

# IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF THE ULTIMATE REALITY

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Iqbal, like Bergson, follows the Cartesian tradition and makes his own conscious experience the starting point. He says that experience manifests itself at three levels, the level of inert matter, the level of life and the level of consciousness. These are the fields of Physics, Biology and Psychology respectively. Thus he thinks that the study, analysis and interpretation of the findings of these sciences can provide a clue to the nature of ultimate reality. This approach establishes three things: -

i) That Conscious experience is life in time,

ii) That pure time is duration or non-successional change and

iii) That life is a centralizing ego i.e. it is not a chaotic fluid but an organizing principle which has efficient and appreciation aspects.

The finite centre of experience is real but its reality is so profound that it cannot be grasped by the intellect. When we introspectively study our mental phenomenon, we come to realize the conscious existence is life in time i.e., that we do not pass from state to state but live in pure duration. Our intellect splits up duration into isolated states. Pure time "is an organic whole in which past is not left behind, but is moving along with and operating in, the present. And the future is not, given to it as lying before, yet to be traversed; it is given only in the sense that it is present in its nature as an open possibility."<sup>98</sup> Conscious experience is thus life in time or better life in pure time or duration. Duration is not a mechanical repetition of homogeneous moments. No two moments in the life of an individual can be exactly alike. "To exist in real time is not to be bound by the fetters of serial time but to create it from moment to moment and to be absolutely free and original in creation. Creation is opposed to repetition which is a characteristic of

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<sup>98</sup> M. Iqbal Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Sh. Ashraf, Lahore, p 49.

mechanical action."<sup>99</sup> Life cannot be explained in terms of mechanism. Iqbal quotes Haldane in support of his thesis' "There can be no mechanism of reproduction. The idea of mechanism which is constantly maintaining or reproducing its own structure, is self-contradictory. A mechanism which reproduced itself would be a mechanism without parts and therefore not a mechanism."<sup>100</sup> Thus an analysis of conscious experience takes us to the conclusion that life is a free creative activity. What is true of conscious existence is also true of the universe at large. Iqbal moves from the highest form of existence to the lowest form and holds that what is true of the highest known form, is also true of the lowest form of existence. This procedure is not scientific but has, however, been followed in philosophical idealism and religion. "On the analogy of our conscious experience, then, the universe is a free creative movement."<sup>101</sup>

On this point Iqbal's vitalistic conception of the universe became different from that of Bergson. Bergson's conception of the ultimate reality is quite inadequate as it fails to assign any role to thought. Iqbal holds that "in conscious experience life and thought permeate each other."<sup>102</sup> Bergson ignores the teleological aspect of the unity of consciousness. Conscious experience is illuminated by idea therefore it becomes teleological. The presence of end does not imply that there are fixed goals to which life moving. In fact there are no distant goals. "..... there is a progressive formation of fresh ends, purposes, and ideal scale of values as the process of life grows and expands. We become by ceasing to be what we are."<sup>103</sup>

Again "The world process, or the movement of the universe in time, is certainly devoid of purpose, if by purpose, we mean a foreseen end-\_\_ a far off fixed destination to which the whole creation moves. To endow the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 50

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 44

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p. 51

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 52

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. 54

world process with purpose in this sense is to rob it of its originality, and its creative character."<sup>104</sup>

Iqbal says on the basis of the analysis of conscious experience that the Ultimate Reality is pure duration in which thought life and purpose interpenetrate to form an organic unity.

Such panpsychism is very prominent in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, William James etc. It also characterizes the thought of many eastern poets and philosophers. Take for example following verses: -

خاک و باد و آب و آتش و بندہ اند  
 بامن و تو مردہ باحق زندہ  
 (رُرمی) اند

از مہر تابہ ذرہ دل و دل بے آنہ  
 طوطی کو شش جہت سے مقابل بے آنہ  
 (غالب) آنہ

در پس آنہ طوطی صفتم داشتہ اند  
 ہرچہ استاد ازل گفت ہماں می گویم  
 (حافظ) گویم

آہستہ چل کہسار  
 میان

ہر سنگ دکان شیشہ گر بے  
 (میر) میر

Such a view of the Ultimate Reality necessarily leads to pantheism. B Iqbal is not a pantheist. He may be regarded as a spiritual pluralist. F him, the entire universe, in the last analysis, is nothing but an infinite number of egos or monads of spiritual atoms. These egos are not like Lieb nizean monads in so far as these are not windowless. These are capable of interaction. Further these are different grades of ego-hood. "It is the degree of the intuition of I-

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. pp. 54-55

amness that determines the place of a thing in the scale of being\_\_\_\_\_our I-amness is dependent and arises out of the distinction between self and the not self." But to the ultimate self" the not-self does not present itself as a confronting other. What we call Nature or the not-self is only a fleeting moment in the life of god. His .I-amness is independent, elemental, absolute."<sup>105</sup> Ghalib has beautifully expressed this idea:

وجود	سامان	تری	تجلی	ہے
نہیں	خورشید	تو	ہے	ذره

(your self-revelation is the reason behind the phenomenal existence. An atom has no being without the reflection (in it) of the sun.)

In Iqbal's words:

وجودے	حق	وجود	از	را	خودی
نمودے	حق	نمود	از	را	خودی

(ارمغان حجاز ص 173)

(Self exists by virtue of the existence of God. Self gets expression through the self-revelation of God.)

