

"THAT I MAY SEE AND TELL": SIGNIFICANCE OF IQBAL'S WISDOM POETRY

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It was Ahmad Shawqi, the famous Egyptian poet and an older contemporary of Iqbal who, while paying his homage to Iqbal made an extremely perceptive remark: His words fervently spoke of the high esteem and regard in which Iqbal was held in the eyes of the Egyptians: At the same time, perhaps incidentally, his remarks convey to us in a remarkably revealing manner the real significance of Iqbal's poetry in particular and his message in general: Shwaqi said:³¹

Iqbal was unique among the Muslim poets in the sense that, while almost all of his contemporaries were singing praises of the high ups or indulging in indolent love poetry. central to the conscious concerns of Iqbal were the issues that were of vital importance to the Muslim Ummah, both on the theoretical as well as the practical level.

In these remarks Shawqi has used the construct "conscious concerns" in order to bring out the characteristic features of thought which, in his view, distinguished Iqbal from his contemporary poets and thinkers. It is the same expression, which, in our view, provides the key to understand the phycodynamics of Iqbal's mind, and leads us to appreciate the reasons for which Iqbal's poetry has become significantly important and meaningful for us.

In the perspective of Islamic metaphysics the phenomenon of consciousness, discerned in the world in a hierarchical manner, is a

³¹ I am indeed to my teacher and one of the greatest living authorities on Iqbal, Mirza Muhammad Munawwar to have informed us, during his class lectures, of the views of the Egyptian intelligentsia about Iqbal.

manifestation of the Divine Consciousness. The most central and total manifestation of the Divine Consciousness, a self-disclosure (tajulli) of the Divine Attribute of Knowledge (Wm), is the human intelligence. In the same way, it is only man, which has the gift of speech because he alone among earthly creatures is made in the image of God in a direct and integral manner. It is the summit and perfection of human intelligence and, therefore, of human consciousness. Speech is as it were the immaterial, though sensory, body of our will and

our understanding.³² Similarly, human speech or human language attains to its full plenitude or perfect deployment in poetry. If the summit and perfection of human consciousness is human language then poetry or the poetic art could like wise be termed as the summit and perfection of human language: This necessarily entails that, not only in the Islamic traditional perspective but also in the traditional oriental theories of art, poetry is a conscious activity never separated from the Intellect, "Art has to do with cognition".³³ It is never envisaged as "emotions recollected in tranquillity" or "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings".³⁴ According to this

³² It may, however, be remembered that speech is not necessarily exteriorised, the articulated thought also involves language.

³³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ill. 33.1.

³⁴ See *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R. L. Brett & A. R. Jones, Methuen & Co Ltd. London, 1963, p. 260. These famous lines from Wordsworth are cited here only as a representative sample of the way the modern, reductionist conception of poetry exhibits itself. Parallel examples could be given from every branch of art in which the artistic activity is reduced to even more inferior psychisms. They all have a common characteristic that, in these theories, the artistic activity is truncated to a segment of the human soul and confined to the limitations of the human domain, cut off from intellectual vision and spirituality. Thus, to quote S. H. Nasr, "poetry, rather than being a vehicle of a truly intellectual knowledge, becomes reduced to sentimentalism or a means of expressing individual idiosyncrasies and forms of subjectivisms." *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, Islamic Text Society, Cambridge, 1987, p. 91. An other authority who had covered the philosophic and religious experience of the entire premodern world, the great orientalist A. K. Coomaraswamy has expressed some thing similar in this regard. He remarked, "As humanists and individualists it flatters us to think that art is the expression of personal feeling and sentiments, preference and free choice, unfettered by the sciences of mathematics and cosmology. But mediaeval art

perspective, poetry is not the expression of the subjective experiences of the separated ego of the poet, but the fruit of a vision of a reality, which transcends the being of the poet, and for which the poet must become the expositor and guide.³⁵ This does not mean — we add by way of a word of caution — that consciousness should be reduced to rationality alone i.e: discursive though³⁶ or reason severed from its transcendent poetic roots, since, to borrow the words of Iqbal, " The Total reality... has other ways of invading our consciousness"³⁷ ; there are "non-rational modes of consciousness"³⁸ ;" there is the possibility of unknown levels of consciousness"³⁹ and "there are potential types of consciousness lying close to our normal consciousness".⁴⁰ How do these "other ways of invasion " relate to poetry ? Iqbal tells us that the questions that call for an intellectual vision of reality for their answers are, "common to religion, philosophy and higher poetry."⁴¹

was not like ours "free " to ignore truth." See his *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Dover, N.Y.,1956, p.29.

³⁵ See S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, Islamic* Text Society, Cambridge,1987,p. 93.

³⁶ Which is, as if, a reflection of the Intellect on the mental plane.

³⁷ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*,(referred to as *Reconstruction*, here after)Iqbal Academy Pakistan /Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1989,p.13.

³⁸ *Ibid* p.14.

³⁹ *Ibid*. p.37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*. p.

⁴¹ His complete statement reads as follows. " What is the character and general structure of the universe in which we live ? Is there a permanent element in the constitution of this universe ? How are we related to it? What place do we occupy in it, and what is the kind of conduct that befits the place we occupy ? These are the questions that are common to religion, philosophy and higher poetry. But the kind of knowledge that poetic inspiration brings is essentially individual in its character; it is figurative vague and indefinite." *Reconstruction*, op. cit. p.l.

In order to elucidate my point further I quote here, not from the theorists of literature but from the poets themselves. Jami referred to the same doctrine when he sang the following verses:

What is poetry? The song of the bird of the Intellect.

What is poetry? The similitude of the world of eternity.

