

IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF EGO IN THE  
LIGHT OF TRADITIONAL METAPHYSICS  
AND SUFISM

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## ABSTRACT

Iqbal's individualist metaphysics and personalist philosophy is unprecedented attempt to secure for man as an ego the metaphysical status in the history of Islam. No one has sought to reinterpret/reconstruct traditional religious thought in Islam in the light of dualist philosophy of ego. A full fledged philosophy of ego revealing the influence of modern Western philosophers coupled with its philosophical and theological dualism that Iqbal's is seems unprecedented in the history of Muslim theology and mysticism. His appropriation of Sufism is quite unorthodox. This paper attempts a metaphysico-mystical critique of his concept of the ego and his personalist appropriation of the concept of religious experience. In the light of certain insights from perennial philosophy and orthodox Unitarian Sufism certain limitations of Iqbalian personalist philosophy are also highlighted.

Iqbal is a great believer in man coming close to Greek and modern humanism. His personalistic philosophy is unprecedented attempt to secure for man as an ego the metaphysical status in the history of Islam. No Muslim philosopher or Sufi or theologian has such a conception of ego's metaphysical stature, his freedom and thus faith in man in the modern humanistic sense. Iqbal is unique in the history of Islamic thought in his humanistic philosophy of ego. No one has sought to reinterpret/reconstruct traditional religious thought in Islam in the light of dualist philosophy of ego. A full fledged philosophy of ego revealing the influence of modern Western philosophers coupled with its philosophical and theological dualism that Iqbal's is seems unprecedented in the history of Muslim theology and mysticism. His appropriation of Sufism is quite unorthodox. In this paper we will attempt to see how far Iqbal's faith in man is conceived from the perspective of philosophy of ego is tenable.

When Iqbal deals with the question of genesis of the ego he seems to give an account that largely reflects quite questionable methodological and philosophical assumptions of modern science. A sort of naturalist/ reductionist explanation is given by him in the fourth lecture. The colony of subegos leads to the emergence of higher egos.<sup>1</sup> One fails to understand how Iqbal would have responded to the query regarding the genesis of the Ultimate Ego and why the emergence of egos stops at the human ego.

It is because of the limited and individualistic metaphysical view that he takes that he gets trapped in the notorious soul-body problem. He seems to take the binary of soul and body rather than the spirit, soul and body for granted. Here he is farthest from the traditional metaphysics. Ibn Rushd as the generality of Muslim philosophers and metaphysicians have not been trapped by these fruitless debates that post-Aristotelian Western philosophy has been plagued by. The traditional metaphysical conception of the Intellect, the supra-individual faculty which alone is uncreated and immortal is not accepted by Iqbal.<sup>2</sup> The Unitarian perspective and metaphysical realization are something that Iqbal come close to approaching but ultimately misses. The way his understanding of the famous expressions of unitive experience in Islam such as "I am the creative truth" 'Glory to me' etc. comes quite close to traditional metaphysical understanding of the same. But his individualist personalist dualist

metaphysics soon comes in his way of full fledged understanding of metaphysical truth.

It is because of his personalist philosophy that Iqbal upholds the conception of personal immortality. He is worried about the assurance of the continuance of the content of our actual experience.<sup>3</sup> Iqbal takes the Quranic view of immortality to be personal immortality and asserts that there should be no difference of opinion on the three points that he enumerates as follows:

1. That the ego has a beginning in time and didn't preexist its emergence in the spatio-temporal order
2. That there is no return to this earth
3. That finitude is not a misfortune.<sup>4</sup>

All these points need certain qualification or at least rephrasing. What Iqbal calls the ego seems to have a beginning in time but then one can't equate the ego with the Spirit, the *Ruh*. One can't explain the verse that speaks of metahistoric covenant with man. One can't make sense of so many prophetic traditions. About the second statement it may be remarked that of course there is no return to this earth of the person So and so but that doesn't mean that the Eastern conception of rebirth stands rejected by the Quran. In fact there is a profound similarity between the Semitic/Quranic and non-Semitic religious eschatologies. Coomaraswamy has masterfully argued this point in his famous essay "One and Only Transmigrant." Schuon has also argued this point quite forcefully. The evolution of soul continues after death and the ledger is not closed or sealed for good at the time of death. The posthumous life of soul spent in *barzakh* comes close to the account of the same one finds in other religious traditions. The popular Hindu conception of rebirth is quite unorthodox and unsound as Coomaraswamy has argued and it needs to be read in the light of monotheistic eschatologies and a clear distinction between the soul and Spirit rigorously maintained. Conversely the simplistic understanding of rebirth by certain Muslim authorities also needs to be scrutinized in the light of Eastern metaphysical doctrines.

Iqbal is quite emphatic in his assertion that the final fate of man, in the Quranic view, doesn't involve the loss of individuality and that the complete liberation from finitude is not the highest state of human bliss.<sup>5</sup> According to his reading of the Quran "the 'unceasing reward' of man consists in his gradual growth of self possession, in uniqueness, and intensity of his activity as an ego."<sup>6</sup> In a great feat of ingenuity he interprets the climax of ego development in a dualistic framework. Basing his position on the verse that speaks of the Prophet's vision of the Ultimate Ego "His eye turned not aside, nor

did it wander” he asserts that the climax of the development of ego is reached when the ego is able to retain full self possession, even in the case of a direct contact with the all embracing Ego.<sup>7</sup>

Iqbal anticipates the difficulties that “pantheistic” Sufism suggests in such a dualistic view and replies by clarifying the true nature of the Infinite as consisting in intensity and not extensity. He then asserts that the finite ego must be distinct though not isolated from the Infinite.<sup>8</sup> A few observations are in order on his rebuttal of pantheistic Sufism here. The first point is that Sufism is antithesis of pantheism as it never denies the transcendence of God. It is the orientalist discourse that has perpetrated the accusation of pantheistic character of Sufism by misusing both these terms. The quarrel is not that the finite ego is not distinct but that it has no essential reality in itself, that it is ultimately unreal and must be annihilated in the vision of the Infinite. Its separation from the Most Real that is illusory. Only God exists; He is the sole Reality, the essence of every existent. So realizing *tawhid* in the orthodox Sufistic sense of the term demands transcendence of all separative principles such as ego.

Iqbal notes that the idea of ego or the unity of human consciousness which constitutes the centre of human personality has never really become a point of interest in the history of Muslim thought.<sup>9</sup> He asserts that the finite centre of experience is real and this ego reveals itself as a unity of mental states.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that he doesn't recognize the domain of no-mind when he argues for the metaphysical reality of the self. It is the unique interrelation of our mental states that Iqbal designates as 'I.' His approach to the problem of finding the nature of this 'I' is psychological and not metaphysical. The latter approach he sees in Ghazali and criticizes it for its postulation of a static entity.<sup>11</sup> He rightly remarks that our conscious experience can give us no clue to the ego regarded as unchanging soul substance.<sup>12</sup> But where he errs is in foregrounding or privileging our conscious experience (ordinary state of consciousness) for exploring the metaphysical constitution of man. The traditional metaphysics and mystical philosophy reaches quite a different conclusion when they analyze conscious experience. In fact the Buddha's acute analysis of conscious experience leads to a diametrically opposite conclusion. In fact it is the interpretation of conscious experience which is the only road by which we can reach the ego as Iqbal says But the interpretation of higher levels of conscious, unconscious and superconscious experience doesn't lead to the idea of the ego. Modern psychology and psychoanalysis on the whole has only reaffirmed the stand of mysticism in regard to the

ultimate unreality of the ego. Western Idealistic philosophies as well as modern psychology have led on the whole to disbelief in the reality of independent metaphysical reality of ego. So Iqbal's appropriation of modern philosophy and psychology is quite marginalizing. The Spirit or Self is not something individual and specific, with all the variations in range, balance, and effectiveness of its unity. It is supraindividual and universal. It is not subject to change. It doesn't act and it is not a thing either. It is personality that constitutes itself by an act not so the Self. The Self is not dependent on or affected by or constituted by experience as the ego is. Mysticism and traditional metaphysics reject such an idea. The Self doesn't act so how can one's whole reality lie in my directive attitude as Iqbal asserts about the ego.<sup>13</sup> One can't say that the Self has will-attitudes, aims and aspirations which Iqbal construes to be the defining characters of the ego. He maintains that the ego grows and it is "only as an ever growing ego that he can belong to the meaning of the universe."<sup>14</sup> This is in sharp contrast to the traditional understanding of the reality of the Self, our deepest self, the ground of our being. He also maintains that the soul or ego can be corrupted and it could be saved from corruption by action.<sup>15</sup> "It is the deed that prepares the ego for dissolution or disciplines him for a future career."<sup>16</sup> All the traditions, in contrast, are unanimous in maintaining that actions can't save. In fact action implies becoming and salvation is in being. It is God's grace rather than the personal efforts (*aamal*) that save ultimately as the Prophet of Islam said. Because of these assumptions Iqbal is led to assert that personal immortality is not ours as of right and it needs to be achieved by personal effort.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to this the sages have universally maintained that we only need to recognize the fact of our immortality and that no effort is needed for this and no action will lead to it. Immortality is ours despite our nonrecognition of the fact that we are immortal. We have to relax into our being in an act of let go to see God. One wins Enlightenment in a flash. Even a simple sight of a flower may be enough to grant us the vision of Eternity. The whole mystical literature testifies that one need not do anything to see God. Or simply contemplate. Contemplation is not action and may be in fact opposed to it. God can come uninvited in a state of utter relaxation. One needs to be still to receive God. But Iqbal doesn't perhaps, if he is to remain consistent to his personalist dualist philosophy, admit that the mystics see God or the ego is illusory and a hurdle in the way of realization of God.

