectly well that he is using these words correctly. Commonsense does not need a new

language.

If we did coin a new language, it would be an entirely unilluminating re-wording or re-writing of names and definitions. But we know that these new linguistic conventions will not give any new information about the physical world. It would be just a new language like my writing this article in Banto Language rather than in English. Now finally if we do not need a new language to understand Iqbal and if all that Iqbal has said could be understood in a natural language, why is Iqbal said to be saying something paradoxical?

On my part Iqbal did not say anything paradoxical. The difficulty arises when the simple sentence "Everything is involved in the Cosmic Dynamics" is taken as a factual, empirical statement. It is not a factual statement which can be verified or falsified by empirical experience. In fact, Iqbal wanted to give a philosophy and a 'methodology of Science'. The corner-stone of his scientific philosophy is 'Cosmic Dynamics' or *Isbq*. This principle is a prescription which can guide a scientist or a social philosopher in his search for truth and at possible explanation of facts of experience. But in itself it is not an empirical statement.