The value of the bird becomes evident through it,

And one discovers whether it comes from the oven of a bath house or a rose garden:

It composes poetry from the Divine rose garden;

It draws its power and sustenance from that sacred precinct:⁴²

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Likewise, Milton in his Paradise Las! (Book 11-17; Book III -51) wrote of a vision which would then be translated into poetry.

And chiefly thou O Spirit, that dost prefer

Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,

Instruct me, Jbr thou know 'st:

...

So much the rather thou celestial light

Shine inward and the mind through her powers

irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence

Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell

⁴² Jami, *Sisalat al-Dhahah*, cf. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, Islamic Text Society, Cambridge, 1987, p.91.

Of things invisible to mortal sight.⁴³

Valmiki, who composed Ratnayana, is reported to have been ordered to record a vision granted to him. "Then only, after concentrated meditation, when the whole story lay like a picture in his mind, he began to shape it into shalokas"⁴⁴

Dante in his Divine Comedy says in the same vein

I am one who hearkens when

Love inspires me, and I put thought into word

After the mode which He dictates within me: "⁴⁵

It is, therefore, significant and not a matter of mere coincidence that the words which denote poetry or poetic activity in all the major Islamic languages⁴⁶ and the word which denotes consciousness (shu 'ur) share the

⁴³ John Milton, *The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Mass., USA, 1941, p.155 and 199; Nasr, op.cil. p.96.

⁴⁴ See A.K. Coomarasawamy and Sister Nivedita, *Myths of the Hindus and the Buddhists*, New York, 1914, pp.23-24, cf. Nasr, op.cit., p.93. Also see A. K. Coomarasawamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Dover, N.Y., 1956, p.53-55.

⁴⁵ Dante, "Purgatorio", XXIV.52-54, *The Divine Comedy*, translated _ by Laurance Binyon in *The Portable Dante*, ed. Paolo Milano, The Viking Press, New York, 1995, p.312. Other authorities are no less explicit about these traditional dicta: Plato says " In the making of thing by art, do we not know that a man who has this God for his leader achieves a brilliant success, whereas he on whom Love has lay no hold is obscure ?" (Symposium 197 A). Plotinus is in complete agreement when he adds crafts such as building and carpentry take their principles from that realm and from the thinking there"(Enneads, V.9.11) ;" My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me... He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory ", (John VII. 16, 18.)" Lo, make all things in accordance with the pattern that was shown thee on the mount " (Exodus, XXV. 40.)

⁴⁶ In Arabic, Persian it is the word shi'r, as well as its various constructs and derivatives which denote poetry. Similar is the case of Urdu, Turkish and most of the regional languages of the Islamic lands. Poet, in all these languages, is called sha'ir which again is a derivative

common trilateral verbal root sh, 'r which means ' to become aware of, ' to be conscious of'. The same conceptual underpinning is evident in the traditional definitions of poetry that are found in the classical works on literary theory and compilations of the technical terms.⁴⁷ For the purposes of our present study, however, we have fashioned afresh these definitions which does, not make them better but merely make these more elaborate and easily accessible. The need for this reformulation⁴⁸ is rooted in the fact that Iqbal, though standing as an out post of the sensibility and the world view which the great masters⁴⁹ of traditional Islamic literature adhered to, was at the same time a man of the modern age.⁵⁰ The definitions are listed here in their

form of the same root implying " the conscious one, some one who is aware, the person with cognition ".

⁴⁷ For example see Kushshafu Lstilahat al- Funun, rpt. Suhail Academy, Lahore, 1993, Vol. I, pp.744-46. This is the finest and the most detailed encyclopaedia of the technical terms used in the Islamic sciences that the Muslim scholars have produced over the centuries. For an account of the views of al- Farabi and Ibn Sina see S. Kamal, *The Poetics of Al-Farabi and Avicenna*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991; Also see S.H. Nasr and O. Leaman (eds.) *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Routledge, London, vol. 2, p.970; Mansour Ajami, *The Alchemy of Glory: the Dialectic of Truthfulness and Untruthfulness in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism*, Washington, 1988, pp.55ff; H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, Irving, 1980. Also see Ibn Qutaybah, *Kitab al-Shi'r Wa 'l-Shu'ura* for the classification of poetry according to the Islamic poetic canons.

⁴⁸ For this formulation we are indebted to our colleague Mr. Ahmad Javid who is himself a first rate poet of the Urdu language, a fine metaphysician and an expert in Iqbal studies, Kalam and Sufism.

⁴⁹ Like 'Attar, Sana'i, Rumi, Jami.

⁵⁰ This point has always been emphasised in most of the studies of Iqbal's mind and art. As a random sample read the following. "A typical example of modern use of traditional forms is the poetry of Mohammed Iqbal, who utilised mainly forms inherited from Persian and Urdu poetry...He used traditional imagery but filled it with new content, and it seems clear that his listeners would scarcely have accepted his daring message had he told it in free verse or in images taken from English or German tradition. People —literate or illiterate—were so used to certain rhythms, rhyme forms and images that their use facilitated Iqbal's work tremendously", Annemarie Schimmel, *The Two Colored Brocade*, Chapel Hill, 1992, p.35. From the other end of the world we hear the comment, " like Abraham, he came out of the fire alive, that is, with his Muslim identity intact despite his Western education and his

hierarchical order, which is also the order of their scope and level of comprehensiveness.

What, then, is poetry,²

1- Language, in-formed⁵¹ or moulded by metrical structures⁵² and rhythmic patterns, is called poetry.

2- Language, in-formed by metrical structures and rhythmic patterns and manipulated in an excellent and beautiful manner, is called poetry.

