

Iqbal and Sufism

Sakina Khan*

Abstract

*According to Iqbal (d. 1356/1938), when Islam passed through Western and Central Asia, it was influenced by what he calls *ajamiyyat* i.e. Persianism.¹ Consequently Sufism was heavily influenced by this, losing therefore much of its original character. What are these influences that he is so critical about? Does his critique imply a rejection of Sufism in total? This article aims to address these and similar other questions.*

Keywords: Allama Iqbal, Sufism, Mysticism, Persianism

Iqbal's Critique of Sufism

In Shuja Alhaq's opinion, Iqbal, at the outset of his career was favorably disposed towards Sufism. His stay in Europe however proved to be a turning point in his life, for on returning to India he became an "apostle of orthodoxy."² Following this stream of thought we trace Iqbal's critique of Sufism.

Writing in 1900, Iqbal is of the view that mysticism is veiled metaphysics, a system of verification through experience;³ in 1908 he is of the view that Vedantist and Buddhist idea of absorption and annihilation which he equates with pantheism found its way into certain forms of Sufism.⁴ In 1915 "Buddhism, Persian Sufism, and allied forms of ethics will not serve our purpose. But they are not wholly useless, because after periods of great activity we need opiates narcotics for some time. These forms of thought and action are like nights in the days of life."⁵ In 1917 Iqbal rejects Hellenic-Persian mysticism as self-mystification and nihilism.⁶ During the same period, in a letter (dated 13th Nov. 1917) addressed to Maulāna Shiblī Nu'mānī⁷ he disclosed that he though he was initiated in the Qādrī *silsilah* (pl. *salāsīl*, lit: chain of initiation, Sufī order), he believed that *wujūdī* Sufism⁸ was an alien plant of *ajam*, and that the dilemma of *wujūd* arose from Buddhism. Ḥāzrat Muhyī al-Dīn's mission had been to cleanse Islam of *ajamiyyat*, nevertheless the Qādiriyyah and the Naqshbandiyyah *salāsīl* or orders suffered from this phenomenon. In 1928 he states that the inner element

* Dr. Sakina Khan, Graduate of Philosophy and Scholar of Comparative Religions.

of religion is known by the unfortunate name of mysticism,⁹ that Muslim Philosophy was influenced by Greek thought, Muslim theology by Magian culture (which was dualistic in spirit); devotional Sufism alone understood the significance of inner experience as a source of knowledge.¹⁰

These, in short, were what Iqbal considered as the un-Islamic elements that entered Islam as it passed through Persia and Central Asia on its way to the sub-continent. He was critical of Hellenic Persian mysticism, of the Buddhist concept of annihilation, of pantheism, of the influence of Greek thought on Muslim Philosophy and of the Magian culture that influenced Muslim theology. However contrary to Alhaq's claim he consistently believed Sufism to be an experience whereby the self discovered its metaphysical status. Had he believed that Sufism *per se* was non-Islamic he would not have acknowledged being a Qādrī initiate.

Iqbal at the beginning of his career considered mysticism as veiled metaphysics, basically an intellectual activity. In *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, he claimed that Sufism was an amalgamation and further development of both Semitic and Aryan thought.¹¹ In his view the Semitic formula of salvation could be summarized as "Transform your will" with the implication that for the Semite, man's essence is his will. For the Aryan the formula is "Transform your understanding," the essence of man for them is thought, not will. The Sufis assimilated both trends and developed the formula further from will and thought to love, which for them was the supreme principle in creation.¹² He believed Sufism to be more Aryan than Semitic.

Iqbal analyzed the foundational beliefs of those religions which in his view affected Islam most i.e., Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity. On his analysis, in Buddhism the central theme was that the universe and man were dominated by forces of pain and the only means of escaping this pain was freedom from individuality through annihilation. In Christianity the foundational belief was the concept of sin. Man was born of sin from which he could not escape without the help of a Redeemer. In Zoroastrianism, the universe was partly good and partly bad. There was an incessant struggle going on in man and nature for the supremacy of good or evil forces and man needed help in this struggle. Thus in Buddhism the predominant factor in nature was pain, in Christianity sin, and in Zoroastrianism struggle.¹³ It seems that Iqbal saw the contemporary Sufi way of life based on renunciation, inaction, self-denial, the need for a mediating shaykh, and the inner struggle of purification as deriving from these three sources.

