

IQBAL AND RUMI

BISHOP MICHAEL J. NAZIR-ALI

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اسلام علیکم، پاکستان زندہ باد

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my talk today I should like to bring out just one aspect, if I may, of Iqbal's work; the deep influence of Islamic philosophical and theological traditions on Iqbal and some of his ideas. Iqbal was exposed quite early in life to traditional Islamic thought. He was exposed to three main traditions within Islamic thought:

1. Kalam or formal theology,
2. Philosophy written in Arabic or Persian within the Darul-Islam (Abode of Peace) i.e. the Islamic World.
3. Tasawwuf or Mysticism.

1. . Taking the last first, before and during his European period, Iqbal tended towards the pantheistic tradition within Islamic Mysticism. Thus in his doctoral dissertation, Iqbal interpreted both Rumi's and Hallaj's work in a pantheistic light.¹ Similarly, in his early article on Al-Jili Iqbal interprets Al-Jili's doctrine in monistic terms. On his return from Europe, however, a sudden change took place and Iqbal began interpreting the work of these three mystics in particular and of other mystics in general, within the framework of personal idealism. For example, Iqbal began emphasising parts of Rumi's work where activism is espoused. The following verses are put in Rumi's mouth:

مومن از عزم و توکل قاهر است
گرنه ارد این و وجوب، کافر است
کو بسار از ضربت او ریزریز
درگر بیانش هزاران رستخیر

“The believer is powerful through a sense of purpose and trust in God. If he does not have these two essential qualities he is an unbeliever, Mountains crumble into little pieces by his blow, Within his breast are a thousand Resurrections”.²

The verses are a re-working of certain ideas which occur again and again in Rumi's work. For example, the following verses seem to echo the same sentiment:

قول بنده ایش شاءالله کان
بهرآن نبود که تنبل کن درآن
بلک تحریض است براخلاص وجد
که درآن خدمت فزدن شومستعد

“The saying of (God's) servant, whatever God wills came to pass `does not signify' be lazy in that!

Nay, it is an encouragement to total devotion and exertion. Meaning ‘make you exceedingly ready to perform that service’.³

And again,

دوست داردیار این آشفستگی
کوشش بهیوده براز خفتگی

“The friend loves this agitation: it is better to struggle vainly than to lie still.”⁴

Also,

گر توکل می گنی در کا رکن

کشت کُن پس تکیه برجبار کُن

“If you are putting trust in God, put trust (in Him) as regards work, sow (the seed), then rely upon the Almighty.”⁵ The language used by Iqbal in his Persian work to refer to the worth and the immortality of the individual is also borrowed from Rumi. Both affirm the doctrine of بقا بند الفناء (survival after anihilation), i.e. after the loss of autonomy for the lower self, the true self which is illumined by the Divine Light comes into its own. Both refer to Hallaj as the exemplar of this new, true self.⁶ In his dissertation⁷ Iqbal implies that Hallaj was influenced during his travels in India by the monist Vedanta school and interprets Hallaj’s famous cry, انا الحق

(I am the Truth) in a pantheistic sense. In his later work, however, as has already been noted, he resiles on his earlier assessment and refers to Hallaj’s work thus:

“The true interpretation of his experience, therefore, is not the drop slipping into the sea, but the realization and bold affirmation in an undying phrase of the reality and the permanence of the human ego in a profounder personality. The phrase of Hallaj seems almost a challenge flung against the Mutakallimin. The difficulty of modern students of religion, however, is that this type of experience, though perhaps perfectly normal in its beginnings, points, in its maturity, to unknown levels of consciousness.”⁸

In this regard Iqbal refers explicitly to the work of Prof. Massignon in the re-interpretation of Hallaj as one who did not mean to deny either the transcendence of God or the reality of the human personality.⁹ It is significant, however, that certain lines of Rumi’s about Hallaj are also capable of bearing this interpretation. For example:

در قلزم نیستی خود غوطه بخورد
آنکه پس از آن در انا الحق آورد

“He dived into the sea,
of his non-entity,
And won for me and you –
This pearl ‘I am the true’¹⁰
And again,

آن انا بے وقت گفتن لعنت است
آن انا در وقت گفتن رحمت است
آن انا منصور رحمت شد یقین
آن انا فرعون لعنت شد ببین

“To say ‘I’ out of the proper time is a curse;
to say ‘I’ at the proper time is a mercy.