3- Language, in-formed by metrical structures and rhythmic patterns and manipulated in an excellent and beautiful manner, is called poetry provided it does not take place involuntarily.⁵³

4- Language, in-formed by metrical structures and rhythmic patterns and manipulated in an excellent and beautiful manner, is called poetry provided it does not take place involuntarily.⁵⁴ The content, which is thus expressed beautifully, pertains to the formal aspect of beauty (jamal suwari).⁵⁵

engaging the West in the frontier of philosophy." Anwar Ibrahim, *The Asian Renaissance*, Time Books, K.L./Singapore, 1996,p,35.

⁵¹ This is a rather unusual usage of the word which is now a days used without a hyphen. However it conveys very well the idea of "shaping, giving form to, fashioning ".See Nasr, op.cit.p.90 ; Oxford Dictionary, Oxford University Press,Vol.I,1971,p.1341; II"ebster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd edition, Dorset & Baber, 1972, p.940.

⁵² The word commonly used to denote the idea of metre (hahr or wazn in Arabic and Persian) is mawzun which means to weigh or measure '.See Finn Thiesen, *A Manual of Classical Persian Prosody...*, Wiesbaden,Harrassowitz,1982 ; Wright,A Grammaer of the Arabic Language,vol.11,last chapter. In so far as number and measure are nothing but expressions of unity, they constitute the essence of rhythm as the "formal " pole of poetry. Number must be understood as the expression of Unity with in multiplicity ; it is the very "vibration" of the One. In this regard see Ray Lavingston, *The Traditional Theory of Literature*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1962.

⁵³ Bi 'l-gasd, that is, an act of one's own volition, some thing accomplished on purpose.

⁵⁴ It was, perhaps, this level of poetic activity to which Dr Schimmel has directed her following remarks in her fine study of Persian poetry. "There are brilliant-looking verses

5- Language, in-formed by metrical structures and rhythmic patterns and manipulated in an excellent and beautiful manner, is called poetry provided it is not involuntary and manifests beauty of expression. The content, which is thus expressed beautifully, pertains not to the outward form of beauty (jamal suwari) but to the beauty⁵⁶ of the inner meaning Mama! ma '~rawi).⁵⁷

What distinguishes Iqbal from other Urdu poets is that his major works, unlike any other Urdu poet, fall under the last of the definitions of poetry that we have listed above which, in fact, is the highest class of poetry.⁵⁸ This

which express no real feeling and have no content what ever — yet which fulfil all the necessary conditions of poetry. The reader will encounter this kind of poetry more often than might be expected." The Two Colored Brocade, op.cit, p38.

⁵⁵ That is, the sublimation of the sensible or the sense data (mahsus) into a more subtle and refined form or a higher integrated pattern.

⁵⁶ That is to say that as the impression or rather the imposition of the ma'na increases the outward form becomes more transparent and reveals more readily its inner meaning. Since we are dealing with poetry here, it would mean that, in the case of this highest level of poetry, the ma'na comes to dominate totally over surah (outward form) and remoulds the outward form from within (without, of course, destroying the poetic canons). Beauty, in this perspective, is, then, the attractive power of perfection. For a further discussion on the point see Coomaraswamy, op.cit. P.34. Plato, in Cratylus, 416 c has made the same point. Also see Dionysius Areopagiticus, De div. nom. IV.5 and Lanka vatara Sutra, 11.1 18-9.4

⁵⁷ That is, the transmutation of the intelligible (ma'qul) into the quasi- sensible or the transmutation of the sensible into the intelligible. In this case the spiritual and the intellectual principle imposes its harmony upon the conceptual modalities of the human soul (mind i.e. discursive thought is included in the faculties of the human soul in classical terminology). If the soul fails to receive the imprint of Beauty, that is, if it is excluded from the orbit of the human receptivity of Beauty the totality of the poetic phenomenon becomes some how lacking.

There is yet an other, rather esoteric, definition of poetry that we have left out from the purview of our present discussion. It reads as follows. "Poetry is the beauty of expression as well as the manifestation of Beauty. It is the total and perfect expression of the manifest which is always rooted in that which is completely unmanifest." This is to say that it is rooted in the ineffable Principle, the Silence, which is the alpha and omega of all poetry and all music.

⁵⁸ Obviously, this should not be taken to mean that Iqbal did not try his hand on versification pure and simple or that the other Urdu poets did not reach the heights of

point, perhaps, needs further elucidation. Proceeding against the backdrop of the definitions that we have formulated, we can say that the Urdu poetry⁵⁹ of the Indian subcontinent, at the time when Iqbal emerged on the literary scene, could be *grosso modo* classified into four categories⁶⁰:

I- Contemplative or higher poetry⁶¹ in which the inner meaning (*ma'na*) dominates over the outward form. In the every day language this kind of poetry⁶² is called the poetry of ideas and concepts e.g. parts of the poetic works of Mir and Ghalib.⁶³

II- Poetry where the process of sublimation of feelings, sentiments and the sense impressions is the dominant motif e.g. most of the poetic works of Mir⁶⁴ and some of the lyrics of Ghalib.⁶⁵

excellence. It is a question of the predominant characteristic only, otherwise examples of "language informed by metrical structures and rhythmic patterns-" abound in Iqbal's *Bayiyat* (disowned verses) and, on the other hand, first rate poetry is to be found in all the great poets of Urdu.

⁵⁹ The reason that we talk here of Urdu poetry only while 55% of Iqbal's poetic works are in Persian is, precisely, that in the days of Iqbal, and even afterwards, the Persian poetry cultivated in India, as well as in the Persian speaking lands, failed to produce any specimens that could be said of genuine significance and real poetic worth.

⁶⁰ The classification is for the ease of discourse, otherwise there are always emphasis shifts and overlapping.

⁶¹ This is the name given to it by Iqbal. See note 8.

⁶² When we say poetry it is presumed that it observes the canons described in the definitions, the difference arising from other distinguishing factors as well as from the level of consciousness and perfection to which a certain poetic composition may attain.

