

IQBAL AND SUFISM

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Every spiritual community has somehow faced the challenge of the existing world and worldly desires and worked out reconciliation on practical and intellectual levels. Among the spiritual communities of the world, perhaps, the Hindu masters and thinkers were the most perceptive and practical people. They divided religion into two categories and introduced practices on two levels:

- i Religion of the common folk,
- ii Higher religion of the intellectuals.

Common man kept himself busy worshipping idols, celebrating events, performing rituals and offering sacrifices, building temples, believing in myths and practicing magic. But the intellectuals always developed thinking on higher subjects such as; human soul, the Supreme Being, God's will etc. Various areas of pantheistic thought have been a great heritage of Indian philosophy. Individual piety, personal communication with God, spiritual purification and devotional life have been very important aspects of religious life throughout human history. Every great thinker or religious scholar has, in some way, expressed his opinion on this subject. I will be sharing with you this afternoon one or two points of Iqbal's view on sufism in the light of his book the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam.

Iqbal, being one of the great modern minds, has tried to work out a solution for the problems faced by modern Islam, and has given an outline for further thinking. He says:

"...I propose to undertake a philosophical discussion on some of the basic ideas of Islam, in the hope that this may, at least, be helpful towards a proper understanding of Islam as a message to humanity; also with a view to give a kind of ground outline for further discussion."¹

Being a philosopher and poet, he has the capacity to understand and explain the nature of intellectual and poetic experience. Equipped with philosophical insight and poetic vision, he tried to provide a framework for the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam. He says:

"...God, human beings and the universe are common issues of religion, philosophy and higher poetry...²" Religion, in its more advanced forms, rises higher than poetry. It moves from the individual to the society. In its attitude towards the ultimate reality it is opposed to the limitations of man. It enlarges his claims and holds out the prospect of nothing less than a direct vision of reality.³

History of religious thought has presented two methods of explaining religious ideas, viz, scholastic and mystic. Iqbal, to my knowledge has not dealt with both approaches separately. However, he has generally reviewed the development of Muslim thought, and a student of Iqbal would find frequent references to mysticism in his works.

Mysticism, or the Muslim term Tasawwuf, according to Shaykh Junayd, is "that your devotion to God is not for any purpose."⁴ To some, it is the code of the heart (Fiqh-al-batin) or the purification of the soul (Tazkiyah-al-Nafs) or the feelings of God's presence (al-lhsan).⁵ A definition adopted by Shaykh Sirhindi is that "Walayah means the effacement (Jana) of man in God and his survival (baqa) in Him."⁶ Qushayri has reported a statement of Shaykh Junayd which could be the basis of this definition. He said, "Tasawwuf is that God make you die to yourself and live by Him."⁷ Is Tasawwuf an experience, or piety and devotion? Is it an ascetic practice, or knowledge? Opinions vary on this issue. As for Iqbal,

we find references to both experience and knowledge. In his Sixth Lecture he says, "The rise and growth of ascetic sufism which gradually developed under influences of a non-Islamic character, a purely speculative side, is to a large extent responsible for this attitude."⁸ Elaborating it furthermore he asserts, "On its speculative side, which developed later, sufism is a form of free thought and in alliance with rationalism. The 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."⁹

Looking at the Reconstruction, it appears that Iqbal is inclined to accept mysticism as an experience. Discussing the nature of religious experience and its being a source of knowledge, he re-marks, "The revealed and mystic literature of mankind bears ample testimony to the fact that religious experience has been too enduring and dominant in the history of mankind to be rejected as mere illusion¹⁰ "and cannot be ignored merely because it cannot be traced back to sense perception."¹¹ Iqbal's view of mystic experience becomes clear when, comparing Kant and Ghazali, he says, "Ghazali, finding no hope in analytic thought, moved to mystic experience and there found an independent content for religion. In this way he succeeded in securing for religion the right to exist independently of science and metaphysics. But the revelation of the total infinite in mystic experience convinced him of the finitude and inclusiveness of thought and drove him to draw a line of cleavage between thought and intuition."¹² He gives a new name to mysticism when he says, "In religious psychology, by which I mean higher sufism, the ideal revealed is the possession and enjoyment of the infinite."¹³

It is the nature of mystic experience which has always been a point of discussion among the scholars and sufis. Pantheistic sufis have talked of unity and complete fana. Iqbal has taken notice of pantheistic doctrine and gave a new meaning to 'Hallaj's utterance.' Explaining the cultural background of Islamic thought he says, "This culture, on the whole Magian in its origin and development, has a structurally dualistic soul picture which we find more or less reflected in the theological thought of Islam. Devotional sufism alone tried to understand the meaning of the unity of inner experience which the Quran declares to be one of three sources of knowledge, the other two being history and nature. The development of this experience in the religious life of Islam reached its culmination in the well known words of Hallaj -- "I am the creative truth." The contemporaries of Hallaj, as well as his successors, interpreted these words pantheistically ... The true interpretation of his experience, therefore, is not the drop slipping into the sea, but the realization and bold affirmation in an undying phase of the reality and permanence of the human ego in a profounder personality."¹⁴

Iqbal is aware of the danger of an independent mystic experience because our Sufi literature is full of Shatahat of the Sufis. According to him prophetic experience is complete and a safe one. It is constructive and useful. Giving a definition of a Prophet, Iqbal says, "A prophet may be defined as a type of mystic consciousness in which 'unitary experience' tends to overflow its boundaries, and seeks opportunities of redirecting or refashioning the forces of collective life."¹⁵ At the start of his fifth lecture he elaborates the difference between a mystic and a Prophet by quoting a saint of the sub-continent:

"Muhammad of Arabia ascended to Heaven and returned. I swear by God that if I had reached that point I should never have returned." Iqbal says, "In the whole range of sufi literature it will be probably difficult to find words which, in a single sentence, disclose such an acute perception of the psychological difference between the prophetic and mystic types of consciousness. The mystic does not wish to return from the repose of "unitary experience"; and even when he does return, as he must, his return does not mean much for

mankind at large. The Prophet's return is creative. He turns to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals. For the mystic the repose of "unitary experience" is something final; for the Prophet it is the awakening, within him, of world-shaking psychological forces, calculated to completely overhaul the world of concrete fact. The desire to see his religious experience transformed into a living world force is supreme in the Prophet."16

Iqbal's treatment of mysticism is two fold. He accepts mystic experience as a source of knowledge and a useful way of approaching reality. Since his concept of Islam is not of a monastic order, and he perceives Islam as a unifying force between the spiritual and temporal world, so he does not accept a passive attitude. To him "the function of sufism in Islam has been to systematize mystic experience; though it must be admitted, that Ibn-i-Khaldun was the only Muslim who approached it in a thoroughly scientific spirit."17 He believes in action because his concept of personality is different from common concept. He says, "Thus my real personality is not a thing, it is an act. My experience is only a series of acts mutually referring to one another, and held together by the unity of purpose."18 We, therefore, find him criticising certain attitude and activities of the mystics. But we also find a sense of appreciation and gratitude even in his criticism. He remarks, "Mysticism has, no doubt, revealed fresh regions of the self by making a special study of this experience. Its literature is illuminating, yet its set phraseology shaped by the thought form of a worn-out metaphysics has rather a deadening effect on the modern mind."19

Iqbal has a critical view of mysticism. His criticism is on two different bases. He believes that life is activity, and a person having communication with God cannot be a passive individual. A human being coming in touch with the Supreme Being is illuminated. He becomes a moving spirit in the society. It seems that such an individual is having a burning fire within him and he is part of God's activity in this world. To him a sufi is a creative and active agent of Divine will. He criticises those who cause passivity and create inactiveness among the Muslims. He says:

خود گیری و خودداری و گلبنانگ اناالحق
 آزاد ہو سالک تو ہیں یہ اس کے مقامات
 محکوم ہو سالک تو یہی اس کا ہمہ اوست
 خود مردہ و خود مرقد و خود مرگ مفاجات
 (20)

"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 differentiates between Faqr and Rahibi and condemns monasticism (Rahbaniyya). He says:

کچھ اور چیز ہے شاید تیری مسلمانی
 تیری نگاہ میں ہے ایک فقر و رہبانی
 سکوں پرستی راہب سے فقر ہے بیزار
 فقیر کا ہے سفینہ ہمیشہ طوفانی
 (21)

"Your Islam is something else, because in your view Faqr and monasticism are the same things. (The fact is) that Faqr is disgusted with monasticism's love for peace and tranquility. Faqr's ship is always in the storms and commotion."

His message to the sufis is very clear:

نکل کر خانقاہوں سے ادا کر رسم شبیری

کہ فقر خانقابی ہے، فقط اندوہ و دلگیری
 ترے دین و ادب سے آرہی ہے بوئے رببانی
 یہی ہے مرنے والی امتوں کا عالم پیری
 (22)

“Come out of the monasteries and follow the example of Shabbir (Martyrdom); for the monastic life is just grief and affliction. Your religion and morality show signs of monasticism. This is the state of decay which is the symptom of every dying nation”

The other basis of criticism is the establishment. Sufi orders and religious institutions were the sources of inspiration for the masses. These orders provided refuge to socially dislocated and mentally disturbed people. As place for spiritual training and purification, Khanqah has lost its role. Sufi orders collaborated with the political establishment and became the source of exploitation and caused disintegration of the social cohesiveness of the Muslim community. It is this aspect of the mysticism which has been rightly criticised by Iqbal. He says:

رمز و ایما اس زمانے کے لیے موزوں نہیں
 اور آتا بھی نہیں مجھ کو سخن سازی کا فن
 'قم باذن اللہ' کہہ سکتے تھے جو رخصت ہوئے
 خانقاہوں میں مجاور رہ گئے یا گورگن
 (23)

“Allusive and suggestive expression is not suitable for this age, and I do not know the art of eloquence. Those who could say, “Stand up with God’s permission” have gone. Living in the monasteries now are only the attendants or the grave-’ diggers.”

On religious leadership his views are also very clear. He says:

فتنہ ملت بیضا ہے امامت اس کی
 جو مسلمان کو سلاطین کا پرستار کرے

“The leadership which persuades Muslims to obey the (sultan) is a mischief and sedition in the Muslim community.”

For Iqbal sufism is an activity and a “source of inspiration; but the unworthy occupants of spiritual seats have destroyed its image and spoiled its usefulness.

Notes and Reference

¹ Sir Mohammad Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 8.

² Ibid, p. 1.

³ Al-Risalah, p. 552.

⁴ Tasawwuf Kiya Hay, (Lucknow 1978), pp. 24, 33, 65.

⁵ Nafahat al-Uns, 4 (Maktubat, v. 1:35 308 1097) p. 241.

⁶ Risalah, p. 551.

⁷ The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 210.

⁸ Ibid., p. 211.

⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹² Ibid., p. 184.

¹³ Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 178. See for further comments, pp. 22-29.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 125.

¹⁹ Kulliat-e-Iqbal, (Urdu) p. 680.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 152.

²¹ Kulliat-e-Iqbal, (Urdu) p. 680.

²² Ibid., p. 453.

²³ Ibid., p. 512.