IQBAL IN THE MIND OF EUROPE

AN OVERVIEW OF WESTERN INTERPRETATIONS OF IQBAL

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ABSTRACT

The inability of the Western critics of Iqbal to reconcile themselves to a system of philosophy places serious limitations on the conclusions drawn with regard to Iqbal's message by some of the most eminent names in English and Orientalist literature. Because many subtleties come out only when we make an effort to discover the internal coherence of the works of Iqbal, for which we need to study him on his own terms– terms that may not be in complete agreement with the current trends of philosophical thought. Amongst the Western scholars' analytical and critical studies on Iqbal the most valuable contributions have been by those who, like Bausani and Metcalf, were brave enough to step outside the narrow tradition. It is a pity that the discovery of internal coherence of Iqbal's works was missed by many scholars. Western scholar's could be traced back to the concepts of the poet as a sentimental being. Since the *Javid Namah* is a reflection on what Iqbal met, thought about, and internalized in his own lifetime, it can be taken as blueprint to be followed literally, since his particular context will never be repeated. Nevertheless, it is a message about what it was like for one human being to try to make sense of his life.

Mechanical Research

The first collision between the new East and the old West on the issue of Iqbal occurred when R.A. Nicholson, the Orientalist best known for his translations of Rumi, tried to introduce the Poet of the East in Europe in 1920.

Nicholson came across Iqbal's first long poem in Persian soon after its publication in India in 1915, and approached him for permission to translate it. Iqbal, who had known him from his own Cambridge days nearly a decade ago, gave permission as well as some notes in which he compared the ideas with a few Western thinkers. Nicholson didn't understand that this was meant to be an easy entry-point for the Western audience. Instead he took the notes as a product of 'mechanical research', a list of sources.[1]

This assumption left him perplexed. If Iqbal had borrowed all his thought from Western thinkers then why didn't he allude to them in the poem? The only Western thinkers mentioned there were Plato and Machiavelli– as major perpetrators of evil! Thus Nicholson presumed that "*Asrar-i-Khudi* gives no systematic account [of Iqbal's thought] though it puts his ideas in a popular and attractive form."

It was obvious that by "systematic account" he meant a text that could be completely exhausted through mechanical research without challenging the existing 'categories' of knowledge in any major way. Having failed to place Iqbal inside this box, he suggested the following method for interpreting Iqbal's work:

> Let us begin at the end. What is the far-off goal on which his eyes are fixed? The answer to that question will discover his true character, and we shall be less likely to stumble on the way if we see whither we are going. Iqbal has drunk deep of European literature, his philosophy owes much to Nietzsche and Bergson, and his poetry often reminds us of Shelley; yet he thinks and feels as a Muslim, and just for this reason his influence may be great. He is a religious enthusiast, inspired by the vision of a New Mecca, a world-wide, theocratic, Utopian state in which all Muslims, no longer divided by the barriers of race and country, shall be one…

Nicholson had raised a valid question but the answer he was suggesting was rather like saying that Columbus crossed the Atlantic because he liked sailing. It was true that Iqbal had the vision of a modern Muslim polity but "the far-off goal" on which his eyes were fixed was about much else besides.

The novelist E.M. Forster, still four years away from *A Passage to India,* mistook the word of Nicholson as authentic and wrote in an otherwise sympathetic and well-meaning review of Iqbal's book:

> …like other of his contemporaries he has been influenced by Nietzsche;[2] he tries to find, in that rather shaky ideal of the Superman, a guide through the intricacy of conduct… As a guide to conduct, Nietzsche is at a discount in Europe. The drawback of being a Superman is that your neighbors observe your efforts, and try to be Supermen too, as Germany now realizes. The significance of Iqbal is not that he…manages to connect it with the Quran. Two modifications, and only two, have to be made: he condemns the Nietzsche who is an aristocrat, and an atheist; his Superman is permitted to spring from any class of society, and is obliged to believe in God. No further difficulty occurs.

Lowes Dickinson, who was among the architects of the League of Nations, joined the beeline. He detected passages in the poem where "the influence of Bergson is clear," and then added:

> But the strongest influence is Nietzsche. The doctrine of hardness, of individuality, of the need to conflict, and the benefit of an enemy run all through the poem.

E.G. Brown, whose *History of Persian Literature* had received a sharp rejoinder from Shibli Nomani (1857-1914) in India a decade ago, decided that Nicholson (and not Iqbal) was "the greatest living authority on Sufi mysticism" and thus repeated Nicholson's opinion about the philosophy of Iqbal:

> …which, as Dr. Nicholson says (p. x.), "owes much to Nietzsche and Bergson" and very little to the Neo-Platonists and their Eastern successors. Yet it is by no means a Western philosophy, rather a philosophical Pan-Islamism…

On these grounds, Brown arrived at the conclusion that "the surprising philosophical doctrine embodied in the poem" stands in "violent antagonism" to Sufi mysticism. (This reluctance of the European scholarship to the possibility of fresh interpretation of Sufi thought is reflected in our own age, for instance, in William Chittick's effort to interpret Rumi without having to deal with Iqbal. To a Western mind such scholarship may appear attractive, perhaps reminiscent of the twilight days of colonialism, but it appears painfully outdated to someone attuned with the recent developments in the East.)[3]

Iqbal wrote back to Nicholson, explaining that in his notes he had deliberately explained his position in reference to Western thinkers as he thought this would facilitate the understanding of his views in England. "I could have easily explained myself in the light of the Quran and Muslim Sufis and thinkers," he wrote, and went on to assert:

> I claim that the philosophy of *Asrar* is a direct development out of the experience and speculation of old Muslim Sufis and thinkers.

Following Nicholson's lead that Iqbal ought to be placed in the category of Muslim revivalists, Dickinson had raised an alarm:

> …some wistful Westerners, hopeless of their own countrymen are turning once more to look for a star in the East. What do they find? Not the star of Bethlehem, but this blood-red planet. If this book be prophetic, the last hope seems taken away. The East, if it arms, may indeed end by conquering the West. But if so, it will conquer no salvation for mankind. The old bloody duel will swing backwards and forwards across distracted and tortured world. And that is all. Is this really Mr. Iqbal's last word?

Apparently, Bethlehem was an allusion to W.B. Yeats' poem 'The Second Coming' that had only recently come out. Dickinson seems to have recognized that the "beast" in Yeats' vision was in fact a symbol of the rising East.[4]

In his letter to Nicholson, Iqbal addressed this concern too (and what he said about Dickinson's fear may also be applied to Yeats' poem):

> I am afraid the old European idea of a blood-thirsty Islam is still lingering in the mind of Dr. Dickinson. All men and not Muslims alone are meant for the kingdom of God on earth, provided they say good-bye to their idols of race and nationality, and treat one another as personalities…That Muslim peoples have fought and conquered like other peoples, and that some of their leaders have screened their personal ambition behind the veil of religion, I do not deny; but I am absolutely sure that territorial conquest was no part of the original programme of Islam…Islam certainly aims at absorption. This absorption, however, is to be achieved, not by territorial conquest, but by the simplicity of its teaching, its appeal to the common sense of mankind, and its aversion from abstruse metaphysical dogma…The object of my Persian poems is not to make out a case for Islam; my aim is simply to discover a universal social reconstruction, and in this endeavour I find it philosophically impossible to ignore a social system which exists with the express object of doing away with all the distinctions of caste, rank and race, and which, while keeping a watchful eye on the affairs of this world, fosters a spirit of the unworldliness so absolutely essential to man in his relations with his neighbours. This is what Europe lacks, and this is what she can still learn from us.

2

For the sake of a better understanding among nations of the world, Iqbal was asking for a paradigm shift in Europe's approach. Unfortunately that didn't happen.

In the 1940s, the Canadian missionary W.C. Smith set out to discover "Modern Islam in India" with a set of categories deeply rooted in the socialist discourse, such as liberal thought, reactionary thought, and so on. He found that Iqbal did not fit completely into any one of those but that parts of him may be placed in each. In his book *Modern Islam in India* (1944), Smith concluded that Iqbal was a sum of contradictions. It never occurred to Smith that if the most prominent exponent on the subject didn't fit into any category then obviously wrong categories were being used for the study.

