

IQBAL'S ATTEMPTS AT CREATIVE SYNTHESIS

Khalifa Abdul Hakim

During the last decades of his life and increasingly as with the lapse of years after his death Iqbal captured the imagination of large masses of humanity even beyond his own section to which his message was primarily addressed.

The poets hailed him as a great genius, the thinkers were stirred to think new thoughts with a fresh reorientation, the preacher in the pulpit warmed himself and his hearers by punctuating his sermons with verses culled from his poems, the politician used his verses to convince the prospective voters of the truth of his assertions and promises, the socialist quoted him as a socialist, the free thinker appreciated him as one who had broken the shackles of reactionary conservatism, and the conservative honoured him as a preserver of traditional ways of life. There is hardly any group that has shown any open hostility to him. Surely this is a strange phenomenon that needs a very close analysis and a comprehensive survey.

St. Paul said about himself that in the propagation of his faith and to bring it home to all types of men he had been 'all things to all men'. If an opportunist politician were to make that kind of admission or confession he would be taken to be a person who prefers expediency to principles but nobody would accuse St. Paul of being an opportunist, for he had developed a stable nucleus of faith which he would not barter for any material or immediate advantage.

Take another example from the teachings and life attitudes of Jalaluddin Rumi who is held in no lesser esteem than St. Paul in

the richness of his spiritual experience and in the breadth and depth of his religious teaching. Different Muslim religious sects, all claim him as a matchless expositor of Islam at its best. The traditional and conservative preacher chants his verses, the mystic dips his bucket in the esoteric well of his ineffable religious experience, the philosopher of religion looks up to him both for the ideals of faith and the dialectical presentation of his arguments.

TO ALL AND TO NONE

Iqbal, deeply versed in the philosophies of all epochs and all creeds, chose him as a guide to conduct him through the realms of Eternity to elucidate for him the mysteries of human life and the destiny of Man. Who can doubt that he has been one of the greatest Muslims and his *Mathnawi* would continue to be an eternal book of reference for all those who desire to strengthen their faith in the spiritual background of Reality. But if, you were to enquire from Rumi as to what creed he belongs, his answer would be 'to all and to none'. It is related in his biography that the orthodoxy of his times was suspicious about his faith because he would subscribe to no dogmas and would attach himself to no sect. The Sheikh-ul-Islam was annoyed with him and made an attempt to expose and debunk him sending a dialectician to him well-equipped with the weapons of debate. The controversialist had mentally rehearsed that to whatever sect he confesses his adherence, he would counter him by specific arguments. The controversialist, at the very outset, asked him, "Sir, may I know to what sect, out of the 'seventy-two', you owe allegiance so that we start the debate on that basis," but he received a curious answer for which he was not at all prepared. Rumi said that he agreed with all the seventy-two. At this even the acute dialectician was

non-plussed because he had thought of no refutation for such an unexpected assertion. Getting irritated the man said, "That proves without doubt that you are an Atheist". Rumi replied that he agreed even with that and the debate ended abruptly. In one of his famous lyrics he cries in despair, saying 'O Muslims what shall I do: I cannot put any label on myself ; I am neither a Magian nor a Jew nor what you would consider to be a Muslim. Nor do I feel any racial or national affinities: I belong neither to the East nor to the West. If you insist on asking me about my creed I must tell you I am a lover of Love in all its universality and the Creed of Love transcends all other creeds.' On a level different from Rumi you could find the same perplexing dilemma about Shakespeare, who, according to the tribute paid to him by Iqbal, was a Mirror of Reality in which Truth reflects Beauty and Beauty reflects Truth. No one has ever been successful in finding out the creed of Shakespeare from his fifty plays in which all types of humanity pass before you in a fascinating and endless procession. Goethe, the paragon of not only German but European culture, confessed that he was devoid of the sentiments of nationalism or patriotism. The Get. anted him to express venomous hatred of the French but even Germany was crushed under the heels of Napoleon he sat quietly him in his theatre in Weimer. both the geniuses admiring each other. No great genius has ever submitted to be stretched on the Procrustean bed of narrow creeds: great minds refuse to put on strait jackets labels everywhere on the sources of libels.