Iqbal's assertion that the Quranic view of destiny of man is partly biological and partly ethical<sup>18</sup> needs serious qualification. He

especially refers to Rumi's biological approach to the question as distinct from the metaphysical approach of certain Muslim philosophers<sup>19</sup> and asserts that the question of immortality as one of biological evolution, and not a problem to be described by arguments of purely metaphysical nature.<sup>20</sup> The Spirit whose realization is the goal of all religions transcends the biological or psychological domains. It is not a phenomenon, either biological or psychic. It even transcends ethical categories of good and evil. It ever remains uncorrupted. It being the Divine Spark in us can't be affected by our moral choices though it may be buried under the cloud of passions but in itself it doesn't get affected by action whatsoever. The following statements ( quoted from W. N .Perry's *The Treasury of Traditional Wisdom* (1979)of the sages make this point clear.

What after all, is right and what is wrong? That thought or action which takes you towards God is right and that thought or action which takes you away from God is wrong. You can find out for yourself whether you are progressing towards God, or going away from Him. There is no thought of right and wrong after you have reached God: all thoughts cease and all duality is transcended. Your life then flows spontaneously for the good of all. You live and act in the divine consciousness. The so called sin has no significance for the saint who realized God. His life becomes totally pure and holy. His entire life is an offering at the feet of God.

*Swami Ramdas*

Him (who knows this) these two do not overcome .... Neither the thought 'Hence I did wrong' nor the thought 'Hence I did right': verily he overcomes them both. What he has done and what he has not done don't affect him.

*Brihad Aranyaka Upanisad IV,IV,22*

One who hath here escaped attachment whether to virtue or vice ... him I call Brahman.

*Dhammapada, XXVI, 412.*

The perfect Man in himself stands over against all the individualizations of existence.

*Jili*

He (Bayazid) was asked concerning the command to do good and shun evil. He answered, 'Be in a domain where neither of these things exists: both of them belong to the world of created beings: in the presence of Unity there is neither command nor prohibition.'

*Attar*

Now, the Self (Atman) is the bridge, the separation for keeping these worlds apart. Over that bridge there cross neither day, nor night, nor old age, nor death, nor sorrow, nor well doing nor evil-doing.

*Chandogya Upanisad VIII, V.1*

Uncontaminated whether by virtue or by vice-self cast away, for such there is no more action needed here.

*Suttanipata*

The vision of God transcends virtues.

*Meister Eckhart*

If God keeps the ego in a man, then He keeps in him the sense of differentiation and also the sense of virtue and sin. But in a rare few He completely effaces the ego and these go beyond virtue and sin, good and bad. As long as man has not realized God, he retains the sense of differentiation and the knowledge of good and bad.

*Sri Ramakrishna*

As long as it is man and not God who chooses our actions can not be wholly good in the real sense of term. Not ours but God's will has to be done and that means ego which differentiates between good and evil and asserts its will vis-à-vis God's will, in defiance of what the Quran calls submission, has to be dropped. The question of morality is the question of being or consciousness. The mystic is not in a realm where one needs to do good rather he is goodness himself. Nothing but goodness can flow from the self realized soul. Animal symbolism of Sufism (wooden dress of the Sufis may be interpreted as implying transmoral state of the animal) emphasizes transcendence of self or ego or willing or choosing self. The self as the chooser of good and evil has to go in *fana* so that it subsists in the Self or God which by definition in *coincidentia oppositorum* or one beyond all such opposites as good and evil. Everything becomes lawful for a person whose hands are God's hands, who sees with God's eyes. All things are lawful for him who has transcended his self or desiring ego in *nafsi amara*. Evil could be chosen by the desiring self only. Evil comes only from our own selves; from God only goodness can come because God or existence can not be but good as traditional metaphysics tells us. The state of pure consciousness (which is called as heaven or self-realization or vision of God in theological language) can not be but fountain of goodness as *tanhas*, attachments, desires, time all are to be transcended to attain that. In heaven (and heaven is realizable here and now; one needs to die before death and see God in *miraj* every moment) one need not choose between good and evil. Innocence of becoming or the repose of being that characterizes *ibn-ul naqt* Sufi is innocent of choice and consequent sin and evil. The Sufi by appropriating divine attributes can not live and breath but goodness. Ordinary morality presupposes dualism of actor and act or subject and object. Actor could choose evil as long as he has his own will intact, as long as he lives in time, as long as he is outside Divine Environment, the state before Adam ate the fruit of separative autonomous consciousness, as long as he

has some interest at stake. But when there is no longer any subject or actor but only pure act, the holy act of being, the benediction of living outside of time in eternity one transcends morality. Transmoral conscience rather than an uneasy conscience that sees the obligation of acting on the law imposed from without is the ideal of religion. Iqbal himself in his perceptive observations on the stages of religious life in his last lecture recognized this point. From the Sufistic perspective man will not become truly moral as long as he is trapped in the world of immanence, of finitude, of ego, of time and does not transcend mind that calculates, manipulates and sees in terms of "I-thou" and clings to ego, to desires, to attachments, to time, to the realm of the known.

Iqbal advocates the idea of strong personality or superman. He knows that ordinary weak mortals are incapable of sustaining a strong personality. He coolly dismisses them to hell and doesn't bother to extricate them out of it. The character of ego trapped in finitude and the realm of immanence needing such relaxants as sleep to maintain the continuity of its tension, so frail that an insignificant stimulus may disrupt its unity and nullify it as a controlling energy belies the sanguine estimate of Iqbal in it. That is why he postulates many different kinds of environment for its organization as a perfect unity.<sup>21</sup> Iqbal is compelled to be an evolutionist to pave way for the arrival of superman, the perfectly developed ego who is otherwise nowhere in sight. The kind of music has yet to be born in the world of Islam that behoves a strong personality according to Iqbal. Man has yet to become man and to fulfill himself to realize his real destiny. He wants iron will and character from man. In Nietzsche he finds some glimpses of such a vision. The weak personalities count for nothing in such a perspective. They just provide fuel for the strong ones. Only strong personalities are capable of winning immortality. And that toughness of character, that steel frame, that immense stamina for appropriating the whole universe along with its pain and suffering is rare indeed in men. Heaven defined by Iqbal as a state of triumph over forces of disintegration is indeed difficult to get for most men and indeed most men are condemned to hell.<sup>22</sup>

We may ask of any personalist philosophy 'What does man as an ego accomplish?' History offers a dismal record and rudely challenges any sanguine estimate of it. The ego counts for nothing in Nature's scheme of things. But man is in no way to be identified with the ego. The immortal Spirit or Self is never born and never dies. It isn't by becoming or in the realm of time that one attains heaven or immortality. It isn't actions which save ultimately. The ego as unity of mental states is simply not there in many cases to be

perfected by any kind of discipline whatsoever. Man is nothing if we see him as an ego that stands over and against or separate from Existence or God. A drop doesn't count in the ocean of existence. It is only when the drop consents to relinquish its separate existence, its "I"ness (defined vis-à-vis the Existence or God which is taken as object) could it count. (However Iqbal sees God as an Ego and the finite egos living as beads in God, deriving their 'I amness' from God. He becomes a panentheist here and comes close to Sufi position though he uses the otherwise libeled term of ego. Otherwise man is nothing (*faqeer*) according to the Quran. Only God is rich. Ego, despite what Iqbal might take it to be, is the principle of alienation as long as it takes God as the other, as long as it insists on not merging with the Ultimate Ego, as long as it doesn't dissolve itself into nothing and let only God to assert through it that "I am that I am." It behooves only God to say "I am." The ego has to be transcended in that discipline of *fana* to subsist eternally in God. This idea is appropriated by Iqbal in his *Asrari Khudi* in the framework of personalist philosophy. There is no cure for alienation, the pain of *hijr* (despite Iqbal's assertion to the contrary) in a dualistic worldview. Apart from God nothing exists and man can have authentic existence only if he cultivates *akhlaq-allah*, if he accepts to be naughted by the All-Encompassing. God is the other pole of man and the mystics experience this. Iqbal seems to grant all these points though he is keen to assert at the same time the autonomy of ego. The ego as something independent or autonomous reality or for that matter any real thing as such is not, only the Ultimate Ego is. The onus lies on the former to realize or experience this and this is the end of mysticism. In countless situations the ego encounters its own nothingness and the dazzling reality of God who alone exists. Despite Iqbal's romanticizing of the achievements of ego and his great attempt to secure its independent status vis-à-vis universe and God the fact remains that pessimistic conclusion is unavoidable in a worldview that reduces the Spirit or Self to the ego and posits unbridgeable dualism. The life of ego is a life of suffering and it is only the mystic who by dissolving ego conquers suffering. As long as one asserts one's ego over and against the Existence, there is bound to be suffering. "Birth is painful, decay is painful, disease is painful, union with the pleasant is painful; painful is the separation from the pleasant and any craving that is unsatisfied that too is painful. In brief the five aggregates which spring from attachment are painful (i.e., body, feeling, perception, will and reason)" as the Buddha has put it. While we wander and stray on this long pilgrimage of the earthly career of ego more tears have been shed

than is water in the world oceans. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, as the author of Ecclesiastics has put it.