Iqbal pointed out that the concept of Savior-ship necessitated priesthood in religion and autocracy in politics exposing man to the dangers of despotism in both fields. The spiritual emancipation of man was not possible with such beliefs. In his view there was no mediation between the sinner and God such as required in Christianity, and that every person was entitled to his own due.¹⁴

Iqbal believed man's essence was will, not intellect. Man was a "...unit of force, an energy, a will, a germ of infinite power, the gradual unfoldment of which must be the object of all human activity."¹⁵ For him therefore spiritual growth involved the metamorphosis of the will.

Self-denial and annihilation was the aim of the Buddhist and the Hindu who sought release from an incessant cycle of births and re-births. Iqbal did not agree to such annihilation.¹⁶ This world was a field of action where man must develop his ego into personality. Through ego-sustaining activity he may buy a ticket to immortality.¹⁷ As ego-sustaining activity is a struggle between man and his environment, for Iqbal therefore, such activity (or *mujāhadah*, lit: fight, struggle) was not an internal struggle as conducted by the Sufis, but an external one by which man achieved *baqā`* (lit: - subsistence).

The Arabic word for striving, endeavor, effort is *jihād* and comes from the root *jhd*. Some derivations from this root are *jahadah* i.e., to do or try ones utmost, to make every conceivable effort; *mujāhadah* i.e., to fight or battle; *ijtihād* i.e., effort, also independent judgment in a legal or theological question as opposed to *taqlīd*. There is therefore the principle of effort and struggle imbibed in the meaning of all these derivations. Ego-sustaining activity is *jihād*, taken in its broad sense, i.e., to strive and make every conceivable effort in order to approach or acquire proximity to God. According to the *Qur'an*; "O ye who believe! Do your duty to Allah, seek the means of approach unto Him, and strive with might and main in his cause: that ye may prosper."¹⁸ For Iqbal the center of life, its essence is personality, which is a state of tension. That which maintains this state of tension is that which makes man immortal. Love strengthens the ego or personality just as *suāl* i.e., asking or soliciting weakens it.¹⁹ For him all that is achieved without personal effort and striving is *suāl*. Effort and struggle therefore receive an important place in his thought. This effort however is subjugated to love and aimed at acquiring proximity to God.

It would be pertinent to point out at this stage that early Sufism developed in the period when Islam was expanding and wealth (accompanied by ease) was pouring in. Sufis therefore, in an attempt to curb the materialistic tendencies that were making in-roads, focused on drawing the Community from excessive involvement with the world to a

state of detachment from it. Iqbal's times were different. The Muslim world was in decline. Now the need was felt in the opposite direction, i.e., an active engagement with the world. However in both cases the aim was always to acquire proximity to God. Previously God could not be approached with a heart given to love of the world; now God could not be approached with a heart defeated and humiliated by the world. In such conditions world-negation was tantamount to dissipation of the ego, to death.

As Iqbal saw spiritual growth closely bound to ego-sustaining activity it is not surprising that he was unsympathetic to certain Sufi practices such as the contemplations practiced by the Naqshbandiyyah which in his view were borrowed from the Indian Vedantist; an imitation of the Hindu doctrine of *Kundālinī*. "Such methods of contemplation are quite un-Islamic in character, and the higher Sufis do not attach any importance to them."²⁰ At another place he is critical of the method of illuminating the *laṭā'if* (lit: - subtlety, in Sufism, an organ or center of spiritual perception, subtle essence) which in his view is self-mystification, "'illuminations' -blue, red and yellow Reality springing up from the cells of an overworked brain."²¹

To sum up, for Iqbal the essence of man was will. Sufism was more inclined to the Aryan modes of thought rather than the Semitic emphasis on will, and therefore the Sufis were not men of action but of contemplation. Persian Sufism, in his view encouraged a dissipation of the will rather than a strengthening of it. Iqbal believed in achieving spiritual growth through an active life based on what he called ego sustaining acts. He therefore focused on subsistence of the self, and was critical of the concept of annihilation of self-hood that demanded withdrawal from the world. What exactly is meant by annihilation?

