

# **IQBAL'S APPROPRIATION OF EVOLUTION IN ISLAM: A CRITIQUE**

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The most typical of modernist sensibility is belief in evolution without which nothing makes sense for modern man. Evolutionism is the cornerstone of modern scientism as it has substituted horizontal causes for the vertical ones and thus made world safe for atheists, as one defender of evolutionism has put it. In the official formulation of evolutionism transcendence or the supernatural has no place and God needs to be smuggled in, or gets only a backdoor entry. Modern science's unflinching commitment to the theory of evolution is understandable in the light of its commitment to philosophical and methodological naturalism, reductionism, demythologization and thus vetoing of all Supernaturalism. The edifice of modern scientism can't stand without the mortar of evolution. It is why nothing makes sense in the world of biology without the background metaphysics of evolutionism as Dobzhansky has said. Evolution far from being a purely scientific matter, a value neutral hypothesis, is part of a worldview or ideology. It makes knowledge and existence claims that are incompatible with theistic religious thesis. It is one of the most important sources of or inspiration of modern disbelief. It amounts to plain rejection of traditional religious belief in the hierarchy of existence. It has been argued with good warrant that all the atheistic material emanating from the West is an outcome of Darwin's theory. Yet the fact is that modern man is heavily conditioned by belief in evolution and if he is religious would demand its appropriation in the religion. To be modern and not to believe in evolution is something inconceivable for most modernists and many religious modernists have tried hard to make room for evolution. It is the excessively modernist sensibility or conditioning that makes one receptive to evolutionism and its reductionist/naturalistic framework. Orthodox religious attitude is otherwise uncompromisingly against evolutionism in all its forms. Orthodox traditional Islam is opposed to Darwinism, especially its metaphysical assumptions and implications. The methodological naturalism associated with evolutionism is hardly reconcilable with Islam. Modernist approach is thus unwarranted from traditionalist perspective. Consistent modernism, as that of Iqbal, attempts to

read evolution in the Qur'an also. He rereads Islamic history to support his evolutionism. Iqbal took for granted modern science's commitment to evolution and took it as given the modern man's conditioning by evolution and evolution inspired belief in progressivism. Iqbal's philosophy of ego, his views on afterlife and perfect man and timecentric interpretation of Islam and many other dimensions of this thought are strongly coloured by evolutionism. Present article critically evaluates and explores Iqbal's approach to evolutionism vis-à-vis traditional Islam.

At the outset it needs to be pointed out that Iqbal is not unique in his endeavour of appropriating evolutionary thesis in Islam. Several of the contemporary Muslim modernists have indulged in such exercises. They include such personalities as Sir Syed, Abul Kalam Azad, Sheikh Abduhu, Dr Rafiuddin, G. A. Pervez, Inayatullah Khan Mashriqi, Ahmed Bashameel and many others. They have all tried to appropriate idea of evolution in Islam. Amongst modern-day defenders of it is Maurice Boccaile, to name only the most popular writer on the issue of 'Qur'an and Science'. However what distinguishes Iqbal from most of such attempts at positive appropriation of evolution in Islam is his reckoning with the deeper philosophical and theological issues involved in the idea of evolution and his advocacy of his own philosophical system and interpretation of Islam that is deeply coloured by evolutionary ideas. One could even argue that evolution forms a key to his philosophy. Iqbal seems to be a thoroughgoing evolutionist; evolution seems to have permeated deep into his thought. The modernist humanist framework that he more or less subscribes to demands this. His personalist philosophy, his idea of perfect man, his views on immortality and hereafter, his philosophy of time, his interpretation of finality of prophethood, his meliorism, his belief in a growing universe, his critique of classical spirit, his demythologizing approach (especially with regard to the legend of Fall), his theodicy, his critique of Sufism, his critique of the Ash'arite doctrine of destiny, his interpretation of *Iblis*, the very project of reconstruction, his inductivist empiricist approach, his critique of Nietzsche and all cyclic theories of time and space (rather than time) centred traditions, his critique of relativity theory, his deed and action-centred interpretation of Islam, his panentheism and links with process philosophy, his plea for absolute *Ijtihad* and dynamism, his praise for innovation, his condoning attitude towards Kemalist project, his conception of man as copartner of God in creatorship,

his interpretation of the West as the further development of some of the most important phases of Islamic culture and thus seeing nothing wrong in Islam's movement towards the West, his epistemology, his interpretation of history, his critical attitude towards traditions and praise for Abu Hanifa for largely ignoring them, his privileging of becoming over being, his defense of what he calls intellectual evil and many more dimensions and aspects of thought reveal a clear direct or indirect impact of evolution and evolutionism. Iqbal is perhaps the only great Muslim intellectual (excepting Abul Kalam Azad) who took evolution so seriously that his whole philosophy is colored by it. Here we critically analyze Iqbalian acceptance of the biological evolution vis-à-vis traditional Islamic approach to the problem. Iqbal's heterodox position will be highlighted.