The Buddhist solution to the problem of evil as the extinction of ego is completely rejected by Iqbal as the preservation and development of ego is the be all and end all or *raison d'être* of his whole philosophy and his understanding of religion. Iqbal, therefore, cannot conceive of the extinction of ego. Nature or the ruthless logic of evolution, as history of mankind shows and anthropological evidence also fortifies it, hardly cares or favors the preservation of ego. Individual's self-multiplication which Iqbal, like Shakespeare in sonnets, sees as one of the ways of ego preservation, is denied to many individuals. This "collective immortality" does not guarantee or mean the individual ego's immortality which is the real concern of Iqbal's own philosophy of ego. The "mutual conflict of opposing individualities" which constitute "the world pain" darkens the career of life, though it may illuminate it for a chosen few. The Superman, not man, can bear the trust of personality as Iqbal understands it. Ordinary average men, in strictly Iqbalian terms, are not eligible candidates for immortality. To preserve ego and thus enter the Kingdom of Heaven as Iqbal visualizes it is not the prerogative of the ordinary mortals. Preserving ego is in itself a painful act and for most people it is itself a hell. To be born, as an ego and trying to preserve it against heavy odds (classical and especially modern literature shows numerous concrete examples of this fact) is the greatest misfortune as Maari, Hardy and Buddhist and Hindu philosophies assert and this is true for most ordinary mortals. The very act of suicide, taking arms against the slings of fate by choosing not to be, despite all the forces of instinctual "life's irresistible desire for a lasting dominion, an infinite career as a concrete individual"<sup>23</sup> speaks volumes against Iqbal's proposed heaven as a state of perfected and integrated ego) as an answer to problem of evil. For Iqbal the Buddha did not find his way to heaven. What a judgment on the whole eastern religious consciousness!. Since the mystics of all religions (even theistic mysticism leads to practical Sufistic dissolution of ego) do not consider winning an individual, separate personality or ego as a legitimate goal, they fail to be admitted to the immortal Kingdom of Heaven! Mystics are in hell! This conclusion follows from all personalistic individualistic ego centred humanist or anthropocentric philosophies and Iqbal's can't be an exception. *Akhirat* or the other worldly oriented thrust of all religions and mysticism, and their refusal to be trapped or too much involved with ceaseless becoming, with the realm of impermanence or *maya* (without the concept of *maya*, some difficult metaphysical problems

of traditional religion, including Islam, as Schuon explains in *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, cannot be solved) and the realm of time and ever changing life cannot be squared with Iqbal's divinization of time and advocacy of becoming.

Iqbal does not allow a man to curse impersonal forces of universe or Fate and get absolved of tremendous guilt of not sustaining or winning an ego. Man is the architect of Fate and himself responsible for future hell. There is no consolation in Iqbal's philosophy for weak willed ordinary men. The traditional conception of *taqdir* as a consolation for smaller misfortunes or evil which man suffers Iqbal perhaps does not accept, or interprets in a very different sense. He despises any escape from the burden of responsibility and choice through bad faith, conformism or group identity (where individualism or individual or personal effort is stressed) or herd mentality. Iqbal, like Nietzsche, knows his philosophy of self and will to power, is not for men but only for Supermen, strong personalities, for whom "the fleetest horse which takes one to perfection is suffering." They are very lonely and love solitude as Zarathustra does. Man has to work out his own salvation; even God can offer no help. God is almost irrelevant and not interested in our deliverance from pain. Strong personalities live very subjective lives. However Iqbal's concept of love qualifies his faith in deeds alone. Love transports us to heaven in a flash. Salvation could be got by one glance from a *Mardi-Mumin*. Prayer can be employed by the ego as a means for escaping from mechanism to freedom.<sup>24</sup> So Iqbal sees possible response to evil in both the rigid discipline and patience under hardships and also some kind of Grace through love.

The Absolute, the Beyond-Being cannot be conceived as ego or ultimate ego and even as an all-inclusive ego, as Iqbal conceive God to be. The very term ego seems anthropomorphic. This is a creative ego for Iqbal that can't be identified with the Beyond-Being. And since Iqbal doesn't conceive God as Beyond-Being (which can't be characterized as good or rationally directed will), he encounters quite difficult problems such as the problem of evil and the problem of free will in relation to God's omnipotence. For Iqbal personality or egohood of God is the central thing about Him. He writes: "The world in all its details, from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego, is the self-revelation of the great I am."<sup>25</sup> Of course, but we need to note that in the traditional metaphysical and mystical conceptions it is only God who can really say 'I am.' Man can't utter it as an ego but only in the capacity of the spirit. But this spirit is not man's though it is in him. This point will be elaborated later.

Iqbal fails to see the enormous religious significance of the crucial religious doctrine of hell. Unfortunate egos must suffer in hell (and from Iqbal's own extremely demanding criteria of defining a strong personality, a superman or perfect immortal ego, almost all are unfortunate; very few are chosen reminding us of Jesus' verdict and also of Shelley's sombre and tragic vision in "The Triumph Of Life", according to which only the sacred few of Athens and Jerusalem, martyrs to vision like Socrates, Jesus and a chosen handful are saved). Although Iqbal says that "it is highly improbable that a being whose evolution has taken millions of years should be thrown away as a thing of no use"<sup>26</sup> but then he makes chances of immortality and escape from hell (which all religions aim at) meager by his tough standards and need of enormous struggle for winning ego-hood. Most egos would suffer dissolution in the process, in this vale of soul making, and heaven as "the joy of triumph over the forces of disintegration" is denied to most egos. Nietzsche is consistent with his doctrine of superman when he sees the value or function of multitudes or common men in only preparing the way for the superman, which are themselves not worthy of that high station and only as raw material or fuel of hell, not withstanding the tragedy and misery (dimly shown in Hitlerian farce, though in a parodied form) which it implies.

Most people are living a paltry and sordid life, conformist life of "one in they," life devoid of care and conscience as Heidegger calls it, and inauthentic life as Sartre calls it, and life of reason and not of imagination, as Blake and Shelley complain, life of "lusting fighting and killing animal" as Hemmingway says. He forgets that most egos are creatures of circumstance, wretched of the earth, the humiliated. Religion achieves salvation for such egos through such ways and means which in the Iqbalian perspective are not assimilable e.g., Buddhism and Hinduism speak of and aim at every soul's salvation through "rebirth" or what Islam calls, as Schuon says, some sort of posthumous evolution/punishment in grave or hell. Hell is ultimately emptied in Islam also and if there is no eternal damnation in it, as Iqbal himself says, there must be universal salvation for all egos including weak and unfortunate ones whom Iqbal seems to disqualify from the station of perfect ego-hood. Religion recognizes hell, the fallen state man is in and seeks to redeem him. Iqbal does not seem to entertain the traditional religious conception of the fallen state, the corrupt world or the world as hell bereft of Grace, where Adam and Eve placed "themselves outside the Divine center" and thus were cut off in practice, albeit in illusory fashion, from God<sup>27</sup> (as Schuon interpret the primordial act of disobedience).