The self-expression of a finite self is his character. Similarly the Infinite Self or God expresses Himself in a uniform mode of behavior, "Nature is to the Divine Self as character is to the human self."<sup>106</sup> Nature, therefore, can grow and expand. It is limit but boundless. Its boundless is potential not actual. There are no external barriers which may constitute a limit to it. Since Nature is organically related to the Ultimate self, it can grow and expand. "The knowledge of the world is, therefore, the knowledge of God's behavior."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 56

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 56

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 57

Thus Iqbal infers from the analysis of conscious experience that Ultimate Reality is a rationally directed creative life. His argument proceeds on analogy. He brings forward the findings of modern physics regarding the nature of time and space to strengthen his vitalistic conception of Reality. The process of divine creation continues without ceasing because the Ultimate Reality is a rationally directed creative life. "To interpret this life as an ego is not to fashion God after the image of man. It is only to accept the simple fact of experience that life is not a formless fluid, but an organizing principle of unity".<sup>108</sup>

موجے	چوں	تپیدم	خویش	بحر	بہ
بطوفانے		رسیدم	تا		تپیدم
	خوش	ازیں	رنگے		دگر
		ندیدم			
خویش			بخون		
(ارمغان حجاز ص 123)	کشیدم		تصویرش		

(In my ocean I agitated like a wave,  
I agitated 6111 encountered a storm,  
I did not perceive any other form

Better than the form of ego.with my own I blood I prepared His portrait"

بر صورت	صنم	شیدم	ترا
	خویش		
نقش	را	خدا	خود
		بسٹم	بشکل

محل	رفتن	بروں	خود	از	مرا
		است			
خود	بستم	کہ	رنگے		بہر
		پرستم			

(I carved idols after my own image

I painted God after my own form.,

I cannot transcend limitations of my own being.

Whatever form I assume, I am a worshiper of my own self.)

Iqbal's position is panentheistic rather than pantheistic. The Ultimate Reality or God is both transcendental and immanent in nature. Nature is not opposed to God. In this sense God is immanent. God transcends the world in so far as the world is not co-extensive with him. In other words we can say that although the world is in God yet God has certain aspect that are beyond the spatio-temporal order of the world. Nature or the world is merely a fleeting moment in the life of God.

Here a difficulty arises. A self is unthinkable without a not-self. How can we conceive of God as a self that encompasses the whole universe and also transcends it? "The world in all its details, from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement, thought in the human ego, -is the self-revelation of the great 'I am', every atom of Divine energy, however low in the scale of existence is an ego"<sup>109</sup> Iqbal removes this difficulty by saying that logical negations are of no use in forming a positive concept which must be based on the character Reality as revealed in experience. Now if we regard the universe as a mere men self-revelation of God, what will be the status of evil as an ethical problem? We will have to include it in the Divine scheme of things. Moreover, it would become difficult to draw a hard and fast line between the self- revelation of God and the self-revelation of a finite ego. If we apply Iqbal's principle consistently, it will snatch away all creativity, initiative and originality from the human ego. If

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p. 71

we regard the created realm of finite egos as the self-revelation of the supreme Ego or God, we will have to believe that a rigid determinism prevails in the world. If I am going to be the author and master of my own actions, then my personality cannot be the self-revelation of God.

Iqbal does not believe in determinism which is a necessary corollary of pantheism. He thinks that once human ego comes into being, it becomes independent of and separate from his origin. A pearl has its origin in water. But once it comes into being, it severs itself from its origin. It does not shade off into water but maintains its individuality; rather it confronts water. Iqbal conceives of the emergence of human egos in this fashion and says that like pearls we come into being and continue to live in the Divine of Flow Energy.

Thus the summum bonum of the human ego is not self-negation i.e, slipping of the drop into the ocean but a bold affirmation of one's individuality, existence and presence. God has created the finite egos giving them complete freedom. No doubt in doing so, He has taken extreme risk.

If space is a subjective interpretation of the human ego which is ascribed to the activity of God, then it follows that God is not in space and spatial categories are not applicable to Him. Space and time are the subjective forms of human understanding. Iqbal, in a sense, is committed to kantian position. The world as it is in itself cannot be imagined. Even the discovery of the Ultimate Reality by the appreciative self cannot be described in our ordinary language.

For Iqbal, mind and spirit are- identical. Consciousness is a spiritual principle and body is termed as a colony of egos of a lower order.

تن	و	جان	را	دوتا	گفتن	کلام	است
تن	و	جان	را	دوتا	دیدن	حرام	است
بجان		پوشیده		رمز		کائنات	است
بدن		حاله	ز	احوال		حیات	است

(زبور عجم ص 217)

(To say that body and soul are two is a way of expression

To see them as two different entities is forbidden.

In soul is concealed the secret of the universe.

Body is a state among the states of life.)

Iqbal thinks that body, spirit and mind belong to one and the same continual; these are the off-shoots of the same stem. Body is the habit of the soul. The acts composing the body repeat themselves. Here we should note that this statement contradicts Iqbal's main thesis viz., there is no repetition in life.

In short, we can say that for Iqbal Ultimate reality is pure duration in which life, thought and purpose interpenetrate to form an organic unity. But by purpose we should not understand a distant goal towards which is moving, but it is an inner principle. Thus the movement of rationally directed will remains creative and undetermined.