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# BRIDGING THE REASON/REVELATION DIVIDE: A QUR'ANIC-PEIRCIAN PERSPECTIVE

Basit Bilal Koshul

## ABSTRACT

Within certain segments of the academic community as well as the religious community the processes of reasoning are considered to be divorced from (and sometimes antithetical to) revelation. This divide between reason and revelation is based on a modern philosophical understanding of “reason” and “revelation”. In the modern academy “philosophy” has come to be associated with certain modes of reasoning that are supposedly not found in religious thought. This interpretation asserts that philosophy is a secular enterprise that is divorced from religious issues and concerns. This interpretation takes the classical Greek thinkers as its role models because they are considered to be the pioneers in the human attempt to rationally comprehend the world and the human being’s place in the world. This understanding of “philosophy” has been accepted by certain segments of the religious community also. As a result of accepting the secular academy’s definition of “philosophy” these segments in the religious community have affirmed the claims of the modern, secular academy that the divide between reason and revelation is unbridgeable. But a considered exploration of the issue reveals that this view of the reason/revelation divide is not tenable from the perspective of either revealed scripture or philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning with a comparative analysis of the Biblical and Qur’anic narratives of Abraham’s spiritual journey, I will argue that the reason vs. revelation dichotomy is at odds with the Prophetic experience. The Qur’anic description of Abraham’s spiritual journey demonstrates that intense philosophical reflection precedes the event of revelation. In other words, revelation is a grace that is bestowed by the One who is in heaven for

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Jim Fodor, Shaul Magid and my colleagues in the Religion Dept. at Concordia colleges for comments on earlier versions of this paper.

reasoning that is done well by those on earth. In looking at Abraham's reasoning processes reference will be made to Greek thinkers who engaged in very similar activity in their own cultural and historical milieu. Looking at Abraham's spiritual journey from the perspective of the reason vs. revelation debate using the tools and language of philosophy will aim to challenge the claims of both secular fundamentalism and religious fundamentalism that the divide between reason and revelation is unbridgeable. The discussion will also integrate elements from both classical and modern philosophy to illustrate this very same point. A look at the classical Greek philosophical tradition as well as the work of Charles Sanders Peirce from the modern period reinforces the point that the reason/revelation divide is untenable.

### Setting the Context

Given the fact that the terms "reason" and "revelation" mean a variety of things it is necessary to define them with some precision – not completely or exhaustively, but only provisionally and minimally. Using C. S. Peirce's reflections, and modifying them slightly, the term "revelation" will refer to "a natural gift" (5.359) that manifests itself in the form of a supra-rational faculty, i.e., instincts/intuition, that is found in all creations. The purpose and character of this faculty is described by Peirce in these words: "Every race of animals is provided with instincts well adapted to its needs, and especially to strengthening the stock. It is wonderful how unerring these instincts are. Man is no exception in this respect..." (6.497).<sup>2</sup> The term "reason" will refer

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<sup>2</sup> Because Peirce's description of "instincts" has been used to propose a provisional description of "revelation" it would be prudent to explicitly identify the points and reasons for the modification of the original description. To begin, Peirce limits "instincts" or the capacity to be the recipient of "revelation" to living creatures. But the Qur'anic narrative makes it clear that the ability to receive "revelation" is a property of "inanimate" objects also (see, Qur'an 99:5 where the earth is depicted as being the recipient of "revelation.") The Qur'an notes that living creatures such as the bee are also the recipients of "revelation" (16:68). Furthermore, the Qur'an describes human beings, such as the mother of Moses in 20:37 as being the recipients of "revelation." But it is exceedingly important, for both philosophical and theological reason, to keep in mind that "revelation" in the sense as it is used in the foregoing examples should not be confused with "revelation *an sich*." This is "revelation" to the Blessed Prophet in the form of the Qur'an (or revelations to earlier Prophets.) The thing that distinguishes "revelation *an sich*" from "revelation" is that the identity of the Qur'an is composed of entirely and exclusively of Revelation, whereas

to the “power of drawing inferences”— a power whose acquisition is the result of “a long and difficult art” (5.359). Peirce describes the character and function of the faculty of reasoning in these words:

“This faculty is a very imperfect one in respect to fallibility; but then it is only needed to bridge short gaps. Every step has to be reviewed and criticized; and indeed this is so essential that it is best to call an un-criticized step of inference by another name”. (6.497)

Given what Peirce has said about instincts and drawing inferences, we can use the following definitions for the purposes of the present discussion:

**Reason:** The acquired skill of drawing rational inferences that produces knowledge claims about reality.

**Revelation:** The spontaneous gift of supra-rational inspiration that produces knowledge claims about reality.<sup>3</sup>

Before dealing directly with the reason/revelation issue from the Qur’anic perspective, some comments on the differing character of the Biblical and Qur’anic narratives will be helpful as these comments have a direct bearing on the discussion. The attention to detail is one of the characteristics that sets the Biblical narrative apart from the Qur’anic narrative. For example, whereas the Qur’an makes a general observation that Noah was commanded to build an ark according to Allah’s instructions (11:37), the Bible details the exact specifications according to which the ark was built (Genesis: 6:13-17).

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“revelation” is one among a number of things that make up the identity of the earth, the bee, the mother of Moses etc. In Weberian terms, the Qur’an is revelation in its ideal type, while the others are departures from the ideal type to varying degrees. Consequently, the way the word “revelation” is used in the present discussion does not depart from, but it builds on Peirce’s description of “instincts.” Simultaneously, it displays a broader spectrum of the semantic field of “revelation” (*awha, yubi*) than is assumed in normal Muslim religious discourse (in which “revelation” is equated with the Qur’an or previous scriptures.)

<sup>3</sup> This description is value-neutral regarding the origins of the supra-rational inspiration – it could be from an external/objective reality which could be either divine or demonic. Or the supra-rational inspiration could be from the subjective subconscious of the individual. This is the description of real given by Peirce in (6.453).

Similarly, whereas the Qur'an makes a general observation that Jesus is part of the Israelite line of prophets going back to Abraham, Noah and Adam (3:33-6), the Bible provides a detailed genealogy (Luke: 3:23-38). In the light of this difference in the narrative style the few instances in which this general rule is broken are worthy of special attention – and perhaps the most significant of these instances is the way that the story of Abraham is treated in the two narratives. The first mention of Abraham in the Bible takes place in the form of God's command to him to leave the land of his fathers:

Go forth from your native land and the land of your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you. Abram went forth as the Lord had commanded him. (Gen. 12: 1-3).

This announcement is of great significance not only for Abram, but for all nations of the earth – all the nations on earth will be judged according to how they related to Abram, those who bless him will be blessed and those who curse him will be cursed. Neither the reasons behind nor the events leading up to the announcement of this momentous imperative are mentioned in the Bible. What has this particular obscure peasant residing somewhere in Babylonia done to be worthy of such a noble status in the eyes of his Lord? Did he demonstrate a particular attitude or display certain characteristics prior to the announcement to be worthy of such grace from his Lord? The Bible is silent on the pre-announcement part of Abram's biography and focuses exclusively on the post-announcement part of his life. In contrast, the Qur'an treats both the pre and post announcement parts of Abraham's biography – and of the two the pre-announcement part is treated more often and in greater detail. The pre-announcement part of Abraham's biography (which is missing in the Bible) details the events, reasons and developments that collectively provide the background for the momentous announcement.

## **Revelation and the Reasoned Argument from Nature**

The Qur'an shows Abraham to be a gadfly *par excellence*, prior to giving him the honorific titles of "leader of humanity" (2:124). The Qur'anic narrative contains detailed descriptions of a number of episodes from Abraham's youth in which he is constantly interrogating those around him about "What is divinity?" or "Who is God?" He argues with his father (19:41), with his people (6:75-83) and (21:51-72) and with the king (2:257). These passages make it obvious that Abraham's initial challenge to the established understanding of divinity is based on reasoned argumentation, not revealed knowledge. Speaking in more general terms than the specific case of Abraham (as), the following passage from the Qur'an acknowledges the fact that arguments for or against a particular understanding of divinity/God can come from at least two different sources:

*Say: "Do you see what it is you invoke besides Allah? Show me what it is they have created on earth, or have they a share in the heavens? Bring me a Book (revealed) before this, or any remnant of knowledge (you may have), if you are telling the truth" (46:4).*

Through the Qur'an, Allah repeatedly affirms the fact that one can appeal to a revealed Book or knowledge acquired through other means (i.e., "any remnant of knowledge") to support a particular understanding of divinity/God. In other words, the Revealed Word does not exhaust the possibilities of legitimate sources of knowledge. The following words appear in two different places in the Qur'an: *Yet among men there is many a one that argues about Allah without having any knowledge, without any guidance and without any light-giving revelation (22:8) and (31:20)*. Once again, the point to be noted is that "light-giving revelation" is considered as one source of knowledge among others that can be appealed to in support of a particular position.

The Qur'an itself identifies the other source of knowledge, besides "light giving revelation", that can be used to support a particular position. This is illustrated by the evidence that the Qur'an appeals to in order to affirm the validity and veracity of Muhammad's claim to Prophethood. The Qur'an refers to itself as "light giving revelation" and posits in the strongest of terms that Muhammad is a Prophet of Allah, following in the line of Adam, Noah, Abraham, the Hebrew Prophets. This claim by the Qur'an and then by the Prophet himself is treated with great derision and mockery by the pagans of

Mecca. Instead of taking this claim seriously they brush it aside by saying that Muhammad is “possessed” or a “madman” (37:36 and 23:70). This charge is repeated with such frequency and gains such currency that Muhammad becomes personally despondent. In response to this charge by the pagans, and to provide succor to Muhammad’s heart, the Qur’an replies:

*Nun. By the pen, and all that they write [therewith]! You are not, by the grace of your Lord, mad or possessed! And, verily, yours shall be reward never-ending— for, behold, you are of the most exalted of character; and [soon] you will see, and they [who ridicule you] will also see, which of you was bereft of reason.(68:1-6)*

Commenting on these *ayat*, Hasan and Usmani note that the Qur’an is appealing to evidence provided by written history (and that which will come to be recorded by history) that Muhammad is neither mad nor possessed. According to Hasan and Usmani “the pen” that is mentioned in 68:1 is symbolic of the knowledge that has been accumulated and recorded through the ages by different scholars of many different cultures and civilizations. This knowledge allows any reasonable person to distinguish between a madman and a genuine Prophet. The knowledge that has been recorded by “the pen” shows that madmen display certain characteristics and modes of behaviour, while genuine Prophets display very different characteristics and modes of behaviour (Hasan and Usmani, 748, n.4). The knowledge claims made in the “light” of revealed knowledge is appealing to the knowledge that has been recorded by “the pen” to support its own knowledge claim – i.e., the verity of Muhammad’s claim to Prophethood. In this particular case Revelation concludes its knowledge claim by stating that soon everyone will come to know which of the two disputing parties is “*bereft of reason*” and both revelation and “the pen” will record this fact also.

The foregoing discussion illustrates the fact that the Qur’an distinguishes between two different sources of knowledge, knowledge contained in the revealed word and knowledge acquired through “the pen”. In his translation and commentary on the Qur’an, Asad equates a Prophet’s reception of revelation as that which has been “bestowed from on high” and knowledge that has been gained through other means, symbolized by “the pen”, as that which has been “vouchsafed”. This distinction corresponds with the different verbs that the Qur’an associates with the transmission of the two

different types of knowledge – *anzala* (bestow from on high) and *'atā* (vouchsafe). The former is associated with the revelation of a Book to a Prophet and the latter with the granting of knowledge through other means. The very first *ayat* revealed to Muhammad illustrate the different, yet related, aspects of these two types of knowledge:

*Read in the name of thy Lord, who has created – created man out of a germ-cell! Read – for thy Lord is the Most Bountiful One who has taught [man] the use of the pen – taught man what he did not know! (96:1-5)*

These words themselves are an example of revealed knowledge – these are the very first words of the Qur'an that were revealed to Muhammad. The earliest of the Qur'anic revelation in turn draws the individual's attention to the human being's biological origins (from a "germ-cell" or "something which clings") and the knowledge that human beings have accumulated through the use of the "pen". Commenting on the meaning of "the pen", Asad notes:

"The pen" is used here as a symbol for the art of writing or, more specifically, for all knowledge recorded by means of writing: and this explains the symbolic summons "Read!" at the beginning of verses 1 and 3. Man's unique ability to transmit, by means of written records, his thoughts, experiences and insights from individual to individual, from generation to generation, and from one cultural environment to another endows all human knowledge with a cumulative character; and since, thanks to this God-given ability, every human being partakes, in one way or another, in mankind's continuous accumulation of knowledge, man is spoken of as being "taught by God" things which the single individual does not – and, indeed, cannot – know by himself...Furthermore, God's "teaching" man signifies also the act of His revealing, through the prophets, spiritual truths and moral standards which cannot be unequivocally established through human experience and reasoning alone: and, thus, it circumscribes the phenomenon of divine revelation as such (Asad, 963 ff, fn. 3).

For Asad, the earliest revelation in the Qur'an draws our attention to the fact that Allah "teaches" human beings through different means. First, there

is the phenomenon of revelation that reaches humanity through the means of oral transmission – from Allah to Gabriel and then to a Prophet (in this case Muhammad) – of which the Qur’anic *ayat* themselves are the most prominent example. Then there is the phenomenon of knowledge based on “human experience and reasoning” that has been accumulated by numerous human beings and cultures and transmitted by means of the written word or “the pen.” The path of transmission of revelation is Allah–Gabriel–Prophet. The path of transmission of acquired knowledge is scholar–pen–recipient. Hasan and Usmani propose that “the pen” mentioned in 96:3 is symbolic of the mediating role played by Gabriel in the transmission process of revealed knowledge (Hasan and Usmani, 797, n.11). Asad further details the characteristics of the type of knowledge transmitted by the pen when commenting on 88:7. Referring to the comments that he made on 96:1-5 he states:

In note 3 on those verses I have expressed the opinion that they allude to mankind’s cumulative acquisition of empirical and rational knowledge, handed down from generation to generation and from one civilization to another: and it is to this very phenomenon that the present passage, too, refers. We are told here that God, who has formed man in accordance with what he is meant to be and has promised to guide him, will enable him to acquire...elements of knowledge which mankind will accumulate, record and collectively “remember” – except what God may cause man to “forget”... as having become redundant by virtue of his new experiences and his acquisition of wider, more differentiated elements of knowledge, empirical as well as deductive or speculative, including more advanced empirically acquired skills. However, the very next sentence makes it clear that all knowledge arrived at through our observation of the external world and through speculation, though necessary and most valuable, is definitely limited in scope and does not therefore, in itself suffice to give us an insight into ultimate truths (Asad, 946 ff. fn. 4)

For Asad, the Qur’anic narrative explicitly recognizes as “necessary and most valuable” the “knowledge arrived at through our observation of the external world and through speculation [i.e., inferential reasoning]”. This type of knowledge that has been transmitted by the “pen” during the course of history is seen as being complementary to the revealed knowledge that has

been transmitted orally. Asad is quite precise and articulate in his description and distinction of the two types of knowledge that are implied in the very first *ayat* revealed to Muhammad. But it is important to note that all Muslim commentators agree that the knowledge which Allah has taught humanity “by the pen” is different from the knowledge that has been revealed to the Prophets. For the purposes of the present discussion we will distinguish between the two types of knowledge by referring to one as “Revelation” that has been “bestowed from on high” or “revealed” to a Prophet. And we will refer to the other as “acquired” knowledge that has been “given” or “vouchsafed” by Allah as a result of proper observation and reasoning processes. It appears that the Qur’anic distinction between revelation and knowledge acquired through the pen (as interpreted by Asad, Hasan and Usmani) corresponds closely to Peirce’s philosophical distinction between “instincts” and “reasoning”. This may be due to the fact that the terms were defined in such a way at the beginning of the discussion so as to facilitate this correspondence. Or it may be the case that such a correspondence is *real*, i.e. it would be what it is whether or not any individual or group of individuals recognized it.<sup>4</sup>

As noted earlier, a number of dialogues between Abraham and his contemporaries are recorded in the Qur’an, prior to his receiving the command to leave his homeland and seek another place of residence. The common characteristic of these dialogues is that Abraham’s arguments in these dialogues are not based on knowledge contained in a revealed Book, but rather on knowledge that has been arrived at through reasoning processes – more specifically through inferential reasoning. In other words, the evidence that Abraham presents to his contemporaries to support his claims regarding the question “What is divinity?” is not based on revealed knowledge but on philosophically reasoned knowledge. In the very early part of his life Abraham confronted his people based upon knowledge that he had gained as a result of turning his attention (or having his attention turned) towards the natural, created world:

*And, Lo, [thus] spoke Abraham unto his father Azar: “Do you take idols for gods? Verily, I see that you and your people have obviously gone astray!” And thus We gave*

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*Abraham [his first] insight into [Our] mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth— and [this] to the end that he might become one of those who are inwardly sure. (6:74-5).*

The Qur'an goes on to detail Abraham's reasoning process once his intentionality (in Husserlian terms) is fixed on the created world (i.e., Allah's "mighty dominion over the heavens and the earth"). Abraham in turn makes his rational reflections on the world of nature a part of public discourse in order to facilitate the education of his people regarding the questions "What is divinity?":

*Then, when the night overshadowed him with its darkness, he beheld a star; [and] he exclaimed, "This is my Lord!"— but when it went down, he said "I love not the things that go down." Then, when he beheld the moon rising, he said "This is my Lord!"— but when it went down he said, "Indeed if my Lord does not guide me, I will most certainly be one of the people who go astray!" Then when he beheld the sun rising, he said, "This is my Lord! This one is the greatest [of all]!" But when it [too] went down, he exclaimed: "O my people! Behold, far be it from me to ascribe divinity, as you do, to anything besides Allah! Behold, unto Him who brought into being the heavens and the earth have I turned my face, having turned away from all that is false; and I am not of those who ascribe divinity to anything besides Him." (6:76-9)*

Here Abraham gathers evidence from the world of nature to support his claim that divinity cannot be ascribed to anything in the world of nature (as his contemporaries were wont to do), it must be ascribed exclusively to the One who has created this world.

When his people continued to argue with him in spite of the fact that they could not counter his philosophic reasoning, Abraham asks them to leave aside philosophic reasoning and bring some other evidence to support their claims:

*And his people argued with him. He said: "Do you argue with me about Allah, when it is He who has guided me? But I do not fear anything to which you ascribe divinity side by side with Him, [for no evil can befall me] unless my Lord so wills. All things does my Lord embrace with His knowledge; will you not, then, keep this in mind? And why should I fear anything that you worship side by side with Him, seeing that you are*

*not afraid of ascribing divinity to other powers besides Allah without His ever having bestowed upon you from on high any warrant thereof?”(6: 80-1).*

In addition to weak philosophical reasoning, his contemporaries are mistaken in their understanding of divinity because it cannot be justified with reference to any revealed knowledge. Abraham’s contemporaries are guilty of ascribing divinity to other powers besides Allah without any warrant being given to them from on high. The Qur’an goes on to identify the source of knowledge that produced Abraham’s line of reasoning. Referring to the line of argumentation that Abraham has used and the conclusions that he has reached as a result, Allah states in the Qur’an: “*And this was Our argument that We vouchsafed unto Abraham against his people: [for] We do raise by degrees whom We will. Verily, your Lord is wise, all-knowing*” (6:83). In terms of the distinction that was made above regarding the two types of knowledge, this *āyah* evidences that Abraham’s arguments against his people were based on philosophic reasoning that had been “vouchsafed” or “given” to him by Allah, not knowledge that had been revealed to him.

At this stage, Abraham uses arguments based on philosophical reflection on the world of nature to support his theological/religious claims. Abraham proceeds from empirical observations about the world of nature, to making philosophic judgments on the nature of empirical reality and concludes with making a particular theological claim. This mode of reasoning by Abraham resembles that of the methodology of the pre-Socratic Greek thinkers. According to Aristotle’s understanding, the pre-Socratics “were the ‘students of nature’ and their subject was the ‘study of nature’” (Barnes, 13). Using their observations of the natural world as a starting point, the pre-Socratic thinkers went on to ponder more “scientific” or “religious” concerns such as the origin, constituents, ultimate fate/destiny, and development of the universe. In its more developed and refined form pre-Socratic thought drew a direct link between the study of nature and reflections on “what is divinity?” An illustration of this pre-Socratic mode of inquiry is the work of Heraclitus, one of the most renowned pre-Socratic thinkers. Nietzsche, a prominent student and admirer of pre-Socratic philosophy, has Heraclitus coming to the following conclusions after Heraclitus has closely observed the workings of the world of nature:

'Becoming' is what I contemplate, and no one else has watched so attentively this everlasting wavebeat and rhythm of things. And what did I see? Lawful order, unfailing certainties, ever-like orbits of lawfulness, Erinnyes sitting in judgement on all transgressions against lawful order, the whole world the spectacle of sovereign justice and of the demonically ever-present natural forces that serve it. Not the punishment of what has come-to-be did I see, but the justification of that which is coming-into-being. When did hybris, when did apostasy ever reveal itself in inviolable forms, in laws held sacred? Where injustice rules, there are caprice, disorder, lawlessness, contradiction. But where law and Zeus' daughter Dike rule alone, as they do in this world, how could there be the sphere of guilt, of penance, of judgment? (Nietzsche, 50 ff.)

Very much like Abraham, Heraclitus proceeds from empirical observations about the world of nature (i.e., lawful regularity), to certain rational claims about the nature of reality (i.e. reality is a "becoming" not a "being") and then to particular theological claims (i.e., lawful order is evidence of the rule of Zeus).

### **Revelation and the Reasoned Argument About Reason**

The distinction between pre-Socratic and Socratic/post-Socratic periods of Greek philosophy is a widely accepted one. One of the reasons given for this distinction is that, generally speaking, the pre-Socratics concentrated their attention on the objects in the world of nature as they carried out their philosophical inquiries. Socrates, in contrast and again generally speaking, concentrated his philosophical gaze on the subject that was busy studying the object. Even though it is only a shift of emphasis, the shift of attention from the world of nature to the inner world of the human being (away from *Natur* and towards the *Geist*) as the object of philosophic inquiry marks a significant development in intellectual history. Socrates posited that proper philosophical inquiry should aim to make the subject more conscious of his (and we may add here) own reasoning processes. It was the flaws in the reasoning processes that led to disagreements about what is "out there" in the world of nature or in the social world of ethical and moral norms. Towards this end, Socrates developed the elenchic method of argumentation based on dialectic. The goal of this method was to lay bare the hidden

presuppositions that at least one of the dialogue partners unconsciously carried him/her in the reasoning processes, which in turn were responsible for the disagreement between the two parties. The goal of instigating aporia was not to reach consensus about a faulty/disputed knowledge claim it is more concerned with bringing to consciousness the line of reasoning that is behind the knowledge claim and demonstrating the flaws in that particular line. In short, the aim of the elanchic method was not to provide a clearer understanding of what is “out there” in the world of nature but rather to provide a clearer understanding of what is “in here”— in the reasoning processes, presuppositions and values that shape the observation of and knowledge claims about empirical reality. With Socrates the Delphic imperative of “Know thyself” takes on a meaning and significance that it had not had before.

Just as Heraclitus’ philosophical reflections are illustrative of arguing from the world of nature to religious claims, the philosophical reflections of Socrates are illustrative of arguing from the individual’s own inner world to higher truths. In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates uses the question of “what is piety?” as the starting point of his elanchic discourse with Euthyphro. In the *Apology*, he uses the question of “what is wisdom?” in order to better understand the proclamation of the Oracle that he himself is the wisest of all people. In both cases his dialectical method of argumentation leads to the realization on the part of his conversation partners that piety and wisdom are not what they had initially thought them to be. If anything the widely accepted, preconceived notions of piety and wisdom are actually a negation of piety and wisdom.

After his observation of the world of nature, along the lines of the pre-Socratic reasoning, and developing arguments based on these observations in line with what Allah had vouchsafed to him, Abraham turns to a more Socratic method of reasoning and directly engages his contemporaries on the issue of “what is divinity?” The Qur’an sets the stage for the upcoming confrontation in the following words:

*And, indeed, long before [the time of Moses] We vouchsafed unto Abraham his consciousness of what is right; and We were aware of [what moved] him when he said*

*to his father and his people, "What are these images to which you are so intensely devoted?" (21:51-2)*

Abraham challenges his contemporaries to provide an adequate explanation of their devotion to idols based on knowledge that had been vouchsafed unto "his consciousness of what is right". Commenting on this phrase, Asad notes:

The possessive pronoun "his" affixed to the noun *rushd* (which, in this context, has the meaning of "consciousness of what is right") emphasizes the highly personal, intellectual quality of Abraham's progressive realization of God's almightiness and uniqueness (Asad, 494, fn.59).

The challenge is based on intellectual, rational reasoning processes that have endowed Abraham with a particular, personal understanding of Allah's power and uniqueness – an understanding that refutes the established, societal understanding of divinity. The response to the personal, intellectual inquiry made by Abraham and the discussion thereafter is as follows:

*They answered: "We found our forefathers worshipping them." He said: "Indeed, you and your forefathers have obviously gone astray!" They asked: "Have you come to us [with this claim] in all earnest – or are you just joking?" He said: "Nay, but your [true] Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth – He who has brought them into being; and I am one of those who bear witness to this [truth]!" (21:53-6)*

In response to the reasoned and rational evidence that Abraham has offered to support his understanding of divinity, his people counter with an appeal to neither revelation nor reason – they fall back on established tradition to support their understanding of divinity (Hasan and Usmani, 453, n.3). As the exchange between Abraham and his people demonstrates, the dialectical process has already begun, with claims and counter-claims being offered by the two parties. It appears that the discussion is at a deadlock as there is no way to objectively demonstrate the validity of one claim or the other. But Abraham's intellectual energies are fast at work in trying to push the dialectic further and instigating the condition of aporia. As the discussion appears to have come to an inconclusive end, Abraham is thinking and planning: *And [he added to himself,] "By Allah, I shall most certainly bring about the*

*downfall of your idols as soon as you have turned your backs and gone away!”* (21: 57). When his people were leaving to celebrate an annual festival, Abraham excused himself on the grounds of ill-health. After the townspeople had left he took advantage of the opportunity and made his way into the pantheon that housed their idols, and;

Thereupon he approached their gods stealthily and said, “What! You do not eat [of the offerings placed before you?] What is wrong with you that you do not speak?” And then he fell upon them, smiting them with his right hand. (37:91-3).

He broke all the idols into pieces using a hammer, but left the biggest idol in tact and hung the hammer around its neck, with the following result upon the return of the townspeople from the festival:

And he broke those [idols] to pieces, [all] save the biggest of them, so that they might turn to it. [When they saw what had happened,] they said: “Who has done this our gods? Verily, he is one of the most wicked individuals.” Some [among them] replied: “We heard a youth speak of these [gods with scorn]: his name is Abraham.” [The others] said: “Then bring him before the people’s eyes, so that they might bear witness [against him]!” (21: 58-61).

Upon finding all their totems smashed to bits, except the biggest one, it did not take long for them to identify the perpetrator of this blasphemous outrage. Abraham was brought before the people and asked to offer an explanation for the dilapidated condition of the pantheon. It appears that this is precisely what Abraham was hoping would happen:

[And when he came] they asked: “Have you done this to our gods, O Abraham?” He answered: “No, it was this one, the biggest of them all, that did it: but ask them [yourselves] – provided they can speak!” (21:62-3)

When asked who had wrought this terrible deed, Abraham told the people that they should direct their inquiry to their gods, and especially to their chief god who was still standing and appeared to be culprit given the fact that a hammer was hanging around its neck. This line of reasoning used by

Abraham made it patently clear to all present the absurdity of their understanding/definition of divinity – and for a brief moment this realization dawned upon them collectively: “*And so they turned upon one another, saying, Behold, it is you who are doing wrong.*” (21:64). But this realization is only for a brief moment, and only to be discussed in their own circles – in the end the pre-existing *collective effervescence* superseded the rational conclusion suggested by one’s own reasoning processes. In terms of their confrontation with Abraham, the people continued their argumentative ways: “*But then they relapsed into their former ways of thinking and said: ‘You know very well that these [idols] cannot speak!’*” (21: 65) This was the opening that Abraham was looking for and he drove his point home with unimpeachable rational clarity:

Replied [Abraham]: “Do you then worship instead of Allah, something that cannot benefit you in any way, nor harm you? Fie upon you and that you worship instead of Allah! Will you then not use your reason?” (21: 66-7).

It is here that the point of aporia is reached and the internal contradiction of the established, collective understanding of divinity shown to be devoid of any substance by Abraham’s reasoned argumentation. Looking at the argument as a whole, it is clear that the pattern of his argument closely follows the elanchic method of Socrates. His final words are an appeal to the people to “*use your reason*” – the response to this very reasonable request is most un-reasonable: “*They exclaimed: Burn him, and [thereby] succor your gods, if you are going to do [anything]!*” (21:68).

Up till this point in his biography, there is no explicit recognition or declaration on Abraham’s part that he is the recipient of divine revelation. He is dialoguing and arguing with his people based upon reasoning processes that are not directly connected to revealed knowledge. As noted above, the reasoning processes used by Abraham display both pre-Socratic characteristics (philosophic wonder about the world of nature) and Socratic characteristics (elanchic reasoning aimed at instigating aporia). In terms of the distinction that is implicit in the very first words revealed to Muhammad (96:1-5), Abraham’s arguments are based on knowledge that Allah has “taught man by the pen”, not on what Allah has revealed orally through Gabriel. There is no parallel in the Biblical narrative to Abraham’s exercise of

reason and rationality prior to the momentous announcement declaring him to be the recipient of Allah's special grace. From the perspective of the Qur'anic narrative, it is in the aftermath of the people's attempt to burn him alive that "Abram" receives the command from Allah to leave the land of his fathers to a land that will be shown to him. The final conversation that Abraham has with his father before leaving his house is recorded by the Qur'an in these words:

*And call to mind, through this divine writ, Abraham. Behold, he was a man of truth, [already] a prophet when he spoke [thus] unto his father: "O my father! Why do you worship something that neither hears nor sees and can be of no avail whatever to you? O my father! Behold, there has indeed come to me knowledge such as has not yet come to you: follow me, then; I shall guide you onto a perfect way." (19:41-3).*

Here Abraham explicitly states that he is in possession of certain knowledge that has "come" to him but has not come to his father. In a sense Abraham has made the claim that he has climbed out of the cave and gazed upon the sun, and returned to those in the cave, more specifically his father, to inform them that they are mistaking the shadows for reality.

### **Revelation's Relationship to Reasoned Arguments**

The manner in which the first revelation to Muhammad speaks of "the pen" (96:1-5) and the way this phrase has been interpreted by Asad, Hasan and Usmani, which is illustrative of the manner in which the phrase is understood by Muslim commentators in general, evidences that there is a complementary relationship between reason and revelation. While the origin of revelatory knowledge and philosophic knowledge is the same – the very first words of the very first revelation are "Read in the name your Lord..." – the specific dynamics and character of the two types of knowledge is different. The complementary yet distinct character of these two types of knowledge is highlighted by looking at the spiritual evolution of Abraham (as). The pre-announcement part of Abraham's biography, as it is recorded in the Qur'an, is illustrative of the value, validity, character and dynamics of rational/reasoned knowledge in the human quest to better understand reality. Just as the very first revelation sent to the last of the Prophets asserts the value and validity of rational/reasoned knowledge, the biography of the

“father of the Prophets”– one of the three honorific titles the Qur’an gives to Abraham – offers a practical example of this value and validity.

At this point it would be useful to engage in some second order reflections on the Qur’anic valuation of reason and rationality. It is not only in the story of Abraham that the Qur’an affirms the value of reasoning faculties and the validity of knowledge arrived at through reasoning processes. There are more than four dozen places in the Qur’an where human beings are either lauded for using their reasoning faculties properly, criticized for using them otherwise and/or encouraged to sharpen their reasoning abilities. In other words the Qur’anic treatment of reason and rationality is pervasive and constant. But it is interesting to note that nowhere in the Qur’an is there a clear and distinct (or Cartesian) definition of “reason” or a description of the elements that go into the reasoning process or definitive criteria delineating flawed reasoning from sound reasoning. The Qur’anic description of reasoning is limited to providing examples of good reasoning (as well as bad reasoning), exhortations to reason well and warnings about the consequences of reasoning poorly. This appears to be a lacuna in the Qur’anic narrative; How can a topic of such pressing import be left so vaguely defined? On closer examination this “lacuna” is a defining characteristic of the Qur’anic narrative, as illustrated by the following examples. In a variety of places the Qur’an describes the Blessed Prophet to be the best model for human behaviour. But there are only a handful of episodes from the Prophet’s life that are even mentioned in the Qur’an – out of them only a few are mentioned in any detail. Furthermore, of the episodes that are mentioned almost half of them are occasions on which the Divine Word is correcting some aspects of the Prophet’s behaviour. In short, if one wants to follow the exhortation of the Qur’an to adopt the Blessed Prophet as a role model then the Qur’anic narrative proves to be an inadequate resource. Another example, in a similar vein, is the Qur’anic command to establish *salāt* and pay the *zakāt*. This command is repeated on dozens of occasions and one’s religious life is defined by performing these acts. But an individual seeking to fulfill these commands will be unable to do so if he/she seeks to do it only on the basis of what the Qur’an has to say about *salāt* and *zakāt*. The Qur’an contains only the most general references to the what, when, how, where of *salāt* and *zakāt* and these references are not nearly

enough to make possible a systematic and coherent performance of *salāt* and payment of *zakāt*.

This presents us with a paradox in the Qur'anic narrative – commands/exhortations combined with an incomplete description of how the commands/exhortations are to be acted upon. The only way to resolve this paradox is to acknowledge that the Qur'anic narrative points to sources of knowledge beyond itself in order for its own commands/exhortations to be understood and carried out. Adopting the Blessed Prophet as a role model requires (at the very minimum) the aid of historical knowledge. Learning how to perform the *salāt* and pay the *zakāt* requires (at the very minimum) the aid of *fiqhi* knowledge. A partial list of the requirements that history and *fiqh* have to meet in order to be reliable sources of knowledge would include historiography, objective research methods and tools, adequate technology to insure reliable transmission of reports (i.e., paper, ink, or other recording devices), a developed and agreed upon written script, etc. It goes without saying that none of this is found “in the Qur'an.” It may very well be the case that the Qur'anic event proved to be the occasion for the development and maturation of certain technologies and processes that were latent potentialities in the pre-Qur'anic cultural setting, but that is not the same as being “in the Qur'an.” In sum, the Qur'an's dependence on the non-Qur'an for the rational comprehension of the Qur'anic message is obvious both from a reasoned and Qur'anic point of view – the latter being illustrated by the journey of Abraham in the present case.

Another way to illustrate the Qur'an's dependence on the non-Qur'an for its own rational comprehension is to look at a few examples that demonstrate how an increase in non-Qur'anic knowledge opens up the possibility of a deeper understanding of the Qur'an. The Qur'an repeatedly states that Allah is the Creator and the Lord of the heavens and the earth and “*what is between them*” (30:7, 32:4, 37:5). The discoveries of modern physics and astronomy (among other non-Qur'anic modern sciences) have exponentially expanded the human understanding of “what is between” the heavens and the earth. Prior to these discoveries the Qur'anic phrase was understood to refer to the air, clouds, birds flying in the air. After the modern scientific discoveries the phrase can be understood to also refer to radio waves, x-rays, neutrinos, ultra-violet light, etc. Along the same lines

findings in the area of entomology and modern medicine potentially expand the understanding of the following Qur'anic passage:

And [consider how] your Lord has inspired the bee: "Prepare for yourself dwellings in mountains and in trees, and what people construct. Then feed on all kinds of fruit and follow the ways made easy for you by your Lord." From their bellies comes a drink of different a colour in which there is healing for human beings. There truly is a sign for those who think. (16: 68-9)

Prior to the findings of modern entomology and medicine human beings had been using honey for culinary and medicinal purposes for centuries, if not millennia. In other words, humans have been aware of the behaviour and benefits of bees long before there was modern science. But at the same time modern science has made possible a level of rational understanding of the phenomena referred to in this passage that was not possible in the pre-modern world.<sup>5</sup>

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that not only is the Qur'an dependent upon the non-Qur'an for its rational comprehension (as illustrated by the examples of the Qur'anic commands to take the Blessed Prophet as exemplar and establish *salāt* /pay *zakāt*), it is also dependent upon the non-

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<sup>5</sup> A word of caution is in order at this point. The examples of "what is between them" and of the bee demonstrate that modern scientific inquiry has the potential of leading to deeper understanding of Qur'anic passages – but this should not be confused with "knowing better". These two examples demonstrate that scientific discoveries have made it possible to expand the field of meaning of particular Qur'anic passages, thereby giving the Qur'anic passages novel depths. But this does not necessarily mean that the knowledge of modern human beings about these things is "better than" that of their pre-modern predecessors. To equate "knowing more" with "knowing better" is a sophomoric logical mistake. It is more a reflection of the immature, underdeveloped reasoning processes and/or pre-established ideological commitments of the individual concerned rather than anything that is real. As Max Weber has observed, the "progress" of knowledge (in which moderns, especially those in the academy, take so much pride) does not necessarily mean knowing better, it does not even necessarily mean knowing "more" than individuals and epochs that have not experienced "progress". The progress of knowledge only means the possibility (not the necessity) of increasing self-awareness and increasing capacity for self-expression, while at the same time opening up the possibility of increasing disenchantment and alienation from the self, as well as alienation from one's natural and social environment.