Iqbal has too much faith in deliverance by deed but these deeds are themselves not always distinguishable from routine, meaningless Sisyphean drudgery of thankless work. The ordinary diversions from these deeds by means of some kind of entertainment like music to defeat Schopenhaurian will to live are, though requirement of most men, hardly acceptable to Iqbal as they don't lead to sustaining of ego. The *via contemplativa* hardly figures in Iqbalian deed centred philosophy. What does Iqbal mean when he says (possibly under the influence of Goethian *Faust* who wants the first verse of the Gospel of John that "in the beginning was the Word" to be rewritten as "in the beginning was the deed" and when he says that the Quran is a book which emphasizes deed rather than idea.<sup>28</sup> What Iqbal calls idea is what the Easterners call contemplation. Has Iqbal Hamlet in mind? Can only action save soul from corruption, as Iqbal asserts? Is not the remembrance of God, *samadhi*, withdrawal into the meditative pose of Buddha and Sufis and absolutely calm and unanimated mind the key to salvation and what Iqbal calls action only the effect of this and also the means, or is religious discipline of meditation to be equated with action? Meditation and contemplation are hardly reconcilable with the notion of ego. Guenon in his *The Crisis of Modern World* points out the limitations of action centered modern approach. One thing is clear that Buddhist and mystic attitude to action and Iqbal's attitude are at variance with each other. So religion does not see action as necessarily leading to salvation and may dub it as evil and hurdle for salvation sometimes. Actions are done by and to *nafs* or soul. The Spirit doesn't act and actions don't affect it. Endless becoming and action would seem to endlessly postpone final attainment of salvation or deliverance from *samsaric* entanglements and world separated from God. What can be the meaning or need of action in the presence of beatific vision? Time's reign never ends in Iqbalian vision of afterlife. The ego's career is never finished and the need of time and action never relinquished. The end of the cycle of rebirths is not a desirable ideal in Iqbalian universe. "Every act of a free ego creates a new situation and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding."<sup>29</sup> Iqbal denies that rest and repose could be enjoyed without any action in heaven even. This is quite in contrast to the Sufi's viewpoint of "paradise as prison." One could genuinely ask what then is the joy of triumph over the forces of disintegration ever attained if new action is needed against ego dissolving forces every single time. It seems like Heidiggerian vision of the wandering needful, projective and finite *Dasein*. Iqbal is emphatic that he will not exchange finitude (*bandagi*) for Godhood. This is a daringly radical vision of man's destiny and

eschatology. It will, however, satisfy only a few souls who share Iqbalian constitution and psychological make up. The Bible tells us that as a “punishment” (which in the Quran is called ordeal) man has to work on this earth but Iqbal makes heaven out of this earth. His interpretation of the Fall as if all is well with humans on earth and the spirit of earth greets man without any tears and sighs in the background is not fully justified, both on scriptural grounds and what plain common sense and history tell us regarding man.

Melancholic strain and tragic poignancy and pathos in great literature, in almost all the spontaneous outpourings of human souls, in our sweetest (which happen to be the saddest also) songs, in all great religious literature, especially the sacred scriptures, demands an answer at a plane which no ego-building functionalist perspective can give. In the Iqbalian perspective, the tragic sense of life (as a tragedy without its soul-elevating cathartic function) is just unavoidable.

The ego, in his struggles against the hostile environment, either invents the methods for self-forgetting and the sleep of all kinds – entertainment, drinks, gossip, drugs, festivals, rituals etc. to avoid the consequent pain which produces so much tension in it or some method of selfish aggrandizement like dirty power politics, rivalries, jealousy and hatred of all kinds. Universal corruption on every sphere, where peace and equilibrium are exceptions rather than the rule, has been the tragic lot of the ego’s career in this world. It is the Hobbesian world where all are at war against all and the Sartrean world where “hell is the other.” This is the world where the ego’s conquest of Nature is more likely to lead to environmental disaster. Modern imperialistic attitude towards Nature is an example of modern man’s very poor ethical sense and his faulty personalist metaphysics. Iqbal’s very description of the relationship of ego to its environment speaks of his anti-environmentalism and this is true of all ego-centred or man-centred personalist philosophies. He says that the life of ego consists of a kind of tension caused by the ego invading the environment and the environment invading the ego.<sup>30</sup> This speaks of “aggressive” outlook on environment in contrast to general mystical, transcendentalist (like Thoreau) especially Advaitic Vedantic and nature-mysticism’s approach (like that of Wordsworth and Jafferys) towards the environment. Iqbal is too keen to emphasize our individuality, privacy and separation from nature and from other egos and also from God.

Iqbal celebrates the ego’s triumphant march, and its great victories stamped on the face of earth (especially in his poetry e.g. his poem *Abaram-i-Misr*). But he forgets that these ego-building activities may involve great magnitude of evil e.g. the sighs and sobs

of poor, starving slaves who built the pyramids. Iqbal enumerates various demonstrations of Man's grandeur but hardly anywhere indicts man for his Faustian pride and ignoring the rights of nature and other creatures. Traditional art and architecture stress different principles than what Iqbal would like to see. Power, not harmony, he would like to be symbolized. For him Islamic art, especially the Islamic music is yet to be born! This remark if contrasted with Nasr's picture of Islamic civilization, its sacred art and architecture, which presuppose the nothingness of man in comparison to almightiness and richness of God will show how different and modern Iqbal's sensibilities are.

Iqbal passes hurriedly over the two important questions regarding the ego's beginning or genesis and his final end and both are crucial for a consistent and complete solution to the problem of evil. When does the career of ego begin? In mother's womb? At puberty? What about idiots? What about those who fail to mature psychically and intellectually even after forty years of age? As no particular point of time could we specify the ego's beginning. When do ego strengthening acts start to build a character? Souls have no "beginning" as the traditional religion affirms; otherwise what is the meaning of the Quranic story of God's covenant with man. The ego as a finite center of experience and unity of mental states must have a beginning in temporal framework and this creates many metaphysical problems which Iqbal doesn't address. Similarly the ego's career is never, in all eternity, going to end according to Iqbal. There is no final destiny. This almost leads to Nietzsche's idea of Eternal Recurrence. Endless novelty is impossible to conceive. It too becomes repetitious act; it too is a boring. How is this new creative activity of ego purposive? Iqbal doesn't answer.

The Quran represents man as accepting the trust of personality but with a qualifying clause that "man has proved unjust, senseless" in accepting this trust. Iqbal forgets this later part of verse (33:72). Man has committed this blunder and now suffers. The Quran further elaborates: "we created man in difficulty." Thus consenting to accept the trust of personality was perhaps the original sin of man. The mystics interpret the original sin in similar terms. It is so difficult to bear the burden of self-consciousness. Suffering is the origin of self-consciousness as Dostoevsky says. To be thrown as aliens in this foreign universe leading to existential nausea; trying to be against the hostile entropic universe; escaping from freedom, from choice and responsibility; from the hell of subjectivity – all these are implied in this acceptance of trust and man has not proved worthy of this great task. He creates thousand means for losing his individuality (ego).

Mysticism, psychedelic drugs, festivals, work, talking and conversation, poetry, love, neurosis, psychosis, schizophrenia, reproduction, sleep, could be seen as attempts to reject/transmute/forfeit our individuality or ego. History confirms the Quranic verdict that man has proved unjust and senseless. He has been fighting a losing battle, on the whole, against evil inherent or implied or consequent of accepting this trust. "Verily man is in loss," the Quran says as a general truth regarding humanity excepting a few, very few "who have faith and do good deeds" because the Quran itself says that very few are the really grateful to God, or believers and God has created most people for hell. Christianity has seen human nature as contaminated by original sin or corrupt and Islam as prone to evil, forgetful of God, hasty, ignorant and *zalim* (transgressor). Buddhists are even more pessimistic. Most prophets have failed in reforming man and they have left dejected and some even cursing humans. The Prophet (SAW) used to weep, and spend long long hours weeping and praying for this sordid state of affairs. He is represented as remembering his *umma* at the time of his ascension (*Miraj*) and prostrating for long long period for sinners in hereafter. While lesser men like Beckett and Golding would be content with just despair at human predicament, the prophets try to labor for salvation and redemption. The absurdists and nihilists have always misunderstood the meaning of the prophets' endeavours. The Buddha's concern was salvation or Nirvana despite his "nihilistic" or "absurdist" initial premises of *annata* (no soul) and no God which are much misunderstood by all personalist and anti-religious philosophies, optimists and pessimists alike. Iqbal's faith in man as ego seems to be at variance with human situation in concrete historical, existential and psychological context.

Life as a routine, mechanical, drab calculated economical affair, as we are condemned to live (one recalls Heidegger's description of our daily working life as inauthentic, not participating in being) for most of the time can hardly be what Iqbal calls ego- strengthening enterprize; only prayer is ego strengthening act. Love too is ego-constructing act (paradoxically, however, as psychologically speaking most of our love is due to collapse and not expansion or strengthening of ego boundaries) for Iqbal. If we apply Iqbal's tests to enumerate ego-strengthening acts, we arrive at a dismal picture, seeing the victory of ego-destroying acts everywhere. Sleep and business are not ego strengthening acts. And what are we doing except sleeping and doing ego-denying business. Fret and fever of waking life cannot be ego-strengthening. Struggling to keep

breathing, as someone has defined life, is not synonymous with building of ego and character. We can not bear to face the solitude of the self in its all nakedness; it being the prerogative of very few souls. Men need not only the relaxation of sleep from the crushing burden of tension-full ego, as Iqbal himself concedes but also music, drinks, countless entertainments, work, idle gossip etc. so as to forget the ego or self. Most of our routine acts are really attempted at forgetting the self or ego. Narrow selfish individualistic business, to which most men are condemned for whole life, is not synonymous with ego building vital acts.