⁶³ In the same category one has to include those verses, lyrics, odes. Poems and epics which are either didactic or versify some historical or mythological story adapted for the purpose.

⁶⁴ See Mohammed Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature*, 2nd edition. Oxford, Karachi, 1984 ; Ali Jawwad Zaidi, *A History of Urdu Literature*, Sahitia Academy, Delhi, 1993.

III- Poetry of lexical and linguistic techniques i.e: poetry which incorporates the appropriate skills like play on words, use of proverbs, adages and other linguistic resources and devices, Poetic works of Dhawq⁶⁶ and Dagh⁶⁷ provide examples of this kind of Urdu poetry.

IV- Poetry of literary embellishment and rhetorical devices. Most of the poetry of the Lucknow school⁶⁸ falls into this category as does a part of Mu'min's⁶⁹ poetic works and Mathnawi Gulzar-i-Nasim.⁷⁰

Iqbal is neither the poet of sublimation, nor of the lexical/linguistic techniques and resources nor of the literary embellishments and rhetorical devices though he uses all these elements in a consummate manner. Iqbal's poetry belongs, essentially and predominantly, to the first category.⁷¹ He is a poet of intellectual-conception and intuition-expression⁷² where in the ma'na (inner meaning) dominates totally over the surah. It is, however, still different from the Urdu poetry of the_ same category, both in its inner dynamics and the content of the inner meaning. While Iqbal's poetic master pieces were a fruit of an intuitive vision associated with the realm of the intelligibles⁷³ in the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Some critics have found in this fact a matter of reproach. From their point of view, which is typically modern, poetry is a matter of feelings and sentiments. Since Iqbal untiringly repeated some basic ideas, used a comparatively smaller number of poetic symbols and there is a complete absence of allusions to erotic subjects in his verse, he should be regarded as a thinker and not a poet.

⁷² We shall explain these terms during the course of our discussion.

first place, the ideas and concepts that were prevalent in the works of the other poets were, by and large, conventional ideas shunted off from Sufism and the Illuminationist schools. The psycho-dynamics of the common run of the poets was different in the sense that it stemmed from a different level of the artist's being. At this point we encounter the question of the levels of consciousness which is central to the gradation of poetry into hierarchical levels, ranging from the most mundane and facile versification to the most sublime degree of in-spired poetry⁷⁴ keeping ourselves within the same perspective but making our terms of reference more concise, we can say that poetry could be considered as the response or activity of a part of our being which, manipulated by the faculty of imagination, manifests itself in linguistic patterns. Those who represent the poetry of lexical/literary techniques and rhetorical devices or, in other words, the skilful craftsmanship of the poetic art, bring into play their rational faculties only and, to a certain extent, the lower reaches of imagination. It is a response born of the cerebral and discursive part of their being. Poetry of sublimation of feelings and sentiments is born of the response of the passionate soul or the psychic activity surging and overflowing from the emotive self.⁷⁵ Contemplative or higher poetry⁷⁶ is the response of the Intellect⁷⁷ i.e. born of intellect.' The

⁷³ Primary or secondary (ma'qulat ula and ma'qulat thaniya) respectively, in the terminology of Muslim philosophy.

⁷⁴ Some of the leading authorities on the religious sciences have given the title of "the poet of inspiration" to Iqbal. See Amin Ahsan Islahi, "Dr. Iqbal — The Poet of Inspiration", Iqbaliat, (Urdu) Vol.27, No. 4, January, 1987, pp.13; "Al-Sha'ir al-Mulham", Iqbaliat (Arabic), 1992, pp. 149; Abu 'I - Hasan 'Ali Nadavi, Rawa'i Iqbal, Dar al-Fikr, Damascus, 1960; Nuqush -i - Iqbal, Karachi, 1973.

⁷⁵ This is the kind of poetry which, in all probability, Wordsworth had in view when he defined poetry. This also explains the remark made by John A. Haywood, "The fact is that by accepted Islamic poetical canons, Wordsworth's poetry would rate very low — much lower than Shelley's — whereas to most English tastes these two poets are rated almost equal." See John A. Haywood, "The Wisdom of Muhammad Iqbal — Some Considerations of Form and Content", in The Sword and the Sceptre, ed. Dr. Riffat Hasan, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1977, pp.162-175.

⁷⁶ The terms in-spired poetry or wisdom poetry as well as other terms shall become clear as we go along.

reason Iqbal's poetry has to be considered as contemplative or higher poetry is, precisely, that the response is born of his intellect. His life is, as if, in the realm of the intelligibles and his faculties entertain their imprint, the ideas, in the way ordinary people receive the effects and impressions of events and sense data. What do we mean, then, by the entertainment of ideas? It is the intuition of things as they are on higher than empirical levels of reference. Before we go any further, we feel that this calls for a word about the terms that we have used in the foregoing remarks since we are aware of the fact that the same terms do not always carry the same signification for every one especially in our times when there is hardly any agreement over the technical terms used in various disciplines, and more markedly, in the field of literature. Moreover it is important for the understanding of the doctrine of art that we have adopted as our point of departure and which provides the theoretical underpinning to our evaluation of Iqbal's art and thought.