Notoriously ferocious debates have occurred on the question of evolution within religious circles. The positions taken vary from the lock, stock and barrel rejection of evolution - of all evolution (in any living species) to frank acceptance of Darwinian account and the Qur'anic warrant has been sought by all the contenders. Some deny human evolution only while accepting the evolution in the animal and plant world. Some have substituted literalist interpretation of the Book of Genesis as an alternative while others have kept silence. The critique of evolution varies from extremely naïve attempts from some ultraconservatist circles and ulema to highly sophisticated attempts of Perennialist traditionalist orthodoxy that however is based on mainly metaphysical grounds rather than purely scientific ones. There have also been good attempts of critique of evolution on purely scientific lines from some Muslim intellectuals. However, they hardly display any originality. They appropriate or simply borrow the insights of the Western and Christian critics of evolution who are better informed and well armed for the purpose. All of these groups bring Qur'anic warrant for their respective positions. Iqbal rejects all such critical attempts and wholly subscribes to Orthodox Darwinian position with its methodological naturalism although the associated agnosticism or atheism he rejects. Now there are various subtypes of evolutionist position in Islam. Some of them argue for what Von Till calls Fully Gifted Creationism while as others bring God to fill in the blanks or gaps here and there, especially at the origin of life. It is difficult to avoid a deist picture of God for those Muslim evolutionists who subscribe to the thesis of autonomy of Nature and accept evolution as a mechanism of

creation. Very few scholars have been able to avoid the trap of either/or (creationist vs. evolutionist binary) logic and try some kind of alternative approach. However what characterizes most Muslim evolutionists is the belief that God is only the Final cause of life. Many take even Darwin to be a theist. Generality of our Muslim evolutionists do not recognize the profound and subtle implications of their belief in evolution. They are inconsistent evolutionists. They have hardly clear idea about what evolution is and how the religious hypothesis of a creator benevolent and all-wise God is affected by their belief in evolution. Of the ingenious appropriations of Darwinism from certain Christian quarters so as to avoid serious theological and philosophical problems they know nothing. They do not bother to see the hidden contradictions in their approach. Evolution is not just a neutral scientific fact that has no implications and repercussions on the great questions of theology. The problem of evil that evolution foregrounds so starkly is hardly reckoned with by these evolutionists. The disturbingly heterodox implications for our understanding of the Qur'an are also not catered to. What becomes of the orthodox way of Qur'anic exegesis and the exegesis of prophetic traditions too are not considered relevant problems by these upholders of evolution in Islam. Iqbal, however, stands in sharp contrast to this generality of lay, inconsistent and naïve appropriation of evolution and evolutionism. He is among the most consistent evolutionists in Islam. He knows what it means to uphold evolution and accordingly caters to the complex theological and philosophical problems that arise in this context. His genius lies in showing how evolution is not a uniquely new and Western idea and how it had already been part of Islamic tradition and even how the Qur'an legitimizes this belief. He rejects Orthodoxy's critique of biological evolution and appropriates it in his own unique and disturbingly original way and in diverse contexts. His approach could be contested from both the scientific as well as the traditional Islamic perspectives as has been argued in this chapter. He adopts the demythologizing strategy as a consistent and real evolutionist would. He rereads, albeit heterodoxically, the Islamic tradition, especially the Qur'an, to fit his evolutionist standpoint. He boldly criticizes both the traditional Islamic approach as well as the Western philosophical appropriation of evolution. He stamps his philosophy of ego here also. He appropriates the evolutionary thesis in the service of his philosophy of ego. He sees nothing smacking of heterodoxy in his approach. However the fact remains that he ignores certain key issues associated with the debate, passing

on silently over them. He could himself be categorized as a philosopher of evolution. It is not merely the biological fact of evolution that he takes seriously but its philosophical and theological implications that interest him most and he cashes on them for his own philosophy. The naturalism, the materialism and the over all antireligious connotations of Darwinian thesis he does not accept without arguing and defending (scientifically and philosophically) his position. He oversimplifies the issue and ignores some disturbing questions in this regard. However given the humanist modernist framework of his own thought he seems fairly consistent in his evolutionist approach but the problem arises when we see him as a Muslim subscribing to evolution and evolutionism – could he be consistent with the traditional Islamic perspective in this context? How far could one go with him if the Qur’an is the criterion? His reinterpretation of the Qur’an and the plea for reconstruction of relevant religious thought will be critically examined in the following pages