The collapse of European colonialism called for a greater effort to understand Iqbal as the man through whose work so many people in the East were seeking guidance for setting up a new world order. Smith obviously realized this change and upon establishing the McGill Institute for Islamic Studies in Canada he tried to associate it with the vision of Iqbal. Another scholar who rose up to face the reality, with a vengeance, was Nicholson's successor at Cambridge, Arthur John Arberry (1905-1969).

In the 1940s, Arberry had offered two volumes of lyrical selections from Iqbal's Persian poetry in English. After the collapse of colonialism he felt that the message of Iqbal and his school of thought were the biggest threat to the Western supremacy and hence the West should be warned about the nature of this "immanent danger." Consequently the passage he chose for translating next was *Rumooz-i-Bekhudi* (Mysteries of Selflessness), the second half of the better-known *Asrar-i-Khudi* (Secrets of the Self).

Arberry had a greater exposure to the works of Iqbal than any of his predecessors. Unfortunately, even he seemed reluctant to step outside the beaten track of critical appreciation. Here is a typical passage of his description of Iqbal's craft:

> …his poetry is in Urdu and Persian, and abounds in the conventional imagery of those literatures; so that even when translated into English it is apt to be felt as somewhat remote and unfamiliar. Moreover, not only is his style highly idiomatic, but his thought is not infrequently complex, and almost too subtle for the language in which he chose to express it; while the exuberance of his poetic fancy baffles the reader not alert to its rapid transitions and not aware of the conceptual unity underlying the rhetorical diversity.

These are generalizations that may be repeated, without changing a single word, about practically every master of classical poetry from Iran or India. We can see that Arberry made no effort to show how Iqbal had used these well-known poetic conventions for constructing the grand architecture of his particular philosophy. In other words, he completely neglected the internal coherence in the work of Iqbal.

Like Nicholson, he also failed to observe that *Asrar-i-Khudi* and *Rumooz-i-Bekhudi* were not separate poems but parts of a single 'Mathnavi', or long poem, *Asrar-o-Rumooz* (Secrets and Mysteries).[5] His assumption that in the 'Secrets of the Self', Iqbal "developed the first part of his theory of the individual in society" was questionable because emphasis on society is found even in this part. To Iqbal, an individual is inconceivable without society just as a wave without the ocean, and hence the following deduction of Arberry hardly makes any sense:

> It is obvious that the Iqbalian conception of selfhood, if developed in isolation from society, ends in unmitigated egoism and anarchy…

It seems that Arberry relied on Nicholson's ideas about Iqbal's concept of the self and therefore arrived at a similar conclusion about Iqbal's concept of society, which is equally incorrect:

> …[Iqbal] aims to show that it is only in an ideal Islamic society, as he understands the matter, that the individual can hope to achieve complete self-affirmation.

Arberry's usage of "an ideal Islamic society" is misleading since according to Iqbal, the Islamic society is a single organism and has always remained so. A Muslim can achieve "complete self-affirmation" (as Arberry chooses to call it) through her or his relationship with this society regardless of whether the society is in its ideal state or not– the ideal in any case lies in the distant future. Likewise, Iqbal's emphasis is not on comparing the Islamic society with others but rather on seeking cooperation from those who have "practically the same ethical outlook."[6]

It is quite sad to notice where Arberry was taking his readers through this partially incorrect information:

> Such, in very brief and very simple, are the fundamental ideas worked out in these two poems. The ideas themselves are of course not particularly new; not particularly new either is the proposition that Islam is the ideal society; what is new, and what justifies Iqbal's pretension to be a leader of thought is the application of this philosophical theory of individuality and community to the religio-political dogma that Islam is superior to all other creeds and systems. The propaganda for Islamic unity in modern times has been continuous from the days of Jamaluddin Afghani (1839-97); Iqbal was one of the latest albeit one of the ablest and most influential of its publicists. He supplied a more or less respectable intellectual basis for a movement which is in reality more emotional than rational.

By his own admission, Arberry was working on the agenda of rehabilitating the colonialist discourse in the post-colonial academia– "the date of the millennium has been postponed," he wrote at the end of this passage. "But in the meanwhile there is important work to be done." How unfortunate that someone as well-reputed as

Arberry accused others of having a "more emotional than rational" basis in order to hide the fact that this was only true of himself!

In the repertoire of Iqbal Studies, *Gabriel's Wing* (1962) by Annemarie Schimmel remains a favorite especially with Western readers who are unfamiliar with Iqbal's works in their entirety. On its first appearance it offered an interesting kaleidoscope of comparisons between fragments of Iqbal's writings and scattered gems from Western and Sufi sources. However, the avowed task, to "simply show Iqbal's views on the essentials of Islam" remained underachieved due to lack of homework beyond mechanical research.

For instance, the very important section on 'predestination' in the third chapter depended too heavily on the general impression that Iqbal gave importance to free will. Thus it wasn't even mentioned that Iqbal's perception of history was entirely based on a kind of fatalism. In *The Reconstruction,* Iqbal quotes from Verse 34, Chapter 7 of the Quran, "Every nation hath its fixed period," and comments that it is "rather an instance of a more specific historical generalization which, in its epigrammatic formulation, suggests the possibility of a scientific treatment of the life of human societies regarded as organisms."[7] In so far as the life of an individual intersects with the life of the society, "destiny" also plays a part, according to Iqbal. Hence in his poetry we often find him rejoicing at "the humiliation of strategy at the hands of destiny."

3

Yet, mechanical research is not without its uses, as may be seen from the several useful indices, bibliographical tools and textual notes prepared by Iqbal scholars.

This mode of research is also useful for unpresumptuous brief studies consciously aimed at giving a sectional view of the subject. Two excellent examples are the various writings of Alessandro Bausani and the paper by Barbra Metcalf on Iqbal's poem 'The Mosque of Cordoba'.

Bausani's crowning grace is his acute sense of history due to which he never fails to place his findings in their proper perspective in the evolution of human civilization. He seems to be the only writer within the European milieu who had the potential to correct the mistakes of all his predecessors, only if he had received more attention. His comparative study of the sources of Iqbal's conception of Satan is quite well-known but here I would like to point out to such lesser-known gems as the following insight in his paper 'Dante and Iqbal', first published in the *East and West,* Rome, in 1951-2:

> Naturally the many vital differences between the two are not to be gainsaid. For one thing, Iqbal lived six centuries after Dante's death, and was born to a religious tradition different from the Catholic one. His is not the settled and well-ordered universe of Aristotle. On the contrary Iqbal strongly criticizes Greek thought which, according to him, ruined the pure atheism of early Christianity through its rationalist theology and Pagan ritualism; whereas Islam, though not entirely immune from the same taint, was better able to resist owing to its own anti-classical theology, such as the Ash'arite, which abolishes all the causes secundae in recognition of God's absolute freedom as Creator.[8]

Hence it is clear that Bausani displays a deeper insight into the world of Iqbal's thought than many European writers we have discussed here. While most of them had a tendency to look for dichotomies, Bausani aims to do the opposite by integrating the works of Iqbal, especially *Javednama* and *The Reconstruction.* This gives him a better view of the larger picture, for instance:

> Iqbal then, is not one of those Oriental mystics admired by too many weary Europeans on account of his own weariness; but neither is he a religious agitator or a fanatic worshipper of action as such. He "rose to heaven" before he went into action. His revaluation of the ego must not be too literally accepted, nor should we transpose it to a meaning too well-known to us Europeans.[9]

This is a very good first step towards discovering the internal coherence in the works of Iqbal. Unfortunately the tradition of Bausani was less often followed in the mainstream than that of Arberry.

