

# IQBAL'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

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Epistemology or the theory of knowledge is an enquiry into the nature, conditions, origin, limits, and validity of human knowledge. It presupposes factual knowledge of the physical world arrived at by various sciences and tries by reflection upon it to determine its nature etc. It is thus not prior to science.

Broadly speaking, a theory which distrusts the capacity of reason to give us knowledge of reality and relies on some other source for it is called intuitionism. It is chiefly associated with the names of Henry Bergson and Iqbal. Bergson holds that our intellect or reason which work with its concepts is not fitted to reveal reality, as it is in itself.

If we wish to have an insight into the true nature of reality, we must get rid of this practical bias of our intellect and resort to intuition in its original purity. Intellect gives us an abstract and false account of reality. The following are the reasons why knowledge yielded by intellect is held to be unsound and inadequate.

(1) Intellect working with its concepts gives us an external view of things and cannot throw any light on its inner nature.

(2) The knowledge yielded by the intellect is relative. It is relative in a double sense. It is relative because it is based on classification, because it gives resemblances and dissimilarities between objects. It is also relative because it is determined by our selective interests and purpose. Intuitive knowledge is free from these objects ; here we know the object as it is in itself and know it directly and immediately.

(3) Intellectual knowledge is necessarily abstract and partial.

(4) Intellectual knowledge is static. Knowledge given by concepts fails to do justice to the living, growing and changing aspects of things. Concepts are unchanging, static and inert entities. Reality, on the other hand, is organic, it is living and developing.

(5) Lastly, knowledge yielded by our discursive intellect is analytical. Iqbal therefore says:

نشان راه ز عقل ہزار حیلہ مپرس

(پیام مشرق صفحہ ۱۹۴)

Do not seek guidance from the intellect which has a thousand wiles.

Come to love which encells by the singleness of its purpose.

A thorough study of Iqbal's system of philosophy will reveal that Iqbal cannot be classed under any of the three schools of philosophical thought: Empiricism rationalism or intuitionism. In his theory of knowledge sense perception, reason and intuition are all combined within an organic whole.

Rationalism as held by Iqbal is not based upon logical Categories or mere abstract representation. He says rationalism if not divorced from concrete reality represents the truth. Thus while Iqbal embraces rationalism, he is not prepared to justify it at the cost of sense-perception. He, consequently criticizes Socrates, Plato and the Mutazilites on account of their abstract thinking. He appreciates Kant's approach to the problem in so far as he tried to effect a compromise between rationalism and empiricism by maintaining that whereas the matter of knowledge comes from experience, its form is contributed by reason.

Locke and Kant came to the conclusion that the range of real knowledge is strictly limited. Kant held that our knowledge is limited to phenomena. Against this view of Kant, Iqbal holds that reality is knowable and one can know it through intuition, Iqbal vigorously maintains that reality is an organic whole. The visible world with its flux and shifting phenomena is organically related to the ultimate reality. Therefore for the purpose of knowing one cannot depend on purely contemplative circuit, ignoring the world of matter, because it is the mental phenomena of the concrete that makes it possible to pass beyond the concrete.<sup>5</sup>

Iqbal thus adumbrates neither reason nor sense perception exclusively. Sensation, according to him, being a chaotic jumble, cannot lead to reality. It is reason that imparts harmony to the chaotic jumble of sensations and moulds it to knowledge yielding patterns. Thus sensible reality is only a

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<sup>5</sup> Lectures, p. 131.

symbol of the ultimate reality and the empirical attitude would bring us into contact with it. Iqbal thus considers sense-perception of the first importance. No doubt, these are to be supplemented by the perception of heart. According to the Quran:

The Quran, recognizing that the empirical attitude is an in-dispensable stage in the spiritual life of humanity, attaches equal importance to all the regions of human experience as yielding knowledge of the ultimate Reality which reveals its symbols both within and without. One indirect way of establishing connexions with the reality that confronts us is reflective observation and control of its symbols as they reveal themselves to sense perception; the other way is direct association with that reality as it reveals itself within. The naturalism of the Quran is only a recognition of the fact that man is related to nature, and this relation, in view of its possibility as a means of controlling her forces, must be exploited in the interests, not of unrighteous desire for domination, but in the nobler interest of a free upward movement of spiritual life. In the interests of securing a complete vision of Reality, therefore, sense-perception must be supplemented by the perception of, what the Quran describes as "fuad", or "Qalb" i.e. heart."<sup>6</sup>

Thus knowledge according to Iqbal is a progressive ideal, starting from the knowledge provided by sense, perception and ending with the knowledge provided by the heart.

گزر جا عقل سے آگے کہ یہ نور      چراغِ راہ ہے، منزل نہیں ہے!