The ‘I’ of Mansur (Hallaj) certainly became a mercy; The ‘I’ of Pharaoh becomes a curse. Mark this!¹¹

In this connection it is interesting to note that Rumi refers to Sahl Ibn `Abdullah Tustari, Hallaj’s spiritual mentor, in a discussion on selfhood:

سہل ابن عبد اللہ تستری رحمتہ اللہ علیہ گفت مومن برستی آنکس است کہ از نفس خود و دل خود غامل نیست.

“Sahl Ibn `Abdullah Tustari (God’s mercy on him) said, in truth the believer is one who is not heedless of his own soul and his own heart.”¹² This in turn is an allusion to the famous Hadith,

من عرف نفسه فقه عن ربه

He who knows himself, Verily, he knows his Lord”.

Iqbal stresses the continuity of his thought with that of Rumi and Hallaj, and also their

agreement with each other on this matter by employing the literary device of a report of a conversation in heaven between Rumi and Hallaj :

حلاج کی لیکن یہ روایت ہے کہ آخر
اک مرد قلندر نے کیا راز خودی فاش

“But Hallaj says (to Rumi). `At last the secret of the self has been revealed to the world by a man of God (Iqbal)”¹³

Iqbal wished to stress the primacy of the spiritual over the material, and in this connection he quotes from Rumi:

پیکر از ماہت شد، نے ما ازو
بادہ از ما مست شد، نے ما ازو

“The body came into being from us, not we from it; Wine became intoxicated from us, not we from it.”¹⁴

It is surprising to note, however, that although elements of pampsychism are to be found in Rumi (Mathnawi I: 838, IV 3532-3533, Fihri Pg. 69 based on Quran 17:45 etc.), Iqbal does not use the terminology found there in his Persian verses dealing with this doctrine.¹⁵

As far as Al-Jili is concerned, the doctrine of the Perfect Man is rescued from its neo-Platonic setting and re-interpreted in terms of strict ethical monotheism: The Perfect Man is not one who has, through a process of meditation, realised his unity with the Absolute. He is, rather, one who has through self control and obedience to the shari’ah attained the status of the Vicegerent of God in accordance with the Quranic Promise (Q II:30, 33, 72).¹⁶

Iqbal was aware, too, of the various mystical systems which were declared heretical by the orthodox, but which had grown up under the tutelage of Sufism. One such system that of Bahauddin, with its similarity to McTaggart’s pluralism, has already been noted. Another was the system of Ishraqi Maqtul. The central idea in ‘Ishraqi’s very complex cosmogony is that the ultimate fact of the universe is An Absolute Light (Nur Al-Qahir). The essence of Light, according to Ishraqi, is manifestation; and it is this manifestation which initiates a process of emanation which accounts for the totality of existence. In his dissertation, Iqbal devotes twenty odd pages to Ishraqi’s thought, and it seems as if Ishraqi’s identification of the Absolute with Light remained with him. In The Reconstruction, while commenting upon the famous “Light” verse of the Quran (24:36), Iqbal remarks that even according to modern science, Light is the nearest approach to the Absolute, as its velocity cannot be exceeded and is the same for all observers whatever their own system of movement.¹⁷