The terms "intuition" and expression are used here as the equivalents of "conception" and "generation" and in using these we are not thinking either of Bergson⁷⁸ or of Croce. By "intuition" we mean an intellection extending beyond the range of dialectic to that of the eternal "reasons"⁷⁹ It is therefore a contemplation rather than a thinking. Contemplation, in turn, implies to raise our level of reference from the empirical to the ideal, from observation to vision, from any auditory sensation to audition and so on. The poet, thus, "taking ideal form under the action of the vision while remaining only potentially 'himself.'⁸⁰ This is what we saw in the case of the verses quoted earlier from Dante.⁸¹ We must emphasise that contemplation is an act and

⁷⁷ It must have been evident by now to the reader that we make a distinction between reason and intellect in the sense that, to use the expression of Rumi, 'aq/-i-juz'i (delimited reason) has defamed the intellect ('uql-i-ku//i). See S.H.Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, rpt., Suhail Academy, 1988; Martin Lings, "Intellect and Reason", *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, rpt., Suhail Academy, 1988, p.57.

⁷⁸ H.L.Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, tr. Arthur Mitchell, London, 1911, p.1, pp.187-88.

⁷⁹ St. Augustin, *De Trin.* IX.6, II, cf. Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de St. Augustin*, 1931 'p.121.

⁸⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.4. 2.

not a passions⁸² and, contrary to what modern psychology says, we do not see in "inspiration" the uprush or inrush of an instinctive and subconscious will. "Inspiration", in the terms of our perspective, is an elevation of the artist's being to super-conscious and supra-individual levels.⁸³ In this the poet or artist is not a passive instrument. "He" is much rather actively and consciously making use of "himself" as an instrument.⁸⁴ Inspiration and aspiration, therefor, are not exclusive alternatives.⁸⁵ It seems that the caricaturing of in-spired poetry of the 20th century surrealists with their "automatic writing" stems from a confusion, which they made between the light of the super conscious with the darkness and the chaos of the subconscious.⁸⁶ Therefore the man incapable of contemplation, in the sense described above, can not be an artist but a skilful workman. It is demanded of an artist to be both a contemplative and a good workman.⁸⁷ This is precisely what we had in mind when we tried to formulate the definitions of higher poetry, in the earlier part of our paper, to which Iqbal's major works conform.⁸⁸

⁸¹ See note 15.

⁸² Free thought is a passion, however; it is much rather the thoughts than ourselves that are free.

⁸³ What is for the psychologist the "libido" is for the other" the divine Eros".

⁸⁴ Body and mind are not the man, but only his instrument and vehicle. The man is passive only when he identifies himself with the psychophysical ego letting it take him where it will.

⁸⁵ Because the spirit to which both the words refer cannot work in the man except to the extent that he is "in the spirit".

⁸⁶ The great mistake of the surrealists is to believe that profundity lies in the direction of what is individual, that it is this and not the universal, which is mysterious, and that the mystery grows more profound the more one delves in to what is obscure and morbid: this is mystery turned upside down and therefore satanic, and it is at the same time a counterfeit of the "originality"— or uniqueness — of God.

⁸⁷ Best of all if, like the angels, he need not in his activity "lose the delights of inward contemplation".

Let us now briefly consider how the form of the artistic creation — in the case of the poet, a verbal crystallisation— is evoked ? Human activity, in this regard as in others, works in a manner analogous to the Divine Activity, the Act of the Logos. The human operation reflects the manner of operation in divinis. The art of the human artist is his creation as the universe is the divine creation. The intuition-expression or, in other words, conception-articulation, of an imitable form is an intellectual conception horn of artist's wisdom just as the eternal reasons are horn of the Eternal Wisdom.⁸⁹ The images arise naturally in the spirit, not by way of an aimless inspiration, but in purposeful and vital operation "by a word conceived in the intellect".⁹⁰

The words "conceived in the intellect" come from a statement of St. Thomas Aquinas⁹¹ and we have so far only alluded to the doctrines of the Christian and Hindu literary traditions just because we regarded it more opportune for the present audience and occasion, Moreover we have not quoted from Iqbal's poetic works either. This was, in the first place, to escape the charge of circular reasoning⁹² and, secondly, to place Iqbal in a more universal and richer perspective. At this point, however, we find ourselves facing such strikingly close similarities of the doctrines mentioned above with the doctrines of the Islamic poetic tradition, to which Iqbal was a direct heir, that we find it impossible to silently pass over it.

According to Firdawsi, Sana'i, 'Attar, Sa'di, umi, Jami and other masters of Persian literature, poetry is the fruit of a vision that is articulated by the poet. To quote their exact formulation," it is conceived in the intellect and

⁸⁸ This does not, obviously, mean that Iqbal was a man devoid of volition, sentiments. Feelings and emotions, merely a cerebral. No one is like that. It, is only a question of emphasis and predominance which, in the traditional scheme of the division of human types, is described as the janunic, the bhuktic and the karumic. All we want to say is that Iqbal was a jananic or, if one prefers that, a pneumatic.

⁸⁹ The conception of an imitable form is a "vital operation" that is to say a generation, St. Bonaventura, In Hexaem, coll, 20, n. 5.

⁹⁰ Per verbann in intellectu conceptum, St. Thomas Aquinas, Sum. Theol., I. 45. 6c.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² i.e. classifying or defining Iqbal by quoting Iqbal himself.

then born through the wisdom of the poet".⁹³ The word used for wisdom is hikmah (sapiential wisdom) and the intellect is referred to by the words " 'aql, zanair, ail or jam etc."⁹⁴

One of the greatest authorities of Islamic metaphysics and sufism is Shaykh Muhyi al- Din Ibn 'Arabi who wrote not only several hundred prose works, but also three divans of poetry and many thousands of additional verses scattered through out his prose writings. As the greatest Muslim theoretician of imagination, he was able to utilise—with perfect awareness of what he was doing—the possibilities of poetical expression gained through imaginal perception.

For the Shaykh as well, the subject matter of poetry is not: something that one thinks about as one might think about a problem in dogmatic theology. Rather it is something that is seen with the inner eye and heard with the inner ear. Only then is it described.⁹⁵

⁹³ They all use various expressions but the meaning is almost always the same.