While Bausani was pointing at the internal coherence in the larger picture of Iqbal's entire work, Barbara D. Metcalf studied a small detail of that picture in order to discover that mechanism through which the coherence of the larger picture could be discerned. In 'Reflections on Iqbal's Mosque', a paper read out at the International Congress on Allama Muhammad Iqbal held at Lahore in December 1977, Metcalf treated Iqbal's poem 'The Mosque of Cordoba' like a masterpiece of architecture in order to discover parallels between the poem and the Mosque which was being praised in it. Of an even greater utility was her general observation which, unfortunately, didn't get much attention in the subsequent decades:

> The appeal of the poem is often attributed to its subject. That alone, however, does not explain the poem's magic, for the mosque alone could be read about in Baedeker or a history of Spain. The subject is important only because of the way it is treated and the way it is embedded in the poem. It is, therefore, important to examine the poem itself, its stanzaic form and patterns of rhyme and rhythm as well as its content. Most studies of Iqbal take for granted that Iqbal is a poet and do not analyze his skill as craftsman and artist. Treatments of his poetry

> typically extract from the verse aspects of Iqbal's political or philosophical or religious thought attention to the context that gives them form and meaning.

In this compact statement, Metcalf summed up the cardinal temptations of Iqbal scholars. Her own success in showing that "Iqbal in this poem not only celebrates a mosque, but literally builds in the verse a 'mosque' of his own" was ensured by her success in avoiding extra-textual resources.

On the other hand, the work of Pakistani-American scholar Mustansir Mir– available so far in the volumes *Tulip in the Desert* (2000) and *Iqbal* (2006), and the quarterly *Iqbalnama*– is a specimen of how first class Western scholarship on Iqbal can occasionally suffer from giving in to these 'cardinal temptations'. The work offers an outstanding translation of passages from the Urdu and Persian poetry of Iqbal with an excellent analysis of the imagery used. Also, it deserves special credit for introducing to the Western scholarship several convictions commonly shared in Pakistan but relatively unknown outside– such as, "Iqbal's poetry and philosophy do not exist in isolation from each other, but are integrally related, his poetry serving as a vehicle for his thought",[10] or "even if we take the period of his stay in Europe (1905-8) as the turning point in the evolution of his thought, Iqbal's writings in the post-Europe period show remarkable consistency."[11]

Mir is at his analytical best on subjects such as the imagery of Iqbal's poems but gives his readers an occasion to be dissatisfied where he attempts to reach a conclusion on the basis of minor details only and overlooks the larger context.

An outstanding example of the first is to be found in Mir's footnotes to his translation of Iqbal's poem 'Philosophers', which is a dialogue between Locke, Kant and Bergson. After explaining the imagery of the poem in relation to the philosophical position of each thinker, Mir concludes:

> A few general remarks on 'Locke, Kant and Bergson'[12] may not be out of place. (1) Iqbal's three couplets are remarkable for their succinct summing up of some of the fundamental ideas of the three philosophers. But Iqbal does not merely state the three philosophers' views; he also shows how these views are interrelated in a continuing movement of thought from Locke to Bergson: how Kant criticized Locke, and how Bergson criticized both Kant and Locke. (2) It is equally remarkable that Iqbal is able to use a single image, that of the tulip, to describe the philosophies of the three thinkers. The tulip, Iqbal's favorite flower, appears ideal for his purposes here: with Locke it becomes a clean slate (empty wine-cup); with Kant it becomes the formal conditioning factors of knowledge and understanding (tulip's starlike cup); and with Bergson the 'scar' in the tulip's heart represents the principle of life which is its own explanation. Iqbal succeeds eminently in explicating certain concepts in

> Western thought by using a typical Eastern image; one could hardly think of a more felicitous way of describing Western thought to an Eastern audience. (3) To which of the three views is Iqbal himself sympathetic? One can say that in the present context at least, Iqbal supports the view of Bergson, or that he uses Bergson as his mouthpiece. Bergson would be quite pleased by Iqbal's description elsewhere (ZK 638 [589][13]) of the natural water fountain: "It is from its inner drive that the water of the fountain gushes forth and rises [*buland josh-i darun se hu'a he fawwara*]."[14]

Mir's analysis of this poem is outstanding. However, while showing us that Iqbal himself may be most sympathetic to Bergson's view on the subject, Mir has chosen to quote from a different book by Iqbal and although one cannot disagree with Mir's comment, the comment itself may have become more substantial if he had informed his readers that in the preface of 'A Message from the East' itself (the book from which this poem is taken), Iqbal has made a comment about Bergson which is very relevant to the substance of the poem and sheds more light on it.

Likewise, while analyzing the theme of nature in the chapter entitled 'Major Themes in Poetry' in *Iqbal,* Mir points out four levels of Iqbal's engagement with nature:

(a) Celebrating the simple beauty of nature;
(b) Nature as a congenial companion;
(c) Nature as a spur to serious reflection;
(d) Nature as a foil for drawing out the human being's potential.

This is inspired scholarship. It is much to be regretted that it doesn't take one more step to demolish some boundaries by showing the very obvious connection between these four levels of Iqbal's engagement with nature and the five elements in his interpretation of the Qur'anic conception of God. Those elements have been listed by Mir himself in the chapter called 'Philosophical Thought' as Individuality, Creativeness, Knowledge, Omnipotence and Eternity.

It should not be difficult to see that the four levels of engagements with nature which Mir has so candidly discovered in the poetry of Iqbal are related to the latter four elements in the conception of God *in the reverse order* (and the reversal is significant, as I will try to show):

(a) Celebrating the simple beauty of nature is recognition of God's Eternity.
(b) Nature as a congenial companion is a sign of God's Omnipotence.
(c) Nature as a spur to serious reflection corresponds to God's Knowledge.
(d) Nature as a foil for drawing out the human being's potential mirrors God's Creativeness.

If Mir had decided to bring this internal coherence in the work of Iqbal it would have not only substantiated his magnificent conception of Iqbal's poetry 'serving as a vehicle for his thought', but he may also have felt inclined to mention a fifth level of Iqbal's engagement with nature. This is where, after using nature as a foil for drawing her or his own potential, the human being makes sustainable modifications to nature and hence:

(e) Nature serves as raw material for sustainable human artistry in celebration of God's Individuality.

As I have tried to show in my book *The Republic of Rumi: A Novel of Reality* (2007), the five elements of the Qur'anic conception of God lead to the formation of five 'categories' for objective analysis in the thought system of Iqbal. Since in any such analysis the human being is ascending from her or his own position, the sequence of the stations of this objective human wisdom is the opposite of the five elements in the conception of God– the human consciousness 'ascends' towards the conception of God while the conception of God 'descends' upon the human consciousness. These subtleties come out only when we make an effort to discover the internal coherence of the works of Iqbal, for which we need to study him on his own terms– terms that may not be in complete agreement with the current trends of philosophical thought.

In a very Shakespearean sense, the tragic flaw of Mir seems to be his bonding with the academic paradigm of the West. In 'Iqbal's Legacy', the final chapter of *Iqbal,* he writes:

> Until now, Iqbal has been mainly viewed as a poet and the serious philosophical aspect of his thought, whether expressed in his prose or in his poetry, has not been fully recognized. That aspect has now begun to attract greater attention, and this changing trend is due, at least in part, to Western scholars' analytical and critical studies on Iqbal.

Of the overall worth of "Western scholars' analytical and critical studies on Iqbal," we have already made a fairly good assessment. The most valuable contributions have been by those who, like Bausani and Metcalf, were brave enough to step outside narrow definitions of "analytical and critical studies" and were therefore able to have a clearer view of Iqbal's poetry "serving as a vehicle for his thought," as Mir himself has stated the matter so beautifully elsewhere.[15]

PART II

The Sentimental Approach

In his review of *The Secrets of the Self,* mentioned earlier, E. M. Forster also informed his readers that Iqbal used to write with a

Muslim sentiment in the beginning but had been catering to patriotic feelings since 1916 due to a change in political trends in India:

> …and there is much discussion as to how he will evolve. If an outsider may venture an opinion, he will not evolve but revolve.

One wonders from where Forster got his information that "there is much discussion as to how [Iqbal] will evolve." There was no such discussion, nor could have been, for the poems did not come in the order Forster had assumed for them. The so-called 'patriotic' poems, which Forster placed in 1916 and later, had in fact been written much earlier around 1904-5. The 'Islamic' poems came later, but what Forster missed was that patriotism and Muslim identity existed in the works of Iqbal simultaneously in any given period, early or late.

