

Theosophical Elements in Iqbal's Magnum Opus "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam": A Preliminary Review

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WHO IS IQBAL

- was born on **22nd Feb.1873, in Sialkot, a place in northern India**
- Iqbal's parents were pious and upright Muslims. His father Nur Muhammed was a tailor who practiced Sufism
- As a young boy, Iqbal **received his elementary education from his father, and was later sent to a Sufi scholar by the name of Mir Hasan.**
- later in life when Iqbal became an established poet, he wrote these lines to express his indebtedness toward Mir Hasan:

That light of the exalted family of Ali,

Whose threshold will always be sacred like the Ka'ba to me,

Whose breath enabled the bud of my desire to blossom.

Whose kind enlightenment developed my critical faculty (Iqbal in Sain, 1989: 34-35).

If it was **Mir Hasan in Sialkot who had great influence on Iqbal-teaching him the past intellectual heritage of the Muslims-in Lahore**, it was Thomas Arnold, the cultured English man who introduced Iqbal to many of the positive aspects of the Western culture and civilization. It has also been said that it was through his **acquaintance with Thomas Arnold that Iqbal learnt to be a critical scholar**...(Ashraf Nurdin, 1985).

- Going to Europe changed Iqbal in many ways. One marked transformation that happened in him is that he began to perceive humanity as a whole without looking at it based on colour, caste, nationality and geographical differences. This psychological makeup of **a new Iqbal can be seen in his philosophy and poetry as he dedicated himself in highlighting the great culture and spiritual heritage of man.**
- **It was also around this time in Europe, that he started to think of Islam as a universal religion that can provide humanity with the much needed peace, security and prosperity. In sharp contrast to his thoughts, he also witnessed that the Muslim world had many shortcomings, that is because of not following the true spirit of Islam... (Kazmi, 1995).**

- Bilgrami (1996), in his writing on Iqbal was able to capture Iqbal's passion and compassion in wanting to change the mindset of Muslims of his time, when he wrote:
- Iqbal has rightly been called the mainspring of Muslim renaissance. He devoted the best part of his life to the careful study of Islam, its laws, polity, culture, history and literature. **He was convinced of Islam 'as a living force for freeing the outlook of man from its geographical limitations.'** He firmly believed that **'religion is a power of utmost importance in the life of individuals as well as states'** and in order to convince the world of these eternal truths he did not merely devote his life in giving expression to his thoughts and feelings in his philosophy and poetry but also **passed many restless nights praying to God** (iv-v).

Tagore, the great poet of India when told about the sad news of Iqbal's death, lamented in these words:

*The death of Sir Mohammed Iqbal creates a void in our literature that, like a mortal wound, will take a very long time to heal. India, whose place in the world is too narrow, can ill-afford to miss **a poet whose poetry has such universal value** (Tagore in Jawed, 1996: 56).*

- Finally, on the predawn of 21st April 1938 Iqbal breathed his last breath.

- **Annemarie Schimmel** who is an expert in the studies on Iqbal said the following words as a tribute to Iqbal's intellectual ability:
- Of all the **Muslim thinkers of the modern world, Iqbal is the greatest of all of them...** I acknowledge Iqbal as one of the Muslim reformers who has managed to formulate a trend of thinking which is original and complementary. It is a trend that **consolidates the Islamic civilization with the good part that comes from the Western culture (Schimmel in Usmani, 1991: 97)**

The crux of his master piece RCOIT focuses on subjects/THEME : **Nature, Man and Civilization in relation with God BASED ON QURAN & PROPHETIC TEACHING**

- Iqbal as a mystic has never failed to embed the element of spirituality to issues pertaining to the human survival that should go in tandem with the latest development in the area of modern science.
- For Iqbal, the human ego that originates from God, inherits some of God's attributes like intelligence and creativity **at a lesser degree**. Man's God given miniscule intelligence and creativity in no way can be equal to God's

- Iqbal's magnum opus 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' (1996). This monumental work is nothing more than a compilation of his lectures delivered at the academic forums. The book consists of seven lectures. The first six were delivered in Madras, Tamil Nadu in the year 1928, while the last one was delivered in England.
- Since Iqbal is an ocean of person who discusses a vast and varied issues in his book, the researchers of this explorative study, due to limitation of space, will confine the discussion only to those issues pertaining to man's relationship with God, nature and civilization.

The Concept of Man in Iqbal's Philosophy

- As a thinker, who was deeply anchored in the teaching of the Muslim holy script,
- the following form the major premises on which his views on human nature were built on:
 1. Among all creations of God, man is the best and the chosen one of God
 2. That man, with all his faults, is meant to be the representative of God on earth
 3. That man is the trustee of a free personality which he accepted at his peril (Iqbal, 1996)

- According to him, among all of Allah's creations, man is the **most honoured one chosen to be His representative to administer earth.**
- Iqbal referred to the following verse of *Sūrah Tāhā*: 122, of the Qur'an: *"Then his Lord chose him (for His grace by showing him the way to repent), and He relented towards him and gave him guidance"* (Basmeh, 2007).
- To Iqbal, though man's position is weak compared to the angels and other celestial bodies, Allah chose man to be His representative on earth.
- While explaining that **this privilege is only given to man and not to any other creations of God**, Iqbal referred to verses of *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*: 30 and *Sūrah Al-An'ām*: 165.