(بال جبریل، صفحہ ۱۱۹)

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<sup>6</sup> Lectures, p. 14,15.

علم را مقصود اگر باشد نظر می شود هم جاده و هم راهبر

علم تفسیر جهان رنگ و بو دیده و دل پرورش گیرد ازو

بر مقام جذب و شوق آرد ترا باز چوں جبریل بگذارد ترا

(جاوید نامه، صفحہ ۲۳۲)

عشق کس را کہ بخلوت می برد آوز چشم خویش غیرت می برد

اول اوهم رفیق و هم طریق آخر او راه رفتن بے رفیق

(جاوید نامه، صفحہ ۲۲۲)

If vision is the goal of intellect,

It becomes both the path and the guide;

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Intellect elucidates this world of smell and colour:

It nurtures the eye and the emotions;

It brings you to the stage of absorption and ecstasy;

And, then, Gabriel, leaves you alone:

Love never guides any one to solitude;

Its every perception of self acts as a screen;

In the early stage it yearns for fellow-Travellers;

Ultimately it means travelling all alone.

In fact it never ends, for the ultimate reality cannot be grasped in full by the self. Iqbal has conveyed the idea in the following couplet.

علم حق اول حواس آخر حضور  
آخر اُو می نگنجد در شعور

(جاوید نامہ، صفحہ ۲۳۸)

"The knowledge of truth is gained first through the senses and then through direct realization. The ultimate stage cannot be encompassed within consciousness."

Thus, intellect infused with intuition gives celestial and divine knowledge. Therefore an attempt is made throughout his poetry to maintain harmony between intellect and intuition. Intuition in itself to Iqbal was a kind of higher intellect. Man in the development of his self-hood has to equip himself from both the aspects of knowledge, one cannot be separated from the other.

عقلے کہ جہاں سوزد، یک جلوہ بے  
ب\_\_\_\_\_اکش  
از عشق بیاموزد، آئین جہاں تاب

(پیام مشرق، صفحہ ۱۵۶)

The Intellect, whose impetuous flame burns up the Universe, learns from Love the art of lighting up.

علم تا از عشق برخوردار نیست  
جز تماشا خانہ افکار نیست

(جاوید نامہ، ۱۰۴)

Till Intellect is blest by Love,

It is naught but a kaleidoscope of ideas.

عقل و دل و نگاہ کا مرشد اولین ہے  
عشق  
عشق نہ ہو تو شرح و دین بتکدہ  
تصورات

(بال جبریل، ۱۵۳)

Love is the perceptor of the Intellect and the Heart and the Vision.

If there is no Love, religion and its precepts.

Are nothing but an idol-house of vain imaginings.

It is in the synthesis of ilm\* and Ishq that one can realize the completeness of life.

Iqbal therefore maintains that knowledge is essential for the establishment of connection with external reality. It is not of much use to man if not employed for the purpose of advancement of his self; for if knowledge gained is not used in the development of the self, the self is bound to lose its richness and the spirit is sure to be hardened within itself.

علم از سامان حفظ زندگی است  
علم از اسباب تقویم خودی است  
علم و فن از پیش خیزان حیات  
علم و فن از خانه زادان حیات

(اسرار خودی، صفحه ۱۷-۱۸)

Science is an instrument for the preservation of life.

Science is a means of establishing the self.

Science and Art are servants of life.

Slaves are born and bred in its house.

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\* Note.– Knowledge is divided by Iqbal into two parts:

- a) Knowledge gained through sense preception is termed by Iqbal as Ilm.
- b) While knowledge achieved by heart or intuition (or love) is the real knowledge of the ultimate reality. Iqbal has made an attempt to maintain harmony between the two aspects of knowledge.

## INTELLECT AND INTUITION

Both Iqbal and Bergson are unanimous in holding that intuition unfolds to us new spheres of all illuminations. In contrast, the knowledge yielded by intellect is sectional, piecemeal and fragmentary because it is involved in the labyrinth of space and time. Thus knowledge through intuition is grounded in the deeper and higher self of man. It is incorporeal and eternal and leads directly to eternal reality. Knowledge through intuition means knowledge through the heart, wherein we have change but no succession, pure duration but no serial time.

می نداند عشق سال و ماه را  
دیگر و زود و نـزود و دور راه را  
عقل در کوپے شگافے می کند  
یا بگرد او طوافے می کند  
کوه پیش عشق چون کاپے بود  
دل سریع السیر چون ماپے بود  
عشق شـبخونے زدن برلا مکان  
گور را نا دیده رفتن کز جہان

(جاوید نامہ، صفحہ ۱۸)

Love knows not the months and the years,

Nor the slow or the quick, nor the nearness or the distance of path!

Intellect bores a hole through the mountain,

Or goes around it by circumlocution!