Eastern religions in general (and some eastern religious appropriation of Semitic religions also) see our birth (the birth as ego) due to some sin committed in “previous” life. The traditionalists or perennialists like Coomaraswamy (e.g. in his essay “Nature of Rebirth” and Schuon in his *Dimensions of Islam*) argue in similar vein. Religion pleads for “rebirth” in this very life so that we, through that baptism, become holy and worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. So all the pessimists and theologians are unanimous in seeing our ordinary life as ‘sin’ or punishment but religion, then, does not stop at this diagnosis of ‘disease’ only; it asks us to die before we are dead, to relinquish our ordinary self and all claims to a distinctive autonomous finite self, to die here in order to live eternally, for death in life so as to be ‘reborn’ ‘twice-born’ ‘baptized’ ‘consecrated’ ‘brought into the fold of Buddha’ ‘reverted to Islam’ i.e., to transcend this life, and share in higher life of *iman*. Gnosis only comes after crossing the dark night of the soul, after ‘ascetically’ withdrawing into one’s own self as the Prophet of Islam did, to contact the oversoul, or to realize the Divine spark in our souls to participate in the life of ultimate ego or Being. Iqbal tries to achieve this through prayer but at the same time, not conceding much value to these orthodox religious “pessimistic” formulations.

Theology is more or less anthropomorphic or anthropocentric, even good and evil are defined with respect to man taken as the measure of all things (and even here man is identified with his self and not Spirit). God and enlightened man are beyond good and evil. Buddhism emphasizes this fact. Everything falls in perfect harmony if we conceive God and the universe as unity as Ibn Rushd argues. We as the desiring egos (extinction of which is the aim of Buddhism, Hinduism and Sufism) want to dictate terms to God. We do not want to surrender to God or Reality. We impose our categories on existence. We mould the image of good God (all theism succumbs too readily to this *shirk*) in our own image. God can be seen only through God’s eyes, as Meister Eckhart said and God can be

perceived only when we leave ourselves behind as Ba Yazid said. Even the most sublime theism is unable to relinquish anthropomorphism. Iqbal's anthropocentric and anthropomorphic tendencies are too evident to need discussion in detail. And he has to pay the price. Personalism whether applied to man or to God leads to difficult metaphysical problems. Only the Absolute, the Impersonal Absolute, the Impersonal Self that is the sole reality dissolves all dualities including the duality of god and evil. And it is here that one needs to transcend the theological plane and rise to the metaphysical plane. The riddle of existence or life is not understandable at a purely theological level. The pure truth, the absolute truth is beyond individual variations, sentimentalities and mental constructions and any kind of change. It is metaphysics as expounded by the perennialists and not the dogmatic theology that is primarily intended for saving people that caters to this truth.

Iqbal's faith in life or the ego despite all the resistance that it encounters in this tough world, coupled with his dynamism make things a bit comfortable to him. Tagore's following observations in *Sadhana* represent Iqbalian position also.

Evil is ever moving; with all its incalculable immensity it does not eventually clog the current of our life... when science collects facts to illustrate the struggle for existence that is going on in the animal world 'red in tooth and claw.' But in these mental pictures are given a fixity to colours and forms which are really evanescent .... Life as a whole never takes death seriously. It laughs, dances and plays, it builds, hoards and loves in death's face. Only when we detach one individual fact of death do we see its bleakness and become dismayed... within us we have hope which always walks in front of our present narrow experience, it the undying faith in the infinite in us ...it sets no limits to its own scope, it dares to assert that man has oneness with God... if existence were an evil; it would wait for no philosopher to prove it. It is like convincing a man of suicide, while all the time he stands before you in the flesh. Existence itself is here to prove that it cannot be an evil.

This is the ego's answer to all pessimists. The ego and love conquer everything according to Iqbal.

The key notion of surrender and submission to Reality in Islam is the religious response to suffering and it demands effacing the ego. Promethean revolt and Faustian transgression are rejected as naïve and facile attempts to evade and escape the Truth. Resisting the innocence of becoming will create only resentment and that creates anguish. Absolute stillness on our part in our encounter with God is what solves this problem. Sometimes he gives such brilliant interpretations as to dissolve all problems. The ego encompasses even God by virtue of love and faith. Only he remains, no "other" is

there to create a hurdle in his onward march. Evil loses its meaning. As there is no “other” for God, encountering Him from a distance, so to speak, as Iqbal says, and thus many difficult theological problems get a solution. Similarly, on such supreme moments, all “others” disappear before *kbudi*. Iqbal’s concept of *kbudi* comes close to what has been called mystical *kbudi* or ego. His concept of ego is much influenced by Sufistic thought or metaphysical intuitions and is clearly distinct from modern humanistic construction of the self that is not grounded in the Divine Self and not able to transcend the narrow circuit of individuality and finitude by virtue of love or *ishq*. Iqbal comes close to the mystical conception of self at many places. In his last years he had come very close to traditional Sufism. His celebration of love echoes his spiritual mentor Rumi of whom he was avowedly a disciple (*mureedi bindi*).

Iqbal assimilates the whole universe as his own as the expression of Divine Life and Immanence of God. Time, looked from or grounded in the perspective of Eternity (pure duration) loses its traditional association with pain and suffering, Iqbal’s divinization of time seems to be his way of marrying time and eternity. It is his translation of mystical idea of eternal now or finding eternity here and now. Eternity doesn’t dissolve the reality of time at its own plane but eternalizes every moment as belonging to the life of God. Iqbal concept of appreciative self transcends the binaries of permanence and change, being and becoming, time and eternity.<sup>31</sup> The perfected ego appropriates the whole universe. He declares in one of his quatrains that not only the earth, the sky and the divine throne but also the whole domain of God belongs to the perfected ego (*zameen asman arsh-o- kursi / kbudi ki zud masi hai sari kbudayi*). Evil loses its absolute character and becomes relative and is ultimately conquered. God’s goodness has the last word. Man ascends to Perfection and God is the witness of it. Rather God guarantees that and ensures that evil becomes nought and man attains the Beatific vision in which sorrow is no more. Slowly but surely man is led to the perfection that is his destiny. “God is equal to his purpose, but most men don’t know.” Man has to be true to his theomorphic constitution even at the cost of hell. God ensures that men say yes to the trust of personality or be true to his self and is ultimately rejoined with his Origin and End (the Self). The ego cannot be thrown like a cabbage. Evil and pain is the unavoidable cost of soul-winning endeavour. Iqbal’s concept of love could well dissolve usual charges that his philosophy of ego would seem to raise. However he was uncomfortable with traditional Sufi notions of self and unity of Being. His individualistic metaphysics makes his position problematic

and limitations of personalist individualist thought are clearly exposed as it encounters such problems as the problem of evil. However the strong undercurrent of mysticism in Iqbal somewhat salvages his position. His concept of *ishq* is an expression of this mystical current. This comes close to deconstructing humanistic conception of the self and reassertion of traditional Islamic position. In fact Iqbal's poetry, especially his later poetry, could well be seen as a critique of certain theses that he upholds in his *Reconstruction*. *Ishq* dissolves evil but then one can hardly accommodate it in the philosophy of ego, despite Iqbal's belief in the contrary. Sufism has cogently demonstrated that self and Self aren't synonymous and thus there is no deliverance from the realm of becoming or time, from suffering or the possibility of Self realization or vision of God in dualistic personalist philosophy of ego. However, Iqbal is himself a Sufi, at least in some of his great poetic moments and there with the sword of love he defeats evil. In the experience of God as transcendent, there can be no distinctions among the knower, the known, and the act of knowing, as God is the non-dual reality. He alone is as the Sufis would put it. A famous Sufi Maroof Karkhi has put the point that subject and object become one most provocatively in the otherwise theistic tradition of Islam. And Iqbal has criticized this position as plain disbelief or *kufjr*. Ba Yazid and Mansoor have made this point in their own ways.<sup>32</sup> This is how the Sufis would interpret the first part of Islamic *shahada* which a Sufi metaphysician like Schuon translates as there is no reality but Reality.<sup>33</sup>

We will now discuss the conception of self in traditional metaphysics and mysticism and compare it with Iqbalian concept. The limitations of dualist personalist philosophy are foregrounded here as in its encounter with the problem of evil. If one holds the possibility of mystical experience as Iqbal does it is quite difficult to go too far with any conception of ego. We will see how far Iqbal's attempt to hold to the reality of both the self and the Supreme Self succeeds. The important point that problematizes dualist personalist theological and philosophical position ( the personalist philosophy can't be but dualist) most forcefully is the transcendence of subject-object duality in mystic experience. Iqbal tries all his ingenuity to somehow explain it away and retain the self-centric dualist worldview. Iqbal thus rounds off this important point that otherwise threatens to deconstruct Iqbalian position: "Mystic state is a moment of intimate association with a Unique Other Self, transcending, encompassing and momentarily suppressing the private personality of the subject of experience."<sup>34</sup> He also writes, "The mystic state brings us into contact with the total passage of reality in which all the