- Besides man being chosen and handpicked by God to be His representative on earth, Iqbal also highlighted in his concept of human nature that **man is the trustee of a free personality**, which he accepted at his peril. As a point of reference to the acceptance of the free personality, Iqbal referred to the following verse of *Sūrah Al-Ahzāb: 72*.
- According to this verse, **the great responsibility metaphorically stated as the 'Amānah', which was refused acceptance by the heaven, earth and mountains due to the immense burden that was attached to it, was a thing willingly accepted by man.**

- Since the word *Amānah* is metaphoric in nature, it meant many different things to many different scholars in writing their exegesis of the Qur'an. As explained in the second part of chapter two, some scholars translated the word *Amānah* to mean 'intelligence', 'the Qur'an', 'the office to the vicegerency', while to a few others it either meant the total sum of all the do's and don't's that are stated in the *Sharī'ah* or the *Mithaq* (the covenant).
- As for Iqbal, the word *Amānah* means the human individuality or personality. **Despite the many shortcomings of man, Iqbal deemed man superior in nature. This high opinion of Iqbal on man finds reference in what had been mentioned in the Qur'an (*Sūrah Al-Tīn*:1-4 ; *Sūrah Al-Isrā'*:70) (Abdul Razak, 2013).**

- Iqbal's concept of man is one, which does not passively leave everything to God without making any effort to change one's fate. **Being one who does not easily surrender to *Taqdīr* (fate) man strives hard to improve his condition with knowledge, skills, expertise and energy. After doing everything within his capacity, such a man leaves the ultimate decision to God.**
- This concept of Iqbal that emphasises vitality and boldness on the part of man in making decision for his survival on earth is something that is in line with the message of the Qur'an.
- One among the many dynamic verses of the Qur'an that calls for hard work and initiative from man is this following verse: ***"...Allah surely does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in their hearts"*** (*Al-Qur'ān, Surah Al-Ra'd: 11; Basmeih, 2007*).

- Iqbal, man as the *Khalīfah* or vicegerent of God, has to make good use of all that has been given to him by God, his body and mind, and also the material things available in the physical world. By using these gifts man has to improve his life to the ideal position he is capable of reaching in the sight of God.
- Only man has the tendency to reshape and recreate his environment and make it more conducive to his survival. To Iqbal, if man can realize the hidden potentials of the human ego, he can lead a more dynamic and productive life in this world and in the next world (Iqbal, 1996:9-10).

Man and his Environment

- In Iqbal's idea, the calling of man to conquer the material world is not a call meant for man to behave as a tyrant who recklessly plunders the riches and wealth found in the belly of the earth. What he really meant is that, man should use his God-given intelligence in a just and systematic
- manner in managing the resources available in the physical world to attain his spiritual nearness with God. In order not to be misguided by his sense perception in witnessing, the bounties found in the physical world, **man needs to be guided by his inner spiritual dimension to be just and fair in his manner and conduct.**
- Guarded and guided by such principles, **man would be able to utilize the wealth found in the world and at the same time share with and distribute it to other fellow human beings (Iqbal, 1996: 12).**

Man and Civilization

- For him, religion (Islam) is a thing that comes from God, as such; it is perfect, while civilization is a human product and for this reason it is not perfect. Since civilization is a man-made thing and its nature is imperfect, Iqbal believed that at times it can reach the zenith depending on how creative and innovative man can be. Conversely, it can decline and vanish when man failed to preserve or maintain his greatness by being creative, innovative and prolific..
- As a good example, Iqbal explained in his magnum opus on how the Islamic civilization benefitted from the ideas taken from the Greek, Persian and Indian civilizations. Likewise, he also explained on how the Western scholars and scientists benefitted from ideas borrowed during the heydays of the Islamic civilization, otherwise known as the golden age of the Muslims (750-1258) (Iqbal, 1996:6).
- The fact that the achievement of Islamic civilization is based on the belief of 'Tauhid' is intact and even any newly built culture must make tauhid as a living principle in life in every human action.

Conclusion

- In his Magnum Opus, Iqbal dwells upon topics on **man's relationship with God, nature, spirituality and civilization**. As a great humanist, Iqbal calls humanity to abide by a philosophy of co-existence in its effort to create a better world for Allah.
- As for the Muslims, **Iqbal recommends them to make a marriage between the *Zikir* (spirituality) and *Fikr* (science and technology) mentioned in the Qur'an**. By doing that, he thinks, the Muslims would be able to take a dominant position in this worldly life avoiding all forms of subjugation by others and at the same time they would be able to overcome all backwardness, superstitious and fatalistic ways of thinking. Last but not least, though "The Reconstruction" is a challenging book, the researchers would like to recommend it to all Muslim academics and students in the Muslim world.