But, Love makes the mountain light like a blade of grass



And the heart quick moving like the moon!

What is Love? An attack on the Infinit!

Leaving the world without a glimpse of the grave.

Iqbal warns us that it should not be construed that intuition is antagonistic to intellect. Both aim at the knowledge of Reality and differ only in the course they adopt. The intellect grasps and views certain parts of Reality as abstracted from the whole. It gives only the temporal aspect of reality. Intuition reveals the reality in its wholeness and fulness. In *Zabur-e-Ajam* Iqbal visualises intuition as a double edged sword in man's hand with one edge he invades the ultimate reality, with the other he invades the universe.

Intuition is the higher form of intellect and in order to view reality as a whole it is necessary that we supplement intuition with intellect. Unless intellect is supplemented by intuition, the knowledge would become narrow, partial and lifeless.

It is thus evident from the above that knowledge as held by Iqbal is not merely the basis of his moral and ethical system, but the foundation stone of the whole life—seen and unseen, real and ideal.

But the important point which is to be taken note of is Iqbal's improvement of the genetic account of knowledge. A genetic approach to the problem of knowledge, e.g. a study of the conditions enables us to lay aside the historic rivalry between Rationalism and Empiricism and to perceive how reason and experience cooperate in building up the edifice of knowledge. Looking at the problem from the genetic point of view, we find that we have to start with a living organism or self and our environment to which it is related. The environment is full of stimuli which evoke varied responses from it. Every one of these responses is accompanied by some sort of awareness which we may call experience.

As the individual organism grows its experience also grows. This organised experience is what we call knowledge. According to this account, senses are not gateway to knowledge. They are rather the instruments with which the organism deals with the environment. Sensations are not part of knowledge but incitements to activities that terminate in knowledge. Knowledge is not the gift of any special faculty, *i.e.*, experience or reason. It

is the result of interaction between a self endowed with certain powers and the environment.

A serious drawback of genetic account of knowledge is that it only emphasises the practical character of knowledge and ignores the distinguished nature of mind and heart that we value. One cannot deny that Iqbal is sceptical of the value of academic knowledge which often saps the students of vitality and fails to equip him properly for life of active striving in the service of worthy causes.

من آن علم و فراست با پرکاهے نمی گیرم  
کہ از تیغ و سپر بیگانه سازد مرد عازی را

(زبور عجم، صفحہ ۱۴۸)

I hold that knowledge and intelligence to be cheap as takes away the crusader's sword and shield!

It is the active quest, the yearning for achievement which give vitality to knowledge and wings to life. Yet all knowledge is not practical, there is knowledge which is contemplative, reflective and intuitive. Iqbal being fully conscious of this very significantly remarks that intuition is the developed form of intellect. The significance of intuition has been the theme of his poetry. According to him, the higher aspects of knowledge, which should be the ultimate aim of man, is based on intuition. Iqbal is conscious of the fact that with the true yearning and correct striving of the self, inspite of insurmountable difficulties, the vision of such knowledge becomes reality:

وادی عشق بسے دور و دراز است ولے  
کہ از تیغ و سپر بیگانه سازد مرد عازی را

در طلب کوش و مدہ دامن امید زدست  
دولتے هست کہ یابی سر راھے گاہے

"Far distant from the value of love, and yet sometimes, ever in that age-long path a solitary sign will bound;

In strife and constant search lose not thy grasp upon the skirt of hope because, sometimes, riches by the way are found".

In his letter to K. G. Saiyidain<sup>7</sup>, Iqbal elucidates his point of view:

"I have generally used the word "knowledge" in the sense of knowledge based on the senses. It gives man Power which should be subordinated to Religion. If it is not subordinated to religion, it is a satanic force. This knowledge is the first step to true knowledge, as I have pointed out in the *Jawid Namah*:

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۷علم سے میری مراد وہ علم ہے جس کا دارو مدار حواس پر ہے۔ عام طور پر میں نے علم کا لفظ انہیں معنوں میں استعمال کیا ہے اس علم سے ایک طبعی قوت ہاتھ آتی ہے جس کو دین کے ماتحت رہنا چاہئے اگر دین کے ماتحت نہ رہے تو محض شطنیت ہے۔ یہ علم علم حق کی ابتدا ہے جیسا کہ میں نے جاوید نامہ میں لکھا ہے:

علم حق اول حواس آخر حضور      آخر او می نگنجید در شعور  
(جاوید نامہ ۳۸)

وہ علم جو شعور میں نہیں سما سکتا اور جو علم حق کی آخری منزل ہے اس کا دوسرا نام عشق ہے علم و عشق کے تعلق میں جاوید نامہ میں کئی اشعار ہیں!