Qur'an for increasing the breadth and depth of its meanings. In other words the rational comprehension of Qur'anic (i.e., revealed) knowledge requires (and is actually dependant on) a variety (perhaps an infinity) of "non-Qur'anic" sciences – i.e., the reasoned and rational investigation of empirical phenomena. The fact that the Qur'an would see an intimate relationship between itself and the empirical reality studied by the non-Qur'anic sciences is not the least surprising in light of the following passage.

*Everything in the heaven and earth belongs to Allah. Allah is Self-sufficient and worthy of all praise. If all the trees on earth were pens and all the seas, with seven more seas besides, [were ink,] still Allah's words would not run out: Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.(31:26-7)*

It is obvious that the "words" referred to in this passage do not mean merely the words of the Qur'an – there is no shortage of ink or pens presently if the goal is to transcribe the words of Qur'an. In the most general sense, the "words" refers to all that which is (actually or potentially) the object of study by the non-Qur'anic sciences. This passage highlights a point that is implicit (but only barely so) in the Qur'anic narrative on Abraham's spiritual/philosophic journey. There is clear consciousness on the Qur'an's part regarding the relationship of what is "in" the Qur'an (or Qur'anic knowledge) to what is "outside" the Qur'an (or non-Qur'anic knowledge.) This consciousness is so acute that it goes to the extent of not only explicitly exhorting but repeatedly directly challenging, instructing, exhorting the reader to turn to the non-Qur'anic for the rational comprehension of the Qur'anic. This is a more particular manifestation of a general Qur'anic characteristic – the Qur'anic consciousness of its relationship to the non-Qur'anic. It is important to keep this seminally Qur'anic characteristic in mind in order to balance, what has been called, the "textual consciousness" of the Qur'an (Berlinerblau, 117). A recent valuation of the self-conscious character of the Qur'anic narrative illustrates the point by contrasting it to the Biblical narrative. After noting that the Hebrew Bible is not a particularly self-conscious book. It does not know its name. It shows no absolute [sic.] awareness that it is a "Bible," or even a corpus of collected documents. It equivocates as to its origins...(Berlinerblau, 118).Berlinerblau goes on to note:

Contrast this with the Qur'an, a work that Stefan Wild described as the most "self-referential holy text known in the history of world religions." Wild has certainly identified a signal oddity of Islam's foundational document. The work in question knows that it is a "book." The name of this book, we are told again and again, is "the Qur'an." Not only is it conscious of itself, but its merits as well. It describes itself as "glorious," "wise," "clear," "the Book with the truth," and so on. So flush is this document with a sense of its incomparability that it challenges others to come up with something better. "If you doubt what We have revealed to Our servant," it affirms, "produce one chapter comparable to it." When the Hebrew Bible wants to prove the greatness of God it depicts God's greatness. The Qur'an does that and more: it also points to the greatness of the Qur'an. As Daniel Madigan recently put it: "The Qur'an is both itself and *about* itself." (*Ibid.*)

It is indeed the case that Qur'an is "both itself and *about* itself" – but it not merely "*about* itself." If we take the Qur'an to be an example of "revealed knowledge" and reasoned arguments as an example of rational knowledge then even the brief discussion of Abraham's journey demonstrates that the Qur'an is just as aware, conscious, conscientious and affirmative of the non-Qur'anic other as it is of its Qur'anic self. The Qur'an is no less about the non-Qur'an than it is about itself.

### **Reason and the Reality of Revelation**

The discussion seems to have gone off on a tangent in light of the title and the stated goals in the introductory pages. Since those opening pages the discussion shifted to the Qur'an's relationship to the non-Qur'anic sciences and in the last few pages into an even more general statement about the Qur'an's relationship to the non-Qur'an. But this tangent will prove to be helpful if we take some of the points raised in the foregoing discussion and apply them to the specific issue at hand, the reason vs. revelation divide. A plain sense reading of the Qur'anic narrative demonstrates that the Qur'an sees a close relationship between reason and revelation – the Qur'an presents itself as the prime example of Divine Revelation and simultaneously affirms the value of proper reasoning and critiques the conclusions reached by faulty reasoning. A second order reading of the Qur'anic narrative demonstrates

that the Qur'an is dependent upon non-Qur'anic sources for a more detailed, rational, and we may even say "practiceable" understanding of its message. Putting these two points together suggests that we will have to turn to non-Qur'anic resources in order to further explicate the reason and revelation relationship that is repeatedly intimated (but never systematically explicated) in the Qur'an. At this point we turn to the science of philosophy to explicate this relationship, more specifically to the philosophical insights of C.S Peirce. For Peirce philosophy is not some vague, imprecise "love of wisdom." He describes philosophy as a "*positive science*, in the sense of discovering what really is true [universally]; but it limits itself to so much of truth as can be inferred from common sense experience" (1.184). Peirce's description of the goal of "positive science" provides an even more precise understanding of philosophy (in light of the fact that he has described philosophy as a positive science). Peirce notes that the goal of "positive science" is to seek "such knowledge as may conveniently be expressed in a *categorical proposition*" (5.39).

In contrast to the Qur'an which does not go beyond giving examples of good/bad reasoning, lauding the proper use of reason and warning against the misuse/abuse of reason, these issues are of central concern in the science of philosophy. Peirce notes:

The object of reasoning is to find out, from the considerations of what we already know, something else which we do not know. Consequently, reasoning is good if it be such as to give true conclusions from true premises, and not otherwise. Thus, the question of the validity is purely one of fact and not of thinking (5.365).

More precisely, logic is the specialized science in philosophy that is specifically concerned with a close and detailed study of the reasoning processes and seeks to establish objective criteria that separate valid reasoning from invalid reasoning. While human beings are "in the main logical animals" (5.366) it is interesting to note that only a handful of individuals "care to study logic, because everybody conceives himself to be proficient enough in the art of reasoning already" (5. 358). The cavalier attitude towards logic is also displayed at the collective level where "the medieval schoolmen, following the Romans, made logic the earliest of a boy's studies after grammar, as being very easy" (5.359). But the history of

the development of logic demonstrates that it is anything but a “very easy” science because the number of times that the predominant logic in a particular socio-historical setting has been demonstrated to be false is as numerous as the number of important scientific discoveries that have been made in history:

[E]very work of science great enough to be well remembered for a few generations affords some exemplification of the defective state of the art of reasoning of the time when it was written; and each chief step in science has been a lesson in logic (5.363).

Logic’s development and self-understanding is dependent on the development and maturation of a variety of sciences. If this is indeed the case then a logician working in an age when certain natural/physical sciences had reached a relatively advanced stage of maturity would be able to advance the science of logic beyond the work of preceding logician.<sup>6</sup> Living in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (thereby benefiting from the scientific advances since the classical and medieval periods) Peirce does just that by demonstrating that reasoning cannot be equated with inferential reasoning if one wants to give a complete and scientifically adequate account for not only the validity but also the origin of novel knowledge claims. After noting that the “chief business of logicians is to classify arguments” (2.619) he goes on to note that the two main types of arguments thus far identified by logicians (deduction and induction) are nothing but an “inversion” of each other. He also goes on to demonstrate that such arguments do not add anything new to already existing knowledge – the one renders existing knowledge claims more precise

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<sup>6</sup> This description of the evolution of logic might be interpreted to mean that because we live in an age characterized by a more refined logic, then it means that we are more rational and know better than those who came before us. Once again, this is an unmitigated, brash value-judgment (as well as an elementary logical mistake.) Peirce notes that “reason is a mere succedaneum to be used where instinct is wanting” (6.500). Those with perfect instincts would be ill-served to subject their activities to logical analysis – the bee, the ant, the bear, the earth, the sky, etc. have, can and should continue to go about their business without any recourse to logic. Similarly, those individuals with unerring instincts (such as the Blessed Prophets) did not need to take courses in elementary and advanced logic for their judgments to be sound. But in an age characterized by the demise of charisma and the end of Prophecy, the dependence on the science of logic becomes that much more pressing and needed in order to judge the soundness of knowledge claims and reasoning processes.

(deduction), while the other provides some of the criteria to test the validity of the knowledge claims (induction). But neither of the two can be considered as the origins of a particular knowledge claim. It is in his attempt to identify origins of a new knowledge claim (or the “Eureka moment”) that Peirce makes a case for a third class of arguments in addition to deduction and induction.

Peirce notes that supra-rational instinct is the origin of all knowledge and inferential reasoning (be in inductive or deductive) is nothing more than a means of articulating and testing the validity of knowledge claims. Peirce labels the logic of hypothesis formation (i.e., making knowledge claims) “retroduction” and in his later works as “abduction”. He identifies supra-rational instincts as the grounds in which such claims are rooted. He calls the logic of explicating the knowledge claims in rational and communicable form as “deduction.” And the logic of testing and evaluating the validity of the knowledge claims as induction. The following passage sums up the basic characteristics and relationship between abduction /retroduction, deduction and induction:

Observe that neither Deduction nor Induction contributes the smallest positive item to the final conclusion of the inquiry. They render definite the indefinite; Deduction explicates; Induction evaluates: that is all. Over chasm that yawns between the ultimate goal of science and such ideas of Man’s environment as, coming over him during his primeval wanderings in the forest, while yet his very notion of error was of the vaguest, he managed to communicate to some fellow, we are building a cantilever bridge of induction, held together by scientific struts and ties. Yet every plank of its advance is first laid by Retroduction alone, that is to say, by the spontaneous conjectures of instinctive reason; and neither Deduction nor Induction contributes a single new concept to that structure. Nor is this less true or less important for those inquiries of self-interest (6.475).

For Peirce human “instinctive reason” is best described as “a divinatorial power” (following Galileo) and it is “like that of a wasp or a bird” that produces both the knowledge claim and the confidence in the validity of the knowledge claim. This confidence that is altogether different from “rash cocksureness” (6.477) because it is open to being tested and verified

according to objective criteria. Most human beings during most of their normal course of their activity find their instincts and common sense to be more than sufficient in their mundane, routine pursuits. When human beings do turn to deductive and inductive reasoning it is only under special circumstances and for very specific and limited purposes. Peirce argues that he is not the first philosopher to make this observation; it is obvious from a careful reading of Hume:

The fourth part of the first book of Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature* affords a strong argument for the correctness of my view that reason is a mere succedaneum to be used where instinct is wanting, by exhibiting the intensely ridiculous way in which a man winds himself up in silly paper doubts if he undertakes to throw common sense, i.e., instinct, overboard and be perfectly rational...[A] careful reader will see that if [Hume] proves anything at all by all his reasoning, it is that reasoning, as such, is *ipso facto* and essentially illogical, "illegitimate," and unreasonable. And the reason it is so is that either it is bad reasoning, or rest on doubtful premises, or else that those premises have not been thoroughly criticized (6.500).

In short, a philosophical analysis of the processes of scientific reasoning demonstrates that supra-rational instinct is at the root of all novel scientific discoveries. Philosophy, and more specifically the science of logic, can do no more than state this as being an empirical fact, but both must remain silent regarding the origins, characteristics and habits of this supra-rational instincts. The careful reader will have noted that philosophy/logic stand in exactly the same relationship to supra-rational instincts as the Qur'an's relationship to reason. The Qur'an recognizes both the reality and the validity of reason, but remains silent regarding the technical specifics related to reasoning (the specifics which are the subject matter of logic.) Similarly, philosophy (at least the philosophy of Peirce) recognizes the reality and validity of revelation (minimally defined) but remains silent regarding technical specifics related to revelation (the specifics which are among the most important subject matter of the Qur'anic narrative.)

There is another important similarity between logic and the Qur'an. It is obvious that the Qur'an is not a textbook of history, law, psychology, poetry, sociology, hydrology, geology, entomology, medicine, physics, astronomy,

etc. It is equally obvious that the Qur'an repeatedly touches upon all of these sciences (and many others) and then goes on to state that its own truth is directly related to the truths of these non-Qur'anic sciences. Similarly, logic as a science cannot be confused with physics, biology, chemistry, sociology, anthropology, etc. But at the same time the development and maturation of these sciences has been indispensable in helping logic as a science to better express its own characteristics and "truths". In both cases the developmental evolution of the various sciences has directly contributed to increasing the potential understanding of the "truth" of both the Qur'an and logic. In other words, the evolution of science has potentially increased the ability to grasp the rational truth of both reason and revelation.

### **A Final Word**

The preceding pages have presented two different narratives. First, I outlined the Qur'anic narrative of the journey of Abraham. Then I summarized Peirce's position on the characteristics and the historical development of the science of logic. Given how the Qur'an treats reason and given Peirce's description of the role of supra-rational instinct in the reasoning process it is clear that the reason/revelation divide is not tenable from either the Qur'anic or the philosophical perspective. Just as the Qur'anic exhortations to take the Blessed Prophet as an example, to perform *salāt* and give *ḡakāt*, etc. cannot be practically comprehended without the aid of a variety of "non-Qur'anic" sciences, the Qur'anic valuation of reason and exhortations to use it properly cannot be put into actual practice without the aid of a variety of "non-Qur'anic" sciences. Conversely, all of science (or philosophy) is dependent on revelation if it is to provide a rational (i.e., scientific) account for the origins of abductive hypotheses. In sum, it is not only the case that revealed knowledge is dependent upon human beings drawing valid inferences in order to be rationally articulated, understood and put into practice. It is also the case that philosophy must acknowledge the reality of a supra-rational dimension of reality in order to give a rational account for the origins of rational thought (otherwise the claims about "rational" thought remain self-referential, circular arguments.)

The foregoing discussion shows the reason/revelation divide to be based on a category mistake. It is based on a confusion between the origin of

knowledge claims (supra-rational instincts) and the criteria for articulating and validating knowledge claims (inferential reasoning)<sup>7</sup>. If this category mistake is recognized then it is obvious that the only “divide” that separates reason from revelation is the “divide” that separates the root from the fruit or the soil from the plant. The mistake of reifying the distinction between root and fruit or soil and plant is based on the same flawed reasoning as the mistake of rejecting the distinction between root/fruit or soil/plant. Both the Qur’anic narrative and Peirce’s philosophical reflections not only demand but also give us the wherewithal to see, simultaneously, the similarity and the distinction between reason and revelation – in brief, they give us the wherewithal to see the relationship between reason and revelation. In sum, this discussion did not merely demonstrate that the reason/revelation divide is untenable from the perspective of scripture and philosophy. It has demonstrated that revelation acknowledges not only the validity of reason but its indispensability so that it itself is properly understood. Conversely, philosophy not only recognizes the reality of revelation, it cannot give a completely rational account of the origin of human knowledge without acknowledging this supra-rational reality. Consequently, the relationship between reason and revelation is not merely that that the one affirms the other – the relationship goes deeper in that the one requires the other for its self-realization.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It is obvious that the work of C.S. Peirce the philosophers lends greater depth and breadth to the description of “reason” or “reasoning” as this word is used in the Qur’an. At the same time the Qur’an lends greater depth and breadth to the terms “instincts” as it is used by Peirce. At this point it would be a worthwhile exercise on the part of the reader to go back to the beginning of the essay and see how the terms “reason” and “revelation” have been affirmed and modified from their originally provisional, minimal description.

<sup>8</sup> This description of the relationship between reason and revelation not only corrects the mistaken views of modern fundamentalists (both in the secular academy and the religious seminary) it also sheds light on debates of bygone centuries. For example, this discussion shows that Ibn Rushd’s claim is clearly erroneous. He claimed that revelation and philosophy talk about the same truth but in two different languages. He imagined that the language of revelation is metaphorical and for the *boi poloi*, while the language of philosophy is rational and for a select elite (with himself at or near the top of this elite group.) He was right in that philosophy and revelation talk about the same truth, but obviously wrong in how the words “the same truth” are to be understood. Ghazzali asserted that the particulars of philosophic (or scientific) claims about reality are completely irrelevant as long as they do not contradict certain religious teachings. He notes:

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Once its [the world's] temporal existence is established, it makes no difference whether it is a sphere, a simple body, a hexagon; no difference whether the highest heaven and what is beneath them are thirteen layers, as they say, or lesser or greater. For the relation of the inquiry into [these matters] to the inquiry into divine [matters] is similar to the relation of looking at the number of layers of an onion [or] the number of seeds in a pomegranate. What is intended here is only [the world's] being God's act, whatever mode it was (Ghazzali, 7).

While one can sympathize with Ghazzali's attempt to shield what he held dear (religious truth) from the irresponsible and undisciplined speculations of philosophers, it appears that he overstated his case. Given the fact that the world is a creation of God no less than scripture is the revelation of God, one cannot be as dismissive of philosophical (i.e., scientific) inquiry and conclusions into the nature of reality as Ghazzali was wont to be. In spite of its historical value, Ghazzali's plea for a minimalist and unilinear relationship between philosophy and religion (or reason and revelation) is inadequate on two counts – one scientific, the other religious. On scientific grounds Ghazzali is mistaken because the relationship between the two is deeper and more reflexive than he concluded. On religious grounds Ghazzali's position is mistaken because it does not “meet the demands of the day” – the day being a period in history in which religion finds itself in a post-traditional, post-industrial, on the verge of “post-human,” global village.

Peirce, C. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University.

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# NEW DISCOVERIES ABOUT THE RECONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN ISLAM

Khurram Ali Shafique

## ABSTRACT

*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* is seen as a problematic writing of Iqbal. The reason may be that although much has been written about the book, it has never been subjected to a linguistic analysis. That is what I intend to do in this paper along with a comparative study of this book with two others writings of Iqbal written around the same time. The “new discoveries” in the title of this paper refers to some astonishing features of *The Reconstruction* that come to light when such a study is carried out. These features have not been brought to light before.

In December 1924, Iqbal delivered a lecture on *ijtihad* in Lahore. Its text is now considered to be lost. It raised some criticism locally but was much appreciated in South India where the Madras Muslim Association invited Iqbal to deliver a series of lectures. He started preparation in the summer of 1928 and delivered the first three lectures in Madras and Hyderabad Deccan in early 1929. Three more were prepared later that year, the last of which was again on *ijtihad*, and is supposed to be a revised version of the controversial one of 1924. All six lectures were delivered at Aligarh University in late 1929 and published as *Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* from Lahore in 1930. Another lecture was later delivered at Aristotelian Society London in 1932 and added to the second edition, which is our definitive version of the book and was published by Oxford University Press, UK, in 1934 as *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Comparative

study of the two editions has shown that there were no fundamental changes apart from minor rephrasing of certain sentences.<sup>9</sup>

Almost a year before starting his preparation for the first three lectures, Iqbal had started his fifth book of poetry, *Javidnama*. It was going to be his greatest work, took several years in the making and was finally published in 1932. Hence it can be safely assumed that throughout the preparation of his *Reconstruction* lectures, Iqbal was simultaneously working on *Javidnama*. Yet he was also an elected member of the Punjab provincial legislature from 1926 to 1930 and the cumulative result of his evolution as a practicing politician was his presidential address at the annual session of the All-India Muslim League in Allahabad on December 30, 1930. In the present paper it will be called *The Allahabad Address*.

It is surprising that a comparative study of these texts has never been carried out. Such a study would have revealed a systematic coherence that exists between these three texts but which has gone unnoticed for more than seventy years. Strange it may seem but there is enough linguistic evidence there to suspect that Iqbal deliberately concealed some of these connections in a kind of “secret code.”

### **Discovering Linguistic Coherence**

In my book *The Republic of Rumi: A Novel of Reality* (2007)<sup>10</sup> I have tried to show the internal coherence in the canon of Iqbal’s writings in some detail. Here I shall briefly point out three aspects of linguistic coherence between *The Reconstruction* and *Javidnama* with some references to *The Allahabad Address*. These three aspects are:

1. Similarities in structure
2. Embedded allusions
3. Jigsaw reading

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<sup>9</sup> This has been shown by Dr. Rafiuddin Hashmi in his pioneering study of Iqbal’s texts, *Tasaniif-i-Iqbal ka Tabqiqi-wa-Tawzihi Mutalia* published by Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore.

<sup>10</sup> *The Republic of Rumi: A Novel of Reality* by Khurram Ali Shafique (2007), published by Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore.

To begin with, *The Reconstruction* consists of seven lectures and *Javidnama* seven chapters. How ironic, that it was never noticed that each lecture covers the same topic which is the focus of the corresponding chapter of *Javidnama!*

	<b><i>The Reconstruction</i></b>	<b><i>Javidnama</i></b>
1	Knowledge and Religious Experience	The Sphere of Moon
2	The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience	The Sphere of Mercury
3	The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer	The Sphere of Venus
4	The Human Ego - His Freedom and Immortality	The Sphere of Mars
5	The Spirit of Muslim Culture	The Sphere of Jupiter
6	The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam	The Sphere of Saturn
7	Is Religion Possible?	Beyond the Spheres

Readers already familiar with both books can see the correspondence between structures from this table. For others this correspondence will become evident from related discussions offered in the rest of this paper.

From this similarity in the structure of both books we may now move on to an investigation of embedded allusions. The most obvious allusion occurs at the very end of each book. The last lecture of *The Reconstruction* ends on a passage from the prologue of *Javidnama*, where Rumi is inviting Iqbal to the spiritual odyssey. Below this passage occurs the reference, i.e. "*Javidnama*," and hence the title of that book becomes the very last word on which *The Reconstruction* culminates. On the other hand, in the epilogue of *Javidnama*, 'An Address to Javid: A Few Words With the Posterity' the author mentions that he has "condensed two oceans in two cups" and expressed his ideas in two manners:

That one is in the difficult language, using the terminology of the West,

This one is an ecstatic song from the strings of a harp.

The origin of one is contemplation, the origin of the other is thought,

May you be the inheritor of them both!

A footnote by Iqbal himself on the first line says: “Allusion to the book, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.” This “cross-referencing” between the two books is the clearest example of embedded allusions through which Iqbal expected his readers to undertake a comparative study of both books and not to read them in isolation.

Another cross-reference, less visible than this one, occurs at the very beginning of the first lecture of *The Reconstruction*, where Iqbal mentions that certain questions are common to religion, philosophy, and higher poetry. These three domains are represented in the first chapter of *Javidnama* by three stations on the Sphere of Moon, i.e., the cave of the metaphysician Vishvamitra, the valley of the perennial muse Sarosh, and Yarghamid or the Valley of Tawas in, which contains the cryptic tablets of four prophets.

Next we may consider what is described in language teaching as “jigsaw reading.” It is an exercise where a text is broken down into pieces and each piece is put up on the wall in a separate corner of the room. Students or readers are asked to reassemble the text by reading the pieces distributed over different places and rearranging the whole text in the correct order. Language teachers use this activity in order to nurture the powers of making correct inferences. Iqbal seems to have used something similar to this technique, and the most interesting example is a chunk in *The Allahabad Address* which can be inserted into the preface of *The Reconstruction* with full justification and for significant results. In *The Allahabad Address*, Iqbal says, “One of the profoundest verses in the Holy Qur’an teaches us that the birth and rebirth of the whole of humanity is like the birth and rebirth of a single individual.” He doesn’t quote the verse nor gives reference but goes on to say:

Why cannot you who, as a people, can well claim to be the first practical exponent of this superb conception of humanity, live and move and have your being as a single individual?

The verse to which Iqbal is referring in *The Allahabad Address* is actually quoted in the 'Preface' of *The Reconstruction*:

'Your creation and resurrection,' says the Qur'an, 'are like the creation and resurrection of a single soul.' A living experience of the kind of biological unity, embodied in this verse, requires today a method physiologically less violent and psychological.

We can see that here Iqbal has abstained from commenting on the verse, due to which we cannot be sure what kind of biological unity, according to him, is embodied in it. This problem is solved if the passage is read together with Iqbal's commentary in *The Allahabad Address*. The result, in the minds of the readers, will be the following inference (in which the sentence from *The Allahabad Address* is italicized):

'Your creation and resurrection,' says the Qur'an, 'are like the creation and resurrection of a single soul.' A living experience of the kind of biological unity, embodied in this verse, requires today a method physiologically less violent and psychological. *Why cannot you who, as a people, can well claim to be the first practical exponent of this superb conception of humanity, live and move and have your being as a single individual?*

It appears from this inference that the method suggested here is in fact the realization of national unity – in other words the formation of a Muslim state based on this unity. It also explains the next lines of the 'Preface': "In the absence of such a method the demand for a scientific form of religious knowledge is only natural." Since true unity of a nation is a creative act, each individual in a society based on such unity would be empowered to have a living experience of the amazing "biological unity" embodied in the verse of the Qur'an. The demand for a scientific form of religious knowledge would be unnatural in such a society because evidence for religious truths will be abundant in the world within and without. However, *in the absence of such a method the demand for a scientific form of religious knowledge is only natural.*

This overview of linguistic coherence between the three texts of Iqbal makes it obvious that the author intended us to study these texts coherently. Now we should consider the question: *Why did he do so?*

## Implications of Linguistic Coherence

Modern mind likes to make inferences. What we call “jigsaw reading” was being offered in one form or another by such masters as Joyce, Yeats and Eliot even in the days of Iqbal. However, what those European masters failed to do was to harness the powers of inference in the service of universal truth. Engagement with their literature becomes relative, subjective and essentially dependent on individual interpretation. Iqbal engaged the same techniques – and a detailed analysis of his verbal art will show that he excelled his contemporaries in doing so – but truth never becomes relative in his art. This is his achievement as a linguistic genius and in this he stands unparalleled in modern literature. However, we must delve deep enough into the canon of his writings in order to see this miracle of verbal art.

On the basis of what has been stated here, we can formulate the following parameters for a linguistic study of *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*:

- a) Its structure is organic, where one part explains the other parts and some parts may reflect the whole.
- b) It is linguistically coherent with other writings of Iqbal, at least with *Javidnama* and *The Allahabad Address*, and a proper study of this book should not ignore those other texts.
- c) A study of this book cannot be based on preconceived notions about the issues tackled in it because previous knowledge from external sources may hinder the discovery of coherence in the text itself (this is the common shortcoming of most previous studies of this book).

On these conditions, let’s now study some basic aspects of this book:

1. What questions does it try to answer?
2. What perspectives does it adopt while answering them?
3. How does it propose to reformulate our knowledge of the world?

4. In what manner does the author hope his work to be relevant beyond his own lifetime?

The fourth question may not be asked of an ordinary book of philosophy but we are justified in asking it of a work of literature and verbal art. That is what *The Reconstruction* is in addition to being a great work of modern philosophy.

### Seven Questions

*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* opens with some questions which, according to Iqbal, are common to religion, philosophy and higher poetry:

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 questions are common to religion, philosophy, and higher poetry.

M. Suheyl Umar has very aptly pointed out that in fact these four question marks embody six questions.<sup>11</sup> I would suggest that we can add one more question: "Is religion possible?" That is the title of the seventh lecture and may even be reformulated according to the definition of religion offered in it, i.e. religion in its higher form is a direct vision of the Ultimate Reality. This gives us a total of seven questions, which are as follows:

1. What is the character of the universe in which we live?
2. What is its general structure?
3. Is there a permanent element in the constitution of this universe?
4. How are we related to it?
5. What place do we occupy in it?
6. What is the kind of conduct that befits the place we occupy?
7. Is it possible to have a direct vision of the Ultimate Reality?

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<sup>11</sup> In a group discussion conducted at Iqbal Academy Pakistan in July 2007. Available on tape but not yet printed.

We find that one of these questions is answered in each lecture of *The Reconstruction* in the same order. The same questions are tackled in the seven chapters of *Javidnama*, again in the same order.

### **Philosophy, Higher Poetry and Religion**

With the exception of the last one, these questions are common to philosophy, higher poetry and religion. Since *The Reconstruction* is a book of philosophy it obviously answers these questions in a manner of “free inquiry” (which, according to Iqbal, is the spirit of philosophy), yet it treats religion “on its own terms” and keeps it as “something focal in the process of reflective synthesis” (which, due to the very nature of religion, are pre-requisites for philosophical analysis of religion according to Iqbal).

While the answers offered in *The Reconstruction* have been discussed at great length in the literature of Iqbal Studies, the questions themselves have seldom been kept as the focal points for each lecture because the text of *The Reconstruction* is not usually seen as an organic unity. Consequently, scholars have complained that it becomes very difficult to follow the bent of the author’s mind at certain points. At such points it may be helpful to refer back to the basic question that underlies all the arguments in a particular chapter. For instance, the first chapter is ‘Knowledge and Religious Experience’ but the underlying question which determines the position of this lecture with regard to the general body of world philosophy is: “What is the character of the universe in which we live?” Hence Iqbal’s answer to this question (in the passage that begins, “What, then, according to the Qur’an, is the character of the universe which we inhabit?”) becomes central to the whole lecture and it should be kept in mind even for understanding the declared subject of the lecture, i.e. ‘Knowledge and Religious Experience’.

It is further important to remember that Iqbal equates the universe with the Qur’an, and most of what is true about the universe is to be used as a key for understanding the Qur’an. In the light of this proposition, the question about the character of the universe is also a question about the general character of the Qur’an with due regard to the essential difference between the word of God and “a fleeting moment in the life of God” (which is how Iqbal sees the world of Nature). According to Iqbal, the universe is:

- a) not the result of a mere creative sport;
- b) a reality to be reckoned with;
- c) so constituted that it is capable of extension;
- d) something whose mysterious swing and impulse is even reflected in the passing of day and night, and which is one of the greatest signs of God;
- e) carries in it the promise of a complete subjugation by the human being “whose duty is to reflect on the signs of God, and thus discover the means of realizing his conquest of Nature as an actual fact.”

The first two of these characteristics can be directly applied to the Qur’an but the rest need explanation. The universe can show its capability of extension materially but the Qur’an as a complete and unchangeable text will show this capability only in terms of its meaning. However, since its text is an organic unity, even the extension of meaning occurs organically and is therefore more real than, and different from, a mere accumulation of commentaries. Likewise, while the universe carries in it the promise of “a complete subjugation by the human being,” the Qur’an empowers the humanity to this end by helping it to “reflect on the signs of God, and thus discover the means of realizing [their] conquest of Nature as an actual fact.”

The fact that Iqbal held the Qur’an as a role model even for the linguistic structure of his verbal art gives us some important clues for understanding his poetry. In *Javidnama*, the same seven questions are handled in corresponding chapters but while the aim of philosophy is to tell, the aim of poetry is to show. In *The Reconstruction*, Iqbal was trying to tell us about a world that was not yet born (“the day is not far off when Religion and Science may discover hitherto unsuspected mutual harmonies,” he said since the day had not arrived by then). In his poetry he showed us the world about which he was telling in his prose (“May you be the inheritor of them both!”). The intricacies of the linguistic structure of *Javidnama* reflect the five characteristics of the universe, especially using the Qur’an as a role model for achieving this end through language.

I will give only one example here from the first chapter. This chapter ought to correspond to the first of the seven questions: “What is the

character of the universe in which we live?” The five characteristics of the universe described by Iqbal in *The Reconstruction* find a practical demonstration here. For instance, the first characteristic, that the universe is not the result of a mere creative sport, is reflected in the fact that even the ghazal of Sarosh has seven couplets, each touching upon one of the seven basic questions. The first couplet that should reflect on the question of the character of the universe in which we live, is:

I fear that you are rowing your ship in a mirage;

Born within a veil, you die within a veil.

In this manner, each couplet also provides the preview of a subsequent chapter of *Javidnama* where the same question will be taken up more exclusively. The implications of this device are enormous. For instance, suppose we wish to study the character of Sarosh. How should we go about it? The poet could have told us about it but he didn't. Instead, he gave us her monologue on the seven questions which we are answering for ourselves. We judge the character of Sarosh by comparing her reflections with our own, and by comparing them with the other realities of her world as they unfold in *Javidnama*. Thus, by chiseling down the ghazal of Sarosh to seven couplets around the basic questions, the poet provides us an opportunity for seeing the characteristics of Sarosh in an endlessly greater detail than would have been possible by any number of vivid descriptions. On one hand, the poet has virtually created the possibility for each reader to form a different opinion about Sarosh, while on the other he has provided a tangible criterion against which the various interpretations by various readers can be judged. That criterion is the world of *Javidnama*, into which the poet keeps pulling us deeper until we become the true protagonist of the story itself. Thus the world presented in *Javidnama* carries in it the promise of “a complete subjugation” by the reader while the text of *Javidnama* itself empowers us for this end by helping us to “reflect on the signs of God, and thus discover the means of realizing [our] conquest of Nature as an actual fact.” Indeed, the linguistic structure of *Javidnama* is “not the result of a mere creative sport.”

It is interesting to note that in the opening paragraph of the first lecture where Iqbal differentiates between the functions of religion, philosophy and

higher poetry, he says, “But the kind of knowledge that poetic inspiration brings is essentially individual in its character; it is figurative, vague, and indefinite.” Now it should become obvious that he didn’t use these adjectives in pejorative sense.

Having considered philosophy and poetry, we may now move on to religion. If the answers to these questions are found in religion then they must be there in the Qur’an, and if they are to be found in the Qur’an then they must also be contained in its first chapter, ‘The Opening,’ which is regarded as a summary of the whole Book. Incidentally, the chapter consists of seven verses (which makes us wonder whether Iqbal had it in mind when he formulated seven questions that could cover the general history of human thought). The seven verses of ‘The Opening’ are:

1. In the name of Allah, the Mercy-giving, the Merciful
2. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Universe,
3. The Mercy-giving, the Merciful,
4. Ruler of the Day of Repayment.
5. You do we worship and You do we call on for help.
6. Guide us along the Straight Road,
7. The road of those whom You have favored, with whom You are not angry, nor who are lost.

The connection between the seven questions and the seven verses of the Qur’an is obvious from the third verse onwards: *Is there a permanent element in the constitution of this universe?* “The Mercy-giving, the Merciful.” *How are we related to it?* “Ruler of the Day of Repayment.” And so on.

In those instances where this connection is not so obvious, for instance, in the case of the first two questions, some observations on *The Reconstruction* help us discover the connection. For instance, the first verse is, “In the name of Allah, the Mercy-giving, the Merciful.” The first question is, *What is the character of the universe in which we live?* In the first lecture, Iqbal specifically answers this question by pointing out five characteristics of the universe. If we keep them in mind, we not only find the connection between this question and the first verse of the Qur’an but we also find a very interesting perspective on that most-of-often repeated verse of the Qur’an.

## Five Perspectives

Each of the seven questions may be undertaken at five levels, as is evident from Iqbal's conception of God. In the third lecture of *The Reconstruction*, he points out that according to the Islamic conception, God is:

- a) intensively infinite,
- b) creative,
- c) knowing,
- d) powerful, and
- e) eternal.

It is quite clear that Iqbal's conception of the character of the universe as discussed above is also derived from his conception of God. The five elements listed here correspond to the five characteristics of the universe described earlier, but the correspondence occurs in the inverse order:

- a) not the result of a mere creative sport; (*God is eternal*)
- b) a reality to be reckoned with; (*God is powerful*)
- c) so constituted that it is capable of extension; (*God is knowing*)
- d) something whose mysterious swing and impulse is even reflected in the passing of day and night, and which is one of the greatest signs of God; (*God is creative*)
- e) carries in it the promise of a complete subjugation by the human being "whose duty is to reflect on the signs of God, and thus discover the means of realizing his conquest of Nature as an actual fact." (*God is intensively infinite*)

Even the seven questions, and hence the seven lectures, are derived from these five elements by extending the first element (God is eternal – the universe is not the result of a mere creative sport) into three stages: character of the universe, its general structure, and the permanent element in it. Yet another linguistic feature of *The Reconstruction* that has gone unnoticed is that each of the first two lectures ends with an announcement of the next, while each of the second and the third opens with a recap of the previous one. This device turns the first three lectures into a mini-series (the other four lectures do not start or end with such cross-references), and the mini-series

together explains one element in the conception of God, i.e., He is eternal – and the corresponding characteristic of the universe, i.e., not the result of a mere creative sport.