References to philosophers writing in Arabic and Persian under the influence of the Aristotelian corpus (which in fact also contained Neo-Platonic material) also occur in Iqbal’s work. Iqbal pays particular attention to two philosophers: Ibn Maskawaih (C.XI.th.C.A.D.) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna, C.XI.th.C.A.D.). Iqbal was particularly impressed by Ibn Maskawaih’s¹⁸ then unfashionable argument that matter is not eternal, since matter and form are inseparable and form can be demonstrably shown to be not eternal. Iqbal was, here, not so much impressed by the logic of the argument as he was by the fact that this was a subtle defence of the Quranic doctrine of Creation at a time when the doctrine was being vigorously denied. Another doctrine of Ibn Maskawaih noticed by Iqbal is his doctrine of evolution, which is the other side of his Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation. Iqbal sees here as he does in Rumi¹⁹ the very first glimmerings of the idea that Man emerges from lower beings. The difference between Rumi’s and Maskawaih’s doctrine on the one hand and the modern theory of evolution (at any rate as understood by Iqbal cf. Re-construction, pg. 187) on the other hand is that the former does not treat Man as the last word in evolution but

looks forward to the development of higher beings from the present homo sapiens. As far as Ibn Maskawaih's psychology is concerned, Iqbal points out that Ibn Maskawaih regarded the soul as non-material, because in perception the soul can assimilate and retain a number of forms simultaneously, whereas matter is capable of having only one form at a time. Similarly, the soul cannot be regarded as a form of matter since it assumes different forms and states and therefore cannot be a form or a state itself, Matter in itself is inert, the power of life which animates and organises our bodies must, therefore, be immaterial. Furthermore, abstract thought is itself immaterial and cannot be shown to be a function of matter. It must, therefore, belong to the soul.²⁰

Iqbal's attention to Ibn Sina's work is confined to two doctrines: that love is the guiding force of evolution, and that the soul does not need a material accompaniment to survive.²¹ The Force of love was regarded by Ibn Sina as the initiator of movement in the Universe: each object strives towards attaining its own ideality which it loves. To make continuous evolution possible, however, ideals must not be fixed but as evolution proceeds the ideals must change and become higher and higher. All things move towards the Ultimate Ideal: The Divine Beloved; and in the end the worth of a thing is to be decided by its distance from or nearness to the Divine Beloved.

It is the soul (or-Nafs) which is the subject of evolution and Ibn Sina tries to show that the soul can survive without a body. The fact that the soul is immediately self-conscious of itself through itself is conclusive proof that the soul does not require a body to exist. This argument was primarily directed against the doctrines of metaphysics which were becoming popular mainly through Indian influence. After attaining freedom from the body, the soul continues its journey, back to the Beloved. As is well known, Ibn Sina's ideas about love made a deep and lasting impression on Iqbal's mind, and Ibn Sina's influence can be discerned not only in the *Asrar* but also in all of Iqbal's Persian and Urdu work.

Another important philosopher is the 13th C. radical, Wahid Mahmud. whose thought was regarded by Iqbal as a reaction to *وحدت الوجود* or contemporary Sufi Monism.²² Anticipating Leibniz, Wahid Mahmud taught that the universe is composed of individuals (Afrad) which have existed from all eternity and have life. The Universe, moreover, is an evolving Universe; and this evolution is largely (though not exclusively) due to the environment of the organism. It is to be noted that in a letter to Dr. Nicholson Iqbal claims continuity with the thought of Wahid Mahmud as far as his own pluralism is concerned.²³ It is difficult, however, to see where the continuity lies, unless it be the very fact of a reactionary pluralism itself. In points of detail, Iqbal would reject the eternity of Mahmud's selves, he would reject the postulate that evolution is largely due to the food that organisms assimilate, and he would reject the doctrine of eternal recurrence which is so basic to Mahmud's cosmogony.

