

# IQBAL'S EPISTEMIC VIEWS

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The ultimate aim of human life is to know reality and to act in accordance with that knowledge. According to the Holy Qur'an, the ultimate aim of man's life is the conquest of Nature (Taskhir-i-Ka'inat)<sup>67</sup> Reality, however, which has to be known and conquered, has two aspects: (i) the inner core of Reality and (ii) the outward appearances or shuhud of the real. Iqbal calls them the 'Observable aspects of reality'<sup>68</sup> and says that '...the Ultimate Reality ... reveals its symbols both within and without'<sup>69</sup> If, therefore Reality is to be grasped fully, then it has to be understood both from within and from without. Thus, the task of man is two-fold. Iqbal stresses the need for approaching the Reality from both the angles in order to have a completer grasp there of.

As regards the external, observable aspects of Reality, which the Qur'an describes as the symbols (ayat) of Allah, Iqbal agrees with the famous German thinker Kant's epistemic model: 'Knowledge is sense-perception elaborated by understanding'.<sup>70</sup> He also agrees that 'character of man's knowledge is conceptual, and it is with this conceptual knowledge that man approaches the observable aspects of Reality'. The Nature which Iqbal calls the character of God is divisible into' three main levels-- the level of matter, the level of life and the level of mind and consciousness-- the subject-matter of physics, biology and psychology respectively'.<sup>71</sup> Thus, what is required is the study of these natural sciences: we have to study and conduct research into physical sciences and social sciences in order to understand the observable aspects of reality and to exercise control over them. This will

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<sup>67</sup> Iqbal, Dr. M., 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, (Lahore) M. Ashraf, 1977, p. 13.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

amount to capturing one aspect of the Nature. Iqbal devotes his second lecture "The philosophical Test of the Revelation of Religious Experiences" to a study of the nature of matter, life and consciousness and comes to the conclusion that basically all the three levels have a spiritual basis and hence come much closer to each other. It is not only this, they also beckon into the direction of a spiritual reality where of they are the manifestations. In the words of Iqbal, "... space, time and matter are interpretations which thought puts on the free, creative energy of God. They are not independent realities existing per se, but only intellectual modes of apprehending the life of God".<sup>72</sup> In fact, the Nature and God are much more closer for Iqbal than we are in a position to think or conceive. Iqbal sums up this whole discussion when he says, "The knowledge of nature is the knowledge of God's behavior"<sup>73</sup> Hence, in the view of Iqbal nature and God are intimately closer to each other and there is no legitimate bifurcation between them. While talking of Islam Iqbal says, "With Islam the ideal and the real are not two opposing forces which cannot be reconciled."<sup>74</sup> Thus Iqbal does not agree with those dualists, or Deists, who make a clear bifurcation between God and the universe. Almost all the naturalists and positivists have been guilty of this error; even the spiritualists and mentalists are equally one-sided.

Kant reached upto this level and failed to go beyond because of his Western legacy. He talked of Sensible Intuition and Intellectual Intuition,<sup>75</sup> but denied that man possessed the latter the result being that man could not know the Noumenon (the Reality Itself). Iqbal, on the other hand, following his Muslim legacy of Rumi and Imam Ghazali, and other sufis came to believe that man can develop a certain type of sensitivity to comprehend the Reality Itself. This sensitivity is generally called "intuition." Regarding intuition Iqbal says, as against the common suffrage, "We must not, however, regard it as a mysterious special faculty; it is rather a mode of dealing with

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> Kant, I., Critique of Pure Reason, (Eng. tr. Norman Kemp Smith), (London: Macmillan, 1963), p. 268.

Reality in which sensation, in the physiological sense of the word, does not play any part'. He goes on to add, 'Yet the vista of experience thus opened to us is as real and concrete as any other experience'.<sup>76</sup> This is very important as it throws light on the basic theory of knowledge as expounded by Iqbal. Iqbal holds, as said in the beginning, 'The total-Reality, which enters our awareness and appears on interpretation as an empirical fact, has other ways of invading our consciousness and offers further opportunities of interpretation'.<sup>77</sup> Again Iqbal acutely remarks, 'As regions of normal experience are subject to interpretation of sense-data for our knowledge of the external world, so the region of mystic experience is subject to interpretation for our knowledge of God'.<sup>78</sup> It appears from this that there is a religious "data" which, when interpreted properly, gives us the knowledge of God. While talking of 'heart' or intuition Iqbal says, 'It is, according to the Qur'an, something "sees", and its reports, if properly interpreted, are never false'.<sup>79</sup> Thus, Iqbal has claimed a kind of finality for this knowledge. It implies that religious experience is also a kind of datum which is not sensory or physiological and which requires interpretation, like the ordinary experience, in order to become knowledge proper.