If we take these five elements as five perspectives, then each question can be answered in five different ways depending on which perspective is taken while answering. The five perspectives correspond to five layers of reality, which are:<sup>12</sup>

1. Things as they are, or the Wisdom of Adam – based on our understanding that God is eternal
2. Principles, or the Wisdom of Angels – based on our understanding that God is powerful
3. Potentials, or the Wisdom of Soul – based on our understanding that God is knowing
4. Contrasts, or the Wisdom of Love – based on our understanding that God is creative
5. Resurrection, or the Wisdom of Civilization – based on our understanding that God is intensively Infinite

It is possible to have functional models of knowledge without relating them to an Ultimate Reality but in that case the functionality of each branch of knowledge becomes restricted to its domain and any correspondence with other branches of knowledge is mechanical and arbitrary. Indeed that has been the case so far. However, recent trends in human thought, especially the American thought, have displayed an increasing desire for holistic worldviews. Iqbal's conception of God deserves our special attention in this context. On one hand it is consistent with the deepest truths of metaphysics while on the other hand it is remarkably free of dogmatic underpinnings. Hence it facilitates a holistic approach that connects the functions of various disciplines in a manner that the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts.

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<sup>12</sup> Adam, Angels, Soul, Love and Civilization are the labels I have discovered from *Persian Psalms* through a system of interpretation which I have described in my book *The Republic of Rumi: A Novel of Reality*. Their attributes, i.e., things as they are, principles, etc., are of my own coinage according to my understanding of Iqbal.

## Functions of Knowledge

In the Wisdom of Adam, where we interact with things as they are, we merely formulate questions (such as the seven basic questions listed above). Answers at this level can be provided through speculation (philosophy), inspiration (higher poetry) or revelation (religion) but empirical evidence for sophisticated answers is not available.

Science and ethics (and hence philosophy in general) is concerned with principles. They are the second layer of reality and correspond with the fact that God is powerful. Hence science and ethics aim at empowering us most directly – science by giving us command over the physical world and ethics by giving us command over the human world. In either case, this command comes through a balance between submission and assertion: we can assert our will over the forces of nature only by submitting to them and over the human society only by submitting to the values of goodness. Iqbal identifies this wisdom with angels, who are powerful and who manipulate the hidden forces of the universe on God's command.

Psychology deals with potentials, which is the third level of reality and corresponds with the fact that God is knowing. Hence psychology aims at giving us knowledge of ourselves, and in his seventh lecture, Iqbal envisions a futuristic psychology that should extend our knowledge of ourselves to an awareness of the inherent unity between us and the rest of the universe. He identifies this wisdom with the soul.

Art and language deal with application of principles and hence they operate among contrasts and polarities of all sort– beginning with the fundamental contrast between the vast potentials of the soul and the fewer applications possible in the world at any given time. This is the fourth layer of reality and corresponds with the fact that God is creative. Iqbal identifies it with love.

Religion is the only institution that is concerned with life after death and aims at empowering the human being to be resurrected beyond this world. It corresponds most directly to the fact that God is intensively Infinite. Iqbal identifies religion with civilization. The life of each civilization is determined

by the formation of fresh ideals and creation of new values, and the birth of a civilization is like resurrection of humanity— “Your creation and resurrection are like the creation and resurrection of a single soul,” the Qur’an says in a verse that is quoted by Iqbal at significant points. Historically, too, religion has been the originator of nations and hence the guiding force in the evolution of human civilization.

### **Redefining the Historical Context of *The Reconstruction***

“The day is not far off when Religion and Science may discover hitherto unsuspected mutual harmonies,” Iqbal wrote in his ‘Preface’ to *The Reconstruction*. The day has arrived now but it is going unnoticed by the intelligentsia of Pakistan mainly due to one crucial mistake made by some of our best minds soon after independence. We misunderstood the decline of the West as the decline of humanity. This mistake deserves some elaboration due to its crucial importance for our future existence.

The birth of modern times is symbolically attributed to the year 1776. Regardless of the accuracy of this placement, at least by the end of that century it had become visible to the aware minds in the West as well as the East that times have changed. The question was whether the change should be accepted or rejected. Of course, it depended on whether the change was temporary or permanent, and whether the spirit of modern times was good or bad. Hence it posed three basic questions to the thinkers of the age:

- a) Are modern times passing or permanent?
- b) Are they good or bad?
- c) Should they be accepted or rejected?

While unprecedented changes were taking place every day it was impossible to assume that any change could be permanent. From this premise, there were eight possible answers to the remaining two questions, out of which only two were logically acceptable:

1. Modern times are passing but good and should be accepted.
2. Modern times are passing and bad, and should be rejected.
3. Modern times are passing but good and should be rejected.

4. Modern times are passing and bad, but should be accepted.

Obviously, the last two propositions are only theoretically possible but they are logically absurd and need not concern us here. Out of the first two, the proposition that modern times are passing but good and should be accepted was adopted by the Romantics. The second proposition, viz. the modern times are passing and bad, and should be rejected, was adopted by the conservatives (and would also become the position of the Marxists still later in the century). This was the situation in 1800.

Over the next hundred years two basic changes took place. The first was that it was by then possible to assume that the modern times were permanent. This assumption would have been incomprehensible to Wordsworth, Coleridge and Goethe but it seemed natural to Conrad, Kipling and Eliot.

The second change was that the Western colonialism had planted the seeds of its own demise in the East and the mind of Europe had become aware of it. Yet it could do nothing about it because such was the spirit of modern times that empires could not be built on brute force alone. They required mandates, treaties and at least pretence of disseminating modern knowledge. Even these pretenses were enough to empower the oppressed. The actual collapse of the Western empire happened in the middle of the twentieth century but the principles that led to it became evident to the East as well as the West by the 1890's. Obviously, the results were different – in fact opposite – in each case. The East adopted the position of the Romantics: the modern times were passing but good and should be accepted (of course, in the East they were to be accepted on Eastern terms). The finest representation of this Eastern Romanticism were Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Iqbal.

In the West, on the other hand, new propositions stemmed out of the fatalistic assumption that the modern times were permanent. Out of the four propositions theoretically possible from this assumption, only one is logically impossible:

1. Modern times are permanent but good, and must be accepted.

2. Modern times are permanent and bad, but must be accepted.
3. Modern times are permanent and bad, and must be rejected.
4. Modern times are permanent and good, but must be rejected.

The fourth proposition is logically impossible. Of the rest, the first was the position of early modernists of the 1890's. That the modern times were good and permanent and must be accepted was the premise hidden beneath all the ambivalence of Nietzsche towards good and evil.<sup>13</sup> This premise found a more direct expression through the bards of Western colonialism in the later nineteenth century but the fatalism implied in accepting any set of circumstances as permanent is only one step away from accepting those times as bad: good times would appear bad after a while if you cannot alter them by choice. Hence the early modernism developed into its later schools of deep pessimism, most characteristically represented by T. S. Eliot. The proposition underlying the works of these later modernists as well as the post-modernists is that the modern times are permanent and bad but must be accepted.

This position is suicidal in a dignified manner. A dignified suicide was indeed how Europe looked upon its obligation to wrap up its empire in the East. Unfortunately certain minds in the East also borrowed this new premise from Europe. Of course, given the fact that the East at that time had not started receiving any dividends on the modern times, the premise had to be modified so that it became the third proposition listed above: modern times are permanent and bad, but must be rejected. When you stand up to reject something bad which cannot be changed because it is permanent, what do you do? Archival footage of Gandhi's followers turning up for a voluntary beating by the police should serve as a graphic illustration of the implications of this proposition. It also explains Tagore's alliance with the modernist poets of the West, the overwhelming appreciation of his poetry by them and

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<sup>13</sup> It is true that he talks about the advent of yet another change in the coming of Superman, yet the doctrine of eternal recurrence gives a very weird kind of permanence to the modern times: they will pass but will come again, just as they have before. Hence the modern times are passing phenomena only superficially but in their essence they are a permanent element of the universe which returns in never-ending cycles.

the unrelenting efforts in the West to turn Gandhi into a media celebrity, a living cult and a role model for the Third World countries. "I do not mystify anybody when I say that things in India are not what they appear to be," Iqbal stated at the end of *The Allahabad Address*. "The meaning of this, however, will dawn upon you only when you have achieved a real collective ego to look at them."

The outlook we adopted five years after the birth of Pakistan was not consistent with the collective ego achieved by our ancestors who had created this great country. Some of us misunderstood that the proposition of the Western modernists that "the modern times are permanent but bad but must be rejected" was a confession that the West was evil. As a free nation of the East it should concern us less whether the West is evil or not. What should concern us more is what role can we play in the future of humanity? This is where Iqbal comes in with the fundamental premise of a Romantic: "the modern times are passing but good and must be accepted."

What does it mean to accept the modern times when the West no longer has jurisdiction over us except what privileges we may grant it out of our folly? This is the question which is answered in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, but the question is of such overwhelming significance that the search for answer must entail a creative engagement with the book rather than a mere understanding of it. That is the task that lies ahead of us since it has never been undertaken before.

### **A New Basis for Comparison**

The proper comparison of Iqbal is not with the decadent stream of golden words emerging out of Europe, especially France, in the twentieth century, which was like the suicide attack of European imperialism against the intellectual frontiers of the Third World. The proper comparison of Iqbal is with that life-giving current of thought which is practically shaping the destiny of our world and also framing the New World Order.

By now Iqbal has been accepted as one of the greatest poets this world has ever produced. It means that we must be careful in picking up

comparisons for him, for he can only be compared with the best. However, as Yeats pointed out in 1920:

The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.<sup>14</sup>

It would be futile to compare Iqbal with those who lack conviction. It is true that the highest names in thought and literature of the twentieth century fall under this category but Yeats was wrong in calling them the best. Nor were those who were full of passionate intensity worst except from the peculiarly biased outlook of Yeats. They were the bestsellers and blockbusters influencing modern consciousness and thus shaping a new world. It is a good world, but its goodness escaped the notice of Yeats because the darkness dropped again too soon while he was reading from *Spiritus Mundi*. Ironically, the beast described by him in ‘The Second Coming’ had already been envisioned by Iqbal long before him and had been described rather differently than Yeats. The description given by Yeats in his 1920 poem was:

The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.

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<sup>14</sup> All quotations from Yeats in this paper are from his poem ‘The Second Coming’, first printed in 1919 and anthologized in *Michael Roberts and the Dancers* in 1920.

In a ghazal titled 'March 1907' (and written in that month), Iqbal had said:

The lion that leapt out of the desert and overthrew the Great Roman  
Empire

Will be reawakened, so have I heard from the angels.<sup>15</sup>

Yeats saw the image of *Spiritus Mundi* while Iqbal heard about it from the angels. Yeats interpreted it as rebirth of bloodthirsty Hellenism whereas Iqbal saw it as the rebirth of freedom, equality and universal brotherhood as enunciated by Islam. In either case it was linked with the death of Western imperialism – a cause for disillusionment to Yeats (despite his links with the Irish freedom movement) but quite understandably a cause for jubilation to Iqbal.

“In view of the basic idea of Islam that there can be no further revelation binding on man, we ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated peoples on earth,” he says at the end of the sixth lecture in *The Reconstruction*. “Early Muslims emerging out of the spiritual slavery of pre-Islamic Asia were not in a position to realize the true significance of this basic idea. Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve, out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam.” This premonition about the future is apparently based on the same vision of “a shape with lion body and the head of a man” which was also seen by Yeats but interpreted in the opposite manner:

The darkness drops again; but now I know

That twenty centuries of stony sleep

Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,

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<sup>15</sup> 'March 1907' was first printed in the Urdu literary magazine *Makhzan* in 1907 and later included in *The Call of the Marching Bell Bang-i-Dara* in 1924. Translation from Urdu is my own.

And what rough beast, its hour comes round at last,

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

The age of European imperialism came to an end with the Second World War. A new world has come into being but we are living in its early phase. Since it is a new world, it is yet to find its classics. It is not surprising that the Nobel prizes for literature have been going mostly to authors from countries which are not leading the world. It is easy for these authors to adhere to the value system of a dead world that passed away with the Second World War. An illusion that the colonial world is still alive is given to us through the efforts of such authors from the Third World who follows the pessimist stance of the European masters of the twentieth century: “the modern times are bad but permanent” (whether the modern times should be rejected or accepted makes little difference once you accept this premise). Of course, these intellectuals, whether from the East or the West, not only feed the nostalgia of Europe but also give it a much-needed self-esteem by letting it imagine that the world didn't become any better after obtaining freedom from its clutches. Self-deprecating writers from East as well as West are duly rewarded by European gods of art and letter for singing this swan song on a broken harp. Hence we find that the most well-reputed names in art and letter continue lacking in conviction.

As long as we keep looking up to this pedestal of intellectual greatness, which is in fact a funeral-pyre, we cannot realize that a new world has no classics of its own and therefore its ideals are represented by bestsellers and blockbusters that will become classics when this world grows up. Nietzsche, Conrad, Kafka, Yeats and Eliot may be worshipped in the lecture halls of the Western *madrasabs* but they are not shaping our world (and shouldn't we be thankful for that!).

Among these bestsellers, Iqbal is a godsend. He is the only established authority from higher literature who celebrated the conception of this new world before it was born. As a thinker he is already accepted by five nations as their ideological role model. Among the giants of such stature he is the only one whose language belongs not only to the Olympian heights of the best poetry and philosophy but also to the classrooms, parliaments and

cinema halls at the same time – places where minds are being shaped and life being directed. The significance of *The Reconstruction* becomes fully evident only when it is taken out of the intellectual's closet and placed before the practical realities of a new world.

# **TRADITIONAL, MODERN AND POST-MODERN CONCEPTUAL SHIFTS ON REALITY: UNDERPINNINGS OF IQBAL'S PERSPECTIVE**

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

## **ABSTRACT**

The task of describing the nature of the philosophy developed in the Indian subcontinent and defining its worldview comes close to being the object of an entire book. I will not try to compress here it into the limits of a brief talk but rather try to focus on some of its aspects with reference to Iqbal. Moreover I would like to take an approach slightly different from the one of comparative study of civilizations and would try to address the issue from a conceptual point of view, by referring to the overarching perspective or the paradigm that governs each conceptual shift. The present audience, I presume, agrees that with regard to the view of Reality we can speak of the entire Premodern world in the singular and simply assume that a common metaphysical “spine” underlies the differences in the worldviews, the theologies of the classical languages of the human soul, the world’s great religions or wisdom traditions. This is coupled with the claims of all the Premodern civilizations, including the pre-renaissance Western civilization, that people need worldviews, that reliable ones are possible, and that they already exist. It is only Modernity that made the totalizing claim for the truth of a single worldview and Postmodernism which categorically denies the existence or the possibility of reliable worldviews. I will come back shortly to the question of these conceptual shifts between traditional, modern and postmodern but let me first situate Iqbal in the context of our present discussion.

Iqbal is the best articulated Muslim response to Modernity that the Islamic world has produced in the twentieth century. His response has three dimensions:

- A creative engagement with the conceptual paradigm of modernism at a sophisticated philosophical level through his prose writings, mainly his *The Reconstruction....*, which present his basic philosophic insights
- His Urdu and Persian poetry which is the best embodiment of poetically mediated thought, squarely in the traditional continuity of Islamic literature and perhaps the finest flowering of wisdom poetry,<sup>16</sup> or contemplative poetry<sup>17</sup> or inspired poetry<sup>18</sup> in the modern times.
- As a political activist/ social reformer – rising up to his social responsibility, his calling at a critical phase of history.

I have referred to the three periods of traditional, modern and Postmodern with regard to their respective conceptual shifts and also the word Modernity. For the rest of my presentation I would use Modernism in place of Modernity. In the wake of its Traditional and Modern periods, the Western world is now generally regarded as having become Postmodern. Both *Modernity* and *Postmodernity* refer to a life-style. *Modernism* and *Postmodernism*, by contrast, suggest an outlook: the basic sense of things that gave rise to *Modernity* and *Postmodernity* in the first place and now reflects its way of life.

Contrasts tend to throw things into relief, so I shall define these terms by contrasting these outlooks with one another; the traditional, the modern and the Postmodern, using epistemology as my point of entry.

Even today, when traditional peoples want to know where they are – when they wonder about the ultimate context in which their lives are set and which has the final say over them – they turn to their sacred texts; or in the case of oral, tribal peoples (what comes to the same thing), to the sacred myths that have been handed down to them by their ancestors. *Modernity* was born when a new source of knowledge was discovered, the scientific method. Because its controlled experiment enabled scientists to prove their hypotheses, and because those proven hypotheses demonstrated that they

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<sup>16</sup> The title given to this genre by Haywood, see note 80.

<sup>17</sup> This is my preferred expression for it.

<sup>18</sup> The epithet used by S. H. Nasr, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

had the power to change the material world dramatically, Westerners turned from revelation to science for the Big Picture. Intellectual historians tell us that by the nineteenth century Westerners were already more certain that atoms exist than they were confident of any of the distinctive things the Bible speaks of.

This much is straightforward, but it doesn't explain why Westerners aren't still modern rather than Postmodern, for science continues to be the main support of the Western mind. By headcount, most Westerners probably still *are* modern, but I am thinking of frontier thinkers who chart the course that others follow. These thinkers have ceased to be modern because they have seen through the so-called scientific worldview, recognizing it to be not *scientific* but *scientistic*. They continue to honour science for what it tells us about nature or the natural order/natural world, but as that is not all that exists, science cannot provide us with a worldview – not a valid one. The most it can show us is half of the world, the half where normative and intrinsic values, existential and ultimate meanings, teleologies, qualities, immaterial realities, and beings that are superior to us do not appear.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> This important point is not generally recognized, so I shall spell it out. The death-knell to modernity, which had science as its source and hope, was sounded with the realization that despite its power in limited regions, six things slip through its controlled experiments in the way sea slips through the nets of fishermen:

1. *Values*. Science can deal with descriptive and instrumental values, but not with intrinsic and normative ones.
2. *Meanings*. Science can work with cognitive meanings, but not with existential meanings (Is X meaningful?), or ultimate ones (What is the meaning of life?).
3. *Purposes*. Science can handle teleonomy – purposiveness in organisms– but not teleology, final causes.
4. *Qualities*. Quantities science is good at, but not qualities.
5. *The invisible and the immaterial*. It can work with invisibles that are rigorously entailed by matter's behaviour (the movements of iron filings that require magnetic fields to account for them, e.g.) but not with others.
6. *Our superiors, if such exist*. This limitation does not prove that beings greater than ourselves exist, but it does leave the question open, for “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”.

In his second lecture, “The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious Experience” in “*The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam*”, Iqbal has made a very perceptive remark:<sup>20</sup>

There is no doubt that the theories of science constitute trustworthy knowledge, because they are verifiable and enable us to predict and control the events of Nature. But we must not forget that what is called science is not a single systematic view of Reality. It is a mass of sectional views of Reality— fragments of a total experience which do not seem to fit together. Natural Science deals with matter, with life, and with mind; but the moment you ask the question how matter, life, and mind are mutually related, you begin to see the sectional character of the various sciences that deal with them and the inability of these sciences, taken singly, to furnish a complete answer to your question. In fact, the various natural sciences are like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, and each running away with a piece of its flesh. Nature as the subject of science is a highly artificial affair, and this artificiality is the result of that selective process to which science must subject her in the interests of precision. The moment you put the subject of science in the total of human experience it begins to disclose a different character. Thus religion, which demands the whole of Reality and for this reason must occupy a central place in any synthesis of all the data of human experience, has no reason to be afraid of any sectional views of Reality. Natural Science is by nature sectional; it cannot, if it is true to its own nature and function, set up its theory as a complete view of Reality.

Where, then, do we now turn for an inclusive worldview? Postmodernism hasn't a clue. And this is its deepest definition.<sup>21</sup> The generally accepted

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<sup>20</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, IAP, Lahore, 1987, pp. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Ernest Gellner defines Postmodernism as relativism – “*relativismus über Alles*” (*Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*) – but relativism is not an easy position to defend, so postmoderns do everything they can to avoid that label; Clifford Geertz’s “anti-antirelativism” is a case in point. The T-shirts that blossomed on the final day of a six-week, 1987 NEH Institute probably tell the story. Superimposed on a slashed circle, their logo read, “No cheap relativism”. By squirming, postmoderns can parry crude relativisms, but sophisticated relativism is still relativism. Postmoderns resist that conclusion, however, so I shall stay with their own self-characterization.

definition of Postmodernism now that Jean-Francois Lyotard fixed in place decades ago in *The Postmodern Condition* is, “incredulity toward metanarratives”.<sup>22</sup> Having deserted revelation for science, the West has now abandoned the scientific worldview as well, leaving it without replacement. In this it mirrors the current stage of Western science which leaves *nature* unimagined. Before modern science, Westerners accepted Aristotle’s model of the earth as surrounded by concentric, crystalline spheres. Newton replaced that model with his image of a clockwork universe, but Postmodern, quantum-and-relativity science gives us not a third model of nature but no model at all. Alan Wallace’s *Choosing Reality* delineates eight different interpretations of quantum physics, all of which can claim the support of physics’ proven facts.<sup>23</sup> A contemporary philosopher described the situation as “*the Reality Market Place*”—you can have as many versions of reality as you like.

Another analogy can pull together all that we have just said and summarize the difference alluded to in these remarks. If we think of traditional peoples as looking out upon the world through the window of revelation (their received myths and sacred texts), the window that they turned to look through in the modern period (science) proved to be stunted. It cuts off at the level of the human nose, which (metaphysically speaking) means that when we look through it our gaze slants downward and we see only things that are inferior to us.<sup>24</sup> As for the Postmodern window, it is boarded over and allows no inclusive view whatsoever. In the words of Richard Rorty, “There is no Big Picture.”

Iqbal mediates between these conflicting views by pointing out to the shortcomings and achievements of all the three paradigms objectively. He agrees that there is a Big Picture and his writings give us to understand that the Postmodern view of the self and its world is in no way nobler than the ones that the world’s religions proclaim. Postmoderns yield to their

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<sup>22</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984), pp. xxiv, 3ff.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Wallace, *Choosing Reality* (Boston and Shaftsbury: Shambala, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> No textbook in science has ever included things that are intrinsically greater than human beings. Bigger, of course, and wielding more physical power, but not superior in the full sense of that term which includes virtues, such as intelligence, compassion, and bliss.

dilapidated views, not because they like them, but because they think that reason and human historicity now force them upon us. Iqbal would argue that it is not necessarily the case and the present predicament is the result of a tunnel vision that we have adopted but which really is not the only option for us. At the same time he is keenly aware of the fact that ideals of irreducible dignity of the individual human being, the equality of all human beings before the law and the value/worth of the material and profane worlds have been successfully embodied in the Modern and Postmodern paradigms. In conjunction with other ideas and in tension with still some others, these three ideals have shaped the social, political and educational institutions of the modern West. Speaking in the most general terms, it can be said that modern civil law, the modern political state and the modern secular academy/university represent the institutionalization of these ideals. While the depth and breath of institutionalization of these ideals has varied greatly in different Western societies, the past 3-4 centuries of Western history show an inexorable movement in this direction. But at the same time he raises a very troubling question about the past. If it is indeed the case that Islam affirms the irreducible dignity of the individual, equality of all before the law and the inherent goodness of the material/profane worlds then the question emerges: why is it that the modern, secular West has succeeded in institutionalizing these ideals with a greater degree of consistency than the traditional Muslim society? The posing of this question and an honest facing up to it opens up the possibility of contemporary Islam gaining a better understanding of the historical development of which it is a product. To gain an insight into that question we shall refer to our earlier remarks again and take a look at those three major stages of our intellectual history from a different angle.

In Iqbal's view a worldview is an inclusive outlook, and it is useful to distinguish its social, cosmological, and metaphysical components. The social component of past worldviews included, at times, justifications for slavery and the divine right of kings, while its cosmological components described the physical universe as understood by the science of the day – Ptolemaic astronomy or whatever. The contents of those two components obviously change, so are not perennial. The perennial, unchanging philosophy is metaphysical, or more precisely, ontological. It concerns such matters as the

distinction between the Absolute and the relative, and the doctrine of the degrees of reality that is consequent thereon.

Following this threefold criteria I would like to say a few words about the Metaphysical, Cosmological and Sociological achievements/ shortcomings of Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernism, respectively. When we align these problems with the three<sup>25</sup> major periods in human history: the traditional period,<sup>26</sup> the Modern period,<sup>27</sup> and Postmodernism,<sup>28</sup> it is obvious that each of these periods poured more of its energies into, and did better by, one of life's inescapable problems than did the other two. Specifically, Modernity gave us our view of *nature*,<sup>29</sup> Postmodernism is tackling *social injustices* more resolutely than people previously did. This leaves *worldviews* – metaphysics as distinct from cosmology, which restricts itself to the empirical universe. In Iqbal's view it is our ancestors, whose accomplishments on that front have not been improved upon.<sup>30</sup> Let us shuffle the historical sequence of the periods and proceed topically – from nature, through society, to the Big Picture, tying each topic to the period that did best by it. Modern first, then Postmodernism, leaving the traditional period for last.

## **Cosmological Achievements of Modernity**

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Europe stumbled on a new way of knowing that we refer to as the *scientific method*. It centres in the

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<sup>25</sup> For the present discussion I have left out the beyond-Postmodern paradigm and its conceptual shift.

<sup>26</sup> Which extended from human beginnings up to the rise of modern science.

<sup>27</sup> Which took over from there and continued through the first half of the twentieth century

<sup>28</sup> Which Nietzsche anticipated, but which waited for the second half of the twentieth century to take hold.

<sup>29</sup> It continues to be refined, but because modernity laid the foundations for the scientific understanding of it, it deserves credit for the discovery.

<sup>30</sup> The just entered distinction between cosmology and metaphysics is important here, so I shall expand it slightly. *Cosmology* is the study of the physical universe – or the world of nature as science conceives of it – and is the domain of science. *Metaphysics*, on the other hand, deals with all there is. (The terms *worldview* and *Big Picture* are used interchangeably with *metaphysics* in this presentation.) In the worldview that holds that nature is all there is, metaphysics coincides with cosmology. That metaphysics is named *naturalism*.

controlled experiment and has given us modern science<sup>31</sup> which adds proof to generic science by its controlled experiment. True hypotheses can be separated from false ones, and brick by brick an edifice has been erected from those proven truths. We commonly call that edifice the *scientific worldview*, but *scientific cosmology* is more precise because of the ambiguity of the word *world*. Iqbal would argue that the scientific edifice is a *worldview* only for those who assume that science can in principle take in all that exists. The scientific cosmology is so much a part of the air we breathe that it is hardly necessary to describe it.<sup>32</sup> Taught from primary schools onward, this story is so familiar that further details would only clutter things.

### **Tradition's Cosmological Shortcomings**

That this scientific cosmology retires traditional ones with their six days of creation and the like goes without saying. Who can possibly question that when the scientific cosmology has landed people on the moon?<sup>33</sup> And there is another point. There is a naturalism in Taoism, Zen Buddhism, Islamic Cosmological doctrines and tribal outlooks that in its own way rivals science's calculative cosmology, but Iqbal would argue that it is the naturalism of the artist, the poet, and the nature lover<sup>34</sup> not that of Galileo and Bacon. For present purposes, aesthetics is irrelevant. Modern cosmology derives from laboratory experiments, not landscape paintings.

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<sup>31</sup> Generic science (which consists of careful attention to nature and its regularities) is as old as the hills – at least as old as art and religion.

<sup>32</sup> Some fifteen billion years ago an incredibly compact pellet of matter exploded to launch its components on a voyage that still continues. Differentiation set in as hydrogen proliferated into the periodic table. Atoms gathered into gaseous clouds. Stars condensed from whirling filaments of flame, and planets spun off from those to become molten drops that pulsated and grew rock-encrusted. Narrowing our gaze to the planet that was to become our home, we watch it grow, ocean-filmed and swathed in atmosphere. Some three and a half billion years ago shallow waters began to ferment with life, which could maintain its inner milieu through homeostasis and could reproduce itself. Life spread from oceans across continents, and intelligence appeared. Several million years ago our ancestors arrived. It is difficult to say exactly when, for every few years palaeontologists announce discoveries that “set the human race back another million years or so”, as press reports like to break the news.

<sup>33</sup> Our ancestors were impressive astronomers, and we can honour them unreservedly for how much they learned about nature with only their unaided senses to work with.

<sup>34</sup> Of Li Po, Wordsworth, and Thoreau.

## Postmodernism's Cosmological Shortcomings

With traditional cosmology out of the running, the question turns to Postmodernism. Because science is cumulative, it follows as a matter of course that the cosmology we have in the twenty-first century is an improvement over what we had in the middle of the twentieth, which on my timeline is when modernity phased into Postmodernity. But Iqbal would argue that the refinements that postmodern scientists (it is well to say postmodern *physics* here) have achieved have not affected life to anything like the degree that postmodern social thrusts have, so the social Oscar is the one Postmodernists are most entitled to.<sup>35</sup> Be that as it may, in Iqbal's view Postmodernism's discoveries (unlike modern discoveries in physics – the laws of gravity, thermodynamics, electromagnetism, relativity theory, and quantum mechanics, which continue to be used to make space shuttles fly and to help us understand how hot electrons behave in semiconductors) have concerned details and exotica.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> I need to support my contention that postmodern science does not measure up to modern physics in the scope of its discoveries. It says nothing against the brilliance of Stephen Hawking, Fred Hoyle, John Wheeler, Freeman Dyson, Steven Weinberg, and their likes to add that they have discovered nothing about nature that compares with the discoveries of Copernicus, Newton, Maxwell, Planck, Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr, Schrödinger, and Born. In molecular chemistry things are different. DNA is a staggering discovery, but – extending back only several billion years compared with the astrophysicists billions of *light* years – it does not pertain to nature's foundations. The fact that no new abstract idea in physics has emerged for seventy years may suggest that nothing more remains to be discovered about nature's foundations.

<sup>36</sup> The billions of dollars that have been spent since the middle of the twentieth century (and the millions of papers that have been written on theories that change back and forth) have produced no discoveries that impact human beings in important ways. All are in the domain of the meta-sciences of high-energy particle physics and astronomy, whose findings– what is supposed to have happened in the first 10-42 seconds of the universe's life, and the like – while headlined by the media have no conceivable connection to human life and can be neither falsified nor checked in normal ways. This allows the building blocks of nature – particles, strings, or whatever – to keep changing, and the age of the universe to be halved or doubled every now and then. Roughly 99.999 percent of science (scientist Rustum Roy's estimate) is unaffected by these flickering hypotheses, and the public does not much care about their fate.

Outranking the foregoing reason for not giving the cosmological Oscar to Postmodernism is the fact that the noisiest postmodernists have called into question the very notion of truth by turning claims to truth into little more than power plays.<sup>37</sup> This relativizes science's assertions radically and rules out even the possibility of its closing in on the nature of nature.<sup>38</sup> As there are no neutral standards by which to judge these paradigms, Kuhn's thesis (if unnuanced) leads to relativism among paradigms that places Hottentot science on a par with Newton's. Kuhn himself phrased his thesis carefully enough to parry such relativism, but even taken at its best, it provides no way that science could get to the bottom of things. This demotes the whole enterprise of science as understood by Modernity, and in doing so provides a strong supporting reason for not giving Postmodernism the cosmological prize. It does better with social issues so now we discuss Postmodernism's achievements on the social front.

### **Postmodernism's Fairness Revolution**

The magic word of Postmodernism is society. This is not surprising. With the belief that there is nothing beyond our present world, nature and society are all that remain, and of the two, nature has become the province of specialists.<sup>39</sup> This leaves society as the domain that presses on us directly and the one in which there is some prospect of our making a difference. Iqbal forcefully advocated the changes and changes are occurring.<sup>40</sup> A quick rehearsal of some changes that have occurred in a single lifetime makes it clear that social injustices are being recognized and addressed more earnestly today than they were by our ancestors.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> According to this reading of the matter, when people claim that what they say is true, all they are really doing is claiming status for beliefs that advance their own social standing.

<sup>38</sup> The most widely used textbook on college campuses for the past thirty years has been Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and its thesis – that facts derive their meaning from the paradigms that set them in place – has shifted attention from scientific facts to scientific paradigms.

<sup>39</sup> We seldom confront it directly anymore; mostly it comes to us via supermarkets and cushioned by air-conditioning and central heating.

<sup>40</sup> Post colonial guilt may play a part here, and so much remains to be done that self-congratulation is premature.

## Tradition's Social Shortcomings

These signs of progress acquire additional life when they are set against the unconcern of earlier times regarding such matters. There is no reason to think that traditional peoples were more callous than we are. Iqbal would argue that on the whole they saw their obligations as extending no further than to members of their primary communities: Buddhism's *dana* (gifts), Jesus' "cup of water given in my name," Islam's "pure due" and their likes.

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- In 1919 the Brooklyn Zoo exhibited an African American caged alongside chimpanzees and gorillas. Today such an act would be met with outrage anywhere in the world.
- The civil rights movement of the 1960s accomplished its major objectives. In the United States and even in South Africa today, people of different races mix where they never could before – on beaches, in airline cabin crews, everywhere.
- In the 1930s, if a streetcar in San Francisco approached a stop where only Chinese Americans were waiting to board, it would routinely pass them by. By contrast, fifty years later, the highly respected chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, was a Chinese American who spoke English with a Chinese accent.
- No war has ever been as vigorously protested as was the war in Vietnam by United States citizens. When things were going so badly that military leaders advised President Nixon to use nuclear weapons, he declined because (as he said) if he did that, he would face a nation that had taken to the streets.
- The women's movement is only a blink in the eyes of history, but it has already scored impressive victories. Until long after the Civil War, American women really had no civil rights, no legal rights, and no property rights. Not until 1918 did Texas alter its law that everyone had the right to vote except "idiots, imbeciles, aliens, the insane, and women."
- Arguably, the most important theological development of the latter twentieth century was the emergence of the theology of liberation, with its Latin American and feminist versions in the vanguard.
- In an unprecedented move, in March 2000 the Pope prayed to God to forgive the sins his church had committed against the people of Israel, against love, peace, and respect for cultures and religions, against the dignity of women and the unity of the human race, and against the fundamental rights of persons. Two months later, two hundred thousand Australians marched across Sydney Harbour Bridge to apologize for their treatment of the aborigines while the sky written word SORRY floated above the Sydney Opera House.

Encountered face-to-face, the hungry were fed, the naked were clothed, and widows and orphans were provided for as means allowed, but there human obligations ended. Injustices that were built into institutions (if such injustices were even recognized) were not human beings' responsibility.<sup>42</sup>

Modernity changed this attitude. Accelerating travel and trade brought encounters between peoples whose societal structures were very different from one another, and these differences showed that such institutions were not like natural laws after all; they were humanly devised and could therefore be critiqued. The French Revolution put this prospect to a historic test; scrapping the divine right of kings, it set out to create a society built on liberty, equality, and fraternity. In Iqbal's view the experiment failed and the backlash was immediate, but its premise – that societies are malleable – survived.

### **Modernity's Social Shortcomings**

Modernity deserves credit for that discovery, and (if we wished) we might excuse it for its poor handling of its discovery on grounds that it was working with a new idea. The record itself, however, is by Postmodern standards, deplorable. Iqbal would argue that under the pretext of shouldering “the white man's burden” to minister to “lesser breeds without the law”, it ensconced colonialism, which raped Asia and Africa, hit its nadir in the Opium Wars of 1841-42, and ended by subjecting the entire civilized world to Western domination.<sup>43</sup>

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42 Perhaps because for those institutions were considered to be God-given and unalterable. People regarded them in the way we regard laws of nature – as givens to be worked with, not criticized.

<sup>43</sup> David Hume is commonly credited with having the clearest head of all the great philosophers, but I (Huston Smith) read that somewhere in his correspondence (I have not been able to find the passage) he wrote that the worst white man is better than the best black man. What I can report firsthand is signs posted in parks of the international settlements in Shanghai, where I attended high school, that read, “No dogs or Chinese allowed”. With a virgin continent to rape, the United States did not need colonies, but this did not keep it from hunting down the Native Americans, continuing the institution of slavery, annexing Puerto Rico and Hawaii, and establishing “protectorates” in the Philippines and several other places.

Having dealt with nature and society, let us turn now to the third inescapable issue that human beings must face: the Big Picture.

### **Modernity's Metaphysical Shortcomings**

Iqbal would argue that Modernity was metaphysically sloppy. Ravished by science's accomplishments, it elevated the scientific method to "our sacral mode of knowing" (Alex Comfort), and because that mode registers nothing that is without a material component, immaterial realities at first dropped from view and then (as the position hardened) were denied existence. In the distinction registered earlier, this was metaphysics reduced to cosmology.<sup>44</sup> Modernity's Big Picture is materialism, as we noted in Iqbal's observation earlier, or (in its more plausible version) naturalism, which acknowledges that there are immaterial things – thoughts and feelings, for example – while insisting that those things are totally dependent on matter. Iqbal would argue that both versions are stunted when compared with the traditional outlook. It is important to understand that neither materialism nor naturalism is required by anything science has discovered in the way of actual facts. Iqbal would argue that we have slid into this smallest of metaphysical positions for psychological, not logical, reasons.

### **Postmodernity's Metaphysical Shortcomings**

As for Postmodernity, it sets itself against the very idea of such a thing as the Big Picture. It got off on the right foot by critiquing the truncated worldview of the Enlightenment, but from that reasonable beginning it plunged on to argue unreasonably that worldviews (often derisively referred to as *grand narratives*) are misguided in principle.<sup>45</sup> Stated in the in-house idiom

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<sup>44</sup> When Carl Sagan opened his television series, *Cosmos*, by announcing that "the Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be", he presented that unargued assumption as if it were a scientific fact.