Iqbal asks the question that Darwin formulated in his *The Descent of Man* – how did man first emerge? His answer is that he arose through evolution. And he argues that this answer is suggested in the Qur’an itself and that Muslim philosophers and anthropologists took this Qur’anic suggestion seriously and developed elaborate views on evolution. He quotes the following two verses and reads suggestion of evolution in them (this hardly seems convincing) “Does not man bear in mind that we made him at first when he was naught?” (19:67) and “yet we are not thereby hindered from replacing you with others your likes or from producing you in a form which ye knew not! Ye have known the first creation, will you not reflect” (56:60-62). Iqbal claims that “this suggestive argument embodied in the last verses of the two passages quoted above did in fact open a new vista to Muslim philosophers. It was Jahiz (d. 255 A.H) who first hinted at the changes in animal life covered migrations and environment generally. The association known as the ‘Brethren Of Purity’ further amplified the views of Jahiz - Ibu Miskawaih (d. 421, A.H.), however, was the first Muslim thinker to give a clear and in many respects thoroughly modern theory of the origin of man”.<sup>279</sup> Thus Iqbal tries to link his reading of history of Muslim thought

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<sup>279</sup> Iqbal, M., *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ed. and annot. M. Saeed Sheikh, Adam Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, p.96

with the supposedly Qur'anic suggestions or hints of evolution. This is unique in contemporary Islamic scholarship. He finds enough evidence of evolution in the history of Islam to be disturbed by Darwin. He gives the impression as if Darwin said nothing fundamentally new in this context and only formulated the theory of evolution that was well known in Islam (without having created the debate and clash with the creationist anthropology and theology of traditional Islam) only more precisely and systemically.<sup>280</sup> He asserts that instead of creating the loss of faith, despair over future of man and the widespread pessimism in the Islamic world, the idea of evolution was greeted and enthusiastically welcomed by Muslims (e.g. Rumi). This is the reading of history that traditional orthodox Muslim historians would totally reject. This seems to be a fanciful account as compared to the generally accepted view of history of Islam. The historians of ideas and the historians of science could hardly accept this view. Iqbal tries to bring history as witness for his own reading of the evolution in the Qur'an. This is his own reconstruction of history that does not stand in the face of generally accepted (with very good evidence in its favour) view of Islamic history. Only a postmodernist historiography could concede of such otherwise fanciful constructions of history. There are far more resemblances than differences between the Biblical Book of Genesis and the Qur'anic account of the genesis of man. Iqbal's reading of Rumi as an evolutionary thinker is quite heterodox and problematic and has been contested by many Iqbalian critics. William Chittick, without referring to Iqbal, has sharply contrasted Rumi's concept of evolution and modern Neo-Darwinian evolutionism, especially its philosophical consequences. Syed Vahidudin also takes Iqbal to task for seeing in Rumi an evolutionary thinker. He points out:

Evolution<sup>281</sup> as understood by Rumi has not much in common with the concept of evolution in modern understanding. What it assumes is not so much the evolutionary continuity of being, but its gradation. It is the idea of the human spirit passing through different world levels.... There is an ascent rather than the evolution of the spirit that can cease with its temporal manifestation. It involves the idea of human spirit which moves forward through different levels of being and does not presuppose these

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<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p.148.

world levels of being to a process of evolution. Hence the mistake of Iqbal and other writers in seeing in Rumi an “evolutionary thinker”.<sup>282</sup>

Finding evolutionism in Islamic history and linking Rumi with it as Iqbal does presupposes very untraditional view of Islamic metaphysics. Iqbal could not perceive the disturbingly heterodox implications of modern evolutionism because he did not fully share the framework of traditional metaphysics that posits hierarchy of existence and proceeds from higher to lower rather than the converse. The reductionist approach of modern science, although not fully shared by Iqbal but still seems to form the background of his overall approach, is anathema for traditional worldview of Islam. Traditional Islamic science as perennialist traditionalist scholarship presents it is irreconcilable with Iqbalian and modern scientific reductionism. Even if there is incontestable evidence in favour of biological evolution of man, still the philosophical naturalism and rejection of hierarchy of existence that are usually associated with evolutionism makes its total acceptance by any traditional religion very unorthodox. Martin Lings goes to the extent of declaring that if evolution is true, religion gets falsified. Although that may be going too far and it leads to dogmatic assertions of creationism, (the exoteric formulation of *creatio ex nihilo* thesis) one must guard against metaphysical consequences and presuppositions of evolutionism. As Schuon observes:

... Evolutionism, that most typical of all the products of the modern spirit – is no more than a sort of substitute; it is a compensation on a plane surface for the missing dimensions – because one no longer admits, or wishes to admit, the suprasensible dimensions. Proceeding from the outward to the Divine centre, one seeks the solution to the cosmogenic problem at the sensory plane and one replaces true courses with imaginary ones which, in appearance at least conform with the possibilities of the corporeal world in the place of hierarchy of invisible world, and in the place of creative emanation – which, it may be said, is not opposed to the theological idea of *creatio ex nihilo*, but in fact explains its meaning – one puts evolution and the transformation of species and with them inevitably