Iqbal shows no awareness of Mahmud's work in his pre-European works, and it is likely that he came upon it during his researches in preparation for his dissertation and saw in it a striking similarity, at least in general outline, to the Pluralism he had encountered at Cambridge. In the realm of classical theology (or Kalam), Iqbal pays attention to both the Mu'tazila (Rationalists) and the Ash'arites (the Orthodox):²⁴

As far as the Mu'tazila are concerned, Iqbal regarded two aspects of the movement as having Metaphysical significance, viz., their conception of God and their theory of matter.²⁵

According to the Mu'tazila, God's attributes are His essentially, i.e. they are His by definition. Espousing the separate reality of God's attributes which are held merely to belong to Him is a kind of shirk (or polytheism) and militates against the pure unity of God. In its

later development, it was hold that one cannot speak of God's attributes at all except analogically, e.g. when we say God is Power; we simply mean that He is the giver of power. The theory was supposed to `protect' God from contingency and also go guard against the tendency to `personalize' God's attributes; e.g. His wisdom or His presence.

Their theory of matter was formed to exclude all arbitrariness from the course of Nature. The ground of all independent, individual phenomena is matter. The-material atoms have all their qualities intrinsically, and the activity of God consists solely in making them perceptible. This theory was designed to protect God from too much intercourse with the material world, so that His Absolute Unity would not be compromised.

The Mu'tazila referred to themselves as the ahl at-tauhid Wal `Adl (the party of God's Unity and Justice). Their stress on God's Unity we have already noted; their belief in God's justice led them to uphold the freedom of the will—A just God can only reward or punish men if they are responsible for their actions. Iqbal must have had a great deal of sympathy for the Mu'tazila in their struggle to maintain this doctrine against stiff opposition, for Iqbal had himself much the same experience. Curiously enough, however, Iqbal defines his own position in terms of the Hadith that the true faith is between Jabr (Necessitarianism) and

Qadr (in his context standing for the Free-will which is a con-sequence of God's just decree).²⁶

Iqbal's interpretation of this tradition is inspired by Ward: the self is determined by its `capacity', its realizable possibilities. This is what is meant by destiny (Taqdir). It is also determined to some extent by its social and physical environment. The freedom of the self, however, is part of its Taqdir. It is part of God's purpose for each self that it should enjoy a certain amount of freedom within its social and physical setting. This freedom can be augmented by striving against the limiting and determining factors.²⁷ There is, however, another element in Iqbal's interpretation of this tradition; and that is drawn from Rumi. In *Fihi ma Fihi*, Rumi says that Predestination consists in the creation of a moral order by which good is rewarded and evil is punished and not in individual election or reprobation regard less of ethical considerations.²⁸

Iqbal echoes this belief in an Urdu verse in *Armughan-e-Hijaz*: "Destiny is a name for recompense of deeds."²⁹

تقدیر ہے اک نام مکافات عمل کو

The ego is free to choose whether to obey the moral law or not. However, the consequences of its choice are already deter-mined. If it chooses to obey it will be-rewarded; if it disobeys it will be punished. It is clear that Ward's emphasis on the freedom of the self is on natural freedom (although he by no means ignores ethical freedom). This is a freedom that is possible for all selves however high or low in the scale of existence. For Ward, life itself implies a degree of freedom. Rumi's emphasis is on ethical freedom, and this is clearly restricted to self-conscious, moral beings. Iqbal relies heavily on Ward in discussing natural freedom, and relies heavily on Rumi in discussing ethical free-dom.

Mu'tazilite Rationalism provoked a reaction, and Iqbal studies this reaction in the life and work of two men: Al-Ash'ari and Al-Ghazzali. The movement led by Al-Ash'ari transferred the dialectical method of the Rationalists to the defence of the authority of Divine Revelation. In opposition to the Mu'tazila the Asli`arites maintained and embellished the doctrine of God's attributes and, as far as the Free-will controversy is concerned, they developed the doctrine of Iqtisab or Acquisition, and held that the power of choice as well as all human actions (or, to take a more charitable view, the possibilities of human actions) have been created by God, and that man has been given the power of appropriating