<sup>45</sup> In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean Francois Lyotard goes so far as to define postmodernism as "incredulity toward meta-narratives", a synonym for metaphysics. The incredulity takes three forms that grow increasingly shrill as they proceed. Postmodern minimalism contents itself with pointing out that we have no consensual worldview today; "we have no maps and don't know how to make them." Mainline Postmodernism adds, "and never again will we have a consensual worldview, such as prevailed in the Middle Ages, Elizabethan England, or

Postmodernists are fond of, worldviews “totalize” by “marginalizing” minority viewpoints. They are oppressive in principle and should be resolutely resisted. If hardcore Postmodernism were accurate in this charge one should stop in one’s tracks, but it has not proved that it is accurate – it merely assumes that it is accurate and rests its case on examples of oppression that, of course, are not lacking. Iqbal would argue that what has not been demonstrated is the impossibility of a worldview that builds the rights of minorities into its foundations as an essential building block. There is irony here, for the very Postmodernism that is dismissing the possibility of a comprehensive humane outlook is working toward the creation of such through its fairness revolution – its insistence that everybody be given an equal chance at the goods of life. The deeper fact, however, is that to have or not to have a worldview is not an option, for peripheral vision always conditions what we are attending to focally, and in conceptual “seeing” the periphery has no cut off. The only choice we have is to be consciously aware of our worldviews and criticize them where they need criticizing, or let them work on us unnoticed and acquiesce to living unexamined lives.

### **Tradition’s Metaphysical Excellence**

Neither Modernity nor Postmodernism handled the metaphysical problem well. It is, of course, no proof that Tradition handled it better. But there is a unanimous view. We have mentioned earlier that a common metaphysical “spine” underlies the differences in the theologies of the world’s great religions. If mainline and polemical Postmodernism were to recede, the obsession with life’s social dimension that they saddled us with would relax and we would find ourselves able to think ontologically again and see what Iqbal has emphasized in his writings time and again; the universality of the traditional worldview. An important consequence of this would be that we would then perceive how much religious outlooks have in common. For one thing, they all situate the manifest, visible world within a larger, invisible whole.<sup>46</sup> The further unanimous claim of religious cosmologies, though, finds

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seventeenth century New England; we now know too well how little the human mind can know”. Hardcore Postmodernism carries this trajectory to its logical limit by adding, “good riddance!”

<sup>46</sup> This is of particular interest at the moment because currently science does the same. Dark matter doesn’t impact any of science’s detectors, and the current recipe for the universe is

no echo in science, for (being a value judgment) it is beyond science's reach. Not only is the invisible real; regions of it are more real and of greater worth than the visible, material world.

This is a very basic insight that informs Iqbal's worldview. He is on the side of Tradition in this regard. The inclusive, presiding paradigm for Tradition is the Great Chain of Being, composed of links ranging in hierarchical order from meagre existents up to the *ens perfectissimum*; and the foremost student of that concept, Arthur Lovejoy, reported that "most educated persons everywhere accepted [it] without question down to late in the eighteenth century".<sup>47</sup> To that endorsement, Ken Wilber has added that the Great Chain of Being is "so overwhelmingly widespread...that it is either the single greatest intellectual error ever to appear in humankind's history – an error so colossally widespread as to literally stagger the mind – or it is the single most accurate reflection of reality yet to appear."<sup>48</sup>

An obvious moral emerges from what has been said. If we run a strainer through our past to lift from each of its three periods the gold it contains and let its dross sink back into the sands of history what do we get? In the light of Iqbal's views Modernity's gold i.e. science is certain to figure importantly in the third millennium, and Postmodernity's focus on justice likewise stands a good chance of continuing. It is the worldview of Tradition that is in jeopardy and must be rehabilitated if it is to survive. Being more specific, the present challenge to the Muslim world is reversed in the sense that it must learn to be tolerant of a world which threatens its very existence without losing its identity and the secularized West must learn the very difficult lesson that its Modern and Postmodern understanding of man and the world is not universal. Moreover, since religion does not acknowledge any principles

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"70 parts cold dark matter, about 30 parts hot dark matter, and just a pinch for all the rest the matter detectable to scientific instruments." (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 October 1992, A 16.)

<sup>47</sup> Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), p. 59. Ernst Cassirer corroborates Lovejoy on this point: "The most important legacy of ancient speculation was the concept and general picture of a graduated cosmos" (*Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 9).

<sup>48</sup> Ken Wilber, "The Great Chain of Being," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 33 No. 3 (summer 1993), p. 53.

higher than its own, not even the survival of the human race, if asked to establish peace, it will do so in its own way or not at all.

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There is an other way in which Iqbal achieves that grand synthesis and that overarching view, some times with greater success. It is through the medium of his poetically mediated thought in his Urdu and Persian poetry which transmits the ethos in a captivating manner. Sapiential poetry or wisdom poetry 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.

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 languages<sup>49</sup> and the word which denotes consciousness (*shu'ur*) share the common trilateral verbal root *sh. 'r* which means 'to become aware of', 'to be conscious of'. It perfectly speaks for the conceptual underpinning of poetry in the Islamic civilization.

The most central and total manifestation of the Divine Consciousness, a self-disclosure (*tajalli*) of the Divine Attribute of Knowledge (*'ilm*), 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<sup>50</sup> in a direct and integral manner. It is the summit and perfection of human intelligence and, therefore, of human consciousness. Speech is as it

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<sup>49</sup>In Arabic, Persian it is the word *shir*, 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 form of the same root implying "the conscious one, some one who is aware, the person with cognition".

<sup>50</sup>The Biblical expression says "in the image of God". In the Islamic tradition it appears in the following Hadith report "*kbalaq Allahu 'l-Adama 'ala Suratibi*". See Bukhari, *Al-Sabih*, "Istidhan", 1; Muslim, *Al- Al-Sabih*, "Birr", 115, "Jannah", 28; A'Amad bin Hanbal, *Musnad*, Vol. II, 244, 251, 315, 323. Also see Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Futubat al Makkiyyab*, Dar Sadir, Beirut, n.d., Vol. II, p. 124, p. 490. For an illuminating exposition of the implications of the statement in terms of the Divine Attributes see Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2000, p. 120.

were the immaterial, though sensory, body of our will and our understanding.<sup>51</sup> 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 likewise 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.

Let us return to the question of the worldview, the big picture and the presiding paradigm for Tradition of a hierarchical view of reality. Already at the opening of the last century, when Postmodernism had not yet emerged on the scene, Yeats was warning that things were falling apart, that the centre didn't hold. Gertrude Stein followed him by noting that "in the twentieth century nothing is in agreement with anything else", and Ezra Pound saw man as "hurling himself at indomitable chaos" – the most durable line from the play *Green Pastures* has been, "Everything that's tied down is coming loose". T. S. Eliot found "The Wasteland" and "The Hollow Men" as appropriate metaphors for the outward and the inward aspects of our predicament.<sup>52</sup> Poetry of first magnitude or great poetry itself works as a bridge and with inevitable particularities always carries an aspect of universality. It brings you face to face with questions that are truly perennial human questions and not just Muslim or Christian or Hindu questions; who am I? What does it mean to be human? Where have I come from? Where am I going? What is this universe and how am I related to it? Great poetry may seem grounded in a certain particular idiom or a specific universe of discourse but it always opens out onto the universal. Let me illustrate it with reference to T. S. Eliot whom I have just mentioned. *Ash Wednesday* derives its title from the Catholic ritual of the same name– a ritual that devout Catholics still do in Pakistan as well as some of their counterparts among the Muslim ascetics. But the poem speaks

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<sup>51</sup>It may, however, be remembered that speech is not necessarily exteriorized; the articulated thought also involves language.

<sup>52</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that when in her last interview Rebecca West was asked to name the dominant mood of our time, she replied, "A desperate search for a pattern." The search is desperate because it seems futile to look for a pattern when reality has become, in Roland Barth's vivid image, kaleidoscopic. With every tick of the clock the pieces of experience come down in new array.

to a universal human question, the essential question of the transience of human life and its destiny beyond the grave.

Iqbal, though standing as an outpost of the sensibility and the worldview which the great masters<sup>53</sup> of traditional Islamic literature adhered to, was at the same time a man of the modern age.<sup>54</sup> His way of handling the big picture is interesting. The idea of a graded universe, of the multiple levels of reality – visible, invisible and beyond – run through all of his poetry but it becomes very prominent when it comes to his magisterial Persian magnum opus *Javid Nama* which in its epic sweep not only encompasses the multiple levels of being but also works across worldviews, civilizations and epochs. To catch glimpse of it we can have a look at the staggering variety of figures that appear in the *Javid Nama* – the Zaratustra, ancient Persian sage, the Indian sage, Buddha, Christ, Rumi, Tosltai, Afghani, Saeed Halim, Ancient gods, Pharaoh, Kichtner, Mahdi Sudani, the Maritian sage, Hallaj, Ghalib and Tahira, Iblis, Nietzsche, Ali Hamadani, Ghani, Abdali, Tipu. At the face of it *Javid Nama* looks like an Islamic universe of discourse but always opens out onto the universal through these characters.

Let us look at a more specific example. In *Javid Nama* when Zinda – Rud reaches the sphere of Mars, he meets a Maritian sage. In the five pages that follow in the form of a dialogue, Iqbal talks about subjects ranging from the human vocation, epistemology, relationship between the divine and the human, social and economic justice and the ecological problem always

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<sup>53</sup> Like ‘Attar, Sana’i, Rumi and Jami.

<sup>54</sup> This point has always been emphasized 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 engaging the West in the frontier of philosophy.” Anwar Ibrahim, *The Asian Renaissance*, Time Books, K. L./Singapore, 1996, p. 35.

keeping an eye on the Big Picture and with reference to the multicultural dimension.

## RUMI

I am of the skies, my companion is of the earth,  
intoxicated, yet he has not tasted the veins of the vine;  
a man intrepid, his name is Zinda-Rud,  
his drunkenness derived from contemplating existence.

We who have chanced thus upon your city  
are in the world, yet free from the world.

In our quest for ever new apparitions  
be our companion on the road for a little time.

## THE MARTIAN SAGE

These are the environs of Marghadin of Barkhiya —

Barkhiya is the name of our ancestor.

Farzmarz, the tempter to all evil,  
came up to Barkhiya once in Paradise;

‘How can you remain here content?’ he cried.

‘For many ages you have been dominated by God.

There is a world far better than your abode,

compared with which Paradise itself is but a moment's springtide;  
that world is loftier than all other worlds,  
that world is more sublime than spacelessness.  
God Himself knows nothing of that world;  
I have never seen a world more free.  
God does not interfere in its ordering,  
it has no Book, no Prophet, no Gabriel,  
no circumambulations, no prostrations there,  
no prayers, no thanksgivings.'  
Barkhiya replied, 'Depart, you sorcerer,  
pour your own image upon that world!'  
Since our ancestor did not succumb to his guile  
God entrusted to us another world.  
So enter this God-given kingdom;  
behold Marghadin and its laws and customs.

#### TOUR OF THE CITY OF MARGHADIN

Marghadin and those lofty edifices —  
what can I say of that noble city?

Its inhabitants sweet of speech as honey,  
comely their faces, gentle their manners, simple their apparel,  
their thoughts innocent of the burning fever of gain,  
they were intimate with the secrets of the sun's alchemy;  
who so of them desires silver or gold gathers it from light,  
even as we gather salt from the briny sea.

The aim of science and art there is service,  
no one weighs work done against gold;  
no one is even acquainted with dinars and dirhams,  
these idols may not enter the sanctuary.

The demon of the machine has no power over nature,  
the skies are not blackened by smoke;  
the lamp of the hard-toiling farmer is always bright,  
he is secure from the plundering of the landlords,  
his tillage is not a struggle for water,  
his harvest is his own, no other shares in it.

In that world there are no armies, no squadrons,  
none gains his livelihood by killing and murder;

In Marghadin no pen wins lustre  
from inscribing and disseminating lies;  
in the market places there is no clamour of the workless,  
no whining of beggars afflicts the ear.

#### THE MARTIAN SAGE

No one here is a mendicant or destitute,  
slave and master, ruler and ruled, here are none.

#### ZINDA-RUD

Mendicant and destitute are so by God's decree,  
by God's decree ruler and ruled;  
none but God is the creator of destiny  
and against destiny human design is powerless.

#### THE MARTIAN SAGE

If your heart bleeds on account of one destiny,  
petition God to decree another destiny;  
if you pray for a new destiny, that is lawful,  
seeing that God's destinies are infinite.  
Earthlings have gambled away the coin of selfhood,

not comprehending the subtle meaning of destiny;

its subtlety is contained in a single phrase —

‘If you transform yourself, it too will be transformed.’

Be dust, and fate will give you the winds;

be a stone, and it will hurl you against glass.

Are you a dew-drop? Your destiny is to perish;

are you an ocean? Your destiny is to endure.

Every moment you are fashioning new Lats and Manats;

inconstant one, do you look for constancy from idols?

So long as your faith is to accord not with your self

the world of your thoughts is your prison;

toil without treasure such is destiny;

treasure without toil such is destiny!

If this is the foundation of faith, ignorant fellow,

then the needy will become still more in need.

Woe to that religion which lulls you to sleep

and still holds you in sleep profound!

Is this religion, or magic and enchantment?

Is this religion, or a grain of opium?

Do you know whence comes the penetrating nature,  
whence came this houri into your tenement of clay?

Do you know whence comes the sages' power of thought,  
whence the potency of prayer in God's interlocutors?

Do you know whence came this heart, and its visitations,  
whence these arts, these miracles?

Do you have fire of speech? That comes not from you;  
do you have flame of action? That comes not from you.

All this is an overflow of the springtime of nature,  
nature which derives from nature's Creator.

What is life? A mine of gems;  
you are the trustee, its owner is Another.

A radiant nature glorifies the man of God,  
to serve all God's creatures, that is his aim —

Service belongs to the wont and way of prophethood;  
to seek a reward for service is mere commerce.

Even so this wind, earth, cloud, field,

orchard, meadow, palace, street, stones, bricks —

you who say, ‘Our property is of ourselves’,

ignorant one, all this belongs to God.

If you regard God’s earth as your own,

then what means the verse, Work not corruption?

Adam’s sons have given their hearts to Iblis,

and from Iblis I have seen only corruption.

None should convert a trust to his own use;

blessed is he who renders God’s property up to God.

You have carried off what does not belong to you;

my soul sorrows for so unworthy a deed.

If you own a thing, that is meet and right,

but if you do not, say yourself, how is that proper?

Return to God the property of God

so that you may loose the knot of your involvement;

for why is there poverty and want under heaven’s arch?

Because you say what is the Lord’s belongs to you.

The man who has not leaped forth from water and clay

has shattered his own glass with his own stone.

You who cannot tell goal from path,

the value of every thing is measured by the regard.

So long as the pearl is your property, it is a pearl,

otherwise it is a pebble, worth less than a farthing.

View the world otherwise, and it will become other,

this earth and heaven will be transformed.

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# VIEWS OF THE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIAN AND PHILOSOPHERS ON OMNISCIENCE AND HUMAN FREEDOM

(PART –II)

Dr. Abdul Hafeez Fazli

## ABSTRACT

It has been commonly understood that Divine knowledge, even though eternal and inclusive of foreknowledge of free human actions, does not restrict human freedom. But the philosophers and theologians both in the Muslim and the Judaeo-Christian tradition have pointed out that apparently the doctrine of Omniscience of God does not cohere with the doctrine of free will of man. The present research is an attempt to examine different formulations of the problem as well as solutions attempted by Christian theologians/philosophers. I have observed that Saint Thomas Aquinas' formulation of the doctrine of omniscience in an absolutist manner (known as Traditional Doctrine of Omniscience) makes it incoherent with the concept of human freedom. History of Christian thought on this problem is basically formulation and reformulation of this doctrine in different ways. The author agrees with Swinburne that there is an essential incompatibility between God's Omniscience and human free will, if the traditional doctrine of Omniscience is accepted. That the basic fault lies in its absolutist approach. Swinburne asserts that it is contrary to Biblical teachings as well. On the basis of his understanding of 'Islamic View of Omniscience and Human Freedom' I believe that the correct formulation of the concept of Omniscience must include an indeterminate aspect concerning free choice of a human action.

(Continued from the previous issue of *Iqbal Review*, Vol. 47:4).

**Pike's Analysis**

Nelson Pike comprehends two items generating the problem for Boethius *viz.*, i) the claim that God is infallible, and ii) that God knows the outcome of human actions in advance of their performance. Analyzing the problem, he identifies six assumptions or theses, as he calls them, working in Boethius's formulation of the problem. Boethius either approves them or denies any of them.

*Assumption 1:* God is omniscient is a necessary statement. Here, God appears as a 'title term' and the proposition as a whole is to be read as having hypothetical form [i.e., if God then omniscient.]”

*Assumption 2:* Being omniscient means that the individual who is omniscient believes all true propositions. “In logical notation:  $\forall x (O(x) \supset (\forall p (P \supset B(x, p))))$  (If x is omniscient, then if P, x believes that P) e.g., if two plus two equals four, then if x is omniscient, x believes that two plus two equals four.”

*Assumption 3:* It is part of the meaning of the predicate 'omniscient' that “if a given individual is omniscient, then that individual believes nothing that is false.”

*Assumption 4:* “Omniscience is an essential property of any individual possessing it. If a given individual is omniscient, that individual would not be the individual he is if he were not omniscient. [For example] a statement of the form 'if x is Yahweh, then x is omniscient' is a necessary truth, if it is true at all.”

*Assumption 5:* “Let this be a necessary truth that if a given individual is God, that individual has always existed and will always exist i.e., that individual have duration extending indefinitely both forward and backward in time.” (This is the assumption which, as Pike observes, Boethius will eventually deny as incorrect in formulating his solution).

*Assumption 6:* “If a given individual exists at a given moment in time, then in order to be counted as omniscient, that individual must hold any belief he

holds at that moment in time. ‘ $\forall(x) (P) (T) (If\ x\ is\ omniscient\ and\ exists\ at\ T,$   
then if x believes P, x believes P at T)’. Here ‘T’ takes times...as values.’<sup>55</sup>

Yahweh is the name of God in Hebrew tradition as Allah is the name of God in Muslim tradition. Pike draws the implications of Yahweh’s foreknowledge at a time  $T_1$  in the case of a hypothetical person Jones who ‘mows his lawn at a time  $T_2$ ’, (eighty years later than  $T_1$ ) in the light of the above assumptions and attempts to reformulate the problem underlying Boethius’s concern. Pike’s reformulation of the problem is as under:

1. Yahweh is omniscient and Yahweh exists at  $T_1$ ’ entails ‘if Jones does A at  $T_2$ , then Yahweh believes at  $T_1$  that Jones does A at  $T_2$ ’ (Assumptions 2 and 6)
2. If Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient, then ‘Yahweh believes P’ entails ‘P’. (The doctrine of divine infallibility from Assumptions 3 and 4.)
3. It is not within one’s power at a given time so to act that both ‘p’ and ‘not-p’ are true.
4. It is not within one’s power at a given time so to act that something believed by an individual at a time prior to the given time was not believed by that individual at the prior time.
5. It is not within one’s power at a given time so to act that an individual existing at a time prior to the given time did not exist at the prior time.
6. If Yahweh believes at  $T_1$  that Jones does A at  $T_2$ , then if it is within Jones’s power at  $T_2$  to refrain from doing A then either: (i) It was within Jones’s power at  $T_2$  so to act that Yahweh believed P at  $T_1$  and ‘P’ is false; or (ii) it was within Jones’s power at  $T_1$  so to act that Yahweh did not believe as He did believe at  $T_2$ ; or (iii) it was within Jones’s power at  $T_1$  so to act that Yahweh did not exist at  $T_1$ .
7. If Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient, then the first alternative in the consequent of line 6 is false (from lines 2 and 3).
8. The second alternative in the consequent of line 6 is false (from line 4).
9. The third alternative in the consequent of line 6 is false (from line 5).

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<sup>55</sup> Pike, *Ibid.*, pp. 54 -56.

10. Therefore if Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient and believes at  $T_1$  that Jones does A at  $T_2$ , then it was within Jones's power at  $T_2$  to refrain from doing A (from lines 6 and 7-9).
11. Therefore if Yahweh is (essentially) omniscient and exist at  $T_1$ , then if Jones does A at  $T_2$ , it was not within Jone's power at  $T_2$  to refrain from doing A (from lines 10 and 1).<sup>56</sup>

We see that the problem as conceived by Boethius, clearly ends at the conclusion that if God exists, no human action is voluntary. (Though Pike does not attempt to formally reconstruct his concept of what a voluntary action is, he recognizes a situation not-representing a voluntary action if it would be wrong to assign a person, say Jones, the ability or power to do other than he did.) Pike examines three attempts to deal with the problem before examining Boethius's solution. The first of these attempts is made by Leibniz.

Leibniz attempts to solve the problem on the basis of a distinction made between *absolute necessity* and *hypothetical necessity*. He observes that to say that an action is necessary or to say that it is not contingent or to say that it is not the effect of free choice, presupposes *absolute necessity*. What is foreseen is not necessary in the first sense, for necessary truth is that 'whereof the contrary is impossible or implies a contradiction.' Leibniz denies that the truth stated in the sentence expressing a contingent human affair (say for example 'Jones does A at time  $T_2$ ') is a necessary truth. Given God's foreknowledge and essential omniscience, all that follows is that the consequent is *true*, not that it is *necessarily true*. Criticizing Leibniz, Pike observes that he uses the term '*necessity*' in contrast to the term '*contingent*' rather than using it in contrast to the term '*voluntary*'.<sup>57</sup>

The second attempt which Pike mentions relates to Cicero. Pike states Cicero's position on the problem of divine foreknowledge as follows:

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59 - 60.

<sup>57</sup> Pike presents Augustine's analysis of the concept of 'necessity' in his support. Given God's foreknowledge of human actions, the actions are necessary. But according to Augustine, "the form of this conditional is 'P implies Q', and not 'P implies N(Q)'. 'Q' in the [later] consequent of this conditional is the claim that human actions are not voluntary..." *Ibid.*, p. 62.

If all things have been foreknown and if they come to pass in this order, there is a certain order of things foreknown by God;

And if a certain order of things, then a certain order of causes, for nothing can happen which is not preceded by some efficient cause.

But if there is a certain order of causes according to which everything happens which does happen, then by fate all things happen which happen.

But if this be so then there is nothing in our own power and there is no such thing as freedom of will;

And if we grant this, the economy of human life is subverted.<sup>58</sup>

According to Augustine, Cicero could not face this conclusion. He transposed the order of the argument as under and drew the conclusion that God does not have foreknowledge of human actions:

If there is freewill, all things do not happen according to fate;

If all things do not happen according to fate, there is not a certain order of causes, neither is there a certain order of things foreknown by God – for things cannot come to pass except they are preceded by efficient causes;

But if there is no fixed and certain order of things foreknown by God, all things cannot be said to happen according to this foreknowledge as they would happen.

If it is not true that all things happen just as they have been foreknown to Him, then he does not have the foreknowledge of all future events.<sup>59</sup>

This account of the problem makes the divine foreknowledge dependent on ‘a certain order of causes’. But given ‘a certain order of causes’, no human action is voluntary. Cicero’s solution of the problem consists in denying that

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63. Pike states this argument with reference to Augustine’s the *City of God*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p 63.

future events and actions are the products of ‘a certain order of causes’. Hence, a denial of foreknowledge. The difference in the thinking of Cicero and that of Boethius and Calvin is that Cicero seems to make foreknowledge of what will happen in the future dependent upon God’s knowledge of the present state of the universe and on the conception of certain rigid causal laws governing the temporal events; whereas Calvin and Boethius envisage God’s foreknowledge of things in that ‘He sees them as actually placed before Him’. Criticizing Cicero, Nelson Pike observes that the problem, Cicero addresses is not the one we are discussing. “His ‘solution’ of the problem consists in denying a premise that is not involved in the issue.”<sup>60</sup> According to Pike’s analysis, the problem as conceived by Boethius does not involve any conception of ‘a certain order of causes’.

The third attempt at solving the same problem, relates to Arthur N. Prior. Prior argues:

If God is omniscient and if God exists at a given time (e.g.,  $T_1$ ), He can know at  $T_1$  only what is true at that time (e.g., at  $T_1$ ).

If a given proposition is not true at  $T_1$ , then even an omniscient being could not know it to be true at  $T_1$ ...

The claim that a voluntary action will be performed in future (i.e., at  $T_2$ ) is neither true nor false (i.e., is *indeterminate*) at  $T_1$ ...

Therefore, God does not have foreknowledge of human actions.<sup>61</sup>

According to Pike Cicero and Prior’s analyses of, and solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge, not merely parallel to each other in a number of respects to rather he perceives Prior’s understanding of the issue to be precisely the same as Cicero’s. For example, the arguments of Cicero and Prior share that “the doctrine of divine foreknowledge entails determinism.” According to both of these arguments, the doctrine of divine foreknowledge entails determinism by way of an intermediate thesis,

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

specifically, “the claim that propositions describing human actions are true at times prior to the times that the actions are performed.”<sup>62</sup> Concerning the solution, Pike observes, that they both solve the problem by denying the intermediate thesis i.e., line 1 of Boethius problem (as reformulated by Pike) which reads: *Yahweh is omniscient and Yahweh exists at T<sub>1</sub> entails ‘if Jones does A at T<sub>2</sub>, then Yahweh believes at T<sub>1</sub> that Jones does A at T<sub>2</sub>’.* Criticizing and examining Prior’s view, Pike observes that it is not right to think that God’s foreknowledge needs evidence of grounds, for God’s foreknowledge has a special visionary nature and to insist on the above would be to disregard this difference. Referring Rogers Albritten’s ‘Present, Truth and Contingency’ which involves discussions on dating truth-values, Pike observes that “the whole idea of dating the truth-value of a statement in which a date is already assigned to a given event or action, is obscuristic and strange.”<sup>63</sup> In support of his criticism Pike examines Prior’s thesis that ‘God’s foreknowledge of human actions presupposes *the prior truth* of propositions describing these actions.’ Examining different interpretations Pike observes that none of them support this thesis and that Prior’s formulation of the problem involves an obscure thesis which is either irrelevant or trivially true and Prior’s solution consists of denying this trivially true or irrelevant thesis.

Let us now examine Boethius’s solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge.

Pike observes that the central point of Boethius’ thinking is his thesis that God has no temporal extension. He further observes that it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that Boethius would also hold that God has no temporal position. Thus he would reject assumption 5 in the list of original assumptions and would conclude that “God’s (infallible) beliefs cannot be

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<sup>62</sup> ‘That human actions are products of certain order of causes’ is the intermediate thesis in Cicero’s case’. *Ibid.*, p. 66. And according to Gale’s interpretation of Prior’s argument in order for God to know at T<sub>1</sub> what Jones does A at T<sub>2</sub> a sufficient evidence or grounds is necessary upon which to base a well-reasoned prediction about what Jones does A at T<sub>2</sub>. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71. Reference here, as mentioned by Pike, is to Rogers Albritten, “Present Truth and Future Contingency”, written in reply to Richard Taylor. “The Problem of Future Contingency”, Both then articles appeared in: *The Philosophical Review* (1957).

dated nor can they be located in time relative to human actions.”<sup>64</sup> Quoting a passage from Augustine’s *City of God*, in which he sketches the picture of God and his cognitions operating in Boethius’ thinking, Pike observes that for Boethius and for Augustine, “God does not look forward to what is future, nor at what is present, nor back to what is past”.<sup>65</sup> A temporal existence of God requires radical present tense description of God’s knowledge and the verbs ‘knows’, ‘sees’, ‘beholds’ must be used in the present tense and must occur without time qualifiers (such as  $T_2$  or  $T_1$  or time-relative predicates e.g., ‘now’ or ‘before’.) Thus Boethius’ solution to the problem of divine foreknowledge consists of a denial of God’s foreknowledge of events and circumstances making up the temporal matrix. God beholds human actions timelessly; His knowledge is the knowledge of a never fading instant. This is why Boethius prefers to call God’s attribute as Providence rather than Prescience or Foresight.

Quoting a passage from Augustine, Pike brings out two points: first that God’s foreknowledge and man’s foreknowledge of a person’s actions (say for example Jones) are parallel concerning deterministic implications. God’s foreknowledge of a person’s actions, in a similar way, does not entail determinism as man’s foreknowledge of another’s actions does not entail determinism. The second point which Augustine spots is that man’s foreknowledge of a person’s actions (say for example Jones) includes that what a man knows before a person acts is what the person is going to do ‘with his own free will’. Augustine claims God’s foreknowledge to be parallel to man’s foreknowledge in this second respect too. The point which Augustine makes seems to be that ‘God knows in advance that a given person is going to *choose* to perform a certain action at some specific time in future.’ But this claim, on the set of assumptions mentioned earlier, is incoherent. Pike makes an analysis of both the above concepts of foreknowledge to show the incorrectness of Augustine’s thinking. Pike says that divine foreknowledge is not parallel to ordinary human foreknowledge, for whereas the first entails determinism, the second does not. Pike says that Augustine also holds that divine foreknowledge, notwithstanding parallel in relevant respects to ordinary human foreknowledge of human actions, differs

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

concerning the fact that while human foreknowledge needs rest on some evidence, God's beliefs do not rest on evidence. Pike distinguishes two kinds of infallibility: a strong sense, and a weak sense and further observes that Augustine's thesis (i.e., parallelism of divine and human foreknowledge) implicitly contains the denial of the infallibility of God in the strong sense of the word. As we have seen, the problem of divine foreknowledge rests on two premises, i.e., that God is infallible, and that God knows the outcome of human actions in advance of their performance. Boethius tries to solve the problem by denying the second premise on the basis of his denial that God is a temporal being. Whereas Augustine seems to solve the problem by denying the first premise through his claiming a parallelism between divine and ordinary human foreknowledge of human actions.

Pike attempts to investigate the traditional theological doctrine of 'timelessness' from different angles to identify the logical status of the statement 'God is timeless' as it occurs in theological statements and finally reaches the conclusion that the doctrine of 'timelessness' does not lend itself to justification. Pike observes that "it is extremely hard to understand why the doctrine (of timelessness) has had a place in traditional Christian theology."<sup>66</sup>

Linda Zegzebski in *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge*, discusses the problem in the form of the following dilemma:

Either God knows what we do before we do it, or we do it freely, but not both. For if God's knowledge and his being God are in our past, we cannot alter them, and if God is infallible, we cannot make his past belief turn out to have erred, and so we cannot do other than God foreknows that we will do.<sup>67</sup>

Linda, arguing that older solutions to this dilemma are to varied degrees inadequate, offers new solutions, and suggests finally that philosophers have misconceived the problem Foreknowledge poses. She considers the three

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii

<sup>67</sup> Brian Leftow's review of "Zegzebski'", Linda T., "The Dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge". in *Ethics* (October, 1992), p. 163.

chief older solutions, Boethian, Ockhamist, and Molinist and observes that Boethius claim that God is timeless and so the dilemma does not truly arise. If His Knowledge of our future is not in time, it is not in our past.

Ockhamists argue that though God is in time, His Foreknowledge falls into a class of past facts— soft facts which do not constrain the freedom of future actions. Molinists contend that God's Foreknowledge does not restrict human freedom because it is based on His middle Knowledge, a pre-creative grasp of what creatures would freely do if placed in appropriate circumstances.<sup>68</sup>

Her objection to Boethianism is that eternal knowledge is enough like past knowledge to create a dilemma like that of Foreknowledge. Against Molinism, she contends that there are not enough pre-creative truths about creature's free actions for God to base all His Foreknowledge on these.<sup>69</sup> Linda finds current attempt to distinguish 'hard' from 'soft' facts, sterile. This does not solve the Foreknowledge problem, because no account of hardness and softness on which God's beliefs are soft facts is significantly simpler, more illuminating, or more broadly explanatory than any which makes them hard.<sup>70</sup> Ockhamism argues that we have "counterfactual power" over God's past beliefs, that is, "that even if we will in fact do  $S$  at  $t$ , we have power at  $t$  to do not- $S$  and had we been going to do not- $S$ , God would have believed so before  $t$ ."<sup>71</sup> Linda argues at length that there can be no such power.

## Conclusion

It has been commonly understood that Divine Knowledge, even though eternal and inclusive of foreknowledge of free human actions, does not restrict human freedom. But the philosophers and theologians both in the Muslim and the Judaeo-Christian tradition have pointed out that apparently the doctrine of Omniscience of God does not cohere with the doctrine of freewill of man. Examination of the different formulations of the problem as

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*,

well as solutions attempted by Christian theologians/philosophers leads us to the conclusion that Saint Thomas Aquinas' formulation of the doctrine of omniscience in an absolutist manner (i.e., Traditional Doctrine of Omniscience) makes it incoherent with the concept of human freedom. History of Christian thought on this problem is basically formulation and reformulation of this doctrine in different ways. I agree with Swinburne that there is essential incompatibility between God's Omniscience and human free will, if the traditional doctrine of Omniscience is accepted. That the basic fault lies in its absolutist approach. Swinburne asserts that it is contrary to Biblical teachings as well. On the base of my understanding of 'Islamic View of Omniscience and Human Freedom' I believe that the correct formulation of the concept of Omniscience must include an indeterminate aspect concerning free choice of a human action.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> For my views on Islamic concept of Divine Omniscience and human freedom. For example:

- Abdul Hafeez. Freewill and predestinarian verses of the Qurān”, *Hamdard Islamicus*, (Karachi, Pakistan), 4 (1999): pp. 97-105.
- *Ibid.* “The antinomy of free will and the appointed term (Ajal Mussamma), *Hamdard Islamicus*, 4, (2000): 63-68;
- *Ibid.* “Allah’s Omnipotence and freedom of will for man, *Hamdard Islamicus*, 1,(2002): 31-40.
- *Ibid.*, Abdul Hafeez. “Iqbal’s view of Omniscience and human freedom”, *The Muslim World*, USA,125-45.
- Fazli, Abdul Hafeez, Islamic view of Omniscience and human freedom, sent for publication to *JICMR*, *CMCU*, Georgetown University, USA.

# THE CREATIVE FEMININE PRINCIPLE IN IBN AL-‘ARABI’S SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

(PART-II)

Ayesha L. Saeed

ABSTRACT

Analysis of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s concept of the feminine principle of existence reveals that this principle is inclusive of the following metaphysical concepts: “Universal Soul,” the “*barzakh*/ Imaginal World,” the “Breath of the All-Merciful,” “Universal Nature” and the “Real Through Whom Creation Takes Place.” The significance of the feminine principle of existence becomes clear when its role is studied in juxtaposition with the role of the masculine principle of existence, the “Universal Spirit.” The conclusion drawn is that the feminine principle of existence is inherently creative as it has within its nature, both the attributes of receptivity and activity in order to create something new. The feminine principle is essentially creative as it receives the activity of the masculine principle of existence, for God’s creative power to become manifest through the interaction and activity that is thus generated within its “Womb”. The focus of the present article is to highlight the creative aspects of the feminine principle of existence in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s school of thought.

(Continued from the previous issue of *Iqbal Review*, Vol. 47:4)

## **The Creative Feminine Principle and the Breath of the All-Merciful**

God’s name Allah is considered as the supreme and all comprehensive name in Islam. All names refer back to it. But the Qur’an also says, “Call upon Allah, or call upon the All-Merciful whichever you call, to Him belong the names most beautiful” (Qur’an 17:110). This verse mentions the all-comprehensive name of Allah and by placing the name All-Merciful

alongside the name of Allah it alludes to the fact that the name All-Merciful is all-comprehensive as well. Another verse in the Qur'an verifies this reality: "My mercy embraces all things" (Qur'an 7:156).

For Ibn al-'Arabi and his school the Breath of the All-Merciful is the substance of creation, the pure mercy out of which all creatures are constituted. He quotes two *hadiths* to verify this concept: "Do not curse the wind for it derives from the Breath of the All-Merciful!" and "I find the Breath of the All-Merciful coming to me from the direction of Yemen."<sup>73</sup>

Ibn al-'Arabi points out that in both instances the word *nafs* points to a kind of *tanfis* (a word which comes from the same root) which means to air, to comfort, to cheer up, to relieve and to remove sorrow.<sup>74</sup>

All existent things in the creation are the words of God emerging from the Breath of the All-Merciful. Ibn al-'Arabi illustrates this point:

God says, "Our only speech to a thing when we desire it" – here "Our speech" refers to the fact that He is a speaker (*mutakallim*) – "is to say to it 'Be!'" (16:40). "Be!" is exactly what He speaks. Through it that to which He says "Be!" becomes manifest. Thereby the entities become manifest within the Breath of the All-Merciful, just as letters become manifest within the human breath. The thing that comes to be is a specific form, like a form painted upon wood.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore all of existence can be perceived as the articulation of the words of the Breath of the All-Merciful. With respect to the Breath, which precedes creation, the Breath is the active, masculine creative principle, which brings things into existence. But with respect to the fact that the thing

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<sup>73</sup> First *hadith*: Ibn Maja, *Adab* 29, Ahmad II 268, 409, 518; V 123; Cf. Tirmidhi, *Fitan* 65, Abu Dawud, *Adab* 104; Ahmad, 11 437. Second *hadith*: Ahmad, II 541.