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<sup>282</sup> Vahidudin, Syed, *Islamic Experience in Contemporary Thought*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Vol. of *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries* ed: Christian. W. Troll, Chanakya Publications, Delhi, p. 86.

the idea of human progress, the only possible answer to satisfy the materialist's 'need of causality.'<sup>283</sup>

Modern evolutionism appears as an allograft on the traditional Islamic body and thus liable to be rejected by the orthodox Islamic spirit. Ibn Miskawaih's speculations on evolution have very little in common with methodological naturalism of Darwinism that assumes the autonomy of nature and has no room for vertical interference or the irruption of the supernatural into the natural world. Jahiz's discovery that migration of birds causes certain changes in them could not be linked to Darwin's discovery of finches on the Galapagos islands and the consequent wholly naturalist account of design in the whole living world. Background worldviews are as divergent as possible.

Iqbal explains the higher level of reality in terms of lower although he tries to guard against reductionist and genealogist fallacies of judging by the origins. He writes:

The fact that the higher emerges out of the lower does not rob the higher of its worth and dignity. It is not the origin of a thing that matters, it is the capacity, the significance, and the final reach of the emergent that matters.... It by no means follows that the emergent can be resolved into what has conditioned its birth and growth.<sup>284</sup>

But emergent evolution too does not fare any better with traditionalists. The very idea of evolution in any guise whatsoever is anti-traditional and as Martin Lings says antithesis of religion. Martin Lings goes to the extent of saying that if evolution is true then religion must be false and vice versa. Although this is going too far and being unnecessarily and unwarrantedly dogmatic it cannot be denied that Darwinism has inherently antireligious flavour. The bitter struggle against Darwinism from Christian theological quarters shows that the evolution could not be taken non seriously. Religion fought a losing battle against evolution in modern times. Materialist and

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<sup>283</sup> Schuon, Frithjof, *Dimensions of Islam*, trans. P. N. Townsend, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, p.154.

<sup>284</sup> Iqbal, M. op. cit., p85



antireligious forces have used this as the main weapon against religion. Largest number of apostasies committed in the religious camp in recent times has Darwinism as the prime motivation. One can ignore this damaging potential of evolutionary thesis only at one's own peril. Religions must guard itself against this. Iqbalian strategy is to own enemy rather than make it the "other" and then fight against it. But this strategy cannot nullify or conceal the effect of venom for too long. One cannot make a friend out of an enemy by calling it a friend. Appropriating evolution and thus covering up the "*differend*" or the irresolvable difference will not do. This is no simple problem for any religionist. It is not easy to refute antireligious implications of orthodox Darwinism on purely philosophical grounds. There remains the strategy of arguing against the very credibility of evolutionary thesis but that strategy is not applicable for any evolutionist like Iqbal. Iqbal is himself much worried about the problem of evil and suffering that theory of evolution put in such a stark light. Iqbal notes:

The course of evolution, as revealed by modern science involves almost universal suffering and wrong doing .... The two facts of physical and moral evil stand out prominent in the life of Nature. Nor can the relativity of evil and the presence of forces that tend to transmute it be a source of consolation to us; for in spite of all this relativity and transmutation, there is something terribly positive about it.<sup>285</sup>

C. E. M. Joad in his *God and Evil* lists some illustrations of this terrible fact of evil – that biological record and evolutionary history displays. All attempts at theodicy utterly fail before such cases. One is hard put to exonerate God and understand His wisdom in the course of evolution. Iqbal rightly diagnoses this painful problem of evil and pain as the crux of theism. This problem of reconciling "the goodness and omnipotence of God with the immense volume of evil in His creation"<sup>286</sup> becomes more difficult when we survey the biological record as evolutionary thesis shows it. Iqbal quotes Nauman in this connection:

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<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

The following of the world God produces the morality of struggle for existence, and the service of the Father Jesus Christ produces the morality of compassion. And yet they are not two gods, but one God. somehow or other, their arms intertwine. Only no mortal can say where and how this occurs.<sup>287</sup>

He confesses his inability to understand “the full import of the great cosmic forces which work havoc”.<sup>288</sup> Darwin’s own agnosticism drew mainly from his inability to explain away the universal fact of pointless suffering in the living world.<sup>289</sup> Iqbal’s theodicy miserably fails and his treatment of the problem of evil forms the weakest point of his whole philosophy, as I have elsewhere argued.<sup>290</sup> There are many other dimensions of evolutionism that are so problematic from religious point of view. Iqbal seems to have assumed that he had solved the problem of evolution vis-à-vis Islam. It is Darwinism that has contributed most to the process of secularization worldwide. Modern secular and radical theologies, Nietzschean declaration of death of God, Satanism, Freudinism, Marxist dialectical materialism, humanism, ethical relativism and its Fascist implications, Hitlerism, social Darwinism, Eugenics and many such movements have direct or indirect Darwinian inspiration. How can one ignore it and maintain complacent attitude with regard to evolution by somehow appropriating and owning it. Bringing a Qur’anic warrant for it will also not solve the problem. Either way one is caught up in a difficult position if one accepts it or rejects it. It demands a deep knowledge of biology, philosophy of science and traditional religion to be rightly approached. Iqbal, for that matter, was neither deeply versed in biology and was also not a philosopher of science. He erred in uncritically accepting evolution and evolutionism and trying to read it in the Qur’an and the Islamic history. The risks of rejecting evolutionism, at least its philosophical or metaphysical overtones are far lesser for religion than that