In his letter to Nicholson, Iqbal tried to correct Forster's mistake rather politely and not without his characteristic humility:

> The view of the writer in *The Athenaeum*[16] is largely affected by some mistakes of fact, for which, however, the writer does not seem to be responsible. But I am sure if he had known some of the dates of the publication of my Urdu poems referred to in his review, he would have certainly taken a totally different view of the growth of my literary activity.[17]

The most striking thing about this mistake is that Nicholson himself, to whom the letter was addressed, repeated it a few years later while reviewing Iqbal's next Persian work, *Payam-i-Mashriq* (A Message from the East). He opened his essay with these words:

> Amongst the Indian Muslim poets of today Iqbal stands on a hill by himself. In him there are two voices of power. One speaks in Urdu and appeals to Indian patriotism, though Iqbal is not a nationalist in politics; the other, which uses the beautiful and melodious language of Persia, sings to a Muslim audience…

It seems that Nicholson, who may not have had any first-hand knowledge of Iqbal's Urdu poetry, was relying on Forster's report. He may have remembered that Iqbal mentioned some error of dating, and therefore he substituted the gradual changes in thought with a dichotomy existing at the same time!

Ironically, "the Muslim element" was actually more obvious in Iqbal's Urdu poetry at that particular time while his latest Persian anthology, which Nicholson was reviewing, contained much of such stuff as "a lover does not differentiate between Ka'aba and the temple." One wonders why –despite this latest evidence of 'universalism' in Iqbal's poetry– Nicholson was so adamant at repeating his previous position that Iqbal's Persian poetry was only about making out a case for Islam.

Thus was born that most persistent myth about Iqbal that his career was either a series of dramatic changes in viewpoints– from patriotism to Muslim nationalism, from pantheism to its opposite, from Sufism to Superman– or it suffered from some sort of dichotomy, whether between his Urdu and Persian poetry or between his poetry and his prose.

It is not difficult to see that this misconception was partially due to Forster's general concept of poets which he had described in the same review. "Poets," he had written, "Since they decide by emotion rather than arithmetic, their attitude is often unstable and vexes the politicians. Iqbal is a case in point." This concept comes quite close to the Quranic description of bad poets from which, in all fairness, Iqbal deserves to be exempted:

> And as for the poets– those who are lost in grievous error would follow them. Are you not aware that they roam confusedly through all the valleys. And that they say what they do not do? Except those who have attained to faith, and do righteous deeds, and remember God unceasingly, and defend themselves [only] after having been wronged, and those who are bent on wrongdoing will in time come to know how evil a turn their destinies are bound to take.[18]

The Islamic concept of 'wisdom poetry' arises out of the Qur'anic conception of good poetry. In his *Mathnavi,* Rumi tells the story of a foolish servant whose master sent him to fetch flour and salt in a pot but told him to keep the two separate. The servant went to the shop and got some flour. Then he turned the pot over and asked the shopkeeper to put some salt on the other side. Of course, the flour was lost in the process but he didn't notice. When he returned to the master and showed the salt, the master said, "That's nice. Now where is the flour?" The servant said, "It must be on the other side." Saying this, he turned the pot over again, thus losing the salt as well. Rumi warns us that when we do with ideas what the foolish servant did with the pot, what we lose in the process is not salt or flour but our selves. One can see an analogy between this constant turning over of the pot and "the continual surrender of himself" which T.S. Eliot asked of a poet towards "the mind of Europe." Rumi foresees loss of the self as a result, and Eliot also hoped for the same:

> The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.[19]

This 'new criticism' that was emerging in Europe those days could not leave much room for 'wisdom poetry'– a handicap of the European scholar that was further enhanced by a new approach to biography usually attributed to the Bloomsbury writer Lytton Strachey (1880-1932), who was a close friend of both Forster and

Eliot. It seems appropriate to see how he viewed the duties of a biographer:

> To preserve, for instance, a becoming brevity– a brevity which excludes everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant– that, surely, is the first duty of the biographer. The second, no less surely, is to maintain his own freedom of spirit. It is not his business to be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them…[20]

The intentions are indeed noble but one can detect a sense of defeat in the qualifier "as he understands them" as it implies that the biographer may not be able to lay bare the facts as they were in themselves. Secondly, the suggestion "to maintain his own freedom of spirit" could lead to a kind of intellectual arrogance that was avoidable only if the writer aimed instead to *discover* that freedom of spirit through the process itself. Ninety years later we can see that Strachey's methods have led to a sentimental approach whereby many subsequent biographers have been compelled to approach their subjects in the light of their own dogmas and misunderstood this as freedom of spirit.

Alternates to the Strachey approach have seldom been taken seriously in the West. One such case is the American critic Herbert Reed, who offered an alternate to the sentimental approach in 1921 when he compared Iqbal with the ideal of Walt Whitman and observed:

> Applying it here and now, I can think of only one living poet who in any way sustains the test, and almost necessarily he is not of our race and creed. I mean Muhammad Iqbal…

He concluded that Iqbal's ideal was more relevant than Nietzsche's and more vital than Whitman's.

Reed could not overthrow the influence of Strachey. "Man is led by man and we are led by Mr. Strachey," a younger biographer Lord David Cecil (1902-86) wrote in 1936. "We may extend his building, but we must always construct on his foundations."[21] Most subsequent writers on Iqbal have been directly or indirectly indebted to the biographical legacy of Strachey whether they knew it or not (and in most instances they did not). Therefore, Iqbal knew exactly what he was talking about when he stated in the preface to *A Message from the East* in 1923:

> Regarded from a purely literary standpoint, the debilitation of the forces of life in Europe after the ordeal of the war is unfavorable to the development of a correct and mature literary ideal. Indeed, the fear is that the minds of the nations may be gripped by that slow-pulsed Magianism which runs away from life's difficulties and which fails to

distinguish between the sentiments of the heart and the thoughts of the mind.[22]

4

In the 1940s, the Canadian missionary Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000) attempted to discover the "modern Islam in India" with a set of categories deeply embedded in the socialist discourse, such as liberal thought, reactionary thought, and so on. He found that Iqbal did not fit completely into any of those but parts of him could be attributed to each. In his book *Modern Islam in India* (1944), Smith concluded that Iqbal was a sum of contradictions. Obviously a more objective approach would have been to notice that if the subject wasn't fitting into any category then the categories being used for the study were wrong.

However, we need not discuss that book further because Smith himself realized his mistake very soon. Consequently the McGill Institute of Islamic Studies founded by him in 1952 was attributed to a mature perception of Iqbal. "My teacher Wilfred Cantwell Smith had been strongly influenced by Iqbal," writes Dr. Sheila McDonough, who was in the first batch of students at McGill Institute:

> Smith said he had tried to pay honor to Iqbal, not by writing explicitly about the poet-philosopher's life and thought, but by receiving inspiration from him, and by applying his mind to the same problems that had concerned the Muslim thinker. Subsequently, Smith has become one of the most significant innovative thinkers and institution builders in North America, and in the world, in the area of the comparative history of religion as an academic discipline.

It is the later and more mature understanding of Iqbal by Smith that properly deserves our attention. He thought that 'destiny' in the writings of Iqbal was a figurative reference to human potentials yet to be unfolded. Likewise, Smith thought that Iqbal, like Nietzsche, had regarded all cultures to be entirely human creations.[23] On both issues, Smith was overlooking a major portion of the canon of Iqbal's writings.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Iqbal's perception of history was based on a kind of fatalism. This made it possible for him to believe that a visionary can foresee the destiny of his or her nation. In the Allahabad Address he stated clearly:

> By leaders I mean men who, by Divine gift or experience, possess a keen perception of the spirit and destiny of Islam, along with an equally keen perception of the trend of modern history. Such men are really the

> driving forces of a people, but they are God's gift and cannot be made to order.