⁹⁴ 'Attar, *Asrar Nanrah*, p. 186; Musibut Namuh, p.48,50,367 ;*Diwan*,p.800; *Ilahi Namah*,p.366; Sana'i, *Hudiqah al-Haqiqah*,p.406,408. In this regard the remarkable detailed studies of Nasr Allah Pourjavadi are extremely informative and illuminating. See his *Bu-i Jan*, Tehran, 1387 and *Naqd -i- Falsafi-i shi'r a_ A'u_ur i 'Attur*, Tehran 1995. For Suharwardi's formulations on art and aesthetics see *Oeuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, (ed. S. H. Nasr) Paris, 1977; W. Thacksten, (tr.) *The mystical and Visionary Treatise of Suhrawardi*, London, 1982; For Muhammad Ghazzali, see R. Ettinghausen, "Al-Ghazzali on Beauty," in *Art and Thought*, Luzac, London, 1947, p. 160: For Ahmad Ghazzali, *Majmu'ah Athar-i- Farsi*, Tehran, 1370s. especially his *Sawanih*, (pp.93-190 loc.cit.) translated into English by Nasrullah Pourjavadi, London, 1986: Rumi, to give just one example of his formulation from among his large opus, speaks of the *modus operandi* of traditional art in the story of the Greek and the Chinese painters in exactly the same vein, see *Mathnawi*, Bk I, 3465-85 (also see Bk IV, 733; Bk V 372): For an other of Jami's formulations see *Lawa'ih*, tr. Whinfield and Kazvini, London, 1978. For a comprehensive survey of these formulations see S. H. Nasr, "Islamic aesthetics" in *A Companion to World Philosophies*, Blackwell, 1996, pp.448-459.

⁹⁵ For a detailed elucidation of the issue see W.C.Chittick, "Revelation and Poetic Imagery" in *Imaginal Worlds*, State University of New York Press, 1994, 67-77. This doctrine of the imaginal world and its significance for artistic creation received further elaboration in the works of Mulla Sadra. "It underlies the belief among so many Islamic artists, from poets to

So whether we call it higher poetry⁹⁶, designate it as the poetry of gnomic wisdom⁹⁷, give it the title of sapiential or contemplative poetry⁹⁸ or classify it as in-spired poetry⁹⁹, all these appellations refer to one and the same reality which is situated at the junction between the form and essence and opens onto the Infinite. It is an activity in which the human poet is but the imitator of the Divine Poet since his "logical"¹⁰⁰ utterance is simultaneously a "poetical"¹⁰¹ work.¹⁰²

To return to what we have earlier said, we repeat that the "vital operation"¹⁰³, of which Iqbal's poetry is a manifestation, is an intellectual conception born of the poet's wisdom. Thus it does not come as a surprise

miniaturists, that traditional art involves an "alchemy" that transforms the corporeal into the spiritual and the spiritual into the corporeal. The alchemical process of spiritualizing the material and materializing the spiritual, for all of its significance for Islamic art can be fully understood in the context of Islamic thought only in the light of the metaphysics of the imaginal world which was to receive its final elaboration in the hands of Mulla Sadra."

⁹⁶ This is how Iqbal designated it. See note 11.

⁹⁷ The title given to this genre by Haywood, see note 76.

⁹⁸ This my preferred expression for it.

⁹⁹ The epithet used by S. H. Nasr, *op.cit.* p.90.

¹⁰⁰ Meaning here "stemming from the logos".

¹⁰¹ Referring here to poesis.

¹⁰² In their essence, "poetry "and "logic "are one and the same."According to traditional doctrines, logic and poetry have a common source, the Intellect, and far from being contradictory are essentially complementary. Logic becomes opposed to poetry only if respect for logic becomes transformed in to rationalism, and poetry. Rather than being a vehicle for the expression of a truth intellectual knowledge, becomes reduced to sentimentalism or a means of expressing individual idiosyncrasies and forms of subjectivism." Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987, p, 91.

¹⁰³ The conception of an imitable form is a "vital operation" that is to say a generation. This statement, already quoted above, comes from St. Bonaventura.

when we find Iqbal singing in the same vein: "Poetry is the heir of prophecy"¹⁰⁴ or when he refers to himself as " of one voice with the trustworthy Gibra'il"¹⁰⁵ or declares that "poetry that communicates the message of eternity is either the song of Gibra'il or the trumpet of Israfil".¹⁰⁶ By doing this he places himself squarely in the traditional continuity of Islamic literature¹⁰⁷, draws the sap of poetry from it and eventually becomes perhaps the finest flower that blossomed in the withering garden of traditional Islamic poetry. This point has been well made in the study made

¹⁰⁴ Javid Nana, tr. A.J. Arberry, Unwin, London, 1966, p.65.

¹⁰⁵ Zabur-i 'Ajam, in Kulliyat -i Iqbal, Iqbal Academy, 1994, p.430. Gibra'il is the angel of revelation in the Islamic angelology.

¹⁰⁶ Zarb-i-Kalim in Kulliyat -i Iqbal, Iqbal Academy, 1994, p.644.

These are only representative samples otherwise much more could be cited from him on this point. See "Hikmat-o-Shi'r" in Kulliyat -i Iqbal, Iqbal Academy, 1994, p.262; "Rumi" in Kulliyat -i Iqbal, Iqbal Academy, 1994, p.335; "Asrar-o-Rumuz" in Kulliyat -i Iqbal, Iqbal Academy, 1994, p.30,52; pertinent is also the following quotation from his prose "Or perhaps our chief want is rather for the poet of the new age than for its prophet— or for one who should be poet and prophet in one. Our poets of recent generations have taught us the love of nature, and enabled us to find in it's the revelation of the Divine. We still look for one who shall show us with the same clearness the presence of the Divine in the human — We still need one who shall be fully and in all seriousness what Heine playfully called himself "Ritter Von dem Heiligen Geist", one who shall teach us to see the working out of our highest ideals in the everyday life of world and to find in devotion to the advancement of that life, not merely a sphere for an ascetic self-sacrifice, but a supreme object in the pursuit of which all thoughts, all passions, all delights may receive their highest development and satisfaction", Sayyid Abdul Wahid, Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal, pp. 95,96.