whichever course of action he chooses. The existence of God is proved, apart from the argument from motion from the diversity of empirical reality. That things should have such different qualities needs an explanation, and the Ash'arites found this in the activity of God. Also, it was held that the Universe is contingent. This was shown by the over-popular argument among Muslim theologians (already mentioned in connection with Ibn Maskawaih's thought) that form and matters are inseparable, and since form or quality is certainly not eternal, matter could not be either. The obvious criticism of this view, that matter could have an endless succession of non-eternal forms and therefore could be eternal, seems not to have struck them. The confusion is, of course, between forms as such and any particular form. Matter always has some form but not necessarily any particular form; it may lose one form and appropriate another, in any cases. It was held that the material universe had a beginning in time and therefore required a cause. This cause is God. Not only did God create the Universe, but it is kept in being at every instant by Him. The Universe is a mere show of ordered subjectivities which finds its ultimate explanation in the Will of God.

Iqbal pays particular attention to the pluralism of the Ash'arites: The world is composed of Jawahir, or atoms; and since the creative activity of God is ceaseless (Quran 35:2); the number of atoms cannot be finite. Fresh atoms are constantly coming into being and the Universe is a growing one.

According to Iqbal, Ash'arite pluralism can serve as a basis for an Islamic system of metaphysics, provided that it is purged of its materialism and its occasionalism, i.e. if the soul is no longer regarded as a finer kind of matter, rather the atom is regarded as a basic kind of soul: in other words, if the priority of the spiritual is recognised. Again, as far as occasionalism is concerned, the Ash'arite doctrine would need to be abandoned and replaced by a doctrine which recognises at least the relative permanence of individuals, while at the same time safeguarding the belief in their ultimate dependence upon God.³⁰

Al-Ghazzali re-affirmed and strengthened the Ash'arite thesis that, as long as human reason alone is used in argument, the issues between the rationalists and the orthodox will remain undecided. Ghazzali used the methods of dialectical philosophy to confound the philosophers. He had, in the beginning, tried to find certainty in Kalam (formal theology), but became increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of coherence and firmness in the theology of his time. After a period of extreme scepticism he had a radical conversion experience, which led him to give up his prestigious teaching at Baghdad and to adopt the life of a wandering dervish, or mendicant contemplative. From now on he denied the possibility of attaining to certainty in religious matters through philosophy and formal theology. The basis for all religious certainty, he held, is an immediate and overwhelming experience of the Divine (this can be an experience either of great love or, as in his own case, one of extreme fear).

According to Iqbal, in his mystical work, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, Ghazzali, who was Persian, returns to purely Persian categories of thought: God is light, darkness is non-existence, the existence of the Universe is due to God's 'lent' light. The physical eye sees only the external manifestation of the Real Light. The internal or spiritual eye, however, discerns the spiritual light by which God enlightens those who search for him.

If I may digress here a little: Although Iqbal does not mention this aspect of the matter, my teacher, the late Professor R. C. Zaehner, held that Ghazzali's Persian work, the *Kimiya ye Sa'adat*, showed traces of Zoroastrian influence, particularly in the use of parables.³¹ Iqbal was quite taken by Ghazzali's emphasis on the immediacy of the self's encounter with God.

Iqbal elaborated his own analogy to account for such an encounter. According to him,

the self's encounter with God may be compared to our encounter with other finite minds in this world. We never perceive another self directly through sense-perception alone. The most we can say on the basis of mere sense-data is that we infer the presence of another conscious being from movements similar to our own. Our experience of other minds, nevertheless, is not simply inferential: it is some sense immediate, and the immediacy is an immediacy of response. An-other mind makes itself known to us by responding to our signals. It is communication which convinces us of the presence of an-other mind. For Iqbal, it is the response of the Ultimate Self to the signals of a religious seeker which results in an experience of God. Iqbal refers to prayer and contemplation as possible models for the sorts of signals which could evoke such a response.

In very general terms, then, it may be said that Iqbal's philosophy was an attempt to understand and to interpret Quranic Islam in terms of modern philosophical thought. His method and the substance of his argument was, on the whole, of Western inspiration, with frequent referrals back to the traditional Islamic thought, of which Iqbal had formidable knowledge, to give his message a certain 'rootedness' in the culture to which he was preaching.