Iqbal and Annihilation

According to Iqbal, Persian Sufism assimilated the Buddhist idea of *Nirvana*, (*fanā'* annihilation) and attempted to build a metaphysical system on this idea.²² Speaking on "Islam and *Ajamī Taṣawwuf*" at a meeting of the Anjuman-i Ḥimāyat-i Islām held in 1914, he expressed the view that Persian Sufism aimed at annihilating the very consciousness of individuality or selfhood. Iqbal believed that the individual's self, his personality was something to be nurtured and developed and not annihilated. It was this very essence of the individual that alone was capable of knowing his Creator. Such a view was therefore un-Islamic.²³ He believed that from the 14th century onwards, Shaykh al Akbar Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī's (d. 560/1240) influence was to be seen in the intellectual atmosphere of the region, particularly in

Persian poetry.²⁴ Hindu pantheism had been an intellectual affair; unfortunately the Persian poets raised the subject to the level of heart, robbing the Muslims of all taste for action.

Khalīfah ‘Abd al-Ĥakīm points out that Iqbal was critical of annihilation because it led to a denial of free will, to fatalism and determinism. He points out that Iqbal was greatly inclined to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) because he amongst all the Sufis was the greatest exponent of the freedom of the human will.²⁵ As Iqbal was of the opinion that Persian concept of annihilation was originally inspired by Buddhist/Hindu ideals, an attempt is made to analyze the Persian Sufi concept of annihilation to see if Iqbal was justified in his critique of this concept.

Annihilation in Persian Sufism

"*Kullu man ‘alayhā faān, wa yabqā wajhu rabbika...* (All that is on earth will perish; But will abide the Face of thy Lord.)"²⁶ The various terms in Sufism such as negation (*naḥī*), affirmation (*asbāt*); annihilation/obliteration (*fanā*)²⁷ and subsistence/ establishment (*baqā*)²⁸ find their root in the above quoted verse of the *Qur’ān*.

The concept of annihilation as a part of Sufism is to be found prior to Islam’s movement through Central Asia as a theme of discussion among the School of Baghdad, e.g., for Junayd Baghdādī (d. 298/910), Sufism "...demands the annihilation (*fanā*) of the servant's attributes, which in turn implies subsistence (*baqā*) of God's attributes..."²⁹ Annihilation therefore is a process where one set of attributes is replaced by another and does not mean a complete dissipation as Buddhism requires.

The importance of this doctrine is that it distinguishes the Sufi position from the non-Islamic concepts of *ittiḥād*, i.e., the idea of identifying and merging of the human ego with God; and *ḥulūl*, i.e., the incarnation of God in man. According to Shaykh ‘Alī Hujwīrī (d. 464/1072), annihilation is not loss of essence or destruction of personality, but it is a vision of the majesty of God which overwhelms the Sufi so that all else is obliterated from his mind.³⁰ While explaining the doctrine as expounded by Abū Aḥmad al-Muzaffīr, Hujwīrī tells the reader that subsistence is not possible in annihilation for both terms negate each other. Essences cannot be annihilated, only attributes can. "A man's will (*ikhtiyār*) is an attribute of himself, and he is veiled by his will from the will of God. Necessarily the Divine will is eternal and the human will is phenomenal, and that which is eternal cannot be annihilated."³¹ Annihilation then involves a transmutation of the will.

For ‘Ayn al-Quzāt (d. 526/1132) a Persian Sufi from Hamadan, spiritual consciousness cannot exist without annihilation of lower self or ego. Annihilation is the product of discipleship and can be attained through service to one who has annihilated himself. The ideal disciple is one who loses or annihilates himself in the master. To achieve this he must put all, even his religion, at stake, for one who follows his religion is still a disciple of his own personal religion and not his master's. A disciple who follows his own desire is "a self-worshipper and an egotist. Discipleship is to adore the master (*murīdī pīr parasī buwad*) and to gird oneself with the cincture of Almighty God and his Prophet (peace be upon him!)." ³² Here too annihilation involves a transmutation of will, in other words adopting divine attributes, or in Iqbal's terminology developing the ego into Personality.