diverse stimuli merge into one another and form a single unanalyzable unity in which the ordinary distinction of subject and object doesn't exist." <sup>35</sup> The tone suggests that Iqbal is for maintaining the separateness or autonomy of the subject or self. This amounts to the rejection of the very *raison d'être* of mysticism. Another point that Iqbal interprets heterodoxically is the question of relationship between eternity and serial time. Iqbal is trying to somehow bridge the unbridgeable; somehow see serial time's reign in the realm of timeless. He says, "The mystic's intimate association with the eternal which gives him a sense of the unreality of serial time doesn't mean a complete break with serial time. The mystic state in respect of its uniqueness remains in some way related to common experience." <sup>36</sup> What is intended here by referring to Iqbal's concept of self is to foreground its heterodoxy from the vantage point of orthodox mystical or Unitarian viewpoint. Religious experience has very different import or significance in the Iqbalian worldview. Major objections against religious experience's veracity, cognitivity and significance can't be answered in any self-centric or subject centric paradigm. In the orthodox Sufism subject disappears in the experience of *fana* (extinction of selfhood) and then alone is God, the Supreme Self, the all-inclusive Reality revealed. One becomes pure consciousness, not conscious of something but simply pure consciousness. Indian tradition calls such an experience of objectless consciousness called *turiya*. This will be discussed in detail later. As Ghazzali has said, the mystic is doubly unconscious—unconscious when he is experiencing the divine and unconscious of being unconscious. That is why the problem of cognitivity or the question of nature of object of experience doesn't arise and if we go by the history of religion need not arise. The Buddha considered these questions irrelevant. For him the experience is all. All the theological and metaphysical questions are irrelevant as far as the goal of the mystic is concerned. The goal is the vision of God, of Nothingness or *Shunya*. Stace and from a different perspective the perennialists consider *Nirvana* and God as identical entities. For the West consciousness is constituted by the other; consciousness is always consciousness of something as Sartre put it in his *Being and Nothingness*. It is the objectifying and objectivist Western mind that is not comfortable with the phenomena of silence and objectless consciousness. The logical, dualist, outward looking or extrovert, demystifying scientific, anthropocentric, humanistic individualistic framework that modernity more or less takes for granted cannot be assimilated with the Eastern tradition, its foregrounding of the negative divine and its notion of metaphysical realization. No "T"

remains, no *seeker* of God or Truth remains there to ask the questions that trouble our apologists and critics of modern concept of religious experience. In the Eastern traditions the divine is approached when conscious mind is not there to apprehend or interpret and thereby distort as in dreamless sleep or utter silence. What matters is silence and that bliss and peace that follows that utter silence, that negation of desire and ego. The mediator doesn't aim at knowing something but being. He is not worried about knowledge and verification or cognitivity of his transformed state. It is the principle of *Tawhid*, interpreted in metaphysical terms as oneness of reality with which Iqbal disagrees, and thus misses the most fundamental things of mysticism, as Shuja Alhaq notes in his perceptive study of Iqbal vis-à-vis mysticism.<sup>37</sup> No Sufi has ever regarded it possible to know God as one knows an object in the conventional cognitive sense. Only God knows God—this is frequently asserted by the Sufis. Only the infinite can “know”—because it is—the infinite. The Sufis focus on the spiritual as opposed to mere theological meaning of *Tawhid*. On the spiritual plane *Tawhid* means realizing that there is but one Reality. Attainment of identity with the sole Reality might be said to flow from this principial truth in the measure that the illusion of the autonomous existence of the world and the ego is concretely effaced. Ibn Arabi puts it thus, “The final end and ultimate return of the Gnostics ... is that the Real is identical with them, while they don't exist.”<sup>38</sup> Zun Nun makes the same point, when he says that *arifân* aren't themselves, but in so far as they exist at all, they exist in God. Their movements are caused by God, and their words are the words of God.<sup>39</sup>

Iqbal fiercely opposes the doctrine of unity as the hallmark of Sufism as it provided the ideological basis for denying the notion of self. If all is one, or, if God is the ultimate Reality of all things, then belief in the reality of human self as other than God's reality is tantamount to disbelief or *kufr*. For Iqbal *shariah* is uncompromisingly dualist and takes God and the world as separate realities. According to his interpretation of the Quran “the world is related to God not in the relation of unity but createdness.”<sup>40</sup> And elsewhere he observes that “according to my religion God isn't inherent in the universe but its Creator.”<sup>41</sup> The most outstanding feature of Iqbal's thought is its dualist character. The individual self has a separate reality from God and it must be affirmed as such. The Perfect Man absorbs God Himself into his Ego, rather than vice versa as Sufism asserts. Thus subject-object duality is there to stay. God-man polarity is absolute in Iqbal but not so in Sufism which in

fact transcends Lord-servant or Creator-created polarity. From the perennialist perspective Mansoor's famous utterance of *Ana'l Haqq* (I am the Truth or God) is understood as an instance of metaphysical realization. It is the Spirit which says: "I am the Truth" or "Glory be to Me." It is through the metaphysical realization that one realizes that the Self withdraws from the "servant-Lord" polarity and resides in its own transpersonal being. The subject-object dichotomy is transcended by virtue of pure intellect or Spirit, which is identical with the divine Essence.<sup>42</sup> Mystic or individual realization, is through self, ego, soul or what the Quran calls *nafs*. It realizes the way from man to God. It manifests a temporary identity with the Lord. Complete identity is impossible in the axis servant-Lord. Such an experience momentarily suppresses the soul or *nafs* of the subject and in this single unanalyzable unity the ordinary dichotomy of subject and object ceases to exist and there is a sense of the unreality of serial time. Iqbal's description fits quite well with this description of mystical realization. This realization of *nafs* is no match for the Self realization which is universal. One must keep in mind that traditional metaphysics operates with the ternary of body, soul and Spirit against Cartesian binary of body and soul. Most modern accounts of mysticism and religious experience presuppose this Cartesian binary paradigm which cannot but lead to problematic (theologically as well as metaphysically) thesis. Descartes' metaphysics that looms large on the modern philosophical consciousness is simply inassimilable to concept of religious experience. He eliminated both intellect and revelation by appealing to the individual consciousness of the thinking subject. He made the

thinking of the individual ego the center of reality and the criterion of all knowledge, turning philosophy into pure rationalism and shifting the main concern of European philosophy from ontology to epistemology. Henceforth, knowledge even if it were extended to the farthest galaxies, was rooted in the cogito. The knowing subject was bound to the realm of reason and separated from both the intellect and revelation, neither of which were henceforth considered as possible sources of knowledge of an objective order.<sup>43</sup>

In this background both the subject and the nature of the object of religious experience are differently construed, or constructed. We will further discuss the nature of subject who encounters the divine.

From the metaphysical viewpoint 'I' is not real but an imagination though not totally groundless as 'I' is not the Reality itself but vaguely and indistinctly reflects the latter on the level of imagination. It is only a symbolic reflection of something truly real it is not the soul or *nafs* but the Spirit or Intellect which attains

universal realization. The reality of the 'I' doesn't belong to man or *nafs* but to the Spirit which is the divine spark at the center of man's being identical with the unmanifest consciousness or Divine Essence. To quote Huston Smith on the distinction between soul and Spirit:

If soul is the element in man that relates to God, Spirit is the element that is identical with Him, not with his personal mode, for in the celestial plane God and soul remain distinct, but with God's mode that is infinite. Spirit is the *Atman* that is *Brahman*, the aspect of man that is the Buddha-nature, the element in man, which exceeding the soul's full panoply is that 'something in the soul that is uncreated and uncreate' (Eckhart).<sup>44</sup>

The Sufi conception of religious experience involves annihilation of self as something separate. Man ceases to be for the final goal of union which constitutes metaphysical realization. Sufism and indeed all mysticism demonstrates that man can undo the existentiating and cosmogonic process inwardly so as to cease to exist or be "annihilated" in *fana*. It should also be remarked that metaphysical realization is not against the essential reality of 'I' or the person whose roots are contained in the Divine Infinitude but dissolves its independent separate nature in the face of the Reality which alone is as Islamic *shabadab* implies before whose "Face" all things perish according to the Quranic verse "All things perish save His Face." Once the soul or *nafs* has withered away in the experience of *fana*, the self-identity of mystic realization is transformed into the Self-identity of metaphysical realization. Iqbal is too keen to preserve soul or self-identity and vehemently opposed its merger or transformation into Self-identity. For him it would compromise monotheism itself. In the Unitarian metaphysical conception man subsists in the Divine Consciousness as realized possibility. Originally he is nothing but a mere name of the Divine unrealized possibility. This possibility is partially realized in mystic and completely realized in the metaphysical realization. (The term intellect in Sufistic metaphysical perspective is not to be confused with the conceptual intellect or reason. It is transcendent universal or supra-individual faculty that directly perceives metaphysical truths. Unlike discursive nature of rational faculty it is not mediate and thus fallible but is commensurate with absolute metaphysical certainty.) In the dualist perspective of Iqbal man identified with the ego or *nafs* is finite and God infinite with no possible union between the two. But Sufism, and indeed all mysticism, is the expression of human yearning that is rooted in the knowledge that the ultimate ideal is union with God. Shuja critiques Iqbal on this point. To quote him:

Under this influence Iqbal tried to evolve a theory of human individuality in the light of what may be termed perverted dualism by bringing God into man instead of man going to God. From this inflated vision of the human self he composed poetry which often appears to be a parody of Sufi poetry ... That it is the I of Pharaoh and not that of Mansur that Iqbal is idealizing is once again evident in the following passage from *The Reconstruction*. In the history of religious experience in Islam, which, according to the Prophet, consists in the creation of Divine attributes in man, this experience has found expression in such phrases as I am the creative truth (Hallaj), I am time (Muhammad), I am the speaking Quran (Ali), Glory to me (BaYazid). In the higher Sufism of Islam unitive experience isn't the finite ego effacing its own identity by some sort of absorption into the infinite ego, it is rather the infinite passing into the loving embrace of the finite....From the Sufi angle and from the common sense point of view it is simply impossible to think that the whole can be absorbed into a fragment. It is like ocean coming into the 'loving embrace' of a drop. This is precisely the claim for which the Sufis denounce Pharaoh. Rumi's vindication of Hallaj is based on the understanding that he effaced his finite self to let the Infinite speak in him. Iqbal, on the other hand, is trying to put the Infinite in the bosom of the finite, which is like father running into the 'loving embrace' of his infant son.<sup>45</sup>

Shuja argues that spiritual (mystic) experience stands on the theoretical foundations that God and man aren't essentially different beings, for otherwise one's experience of the other isn't possible. Further, this experience is characterized by individual's loss of consciousness of his own self due to an awareness of all pervading Reality. It therefore affirms that the individual self has ultimately no reality of its own, that Reality only belongs to God and that the individual attains this thorough self-effacement and unity with Him.<sup>46</sup>

However, Iqbal comes close to the Sufi position at many places in the *Reconstruction* and it is not quite warranted to say that he is idealizing Pharoic ego. At least it was not his intention at all. But we are compelled to admit that he contradicts himself as he is committed to the thesis of *Asrari Khudi*. His spiritual mentor, Rumi, holds diametrically opposite view on the reality of self vis-à-vis the Supreme Self. Compare, for instance, the following verses, quoted by Shuja, which typically underlines Rumi's concept of the self and his longing for unity, in opposition to Iqbal's notion of the self. "Pour out wine till I become a wanderer from myself,/For in selfhood and existence I have felt only fatigue. And "O lovers, come out of the attributes of self-hood— obliterate yourselves in the vision of the living God's Beauty."<sup>47</sup> Shuja sums up contrast between Rumi's and Iqbal's views on the reality of ego: "for Rumi 'the life of the ego is the death of the spirit'."<sup>48</sup>

Iqbal's fear about the loss of self in Sufism is not warranted. Whereas the Sufi's own personality, the human self, the person So and so, the identifiable ego, is no doubt obliterated, it becomes the embodiment of divine personality. Thus he comes close to the understanding of the Sufi position, which in classical Sufi sources is frequently seen as the replacement of human attributes by the divine attributes. In other words, the Sufi notion of self-effacement implies what may be termed as self-replacement i.e., the human being becomes the image of God, the perfect manifestation of his true essence.

The deepest realization of all mystics is that our being is a non-being. Osho makes this point quite pithily. "To say it is a being is wrong because it is not something, it is not like something. It is like nothing: a vast emptiness, with no boundaries to it. It is an anatma, a no-self, it is not a self inside you."<sup>49</sup> Most people are afraid of meditation because it is the death of the ego. The divine is neither 'I' nor 'thou'; it is one.<sup>50</sup> The question of individuality or ego has been dealt by the mystics with great subtlety and depth in all its aspects, psychological and metaphysical. The West, especially the modern psychology and philosophy, is quite unaware or has only a vague apprehension of certain of these dimensions of our existence. In fact as Iqbal himself recognized the Western psychology has only touched the outer fringes of religious dimension of our life.<sup>51</sup> The sages have identified as many as seven bodies—the physical, the etheric, the astral, the mental, the spiritual, the cosmic and the nirvanic. There is a detailed and systematic science of all of them and the travelers on the Path are become acquainted with all of them. The analytical tools of profane philosophy are crippled in making sense of this science in its entirety. Modern psychology can't appropriate the realm of the spirit. Iqbal has however been too loyal to modern psychological and philosophical thought when he talks about mysticism. It is only upto the fifth body that the selfhood, the individuality can be carried. If one insists to retain individuality or ego he can't taste of the higher realms still to come. And so many spiritual systems including the one that Iqbal advocates stop with the fifth. As Osho remarks: "All those who say that the soul has its own individuality, not embodied with your physical being but embodied in your selfhood – any system that says this stops with the fifth"<sup>52</sup> The concept of God as the cosmic no-individuality, as the totality of existence is not applicable at this plane. The assertion of individuality at the level of the sixth body is against "the oceanic existence, against an oceanic feeling – a feeling without limitation, a feeling that is beginningless and endless, a feeling not of 'me' but of 'we.' And the

'we' includes everything. Not only persons, not only organic beings, but everything that exists. 'We' means the existence itself."<sup>53</sup> The drop must lose itself to become an ocean. It is not annihilation as Iqbal thinks of unitarain (which he mistakenly characterizes as pantheistic) as it is not really losing itself though it seems so from the standpoint of the drop. The drop gains the ocean, the drop becomes the ocean as Iqbal would also wish. The drop appropriates the ocean; the finite ego appropriates the Infinite in his perspective. The danger with this mode of thought is well pointed out by Shuja as discussed here.

It is the seventh body called nirvanic body which is the climax of self realization is quite foreign to the personalist philosophies. It is here that one encounters the Essence, the Beyond-Going, the Void. It is the *tamashye zat* which Mustafa demanded as Iqbal also recognized though his concept of *zat* and the vision of *zat*, (though it is quite improper to call it vision of something as it annihilates all vision and bewilders every seeker. As Osho says that in the sixth, the seeker has lost himself, but not the existence. He *is* – f not as an individual, but as the cosmic being. The existence is there. There are philosophies and systems that stop with the sixth. They stop with God or they stop with *moksha*, liberation. The seventh means to lose even the existence into the non-existence. It is not losing oneself; it is just losing. The existential becomes non-existential. Then you come to the source from which all existence comes and goes. This is the original source. Existence comes out of it, non-existence goes back into it: to the womb."<sup>54</sup> Here in the seventh only does one touch the Absolute, the undifferentiated Godhead, the One beyond existence. Nothing can be predicated of it. It is unknowable. The so-called attributes of God are the dimensions through which we experience the divine. They don't belong to the divine as such but are our perceptions. This is very much emphasized by Ibn Arabi."To know the total is to become nothing. Only nothingness can know the wholeness at all. It is where the domain of silence is. Nothing answers the question what is "It" as al-Jili said. Here the laws of logic have no say. It is *coincidentia oppositorum*. It is unmanifest Godhead, the Hidden treasure. It is pure consciousness, pure existence. Here we may refer to Stace's beautiful explication of this ultimate reality that is the subject of religion though not of rational science of theology. Here we see how far away from the target is any personalist dualist philosophical and theological approach to the divine, the Absolute. Stace says:

The religious impulse in men is the hunger for the impossible, the unattainable, the inconceivable – or at least for that which is these

things in the world of time. And anything which is less than this is not religion – though it may be some very admirable thing such as morality.... Religion seeks the infinite. And the infinite by definition is impossible, unattainable. It is by definition that which can never be reached. Religion seeks the light. But it isn't a light which can be found at any place or time. It isn't somewhere. It is the light which is nowhere. It is "the light which never was on sea or land." Never was. Never will be even in the infinite stretches of future time. This light is non-existent .... Yet it is the great light which lightens the world. Religion is the desire to break away from being and existence altogether to get beyond existence into that nothingness where the great light is. It is the desire to be utterly free from the fetters of being. For every being is a fetter. Existence is a fetter. To be is to be tied to what you are. Religion is the hunger for the non being which yet is ..... So long as there is light in your life, the light has not yet dawned,. You must see that all things all places, all times, all experiences are equally dark. You must see that all stars are black, only out of the total darkness will the light dawn. Religion is that hunger which no existence past, present or future, no actual existence and no possible existence, in this world or in any other world on the earth or above the cloud and stares material or mental or spiritual, can ever satisfy. For whatever is or could be will have the curse of thisness or thatness.<sup>55</sup>

Though Iqbal has emphatically critiqued Buddhist notion of *annata* it may be argued that his own conception of self is not totally incompatible with Buddhist conception of the Great Self. The latter though described in negative terms is shared by other religious traditions as the perennialists like Coomaraswamy have argued. Suitably interpreted Iqbal's conception of self would seem to closely approximate the traditional metaphysical conception of Self and non-Self. As far as Iqbal accepts essential Sufistic conception of Self he implicitly accepts Buddhist version of the same also. However it must be noted that by and large Iqbal does retain to the end the dualistic metaphysics and theology that is at variance with traditional Unitarian Sufism.