<sup>74</sup> Lane gives *nafas* as a synonym for *tanfis*, citing the above *hadiths* as examples (*Arabic-English Lexicon*, s.v. *nafas*). Chittick, *SPK*, p. 127.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futuh al makkīyya*, II 401.29. Cf. Chittick, *SPK*, p.128.

comes into existence and is differentiated by manifesting the Breath as an articulated reality i.e., a word and a specific form, the Breath displays the feminine characteristic of receptivity. Without this feminine aspect of the Breath of the All-Merciful, no creation would take place.

All things in the cosmos are the words of God that receive their being from God's own Breath. All of creation displays its feminine aspect by its receptivity and utter dependence upon God's mercy. "Existence itself is a mercy for every existent thing".<sup>76</sup>

### **The Creative Feminine Principle and the Supreme Barzakh/ Universal Nature:**

The articulated words of God result in the creation of all that is, including the Supreme *Barzakh*/ Universal Nature. Ibn al-'Arabi discusses Universal Nature as a reality that is primarily receptive. He places Nature in a polarity with the Spirit, which is primarily active and masculine in essence. He makes it clear that this active dimension of the Spirit is inseparable from the receptive dimension of Nature. The activity of the Spirit finds a means of expression in the receptivity of Nature. Just as the relationship between the Creator and creation is reciprocal for without creation there would be no Creator, similarly Nature has an effect on the Spirit. The realm of the Spirit is also known as the world of Command (*'alam al-amr*). Ibn al-'Arabi says:

A woman in relation to a man is like Nature in relation to the Divine Command, since the woman is the locus for the existence of the children, just as Nature in relation to the Divine Command (*al-amr al-ilabi*), is the locus of manifestation for the entities of the corporeal bodies. Through Nature they are engendered and from it they become manifest. So there can be no command without Nature and no Nature without command. Hence engendered existence depends upon both... He who knows the level of Nature knows the level of the woman, and he who knows the Divine Command knows the level of the man and the fact that the

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<sup>76</sup>Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futubat*, II 281.27. Cf, Chittick, *SPK*, p. 130.

existence of all existent things other than God depends upon these two realities.<sup>77</sup>

Nature, compared to the woman is contrasted with the Spirit, compared to the man, provides the Macrocosmic Womb within which all corporeal bodies originate, are brought into existence and nurtured.

Ibn al-‘Arabi employs the terms wife and husband to explain the underlying relationship between Nature and the World of the Command.

When a natural form that has the receptivity to be governed becomes manifest and when a particular soul becomes manifest governing it, the form is like the female, while the governing spirit is like the male. Hence the form is the wife while the spirit is the husband.<sup>78</sup>

Human beings are permeated by the qualities of both the masculine principle i.e., the world of the command or spirit and the feminine principle i.e., the world of the soul or Nature. Ibn al-‘Arabi explains how these two principles interact in the context of the male principle being represented by the father and the female principle being represented by the mother. “The spirits are all fathers, while Nature is the Mother, since it is the locus of transmutations”<sup>79</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabi believes that Nature is the “highest and greatest mother, (*al-umm al-‘aliyat al-kubra*)”<sup>80</sup> through whom the birth of everything in the cosmos takes place, whereas she herself remains unseen. The Supreme *Barzakh* is also called by various other significant names or synonyms, such as the Reality of the Perfect Man and Muhammadan Reality. Both these synonyms point to the predominantly receptive feminine attribute of submitting to the active masculine World of Command or World of Spirit. The Reality of the Perfect Man and the Muhammadan Reality are realities that are completely submissive (*muslim*) to the Will and Command of Alalh. But within the attributes of Universal Nature/ the Universal Soul/ the Reality of the Perfect man and Muhammadan Reality is also the attribute of

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<sup>77</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Futhubat*, III 90.18,28. Cf. Chittick, *SPK*, p. 141.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Futhubat*, III 99.7. Cf. Murata, *Tao*, p.211.

<sup>79</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Futhubat*, I 138.29. Cf. Chittick, *SPK*, p. 142.

<sup>80</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Futhubat*, IV 150.15. Cf. Chittick, *SPK*, p. 140.

being active and therefore masculine with respect to everything else in creation because everything else in creation is submissive towards it

### **The Creative Feminine Principle and the Macrocosmic Womb**

According to a certain perspective, the father who is the symbol of the spirit has a greater claim upon the child (human being), than the mother, due to the spirit's ontological preeminence.<sup>81</sup> But the Islamic perspective emphasizes loving kindness, honour and respect for the mother to the extent that the mother is given a higher place of reverence in human relations even than the one given to the father.<sup>82</sup>

The mother epitomizes the nurturing, loving, caring, affectionate, merciful, forgiving, gentle, beautiful and creative qualities of God, on earth. In fact, the mother represents Universal Nature, the earth, and the Macrocosmic Womb, which was created by God for the creation of everything in existence.

This aspect of giving the mother or the Macrocosmic Womb/Nature a higher status in Islam is a point of great significance for it is here that Islam parts company with those religious belief systems, which condemn this world and Nature as inherently bad and evil. From the Islamic perspective Nature with all its bounties, is inherently good. This earth and this body is the locus of manifestation of God's own names and qualities, therefore it is a divine gift. Marriage is also inherently good for it allows the masculine and feminine principles inherent in both the man and the woman to interact harmoniously with each other. The marriage relationship is meant to be creative not only at the level of procreation but also at the psychological and spiritual level.

The mother has a claim over human loving kindness and regard, in some respects, greater than the claim of the father as expressed in the following famous *hadith*:

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<sup>81</sup> Murata, *Tao*, p.213.

<sup>82</sup> Murata, *Tao*, p.213.

Someone once asked the Prophet, “Among people, who is most deserving of loving kindness (*birr*)?” He answered, “Your mother”. The questioner asked, “After her, who?” He replied, “Your mother”. He asked “After her, who?” He said, “Your mother. Then your father.”<sup>83</sup>

The rights of the mother have been given their due significance by the Prophet’s great-grandson, ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn:

The right of your mother is that you know that she carried you where none carries anyone, she gave to you that fruit of her heart that which no one gives to anyone, and she protected you with all her organs. She did not care if she went hungry as long as you ate, if she was thirsty as long as you drank, if she was naked as long as you were clothed, if she was in the sun as long as you were in the shade. She gave up sleep for your sake, she protected you from the heat and cold, in order that you might belong to her. You will not be able to show her gratitude, unless through God’s help and giving success.<sup>84</sup>

Ibn al-‘Arabi believed that women could attain the highest of spiritual stations even to the extent of becoming the pole (*quṭb*). The pole (*quṭb*) in Islamic spirituality is the supreme spiritual governor of the age, around whose axis the universe rotates and upon whom the actual existence of the cosmos depends. The pole is the perfected human being who reflects God’s attributes and names so perfectly that he or she is given the vicegerency of the universe. Ibn al-‘Arabi states:

Women share with men in all levels, even in being pole... If the only thing that had reached us concerning this matter were the words of the Prophet, “Women are the likes of men,” that would be enough, since it means that everything to which man can attain – stations, levels or attributes – can also belong to any woman whom God wills just as it can belong to any man whom God wills.

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<sup>83</sup> Muslim, *Birr* I, Bukahri, *Adab* 2; Tirmidhi *Birr* I, Abu Dawud, *Adab* 120; Ibn Maja, *Adab* I, Ahmad V 3,5.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn, *The Psalms of Islam: al-Sahifa al-sajjadiyya*. Translated by Chittick. p. 287.

Do you not notice God's wisdom in the extra which He has given to the woman over the man in the name? Concerning the male human being, He says *mar'*, and concerning the female He says, *mar'a*, so He added an *a* or an *at* in contradistinction— to the name *mar'* given to man. Hence she has a degree over the man in this station, degree not possessed by him, in contradistinction to the degree given to men in the verse, “Men have a degree above them” (2:228). Hence God blocked that gap [alluded to in the verse] with this extra in *mar'a*.<sup>85</sup>

In Islam there is an emphasis laid on observing the rights of “womb relatives”. Even the word womb (*rahim*) has been derived from the same linguistic root as the word *rahma* which means mercy and which is God's intrinsic quality. “My Mercy encompassed all things” (7:156), are the words of the Qur'an. The womb is the receptacle where the young originate and are nurtured until they are mature enough for birth. In Arabic, this word also means kinship, a blood tie or a close family relationship. *Rahma* signifies mercy, compassion, pity, tenderness and attentiveness towards someone whom one favours. It is the natural inclination of loving tenderness, which a mother displays towards her child.<sup>86</sup>

The relationship between mercy and womb is obvious from the linguistic and symbolic connection between *rahma* and *rahim*. There are four different *hadiths* of the Prophet Muhammad that uphold the connection between God's Mercy and the womb. For our purpose we look at the womb as the macrocosmic receptacle where all creativity takes place. It is the aspect of God's creativity that highlights the feminine principle inherent within the creative process. For without God's all-embracing mercy nothing would be created.

The womb present within the woman is a perfect microcosmic reflection of the Macrocosmic Womb of Nature that encompasses all of existence. Every single entity from the depths of which another entity originates and emerges is a womb. From this perspective it becomes obvious that everything in the universe is present within a womb, before its birth or

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<sup>85</sup> Ibn al-'Arabi, *Futubat*, III 89.22. Cf. Murata, *Tao*. p.183.

<sup>86</sup> Murata, *Tao*, 215.

creation. The Macrocosmic Womb symbolizes the all-embracing dome of God's mercy and is synonymous with the *barzakh* reality. Just like the dome of the mosque symbolically nurtures and envelopes the spiritual aspirations of Muslim worshipers, the dome of God's macrocosmic Mercy i.e., Nature, becomes the receptacle for the manifestations of God's names and attributes.

The relationship between God's Mercy, the Macrocosmic Womb, Nature and the creative feminine principle, becomes apparent through the following four *hadiths* regarding the "womb":

1. God said, "I am God and I am the All-Merciful. I created the womb and I gave it a name derived from My own name. Hence if someone cuts off the womb, I will cut him off, but if someone joins the womb, I will join him to myself."<sup>87</sup>
2. God created the creatures. When He finished with them, the womb stood up and seized the All-Merciful by the belt. The All-Merciful said, "What is this?" It replied, "This is the station of whoever seeks refuge from being cut off." God said, "Indeed it is. Will you not be satisfied that I join him who joins you and cut him off who cuts you off?" The womb replied, "Yes, I will." God said, "Then that is yours."<sup>88</sup>
3. The womb is attached to the Throne and says, "If someone joins me let God join him, but if someone cuts me off, let God cut him off."<sup>89</sup>
4. The womb is a branch of the All-Merciful. God said to it, "When a person joins you, I will join him, but when a person cuts you off, I will cut him off."<sup>90</sup>

Sadr al-Din Qunawi gives a detailed commentary on the *hadiths* of the womb given above. He does not believe that these *hadiths* emphasize only the importance of family relationships. The significance of family ties is definitely implied, yet the *hadiths* have symbolic meanings pointing to certain

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<sup>87</sup> Ahmad ibn Hanbal, I 191, 194.

<sup>88</sup> Muslim, *Birr* 16; Bukhari Tafsir sura 47, Tawhid 35; Ahmad II 330, 383, 406.

<sup>89</sup> Muslim, *Birr* 17; Ahmad II 163, 190, 193, 209]

<sup>90</sup> Bukhari, Adab 13, Tirmidhi, *Birr* 16; Ahmad I 190, 321; II 295, 382, 406, 455, 498.

cosmological realities. Three of these four *hadiths* are *hadith-i-qudsi*, i.e., the Prophet is quoting the words of God Himself.

Qunawi, in his commentary on these *hadiths*, identifies the womb with Nature and with the verse of the Qur'an: "The All-Merciful sat upon the Throne. (20:5). This verse is interpreted by Ibn al-'Arabi and his followers (including Qunawi) to mean that God, who is Being (*wujud*) envelops the universe through His All-Merciful Breath.<sup>91</sup> Qunawi interprets the *hadith* of the womb in the following manner:

"Womb" is a name for the reality of Nature... The womb in "attached to the Throne" in the respect that in the view of those who verifying the truth, all existent corporeal bodies are natural, while the throne is the first of these corporeal bodies. Reports of the *shari'a* have come concerning this fact, and the unveilings of the perfect human beings all give witness to its correctness.

The womb is a "branch of the All-Merciful" because mercy is identical with existence, since it is mercy that "embraces all things". Nothing embraces all things except existence, since it embraces everything, even that which is called "non-existence."<sup>92</sup>

The word "withness" (*ma'yya*) has been taken from the Qur'an where God says about Himself, "He [God] is with you wherever you are (57:4) whether in the spirit or in the body. God's Presence covers all levels of reality, even the level of the Macrocosmic Womb. Qunawi uses the *hadith* of the womb to give evidence for the Islamic belief of holding this corporeal world, marriage, the marriage act and reproduction, in high esteem.<sup>93</sup>

Before the birth into this world, the human spirit is undifferentiated from its one source. When the spirit enters the body, only then, it becomes distinct, differentiated, separate and individualized. The body or the

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<sup>91</sup> Qunawi, Sadr al-Din al-. *Sharh al-hadith*, no. 20. Cf. Murata, *Tao*. p.221

<sup>92</sup> Qunawi, *Sharh al-hadith*, no. 20. Cf. Murata, *Tao*. p. 221.

<sup>93</sup> Murata, *Tao*. p. 221.

corporeal realm is feminine in its characteristic of receptivity towards the spirit.

Only after this separation and individualization, can the spirit have knowledge and awareness of itself and others, since things become known through their opposites. It is through the opposition between heaven and earth, light and darkness, existence and non-existence that each of these opposite entities is recognized and identified.

The whole body of Nature, the Macrocosmic Womb manifests God's Hidden Treasure. Rumi mentions this same concept when he says: "The body did not exist and I was a spirit with thee in heaven; between us was none of my speaking and listening".<sup>94</sup> Speaking and listening takes place between entities that are separate and are aware of each other. Without being born into the natural sphere, which is the sphere of the feminine "womb", the spirits remain in a state of non-awareness. It is only when they are sent to this world that "The birds of consciousness... realize the worth of union with God and to see the pain of separation from Him".<sup>95</sup>

Human beings are capable of becoming God's vicegerents on earth due to their two fold nature, one of which is immersed in the spiritual world and the other is immersed in the corporeal world. Human beings have greater knowledge and awareness due to the fact that they replicate, in microscopic form, the macroscopic nature of the ultimate reality, in both its spiritual, active, invisible masculine aspect as well as its corporeal, receptive visible and feminine aspect. Qunawi writes that the perfect human beings actualize their *barzakhi* realities by honouring the "womb" which represents the feminine principle of imagination.

To "join the womb" is to recognize its position and to honour its measure... Through the natural configuration and the characteristics, faculties and instruments that God placed within it, the human being brings together both spiritual and natural characteristics, properties and perfections. Through this bringing together, he is able to seek access to

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<sup>94</sup> Rumi, *Divan*, 19132. Cf. Chittick, SPL. p.70.

<sup>95</sup> Rumi, *Divan*, 7192-94. Cf. Chittick, SPL. p.70.

the realization of the *barzakb* reality that encompasses the properties of necessity and possibility. Thereby his conformity [with the Real] is perfected and his parallelism [with Him] is established. He becomes manifest of the Divine Presence and the form of the whole cosmos, both outwardly and inwardly. So understand! These are some of the properties of its joining that can be mentioned.<sup>96</sup>

From the above passage it becomes clear that the human reality reflects the *barzakb* reality. The *barzakb*, as has been discussed before, is the creative realm which brings all opposites together and which is the source of all creativity and creation. It is only when male and female, light and darkness, existence and non-existence join in the *barzakb* reality that something new comes into being. The active, masculine spirit is as essential as the receptive feminine body for the creation of anything to take place. The body is as essential, holy and good as the spirit, for without it the spirit finds no existence, no manifestation. Qunawi explains the significance and meaning of “cutting off” the Womb:

The cutting off, concerning which God says that, “He will cut off him who cuts it off”, takes place through belittling the womb, ignoring its position, and disregarding its rights. The person who disregards its rights and belittles it has disregarded God and ignored the specific characteristics of the names that God has deposited within it, names in respect to which it is supported and related to God.<sup>97</sup>

Qunawi makes it clear that to consider the Womb, which represents the creative feminine principle of life and Nature, “dark” and “opaque” is to belittle it.<sup>98</sup> He believed that this attitude of irreverence towards Nature springs from an ignorance of the true significance of this highly important aspect of life. Nothing can emerge into existence without the Womb. The spirit can find no expression unless it manifests itself through a receptive

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<sup>96</sup> Qunawi, Sadr al-Din al-. *Sharb al-hadith*, no. 20. Cf. Murata, *Tao*, p. 221.

<sup>97</sup> Qunawi, *Sharb al-hadith*, no. 20. Cf. Murata, *Tao*, p. 221-222.

<sup>98</sup> Qunawi, *Sharb al-hadith*, no. 20. Cf. Murata, *Tao*, p. 221-222.

body. All entities in their receptivity exhibit the feminine principle of the Womb or Nature.

Nature is predominantly feminine and receptive in character and therefore it is “attached to the Throne” in the *hadith* of the Womb. Qunawi explains that the “Throne” mentioned in the verse “The All-Merciful sat upon the Throne” (Qur’an 20:5) represents Universal Nature, the first of the world of material bodies and it envelops and governs everything.<sup>99</sup>

If anyone “cuts himself” off from the Womb, the world of nature and his own natural configuration, he is cutting himself off from God’s Mercy. But, if anyone joins the Womb, has an attitude of respect and reverence for Nature and learns to live harmoniously with his/her own natural configuration, he/she will join God. Joining God means to become proximate to God and to become a witness of God by being able to discern God through God’s constant and creative self-disclosures. By having a true understanding of how the active, masculine spirit manifests itself in the Womb of nature in a constant process of creativity and new creation, the human being starts to witness God.<sup>100</sup>

The feminine macrocosmic principle that emerges out of God’s “*rahma*” (Mercy) is called the “*rahim*” or Womb.<sup>101</sup> This Macrocosmic Womb is the macrocosmic world of Nature, which is the reality upon which the witnessing of God depends not only on this earth but also in the next world. God is the Ruler over all levels of reality. He rules the reality of this world of corporeal bodies and forms through His Throne. Therefore, it is impossible to witness Him in this world unless we witness Him within the locus He chooses to manifest Himself.

This locus is the Macrocosmic Womb, the world of Nature within which He chooses to manifest Himself. Therefore, all witnessing of God depends upon a true understanding and due respect accorded to the “Womb”. God is a ruler, even over the level of reality of the next world. Witnessing of God in

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<sup>99</sup> Murata, *Tao*, p. 219.

<sup>100</sup> Murata, *Tao*, p. 220.

<sup>101</sup> Murata, *Tao*, p. 215.

the next world will also be possible only through remaining joined to the “womb” and witnessing Him through whatever locus He discloses Himself in.<sup>102</sup>

The correct attitude towards God is to be always a Muslim. A Muslim is one who submits to God and who is ever receptive towards God. Therefore, with respect to God Muslims are taught to inculcate their feminine, submissive, receptive characteristic but with respect to becoming the vicegerent of God on earth, they are encouraged to inculcate the masculine active characteristics. Thereby they can become conscious participants of the multidimensional creative process of life.

The true aim of life for human beings according to Islamic spirituality is to become the perfect human being/ *insan al-kamil*. The full range of *wujud*'s potential is manifested through the reflection of the divine attributes in the perfect human being. This means that human beings have a function in the cosmos that is far greater than is ordinarily thought. It is a transcendental function, and the actual reason for their creation. The cosmos depends upon the perfect human beings for the actualization of *wujud*'s myriad attributes in the realm of manifestation. The cosmos was brought into existence so that the full manifestation of God's attributes takes place through the perfect human beings.

As God's representative or deputy, the perfect human being is the substitute for God in creation. The perfect human being displays the characteristic of being a perfect intermediate reality within the greater intermediate reality (*barzakh al-barzakh*) of divine Imagination. Ibn al-‘Arabi writes about this quality of the perfect human being in the following way:

Hence everyone in the cosmos is ignorant of the whole and knows the part, except only the perfect human being. For God *taught him the names, all of them* [Qur'an 2:31] and gave him the all-comprehensive words, so his form becomes perfect. The perfect human being brings together the form of the Real and the form of the cosmos. He is a *barzakh* between the Real and the cosmos, a raised up mirror. The Real sees His form in the mirror

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<sup>102</sup> Qunawi, *Sharh al-hadith*, no. 20. Cf. Murata, *Tao*, p. 222.

of the human being and the creation also sees its form in him. He who has gained this level has gained a level of perfection more perfect than which nothing is found in possibility.<sup>103</sup>

By bringing together “the form of the Real and the form of the cosmos” the perfect human being becomes the perfect “isthmus” linking the feminine realm of the Macrocosmic Womb with the realm of the Universal Spirit. The creativity inherent in the Divine realm is fully actualized in the human form of the perfect human being and the creativity inherent in the human form is fully actualized by a union and subsistence in the Divine realm by the perfect human being. To reach the status of perfect human being/*insan al-kamil* the creative transformation of the feminine principle of the soul through “joining the Womb” is necessary so that illumination and subsistence in the Spirit can take place. In other words no human being can become perfect unless he/she allows for the creative interaction of both the feminine and masculine principles of existence within their human configuration so that the human soul finds illumination and subsistence in the everlasting spiritual realm. Only and only due to the fact that the perfect human beings are able to reflect these two realities in a perfect manner both at the microcosmic level of existence and at the macrocosmic level of existence, that everything in creation finds existence.

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<sup>103</sup>*Futubat*, III 397.3. Cf. Chittick, *Self-Disclosure*, p.249.

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# SLAVERY: HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE AND ISLAMIC REFORMS

Hafiz Safwan Muhammad Chohan

## ABSTRACT

The term slavery, generally speaking, refers to systematic exploitation of labour for work and services without proper compensation and the possession of human being as property. Although there is no clear timeline for the formation of slavery in any formalized sense, the history of slavery covers different forms of human exploitation across many cultures and throughout human history. Existence of slaves can be traced to the earliest records that refer to slavery as an already established institution.

This article starts with finding the reason that is impetus to slavery. The history of slavery is surfed. Slavery in Turkey is especially scanned due to the special, distinctive position of the Ottoman caliphate the last body of the united Muslim Ummah. How did Islam take up with the institution of slave trade and what corrections & legislations did it put in this inhumane system so that it eventually transformed the typical master-slave relation into a fraternity and “brotherhood,” is discussed at large. A casual look at the content may be this way that: the foundation of the practice of slavery; what features made this institution a necessary racecourse; why did Islam let it continue with certain customizations and parameters. The articles of concubine and *mukātabat* (مكاتبت) are separately treated.

Muhammad ﷺ did instruct on his deathbed about taking care of and being gentlemanly to the slaves.<sup>104</sup> The words of his last will lend colour to the fact that slavery will never die out. It will remain alive with the humanity, in one form or another. In this sense, the slogans of driving slavery to a full stop seem more a political stunt and a downright nonsense than a serious suggestion.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibn Majah, 1614 (Chapter on Funerals).

Slavery was legally abolished as it did not remain economically feasible. However, this abolition was in name only. In the past it prevailed due to economic reasons, and is found today in different fiber in consonance with the present-day economic needs. Today's forms of slavery, i.e., "white-collar" slavery which is commonly labeled as "job" or "service," and the mass enslaving of governments and sucking their resources, is also discussed.

Missionaries hold that the social reforms which they impose are the dictates of Christianity but the facts are otherwise; these icons of development are the result of intellectual progress and their religion has no say in these reforms. If it were true, slavery won't have persisted in them for millenniums. In contrast, whatever Islam did to do away with slavery was not prompted by economic exigencies or social conditions. It did *only* from a moral point of view. According to the teachings of Islam, all men are equal and it is not proper for anyone to impose himself on another.

Western sources of the era of legal abolition of slavery worldwide (late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) are quoted plentifully so that varying perspectives of the forerunners of slavery come in front. Blemish over the practice of slavery is not the problem of Islam, for Islam is rightfully proud of being superbly immaculate in its nature.

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## MOTIVES BEHIND THE PREVALENCE OF SLAVERY: A BITTER PILL FOR THE BODY OF SOCIETY

From a psychological perspective, slavery becomes unavoidable in many the situation. The captives of war, for example, can be (1) put to death, (2) set free without or against ransom, (3) jailed as state-prisoners or (4) enslaved. This is so because not all prisoners can be treated at par due to their differing conditions and political demands. Growingly evil prisoners, warmongers and war-criminals are better if killed but there are others whose potentials can be used. Together the outcome of wars is twofold, the second being the sheltering of women and children who are yet in big number. What to do with men on the one hand and where to keep these families on the

other thus becomes imperative; and from here starts the need of this unpleasant but necessary medicine of slavery.

There are certain collective & cultural aspects of slavery as well. Under certain circumstances of national importance, slavery becomes inductive to cultural and economic progress.

It is very easy to accept that when one of the parties does not annihilate the other in spite of its victory and overwhelming power but contents itself with enslaving them, then sparing them alive is itself a step towards progress. Slavery may be very evil but relatively it is very good and in certain extraordinary cases it is most workable of all alternatives.<sup>105</sup>

Sometimes conditions take such a turn that it becomes reasonable to say yes to the option of slavery. Says R H Barrow:

Slavery is a word bad-sounding to ear. On hearing it, the ears are filled with the sound of heavy chains, the swish of the whip and the shriek of the wronged slaves... Slavery is generally viewed in its evil aspect. But if we delve into details, we will realize that though the slave may not be sacred and chaste yet he has some say in the progress of civilization. We can abolish the institution of slavery but we must not condemn the past traditions of slavery as outright bad.<sup>106</sup>

While on the moral and social standpoint, it is safe to say that slavery can be good or bad depending on the manners of masters, and has a far-reaching impact on the entire society and culture. The French Encyclopedia runs: "... So the great advantage that accrues is that in the presence of a slave, a husband learns to respect his wife and a wife respects her husband, and other relatives."<sup>107</sup>

Politics is also an essential social stunt. Not to mention the dictators alone but the politicians too do carry on with the public. Herbert Spencer speaks

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<sup>105</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, p. 253

<sup>106</sup> R H Barrow, *Slavery in the Roman Empire*, p. II (Introduction).

<sup>107</sup> The French Encyclopedia of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, (Slavery).

this truth when he says: “Without slavery, politics cannot attain perfection.”<sup>108</sup> W. G. Sumner suggests that slavery has influenced every sector of society wherever it has been practiced. “If it is practiced in tribes and societies, it grows colour and beauty in all sections of the tribe.”<sup>109</sup>

The Greek philosophers contended that it was natural for mankind to be divided into different strata of society: the leader and his subjects, the ruler and the ruled, the master and his slaves. The collective administration of the world cannot continue and exist unless there are some people who can rule, legislate and implement for which they have the power and ability, and unless there are many others who are called subjects and who are ruled. They held that in a civilization, slavery is indispensable so that the intellectual people are spared physical effort.<sup>110</sup> A. N. Gilbertson reflects these thoughts in yet clearer words: “... The division in society with someone to rule and others to be ruled is the very initial and natural division. Slavery produces individuals who work, not think. These people are not there to think because other people are there to do that.”<sup>111</sup>

Dealey and Ward, both agree in that “the root problem is to get people to work, and nothing but slavery can be helpful in this regard.”<sup>112</sup>

These quotes are well displaying the motives, individual as well as collective, which have been vital in the existence of the institution of slavery throughout. One-word answer to the reason of slavery thus comes out to be: economics.

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## SLAVERY AND SLAVE TRADE: A PEEP THROUGH THE RELIGIO-HISTORICAL WINDOW

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<sup>108</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology, Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> William Graham Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals.*

<sup>110</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, Book-I, Chapters 4-6.

<sup>111</sup> Albert N. Gilbertson, *Alexander Francis Chamberlain, 1865-1914.*

<sup>112</sup> Lester F. Ward and James Q. Dealey, *Sociology: Its Simpler Teachings and Applications.*

## 1. Slavery and Christianity

Slavery is not condemned in any of the Divine Writs and has been unanimously practiced since the ancient times in all the civilized nations. L. D. Agate contends: “The teachings of Christ عليه السلام do not clearly condemn slavery. It is correct that the disputants of slavery are unable to cite any verse of the Bible in support of their views.” Yet he is so disrespectful as to write afterwards: “Christ عليه السلام has imparted teachings consonant with the political and social conditions prevailing in his times.”<sup>113</sup> When the Christian writers do not find condemnation of slavery in the Bible while the practice of taking slaves and buying and selling them was at its peak among them, they impudently begin to tilt the teachings of Christ عليه السلام. Agates argues: “The initial period of the church was based on the hope that Christ عليه السلام would return soon. So, attention was not paid to the material question that slavery is. It was presupposed that every man should stay content on his condition in this worldly life whether he is a master over someone or a subdued subject.”<sup>114</sup>

The Bible does not say or even hint anywhere that slaves should be emancipated. Also it does not mention that slaves should be treated kindly. On the contrary, the slaves are cautioned, again and again, that they should obey their masters and should not turn away from their commands. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that slaves should obey their masters in the same way as they obey the Christ عليه السلام. He affirms that he has written exactly what Christ عليه السلام had taught and that anyone who denies it is a liar.<sup>115</sup> St. Basileus comments on this letter saying that it is an obligation on the slave to obey his master and such behaviour represents respect of God.<sup>116</sup>

The Christian theologians did not consider slavery to be a terrible tragedy for a helpless man; they rather imagined that it was natural to man that some of them must be enslaved. Most of them concede that the institution of slavery was proper among them and was a part of religious injunctions.

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<sup>113</sup> *Encyclopedia of Religion & Ethics*, Vol. XI, (Slavery).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

Gilbertson says: “We need not remind that until recently slavery was practiced ... by people who were Christians. In fact, great religious scholars regarded it as a command of God and a reformative law.”<sup>117</sup> The *reformative law* was then so severely exercised that some of the African nations were simply washed from the surface of the earth. The Europeans nabbed them and made them all slaves. Avowed Lothrop Stoddard: “The Europeans have committed many atrocities on the black African people. They were so cruel that it is not possible to atone for that now. The result was that some nations were simply eliminated. The white people of different nationalities would go there and take the Africans and their children as captives and carry them with them.”<sup>118</sup>

Gilbertson owns very clearly that while the Christian clergy advised the slaves to obey their masters, they did not tell the masters that they should set their slaves free.<sup>119</sup> Pope Celestine-V (1294 CE) framed special laws and rules for slaves. Let us see one of these clauses which speaks volumes for the mindset to which Gilbertson is referring: If a priest marries a female slave, all her children will be treated as slaves of the church. They will have to suffer the sin of their father (the priest).<sup>120</sup>

The Christians have been accustomed to enslave everyone who did not profess Christianity. T. W. Arnold writes: “In 1880, king Yahya is reported to have baptized fifty thousand Muslims.” He comments: “Slavery was a kind of punishment awarded for different crimes, like conspiracy, cheating, soothsaying, stealing and inability to produce stolen property, and selling weapons to Muslims in crusade wars.” He goes on to say that: “For a long time the German priests took part in slave-trade which was handled by Jew traders. In 1452, Pope Nicholas-V granted rights to the king of Portugal to decimate the Muslims and to enslave and sell them.” He continues: “Apart from taxes, the Muslims of Oyo had to send the Christian rulers an unmarried young woman every year who was compelled to become Christian as part of an ancient covenant which the tyrant king did not fail to observe.

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> T. Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*

<sup>119</sup> *Encyclopedia of Religion & Ethics*, Vol. XI, (Slavery).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

Also, the Muslims were not allowed to keep weapons or wear armour. They were not allowed to saddle the horse. If they violated these commands, they were killed and their mosques burned down. The king's men came to them from Ethiopia every year to collect the young woman. The Muslims bathed the woman, made her lie down on a mattress and covered her with a sheet (as if dead), making supplications all the while and took her on the mattress to the door from where the king's men carried her away. This was done by their forefathers too."<sup>121</sup>

Kidnapping too have been very common in the business of slavery. Lord Cromer, a priest, laments: "It is among the very shameful acts of Christians that not only did they enslave other people but they also kidnapped them to enslave them forcibly, and this is more wicked".<sup>122</sup>

These are economic factors as well that why even today we find traces of slavery in certain regions of Europe and, in fact, we do come across cases of women-trade in England, civilized as it is! In a letter to the editor of the Daily Times, a Mr. Watson wrote: "I had to stop on the highway to attend to my motorcycle. Some gypsies were there. A man and woman came and the man offered to sell a basket which I did not want. He then offered his dog for 2 shillings which I refused to buy. In desperation he offered his wife for 2½ shillings".<sup>123</sup>

## 2. Slavery and Judaism

The Jews also traded in slaves. In the era of Louis, the Pious, a large number of Christian slaves were brought to Spain and North Africa by the Jew brokers. In times of prosperity in Spain (10<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century) many wealthy Jews of Spain earned much wealth through supply of slaves all over the world.

There's no denying however that when weighed on the scale of rights, Jews gave more rights to slaves compared to other people. The rights of

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<sup>121</sup> T. W. Arnold, *The Spread of Islam in the World* (Gebundene Ausgabe).

<sup>122</sup> Roger Owen, *Lord Cromer- Victorian Imperialist, Edwardian Proconsul*.

<sup>123</sup> The London Times, May 5, 1932.

concession allowed to slaves in Jewish religion were very similar to those of Islam. For instance, if a master speaks of his intention to free his slave by his tongue then the slave will be free to go and the master cannot take back his words. Another such similar clause runs thus: the master will be compelled to write down a letter of freedom for the slave under his signature. Such laws portray that the Jews were relatively lenient to their slaves.

Jews are the breed of money. The reasons for putting others to enslavement among them depict this propensity. For example, if a person could not repay a loan because of poverty then a rich man may repaid the loan on his behalf and enslaved him. A very astonishing reason of enslavement was that parents could sell their son or daughter to anyone.<sup>124</sup>

### 3. Slavery and Hinduism

In Hinduism too, slavery is recognized in all Sanskrit books. The book of Manu describes seven reasons for enslaving anyone. Narid has cited fifteen, of which the eighth one includes losing a gamble, and another being unable to repay a loan – are worth mentioning. To Hindus since the Sudras are born from the feet of the Brahmin, slavery is a part of their body; and even if their masters release them they could not come out of slavery.<sup>125</sup>

Among the laws in Hinduism against the Sudra are written such clauses as: (1) If a Sudra happens to hurt a Brahmin, there is no choice for him but to be killed. (2) Sudra's tongue should be pulled out from the nape if he happens to utter a word of abuse. (3) Boiling oil should be poured into the mouth and ears of the Sudra if he happened to utter a word of advice. (4) If the Sudra happened to steal a thing, punishment was of burning him alive.

Together, ancient Hindu law allowed parents to sell their children as slaves.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Allama Rashid Reza Misri, *Nida al-Jins al-Latif*; as referenced by Maulana Saeed Ahmad, *Slavery In Islam*, p.78.

<sup>125</sup> *Encyclopedia of Religion & Ethics*, Vol. XI, (Slavery).

<sup>126</sup> <http://www.whale.to/b/sp/f4.html>.

## 4. Slavery in Greece

Slavery is traced in Greece to the times of Homer. It is strange that even the great Greece philosophers were of one mind with the common tradesman on the subject of slavery. Aristotle said: “The slave is an instrument but with a soul, and a toy but with life.” W. J. Woodhouse cites the reasons of slavery among the Greece as “war and necessity.”<sup>127</sup>

Slaves were the commodity sold, and also hired, to others in the market called Aneena. Masters were allowed to punish their slaves on flimsy grounds. The normal punishment was whipping which could end up at fifty stripes. The other punishments included chaining the feet, which was so common that the writer of the article in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics* argues that it should not be called a punishment. Punishment to the run-away and recaptured slaves was given by branding.<sup>128</sup>

Emancipation of slaves was, mostly, by the authority of the government who when required men for defending the country, exercised her power to choose as many slaves as needed. Another way of freeing the slaves was that the master may ask the slave to earn his freedom by paying a certain amount, as is the case in Islam with an *abd mukātab* (عبد مكاتب). Even after freeing, these people did not have the rights of common citizens and needed to obtain someone’s guardianship. Special rules were framed for such people, failing to observe those laws let them to punish with enslavement once again.