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<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.64 - 65.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.

<sup>289</sup> I have elsewhere argued that Iqbal has, on sum, been unable to effectively treat this disturbing problem. His is a very unorthodox approach. He has failed to appropriate traditional Islamic perspective on the problem of evil. I have argued that it is his evolutionist framework that comes in his way to properly approach the problem of evil.

<sup>290</sup> As quoted in Witham, Larry, *By Design: Science of God*, Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., Chandigarh, 2004, p.148.

of somehow making peace with it. Orthodox Darwinism is closely linked with secularist and other anti-religious ideologies. The religious appropriation of evolutionism, as in Tillich and others, is severely criticized by official ideologues of evolution. It is difficult to silence critics of religious evolutionism. The ad hoc compromises suggested by some scholars are rejected by both the critics as well as the orthodox champions of Darwinism. Dawkins, a spokesperson for Neo-Darwinism, representing this official policy of evolutionist *vis à vis* religion, says that since religion makes existence claims and science (especially evolutionary science) too makes existence or knowledge claims and they diverge so one must, as a scientist, oppose religion tooth and nail.<sup>12</sup> However the subject is so full of ambiguities and conceptual confusions that there is a scope for “heterodox” approaches to the problem. Iqbalian approach could not be rejected too hurriedly especially by those who are for a serious and drastic reconstruction of religious thought. However one thing is clear: one cannot keep one’s foot with easy conscience in both the boats. Orthodox traditionalist religious worldview and the orthodox evolutionism are two separate epistemic and cognitive universes that are hard to reconcile but the problem is crucial one and it is hardly prudent gesture to maintain a dogmatic defiant either/or stance.

The way Iqbal tries to read evolution in the Qur’an is perhaps not defensible. He reads evolution in those selected few verses that do not exclude other interpretations by their phrasing. This selective appropriation of verses could be easily challenged on various grounds. Iqbal could be accused of misreading the Qur’an because he marginalizes/excludes those verses of the Qur’an which seem to argue against his position. Our classical commentaries could not be so hastily and so easily brushed aside when we read evolution in the Qur’an. There is Qur’anic warrant for transformation of human morphology in the history as palaeontologists argue but there is no warrant for seeing the “modern theory of origin of Man” in it as Boccaile argues.<sup>291</sup> The divine “interference” in man’s creation or “evolution” that is so clearly and so unequivocally discernible in the Qur’an cannot be interpreted away in the way that Iqbal suggests. The monotheistic religions do not acknowledge any explanation of man’s presence on earth other than

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<sup>291</sup> See Bucaille’s *What is the Origin Of Man? The Answers of Science and the Holy Scriptures.*, Islamic Book Service, 2000.

that there was a definite and planned initiative from God. God has surely acted and interfered in this drama in the usual sense of the words action and interference. The man created by God could well have evolved with regard to his form as Qur'an seems to suggest in various verses quoted by Boccaile (e.g. 76:28, 71:14, 82:7&8 etc) but the general concept of creation as stated by all the scriptures of the monotheistic religions does not seem to be compatible with modern theory of origin of man (i.e., evolution from subhuman or non-human ancestors). Iqbalian stand on animal evolution could not be rejected on Qur'anic ground as there is no reference in the Qur'an to evolution in the animal kingdom and here is undeniable and incontrovertible evidence from palaeontology in its favour.

Iqbalian pantheism seems to be an attempt to incorporate modernist evolutionist ideas that hardly allows interference from "capricious" Divine Will and guard autonomy of nature. Modern interpretations of religion generally reject any interference from supernatural world. This is best exemplified by Staces' *Time and Eternity: An Inquiry into the Philosophy of Religion*. Natural Philosophers have been vetoing against miracles and any supernaturalist account of the natural world. Iqbal sharing modernist naturalist assumptions was led to reject classical theism that posits God as Eternal consciousness, knowing but not including the world and opts for a sort of pantheistic conception of God that posits the Supreme as Eternal Temporal consciousness knowing and including the world. This is to accommodate modern objections against classical theistic conceptions that usually posits God's active role in sustaining Nature from "outside" and His periodic interferences in Nature that show unmistakably God's stamp or imprint. Von Till's "Fully Gifted Creationism" that leaves no role for the "capricious" God after He has initially created the world is typical modernist appropriation of Bible<sup>292</sup> Nature is completely self-sufficient and allows automatically for the emergence of the emergent. There is absolutely no scope for God of the gaps. Iqbalian God is too active (and every moment involved in new work) to be allowed the role that traditional creationist theology supposes. He ingeniously keeps God at bay and thus does not allow

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<sup>292</sup> See *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, ed. J.P. Moreland & John Mark Reynolds, O. M. Books, 1999.