From the traditional metaphysical perspective Iqbal's fundamental assumptions about the Spirit and the soul and his reduction of the Spirit and soul to what he calls the ego and then his attempt to build his metaphysics not from the strictly Unitarian and universalistic but individualistic and dualistic basis and committing himself to rational and inductive methodology that ignores metaphysical understanding of man's intellectual constitution are problematic. His rational treatment of the Absolute, emphasis on the individuality of God, privileging of individual mystical over universal metaphysical realization and thus his personalist concept of man's ultimate destiny and salvation are also quite problematic. The Intellect is supra-

individual faculty that comprehends things in their totality and doesn't take only a piecemeal view of things. He has not touched pure metaphysics or traditional metaphysics. Iqbal's starting point is Divinity or differentiated Reality (personal God conceived as the Ultimate Ego) rather than the Absolute, the Supreme Principle, the Essence or Pure Being or Beyond-Being. He doesn't take into consideration the metaphysical Reality of man which is constituted by Intellect or Spirit (*ruh*) which is in man but not his. This universal element or Self in man transcends individuality. He translates *ruh* (Spirit) as *nafs* (soul) and rereads traditional idea of soul as ego. He does reach at certain moments the threshold of traditional metaphysics but in the absence of intellectual perspective falls back to his essentially individualistic approach as Shahzad Qaisar, a Pakistani perennialist critic of Iqbal, to whom I am indebted for appropriating certain remarks from a perennialist perspective on Iqbal in this paper, notes.<sup>56</sup>

Iqbal is a notoriously difficult and complex position as he changed his views on important issues, especially his standpoint vis-à-vis Sufism many times. He started as some sort of Unitarian Sufi and then became a strong critic of it but again by the end of his life he had again come closer to it. He used the notorious term of ego to characterize his more or less mystical conception of self. He never fully abandoned though he never accepted quite unproblematically the philosophical and theological dualism. He approached self denying Sufism from a personalist standpoint yet built his argument for the existence of God on mystical experience. There is discernable divergence between his poetical writings which are suffused with traditional spirit and imagery and his standpoint on certain issues in his *Reconstruction* though he has on the whole come closer to Sufistic viewpoint in *Reconstruction*. He is on the border line of mystic and theologian. But approaches both mysticism and theology from his unique and unprecedented philosophical perspective. So our treatment of him may sound incoherent. He has critiqued certain theses of his own at many places.

Iqbal's faith in the ego is associated with his denial of the Fall as traditionally understood and praise, mostly unqualified, of the world of matter. Traditionally, religions consider the world to be separated from God as "it involves a partial and contingent aspect of badness because, not being God despite its existence, it sets itself against God or is a would-be equal of God; as this is impossible as all phenomena and ultimately the world itself – are touched by impermanence."<sup>57</sup> So this world cannot be good. The crucial notion of Beyond-Being is necessary for solution to the problem of evil (Iqbal does not concede

this). Why is man exposed to evil? Schuon answers that this is because "...he is the handiwork, not the Principle, which alone is good, he can neither be, nor experience, good alone ... In a certain sense, the function of evil in the world is to serve as a reminder that 'God alone is good'; otherwise the world would be good..."<sup>58</sup>

Iqbal's concept of *ishq* understood in relation to the existence of evil salvages his "theodicy." In the opening lines of *Javid Nama* we see love alone as a way out of the life's absurdity and pain and loneliness. As man can love and shake hands with the Ultimate Ego he is able to make peace with life. A relationship of trust and faith is possible with the universe and its sustainer. Life becomes an adventure, a celebration, a benediction by virtue of love. The ego can transcend the limitations of finitude by appropriating or embracing the Infinite. Man is no less than God's co-partner. Religion in Iqbalian view is "only a search for a larger life" and God is the ideal pole of man, the limit or Ultimate Ego towards which the finite ego must travel though it will never be reached as *wasl* or merger with God is death as that will put end to life that is creative and dynamic and ever in its new glory. The ego goes on and on but never reaches any final destination or stopping point. He must go on ceaselessly creating (it is co-partner of God in creation). Religion is, as Whitehead says, a hopeless quest, God ever unreachable though the greatest of present facts. God is the limit of perfection towards which we must ever strive. Iqbal's God is not the static absolute but infinite creativity. If evil is encountered on the way it need not deter us. However in a completely Unitarian perspective the subject-object duality disappears completely. Love too is transcended in metaphysical realization as it too presupposes the reality of the distinct existence of the lover and the beloved, the dualism of 'I' and 'Thou.' The finite is dissolved into the Infinite. Greeting the infinite implies a certain separation remains. Finitude can't be finally transcended in a dualist personalist worldview. The element of pain and suffering continues on the plane of love. The final state is merger as orthodox Sufism maintains. No trace of separate individuality or 'Iness' should remain for the traveler on the path. Any relationship is bound to be dualistic but to realize God means to realize that none exists save Him; only God is and man is not. So the relationship of created-Creator or servant-Lord is bound to be in the domain of Maya or Divine Relativity. To reach the Essence, the Absolute one has to be outside this domain and it is here that Iqbal can no longer concede the thesis of orthodox Sufism. Ibn Arabi or Mansoor here part with Iqbal. He cannot even follow his Murshid Rumi also who was for a unitarian *wujudi* or metaphysical conception

of *tawhid*. Ba Yazid's famous statement that he knocked for thirty years at the gate of God but was not let in until he was prepared to leave himself, his ego behind puts Iqbal's position in sharp contrast who is not prepared to sacrifice his personality, to be annihilated in the All-Encompassing.

Iqbal's concepts of appreciative self and pure duration or non-successional change deconstruct his own avowed privileging of time and becoming. Despite seeing Love as beyond all determinations and change and becoming, he, as a philosopher, tries time and again to uphold time and divinize it. As a poet, he does want to transcend time (e.g., in his poem "Mosque of Cordova" and many poems of *Bangī Dara*). He wants to defy time through Love and art. He sees, as many others (philosophers, mystics and prophets of religion have seen) time's and especially serial time's mechanizing effect as evil and regards prayer as an escape from this mechanizing evil effect of time. Solving the problem of evil becomes very difficult if time is divinized and its reign accepted even in heaven. Iqbal knows this but he has other compulsions to see time as a question of life and death for Muslims. Iqbal believes in *faqr*. The ego's onward march goes on without complaint of hardship and pain. He is "patient under hardships." He is co-partner of God in creative work. He does not feel Sartrean nausea in his sojourn to life eternal. In Whitmanian and Oshoian sense he blesses the existence and is at peace with God given life which is always worth living for a Muslim as he is the one who has submitted or surrendered to Existence's or God's call of saying yes to existence, to becoming with all its pain and trials. Islam emphasizes innocence of becoming by asking for merging our self will with God's will. There is no resentment against the "given." However, the Quran is pessimistic due to man's unwillingness to surrender or submit to God. Very few indeed are Muslims, most are disbelievers, transgressors, ignorant, not paying thanks, who deny their selves and thus they are condemned to hell. God has given man freedom not to be, not to recognize the value of soul-making. The Quran declares that man is indeed in a loss excepting only those who believe and enjoy good. But very few count as believers and doers of good according to the Quran. Religion ensures that man will recognize his disbelief or his failure to win the ego and then work for winning it (religion uses the term salvation for it). But Iqbal's eschatology being based on Muslim exoteric theological sources (ignoring esoteric and metaphysical dimension of Islamic eschatology which is similar to other traditional religious eschatologies which ensure universal salvation) ends in destroying most egos. Within the modernist humanist context which colors Iqbalian reading of Islam

to some extent there is no satisfactory solution to life's enigmas including the enigma of evil.

This reminds us of the enlightened Sage or the Perfect Man who enjoys a sort of lordship in the whole universe before whom even gods come to bow. God's function, as the Prophetic experience of ascension (*mi'raj*) shows, is to be witness of the ego's power and glory. He becomes heir to eternity and thus not susceptible to evil or corruption. It is a moment of supreme bliss when the ego through this vital act (*iman*) conquers space and time and gets a station where the categories of good and evil are transcended (as in stations of the mystic). How profound Iqbal can be in facing the ultimate questions, "the greatest trial for the ego" and achieving "supreme bliss" of heaven and thus conquer evil is seen in the following verses from *Javid Nama*.

Art Thou in the state of 'life, death, or 'death in life' invoke the aids of  
three witnesses to verify thy 'station,'  
The first witness is thine own consciousness  
See thyself, then, with thine own light  
The second witness is the consciousness of another ego –  
See thyself, then, with the light of an ego other than thee  
The third witness is God's consciousness –  
See thyself, then, with God's light  
Consider thyself as living and eternal as He!  
That man alone is real who dares –  
Dares to see God face to face!  
What is 'Ascension' only a search for witness  
Who may finally confirm thy reality –  
A witness whose confirmation alone makes thee eternal  
No one can stand unshaken in His Presence  
And who he can, verity he is pure gold.  
Art thou a mere particle of dust?  
Tighten the knot of thy ego  
And held fast to thy tiny being!  
How glorious to burnish one's ego  
And to test its lustre in the presence of the Sun!  
Re-chisel, then, thine ancient frames And build up a new being  
Such being is real being  
Or else thy ego is a mere ring of smoke.<sup>59</sup>

Thus Iqbal's concept of ego as an appropriation of traditional Islamic, Eastern and modern Western philosophical and scientific ideas though problematic from various accounts is something that is still a great feat of philosophical and theological genius. Dualist framework creates problems for him though at certain moments he has transcended dualist standpoint. His is not a very coherent and plausible account of the ego and its destiny though he must be given

the credit of trying to seriously grapple with the major currents of modern thought while sticking to his own philosophical version of Islam.

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