## 5. Slavery and the Romans

The Romans ruled supreme for eight hundred years and they were the most civilized of ancient civilizations. Slavery in the Romans enjoys a special place in the history of slavery. The traffickers in slaves accompanied the Roman army when they marched through and they seized every opportunity to steal boys and arrest women. They had certain provisions in their laws whereby they could usurp the freedom of a free man and enslave him. Children born to female slaves were also their slaves. According to

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<sup>127</sup> *Encyclopedia of Religion & Ethics*, Vol. XI, (Slavery).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*.

conjecture, slaves were about one-fourth of the entire Roman population. If a slave did commit a small wrong, a heavy rock was placed on his back. At times they were suspended upside down and heavy weights were tied upon their bodies. They were chained like animals.

It was a custom in Rome that when a slave's daughter married, she spent her first night with the master of his father. "The clergy was not free from this evil," writes Syed Ameer Ali.<sup>129</sup>

We do find in the history of the Rome examples of the relationship of Mahmood and Ayaz. It is stated that Cicero had a cordial relationship with his slave Tiro, and Atticus with his slave Alexis. However, W. I. Woodhouse says that such cases were rare and the general conditions were quite the contrary.<sup>130</sup>

In the dusk of the rule of Romans, however, a number of reformatory laws were enforced that did away with many of the torturing features, and became the milestones towards the gradual elimination of slavery. Although slaves had no say in civil, political or judicial affairs, they were then not slain by their masters or put to fight with beasts in the presence of onlookers, nor were their children given away in settlement of debt. Making prostitutes of the slave girls was also checked, thus putting an end to the practice of making money this way.

Emancipation was not usually out of goodness of heart but with a commercial point of view.

Selfishness and meanness were nowhere as apparent as here in releasing slaves. By setting a slave free the master lost nothing but gained more than he had. Among the Romans to release a slave was not as much a sign of noble character as of business acumen. It was often more advantageous for a master to become a partner in the business of his freed slave than

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<sup>129</sup> As referenced by Maulana Saeed Ahmad, *Slavery In Islam*, p.159.

<sup>130</sup> *Encyclopedia of Religion & Ethics*, Vol. XI, (Slavery).

allow his slave to earn wholly for him (master) on his (master's) responsibility.<sup>131</sup>

It was due to such wickedness of the masters that when setting a slave free, the master had to not only declare it in the court and affix his signatures together with adding the name of slave to the list of citizens but also to have proclaimed publicly that thus and thus slave was now free.

The freed slaves have played an important role in the history of Rome but the freedmen in Greece did not earn the absolute rights of citizen.

## **6. Slavery in the Ancient Egypt**

Egyptian civilization stands out among the ancient civilizations of the world. Their masters had powers over the slaves in every way and they had authority to kill or spare them. With progress, the strictness became softer and the biggest favour that the slaves received was that the government prescribed killing of the master who killed his slave.<sup>132</sup>

## **7. Slavery in Phoenicia (Southern Syria)**

People living between the Jabl Lebanon and the ocean in the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC were related to Arabs and Jews, and were very interested in enslaving the others. They were always on the lookout of young boys and girls and warrior slaves whom they bought from victors. They used to steal and kidnap men and enslaved them. They were known pirates since they frequently used boats for this purpose.<sup>133</sup>

## **8. Slavery in the French**

French were the most cruel and merciless of the Europeans in their treatment of the slaves. Some of their tribes used to fling the marrying slaves in the fire to burn them alive. A large number of traders herded prisoners

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

from France and Spain and took them to Africa, Syria and Egypt. These businessmen went to the shores of the Black Sea and Dunob to sell the Russian and German slaves and herded them as sheep.<sup>134</sup>

Kidnapping of people and sexual abuse of female slaves was too current in them. Concedes Basil Davidson, the author of *The Black Man's Burden*:

The Europeans are accustomed to dispute with the Sudanese over property, and they receive large sums of money from them in the name of different kinds of unjust taxes. The white men perpetrate cruelty on the black and they beat them, take away their property, use their women with no compunction and let the poor people go hungry.<sup>135</sup>

## 9. Slavery in Russia

Some Russians claim that slavery was unknown initially in Russia. Facts stay otherwise however. The Moscow Gazette of 1801, for example, carried an advertisement: "For sale: Three working men, well- trained and two beautiful girls, aged 18 and 15. Both the girls are adept in household work..." Alexander-I prohibited such ads about slaves and Nicholas-I abolished the practice of slavery.<sup>136</sup>

## 10. Slavery in Americas

The practice of enslaving people in South America was most savage and tyrannous. The Black Law meant that a master could place his slave on mortgage, lend him on rent and play a bet on him. Most strange was that a slave could not walk on the streets of the city without official permission. *The White Man's Book of Manners* carried on its banner line: *Slave is a body without soul and intelligence whose life is in our hands*. In 1712 and in 1741, slaves in the USA rebelled. The result was that every slave who was captured faced death under the wheels of vehicles (bullock- or horse-carts of course) or was burnt

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*.

<sup>136</sup> *Encyclopedia of Religion & Ethics*, Vol. XI, (Slavery).

alive. Such cruel behaviour was so common that Alfred Fouillée writes while quoting instances like these:

Strange events take place in the United States which are in no way worthy of it. The blacks love the white women dearly and sometimes have sex with them too. The Lynch law requires that such people be smeared with coal-tar and then burnt like a lamp. The negro officers are compelled to witness the ordeal.<sup>137</sup>

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in the US, white-slavery had been in wide practice and large numbers of white women were being kidnapped and forced into prostitution. Frederick Douglass in his autobiography, described the sale of female slaves openly advertised for sexual purposes at slave auctions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States.<sup>138</sup> According to John A Morone's book *Hellfire Nation*, slave owners in the South America openly admitted to practicing sexual slavery.<sup>139</sup>

### **Slave Trade and Slavery in the US– Facts, Not Myths**

- The level of slave exports grew from about 36,000 a year during the early 18<sup>th</sup> century to almost 80,000 a year during the 1780s.
- The Angolan region of west-central Africa made up slightly more than half of all Africans sent to the Americas and a quarter of imports to British North America.
- Approximately 11,863,000 Africans were shipped across the Atlantic, with a death rate during the Middle Passage reducing this number by 10-20%.
- As a result between 9.6 and 10.8 million Africans arrived in the Americas.
- About 500,000 Africans were imported into what is now the U.S. between 1619 and 1807– or about 6% of all Africans forcibly imported into the Americas. About 70% arrived directly from Africa.

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<sup>137</sup> Alfred Jules émile Fouillée, *Temperament at Caractere*.

<sup>138</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*.

<sup>139</sup> <http://www.walnet.org/csis/papers/irwin-wslavery.html>.

- Well over 90% of African slaves were imported into the Caribbean and South America. Only about 6% of imports went directly to British North America. Yet by 1825, the US had a quarter of blacks in the New World.
- The majority of African slaves were brought to British North America between 1720 and 1780. (Average date of arrival for whites is 1890).<sup>140</sup>

## 11. Slavery in Muslim Lands with Special Reference to the Ottoman Caliphate

Contrasting with ancient and colonial systems, slaves in Muslim lands had a certain legal status and had obligations to as well as rights over the slave owner. Slavery was not only recognized but was elaborately regulated by Islamic jurisprudence. James R. Lewis elucidates that it was for this reason that “the position of the domestic slave in Muslim society was in most respects better than in either classical antiquity or the 19<sup>th</sup> century Americas,” and that “the situation of such slaves were no worse than (and even in some cases better than) free poor” and “once the slaves were settled in Islamic culture they had genuine opportunities to realize their potential. Many of them became merchants in Makkah, Jeddah, and elsewhere.”<sup>141</sup> The hardships of acquisition and transportation of slaves to Muslim lands drew attention of European opponents of slavery. The continuing pressure from European countries gradually overcame the strong resistance of religious conservatives who were holding that forbidding what Allah permits is just as great an offense as to permit what Allah forbids. Slavery, in their eyes, was “authorized and regulated by the holy law.”<sup>142</sup> There were also many pious Muslims who refused to have slaves and persuaded others to do so.<sup>143</sup> Eventually, the Ottoman Caliphate’s orders against the traffic of slaves were issued and put into effect.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/slav\\_fact.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/slav_fact.cfm).

<sup>141</sup> James R. Lewis and Carl Skutsch, *The Human Rights Encyclopedia*, V.3, p. 898-904.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>143</sup> Jok Madut Jok, *War and Slavery in Sudan*, p. 3.

<sup>144</sup> James R. Lewis and Carl Skutsch, *The Human Rights Encyclopedia*, V. 3, p. 898-904.

T. W. Arnold has written on the topic of slavery that was current among the last Muslim caliphate in Turkey. He writes on the treatment of slaves and their status in the society:

The helpless slaves of Spain were the first to accept Islam. They regarded the coming of the Arabs as auspicious for them, for they were the wronged ones. It were these ideas that had a shattering influence on the Christians in Turkey, particularly the miserable Christian slaves who were passing a hopeless life of slavery for the past many years and they saw no prospect of freedom from slavery and getting out of their predicament... The injunctions on slavery in Islam have removed the severity from slavery. The slaves in Turkey were not tormented as those in north Africa, and in Turkey the slaves had rights similar to the free men, and if a master was severe, the slave could summon him before a judge.<sup>145</sup>

The Muslim slave owners of Turkey were very kind to their slaves. Even the most biased scholars are heard admitting this fact:

We must say in praise of the Turks that they give good treatment to their slaves and servants from whom they derive much benefit. They are often better than the Christians in dealing with their slaves and servants. If a slave among the Muslim acquires an art or learning then he only requires freedom, for, he has at his disposal everything that a free man needs, except freedom.<sup>146</sup>

Contrary to the Christian practice of forcibly baptizing the slaves (as referenced above), Muslims have never exercised this brutality in the name of religion. No one was forced or compelled to accept Islam by any means in the entire jurisdiction of the Ottoman Caliphate like the previous rulers of Islam. Says Arnold with reference to the slavery practiced in Turkey:

Some historians suppose that a slave gained freedom after he accepted Islam but that is not so, for, it is dependent on the will of the master. However, often their masters confirmed that if they became Muslims,

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<sup>145</sup> T. W. Arnold, *Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of Muslim Faith*, pp. 148, 194.

<sup>146</sup> Referenced by Maulana Saeed Ahmad, *Slavery in Islam*, p. 207.

slaves would be set free without having to buy their freedom. If the Christian slaves proved to be good servants, their Muslim masters set them free although they persisted to practice Christianity. Also, in the old age of slaves, masters provided them with something to subsist.<sup>147</sup>

Edmund Spenser Falrie holds while writing on the institution of slavery in these areas:

The enemies of Islam have resolved to target it and condemn it for allowing the practice of slavery to subsist. But the facilities afforded to the slaves far exceed that are available to slaves in Europe. And truly the slavery found in the east has no connection to what is practiced in America. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ had indeed brought about fantastic reformation in this case too.” He then cites the Hadith “No one should call his slave a slave or a female slave” and then concludes: “What better humanity can there be?”<sup>148</sup>

Slavery in Muslim lands is discussed here casually and partially; the practice of slavery in the Arabs will be discussed at length later in these pages. Slavery in Turkey is scanned here due to the special, distinctive position of the Ottoman Caliphate – the last body of the united Muslim Ummah.

## **Price of Slaves**

Prices of slaves varied widely over time. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, slave prices generally rose. Though they fell somewhat before the start of the revolution, by the early 1790s, even before the onset of cotton expansion, prices had returned to earlier levels. Prices rose to a height of about \$1,250 during the cotton boom of the late 1830s, fell to below half that level in the 1840s, and rose to about \$1,450 in the late 1850s. Males were valued 10-20%

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<sup>147</sup> T W Arnold: Preaching of Islam, *A History of the Propagation of Muslim Faith*, p.197.

<sup>148</sup> Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams*.

more than females; at age ten, children's prices were about half that of a prime male field hand.<sup>149</sup>

## Conclusion

Let me conclude this topic by a quick glimpse at a statistics, in words that carry more weight since these are written by a western author.

In 1433, Nunez Trestan sailed to Africa on an expedition and brought back fourteen slaves. The Africans were naturally against these expeditions whose purpose was merely to enslave them while the Europeans looked for excuses to attack them by instigating the Africans to fight one another. In 1640, Louis-XIII issued a proclamation that said that all Africans who lived in French colonies could be enslaved. In 1655, Cornwell conquered Jamaica from Spain and found that fifteen hundred whites and as many negro slaves were there while the natives no longer lived there. In 1662, the 3<sup>rd</sup> African company was established with the aim of procuring three thousand slaves annually for the new British colonies in India. In the ten years between 1679 and 1689, about four thousand five hundred slaves were provided every year to the British colonies. Kurt von Francois has lamented on the plight of these poor people and said that the biggest trade was in slaves. They were brought completely in the nude and buyers examined them even opening their mouths as if they were horses and quadrupeds. In 1713, England and Spain arrived at an agreement whereby the former was to provide the latter four thousand eight hundred slaves annually for thirty years. The kings of England and Spain were partners in the profit derived from slave trade. The trade continued until 1788 when parliament was presented with a bill to abolish it. It is estimated that two hundred thousand slaves were taken away from Africa every year until 1788, half of these were sent to America, etc.<sup>150</sup>

THE EVENING OF THE ERA OF SLAVERY: TWISTS & TURNS OF THE EUROPEANS AND THE WEST, AND THE POLICY OF ISLAM

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<sup>149</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery-in-Islam#-note-Lewis1>.

<sup>150</sup> *Encyclopedia of Religion & Ethics*, Vol. XI, (Slavery).

Slavery has existed, in one form or another, through the whole of human history. So, too, have movements to free large or distinct groups of slaves. Moses عليه السلام led Israelite slaves from ancient Egypt according to the Biblical Book of Exodus – possibly the first big movement to free slaves, though the fibre of modern archaeology as is opposed to the authenticity of the Qur’an even today throws doubt on the claims of such a mass exodus. However, abolitionism should be distinguished from efforts to help a particular group of slaves, or to restrict one practice, such as the slave trade.

## **1. Slavery: Putting to an End**

From the above pages it is learnt that slavery was practiced in practically every community of the world, ancient and modern, and in every country. It was a most inhuman experience. It was a devilish custom, impetuously cruel and utterly greedy. It was sort of cannibalistic and universal. The people who today present themselves as beacons of progress and modern thought were themselves involved in this heinous crime. They themselves treated the slave as an animal. Just as man eats animal flesh and feels no compunction, and devours the birds and his conscience pricks him not, so too they perpetrated monstrous cruelty on the poor slave who was a commodity for them, its numbers to be proud of. However, man is also given the characteristics of shame and remorse so that even the wicked person comes to a moment when he repents and says, “alas.” The cries of pain and anguish of the oppressed did after all get an answer and in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century efforts began to be made to reform the plight of slaves and to abolish slavery altogether. In 1845 useful reforms were made in the French colonies and in 1848 it was abolished completely. Others took the hint and in 1863, slavery was put to stop in the West Dutch Indies, in 1886 in Cuba, in 1888 in Brazil and in 1897 in Zanzibar. However, until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the islands of the South Seas continued to be invaded by people of Queensland and they enslaved the natives but, in 1884, slavery was wiped out from here too. In the America, slavery did continue until after the end of the American Civil War with the ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in December 1865.

As regards putting the practice of slavery to stop in the quarter of Americans, it will not be an exaggeration to state that they’ve never been sincere to this end as well. Steps taken by them for abolishing or even

legislating slavery have always been under spells of serious criticism throughout. For example, in a protest of slaves in 1854, Garrison publicly burnt a copy of the US Constitution, calling it “a covenant with death and an agreement with Hell.”<sup>151</sup>

Writing on the reasons of abolishing slavery in North America, J. E. Cairnes brackets this decision with the economic constraints. As long as modern gadgets were not invented they needed slaves to run their industries and business. With the invention of tools and machinery, labour became superfluous and slaves did not remain in demand. Their masters could not bear expenses over upkeep of slaves. This forced them to set slaves free and the law enforcing emancipation of slaves was passed:

Why did not the northern states abandon slavery while the southern states continued with it? The reason advanced is not very sound. It is wrong to say that while the white man is not made lazy by the southern climate and can work hard the negro becomes lethargic and works only under duress. The real reason is economic as is evident from the labour of a free man and a slave. The institution of slavery allows a large latitude to the master and he happily consumes the produce of his slave and cannot complain on having to spend more on him. Now, when different tools are available entailing a lower expenditure but giving greater benefit then why must he spend on slaves unnecessarily?<sup>152</sup>

Slavery is defined as *crime against humanity* by a French law of 2001.<sup>153</sup>

## 2. SLAVERY TODAY: OLD WINES IN NEW BOTTLES, NAY, OLD HUNTERS WITH NEW NETS

On the face of it the steps taken by the Europeans to abolish slavery are truly praiseworthy, yet the basic cause of slavery is more the economic factor than the moral factor. Slavery was legally abolished as it was not

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<sup>151</sup> <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu>.

<sup>152</sup> Cairnes, John Elliott, *The Slave Power: Its Character, Career, and Probable Designs*, Being an Attempt to Explain the Real Issues Involved in the American Contest.

<sup>153</sup> <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu>.

economically feasible. It has not been abolished on grounds of humanity and equality of men in anyway. Although slavery is often stigmatized as archaic and backward, it is found in colourful, attractive dresses in all progressive societies.

What today is going on with the third-world countries— how their countryside and landscapes are being raped and how many craving mouths are suckling, gush after gush, their natural, mineral and human resources— is a real weepie. More unfortunate is that there are very few who know the gravity of the situation and the rest are singing the songs of their butchers. Rather they are being lulled into a false sense of security altogether. They have plenty of muscles but no brains, and these muscles are absorbed in strengthening empires of their traders. These poor fellows are fed and nurtured like chicken, but they flex their muscles in pride. They are themselves casting dust into the wells that are giving them water. This is a topic pregnant with lengthy, multilayered details. Let me cursor over this area only with mentioning the crux (which I rate on the basis of my vision).

Those very people who have abolished slavery by law have, in turn, enslaved other nations politically. They give very insulting treatment to the colonized people. Equal rights are not given to them because of difference in colour and descent. They are constantly under check through burdensome laws. The colonists take away the produce of the colonies at the expense of the colonized people. For producing generations of working-hands they customize the education syllabi and social intercourse of these nations. These things show clearly that their minds are yet set on enslaving people. In earlier times individuals were made slaves, but now whole nations are enslaved by other nations, and the treatment is worse than what the individual slave passed through. More unfortunate still is that these birds of a feather are now flocking together and are after their preys like wolves hunting in packs. Be it the EU, be it the G-7, or be it the UN, these all differ in name only. Tolstoy criticizes:

The national outlook has led to wars and human destruction and build-up of arms and weapons. The kind of slavery that came up in Europe in the

second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through military regulations is more terrible than the shameful slavery of old.<sup>154</sup>

There's no denying that today's Islamic governments are yeomen to the countries vested with worldly powers. The root cause of this humiliation is only that they've retraced their steps on the path of prosperity, for they are now putting the life of this world prior to the life to come— which is vice versa of what was commanded by their religion: والأخرة خير وأبقى “although the life to come is better and more enduring,”<sup>155</sup> and have thus become the sad pictures of what is declared in the Qur'an as: خسرا الدنيا والأخرة “losing [thereby both] this world and the life to come.”<sup>156</sup> Using the potentials and resources of these “subjects” in a way to mar their interests and selfishly steering the expansionist ambitions is an unparalleled, brutal form of slavery of the recent times. Israel-Lebanon war of 2006 if viewed through the lens of religion, can be taken as an example. Jews backed by the Christians intruded a Muslim country to satisfy their regional & financial ends; all the rich Muslim countries were cast by the UN to provide food and shelter to the war-hit people. Nor is this all, they were put to donating huge amounts to the rebuilding of Lebanon funds which were run by the UN herself. See how these poor puppets and poodles are being fried into their own grease!

Allama Muhammad Iqbal, poet of the East, has too wept over this sad picture and position of the Muslims, concatenating its cause to be the customization of Muslim mind in the frames of Europe which has eventually voided the Muslims of their actual substance of the self. Let me quote here only one from scores of such laments from his poetry; this is from *The Rod of Moses*.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Tolstoy, *Social Evils & Their Remedy*.

<sup>155</sup> Q.[87:17].

<sup>156</sup> Q.[22:11].

<sup>157</sup> Translation of Urdu verses is reproduced here by courtesy of Mr Muhammad Suheyl Umer, Director, Iqbal Academy Pakistan; <http://allamaiqbal.com/works/poetry/urdu/zarb/translation/part01/25.htm>

*Dazzled by Europe*

Your light is only Europe's light  
reflected:

You are four walls her architects  
have built,

A shell of dry mud with no  
tenant soul,

An empty scabbard chased with  
flowery gilt!

افرنک زده

ترا وجود سراپا تجھ تلی افسرنک  
کہ تو وہاں کے عمارت کروں کی ہے تعمیر  
مگر یہ سیکر خالی خودی سے ہے حتمی  
فقط نیام ہے تو، زرنکارو بے ششیر!

Actually all non-Muslims have dual standards of measurement. When it comes to criticizing the Muslims who earn their living by serving in the Muslim lands thus promoting the businesses of Muslims of these countries, they brand this employment as slavery and slave-like working. On such misleading and wrapped-up statements not only they do not feel guilt but even want standing-ovation in their favour. For example, a statement of the US State department runs thus:

Saudi Arabia is a destination for men and women from South and East Asia and East Africa trafficked for the purpose of labour exploitation, and for children from Yemen, Afghanistan, and Africa trafficking for forced begging. Hundreds of thousands of low-skilled workers from India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Kenya migrate voluntarily to Saudi Arabia; some fall into conditions of involuntary servitude, suffering from physical and sexual abuse, non-payment or delayed payment of wages, the withholding of travel documents, restrictions on their freedom of movement and non-consensual contract alterations. The Government of Saudi Arabia does

not comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so.<sup>158</sup>

But when they themselves rinse the skilled manpower of these Muslim countries under different “talent-hunt” programmes, it is by no means a fraudulent tactic aimed at serving the selfish, financial ends. When visas lotteries fuel the industries with the youth of these countries, they take it to be their right. When they check the passengers of these countries by undressing them and not only withhold their travel documents but all their educational degrees and job certificates, it is again justified! What a dual behaviour it is?

A singsong voice is usually easy on the ears. Listen to another melodious poem which is composed in the same music and rhythm but is being sung in a different tune. This extract is taken from a report which refers to human trafficking and sexual exploitation: “As unimaginable as it seems, slavery and bondage still persist in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Millions of people around the world still suffer in silence in slave-like situations of forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation from which they cannot free themselves. Trafficking in persons is one of the greatest human rights challenges of our time.”<sup>159</sup> Instead of searching for the real statistics of the inputs and proving the authenticity of such claims in detail, for the sake of sampling suffice will be to calculate the portion of this “millions of people” that is being forced to work as sex-labour inside the US today; the result will take reader to the snapshot of white-slavery of the olden days. Again, how funny it becomes when they who themselves have given women the right of vote a few decades back foster malicious activists in the name of women rights and compel governments to frame laws in harmony with their culture so that the societies of these countries also get dyed in their colours of immodesty and free-sex, but since they do it so as to get ready sex-labour well able to boost their sex-trade round the globe, this debauchery becomes a business plan and hence there arises no question of moral values!

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<sup>158</sup> Report of US State Department. <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005/46616.htm>.

<sup>159</sup> US State Department Trafficking in Persons Report, June 2003.

### 3. The Policy of Islam

I've depicted at some length the policy of non-Muslims who seize the reins of other countries. Now I'll try to deliver the policy of Islam in this respect. Basically, the wars of Islam (which are one of the two avenues of enslavement as allowed in Islam) were never fought to the mere end of seizing any piece of land or capturing people; the motive prevailing behind these expeditions have always been to exalt the Word of Allah. So much so that if there were found any worldly ambition behind even after the conquest, captives were set free and conquered lands were thus withdrew, and that too with compensation. Traditionally the ruler of Islam (the caliph of course) is the person who "takes from God" and "dissipates among the fellow people."<sup>160</sup> Thus the ruler's sight is never set on the worldly resources of the countryside or to selfishly exploiting the potentials of the ruled. For example, Rab'i ibn Amir, delegate of the commander of Muslim army in the lands of Iraq (the then part of Persian Empire) addressed the assembly of the king saying: *اللّٰه ابتمعثنا لنخرج من شاء من* Allah has sent us to bring the people to light from the worship of people towards the worship of Allah, from the narrowness of the world towards its vastness, from the oppression of religions towards the justice of Islam."<sup>161</sup> Muslims are taught that every Muslim is a brother of the other Muslim in the name of religion and every non-Muslim is their brother on account of his being the son of Adam *عليه السلام*.<sup>162</sup> Therefore, the propagatory efforts of Muslims are with none other ambition than to save these non-Muslim brothers from the hellfire; use of armour is subject to the work of propagation and is allowed only in the extreme situation, and that too with weeping hearts that such brothers are being killed as are making the sons of Adam *عليه السلام* the fuel of hellfire. Before the combat, it is necessary for Muslims to convey their invitation to those to whom it has not reached. If they begin fighting without that then add to vacating

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<sup>160</sup> Maulana Muhammad Ahmad Ansari, *Establishing of Deen in the Times of the Prophet ﷺ* Its Methodology, p. 113.

<sup>161</sup> Muhammad Yusuf Kandhalavi, *Hayat al-Sahabah*, Dar al-Kutub al-Arabi, p. 129.

<sup>162</sup> *لقد كرمنا بني آدم* "Indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam." Q.[17:70].

the captured land & resources they will have to pay blood-money against everyone whom they have killed. Scores of such instances are found in history.

This depiction lends colour to the fact— and the history bears witness to it— that the Muslim rulers of all times gave important offices to non-Muslims in government. They never differentiated on the bases of colour or ancestry. The Islamic teachings of fraternity had given them much encouragement and a broad outlook. Their behaviour reflected the Islamic spirit of compassion for mankind and a sense of well-wishing for them. It is on the threshold of this conscientiousness alone that the people wherever Muslims went as conquerors welcomed them. People of India, for example, were very sad when Muhammad ibn Qasim was summoned by the caliphate. They even built his statue in his memory. This is the proof of Muslim integrity and honest intentions that where on earth they halted on the march, that country's wealth and resources did multiply, knowledge and sciences were promoted and civilized behaviour became common. Now mentioning the behaviour of the Europeans in contrast, I need not to cite the rest since only one example of the British Raj over India (as made a collective slave) is suffice.

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## SLAVERY IN ISLAM: A SYNONYM OF SINGLE FRATERNITY & BROTHERHOOD

### **Reformation: Rational, Balanced & Gentlemanly Approach of Islam**

Islam is the last of all revealed religions. The institution of slavery was therefore come down to it from earlier times. The Qur'ān did away with many of the deeply rooted practices yet astonishingly it is silent on the one-word allowance or the otherwise of the matter in question. If we think for a while, we'll soon come to the conclusion that it is a blessing for the mankind that Allāh did not annul this practice at one go. Slavery was intertwined with the utmost relation of the people to whom the Messenger of Allāh صلى الله

عليه وسلم was sent. Its extinction was only to be achieved by the continued agency of wise and humane laws, and not by the sudden and entire emancipation of the existing slaves, which was morally and economically impossible. Numberless provisions, negative as well as positive, were accordingly introduced in order to promote and accomplish a gradual enfranchisement. "A contrary policy would have produced an utter collapse of the infant common wealth."<sup>163</sup>

Western writers do agree on the policy of gradual elimination of slavery as initially engendered by Islam. "Surely, those people who kept slaves had some reasons for that and they were not themselves responsible for this practice which had come down to them from earlier times. Besides, if slavery were abolished all of a sudden, what would have become of the black slaves? If they were given the same rights as the whites then the people of the south [America] would have been terrified by the prospects."<sup>164</sup>

"Islam let slavery be practiced firstly to preserve military balance with the enemy. The second reason is that in this way, weak women and children could be supported and helped, for their men had been killed in war. If they were left to look after themselves then they would have been a problem for society and there might have been mischief and corruption." writes Dr Hasan Ibrahim Hasan.<sup>165</sup> Such a situation did appear in the recent past and many of those who have seen the victims are yet alive. During the WW1 in England and Germany, sex had deflated to a mere loaf of bread and a cup of tea. The film "Bus Stop" of Marilyn Monroe, which was a lamenting picturesque of this downeering of women, is not yet deleted from the memory of people. Islam has never gone against the spirit of the times. When such miserable situations make their presence felt and spot the face of humanity, people of knowledge bow before Allāh as they find a solution that Islam carries.

Islam addressed national and social reformation with very wise steps.

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<sup>163</sup> Syed Ameer Ali: The Spirit of Islam, p-262

<sup>164</sup> Encyclopedia of Religion & Ethics; vol XI, (Christian Slavery)

<sup>165</sup> Hasan Ibrahim Hasan: Tarikh al-Islami al-Siyasi, p-23; as referenced by Maulana Saeed Ahmad: Slavery in Islam, p-80

Forbidding of wine and usury are very common examples of this nature. We must place slavery as one of such stunts since it was an essential part of the social and civic life in those days. Thus, the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم did not announce an abrupt abolition of this practice; he rather incorporated such perfect and basic reformation that among Muslims, slavery did transform into a perfect “brotherhood.”

This human treatment of slaves did travel in the Caliphate and in the Muslim governments of the later times as well, and it has been exercised throughout the jurisdiction of Islam. Umer رضى الله عنه once wrote to the governor of Egypt when getting to know about his hardness: يا عمرو متى استعبدتم الناس وقد ولدتهم امهاتهم احراراً (O A’mr! Why enslave people when their mothers delivered them free?)<sup>166</sup>

### Scope of Enslavement in Islam

Islamic legislation brought two major changes to ancient slavery which were to have far-reaching effects: the presumption of freedom and putting ban on the enslavement of free persons except in strictly defined circumstances. Muslim jurists defined slavery as an exceptional condition, with the general rule being a presumption of freedom (—الاصل هو الحرية) —“*The basic principle is liberty*”) for a person if his origins were unknown. Furthermore, lawful enslavement was restricted to two instances: capture in war (on condition that the prisoner is not a Muslim), or birth in slavery.<sup>167</sup>

The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم first disallowed within his fraternity all prevailing ways of enslavement sparing only one, which is jihād. Before that, when people were distressed with poverty and hunger, they sold their children or even themselves to someone. This also happened when they were burdened with debt. Those who bought them, enslaved them. People were

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<sup>166</sup> <http://www.islamonline.net/iol-english/dowalia/art-2000-August-22/art13.asp>

<sup>167</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam\\_and\\_slavery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_and_slavery)

also enslaved when they committed a crime or lost in gambling. Or, people were just picked up or stolen and enslaved forcibly. The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم declared all these kinds of slavery as forbidden and means of inviting wrath of Allāh. He spared only one means of taking slaves: by permitting the Imam to enslave the war captives if he deemed it wise in the situation.<sup>168</sup> It must be clear that it is only a *permission*, not a command or binding.

Islamic warfare is very often misinterpreted. We must realize that jihād is waged when an intense mischief is going on. Muslims participate in jihād for no other reason but to raise the Word of Allāh and with no desire to gain worldly benefits. It is worth considering that on the one hand we are told that male or female slaves can be acquired only through jihād when they are taken captives, but on the other we are told that we may take part in jihād only for the sake of Allāh and not aspire slaves or other worldly possessions. The natural corollary to this attitude is that warriors will make little effort to arrest anyone, and if a few are arrested, no one will make much effort to enslave them. They will fear that if they receive some worldly gains then that might offset their reward from Allāh against jihād. This reformation towards the institution of slavery is not small in anyway.

Note that all avenues of taking slaves are close but one and that too is beset with strong warnings that any thought of taking slaves would erase all reward and the warrior's sole aim should be to gain pleasure of Allāh.

### **All Believers are but Brethren<sup>169</sup>**

Contrary to the Greek, Roman, Christian and Hindu descriptions, Islam placed a slave in conjunction with his master: a man with feelings and thoughts. Islam changed through different ways the conventional mind about male and female slaves which has persisted hitherto in every nation and religion. Teachings of Islam in this regard are of two kinds: concerning all human beings including slaves and others specific to slaves.

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<sup>168</sup> Maulana Saeed Ahmad: Slavery in Islam, p-87

<sup>169</sup> انما المؤمنون اخوة Q.[49:10]

This is the individuality of Islam that it has done away with distinction of colour, ancestry, tribe and nation in the truest sense of the term, and has brought all mankind into a single brotherhood. Mark of excellence in these quarters is but piety.<sup>170</sup> Attributes of wealth, position, complexion and ancestry are though offerings of Allāh but He Himself states the reason behind these as “that you might come to know one another.”<sup>171</sup> This explanation runs as: يا ايها الناس انا جعلتكم شعوباً وقبائل لتعارفوا. ان اكرمكم عند الله لا فضل لعربي على عجمي ولا لعجمي على عربي ولا لاحمر على اسود ولا لا تقوى “O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of Allāh is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him.”<sup>172</sup> The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم explained this verse saying: لا فضل لعربي على عجمي ولا لعجمي على عربي ولا لاحمر على اسود ولا لا تقوى “Neither does an Arab has excellence over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab over an Arab. Neither does a white skin excel over a black. But, excellence is only on the basis of Taqwa.”<sup>173</sup> Thus, in the sight of Islam all men are equal without distinction of colour and ancestry, ruler and ruled, master and slave. These differences are not excuses for giving unequal treatment to anyone.

The uniform practice of this command of انما المومنون اخوة throughout the Muslim lands did compel even the most biased writers to concede and praise Islamic reforms. Francis Atterbury writes: “A negro when he embraces Islam begins to feel honoured and believes himself to be not a slave, but a free man.”<sup>174</sup> Another writer of this line traces the reason for the spread of Islam in Africa as: “Islam does not recognize ranks and levels in society. A negro when becomes a Muslim does not consider himself lowly... There are rich and poor men in every religion but we do not find the hard heartedness in a

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<sup>170</sup> Q.[49:13]

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Musnad Ahmad: 22391

<sup>174</sup> Rex A Barrell: Francis Atterbury 1662-1732- Bishop of Rochester and his French Correspondents

Muslim rich man that we find in our rich men. The Muslim rich in comparison to Christian rich is more mindful of the vicissitudes of fate and blessings. And, it is not difficult for a Muslim poor to enter a Muslim rich man's house and find hospitality there.”<sup>175</sup>

Narrating the parable of the Muslim society around Sultān Sī alāhī uddīn Ayyubi, Stanley Lane-Poole has confessed: “Their slaves were as honourable and proud as the commanders of the democracies of the middle ages. And when they had the royal power in their hands they inherited the right, noble traditions of their masters.”<sup>176</sup>

### **Kind Treatment to Slaves**

Among the people with whom Qur’ān exceptionally commands to deal with kindness lie the slaves as well.<sup>177</sup> The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself has been so kind to his slave Zaid ibn Hāritha رضى الله عنه that people generally called him Zaid ibn Muhammad. Once his father came to Madinah and requested Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم to release Zaid against compensation. The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم replied him to ask Zaid, and if he were willing to go with him, he might go. When he asked Zaid, he preferred slavery over the freedom and refused to go back to his tribe.

As regards the female slaves, Islam encourages to look after them and giving them good training of the household, etc. The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said in a Hadith: “Three people will get two great rewards: (1) He who educates his female slave and gives her a very good education and teaches her manners thoroughly and then sets her free and marries her...”<sup>178</sup> Naturally, the house of such a master is not a cell to imprison but is the best cradle for developing natural potentials as are necessary for the rest of life.

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<sup>175</sup> Maulana Saeed Ahmad: Slavery in Islam, pp-192-3

<sup>176</sup> Stanley Lane-Poole: Saladin: All-Powerful Sultan and the Uniter of Islam, p-22

<sup>177</sup> Q.[4:36]

<sup>178</sup> Sahīh Bukhāri: 4693

## Social Status of Slaves

Islam tells that slaves are our brothers and they must be treated as such. It is only with Islam that it does not use words that refer to slaves in a derogatory manner, or placing them as an unchaste, detested lot. A well-known Hadith is available in all authentic books of Traditions: اخوانكم جعلهم: “Your slaves are your brothers whom Allāh has placed in your hands...”<sup>179</sup> In another Hadith did the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم teach the words to be used when calling a slave: لا يقولن احدكم عبدى و امتى ولا يقولن المملوك ربى و ربتى. وليقل المالك فتاى و فتاتى وليقل المملوك سيدى و سيدتى فانكم المملوكون والرب الله عزوجل. “Let no one of you say *my slave* or *my female slave*. And let not a slave say *my lord*. The master should say *my son* or *my daughter* and the slave should say *syedi* or *syedati* (respectively for master and lady) because all of you are owned and the Lord of all is Allāh.”<sup>180</sup>

The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم once gave a slave of ripe age to his daughter Fātimah رضى الله عنها. She had on her a cloak that was so small that if she covered her head her feet bared. Seeing her in unease the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: “It doesn’t matter. He is only your father.”<sup>181</sup>

These words make the philosophy of Islam clear: slaves are their sons and daughters, and are even their fathers and mothers; the only exception is that they do not have the right to inherit.