Let me look at Iqbal now from this view point. Why do we find so much in Iqbal that appears on the surface to be contradictory? There are two reasons for such a variety in his thoughts and sentiments. The first reason is that his was not a static and stereotyped mind which imbibes certain doctrines from his parents or his communal or social environment at a very early

stage and these borrowed beliefs sink into the abysses of the subconscious mind and become inaccessible to conscious reason ever afterwards except through extraordinary upheavals or psycho-analytical probings. As a poet with great sensitivity he reacted to the influences that emanated from the environment or from his early education. No man, however great, can rise entirely above his environment, and as Goethe has put very aptly, a person's life is determined to a considerable extent by the door through which he enters life. You find in Iqbal's early poems intense patriotism: he exhorts his countrymen to rise above the wrangling of creeds and to worship at the Temple of Patriotism dislodging old gods who have become effete and superannuated and instal new ones in their stead. He says at this stage that every atom of the land we live in is to him a God to which we owe loyalty and devotion. His patriotic poems were recited with great fervour by Hindus as well as Muslims. It is a curious phenomenon that the anthem of 'Hindustan Hamara' was sung in chorus at midnight in the hall where Bharat was celebrating its independence, forgetting that it was the song composed by the ideological founder of Pakistan which according to the Hindus had vivisected India. You will also find traces of Pantheistic Sufism in his early poems. There are also poems of youthful love or exuberance. This is the same Iqbal who later on vehemently denounced territorial patriotism or nationalism as the worst type of idolatory. The simple explanation is the evolution of the poet who continued extending the frontiers of his knowledge and emotions---a gradual process of universalisation and almost cosmic expansion.

The Holy Quran in a beautiful simile about the nature of God says that the Light that is God is neither Eastern nor Western. We have already quoted Rumi saying about himself that he belongs neither to the East nor to the West. Could we not say the same about Iqbal! He is never weary of denouncing the materialistic

outlook of the and the God-forsakenness of its economics and politics which is result of the severance of its life from Spiritual Roots. Getting dogmatic wranglings and cruelties perpetrated during the religion for almost two centuries Europe decided to secularise its en throwing away the baby along with the bath water. But he w blind to the achievements of the Western scientific and technology civilisation that had eliminated so much of disease and squalor soul-scaring poverty from which the East proud of its vaunted religiosity instill: suffering.

People quote him very often when they feel impelled to den Western imperialism and what they consider to be sheer materialism they forget what he thought of the East. He considered the East to spiritually as well as materially dead. And what about the Muslims? was pained to say that their spiritual and religious leaders, the *mullas* and the *sufis*, are worshippers of the forms which have been deserted by the ' Spirit, they are clearing the husks and shells in there is no kernel, like dogs they are fighting about the bones that depleted of any marrow. About his contemporary Muslims he that they are a heap of ashes left after the fire of Creative Love extinguished. But denunciations only are nothing very positive constructive. He is convinced that buried deep down in the ashes the East there exist still live embers which can generate flames if the Spirit of Life blows on them. He denounces the East denounces the West but aims at a synthesis of the best in both. In the terminology of Hegel, from the Thesis and Antithesis there is v' sing a grand synthesis which would preserve the abiding vat both and create a new Adam. The achievements of Western ralism and Reorientation must be infused and informed by a Sp' view of Life.

SYNTHESIS OF REASON AND INTUITION

Iqbal is a rationalist and a mystic at the same time. He tried to achieve in his own ego a synthesis of Intuition and Reason. Mystics in the effort to dive in their own psyche had a tendency to deny and mentally annihilate physical Nature, reducing the entire Cosmos to a phantasmagoria of shadows. With respect to physical Nature they preached and practised not fight but flight. Nietzsche, the atheistic prophet of the Superman, in his lucid moment had many a flash of truth. He said, there is only one sound basis on which all religions could be classified, a religion either says Yes to Life or says No to it. He wanted *Weltbejahende* and not a *Weltebenemende* religion. Those who say Yes to Life are ready to meet its every challenge; they are ready to take the bitter with the sweet. But Nietzsche himself fell short of a total life-affirming acceptance of all Reality. Moving in the tone of Darwinian Evolution, his Superman turned out to be only a super-animal. The self in the self-realisation that Iqbal preaches is not a physical or biological entity: its aim is not Power for the sake of Power but the increasing power of Love. Iqbal, like Rumi, was a Creative Evolutionist. Rumi was much ahead of Bergson in his outlook although the philosophic genius of Bergson made this view more acceptable to modern philosophic and scientific thinking. Iqbal, although he is indebted a great deal to Bergson so far as the philosophic presentation and proof is concerned, was equally ahead of Bergson in drawing conclusions which Bergson hesitated to draw until the last decade of his life. Many years after Iqbal and centuries after Rumi he substantiated his thesis in his last book the *'Two Sources of Morality and Religion'*, that the Creative Force, the Intuition, and the Creative Cosmic Urge are only other words for Creative and Universal Love which is the Source as well as the Goal of Life, and which is found at its best in the souls of saints and prophets for whom religion and morality are not parochial or tribal.