¹⁰⁷ Many fine studies have appeared which focus on this aspect of continuity. See Annemarie Schimmel, Gabriel's Wing, Iqbal Academy, Lahore, 1989; Two Colored Brocade, op. cit.; Mirza Muhammad Munawwar, Iqbal ki Farsi Ghazal.

by John Haywood¹⁰⁸ which, however, focuses mainly on the formal aspect of this continuity.

Iqbal is in the long line of Classical Islamic poets (and I do not use the term "Islamic" in the narrow religious sense). Indeed, he is perhaps the last great Classical Islamic poet....The scholar familiar with the poetical classics of Arabic and Persian has the feeling, after reading Iqbal, that he is very much in the same tradition. Indeed, the last way to think of Iqbal is as a Pakistani poet. Rather does he speak for Islam universally and for the common ground between Islam and the other major world religions...¹⁰⁹

a large proportion of the verses in his work are truly gnomic poetry — "hikmah" wisdom in the highest sense of the word. Moreover, they are not wisdom only to Muslims, or to Orientals, but to men of every creed and race. This is one of Iqbal's great achievements that he bridged the gap between East and West, and gave utterance to the common ground in the great religious and philosophical systems of the world.¹¹⁰

In the context of the issue of formal and spiritual continuity that we have just mentioned the question that is often debated in tribal studies is that whether Iqbal was Classical in both matter and manner or in style and imagery only! In other words, did he express new ideas, new matter in a classical manner? Old symbols - new message; traditional forms, modern content! A definitive answer to this problem requires further research and comparative studies with the great figures of the Islamic tradition that could reveal the intellectual aspect of this continuity. In my view, however, he represents a continuity of both form and content. To maintain this position one has to explain for the differences that exist between the content of his poetry and that of the classics of the Islamic literary tradition. In this regard, some scholars have also pointed out, often in a manner of reproach, that much of Iqbal's poetry focuses on the problems and concerns of his own

¹⁰⁸ See John A, Haywood, " The Wisdom of Muhammad Iqbal — Some Considerations of Form and Content ", in *The Sword and the Sceptre*, ed. Dr. Riffat Hasan, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1977, pp.162-175.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.162

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.172-73

community. It is also something, which, at least apparently, runs contrary to universality, which is fundamental to sapiential poetry.

The key to the understanding of this problem again lies in the doctrine of art that we have tried to expound in its essentials. Poetry “has something to say “which " cannot be said." It “has something to say”: it may not be didactic in the negative sense of the word but, if genuine, it is also the result of a kind of necessity, the outcome of a "pressure" or a "need" to crystallise a "meaning" into a "form". Then, an invisible spiritual, universe governs every sector of humanity. This spiritual universe not only determines the form, language and symbolism that the poetic inspiration of that sector of humanity has to take but also the "pressure" and the "need" that arise from the specific cosmic conditions pertaining to it. The specificity of this "urgent" and "necessitating" character of inspiration, under which the poetry of that particular sector comes into existence, does not prevent the poetic expression to be any thing less than perfect and to fulfil the first and the main criterion of art i.e. nobility of content.¹¹¹ On a secondary and contingent level the question of social responsibility also enters into consideration.¹¹² As an applied side of sapiential doctrines and art, practical wisdom has always occupied its legitimate place in human collectivities and a poet, being a responsible member of the collectivity, has to participate in it and to undertake it as a part of his human and spiritual vocation. It is, therefore, neither the question of a dichotomy nor a contradiction of the claims of universality. It is rather the other side of the same intellection, which is turned towards more practical and immediate issues of human existence. Here, poetry is "given to" or rather "imposed upon" the poet. Consider the case of Shaykh Mahmud Shabistari, the author of *Gulshan-i Ric* (The Secret

¹¹¹ Perfect art can be recognised by three main criteria — nobility of content, this being a spiritual condition apart from which art has no right to exist ; exactness of symbolism...and purity of style and elegance. See F. Schuon, *Language of the Self* Ganesh, Madras, 1954, pp.122-135.

¹¹² A contemporary poet such as Rilke is still very aware of this aspect when he writes to a young would be poet. "This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of the night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer and if the answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong simple I must', then build your life according to this necessity." Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letter to a Young Poet*, Random House, N.Y., 1987, p.6.

Rose Garden) which is one of the greatest masterpieces of Persian Sufi poetry. He was asked about some extremely sophisticated and subtle theological and esoteric questions. In his own words:

Everyone knows that during all my life, / have never

Intended to compose poetry.

*Although my temperament was capable of it, rarely did
I choose to write poems.*

Yet in spite of himself, Shabistari, in a period of few days, and through direct inspiration (ilharn) composed one of the most enduring and widely read masterpieces of oriental literature.¹¹³

This brings its to consider, at the end of this paper. the question of the purpose or "use" of sapiential poetry. Let us have, first of all, a look at a few representative statements of Iqbal on the question.¹¹⁴ He said:

I have no interest in the art of poetry, but I have some special objectives. To achieve these ends I have chosen the medium of poetry because of the state and conditions of this country.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ See Muhammad Lahiji, Sharh -i Gulshan-i Raa, Tehran, 1337, p.41.

¹¹⁴ See Schimmel, Gahriel's Wing, op.cit.pp.61-72.