The "spirit" and "destiny" both refer here to certain concretes. Iqbal himself claimed knowledge of the major events of Muslim history up to several centuries into the future– he wrote that very clearly in a letter to a friend in 1917, in every single book of his poetry and in the Allahabad Address itself where he stated:

> Self-Government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire, *the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim state* appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims at least of the North-West India. [24]

Likewise the 'spirit' of Islam– or "the spirit of Muslim culture" as he calls it in the *Reconstruction*– is not just a figure of speech but an entity, a 'self'. As such it cannot be a human creation and only the Divine command could have created it. Since the spirit of Muslim culture is an entity– a 'spirit'– its aims, objects and future intentions may be discovered by someone who dares to look beyond appearances and take into account all the forces that shape history. Iqbal believed it possible to acquire such knowledge and considered himself to be one such person (which wasn't very unusual in the particular tradition to which he belonged: Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi and Shah Waliullah had also made similar assertions in their own times, and their predictions had come true, just like Iqbal's prediction about 'the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim state').

It is a pity that Smith didn't grasp this dimension of Iqbal. One can see why. Dr. Sheila McDonough writes:

> The shocks of partition, and his discovery of the brutality of the Stalinist regime, had knocked out of Smith's head any certainty that he, or anyone else, could ever have a clear enough grasp of all the factors at work in any historical situation to be able to say that they knew exactly what forces were shaping history.

One can sympathize with Smith but should not presume too readily that he and Iqbal were on the same plane.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, another significant Orientalist who appeared with the collapse of colonialism around the same time was A.J. Arberry. His treatment of Iqbal's biography in the preface to *The Mysteries of Selflessness* (a part of which was discussed earlier) was as sentimental as any Bloomsbury:

> …his last years of mental and physical anguish were not relieved by the consolation of knowing that the cause for which he strove so long was so soon to triumph. But a spate of publications, issued in Pakistan hard upon the heels of its independence, hailed him as the spiritual founder of the richest and most numerous Muslim country in the world…

In this sample, Arberry has glossed over certain facts. We have seen that Iqbal's foresight is an issue that cannot be handled without some serious analysis of his statements in that regard but Arberry was either not aware of such material or he overlooked it in order to achieve a Stracheyesque style in his writing. At least his next sentence seems to be driven more by stylistic concerns than by what he must have known about "the spate of publications" that hailed Iqbal as the spiritual founder of Pakistan: such publications had been quite abundant even before the independence of Pakistan and included several statements by the Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah himself.

The low ebb of sentimentality in Iqbal Studies, however, may only be assessed through H.T. Sorley who, in his note on Iqbal in *Musa Parvagans* (1953), came up with a fantastic observation:

> Iqbal would have been a better poet if he had had the spirit to climb Mount Everest. But he did not care for such things of the pulsating and active spirit. The result is that his poetry is the work of a sedate intellectual who at times reaches the high levels of achievement but cannot hope to scale the utmost peaks.[25]

Annemarie Schimmel echoed Sorley, although in a more sympathetic manner, when she wrote about 'the aesthetic side' of Iqbal in the first chapter of *Gabriel's Wing*:

> Iqbal himself was not fond of outdoor amusements, and therefore praises Islam which has, essentially, no amusements…[26]

She quoted an entry from Iqbal's private notebook *Stray Reflections* where Iqbal states, "The absence of amusement in Muslim countries indicates neither poverty nor austerity nor bluntness of the sense for enjoyment…" If the thesis of Sorley and Schimmel is accepted then it becomes very difficult to explain such passages from Iqbal's poetry where the protagonists attempt to cross the Atlantic on horsebacks– we cannot presume that the poet developed a temporary passion for horse-riding when he wrote those lines.

The assessments of Sorley and Schimmel seem to be driven by the same concept of poet which Forster had erroneously applied to Iqbal: *"they decide by emotion rather than arithmetic…"* Hence from a letter written by Iqbal in 1918, she inferred that he "wanted literature to be optimistic" and presumed that "this is also the reason for his criticism of Hafiz whose poetical art– if taken only as art– he highly admired but who 'did not sharpen the sword of the self' (ZK 127)."

It seems that Schimmel overlooked the fact that Iqbal had a tendency towards meliorism rather than optimism, but what is even more baffling is that Hafiz is not even mentioned in that poem in *Zarb-i-Kaleem* ('ZK') from which she quoted the line with some interpolation. On the

contrary, two poems later Iqbal praises "the tavern of Hafiz" for being a testimony to "the heat of its architect's blood."

Schimmel was obviously relying on the information that Iqbal made harsh remarks about Hafiz at one point in his life and overlooked the fact that he took back those remarks two years later. Even then it was not a very safe presumption that one could quote any statement of Iqbal on bad poetry as Iqbal's opinion on Hafiz.

5

The Flame of Sinai: Hope and Vision in Iqbal (2002) by Dr. Sheila McDonough was a full-length biography from the perspective of comparative history of religions. The positive, and perhaps lasting, contribution of the book was to revisit the life of Iqbal with a number of perspectives that had emerged in the academic discourse since the collapse of colonialism, such as the potential contribution of Iqbal to the comparative history of religions, his comparison with Gandhi and Nehru, and so on. Some of these aspects had never been studied in book-length detail.

What made this commendable effort ineffective was a high number of factual mistakes and unsubstantiated opinions. It is true that most scholars face some gaps in factual information, since few people can claim to know everything about a subject but writers usually get around it by wording their statements carefully. Unfortunately, Dr. McDonough's work gave the impression of a general disregard for facts. Her assertion that Iqbal was "deified" and "divinized" in Pakistan could have been worded more carefully to show her familiarity with the difference between 'canonization' and 'deification'.

Apparently the statement was rooted in the author's dislike for reverence but she went on to state that Iqbal was never called "Allama" in his lifetime[27]– as if those who now call him by that title lack in a sense of history. Since 'Allama' was the singularly most common epithet used for Iqbal in his lifetime, at least in the Muslim press of India, Dr. McDonough's assertion amounts to a mild intellectual violence: as if she was claiming superiority over the more knowledgeable on the ground that she knew less. One could see the Stracheyesque sentimentalism at work here: objectivity was being interpreted as mere irreverence and the author's "independence of spirit" soared higher than the need to be checked by accuracy of facts.

To this may be added some fifteen other errors that punctuated the 250-page book. Some seemed to be due to a lack of familiarity

with basic texts– such as that Iqbal delivered his *Reconstruction* lectures "in Madras in 1929".[28] (The preface of *Reconstruction* mentions that the lectures were "delivered at Madras, Hyderabad, and Aligarh.") Other mistakes may have arisen out of a general disregard for facts.

This overall inability 'to distinguish between the sentiments of the heart and the thoughts of the mind' prevented Dr. McDonough from seeing a basic problem in her premise. In the introduction to her book she stated:

> The theoretical point is that religions are best understood by those who practice them…

It is difficult to disagree with her position but it is a position which questions the very justification for comparative history of religion, of which Dr. McDonough herself is an exponent and in her book she tried to show Iqbal as one of the earliest exponents too. If "religions are best understood by those who practice them", then a scholar of comparative history of religions should presume to be superior to the followers of religions, since they can best understand only their own religions while the scholar can understand all religions. To say the least, this would lead to an intellectual arrogance even when the scholar doesn't intend it.

The other alternate for the scholar is to admit that she or he is working with something less than average, something less than the best understanding of religions possible only for those 'who practice them'. This would be tantamount to admitting that the discipline itself is an exercise in mediocrity, and hence the practitioners of comparative history of religions would be reluctant to go for this alternative.

Iqbal offers a solution. In *Javidnama,* his journey across the universe begins under the guidance of Rumi and the first stop in the itinerary is moon where the following seven stations may be recognized:

1. The cave of Vishvamitra[29]
2. The music of Sarosh
3. The poetry of Sarosh
4. The tablet of Buddha
5. The tablet of Zarathustra
6. The tablet of Christ
7. The tablet of Muhammad

A careful study would reveal that these seven stations are meant to highlight the spiritual journey of the entire humanity as well as that of an individual soul. The first station is metaphysics, the second and third stations are fine arts, and the remaining are four

religions in historic progression. The unity between religions is to be understood through the unity of life which insists on integrating spirituality with other areas (hence the first three stations) and by assigning a unique role to each religion in history (hence the four latter stations). Practically, the entire existing civilization can be divided into four zones, each of which is illuminated by the message of one of the four prophets mentioned here: Buddha, Zarathustra, Christ and Muhammad.