Him to disturb mathematically harmonious and physically and biologically self contained universe. He writes:

Nor is there such a thing as purely physical level in the sense of possessing a materiality, elementally incapable of evolving the creative synthesis we call life and mind, and needing a transcendental Deity to impregnate it with the sentient and the mental. The Ultimate Ego that makes the emergent emerge is immanent in nature, and is described by the Qur'an, as the first and the last, the visible and the invisible.<sup>293</sup>

Thus Iqbal's pantheistic God is too active in nature to be active in the traditional theological sense of the term! If all egos share in the life of Ultimate Ego as Iqbal says the traditionalist's creationist picture has no relevance or role. Iqbal does not subscribe to the classical dualism and binaries that have infected theological thinking and thus he is able to avoid black and white either/or framework that commits one to take a position either on one or the other side of the creationist/evolutionist debate that involves the logic of excluded middle. This may provide a good alternative to traditional either/or type of thinking that characterizes the debate on evolution. Some biologists and theologians have been recently arguing for the transcendence of absolutist and exclusivist watertight positions of both the orthodox evolutionists and the orthodox creationists. The idea of creative evolution in one or the other guise is being exploited by these thinkers. The idea of creative evolution runs as refrain in Bergson and also in Iqbal. Leaving aside the metaphysical aspect of the debate, if we concentrate on the purely scientific aspect of the issue that involves concrete problem solving enterprise by working biologists Iqbalian insights are highly relevant. The practical pragmatic and utilitarian nature of science that demands concrete solutions to the problems posed by nature will not and cannot pay much heed to the abstract metaphysical and philosophical discussions which characterize the contributions of the detractors of evolution. As long as the creationist science does not provide a strong working alternative to presently enormously successful evolutionist biology, the mainstream science will go

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<sup>293</sup> Iqbal, M., *op. cit.*, p. 65.

on without caring about faulty metaphysical foundations that perennialists and other critics of evolutionism rightly point out.<sup>294</sup>

Iqbal is however not an orthodox evolutionist and he does not share some of the philosophical interpretations put forward by those who share evolutionist thesis. Strictly speaking he cannot be accused of evolutionism in the sense scientific philosophers uphold it. He emphatically rejects materialist and wholly naturalistic reductionistic demythologizing framework of consistent orthodox evolutionism. His contention was that evolutionary theory could be delinked from its purely materialist metaphysical underpinnings. One can't doubt his good intentions which were essentially directed to Islamize the idea of evolution. He is for the spiritual interpretation of universe and even tries to critique evolutionary theory from that vantage point. He sees no warrant for despair that the evolutionary thinking has inspired in the West. His own meliorist approach (that he attributes to the Qur'an also) is quick to see a silver lining in otherwise despairing evolutionary worldview that sees man's lowly origins, his inheritance of apes and very little prospect for the evolution of superman. Iqbal believed in the coming of perfect man, of unbounded evolutionary progress and not in the dead end of evolution as some have supposed. Iqbal believed in time's creative role in man's transcendence of man as he is or was in the past, in the progressive perfection of man and thus coming of the perfect man. This belief of Iqbal is not defensible on Qur'anic grounds. Syed Vahidudin's comments on this evolution inspired belief in perfect man are significant and I take liberty to quote him at length:

It is very difficult to accommodate Iqbal's concept of the perfect man in the Islamic perspective. Iqbal's observations in this regard show the limitation of all evolutionary oriented philosophies. Is the perfect man only a dream of the future? It is very sad to see a Muslim thinker fixing all his hopes of human perfection in the future whilst traditional Muslim thought has found all its models and spiritual patterns in the past. Is the idea of perfect manhood an idea which has yet to find its realization.... In his communication to R.A. Nicholson he makes his stand very clear. Man as he is at present only possesses "the germ of vicegerancy" but he is yet

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<sup>294</sup> Vahidudin, Syed, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-165.

to come to full growth. “The more we advance in evolution the nearer one gets to him “says Iqbal and adds that the evolution of humanity tending towards production of an ideal race of more or less unique individuals who will become his fitting patterns. While the Qur’an attributes to man the vicegerancy of God as a fact. Iqbal thinks it an ideal still to be realized through the process of evolution. This concept of the perfect man is far cry from the Sufi concept.<sup>295</sup>

Aurobindo, Nietzsche and Shaw and many others have spoken about the perfect man and the superman and all this is not quite in tune with the traditional religious perspective.