¹¹⁵ A letter written in 1935, see Iqbal Nama, Ed. S. 'Ata Ullah, Lahore, Vol. I. See also the following quotations; "In poetry, literature for the sake of literature has never be enemy aim. There is no time left to me to attend to the delicacies of art. The purpose. Is to revolutionise modes of thinking. That is all. Keeping this principle in view I try to express what I find useful. No wonder if the coming generations may not recognise me as a poet." (Iqbal Nama, Ed. S. 'Ata Ullah, Lahore, Vol. 1, p. 108); "I have never known myself as a poet. Therefore I have no rival competitors and I do not recognise any as such. I have no interest in the art of poetry. Yes, I have some specific goals to achieve, which I always keep before me. I took to poetry to explain these goals with reference to the conditions and traditions obtaining in the country, otherwise

You will not find any good coming from that low-minded person

All human art must be subordinated to this final purpose (i.e. life) and the value of every thing must be determined with reference to its life-yielding

capacity. The dogma of the art for the sake of art¹¹⁶ is a clever invention of decadence to cheat us out of life and power.¹¹⁷

Iqbal is again in conformity with the traditional theory of literature here. Coomaraswamy tells us that " It is the same if we read the scriptures of any tradition or the authors like Dante or Ashvaghosha who tell us frankly that they wrote with other than "aesthetic" ends in view".¹¹⁸ Since, according to the Hindu tradition, the purpose of art and, of course, poetry is " to know immortal through mortal things"¹¹⁹ and the Christian doctrine announces that " the invisible things of God " (that is to say the ideas or eternal reasons of things, by which we know what they ought to be like) are to be seen in the things that are made".¹²⁰ Dante could say, "The whole work was undertaken not for speculative but a practical end... The purpose of the whole is to remove those who are living in this life from the state of wretchedness and to

Who accuses me of writing poetry?

Iqbal! Alamo, Ed. S. 'Ata Ullah, Lahore, Vol. I, p. 195.

¹¹⁶ The error in the thesis of "art for art's sake" really amounts to supposing that there are relativities which bear their adequate justification within themselves, in their own relative nature, and that consequently there are criteria of value inaccessible to pure intelligence and foreign to objective truth. This error involves abolishing the primacy of the spirit and its replacement either by instinct or taste, by criteria that are either purely subjective or else arbitrary. F. Schuon, loc.cit.

¹¹⁷ Translation taken from Schimmel, Gabreil's Wing, op.cit. p.62.

¹¹⁸ A. K. Coomarasawamy, Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art, Dover, N.Y., 1956, p.25.

¹¹⁹ *Aitareya Aranyaka*, II. 3.2; *Aitareya Brahmana*, VII.10; *Katha Upanishad*, II.10 b.

¹²⁰ Rom. I. 20. St. Thomas Aquinas repeatedly compares the human and divine architects: God's knowledge is to His creation as is the artist's knowledge of art to the things made by art. See his *Sum. Theol.* I. 14.8:I. 17,I; I. 200. 2; I. 45. 6;I-III. 13. 2 ad 3.

lead them to the state of blessedness".¹²¹ Ashvaghosha declared¹²² his purpose in the following manner:

This poem, pregnant with the burden of Liberation, has been composed by me in the poetic manner, not for the sake of giving pleasure but for the sake of giving peace, and to win over other-minded hearers. If I have dealt in it with subjects other than that of Liberation, that pertains to what is proper to poetry, to make it tasty, just as when honey is mixed with a sour medicinal herbs to make it drinkable. Since I beheld the world for the most part given over to objects of sense and disliking to consider Liberation, I have spoken here in the garb of poetry, holding that Liberation is the primary value.

Plato was also explicit on the point since the Muses are given us "that we may use them intellectually, not as a source of irrational pleasure but as an aid to the revolution of the soul within us, of which the harmony was lost at birth, to help in restoring it to order and content with its Self".¹²³

We need not expand on it because it is evident that, according to the traditional theory of literature, the foundations of art lie in the Spirit, in metaphysical, theological and mystical knowledge, not in the knowledge of the craft alone nor yet in genius, for this may be anything at all in other words the intrinsic principles of art are essentially subordinate to the extrinsic principles of a higher order. Art is an activity, an exteriorisation, and thus depends by definition on a knowledge that transcends it and gives it order; apart from such knowledge art has no justification: it is knowledge which determines action, manifestation, form and never the reverse.

Sapiential poetry. Then, is a means and a vehicle for the expression of truth and it complements logic in that it deals with forms of knowledge which are not accessible to the unaided logical faculties of man. Also this

¹²¹ Cf. Commaraswamy.*op. cit.*, p.54.

¹²² Ashvaghosha, *Saudarananda*, colophon, cf. Coomaraswamy, *op.cit.* p.54.

¹²³ *Timaeus* 47 D, cf. Coomaraswamy, *op.cit.* p.55

poetry brings about the transformation of the soul and its sensibilities in a manner which is not possible otherwise. It causes an assent in the soul of man and in this regard it has an almost alchemical quality about it, a power to transform knowledge, making it a "tasted " fruit which is digested and which transforms one's being. thus. through its re-echoing of the fundamental truths of our existence aids man to return to the higher states of being and consciousness.

Finally, art, even the highest as in the case of sapiential poetry, is only the means to an end. It is a manner of "seeing through a glass, darkly," and although it is far better than not to see at all, the utility of every art must come to an end when "vision is face to face".¹²⁴

A finite image of Infinity:

This is the nature of all poetry.

All human work to its last limit tends;

*Its Archetype in Heaven never ends.*¹²⁵

¹²⁴ I Cor. 13. 12

¹²⁵ F.Schuon, *The Garland -Poems*, Bloomington:Abodes,1994,p.85.