It was the outcome of molding of minds that a black Ethiopian slave Bilal رضى الله عنه was called *manlana* (Lit. our lord) by all the Muslim community, especially by Umer رضى الله عنه. This was a feather in his cap that he was the

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<sup>179</sup> Sahīh Muslim: 1661, 4094

<sup>180</sup> Sahīh Muslim: 2249.

<sup>181</sup> Sunan Abu Daūd: 5382

official caller designate to collective and congregational prayers (موذن *muazzin* by terminology). Umer رضى الله عنه used to mention about him: “Our master Abu Bakr رضى الله عنه set free our master [Bilal رضى الله عنه].”<sup>182</sup>

The teachings of Islam encouraged the Arabs to shun the narrow tribal and national outlook. They came to regard one another as a larger Islamic fraternity and became very kind in their treatment to male and female slaves. Umer رضى الله عنه said about Sālim رضى الله عنه, a slave, that if he were alive he would have entrusted him the reins of government. Mu’āviyah رضى الله عنه used to say: “If Muslims were not to swear allegiance to Yazīd, I’d have left the caliph to the consultation between Qāsim and Muhammad.”<sup>183</sup> The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said himself: “Obey your caliph even if he is a black slave.”<sup>184</sup>

It is noteworthy that Islam imparted these teachings and fostered such behaviour in a time which was very unfortunate for slaves. Let me quote here an example of the very days: In the 611 CE, a little after the Heraclius ascended the throne, his wife dead. Her funeral was being carried over to the cemetery when one of the slave girls accompanying it spat on the ground. She was sentenced to death for that.<sup>185</sup>

## **The Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم Carry out Regarding POWs & Emancipation**

Although slavery in itself was not abolished by the Qur’ān, Muslims were admonished to treat their slaves well: In the instance of illness, for example, it would be required for the slave to be looked after. Slave manumission

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<sup>182</sup> Ibn Hābal: Fazāil e Sahābah: vol.1, p-237

<sup>183</sup> Mu’āviyah رضى الله عنه is mentioning here the names of two slaves (Qāsim & Muhammad) of the famous “7 jurists of Madīnah.” Remaining five are: Ubaid Allāh, Urwah, Saeed, Sulemān & Khārijah.

<sup>184</sup> Sahīh Bukhārī: 6609

<sup>185</sup> Robert Browning: The Byzantine Empire, p-99

(declaring the slave to be free) would be considered a meritorious act, although the slave would be eligible to ransom himself with the money he has earned while conducting his own business. Slave owners were encouraged to allow their slaves to earn their freedom, and to *أَتَوْهُمْ مِنْ مَالِ اللَّهِ* “give them [their share] of wealth of Allāh which He has given you.”<sup>186</sup>

In pre-Islamic times, the Arabs used to change the lineage of their adopted sons to their own lineage. Hence slaves with last names often assumed the last name of their owners.<sup>187</sup> In Islam, however, slave owners were instructed to keep the family names of the slaves unaltered and not to name them after their owners<sup>188</sup>: *ادعُوهُمْ لِأَبَائِهِمْ هُوَ أَقْسَطُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ*. See that it is the Qur’ān only which is addressing the issue of *identity theft*, and Islam rightfully looks down upon it.<sup>189</sup> Today’s world has come to make identity theft a stunt only a few years back.<sup>190</sup>

Both the Qur’ān and Hadith are repeatedly exhorting Muslims to treat the slaves well. Muhammad *صلى الله عليه وسلم* himself showed this both in action and in words. His famous Last Address<sup>191</sup> and scores of other Hadiths emphasize that all believers, whether free or enslaved, are siblings.

Recalling the Battle of Badr, Abu Aziz ibn Umayr (who was the flag-bearer

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<sup>186</sup> Q.[24:33]

<sup>187</sup> [www.theislamproject.org/docs/lesson%20plan%20afri%20american.doc](http://www.theislamproject.org/docs/lesson%20plan%20afri%20american.doc)

<sup>188</sup> “(As for your adopted children,) call them by their (real) fathers’ names: this is more equitable in the sight of Allāh...” Q.[33:5]

<sup>189</sup> Once this principle became part of the divine law, the Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* was instructed to further emphasize it by a series of warnings. For example, on one occasion he said, “He who knowingly attributed his fatherhood to someone other than his real father, he but disbelieves in Allāh; and if somebody claims to belong to some folk to whom he does not belong, let such a person take his place in the (Hell) Fire.” *Sahīh Bukhārī: Vol.4, Book 56, No.711*

<sup>190</sup> <http://www.identity-theft.org.uk/>

<sup>191</sup> Address of Muhammad *صلى الله عليه وسلم* delivered at his Farewell Hajj which is consonant with the charter of human rights.

of Quraish and was taken captive and thus enslaved,) reports that those Muslims who took him as captive when had their meals in the morning and evening, they made to do with dates but fed him with bread because the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had commanded them to treat the slaves well.<sup>192</sup>

In the Battle of Hunayn, six thousand of the enemies were taken prisoners, but they were all set free at once. Same did happen in the Battle of Banu Mustaliq when six hundred prisoners were set free since the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم married Juwairiyya عنها رضي الله عنها, a lady of the clan of these prisoners.<sup>193</sup> And at the conquest of Makkah, no one was enslaved either.<sup>194</sup>

### **From the Lens of Jurisprudence: Legal Status of Slaves in Islam**

Islam has allowed the master to benefit from the services of slaves. Masters are given no right whatever on human aspect and soul of their slaves. Within Islamic jurisprudence, slaves are able to occupy any office within the government, and instances of this in history include the Mamluk who ruled Egypt for almost 260 years and the Eunuchs (castrated human male) who have held military and administrative positions of note. Slaves were also able to marry, own property, occupy the seat of religious learning and lead the congregational prayers. The master has to covenant with Allāh that he will not burden the slave more than his strength, will feed him that which he eats, will take care of his clothing, will not slander him, will not castrate him, will not curse him, and so on.

The equality of the slave and the master does not rest with life alone but is extended to limbs and organs too— he who cuts his nose, his nose will be

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<sup>192</sup> Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Sirājuddin): Muhammad- His Life Based on the Earliest Sources

<sup>193</sup> It was due to such incidents of social & public blessing that Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم appreciated contracts of marriage from the core of his heart. In a Hadith reported by Ibn Abbās رضي الله عنه carries words as: “لم تر للمتحابين مثل النكاح:” “I’ve not seen a thing which increases love between the two [tribes] like that of marriage.” Ibn Mājah: 1847 as referenced at: <http://duskanddawn.wordpress.com/2007/03/11/weakness-no-1/>

<sup>194</sup> Martin Lings (Abu Bakr Sirājuddin): Muhammad- His Life Based on the Earliest Sources

cut and he who castrates his slave, will be castrated.<sup>195</sup>

The marriage of slaves required the consent of the owner. Under the Hānafi and Shāfi schools of jurisprudence male slaves could marry two wives, but the Māliki permitted them to marry four wives like the free men. According to the Islamic law, a male slave could marry a free woman.

Islam has not denied the slave the freedom of thought and speech: slave can give advice to his master. Slaves are given equal share of the spoils of war. Their testimony is maintainable. Their offering of protection to anyone is proper.<sup>196</sup> Disfiguring slaves is barred; and if punishment becomes necessary, it'll be half that of a free man.<sup>197</sup>

### **Concede the Doyens of Enemy Quarters...**

The kind of slavery that Islam has condoned as temporary measure is not really slavery. Nieboer has stated very clearly that if slavery is founded on a mutual understanding by the two parties then that is not slavery but service.<sup>198</sup> It is clear that the application of Nieboer's words is not fitting over the Islamic way of treatment of slaves. "The slavery which was allowed in Islam had, in fact, nothing in common with that which was in vogue in Christendom until recent times, or with American slavery until the holy war of 1865 put all end to that curse" writes Syed Ameer Ali while comparing Christianity and Islam.<sup>199</sup> "... and it is simply an abuse of the words to apply the word slavery in the English sense, to any status known to the legislation of Islam."<sup>200</sup>

Singing one's own praises is not a fair play. Let me now quote here some of the praises that Christian scholars have sung about the practice of slavery in Islam. F Denberg writes: "The laws of Islam are very good for the slaves

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<sup>195</sup> Maulana Saeed Ahmad: Slavery in Islam, p-149

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. p-159

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. p-177

<sup>198</sup> Herman Jeremias Nieboer: Slavery as an Industrial System; Ethnological Researches

<sup>199</sup> Syed Ameer Ali: The Spirit of Islam, p-364

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. p-263

which prove that Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم and his followers had great human sympathy... The laws of Islam are meant to break down the practices which until now great civilized nations adopted. True, Islam has not abolished the institution of slavery that was spread the world over but it has tried much to improve the lot of the slave.”<sup>201</sup>

W G Palgrave writes: “I have met negro slaves in Arabia frequently... I found everywhere that the slaves were in much improved state, and the practice of setting them free is also very common... Although a freed slave cannot approach the rich and the noble in the beginning and no Arab chief consents to give his daughter in marriage to a slave, yet these people are safe from the restrictions of colour and blood that are common to the English nations.”<sup>202</sup>

Paul Johnson wrote: “It can be said justly that although Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم has allowed slavery to continue yet he has exhorted his followers forcefully to be mild to slaves and to look after them. As far as possible, he has made life easy and comfortable for the slaves.”<sup>203</sup> He further writes: “If all the owners of slaves had abided by the exhortations that the Messenger of Islam suggested to them, then there is no doubt that slavery would have been abolished in a matter of days.”<sup>204</sup>

Gustave Le Bon, the French physician and sociologist, has written in his book *La Civilisation des Arabes*: “When the word slavery is spoken to a European who reads American novels and tales of the last thirty years, he pictures poor people shackled in iron chains being whipped. People who are not even fed enough and made to live in shabby, dingy cabins. It does not concern me whether the European slaves face these things or not, but there is no doubt the picture of a slave in Islam is absolutely different from the

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<sup>201</sup> From: Mrs M F Anderson: *The Baptists in Sweden*, p-83

<sup>202</sup> From: G H Pember: *Earths Earliest Ages*, p-247

<sup>203</sup> Paul Johnson: *History of Christianity*

<sup>204</sup> *Studies in Muhammadanism*, p-352; as referenced by Maulana Saeed Ahmad: *Slavery in Islam*, p-131

picture of the European slave.”<sup>205</sup>

A Dutch scholar and traveler Snouck Hurgronje relates: “The slaves are well fed... They get garments and whatever one requires to make life pleasant, plentifully... they are slaves only in name... Honorable families consider it their duty to provide residential accommodation to their freed slaves... owners of houses and shops are they who had been slaves and their black skin does not deter progress... The negro women normally work at homes and also look after the kitchen...”<sup>206</sup>

Joseph Thompson, an African traveler, wrote to The London Times: “I can say with confidence that I have more experience about the central eastern Africa than anyone of your correspondents or reporters. If slave markets flourish here, the reason is that Islam has not been preached here. I am sure if Islam was preached here then slave trade would have been eliminated long ago.”<sup>207</sup>

R Bosworth Smith has written: “Let us see what Islam did about slavery. Indeed, there has been a reformation more than what has been done for women. Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم did not put an end to slavery because that was neither possible nor expedient given the state of Arab life at that time, but he encouraged them to emancipate slaves. He underlined the principle that the slave who embraces Islam is free. More praiseworthy is that if a freed slave lives honorably, he must not be looked down upon... A slave who is protected in this way by law and religion cannot fit the everyday description of slaves... The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had permitted that women captives may be made slaves but if one of them delivers her master’s child then she cannot be separated from her child or resold. Rather, on the death of her master she becomes a free woman. These compassionate rules... were not incorporated in any European or American slave trading

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<sup>205</sup> Gustave Le Bon: Gustave Le Bon- The Man and His Works: A Presentation with Introduction, First Translation into English, and Edited Extracts

<sup>206</sup> C Snouck Hurgronje: Mohammedanism- Lectures on its Origin, its Religious and Political Growth, and its Present State

<sup>207</sup> The London Times: November 14, 1887

country until slavery was banished from all Christian countries.”<sup>208</sup>

In spite of being very prejudicial, Dieter Dowe cannot help confess the truth: “Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم was very kind and merciful. Indeed, it was his aim that the lot of the slaves should be improved. If he had thought of wiping out slavery at one stroke then that was impossible. But by declaring انما المومنون اخوة<sup>209</sup> ‘all believers are but brethren,’<sup>209</sup> he thought of a certain way to eliminate slavery gradually and that was the best option available to him... He instructed: ‘As for your slaves, listen, give them to eat what you eat. Clothe them what you wear. If they make a mistake which you cannot forgive then you’d dispose off them because they are slaves of Allāh Who should not be hurt. O People! Listen to me, and understand it well. Muslims are brothers one of the other. All of you are equal. And all of you are a single fraternity.’<sup>210</sup> We must confess that his teachings are practiced in some countries but, it is very sad that we do not it practiced in any Christian country. Umer رضى الله عنه holds the reins of his camel while his slave is riding it. The dear daughter of the Prophet رضى الله عنها Fātimah, صلى الله عليه وسلم, grinds the handmill with her female slaves. These are examples of the Prophet’s صلى الله عليه وسلم teachings.”<sup>211</sup>

Annemarie Schimmel, a contemporary scholar on Islamic civilization, asserts that because the status of slave under Islam could only be obtained through either being a prisoner of war (this was soon restricted only to infidels captured in a holy war) or born from slave parents, slavery would be theoretically abolished with the expansion of Islam.<sup>212</sup>

Islam’s reforms seriously limited the supply of new slaves. In the early days of Islam, a plentiful supply of new slaves was brought due to rapid conquest

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<sup>208</sup> R Bosworth Smith: Muhammad and Muhammadanism, pp-243-45

<sup>209</sup> Q.[49:10]

<sup>210</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Farewell\\_Sermon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Farewell_Sermon)

<sup>211</sup> Dieter Dowe: Europe in 1848: Revolution and Reform

<sup>212</sup> Annemarie Schimmel: And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety

and expansion. But as the frontiers were gradually stabilized, this supply dwindled to a mere trickle. The prisoners of later wars between Muslims and Christians were commonly ransomed or exchanged. Patrick Manning, a professor of World History, states that Islamic legislations against the abuse of the slaves convincingly limited the extent of slavery in Arabian peninsula and to a lesser degree for the whole area of the whole Umayyad Caliphate where slavery existed since the most ancient times.<sup>213</sup>

### **Slave Trade in the Early Islamic Caliphate**

Of course, the buying and selling of slaves is a very repulsive thing. But, just as slavery was permitted out of compulsion, so too the trade in slaves was allowed for the benefit of the slave. Just as divorce is allowed only in extreme cases, so too the buying and selling of slaves was allowed in unavoidable cases.

Some people visited Mu'āviyah رضى الله عنه. He asked them what they did. They disclosed that they were engaged in slave trade. He said to them: *بئس* "This is a bad business; a soul has to be looked after and that is much toilsome."<sup>214</sup>

The business in slaves had picked up in the Abbasside period but they kept an eye on those who were engaged in this business. A special post was created under the name *قيّم الرقيق qayyim al raqiq* (supervisor of slave trade) that superintended these transactions.<sup>215</sup>

Commenting on the position of slavery and slave trade in the early Islamic caliphate, Syed Ameer Ali writes: "Slave lifting and slave dealing, patronized by dominant Christianity, and sanctified by Judaism, were utterly reprobated and condemned. The man dealt in slaves was declared the outcast of

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<sup>213</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery\\_in\\_Islam#\\_note-Manning1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_Islam#_note-Manning1)

<sup>214</sup> D. Crecelius, Ahmad D. Damurdashi & Abd Al-Wahhab Bakr: *Al-Damurdashi's Chronicle of Egypt 1968-1755: Al-Durra Al-Musana Fi Akhbar Al-Kinana* (Arab History & Civilization, Vol 2)

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

humanity.”<sup>216</sup> He further writes: “Slavery by purchase was unknown during the reigns of the first four Caliphs رضى الله عنهم. There is at least no authentic record of any slave having been acquired by purchase during their tenure of the office... During the reigns of early Abbassides, the Shia Imām Ja’far al Sādiq preached against slavery.”<sup>217</sup>

## A Note on Concubine: Ladyfying the slave women

Indeed, if we want to discuss whether women’s status in pre-Islamic Arabia was ‘good’ or ‘bad’ we have to compare it to the neighbouring civilizations at that time. If compared with the status of women in Europe, or even the Byzantine Middle East at that time, Arabian women were not treated badly.<sup>218</sup> What types of marriage (Lit. male-female relationship) were current those days and what Islam did to do away with all forms of indecencies therein, can be judged in the light of a Hadith which is reported by Āisha رضى الله عنها, the Mother of the Faithful:

عَنْ ابْنِ شِهَابٍ قَالَ أَخْبَرَنِي عُرْوَةُ بْنُ الرَّبِيعِ أَنَّ عَائِشَةَ زَوْجَ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَخْبَرَتْهُ أَنَّ النَّكَاحَ فِي الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ كَانَ عَلَى أَرْبَعَةِ أَنْحَاءٍ فَنِكَاحٌ مِنْهَا يَنْكَاحُ النَّاسَ الْيَوْمَ يَخْطُبُ الرَّجُلُ إِلَى الرَّجُلِ وَلَيْتَهُ أَوْ ابْنَتَهُ فَيُصَدِّقُهَا ثُمَّ يَنْكِحُهَا وَيَنْكَاحُ آخَرَ كَانَ الرَّجُلُ يَقُولُ لِأَمْرَأَتِهِ إِذَا طَهَّرْتِ مِنْ طَمَئِنِّهَا أُرْسِلِي إِلَى فُلَانٍ فَاسْتَبْصِعِي مِنْهُ وَيَعْتَرِلُهَا زَوْجَهَا وَلَا يَمَسُّهَا أَبَدًا حَتَّى يَبْتَيِّنَ حَمْلَهَا مِنْ ذَلِكَ الرَّجُلِ الَّذِي تَسْتَبْصِعُ مِنْهُ فَإِذَا تَبَيَّنَ حَمْلُهَا أَصَاتَهَا زَوْجَهَا إِذَا أَحَبَّ وَإِنَّمَا يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ رَغْبَةً فِي نَجَابَةِ الْوَلَدِ فَكَانَ هَذَا النِّكَاحُ يَنْكَاحُ الْإِسْتِبْصَاعَ وَنِكَاحُ آخَرَ يَجْتَمِعُ الرَّهْطُ مَا دُونَ الْعَشْرَةِ فَيَدْخُلُونَ عَلَى الْمَرْأَةِ كُلَّهُمْ بِصَبِيئِهَا إِذَا حَمَلَتْ وَوَضَعَتْ وَمَرَّ عَلَيْهَا لَيْالٍ بَعْدَ أَنْ تَضَعَ حَمْلَهَا أُرْسِلَتْ إِلَيْهِمْ فَلَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ رَجُلٌ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يَمْتَنِعَ حَتَّى يَجْتَمِعُوا عِنْدَهَا تَقُولُ لَهُمْ قَدْ عَرَفْتُمْ الَّذِي كَانَ مِنْ أَمْرِكُمْ وَقَدْ وُلِدْتُ فَهِيَ ابْنُكَ يَا فُلَانُ تُسَمِّي مَنْ أَحَبَّبْتَ بِاسْمِهِ فَيَلْحَقُ بِهِ وَلِذَلِكَ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ أَنْ يَمْتَنِعَ بِهِ الرَّجُلُ وَنِكَاحُ الرَّابِعِ يَجْتَمِعُ النَّاسَ الْكَثِيرُ فَيَدْخُلُونَ عَلَى الْمَرْأَةِ لَا تَمْتَنِعُ مِمَّنْ جَاءَهَا وَهِيَ الْبَغَايَا كُنَّ يَنْصِبْنَ عَلَى أَبْوَابِهِنَّ رَابَاتٍ تَكُونُ عَلِمًا فَمَنْ أَرَادَهُنَّ دَخَلَ عَلَيْهِنَّ إِذَا حَمَلَتْ إِخْدَاهُنَّ وَوَضَعَتْ حَمْلَهَا جُمِعُوا لَهَا وَدَعُوا لَهُمْ الْقَافَةَ ثُمَّ أَحْفُوا وَلِذَلِكَ بِالَّذِي يَزُونَ فَالْتَأَطُّ بِهِ وَدَعِيَ ابْنَهُ لَا يَمْتَنِعُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ فَلَمَّا بَعِثَ مُحَمَّدٌ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بِالْحَقِّ هَدَمَ نِكَاحَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ كُلَّهُ إِلَّا نِكَاحَ النَّاسِ الْيَوْمِ

Ibn Shehāb narrates that ‘Urwa ibn Zubayr informed him on the authority of Āisha رضى الله عنها, the wife of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that there were four types of marriage in the Times of Ignorance. There was the marriage which is that still practiced by people today in which a man asked another

<sup>216</sup> Syed Ameer Ali: The Spirit of Islam, p-265

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. p-266

<sup>218</sup> <http://www.al-islam.org/restatement/3.htm>

man for his ward or daughter, paid her her dower and then married her. Another type was that a man would say to his wife after she was pure from menstruation, “Send for so-and-so and have intercourse with him.” Her husband would stay away from her and not have sex with her until she became pregnant by that man with whom she was sleeping. When it was clear that she was pregnant, then her husband would sleep with her if he wished. He did that out of the desire for a child of noble descent. This marriage was called *استبضاع* *al-Istibḍāʿ*.<sup>219</sup> Another type of marriage was that a group of less than ten men would go to the same woman and all have intercourse with her. If she became pregnant and gave birth, some days after the birth she would send for them, and none of them could refuse to come. When they were gathered together before her, she would say to them, “You know what you did. I have given birth. It is your son, so-and-so!” She would name whichever of them she wanted to name, and her child would be attributed to him and the man could not deny that. The fourth type of marriage was that many men would go to a woman who would not refuse whoever came to her. They were prostitutes and they used to set up flags at their doors as signs. Whoever wanted could go to them. If one of them became pregnant, when she gave birth, they would be brought together and they would call the physiognomists who would then attach the child to the one they thought was the father. He would be ascribed to him and called his son. None of them could reject that. When Muhammad *صلى الله عليه وسلم* was sent with the truth, he abolished all of the marriages of the Times of Ignorance except the marriage practiced by people today.<sup>219</sup>

I’ll discuss the provenance of decency later but one thing is clear from the face of this Hadith: no matter how defiled was the profile of Arab society at that time, they did not let their women— even if they were as lowly as prostitutes— stay “single mothers” with their “love-child” to feed and bring-up. The tomorrows of an intimate relation were not the lot of women alone; men were endorsed the lion’s share of the aftercome. In the loose-union society of those days in the Arab (of which a reference is coming below), there was a definite system of parentage & childcare and no child was left

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<sup>219</sup> Sahīh Bukhāri: 4732

“single-parent.”<sup>220</sup> This is the fruit of today’s free society.

The period in the Arabian history which preceded the birth of Islam is known as الجاهلية, the Times of Ignorance. Judging by the beliefs and the practices of the pagan Arabs, it appears that it was a most appropriate name. In common with the civilizations of the world, Arabia too was a male-dominated society. The number of women a man could marry was not fixed in this society as well. “Inheritance” in kept women was also current in them since it was a worldwide practice: when a man died, his son “inherited” all his wives except his own mother.

Promiscuity, being present worldwide, was quite common in Makkah before the advent of Islam. Women could “play the field” and enjoy physical relationships with men, without being hindered by demands of strict decency. As Joseph Schacht stated: “The relations of sexes in pre-Islamic Arabia were characterized not so much by polygamy, which certainly existed, as by frequency of divorce, loose unions, and promiscuity, which sometimes make it difficult to draw a line between marriage and prostitution...”<sup>221</sup>

A form of relation current those days was that a husband sent his wife or slave woman to a man of high rank or some other specialty and kept her with him until she got pregnant from that (other) man. This type of marriage was called الاستبضاع نكاح *nikah* *al-Istibḍāʿ* (Lit. eugenics cohabitation) and it was simply for the desire for a noble child.<sup>222</sup> Sperm-banks present in the western world today do endorse the need and desire of this type of marriage. In the Islamic world, such practice is specific alone to the reproduction of livestock.

A group of women, mostly slave-girls, called قيان *qiyān* (singular قينه *qayna*) entertained pilgrims in Makkah as well as the local population. They danced, sang and slept with whomsoever they liked or especially with those could

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<sup>220</sup> [http://www.alsharia.org/2006/alsharia/articles/monthly\\_alsharia/2007/Feb07/KalmaHaq.htm](http://www.alsharia.org/2006/alsharia/articles/monthly_alsharia/2007/Feb07/KalmaHaq.htm)

<sup>221</sup> Joseph Schacht, Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law (Princeton,1981), p-7

<sup>222</sup> [http://www.alsharia.org/2006/alsharia/articles/monthly\\_alsharia/2007/Feb07/KalmaHaq.htm](http://www.alsharia.org/2006/alsharia/articles/monthly_alsharia/2007/Feb07/KalmaHaq.htm)

reward them abundantly for their favours. These slave-girls were captured either in raids or were imported from Iraq or Syria. They are sometimes confused with a type of sex-sellers بغايا *baghāyā* (singular بغيه *baghīyyah*); these were another type of women.<sup>223</sup>

The relations of the sexes were extremely loose. Many a women sold sex to make their living since there was little else they could do. These women flew flags on their houses and were called “ladies of the flags” ذوات الرايات *dhawāt-ur-ra’yāt* (singular ذات الراية *dhāt-er-ra’yah*).

Islam also barred the form of loose union commonly termed as نكاح الموقت *nikah al-mu’aqqat* or نكاح التمتع *nikah al-tamattu’* or متعه *mut’a*, in which a man contracted a temporary marriage with a woman and they lived together as husband and wife for a definite agreed-upon time; and the woman was offered compensation for this service.<sup>224</sup>

In such a society did Islam appear with a paradigm shift and a charter of human rights, woman rights, social reform, family life and the like. With its human development system & legislation at all levels, it triggered the deeply rooted social norms and cultivated the concept of حياء (Lit. modesty).

Islam permits intimate relations between a male master and his female slave outside of marriage referred to in the Qur’ān as “ماملكت ايمانكم” “from among those whom you rightfully possess,”<sup>225</sup> although he may not co-habit with a female slave belonging to his wife. Neither can he have relations with a female slave if she is co-owned, or already married. If the female slave has a child by her master, she then receives the title of ام ولد (Lit. Mother of a child), which is an improvement in her status as she can no longer be sold and is legally freed upon the death of her master. The child, by default, is

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Q.[4:3]

born free due to the father (ie, the master) being a free man. Although there is no limit on the number of concubines a master may possess, the general marital laws are to be observed, such as not having intimate relations with the sister of a female slave.

The concubines, under the Islamic law, had an intermediate position between slave and free. Modern western writers as well do agree to this standpoint of Islam. In Islam, “men are enjoined to marry free women in the first instance, but if they cannot afford the bridewealth for free women, they are told to marry slave women rather than engage in wrongful acts” hold Bloom and Blair.<sup>226</sup> Another rationalization given for recognition of concubinage in Islam is that “it satisfied the sexual desire of the female slaves and thereby prevented the spread of immorality in the Muslim community.”<sup>227</sup>

Concubinage was only allowed as a monogamous relation between the slave woman and her master; it is unfair to confuse this allowance with concupiscence or debauchery in any way. Some Islamic scholars assert that intimate relations with concubines were only permitted because slavery couldn't be eradicated immediately being an essential component of social and economic infrastructure, as Qur'ān presents marriage as the only legal way of satisfying one's sexual desires.

It is safe to say that Islam offered the portal of concubinage for the welfare of enslaved women themselves. A woman who was destined to spend all her life in the shelter of a master and was never to go back to her homeland or environment and/or her husband is killed or slain, she was simply made a plaything and a means of making money. There was no question of her human rights whatsoever. In the days when such women were kept herds, Islam said yes to the basic<sup>228</sup> human rights— satisfying the sexual desire, giving shelter & security, respect for private and family life, children, health, education, liberty and freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion— of such low-profile women who had no say on any

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<sup>226</sup> Bloom and Blair: [www.socialistworld.net/eng/2002/06/06Islam.html](http://www.socialistworld.net/eng/2002/06/06Islam.html)

<sup>227</sup> Sikainga: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/cmcs/publications/modmideast/>

<sup>228</sup> [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/RightsAndResponsibilities/DG\\_4002951](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/RightsAndResponsibilities/DG_4002951)

platform and introduced a humane, decent solution.<sup>229</sup> To crown it all, this intimate relation which on the one hand was fulfilling the essentials of life and basic human needs of these women was leading to their freedom on the other. This solution was, in all ways, most suitable according to the needs of the times.

It will not be out of place to mention here that there were two ways to keep the POWs current in those days: keeping them as state prisoners or distributing them among the families as slaves. It is evident that the first solution was not proper at large and it left the women slaves as mere objects of sex and abuse since every statehand was their owner. Islam did opt the second available norm<sup>230</sup>, and put legislations therein that were adduced to basic human rights and were ensuring a modest living.

Islam has not permitted the master to sleep with his female slave just to satisfy his sexual urge but the permission was based on social demands. If we look at the history we will find that in the last days of Umayyad caliphate and during the Abbasside caliphate the female slaves had played a great role in the progress of the civilization.<sup>231</sup>

### **Contract of Freedom: Mukātabat (مكاتبت)**

*Mukātabat* is a right given to slaves— the right to make contract with their masters according to which they would be required to pay a certain sum of money in a specific time period, or would carry out a specific service for their masters; once they would successfully fulfill either of these two options, they would stand liberated. Slaves who opt for *mukātabat* are called مكاتب *mukātab* and Islamic Jurisprudence has dealt with *mukātab* slave differently, as stated in the Qurʾān.<sup>232</sup>

This right of *mukātabat* was granted to slave-men and slave-women. Prior

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<sup>229</sup> [http://www.alsharia.org/2006/alsharia/articles/monthly\\_alsharia/2006/oct06/Ghulami\\_AbuAmmar.htm](http://www.alsharia.org/2006/alsharia/articles/monthly_alsharia/2006/oct06/Ghulami_AbuAmmar.htm)

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Maulana Saeed Ahmad: Slavery in Islam, p-216

<sup>232</sup> Q.[33:24]

to this, various other directives were given at various stages to gradually reach this stage. These steps are summarized below:<sup>233</sup>

- In the very beginning of its revelation, the Qurʾān regarded emancipation of slaves as a great virtue.<sup>234</sup>
- People were urged that until they free their slaves they should treat them with kindness.<sup>235</sup>
- In cases of unintentional murder, *ḡibār*<sup>236</sup>, and other similar offences, liberating a slave was regarded as their atonement and charity.<sup>237</sup>
- It was directed to marry off slave-men and slave-women who were capable of marriage so that they could become equivalent in status, both morally and socially, to other members of society.<sup>238</sup>
- If some person were to marry a slave-woman of someone, great care was exercised since this could result in a clash between ownership and conjugal rights. However, such people were told that if they did not have the means to marry free-women, they could marry, with the permission of their masters, slave-women who were Muslims and were also kept chaste. In such marriages, they must pay their dowers so that this could bring them gradually equal in status to free-women.<sup>239</sup>
- In the heads of *ḡakāt*, a specific head (for freeing necks [emancipation of slaves]) was instituted so that the campaign of slave emancipation could receive impetus from the public treasury.<sup>240</sup>
- Fornication (sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are not married to each other) is an offence. Since prostitution centres around this offence, brothels that were operated by owners using their

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<sup>233</sup> Michael Bonner, “Poverty and Economics in the Qurʾān”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xxxv:3 (Winter, 2005), 391–406

<sup>234</sup> Sahīh Muslim: 1662, 1661, 1657, 1659

<sup>235</sup> Sunan Abu Daūd: 5164.

<sup>236</sup> A particular form of severing relationship with one’s wife. In this form, the man would declare something to the effect that his wife shall from now on be like a mother to him, as mentioned in Qurʾān: 58:3.

<sup>237</sup> Q.[4:92, 58:3, 5:89]

<sup>238</sup> Q.[24:32-33]

<sup>239</sup> Q.[4:25]

<sup>240</sup> Q.[9:60]

slave-women were shut down automatically, and if someone tried to go on secretly running this business, he was given exemplary punishment.<sup>241</sup>

- People were told that they were all slaves/servants of Allāh and so instead of using the words عَبْد (slave-man) and أَمَةٌ (slave-woman), the words used should be فَتَى (boy/man) and فَتَاةٌ (girl/woman) so that the psyche about them should change and a change is brought about in these conventional concepts.<sup>242</sup>
- At the advent of Islam a major source of slaves was the POWs. The Qur’ān rooted this out by legislating that POWs should be freed at all costs, either by accepting ransom or as a favour by not taking any ransom money. No other option was available to the Muslims.<sup>243</sup>

## Conclusion

On concluding this topic, it is safe to reiterate that it is only Islam that faithfully aims to finish off the practice of slavery. It summoned the attention of the world towards the plight of slaves at a time when the followers of the Christ عليه السلام were preaching such dictates in the name of religion as “... Those who are slaves must consider their masters worthy of all respect, so that no one will speak evil of the name of God and of our teaching. Slaves belonging to Christian masters must not despise them, for they are believers too. Instead they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their work are believers whom they love. You must teach and preach these things.”<sup>244</sup> However, Islam did not disallow slavery at one go because that would have upset the social and economic life of society. It rather adopted gradual reformative measures like:

- The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم also followed the Qur’ān in not saying anything about enslavement. The institution was already there and so

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<sup>241</sup> Ghāmidī, *The Penal Law of Islam*

<sup>242</sup> Sahīh Muslim: 2249

<sup>243</sup> Q.[47:4]

<sup>244</sup> Encyclopedia of Religion & Ethics; vol XI, (Christian Slavery); Timothy, 1<sup>st</sup> Letter, 6:1,2 as referenced by Maulana Saeed Ahmad: Slavery in Islam, p-241

- only directions were issued for putting correction in the system.
- All methods of enslaving people were abolished except the POWs, and that too with caution and was only a permission.
  - The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself treated the POWs in consonance with the Qur'ānic instruction of من و فداً “setting them free either by act of grace or against ransom.”<sup>245</sup> In some battles, isolated cases of enslaving prisoners did indeed occur.
  - Of course, the Qur'ān frequently commands that monetary efforts must be made to get slaves released and they'd be treated kindly but never does it command slaves to literally “bow before their masters” as the Christians are told to do. It has sufficed on dealing with gentlemanly social manners.
  - Islam reformed the wicked concept about slaves and declared that slave were brothers, and reminded that slaves have rights like all free men. The social rank and personhood of slaves was thus raised far above the ancient practice.
  - Together, thieving the lineage identity of slaves was abolished.
  - The Qur'ān declares that there was tremendous reward against setting slaves free.
  - There are many provisions which prescribe that slaves become free automatically.
  - Many a sin can be atoned by releasing slaves.
  - Even slaves are allowed to earn their freedom through *mukātabat* in which case their masters are instructed not to create hurdles but should rather do their best to make things easy for them.
  - Islam stands atop the scroll of awarding recognition of full personhood to women; only Islam elevated female slaves to the rank of ladies of house and housewives.
  - The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his Companions رضی الله عنهم showed by their behaviour that a slave deserves compassionate and equal treatment; he shouldn't be detested or be looked down upon.

Contrary to previous Divine Writs and religious codes neither has Islam

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<sup>245</sup> Q.[47:4]

commanded its followers to enslave anyone nor did it declare enslavement an obligatory duty; it was a custom found among all people and Islam suggested such wise commands as may erase brutality from this custom.

This character is unique to Islam that it has been on the way to remove slavery from its beginning whereas in the recent civilizations the history of abolishing slavery is only a few years more than a century. All civilizations were drowned in the oceans of disparity & inequity when Islam came with a charter of human rights and equality; and wherever Islam got station on the globe— no matter even if it were for a thinner time-slice— it lit the flame of human rights in the suppressed human nature. It is on this threshold that the weaker voice of slaves gradually strengthened and with the passage of time the masters were to recognize their rights; and in the long run it resulted in the official banishment of this cruel practice throughout the world.

متى استعبدتم الناس وقد ولدتهم امهاتهم احراراً

Why enslave people when their mothers delivered them free?