¹ The Development of Metaphysics in Persia, Lahore, 1964, p. 89f.

² Mathnawi Pas che bayad kard, Lahore, 1936, p. 6.

³ Mathnawi (Maulana Rum). V 3111-3112.

⁴ Mathnawi I, 1822.

⁵ Mathnawi I, 947.

⁶ Kulliyat-e-Shams-E-Tabrizi (ed. M. Dervish) Vol. 3, Teheran, 1341. H. S. Pg. 76cf. Darb-e-Kalim. p. 107.

⁷ The Development of Metaphysics in Persia, Lahore, 1964, p. 83.

⁸ Reconstruction, reprinted 1971, p. 96.

⁹ Reconstruction, p. 96. See further L. Marrignon, Kitab at tavvasin (ed.), Paris 1913, Le Diwan d'al-Hallaj (ed.), Paris, 1931. La Passion de Hallaj, Vols. I--IV, Paris, 1975.

¹⁰ Kulliyat, p. 76 trans. (A. J. Arberry) Ruba'iyat of Rumi, London, 1949', p. 31.

¹¹ Mathnawi II. 2522-23.

¹² Fihi ma Fihi, Teheran, 1959, p. 269.

¹³ Kulliyat Iqbal (Urdu), p. 58.

¹⁴ Reconstruction reprint 1971, p. 71 cf. Mathnawi I, 1812.

¹⁵ See further, Chapter I, "Pampsychism".

¹⁶ Kulliyat Iqbal (persian), p. 46.

¹⁷ Reconstruction, 1971, pp. 63-64.

¹⁸ See his Al fauz Al-Asghar, Beirut 1319 cf. See also the article bearing his name in Da'ira Ma'arif-i-Islamia, Lahore, 1964.

¹⁹ Mathnawi III: 3901 ff cf. Reconstruction, pp. 186f; also Mathnawi IV: 3637-3641, 3646-3648 cf. Reconstruction p. 121 f.

²⁰ The Development of Metaphysics in Persia, pp. 29ff.

²¹ The Development of Metaphysics in Persia, pp. 32ff cf. The collected works of Avicenna (ed. N. A. F. Mehren) Leiden 1894 (Fragment on Love) and Yuhanna Qamir, "Ibn Sina", Vol. II. Catholic Press, Beirut, 1956 for a convenient summary of Ibn Sina's Psychology with detailed references to his works.

²² The Development of Metaphysics 93f. See also the Dabistan Madhabib (Trans. D. Shea and A. Troyer), Lahore, 1973, pp. 337t.

²³ Lahore, 24-1-1921 Reprinted in Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal, p. 93.f.

²⁴ For a convenient summary of Mutazila and Ash'arite theology see D. B. MacDonald, Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory, Lahore, 1972, pp. 119ff.

²⁵ The Development of Metaphysics, pp. 40ff.

²⁶ The tradition is quoted by Iqbal in the introduction to The Secrets of Self, Trans. R. A. Nicholson, MacMillan, 1920, p. 15.

²⁷ Ward, The Realm of Ends, pp. 315f, The Reconstruction, pp. 50f, 116f. See further the chapter on Freedom.

²⁸ *Fihī ma Fihī*, p. 92.

²⁹ *Kulliyat*, (Urdu), p. 687.

³⁰ *The Development of Metaphysics*, pp. 52ff, *The Reconstruction*, pp. 68ff.

³¹ *The Development of Metaphysics*, pp. 58ff, *Reconstruction*, 4ff, 100f, 129. For Ghazzali's refutation of the philosophers see his *Tahafut Al-Falasifa* (Trans. S. A. Kamali). Lahore 1963. For an account of his conversion see his *Al-munqidh min ad-dalal*, Damascus, 1934. For an appreciation of his Persian work see his *Kimiya ye Sa'adat*, Teheran, 1940. For a discussions of Ghazzali's contribution in the context of Islamic theology and mysticism see my *Islam; A Christian Perspective*, Exeter, 1982.