Iqbal could easily accept the evolutionary thesis because of his prior commitment to certain philosophical assumptions that fit quite well with the evolutionary worldview. Iqbal privileges becoming over being,<sup>296</sup> time over space,<sup>297</sup> struggle over repose and peace, self over non-self, deed or action over contemplation, novelty over repetitious and fixed patterns, creativity and dynamism over immutability and all this concurs quite well with evolutionist assumptions.

Iqbal goes farther than any Muslim thinker in appropriating heterodox implications of evolution within Islam. His interpretation of finality of prophethood in Islam seems to be a “logical extrapolation from evolutionary assumptions”. Evolution implies transcendence and severance from past and looking towards future. Iqbal says:

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<sup>295</sup> His critique of Nietzsche’s concept of Eternal Recurrence that he sees as the “same old idea of ‘being’ masquerading as becoming” is based on his privileging of being over becoming. This becoming must always result in something novel and something unpredictable as evolution demands. Religion has traditionally been centred on being rather than becoming.

<sup>296</sup> Traditional civilizations are space rather than time as Schuon says in his *Understanding Islam* (p.30). He writes in this connection “like all traditional civilizations Islam is a ‘space’ not a ‘time’ for Islam ‘time is only the corruption of this ‘space’. No period will come, predicted the Prophet, which will not be worse than the period before it.”

<sup>297</sup> Iqbal, M., *op. cit.* P.100.

In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection by abolishing in discovering the need for its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life can not forever be kept in leading strings; that, in order to achieve full self consciousness, man must finally be thrown back on his own resources.<sup>298</sup>

Bonhauffer's notorious remark that man has come of age seems to be perfectly consistent with this attitude that assumes the truth of evolution. The secular theology is fundamentally an appropriation of and a response to evolution and Iqbal comes dangerously close to it at some occasions in his Madras lectures. This well illustrates the dangers of all evolutionary philosophies. For Prophet (Holy) this age is the last age as the day of judgment is so near to it. This is the *Kaliyuga*, and the age of progressive degeneration from religious perspective. It is the culmination of the fall of man rather than his rise. Modern man has experienced many smaller falls as Schuon says and his nemesis will be soon executed according to the Qur'an . It is Iqbal's evolutionist (closely tied with inductivist empiricist spirit of modern science) conviction that makes him to deny Fall. He not only denies the primordial Fall of Man (and interprets that as rise of consciousness in primitive man!) but also any other Fall or Sin of man (like Renaissance which is the Fall in the eyes of perennialist traditionalist authors such as Rene Guenon, Frithjof Schuon, Coommaraswamy, and others and such great critics of Modern project as Niebuher, Toynbee, Eliot and others). Iqbal denies any idea of sin and evil in Renaissance and modern scientific rationalist project. He denies, in true evolutionist spirit, that evil is there at the heart of things and that it may overcome man and that man has proved true the Satanic reservations about man's spiritual excellence. From an evolutionist perspective there should be no hell, no damnation, no dissolution of egos of some unfortunate individuals. The Qur'anic stories of destruction of large number of human habitations due to their sins is the sorry state of affairs that post-Adamic history reveals against the evolutionist thesis. Man has fallen by placing himself outside the Divine centers and his fallen condition could not be denied in any way. There has been a devolution, a demotion, a retrogression so far as his state of grace and his spiritual development is concerned. Surely man is in the loss, declares the

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<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, P.101.



Qur'an and most men are guilty of *kufr* or ingratitude towards God and thus deserve hell. Very few win salvation.<sup>299</sup>

What can consistent application of evolutionist ideas to religion mean is illustrated best in Iqbalian philosophical writings especially his Madras lectures. Here is revealed Iqbal's consistency as an evolutionary thinker in Islam. His heterodoxy is best revealed in this appropriation of evolution in Islam. Traditional Orthodoxy has justifiably taken Iqbal to the task for these heterodoxies. Iqbalian appropriation of evolution in Islam is distinguished from most other such appropriations in its very bold extension and application of evolutionary ideas to other spheres of religion. His demythologizing of some the most important myths in traditional Islam is primarily inspired by evolution. Modern attempts of demythologization of Bible are traceable to the impact of evolutionary ideas. Anthropology has been worst affected by evolutionary thinking and Iqbal seems to fully share these assumptions of evolutionary anthropology and accordingly interprets Edenic garden as primitive state of existence, the Fall of Adam as the rise of self consciousness, the fruit of Tree of Knowledge as man's weakness for