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GUEST SCHOLARS



IMRA' UL-QAYS:

FATHER OF SIMILE IN PRE-ISLAMIC TIMES

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IQBAL'S APPROPRIATION OF EVOLUTION

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THE ONTOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF SELF

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# IMRA' UL-QAYS: FATHER OF SIMILE IN PRE-ISLAMIC TIMES

Dr. Ahad Pishgar\*

Imra' ul-Qays, Abū 'l-Hārith Hunduj,<sup>246</sup> son of Hijr al-Kindī,<sup>247</sup> one of the foremost poets of the 6<sup>th</sup> century pre-Islamic Arabia whose unparalleled poetic talent and its injurious impact on society were epitomized in the following saying of the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) that “he was the most poetic of all poets, and their leader to Hell-fire”<sup>248</sup> was the scion of the precarious north Arabian kingdom of Kindah<sup>249</sup> and on his mother's side he was descended from the famous tribe of Taghlib.<sup>250</sup> His father who ruled over the tribe of Banū Asad was treacherously killed by one of his subjects. Having failed to muster enough support despite his relentless efforts to avenge this dastardly act, Imra' ul-Qays finally took refuge at the court of the Roman emperor, Justinian I. After a long stay at Constantinople, he was named the phylarch of Palestine and received a body of troops from Justin II. Strengthened by this newly acquired military contingent, Imra' ul-Qays once again set out for Arabia to settle score with the assassin of his father, but, in the meanwhile, one of his inveterate enemies from the same tribe of Banū Asad, who had been following him from place to place, charged him

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<sup>246</sup> *Mu'allaqāt-i-Sab'*, Persian trans., 'Abd al-Muhammad Āyatī, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Tehran: Surūsh, 1397 Shamsī, p.11.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, “Our Prophet's Criticism of Contemporary Arabian Poetry”, *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, ed. Latif Ahmed Sherwani, Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1977, p.124. Also see Muhammad Salīm Akhtar, “Rasūl-i-Maqbūl kā apnē 'ahd kī shā'irī par tabsirah aur Iqbā”, *Daryāft*, NUML, Islamabad, Annual Number 3 (2004), 353-367.

<sup>249</sup> H. A. R. Gibb. *Arabic Literature, an introduction*, London, OUP, 1974, p.23.

<sup>250</sup> <http://historymedren.about-com./od/aentries/a/11-amru-htm>, p. 1 (6/8/2008)

before the emperor with the seduction of a princess. Consequently, the emperor sent him a poisoned cloak, which caused his death at Ancyra.<sup>251</sup>

Most of Imrū' ul-Qays's poems have been lost and what is left is a small book of poems including about 25 odes together with some literary pieces. It was first published by MacGuckin de Slane at Paris, in 1837.<sup>252</sup> However, his most famous contribution is his *Mu'allaqah*, or the "suspended poem" which comprises 82 verses and starts with the following couplet:<sup>253</sup>

قفا نَبَّكِ مِنْ ذِكْرِي حَبِيبٍ وَمَنْزِلِ بَسْفُطِ اللَّوِيِّ بَيْنَ الدَّخُولِ فَحَوْمَلِ

Oh, co-travellers let us stop and, for the sake of the beloved's memory/  
cry in the sandy place between Dakhūl and Haumal.<sup>254</sup>

The poem has been extensively written about and commented upon, over the centuries, by numerous renowned authorities, such as Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Nahhās (d. 949 A.D.), Abu 'Abd Allah Husayn bin Ahmad Zūzanī (d. 1091 A.D.) and Khatīb Tabrīzī (d. 1108 A.D.). It has also been translated, from time to time, into German,<sup>255</sup> English<sup>256</sup> and Persian<sup>257</sup> languages.

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., also see <http://infao5501.ag5.mpi-sb.mpg.de:8080/topx/archive?link=Wikipedia-L..../2598989.xml&styl>. Abū'l-Faraj 'Alī bin al-Husayn al-Isfahānī relates many stories of his life in his stupendous work, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Egypt ed., Vol. VIII, 62-67.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. *Mu'allaqat-i-Sab'*, p.11, where the year of publication has been erroneously mentioned as 1877. Imrū'ul-Qays's poems are also included in Wilhelm Ahlwardt's *The Divans of Six Ancient Arabian Poets*, London, 1870.

<sup>253</sup> *Mu'allaqāt-i-Sab'*, p. 19.

<sup>254</sup> The English rendering of this and those of the subsequent verses of the *Mu'allaqah* are based upon the Persian translation of 'Abd al-Muhammad Āyatī, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-18; [http://sacred-texts/isl/hanged\\_1.htm](http://sacred-texts/isl/hanged_1.htm); and [http://fordham.edu/halsall/source/640\\_hangedpoems.html](http://fordham.edu/halsall/source/640_hangedpoems.html) (5/24/08)

<sup>255</sup> Friedrich Rückert, *Amrīlkais der Dichter und König*, Stuttgart, 1843.

<sup>256</sup> W. S. Blunt, *Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia*, London, 1903; A. J. Arberry. *The Seven Odes*, London, 1954 and two English translations referred to in n.9, above.

<sup>257</sup> *Sharh-i-Sab'ah Mu'allaqah*, Government Printing Press, Lahore, 1871 and 'Abd al-Muhammad Āyatī, *op. cit.*

Imra' ul-Qays who led a dissolute life and was known for his overindulgence in winebibbing and carefree manners, passionately loved his cousin, 'Unayzah and as the legend goes, once he followed her to the pool Dārati Juljul<sup>258</sup> where she had gone picnicking with her friends. While the maidens were bathing in the pool, Imra' ul-Qays captured their clothes and would not surrender these until each one of them came out of the water and asked for hers. They held back as long as possible before they yielded to this demand of his. Afterwards, when the damsels complained of hunger, Imra' ul-Qays forthwith slew his camel to feed them. Having eaten their food, lest he should be left stranded in the desert, the girls divided the trappings of his camel, each carrying home a part upon her beast, while the carrying of the poet himself fell to the lot of 'Unayzah, who jestingly protested that the howdah on her camel's back was too small to accommodate them both.<sup>259</sup>

The *Mu'allaqah* of Imra' ul-Qays mainly revolves around three main themes, namely, the elegiac reminiscence of love and poet's mourning at the erstwhile encampment of his beloved (verses 1-9), the frank restatement of his amatory adventures, especially at the Dārati Juljul (verses 10-43), and the glimpses of whatever he had encountered in the course of his wanderings during his homelessness. This last includes beautiful portrayal of phenomena of nature such as night (44-49), thunderstorm (verses 71-73) and flood (verses 74-82), animals like wolves (50-52) and horse and his hunting exploits (53-70).

Not only first in point of time, but in poetic talent also, according to most of the critics, Imra' ul-Qays's *Mu'allaqah* stands unrivalled and Arabs, in general, looked upon it as an example par excellence of beauty and creativity.<sup>260</sup> According to H. A. R. Gibb, this "poem is entirely self-centred, and noted for its natural descriptions, including a fine picture of a thunderstorm, as well as for the frankness of his amatory passages."<sup>261</sup>

Imra' ul-Qays is credited with the innovation of starting his odes with crying over the relics of the deserted encampment of the beloved, of

<sup>258</sup> A place within the domain of the Kindah tribes. See 'Abd al-Muhammad Āyatī, 23, n. 10.

<sup>259</sup> [http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/hanged/hanged\\_1.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/hanged/hanged_1.htm), footnote 2 (6/9/2008)

<sup>260</sup> Hannā al-Fākhūrī, *Ta'rikh-i-Adabīyyat-i-Zabān-i-'Arabī*, Persian tr., 'Abd al-Muhammad Āyatī, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Tehran: Tūs Publications, 1368 Shamsī, 58-59.

<sup>261</sup> H. A. R. Gibb, 23.

speaking of love so passionately, of weaving beautiful images into his poems, and of skillfully employing short and meaningful descriptions (of women, hunting scenes, horses, camels and nights).<sup>262</sup> These themes not only possessed an enduring appeal for the poet and his audience, but they also left an indelible imprint on the poetry of succeeding generations of poets as well. Summarizing this aspect of the pre-Islamic poetry, in which Imra' ul-Qays no doubt, excelled all his contemporaries, H. A. R. Gibb rightly observes:

After depicting the final separation from his beloved as her tribe moves off to seek fresh pastures, the poet pursues his journey and seizes the occasion to describe, some time briefly but often with all an expert's enthusiasm, the fine points of his camel or horse. Its swiftness and endurance of fatigue on his long and dangerous journeys leads him to compare it to a wild ass, ostrich, or oryx, but the comparison often seems to become submerged as the theme is developed into a lively picture of animal life or of a hunting scene, which to western taste is often the most attractive section of the poem.<sup>263</sup>

Characterized by peculiar aesthetic sensibilities, apt use of words, irresistible emotive power, one of the most important hallmarks of Imra' ul-Qays's poetry is his exquisite employment of similes, a trait which has deservedly earned him the epithet of the 'creator of images'.<sup>264</sup> The chief characteristic of his similes is that they are sensory, a feature which is amply illustrated by the following verses of his *Mu'allaqah*. Boasting of his amatory adventures and the enticing beauty of his beloved he has this to say:

وَبَيْضَنِهِ خَدْرٍ لَا يُرَامُ خِبَاؤُهَا تَمَتَّعْتُ مِنْ لَهْوِ بِهَا غَيْرَ مُعْجَلٍ<sup>265</sup>

Many a veiled and egg like fair woman, whose tent was even inaccessible to others/ I enjoyed playing with her leisurely.

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<sup>262</sup> J. M. 'Abd al-Jalīl, *Ta'riḫ-i-Adabiyāt-i-'Arab*, tr., A. Adharnūsh, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Tehran: Amīr Kabīr Publications, 1381 Shamsī, 46.

<sup>263</sup> *Arabic Literature, An Introduction*, 16-17.

<sup>264</sup> [http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/hanged/hanged\\_1.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/hanged/hanged_1.htm), p.5 (6/9/2008).

<sup>265</sup> Abū 'Abd Allah Husayn bin Ahmad Zūzanī, *Sharḥ al-Mu'allaqāt al-Sab' al-Tiwāl*, ed. 'Umar al-Tabbā', 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Beirut: Dār al-Arqam bin Abī'l-Arqam, 1997, 72, line 23.

مُهْفَهْفَةٌ بِيَضَاءٍ غَيْرِ مُفَاضِهِ تَرَايِبُهَا مَصْقُولَةٌ كَالسَّجْجَلِ<sup>266</sup>

Thin-waisted, white-skinned, slender of body, her breast was/ shining like a polished mirror.

وَ كَشْحٍ لَطِيفٍ كَالجَدِيلِ مُخَضَّرٍ وَ سَاقٍ كَأَثْبَابِ السَّيِّ الْمَذَلِّ<sup>267</sup> ِ

Her soft, thin and flexible waist is like a leather bridle/ She is of soft, white and delicate feet like a cane under leafy branches of a palm tree.

وَ تَعْطُو بِرَخْصٍ غَيْرِ شَنْنٍ كَأَنَّهُ أُسَارِيغٌ ظَنِّي أَوْ مَسَاوِيكُ أُسْجَلِ<sup>268</sup>

She gives the things with her quite soft, not coarse, fingers. It seems her fingers/ are as soft as Zabi worms or Eshal brushes.

A picturesque pastoral scene at dusk is portrayed by him in the following terms:

فَعَنَّ لَنَا سِرْبٌ كَانَ نِعَاجُهُ عَذَارِي دَوَارٍ فِي مَلَأٍ مُذَيَّلِ<sup>269</sup>

We came face to face with a flock of wild cows whose ewe looked like maidens with long skirts going round the idol called Dawār.

It will not be out of place to mention here that in Arabic poetry, women are not infrequently compared to she cows, a tradition whose originator was none other than Imra' ul-Qays.

Horse being one of the most valuable possessions of the adventure-loving Arabs, Imra' ul-Qays, a seasoned huntsman as he was, had this to say about his courser:

رَيْرٍ كَحْدُرُوفِ الْوَالِيدِ أَمْرَهُ تَتَابَعُ كَفَيْهِ بِخَيْطٍ مُوصَلِ<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 76, l. 31.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 78, l. 37.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 39.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 89, l. 63.

Fast is my steed like a top spun well by a child/ with a long and strong string.

لَهُ أَبْطَلَا ظَبْيِي وَ سَاقَا نَعَامِهِ وَ أَرْخَاءُ سِرْحَانٍ وَ تَقْرِيْبُ تَنْفَلٍ<sup>271</sup>

The waist of that horse was like that of a deer in slenderness and its shank/ was like that of an ostrich in height and it galloped like a wolf and jumped like a fox.

Here again the similes are sensory in nature and their tenor and vehicle both consist of single words which have been used by the poet to lay emphasis on the slenderness, height, running and jumping of his steed. The following two couplets are also in praise of his horse:

مَكَرَّ مَقَرَّ مُقْبِلٍ مُدْبِرٍ مَعَا كَجَلْمُودٍ صَخْرٍ حَطَّهُ السَّيْلُ مِنْ عَلٍ<sup>272</sup>

Swift to attack, to flee, to turn, yet firm as a rock/ swept down by the torrent.

كَأَنَّ عَلِيَّ الْمَتْنَيْنِ مِنْهُ إِذَا انْتَحَى مَدَاكَ عَرُوسٍ أَوْ صَلَابِيَةَ حَنْظَلٍ<sup>273</sup>

As he turns his head to a side, his soft and shining back looks like/ a bride's sweet smelling stone or like colocynth.

This brings us to the description of rain and flood which again have been depicted beautifully in the following two verses with the aid of similes:

كَأَنَّ ثَبِيرًا فِي عَرَانِينِ وَبَيْلِهِ كَبِيرٌ أَنَا فِي بَجَادٍ مُزْمَلٍ<sup>274</sup>

.At the start of the rain the Thabir Mountain looked like the head/ of the tribe draped in a striped cloak.

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<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 87, l. 58.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 59.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 84, l. 53.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 88, l. 61.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 93, l. 77.

كَأَنَّ ذُرِّيَ رَأْسِ الْمُجَيْمِرِ غُدُوَّةٌ مِنَ السَّبِيلِ وَ الْأَعْتَاءِ فَلَاكُهُ مِعْزَلٌ<sup>275</sup>

And the peak of the Mujaymir Mountain in the flood and rush of debris/  
looked like a whirling spindle.

How did Imra' ul-Qays visualize a thunderstorm in the desert can best be  
adjudged by reference to his own words:

أَصَاحُ تَرَى بَرْقًا أُرِيكَ وَ مِيضَهُ كَلَّمَعِ الْيَدَيْنِ فِي حَيِّ مُكَلَّلٌ<sup>276</sup>

O my friend, as we stand here mourning, do you see the lightning  
glittering like/ the flash of two moving hands amid the thick gathering  
clouds.

بُضِيءٌ سَنَاهُ أَوْ مَصَابِيحُ رَاهِبِ أَمَانَ السَّلَيْطِ بِالذَّبَالِ الْمُفْتَلِ<sup>277</sup>

Its glory is reminiscent of the lamp of the monks when its wick/ is dipped  
thick in oil.

Only one who has encountered a thunderstorm in the desert during a  
dark, cloudy night can really appreciate the beauty of this simile

In short, Imra' ul-Qays's *Mu'allaqah* is replete with fine and ever new  
similes which he uses to great effect and appeal befitting of a great poet of  
his stature. The renowned literary critic Ibn Sallām Jumhī (who was born at  
Basra in 139 A.H. /756 A.D and passed away, at Baghdad, in 232 A.H. /845  
A.D.), dedicates a whole chapter of his *Tabaqāt al-Shu'arā' al-Jābiliyyah* to Imra'  
ul-Qays and while bestowing lavish encomiums on his poetic art, as far as the  
coining and apt use of similes were concerned, declares him to be the most  
pre-eminent of pre-Islamic poets.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 94, l. 78.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 91, l. 70

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 90, l. 71.

<sup>278</sup> Zayf Shauqī, *Ta'rikh-i-Adabi-i-'Arab (al-'usr al-Jābili)*, Persian tr., 'Alīrīdā Dhakāwatī  
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# IQBAL'S APPROPRIATION OF EVOLUTION IN ISLAM: A CRITIQUE

Dr. M. Maroof Shah

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.

# THE ONTOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF SELF

Brig (R) Dr. Allah Bakhsh Malik

Modern philosophical thought recognizes the problematic status of the reality of self. Earlier philosophers like Locke and Hume had raised serious taxing questions. Locke held that we have intuitive knowledge of the existence of self and that it is impossible to perceive without perceiving that we perceive. In Hume's view the material world, where the emphasis is on perception and sense experience, acquaintance with real world remains beyond us (4-55). Phillip Hodgkiss (5-40) also affirms that the thing-in-itself is unknowable and a solitary ego is destined to be detained in an unreal world of appearance.

Self is a complex phenomenon, it possesses an inner propensity to striving, it cannot remain closeted and isolated. Johari Window Theory stipulates that in its outward journey, only one fourth of self is known to itself and to others where human interaction occurs, with full awareness and understanding. One fourth of self is hidden from the other selves but is open and clear to self. The self must open up through more disclosure for better interaction. One fourth of self is not known to self but the other selves act as mirrors and through feedback may help the self to attain still better interaction. One fourth of self is a blind spot for self and others - an unknown area of self. So we may say that self involves some mysterious and exoteric dimension along with the tangible and the objective aspects of it. The hidden and the apparent, the visible and the invisible, the objective and the subjective represent two poles which are indicative of two distinct dimensions of self. In order to understand self we shall have to consider these two time-honoured ontologies.

The part of self which is objective can be separated for scientific study and it is therefore common concern of every other self. Phillip Hodgkiss (2005) says that human beings work on the assumption that they have a self and that others are similarly so endowed. This ontology may be called positivistic, well within the purview of scientific study, as we do in all

physical sciences. By extension we also include the social sciences which are following scientific procedures for study of reality which lies outside as part of nature. This is the dimension of self which is knowable, understandable and testable, self linked with other selves in various inter-relationships and inter-actions, self studied at the organizational levels, at the cultural, the linguistic. Self is considered in all these inter-relationships as an entity, a reckonable and almost stable entity. The interplay of active ingredients of consciousness namely thoughts, emotions, imagination, reflection, language, volition and action enhances the interaction of selves. We also know that there is a least common denominator of self which for practical purposes may be reckoned as stable, knowable and testable as evidenced by cultural, linguistic, sociological and historical studies in large human group. The self seen thus has extended itself from self consciousness to collective consciousness. When the self as a person relates to others it moves outward towards the dimension of personality amongst other personalities. It has moved away from purely individual self to grouping of nations, classes and professions, i.e., the human self. This is that one fourth dimension of self which according to Johari Window Theory is the arena of human interaction, with full awareness, understanding and disclosure 6-190.

The other reality belonging to self is born from its inside, the subjective, the intuitive, the mystical and purely singular nature of self belongs to each self and makes it unique, Deep down lies, sui generis singularity, the unfathomable, the unknowable, the unconscious and the mysterious. It is this reality of self which makes it different from the positivistic and objective ontology. The inner world of experience, cognition, affection belongs to a relativistic ontology, the subjective, the peculiar and introspective reality. The dictum "Know thyself" refers to this type of reality of self. What type of inner self emerges out of this subjective experiential and perceptive self Philip Hodgkiss expresses (5-405) this link between two different ontologies succinctly: Consciousness symbolically represents the objective world and experientially remains subjective. Does consciousness have identity, intentionality, consecutiveness, stability and durability? All types of creativity, originality, spontaneity and perfectibility belong to this inner self which yearns for individuality and achievement. McGinn (1993) considers mind a noumenal realm, with consciousness having a hidden structure not revealed to conscious beings themselves. This is that area of Johari Window Theory

of self which remains dark, unknown to self as well as to the other selves. A great deal of imagination, reflection intuition, meditation and Intention is required to make it available to self-consciousness. The latent, the endowed, the inborn tendencies are brought to surface by the self to make itself self-actualized and self-satisfied. All innovation all advancement, all achievement, is the direct result of individual self working with inner propulsion and self-direction. All great men in the field of literature, art, history, philosophy, natural and social sciences delved deep into themselves to self realize and self-actualize. It is through the self consciousness that a progress towards the collective consciousness enshrined in various substantive aspects of civilization can be made. Gadamer (5-177) however puts the case of the external world as follows:-

*Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self examination we understand ourselves in a self-evident way, in the family, society and the state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self awareness of the individual in only a flickering in the closed circuit of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*

He explains the effective historical consciousness in two ways In one sense, it refers to a consciousness or understanding that is produced or effected by history. In another sense it signals an awareness of the effect of being historically situated. Pragmatic philosophy denounces this separateness of self and the external world. It claims that reality does not lie solely either in the one or the other but resides in their mutual interaction and coordination. Thus reality is constructed reality; it does not exist in any other form in isolation

The self in its pursuit of extension becomes aware of his situation as being effected by historical time and also enclosed by it. So the extension of self to others is not unlimited; the existentialists are very cautious in moving outwards. They use the concepts of inclusion and presence to relate one self with the other selves, but with one condition that the essential freedom of self shall not be compromised on the pretext of emotions of love and self sacrifice (2-75). Self moves in two types of cognitive experiences the ones which limit him, and others which liberate him. The home, the community,

the professions, the society, the nation, the comity of nations are the stages through which collective self extends itself and creates a common social consciousness and then cosmic consciousness to reach its ultimate association with human kind and the natural world. The inner self, the mystic and intuitive, the subjective does not lose grip, however, on its various stages of expression in the objective world or the ontology of realism or positivism. It leaps to the metaphysical reality, the reality of man's connection with its creator, the supreme self the transcendental self. Robert S. Zais (7-123) puts forth idealistic metaphysics as a distinct dimension of ontology. The philosophic idealist claims that ultimate reality is spiritual rather than physical, mental rather than material. Idealists claim idea as a reality. Parmenides, a Greek philosopher, had asserted long ago that what cannot be thought cannot be real. Schopenhauer had in the same vein asserted that the world is my idea. Berkeley, Hegel and Kant also asserted the reality of ideas (2-9).

Those who accepted Plato's theory of innate ideas i.e., a priori existence of ideas linked up the existence in this world to the existence of the other world, the world of perfection from which the souls came (4-78). The religious idealists also emphasize the reality of the other world. Iqbal also recognizes the two faces of the self. The efficient self, he considers to be affected by historical time and limited by the linearity of historical time. He gives a higher level of mastery to the appreciative self which lives in time duration and is therefore beyond the limitations imposed by inclusion and presence to relate one self with the other selves (1-38). It is this self which very few philosophers of the calibre of Iqbal consider to be guardian angel of the other part of self which is tied to historicity of time. The past, present and the future of this part of self is likened by Iqbal to a seed which contains its future possibilities (1-97). The appreciative self working with one quick jump reaches the pure duration of the Ultimate Ego; the finite ego (self) enters in the loving embrace of the Ultimate Ego, the infinite i.e., the Almighty Allah. The analogy of human consciousness working in duration time dimension with its metaphysical relation with the pure duration of Allah's Supreme Ego, is not far to seek. Iqbal, therefore, considers the ultimate journey of self towards the supreme ego. He does not circumscribe the journey of self to the finite limits of this universe but gives it a far

superior task of understanding the Pure Ego of the creator by entering into schemes of things of the creator as his helper.

The ontology of objective reality, therefore, is left behind by the subjective experiential self and leaps up to reach the third type of ontology of the Supreme Ego, the Creator, the infinite, which encompasses all finite things in its loving embrace without absorbing them or uniting with them, as is conjectured by some, ideologues.

In the final analysis, therefore, three distinct realities seem to exist in connection with the self, the subjective reality of self which nobody can visit even the self itself is normally not aware of it. It is through meditation, reflection, imagination, introspection and intuition that the dark niches of self get illuminated. The second type of reality comes into being when it extends itself to other selves and consciousness surfaces itself in social thought. Whole civilizations including economic, political, social, historical systems of thought get built around the social consciousness. The social consciousness leads to cosmic consciousness. The self in its attempt to come to grips with social and physical environments becomes cognizant of the ultimate reality of the Creator. The self makes a transcendental leap and finds a connection between self, the cosmos and the Creator, the Last and the Everlasting Reality.

INFORMATION



SURVEY REPORT:

APPROACHES TO MODERN ISLAM

M. S. Umar



**SURVEY REPORT:**

# APPROACHES TO MODERN ISLAM

M. S. Umar

A survey was recently conducted by the Academy with regard to the questions given below. The objective was to gain a better understanding of the public opinion and to gain insights into the reasons for which certain erroneous but widespread perceptions come to be accepted about Pakistan. The questionnaire was the following.

- How would you characterize the majority opinion in Pakistan on issues such as religious pluralism and women's rights?
- Do you believe there is a correlation between Islamic education and religious intolerance in Pakistan?
- Would you recommend reform on religious education or public education regarding religious minorities?
- Given Islam's long legal tradition of guaranteeing religious freedom, how would you recommend promotion of pluralism in Pakistan?

The Survey was conducted in the area of Lahore and outlying townships, across a wide cross section of Pakistani society. It included 66 persons from different walks of life, representing various religious affiliations and diverse educational and professional back grounds, ranging from the "Secular, Liberals" to religious groups of different persuasions (both Shi'ite and Sunni) and other stake holders of the society. Maximum effort was made to identify the finer shades of religious affiliations by indicating the groups to which the individual giving their opinions belonged. Political affiliations were also noted. In what follows we have tried to present the "lay of the intellectual landscape" that emerges from our Survey.

## General Observations and Points of Agreement

Almost all the participants of the Survey were keenly aware of the widening breach between the points of view and the growing debate on the issues singled out for the Survey. There was a general agreement on the point that there is an evident polarization of our society between westernized rejectionism and religious extremism/political violence. The “ultras” are no more a minority, forming only a tiny wart on the face of the worldwide attempt to revivify Islam and we can no longer enjoy the luxury of ignoring them. The extreme has broadened, and the middle ground, giving way, is everywhere dislocated and confused.

Enfeeblement of the middle ground, more often identified with “moderation”, is in turn accelerated by the opprobrium which the extremists bring not simply upon themselves, but upon committed Muslims everywhere.

“Moderation” emerged as a key-concept around which most of the issues were debated. Apart from the fact that it was embraced officially as the strategy enunciated by the present Government, it was seen as a Middle Course— the foundational critique and suggested remedy of the present crisis that seeks to regain the required equilibrium— religiously, intellectually, and culturally. There was no consensus, however, on its exact definition and implications. It was noted that it received support as well as opposition and criticism from the participants of the Survey. Objections, reservations and disagreements about the idea of Moderation, of the Middle Path, have been voiced by those who harbour certain suspicions about its rationale and reality. Suggestions were made that along side addressing these objections, it was also needed to move beyond the confines of merely suggesting a conceptual shift towards actually remedying the prevailing situation in terms of building bridges across divergent views and promoting confidence for the “other” that could bring us to create a reliable and effective national strategy for solving the problem.

It was evident from the responses of the participants of the Survey that as soon as the approach that advocates the idea of Moderation, of the Middle Path, moves beyond the advocacy of a conceptual shift and tries to translate itself into action, certain conflict zones immediately come into

focus. There are five major areas of conflict, which subsume a number of secondary issues, where the approach that looks for a Middle Path is immediately confronted with opposition and severity of divergent views:

- Gender Issues (Subsuming: Status and rights of women, employment, education etc.)
- The Religious “other” (Subsuming: Status of Minorities, Human Rights, International Relations with Non Muslims, Jihad/Terrorism)
- Cultural Issues (Subsuming: Cultural Values– Islamic/Western, Fine Arts, Entertainment, and Media Forms etc.)
- State– Religion (Subsuming: the questions related to the intervention of State in individual/private life– issues like *Hisbah Act*/Implementation of laws etc. The invasion of the public life with sectarian activities is the flip side of the question)
- State Legislation (Subsuming: the questions related to the *Hudud Ordinance/Riba/ Blasphemy Law* etc.)

## 2

Important points of criticism were encountered during the Survey concerning the framework in which the questions were being asked. These concerns were more frequently voiced by the “lay” but religiously musical and well informed people among the participants of the Survey. These could be summarized as follows:

- I– The West should put the question to itself first; Where in the Muslim world the fanatics are in the positions of decision making? In the West, especially in the US, that is an undeniable fact that the decision making ranks are bustling with fanatics/fundamentalist!
- II– Recent polls reveal that 85% of the western population approved of civilian killings, under what ever pretext or logic, while only 45% of the Muslim population approved of this course of action!
- III– Throughout Europe, the borderline right wing fascist parties are in the ascendancy. It presents a sharp contrast with the Muslim world.

IV– Amendment in the Laws of the land has been observed to curtail civil liberties and rights in the West. Who is doing it? The moderates?

The upshot is that the predetermined framework forces the participants of the Survey to reach conclusions that are not correct in the larger perspective!

### 3

This part summarizes the findings that the responses from the participants of the Survey have yielded in reply to the set of questions given above:

**How would you characterize the majority opinion in Pakistan on issues such as religious pluralism and women’s rights?**

**Women’s rights:**

There are three levels of responses that could be discerned from the opinions expressed in reply to the question. On the first level both the religious and the liberals (and to a large extent the seculars– 60%) agree that women’s rights are guaranteed in the basic Islamic texts and the later Islamic law and mention it with a sense of pride (80%), some even comparing the Islamic record with the lackluster performance in the West up till the modern times (even the examples of Cambridge University’s admittance of female students/teachers came up as examples; 30%). There is a difference, however. The “lay” but religiously musical and well informed people among the participants of the Survey often pointed out certain parts of the basic Islamic texts that they thought problematic (60%; the “lesser status in intelligence and, by implication, in creation”; “sanction of wife beating in the Qur’an”; male superiority etc.) while the religious people (80%) simply glided over it silently, mostly because of a chauvinistic attitude that was thinly disguised and some times worn on the sleeves!

On the second level almost all (90%) of the liberals/moderates and the seculars (if they cared to comment) talked about the duplicity or

dichotomy of thought/claims and practice in vast sections of the Pakistani society, especially rural and tribal areas, *vis a vis* the question of women's rights, cited examples of customs, conventions, attitudes that hamper or violate women's rights and emphasized a need of social/legal reform. Most of the religious participants of the Survey, however, stopped short at platitudes about women's rights (60%) or side stepped the issue (40%) by relating it to the western agenda (a theme that come up later as well).

On the third level the question was responded to on a conceptual level with a divided opinion as some of the participants of the Survey traced the issue back to its conceptual underpinnings (60% [40% religious scholars 20% liberal lawyers]). They were sensitive to the fact that the whole question of women's rights, as well as the larger issue of human rights, was conceived and evolved differently in the modern discourse of human rights/social sciences as it did in the classical Islamic tradition in the conceptual framework of *maqasid al-shari'a*, hence the difficulty that it faces to sink in the Islamic society.

The same idea entailed the related issue of male chauvinism and negative stereotypes of the feminine in Islam that hampers the process of reform and legislation (60% of the total participants of the Survey). The seculars asserted that it was inherent to Islam as well as to religion as such, some of the liberals (40%) attributed it to an erroneous interpretation of Islamic texts and the attitudes prevalent among the religious people, a tiny minority of the religious (20%) grudgingly admitted that it was related to misplaced religious arguments (claiming at the same time that it was nothing specific to Islam, citing Hindu and Christian instances). Some of the participants of the Survey (15%) rejected the idea out of hand and attributed it to western propaganda and the American agenda of globalization / westernization / modernism/ political aims etc.

### **Religious pluralism:**

Conceptually, the question of religious pluralism was not of supreme importance for the seculars as, explicitly or implicitly, they maintained the position that religion was a human phenomenon that developed in response to the psychological, social, etc. challenges and needs of the

humans. Practically almost all the seculars regarded religion as irrelevant to the concerns of modern life and state hence religious pluralism was not seen as a problem, all religions being equally redundant. It should however be noted that, unlike their western counterparts, none of the Pakistani seculars took the next logical step of denying the transcendent or the divine (perhaps for lack of conviction or the fear of the public reaction!).

For the religious side, we take the responses in turn, conceptually first. For the religious, both lay people and the authorities, diversity of religions was some thing divinely ordained which, according to the Qur'anic perspective, had a wisdom pertaining to the geographical expanse and ethnic diversity of mankind. As such they had no problems with religious pluralism. The problem, as we discerned it, lies elsewhere. Muslims have been encouraged to believe, and the majority have been only too eager to believe, that Islam has superseded all other religions and that it is therefore the sole truly valid religion on earth. But however absolute the claims of Muslim theologians and jurists may be, they are shown in fact to be relative by the tolerance which Islam makes obligatory towards Judaism and Christianity and the Qur'anic praise of the groups of Jews and Christians. There seemed to be a confusion on the question of religious pluralism. Taken with that 'grain of salt'— though few were found fully conscious of it— the claims in question were not fully palatable but, nevertheless, stopped them from seeing the full implications of this exclusivism.

On the practical level the situation was similar to the opinions expressed in reply to the question of women's rights, that is, both the religious and the liberals agreed that rights of the minorities were guaranteed in the basic Islamic texts and the later Islamic law and mention it with a sense of pride (75%) that the Islamic historical record on that count outshined the Christian, Jew and the Hindu etc. When confronted with the issue of "the persistent attacks on minority Shia's, Christian, and Hindu communities" the responses were both divided and unanimous. These were unanimous in saying that such acts were not sanctioned by Islam and were the doing of individuals or groups who believed in religious extremism/political violence. The responses were, however, divided on the issue of

responsibility. The most common of the responses to such arguments (60%) was to dissociate oneself from the monstrosities by saying that it was not true Islam. The other (40%) argued that it amounts to side stepping the question and turning a blind eye to the fact that the groups in question from among the Muslim communities are putting forward religious arguments to validate their actions and the conceptual framework and basic assumptions through which these operate are claimed to be supported by their basic religious texts. In this case one cannot absolve oneself of one's responsibility by simply disowning the group or groups in question. One must place the sin at the doorsteps of a definite group, school of thought or mode of interpretation in one's community and try to hold a mirror to their thinking.

A small number of the participants of the Survey (20%) suggested that the lack of accommodation and tolerance for religious pluralism stemmed from the growing tendency of equating the Non-Muslim with the faithless/unbeliever (*kafir*), in the authorities and, under their influence, in the lay people. Thus there was a shift from the earlier inclusivity to an overwhelming exclusivity.

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### **Do you believe there is a correlation between Islamic education and religious intolerance in Pakistan?**

Almost all (90%) of the seculars and some of the liberals (20%) agreed that there was a correlation between Islamic education and religious intolerance in Pakistan; termed as the hot bed of intolerance. Rest of the liberals (80%) and the religious denied that there was any connection between Islamic education and religious intolerance. A small number of the participants of the Survey (20%) denied the manifestations of religious intolerance. The rest admitted of its existence but attributed it to the shift from inclusivity to exclusivity mentioned earlier. The religious authorities were more explicit on the question as they pointed out the fact that the texts/syllabi used in the *madrasa* system for the last five centuries contained no such materials that promoted religious intolerance. Some even went to the extent of mentioning the fact that no student of Islamic

education ever had the chance to read a work like *The Green Mantle* that was a common school book in the West! According to them it was not the text but the context that drove toward such extremism. It was the mind set of the management, the men at the helm that gave the interpretation and created the ethos.

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### **Would you recommend reform on religious education or public education regarding religious minorities?**

Though some (10%) of the seculars had some misgivings about the question, almost all the other participants of the Survey saw no need for a reform on public education regarding religious minorities since the settlements/models used in Pakistani public education in this regard have worked well. Not only there were no polemical or hate promoting texts in public education but, what was more important, there was a solid system in which there was no coercion. Both the Muslim and Non-Muslim students studied common subjects together and parted company when Muslim students studied Islamic Studies and the Non-Muslim students opted for Ethics etc.

Reform on religious education regarding religious minorities met with a mixed response from the participants of the Survey. Some (40%) of the seculars regarded it necessary with the argument (refuted by the religious) that it was the religious education that was responsible for negative stereotyping of the Other, a view that was shared by a tiny minority of the liberals. The rest of the participants of the Survey referred it back to the correlation between Islamic education and religious intolerance discussed earlier as far as the question of religious education regarding religious minorities was concerned. More informed among them mentioned the initiatives that have been taken with the help of the Norwegian government in this regard where in the Islamic religious authorities responsible for *madrasa* education system (*Wafq*— The Association of Islamic School) was brought into dialogue with their Christian counterparts. They suggested that such interaction and exchange was

required instead of *madrasa* bashing and superfluous, uninformed talk of religious education reform.

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**Given Islam's long legal tradition of guaranteeing religious freedom, how would you recommend promotion of pluralism in Pakistan?**

There was no uniform response from the participants of the Survey. Almost all (90%) of the seculars recommended a secular or at least a neutral public sphere for the promotion of pluralism in Pakistan and some of the liberals (15%) agreed with them. With the religious, the mention of Islam's long legal tradition of guaranteeing religious freedom elicited the same response as it did with the question of women's rights; that these were guaranteed in the basic Islamic texts and the later Islamic law and mentioned it with a sense of pride (80%), some even comparing the Islamic record with the lackluster performance in the West up till the modern times. Argument was forwarded that there was no flaw in the Islamic law or its provisions; it was the haphazard way of its implementation or the mishandling/corruption of the executing authorities that gave rise to the problems. Not many concrete recommendations were received for the promotion of pluralism in Pakistan except those mentioned earlier. Some of the participants of the Survey, however, suggested greater number of dialogues, talk shows, cultural activity and publications on the issue to enhance awareness.