Another point which Iqbal emphasizes in connection with knowledge is the nature and role of thought or reason in this field. Following the legacy of Aristotle, Kant believed in two kinds of thought/reason only– viz., Pure Reason and Practical Reason. The function of the former is to analyze and unravel the skein of discursive thought, while that of the latter is to suggest ways and means to the already given end. Kant, accordingly, titled his famous treatises *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *The Critique Practical Reason* (1788).<sup>80</sup> Iqbal, however, insisted the need for a third level of thought, beside these two, which he described as the deeper movement of

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<sup>76</sup> Iqbal, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>80</sup> The two famous treatises of Imanuel Kant published in the 18th centuries.

thought. He says, 'In its deeper movement thought is capable reaching an imminent Infinite ...'.<sup>81</sup> He regrets that both Ghazali and Kant failed to see the real movement of thought in the field of knowledge.<sup>82</sup> In the system of Iqbal, thought plays an immensely important role in the field of religious knowledge. While critically examining the Pure Reason

(Thought) Iqbal writes in Baal-i Jibril (The Gabriel's Wing):

خرد کی گہتیاں سلجھا چکا  
 مرے مولیٰ مجھے صاحب جنوں کر!  
 میں

'Having unravelled the knotty skein of Intellect;

O Allah! bestow madness on me'.<sup>83</sup>

In this verse he pithily brings out limitations of the Intellect or Pure Reason. Next he proceeds to examine the nature of Practical Reason in the following verse,

گزر جا عقل سے آگے کہ یہ  
 چراغ راہ ہے منزل نہیں ہے !

'Pass beyond the Pale of reason as this light;

Can show the way, not the goal'<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Iqbal, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Iqbal, Baal-i Jibril (Urdu), (Lahore: Sh. Ghulam Ali, 1976), p. 87.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

In the above verse Iqbal advises the man to go beyond the sphere of Practical Reason as it cannot suggest the goal; it can at best show the way to a given end. Both these kinds of thought or reason are superficial and 'discursive'. Besides these, Iqbal believes in the "deeper movement of thought",<sup>85</sup> which may be called "non-discursive" thought, in which capacity thought and intuition become complementarities to each other. He says, "They spring up from the same root and complement each other".<sup>86</sup> Not only this, he goes on to add, 'Both are in need of each other for mutual rejuvenation. Both seek visions of the same Reality...'<sup>87</sup> Here Iqbal comes closer to al-Farabi who, in his theory of Intellect, holds, "The acquired intellect rises to the level of communication, ecstasy, and inspiration".<sup>88</sup>

We have seen above that Iqbal agrees with Kant regarding the organizational role of thought in human knowledge. He agrees that thought organizes the sense-data received through the various senses and integrates them into knowledge proper of the external world. As said before, he agrees to the epistemic model of Kant so far as our knowledge of the external world is concerned. However, Iqbal extends the application of this epistemic model to the sphere of religious knowledge also. In his view, thought plays the same organizational role in religious knowledge as in the case of sensory knowledge - a fact which Kant failed to realize due to his Western legacy which presupposed that (i) sensory kind of experience is the only genuine human experience and (ii) that all human thought is discursive and cursory. According to Iqbal, on the other hand, religion' knowledge, like any other form of knowledge, consists of data organized by human thought or understanding. The religious data<sup>89</sup> which arise through intuition, is a non-

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<sup>85</sup> Reconstruction, p. 6.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Sharif M.M. (ed.), A History of Muslim Philosophy, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrossowitz, 1963), Vol.-I. "Al-Farabi", p. 462.

<sup>89</sup> Reconstruction, "There conflict is due to the misapprehension that both interpret the same data of experience. We forget that religion aims at reaching the real significance of a

sensory type of data which arises through intuition, is a non-sensory type of data which arises through a direct and immediate presentation of the religious object to the 'faculty of knowing and this data is then organized into knowledge proper, not of course by the ordinary discursive thought but by higher, or what Iqbal calls, 'the deeper movement of thought' which is non-discursive. Among the Western writers it was Nels Ferre, the French writer, who in this book *Reason in Religion*<sup>90</sup> realized that there could be various kinds of thought, but ever he could not assign it any constitutive role in religious or mystic knowledge. Iqbal believes, like al-Farabi that at its higher level thought or reason becomes one with ecstasy or intuition, as said before. Now according to Iqbal, the model of religious knowledge is that some specific kind of data is supplied by the intuition (intellectual intuition in the case of Kant which he denied of man) on which higher thought operates organizing them into knowledge of religious realities. Thus, Iqbal has divested religious or mystic knowledge of its weird or mysterious nature and has brought it at par with sensory or any other form of human knowledge. This, to my mind, is a great and original contribution of Iqbal.