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<sup>299</sup> Popper put this point so well in his remarks on evolution. He does not accept Darwinism as a testable scientific theory because of its near tautological nature – the best fitted to survive will survive– and its lack of testability. However, it does provide what he calls ‘a metaphysical research programme) and none can deny the fact that it has stimulated biological research with remarkable effect in last 100 years. Many Muslim critics of evolution assume that Darwinism could be refuted, falsified by gaps in the fossil record, non-availability of missing links, arguments from thermodynamics, etc. But this is to precisely miss this important point that Popper makes. Many defenders of evolution have admitted evolution's vulnerability as a scientific theory on various accounts but they have not abandoned it precisely for this reason. Unless creationism becomes an alternative science, with all the attributes of the competitive scientific theory, mere negative critique of the theory of evolution will not reverse the present situation that privileges evolutionary theories over creationist's claims. Islamizing biology in the manner Farooqi would envisage will not be achieved by a metaphysical critique of evolutionism but by very serious efforts in the direction of constructing a viable alternative creation science. Science will not abandon evolution as long as creationist science is not forthcoming. There have been certain brilliant attempts in this direction but still the road is very long and arduous. The arguments for intelligent design, however convincing, will still not silence the dominant evolutionist voice as science is more concerned with predicting, manipulating or changing the world rather than interpreting it or speculating on origins and it has been cashing on design leaving the Designer as being outside its scope.

non-inductive shortcuts to science and knowledge and the Tree of Eternity as just a symbol for sexual reproduction. The Modernist symbolist/demythologizing approach leads ultimately to emptying of traditional religion of all the content. The story of creation as described in the Book of Genesis and then Qur'an becomes at best a metaphor for some very ordinary facts. Much of the Qur'an and the major part of traditional commentaries become "outdated" because they use outdated psychological terminology and incomprehensible symbolism. The significance of traditional symbolism is almost fully lost to modern sensibility. Theology becomes anthropology. The Realm of Psyche takes the place of the Realm of Spirit. Religion must be reconstructed and drastically reinterpreted to appeal to evolved mind of modern man ( who has supposedly evolved from medieval and ancient or primitive mentality). The Prophet closes off the medieval era by abolishing the institution of prophethood. He is no longer needed or relevant in the sense traditionalists would have it. Man is thrown back, on his own resources. The Prophetic mystical mode of consciousness must be inhibited in the interests of rational inductive science. Man has come of age and reason or science would be his sole guide in the post-prophetic era. Life could not forever be kept in leading "strings" of tradition. The critical faculty of reason and the tool of inductive science could judge mystical or supernatural realms. Man has evolved and left behind the traditional worldview. The modern spirit that presupposed its own progress from traditional medieval mindset and thus conceives, in true positivist fashion of evolution, is appropriated or legitimized by Iqbal. This is evolutionist spirit let loose and running wild. Iqbal's legitimizing of modernity and Western project is basically an extension of this evolutionary thinking. He writes:

The most remarkable phenomenon of modern history, however, is the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islam is spiritually moving towards the West. There is nothing wrong in this movement, for European culture, on its intellectual side-is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islam.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Iqbal, M., *op. cit.*, p.6.

His plea for modernization of Islam is also yet another application of evolutionist logic. The very title of his Madras lectures smacks of evolutionism. Orthodox Islamic position pleads for Islamization of knowledge or reconstruction of modern thought in the light of Islamic tradition rather than the vice-versa that Iqbal advocates. Even Freudian psychoanalysis, otherwise such an anathema for orthodox religious consciousness, has much value in Iqbal's Islam. Iqbal is too open to all innovatory "advances" in knowledge (as evolutionist spirit would demand) not to see a great value even in inherently heterodox scientific movements. He writes "And it is in the elimination of the satanic from the Divine that the followers of Freud have done inestimable service to religion....."<sup>301</sup> This illustrates how deeply entrenched is evolutionist spirit in Iqbal – evolution here understood not just as a particular biological concept but in a wider philosophic context. Thus Iqbal is, by and large, a consistent evolutionary thinker. Evolution colors his whole philosophy and interpretation of Islam. Serious reconstructionist project needs some kind of appropriation of evolution. If reconstruction of religious thought is an admissible endeavor, evolution has much value. Iqbal's defence of reconstructionist project is closely linked to his defence of evolution. Iqbal as the modernist Muslim intellectual is unthinkable without some kind of evolutionism. Iqbal fully knows what it means to be modern and is willing to pay the price. This distinguishes him from most other superficial appropriations of evolution and modern science by Muslims. This underscores great significance of Iqbal in the history of modern Islam. Retrospectively it looks easy to reject evolutionary thesis in the light of its criticisms from so many quarters, even from orthodox scientific circles. At the time of Iqbal, dogma of evolutionism had not suffered so many fissures and cracks as it has suffered now. Iqbal's credulity towards this dogma is thus understandable. He should not be too severely judged for his too positive appropriation or credulity towards evolution.

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<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.