However, while one particular region may find more emphasis in a particular region, the real boundaries cannot be geographic or eugenic. The point is not to stop at any point, since the seven stations of Moon are paralleled by seven stages of the journey itself. Those stages are Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and the Paradise:

1. As the first station on Moon, the cave of Vishvamitra comes to represent the whole of the planet, which is the first stage of the journey: Vishvamitra's "nine sayings" give an overview of the entire journey from an intellectual point of view while the seven stations of Moon give an overview through experience.
2. The deeper meaning of the music of Sarosh (the second station on Moon) is revealed on Mercury (the second stage of the journey) through recitation of the Quran by Jamaluddin Afghani and his exposition of 'the World of the Quran'.
3. The poetry of Sarosh (the third station on Moon) is apparently the inspiration for two poems recited on Venus (the third stage of the journey): Iqbal's *ghazal* recited by Rumi in defiance of false idols and the Mahdi of Sudan's lyrics recited by him in defiance of human tyrants.
4. The message of Buddha 'to be in the world and yet be free of it' (the fourth station on Moon) gets fully illustrated through the world of Barkhia on Mars (the fourth stage in the journey).
5. The prophetic consciousness of Zarathustra, who defies the ascetic preaching of Ahriman (at the fifth station on Moon), is echoed in the souls whom Iqbal meets on Jupiter (the fifth stage) and the purpose of Ahriman is also better understood there.
6. The tablet of Christ with the dream of Tolstoy (the sixth station on Moon) is paralleled in the plight of India as depicted on Saturn (the sixth stage).
7. The tablet of Muhammad, where his arch enemy is urging the idols to stay in Ka'aba or at least in the infidels' hearts (the final station on Moon) may be better understood in the light of the final stage of the journey where Iqbal meets God face to face.

It is a pity that the discovery of this internal coherence of *Javidnama* escaped the one scholar who had the "cause, and will, and strength, and means to do it."[30] Dr. McDonough's limitations didn't seem to be personal but could be traced back to the Bloomsbury concept of the poet as a sentimental being. "Since the *Javid Namah* is a reflection on what Iqbal met, thought about, and internalized in his own lifetime, it cannot be taken as blueprint to be followed literally, since his particular context will never be repeated," she observed at the beginning of her analysis. "Nevertheless, it is a message about what it was like for one human being to try to make sense of his life."[31]

Ironically, this is the assumption against which Iqbal warns the potential reader at the very beginning of the poem:

> What I have said comes from another world; this book descends from another heaven.

*****

Postscript:

In His Own Words

My Dear Dr. Nicholson,[32]

I was very glad to learn from your letter to Shafi[33] that your translation of the *Asrar-i-Khudi* has been favourably received and excited much attention in England. Some of the English reviewers, however, have been misled by the superficial resemblance of some of my ideas to those of Nietzsche.[34] The view of the writer in *The Athenaeum*[35] is largely affected by some mistakes of fact, for which, however, the writer does not seem to be responsible. But I am sure if he had known some of the dates of the publication of my Urdu poems referred to in his review, he would have certainly taken a totally different view of the growth of my literary activity. Nor does he rightly understand my idea of the Perfect Man, which he confounds with the German thinker's Superman. I wrote on the Sufi doctrine of the Perfect Man more than twenty years ago – long before I had read or heard anything of Nietzsche. This was then published in *The Indian Antiquary*[36] and later, in 1908, formed part of my book on Persian Metaphysics.[37] The English reader ought to approach this idea not through the German thinker, but through an English thinker of great merit – I mean Alexander,[38] whose Gifford Lectures delivered in Glasgow were published last year. His chapter on Deity and God (ii.341) is worth reading. On page 347 he says: "Deity is thus the next higher empirical quality to mind, which the universe is engaged in bringing to birth. That the universe is pregnant with such a quality we are speculatively assured. What that quality is we cannot know; for we can neither enjoy nor still less contemplate it. Our human altars still are raised to the unknown God. If

we could know what Deity is, how it feels to be Divine, we should first have to become as God." Alexander's thought is much bolder than mine. I believe there is a Divine tendency in the universe, but this tendency will eventually find its complete expression in a higher man, not in a God subject to Time, as Alexander implies in his discussion of the subject. I do not agree with Alexander's view of God; but it is clear that my idea of the Perfect Man will lose much of its outlandishness in the eye of the English reader if he approaches it through the ideas of a thinker of his own country.

But it was Mr. Lowes Dickinson's review[39] which interested me most, and I want to make a few remarks on it.

1. Mr. Dickinson thinks, as I understand from his private letter to me,[40] that I have deified physical force in the poem. He is, however, mistaken in his view. I believe in the power of the spirit, not brute force. When a people is called to a righteous war, it is, according to my belief, their duty to obey the call; but I condemn all war of conquest (cf. the story of Miyan Mir and the Emperor of India).[41] But Mr. Dickinson is quite right when he says that war is destructive, whether it is waged in the interest of truth and justice or in the interests of conquest and exploitation. It must be put an end to in any case. We have seen, however, that treaties, leagues, arbitrations and conferences cannot put an end to it. Even if we secure these in a more effective manner than before, ambitious nations will substitute more peaceful forms of the exploitation of races supposed to be less favoured or less civilized. The truth is that we stand in need of a living personality to solve our social problems, to settle our disputes and to place international morality on a surer basis. How very true are the last two paragraphs of Prof. Mackenzie's *Introduction to Social Philosophy* (pp.367ff).[42] I take the liberty to transcribe them here:

> There can be no ideal society without ideal men: and for the production of these we require not only insight but a motive power; fire as well as light. Perhaps a philosophical understanding of our social problems is not even the chief want of our time. We need prophets as well as teachers, men like Carlyle or Ruskin or Tolstoy, who are able to add for us a new severity to conscience or a new breadth to duty. Perhaps we want a new Christ… It has been well said that the wilderness of the present is in the incessant war by which we are trying to make our way upwards. It is there that the prophet must be.
>
> Or perhaps our chief want is rather for the poet of the new age than for its prophet – or for one who should be poet and prophet in one. Our poets of recent generations have taught us the love of nature, and enabled us to see in it the revelation of the divine. We still look for one who shall show us with the same clearness the presence of the divine in the human… We shall need one who shall be fully and in all seriousness what Heine

playfully called himself, a 'Ritter von dem Heiligen Geist,' one who shall teach us to see the working out of our highest ideals in everyday life of the world, and to find in devotion to the advancement of that life, not merely a sphere for an ascetic self-sacrifice, but a supreme object in the pursuit of which 'all thoughts, all passions, all delights' may receive their highest development and satisfaction.

It is in the light of such thoughts that I want the British public to read my description of the ideal man. It is not our treaties and arbitrations which will put an end to the internecine wars of the human family. A living personality alone will effectively do such a thing, and it is to him that I say:
Bring once more days of peace to the world,
Give a message of peace to them that seek battle.[43]

2. Mr. Dickinson further refers to my "Be hard." This is based on the view of reality that I have taken in the poem. According to my belief reality is a collection of individualities tending to become a harmonious whole through conflict which must inevitably lead to mutual adjustment. This conflict is a necessity in the interests of the evolution of higher forms of life and of personal immortality. Nietzsche did not believe in personal immortality. To those desiring it he ruthlessly says: "Do you wish to be a perpetual burden on the shoulders of time?"[44] He was led to say this because he had a wrong notion of time, and never tried to grapple with the ethical issue involved in the question of time. On the other hand I look upon immortality as the highest aspiration of man, on which he should focus all his energies, and consequently I recognize the need of all forms of activity, including conflict, which tend to make the human person more and more stable.[45] And for the same consideration I condemn speculative mysticism and inactive quietism. My interest in conflict is mainly ethical and not political, whereas Nietzsche's was probably only political. Modern physical science has taught us that the atom of material energy has achieved its present form through many thousands of years of evolution. Yet it is unstable and can be made to disappear. The same is the case with the atom of mind-energy, i.e. the human person. It has achieved its present form through aeons of incessant effort and conflict; yet, in spite of all this, its instability is clear from the various phenomena of mental pathology. If it is to continue intact it cannot ignore the lessons learnt from its past career, and will require the same (or similar) forces to maintain its stability which it has availed itself or before. It is possible that in its onward march nature may modify or eliminate altogether some of the forces (e.g. conflict in the way of mutual wars) that have so far determined and helped its evolution, and introduce new forces hitherto unknown to mankind, to secure its stability. But I confess I am not an idealist in this matter, and believe this time to be very distant. I am afraid mankind will not, for a very long time to come, learn the lesson that the Great European War[46] has

offered them. Thus it is clear that my purpose in recognizing the need of conflict is merely ethical. Mr. Dickinson has unfortunately altogether ignored this aspect of the "Be hard."