What is very important in Iqbal is that he denies that there is any antagonism between reason and intuition, between philosophy and, religion. Rather they spring up from the same root and complement each other.<sup>91</sup> Not only this, 'Both are in need of each other for mutual rejuvenation. Both seek visions of the same Reality which reveals itself to them in accordance with their function in life'<sup>92</sup> It is not that they do not oppose each other, they rather must go together and complement each other in order to have a complete and fuller vision of Reality: the two vistas of knowledge must combine to avoid the sin of one-sidedness. He say in *Javed Namah* (Pilgrimage of Eternity);

علم ہے عشق است از طاغوتیاں

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special variety of human experience', pp. 25-6.

<sup>90</sup> Nels Ferre, *Reason in religion*, (London: Thomas Nelson, 1963).

<sup>91</sup> op. cit., *Reconstruction*, p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

علم با عشق است از لاهوتیان !

'...If it be divorced from love,  
then knowledge is but Satan's progeny;  
But if it blends with love, it joins the ranks  
Of high celestial spirits ....'<sup>93</sup>

Iqbal is more emphatic in his Gulshan-i-Raz-i-Jadeed (The New Rose Garden of Mystery) when he says:

اگر یک چشم بر بندد گناہے است  
اگر باہر دو بیند شرط راہے است

'If he should close one eye, it would be sin:  
It is by seeing with both eyes that he can gain  
The path....'<sup>94</sup>

Thus, for Iqbal one-sided approach is an unpardonable sin because it leads the man astray as is the situation obtaining in the West. The Westerners have gone too far into their materialism and technology. He accuses both the East and the West of one-sidedness when he says in Javed Namah:

غریبان را زیر کی ساز  
شرقیان را کائنات عشق راز

'For Westerns doth reason furnish all -

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<sup>93</sup> Mahmud Ahmad, Pilgrimage of Eternity (Eng. tr. of Javed Namah), (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture), Vs. 1400-1405, p. 66.

<sup>94</sup> Iqbal, Gulshn-i-Raz-i Jadeed, Eng. tr. by Hadi Hussain, (Lahore: Sh.Ashraf, 1969), p.8.

Accoutrement of life and for the East

Love is the key of mystery...<sup>95</sup>

Thus, both the East and West are erring by one-sidedness. He goes on to add:

حق	گردد	عشق شناس	از	زیر کی
محکم	زیر کی	از اساس	عشق	کار
ہمبر	زیر کی	با شود	چوں	عشق
دیگر		عالم شود		نقشبند

Love-led

Can reason claim the Lord and reason-lit Love strikes firm roots. When integrated,

These two draw the pattern of a different world'<sup>96</sup>

What Iqbal wishes to emphasis is that the approaches of the East and West he combined; that the wisdom of the East and the West be brought closer in order to re-solve the ills and problems of the modern world which, being one-sided and West-dominated, is heading towards a very big catastrophe. What he advocates is that we should combine the rational and technological advancements of the Western world with the moral and spiritual thinking of the East, only then a proper balance can be struck between them which can generate a world of peace and salvation which Iqbal has called "the pattern of a different world", the path of peace and salvation, as said before. Discussing the results of modern Western civilization, Iqbal

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, Mahmud Ahmad, Vs. 1133-35, p. 54.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, Vs. 1133-38, p. 54.



writes: "Thus, wholly overshadowed by the results of his intellectual activity, the modern man has ceased to live soulfully, i.e., from within. In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others. He finds himself unable to control his ruthless .egoism and his infinite gold-hunger which is gradually killing all higher striving in him and bringing him nothing but life-weariness<sup>97</sup> This situation can best be retrieved only by the moral and spiritual asp, contributed by Eastern thought. Only a proper balance between them in guide human progress on the right and straight lines which the .?Qur'an calls "al-Sirat al-Mustagim ".

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<sup>97</sup> Op. cit., Reconstruction, pp. 187-88.