علم بے عشق است از طاغوتیان	علم باعشق است از لاہوتیان
(جاوید نامہ ۳۸)	(جاوید نامہ ۳۸)

مسلمان کے لئے لازم ہے کہ علم کو (یعنی اس علم کو جس کا مدار حواس پر ہے اور جس سے بے پناہ قوت پیدا ہوتی ہے) مسلمان کرے ”بو لہب را حیدر کرار کن“ اگر یہ بو لہب حیدر کرار بن جائے۔ یا یوں کہیے کہ اگر اس کی قوت دین کے تابع ہو جائے۔ تو نوع انسان کے لیے سراسر رحمت ہے۔“

"The knowledge of Truth is gained first through the senses and then through direct realization. Its ultimate stages cannot be encompassed within consciousness".

"Knowledge, which cannot be circumscribed within consciousness and which is the final stage of Truth, is also called Love or Intuition".

"Intellect, divorced from Love, is a rebel (like Satan) while Intellect, wedded to Love, has divine attributes".

A Muslim should try to convert such knowledge, which is based on senses and is the source of limitless power, to Islam i.e., transform this (unbeliever), Bu Lamb, into (the perfect *Momin*), Ali. In other words, if the power of knowledge is inspired by religion, it is the greatest blessing for mankind.

It is this intuitive perception which gives meaning to life and makes the Intellect a source of blessing for mankind.

Intuition brings about a concentration of powers and in the case of great individuals, it may lead to a complete identification of the self with God's purpose. It is thus affirmed by Iqbal that when the cold analytic intellect is suffused with the warm life-giving glow of love, it becomes the greatest power for good both in the life of an individual and of the community:

از محبت چوں خودی محکم شود  
قوتش فرمانده عالم شود

(اسرار خودی، صفحہ ۶۲)

When self is fortified by love,

It becomes the law-giver to the world.

The same idea is expressed thus.

خودی ہو علم سے محکم تو غیرت جبریل  
اگر ہو عشق سے محکم تو صور اسرافیل

(بال جبریل، صفحہ ۹۲)

When the self is fortified by intellect,

It is the envy of Gabriel; when it is fortified by Love.

It becomes the trumpet call of Israfil.

The practical explanation of Love is contained in Iqbal's Philosophy of the Self, and its systematized exposition is contained in the letter sent by the poet to Dr. Nicholson and incorporated in his introduction to 'The Secrets of the Self', the English translation of Iqbal's *Asrar-i-Khudi* Iqbal says about Love.

The word is used in a very wide sense and means the desire to assimilate, to absorb. Its highest form is the creation of values and ideas, and the endeavour to realise them. Love individualises the lover as well as the beloved.

Intellect the power of the mind on the other hand conceives, judges and infers, marks the differences, agreements and concomitant variations, travels from the particulars to the general and from the general to the particular. In the same letter Iqbal has laid stress on the true function of intellect. He says, "For the purpose of its preservation and expansion it (life) has invented or developed out of itself certain instruments, e.g., senses, intellect, etc., which help it to assimilate obstruction.

Love again, acts as the purgative that effects the perfection of soul by purging it of all spurious matter accumulated by intellect. Iqbal says:

خرد از در سـرم بتخانـه ریخت  
خلیل عشق دیرم را حرم کرد

(پیام مشرق، صفحہ ۲۳)

Intellect founded a temple in my head,

But the Abraham of love has turned it into the House of God.

Thus according to Iqbal, intellect is desirable but love is more so. The former is necessary because it preserves the self and puts salutary checks on the stray ramblings of the heart. But to Iqbal love's worth is great. He glorifies love or Intuition in his following verses. Says he

گرچه متاع عشق را، عقل بهائے کم نهد  
من ندهم به تخت جم، آه جگر گداز را

(پیام مشرق، صفحه ۱۵۷)

Although intellect puts little value upon the goods of love,

Yet I have no intention of exchanging the heart-melting sigh for Jamshid's throne.

The reason why Iqbal praises love or intuition so much is that in-tuition catches the glimpses of the ultimate reality while intellect fails to achieve that goal on account of its inherent imperfection. Love according to Iqbal is able to know the unknowable

هر معنی پیچیده در حرف نمے گنجد  
یک لحظ بدل درشو، شاید که تو دریابی

(پیام مشرق، صفحه ۱۵۲)

Every complicated thought cannot be expressed in words,

Dip a while into the heart, thou mayst find it there.

Again:

نگاه می رسد از نغمه دل افروزے

بمعنی کہ برو جامہ سخن تنگ است

(پیام مشرق، صفحہ ۱۷۸)

Through the heart illuminating melody our eye catches meaning.

That cannot be contained in the narrow span of words.

Iqbal, no doubt, gives the first place to love yet he does not fail to render intellect its due.