How Iqbal could synthesise the apparent opposites can be illustrated by taking his thoughts, not in their isolation but in their final integration. His first long philosophical poem was *Asrar-i-Khudi* (*The Secretsof the Self*) in which you find a strong plea for self assertion. No spiritually-minded poet or philosopher had ever before pleaded the cause of self-assertion so vehemently. The very word *Khudi* was identified with diabolical pride. Iqbal gave a new meaning to it, transforming it into self-realisation through the assertion of the self over against all that is non-self.

Nietzsche had preached the self-assertion of the Superman who should be devoid of all that we had hitherto considered to be love. There is good deal of what may be turned satanic in the make-up of his superman. We feel reverberations of Nietzsche in Iqbal's *Secrets of the Self* thereby he invited a good deal of adverse criticism from religious as well as philosophical quarters. People (lid not know that he was putting forth this strong advocacy of a teaching which looked heretical because he thought that the slumbering and self-negating East needed a strong dose. They were also unaware that the antithesis, the 'Secret of self-abnegation', *Ramuz-i-bekhudi*' was to follow soon after, in he has preached how the human individual ego widens its consciousness and its power by continuously merging itself in wider and wider ideals. This might be taken as a commentary on what Jesus said that. those who lost their life shall gain It. Similarly his *Shikw'a* (*Complaining to God*) has to be read in conjunction with the reply of God to that unfounded complaint.

With respect to his attempts at religious revival and renaissnce, it may be asked, was he harking back to the period of the Advent of Islam or did he aim at a total reconstruction of forms and institutions, so, that life may be fruitfully adapted to the present and move forward to a more vital future. To answer this question one must never forget that he was essentially a

Creative Evolutionist for whom Life in its Creative Urge cracks new realities at every step and demolishes forms and institutions which have outlived their use-fulness; to try to continue them is to drag on a heavy chain of antiquity which hampers the forward movement of life. In the words of Tennyson: 'Old order changeth yielding place to new ; as God fulfils Himself in many ways lest one good custom should corrupt the world'. For Iqbal, Islam and its fundamental trends are evolutionary ; it is only the decadence of the hide-bound and fossilized followers that makes it stagnant. For him the spirit of Islam is eternal but the superstructure of life as well as thought must be reworded which cannot be done without effacing time-honoured trends and prejudices.

THE-DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

Did he plead for democracy or did he stand for dictatorship? Again you could find him saying one thing in one place and quite the opposite in another place. Was he guilty of a glaring contradiction? The answer is 'no'. Before his vision was the Prophet of Islam and 'residents' of the first genuinely Islamic Democratic re-public? The Prophet was chosen not by the people who struggled to destroy him for more than a decade; he was elected by God, the Creator and Sustainer of human destiny. All great forward movements start not with the many but with the one, whom nobody understands in the beginning. When his Truth begins to triumph it is only then that first individuals and then whole nations flock to his banner. Did the Prophet of God become dictatorial; the answer is yes and no. About his God-granted revelation and vision he needed no majority vote to confirm its truth but as to the implementation of that vision he is exhorted by God himself not to rely always on his own judgment but act after consultation and his companions who were never

called his followers were also enjoined to settle all vital matters by consultation. In this democracy even an old hag had the right to stand up and contradict the 'President'. The right of vote was not limited by property or wealth or social status. All men of understanding and virtue were asked to participate and give advice. Iqbal wanted a similar kind of theo-democratic system in which the best of the Muslims is chosen as Head of the State. After you have chosen him you have to grant him wide powers, almost dictatorial in many respects, but the moment he transgresses the basic principles of Islam, you owe it to yourself and to him and to your Faith that he shall not be allowed to do so. As the Great Abu Bakr said in his short but pithy inaugural address, 'Follow me when I am on the right path and correct me when I am wrong.' Iqbal visualised democracy and dictatorship of this pattern, moulded in details by the exigencies of modern times.

Was he a socialist or did he uphold the right of unlimited ownership of land and wealth? He surely was a socialist of a very high order. He wanted to abolish big landlordism and would not tolerate a society in which virtueless ignoramuses become the rulers and legislators by dint of power and pelf. But he was at the same time a strong individualist and would not tolerate that type of socialism which starts with an atheistic and materialistic ideology and deprives the individual of all freedom of thought, expression and action. There was much that he appreciated in the Russian experiment but he was convinced that the real self of man, emanating from God and moving towards God in freedom of the Spirit, is thereby annihilated.

He was a great integrated vision. In every movement and in every ideology he appreciated what according to him would advance the dignity of Man and spurn all that he considered to be life-negating. He was a poet of Life and Love which possess the alchemy of transmitting everything into their own essence. He is

to be studied not in fragments but as a whole which is as wide as
Life and Love.