3. Mr. Dickinson further remarks that while my philosophy is universal, my application of it is particular and exclusive. This is in a sense true. The humanitarian ideal is always universal in poetry and philosophy; but if you make it an effective ideal and work it out in actual life, you must start, not with poets and philosophers, but with a society exclusive, in the sense of having a creed and a well-defined outline, but ever enlarging its limits by example and persuasion.[47] Such a society, according to my belief, is Islam. This society has so far proved itself a most successful opponent of the race-idea, which is probably the hardest barrier in the way of the humanitarian ideal. Renan[48] was wrong when he said that science is the greatest enemy of Islam. No, it is the race-idea which is the greatest enemy of Islam – in fact of all humanity; and it is the duty of all lovers of mankind to stand in revolt against this dreadful invention of the Devil. Since I find that the idea of nationality – based on race or territory – is making headway in the world of Islam, and since I fear that the Muslims, losing sight of their own ideal of a universal humanity, are being lured by the idea of a territorial nationality, I feel it is my duty, as a Muslim and as a lover of all men, to remind them of their true function in the evolution of mankind. Tribal and national organization on the lines of race or territory are only a temporary phase in the unfolding and upbringing of collective life, and as such I have no quarrel with them; but I condemn them in the strongest possible terms when they are regarded as the ultimate expression of the life of mankind. While I have the greatest love for Islam, it is in view of practical and not patriotic considerations, as Mr. Dickinson thinks, that I am compelled to start with a specific society (e.g. Islam) which, among the societies of the world, happens to be the only one suitable to my purpose. Nor is the spirit of Islam so exclusive as Mr. Dickinson thinks. In the interests of a universal unification of mankind the Quran ignores their minor differences and says: "Come let us unite on what is common to us all."[49]

I am afraid the old European idea of a blood-thirsty Islam is still lingering in the mind of Dr. Dickinson. All men and not Muslims alone are meant for the kingdom of God on earth, provided they say good-bye to their idols of race and nationality, and treat one another as personalities. Leagues, mandates, treaties, like the one described by Mr. Keynes,[50] and imperialisms, however draped in democracy, can never bring salvation to mankind. The salvation of man lies in absolute equality and freedom of all. We stand in need of a thorough overhauling of the uses of science which have brought so much misery to mankind, and of a total abandonment of

what may be called esoteric politics, which is ever planning the ruin of less clever or weaker races.

That Muslim peoples have fought and conquered like other peoples, and that some of their leaders have screened their personal ambition behind the veil of religion, I do not deny; but I am absolutely sure that territorial conquest was no part of the original programme of Islam. As a matter of fact I consider it a great loss that the progress of Islam as a conquering faith stultified the growth of those germs of an economic and democratic organization of society, which I find scattered up and down the pages of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet. No doubt the Muslims succeeded in building a great empire, but thereby they largely re-paganised their political ideals and lost sight of some of the most important potentialities of their faith.[51] Islam certainly aims at absorption. This absorption, however, is to be achieved, not by territorial conquest, but by the simplicity of its teaching, its appeal to the common sense of mankind, and its aversion from abstruse metaphysical dogma.[52] That Islam can succeed by its inherent force is sufficiently clear from the Muslim missionary work in China, where it has won millions of adherents without the help of any political power. I hope that more than twenty years' study of the world's thought has given me sufficient training to judge things impartially.

The object of my Persian poems is not to make out a case for Islam; my aim is simply to discover a universal social reconstruction, and in this endeavour I find it philosophically impossible to ignore a social system which exists with the express object of doing away with all the distinctions of caste, rank and race, and which, while keeping a watchful eye on the affairs of this world, fosters a spirit of the unworldliness so absolutely essential to man in his relations with his neighbours. This is what Europe lacks, and this is what she can still learn from us.

One word more, in my notes which now form part of your introduction to *Asrar-i-Khudi* I deliberately explained my position in reference to Western thinkers, as I thought this would facilitate the understanding of my views in England. I could have easily explained myself in the light of the Quran and Muslim Sufis and thinkers, e.g. Ibn Arabi and Iraqi (Pantheism), Wahid Mahmud (Reality as a Plurality), Al-Jili (the idea of the Perfect Man) and Mujaddid Sarhindi (the human person in relation to the Divine Person).[53] As a matter of fact I did so explain myself in my Hindustani[54] introduction to the 1st edition of the *Asrar*.

I claim that the philosophy of the *Asrar* is a direct development out of the experience and speculation of old Muslim Sufis and thinkers. Even Bergson's[55] idea of time is not quite foreign to our Sufis. The Quran is certainly not a book of metaphysics, but it takes a definite view of life and destiny of man, which must eventually rest on propositions of a

metaphysical import. A statement by a modern Muslim student of philosophy of such a proposition, especially invoked by that great book, is not putting new wine in old bottles.[56] It is only a restatement of the old in the light of the new. It is unfortunate that the history of Muslim thought is so little known in the West. I wish I had time to write an extensive book on the subject to show the Western student of philosophy how philosophic thinking makes the whole world kin.

Yours very sincerely,
Muhammad Iqbal
Lahore, 26th January, 1921

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] My deductions about Nicholson's reading of Iqbal's notes is based on a comparison of his 'Introduction' to *The Secrets of the Self* with the letter written to him by Iqbal after reading it (see the 'postscript').

[2] Nietzsche's influence on Iqbal was a myth that seems to have been created by this review. Iqbal protested vehemently.

[3] In the East, Iqbal is seen as a legitimate intellectual heir of Rumi. His ceremonial 'tomb' now exists inside the precinct of Rumi's mausoleum in Konia. Separate sessions were allocated for discussing Iqbal's thought in the International Congress on Rumi in Iran, organized by UNESCO on the 800th birth anniversary in October 2007, where I happened to be present.

[4] I have attempted a detailed comparison of Yeats' poem with a similar idea expressed thirteen years earlier by Iqbal in *The Beast and the Lion* (2007) published by Iqbal Academy Pakistan.

[5] Iqbal printed the two parts separately while they were being composed but once they were completed he published them collectively as a single poem only.

[6] Presidential Address.

[7] In my brief Urdu monograph published this year, *Tarikh-i-Pakistan 1886-2027,* I have attempted to discover the fundamental principles of this new science.

[8] Reproduced in *The Sword and the Sceptre,* Riffat Hasan (ed.), pp.333-4.

[9] Reproduced in *The Sword and the Sceptre,* p.334.

[10] *Tulip in the Desert,* Mustansir Mir (2000), 'Introduction', p.1.

[11] *Iqbal,* Mustansir Mir (2006), 'Preface', p. ii.

[12] This is the title Mir has given to the poem whose original title, given by Iqbal himself, is 'Philosophers'.

[13] "ZK 638 [589]" refers to *Zarb-i-Kalim,* the seventh book of Iqbal's verse and the page number of the quotation in two different editions of the complete Urdu works of Iqbal.

[14] *Tulip in the Desert,* Mir (2000), p.80.

[15] The ambiguity here seems to be over the meaning of an 'analytical and critical'

study. Metcalf's study of Iqbal's poem was analytical precisely because it aimed at 'analyzing' the poem instead of furnishing lexicographical details on the persons and texts mentioned in it.

[16] This is an allusion to E.M. Forster's review (included above).

[17] Letter to Nicholson (see Appendix for complete text).

[18] Quran, Chapter 26: 'The Poets', Verses 224-227. Translation is based on Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Quran* (1980).

[19] Quotations from Eliot are from his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. It may be noted that without 'extinction of personality' it would not be possible for a non-European to become a medium for 'the mind of Europe'.

[20] Preface to *Eminent Victorians* (1918).

[21] Introduction to *An Anthology of Modern Biography* (1936), edited by Lord David Cecil, p.xii. Cecil's *The Young Melbourne* (1939) is said to be one of John F. Kennedy's favourite books.

[22] Iqbal's own preference was for the 'popular' yarn, an antithesis of the Bloomsbury. He recommended *Napoleon* (1926) by German biographer Emily Ludwig (1881-1941) as a model to be emulated for Muslim heroes. (Strachey found the book to be "interesting but really second-rate." See Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Biography* [1971], p.920.)

[23] For my comparison of Smith and Iqbal, I have especially relied on Dr. Sheila McDonough's *The Flame of Sinai: Hope and Vision in Iqbal* (2002).

[24] The passage was italicized in the published version of the Address distributed on the occasion. A copy is preserved in the library of Iqbal Academy Pakistan.

[25] Reproduced in *The Sword and the Sceptre* by Dr. Riffat Hassan, p. 178.

[26] Schimmel: *Gabriel's Wing* (1962), p. 64.

[27] *The Flame of Sinai,* p. "iv".

[28] p. 180.

[29] In *Javidnama,* 'the Indian Sage' is named Jahan Dost, or 'the friend of the world', explained by Iqbal in a statement dictated to the Iqbal Literary Association, London, in November 1931, as "…the Spirit of the great Indian ascetic, Vishwamitra, whose name the poet translates as *Jahan Dost*." Dr. McDonough didn't seem to be aware of Iqbal's statement and relied on Jagan Nath Azad's conjecture that "this is a reference to the attribute of Shiva as the friend of the world" (p. 234). In her summary of *Javidnama* she referred to Vishvamitra as "the imaginary Hindu" and also as "Shiva" (p. 234).

[30] Of course, the quotation is from *Hamlet*.

[31] *The Flame of Sinai,* p. 232.

[32] Iqbal wrote this letter to R.A. Nicholson regarding the 'Introduction' and some of the reviews on the *Secrets of the Self*. It was published in *The Quest,* London, October 1920-July 1921, Volume XII, pp. 484-492. Source: Riffat Hassan, ed (1977), *The Sword and the Sceptre.*

[33] This must be Prof. Muhammad Shafi whom Nicholson had also mentioned in his 'Introduction' as "my friend Muhammad Shafi, now Professor of Arabic at Lahore, with whom I read the poem and discussed many points of difficulty."

[34] Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), German philosopher and the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885).

[35] This is a reference to E.M. Forster's review, which has been discussed in the previous chapters.

[36] In September 1900.

[37] *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia,* first published by Luzac, London in 1908.

[38] Samuel Alexander (1859-1938), Australian-born Jewish British philosopher. His Gifford lectures were delivered in the winters of 1917 and 1918 and published in 1920 as *Space, Time and Deity* (reprinted with a new preface in 1927). It consisted of four books divided into two volumes. 'Deity and God', from which Iqbal quotes in the next lines, is Chapter 1 of Book IV (second volume) and the quoted passage occurs under the subheading, 'Deity the next higher empirical quality than mind.'

[39] Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1862-1932); the reference is to his review. Later his biography of Iqbal's teacher James McTaggart, published in 1931, was reviewed by Iqbal in a literary journal of London. His own biography was written by E.M. Forster and published as *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* in 1934. For other details, see previous chapters.

[40] The letter is not extant. Iqbal used to destroy private correspondence out of courtesy for the correspondents.

[41] The chapter on war in 'The Secrets of the Self' includes a story about the emperor of India (apparently Shahjehan) visiting a saint of Lahore to seek blessing for a war of conquest. In the meanwhile, a poor disciple comes offers a coin to the saint. The saint says, "This money ought to be given to our Sultan, who is a beggar wearing the raiment of a king. Though he holds sway over sun, moon and stars, our Emperor is the most penniless of mankind. His eye is fixed on the table of strangers; the fire of his hunger hath consumed a whole world…"

[42] John Stuart Mackenzie, British philosopher (and from 1890-1896, fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, where Iqbal studied from 1905-1907); *An Introduction to Social Philosophy: The Shaw Fellowship Lectures at Glasgow* was published in 1890, and a second edition came out in 1895.

[43] The lines are from the section on "divine vicegerency" in 'The Secrets of the Self'.

[44] Perhaps in defiance to Nietzsche, Iqbal addresses the world of nature in the sixth book of his poetry, *Baal-i-Gabriel (Gabriel's Wing):* "For whose manifestation are the day and the night in perpetual race? Am I a heavy burden on the shoulders of time, or are you?" (Poem 4, Section 2).

[45] While discussing immortality in the fourth lecture in the *Reconstruction* (1930/34), Iqbal says: "Life is one and continuous. Man marches always onward to receive ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality which 'every moment appears in a new glory'. And the recipient of Divine illumination is not merely a passive recipient. Every act of a free ego creates a new situation, and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding."

[46] This was Iqbal's way of referring to the First World War, or World War I (1914-1918). Before the Second World War, or World War II (1939-1945), it used to be known by various names including the Great War, the World War, the War to End All Wars and the War in Europe.

[47] In the *Allahabad Address,* while laying out the concept of a Muslim state (later named Pakistan), Iqbal stated: "One of the profoundest verses in the Holy Quran teaches us that the birth and rebirth of the whole of humanity is like the birth and rebirth of a single individual. 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?"

[48] Ernest Renan (1823-1892), French philosopher and writer best known for his

writings on early Christianity and his political theories. Iqbal also mentioned him in the *Allahabad Address* (1930).

[49] The Quran, Chapter 3: "The House of Imran" Verse 64. Iqbal also quoted this verse in the *Allahabad Address* (see quotation in the previous chapter).

[50] John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) was British economist and a member of the Bloomsbury Group. His polemic *The Economic Consequence of Peace* (published in December 1919) influenced the American and British decisions at Versailles. In addition to statistics (many of which were wrong about the future) he owed his success to sarcastic jibes at President Wilson, Prime Minister George Lloyd and the French statesman Clemenceau. Apparently, he imitated his friend and lover Strachey, who also advised on the draft.

[51] In the sixth lecture of the *Reconstruction* (1930/34), 'The Principle of Movement in Islam', Iqbal stated: "…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. 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 to-day 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."

[52] In Iqbal's last "grand" poem, 'The Devil's Parliament', the Satan commands his counsellors to indulge the Muslims in abstruse metaphysical dogma in order to keep them away from the real world.

[53] "e.g. Ibn Arabi and Iraqi… in relation to the Divine Person": these phrases are not found in Riffat Hassan, ed. (1977) and is only found in B.A. Dar, ed. (1977), *The Letters of Iqbal,* published by Iqbal Academy Pakistan, pp.146-147.

[54] Apparently, "Hindustani" here means Urdu. Introduction to the first edition of *Asrar-i-Khudi* (1915) appeared in Urdu although the poem was in Persian. This introduction, along with controversial verses against Hafiz of Shiraz, was eliminated from the second edition, which is supposed to have appeared around 1917. *Payam-i-Mashriq* (1923) is now the only Persian book in the "canon" to have an introduction, and that is also in Urdu.

[55] Henri-Louis Bergson (1859-1941), French philosopher and the author of *Creative Evolution* (1910; translated into English in 1911); Iqbal met him in Paris in 1933.

[56] In his review, Dickinson had written of Iqbal: "Muhammad is his Prophet and the Qur'an his Bible. He thinks, or he chooses to affirm, that his gospel is also the gospel of that ancient book, so inveterate is the determination of men to put new wine into old bottles."

دی شیخ با چراغ همی گشت گردِ شهر
کز دام و دد ملولم و انسانم آرزوست
زیں همرهانِ سست عناصر دلم گرفت
شیر خدا و رستم دستانم آرزوست
گفتم که یافت می نشود جسته ایم ما
گفت آنکه یافت می نشود آنم آرزوست

But yester-eve a lamp in hand
The Shaykh did all the city span,
Sick of mere ghosts he sought a man,
But could find none in all the land.

"I Rustam or a Hyder seek
I'm sick of snails, am sick," he said,
"There's none," said I. He shook his head,
"There's none like them, but still I seek."