The ideal disciple is the one who "loses himself in the master;" ³³ he must die to self-hood through love of God. How does one love an abstract unseen entity? For the Sufis, love is beheld in the mirror of the guide. Annihilation in the guide is followed by annihilation in the soul of Muḥammad (s.a.w). According to ‘Ayn al-Quzāt, whoever desires to acquire gnosis of the Divine Essence must make the soul of his reality into a mirror and gaze therein. When he does this he will recognize therein the soul of Muḥammad. ³⁴ Next follows annihilation in Allah, "Lo! Kings, when they enter a township, ruin it." ³⁵ In this stage the individual beholds his own being reflected in the mirror of the Eternal Being. When the Prophet said "Whoever has seen me has seen Reality," he was referring to this station. (To this one may add the maxim, "He who knows his self knows his Lord.") ‘Ayn al-Quzāt points out that Ḥallāj and Bisṭāmī's statements referred to the same spiritual station.

Contrary to the Buddhist conception of annihilation, in Sufism therefore there is no such thing as annihilation for its own sake; annihilation is sought to obtain self-realization. This is supported by Junayd's view of annihilation. ³⁶ When the Persian Sufi is talking of annihilation he still admits the fact of the existence of the individual, for the whole journey brings him back to himself. Through annihilation in the shaykh and the Prophet the *sālik* is brought to the stage of witnessing; God becomes the Mirror in which the *sālik* sees the reality of the Prophet, and his own reality. Only by annihilating the smaller "I" can the seeker have knowledge of his greater Self. As seen in this light, Iqbal would not differ for he too talks of the Infinite passing into the loving embrace of the finite. ³⁷ In Buddhist and Hindu forms of thought complete annihilation is to be achieved where man ceases to exist, thus freeing himself from the unending chain of re-incarnation. For the Sufi

annihilation is the pre-condition for a higher existence i.e., *baqā`*, a concept that Iqbal advocates too.

It would perhaps be more appropriate to say that Iqbal focused his attention on *baqā`*, for the object of moral life is to nurture and establish the Trust, i.e. the self, which is the divine part of man. "Live wakeful and meditating on God! Whatever thou doest, let it be thine aim therein to draw nigh to God, That His Glory may be made manifest by thee."³⁸ He warns the reader; "Do not Abandon Self! Persist therein!"³⁹ The individual is not to let go of the self, like a drop dispersing in the ocean, but rather the self is like the drop that can accommodate the whole ocean. In Iqbal's thought man did not lose himself in God, but God was encompassed in man's heart. Reference is to a Tradition that loosely translates as the heaven and the earth do not contain Me yet I am contained in the heart of a *mu`min* (believer). This expressed in *wujūdī* terms is God "finding" Himself in the heart of His votary!

It remains to be added that the Persian Sufi, and all others, make discipleship an integral part of the spiritual journey. As noted above Iqbal did not entertain any notions of mediation in religion. Can one thus say that he rejected the role of the guide? In the *Asrār-i Khudī* Iqbal tells the reader that the process of self development or education of the ego is best carried out under the guidance of a self realized person, a Perfect Man.⁴⁰ Iqbal depicts the role of a spiritual guide and pays glowing tribute to al-Hujwīrī, who was a lover who taught the secret of love, and had reached the station of perfection. Iqbal himself considered Rūmī to be his spiritual guide. It appears that he accepted the shaykh in the role of teacher but not as mediator.

Iqbal and Pantheism

Iqbal was critical of pantheism, which he equated with *wahdat-al wujūd* (unity or oneness of being). In his view pantheism was the consequence of an intellectual view of the universe. He disapproved of those schools of Sufism that had adopted this mode of thought. Iqbal in his stay in Europe had closely studied the philosophies of Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Bergson. They, in turn, had been influenced by Spinoza.⁴¹

In pantheism, such as e.g., in Spinoza's system, there is a complete and rigid determinism; God, mind, matter is inextricably interwoven and design and purpose are not accommodated. In Russell's assessment of Spinoza everything is ruled by an absolute logical necessity with no such thing as free will in the mental sphere, or chance in the physical world.⁴² Iqbal's own thought militates against such a

view. First of all man occupies a central position to creation; he is the vicegerent.⁴³ Secondly, Iqbal's conception of God as a unique Individual⁴⁴ moves totally against the pantheistic conception of the god-head as a mathematical entity underlying all existence. Thirdly, Iqbal sees man as the architect of his own destiny, who can intervene in the causal chain through the operation of faith,⁴⁵ he believes in evolution which is teleological as goals and purposes acting from within determine acts.⁴⁶ In Spinoza's thought to be free is to be free from desire, while in Iqbal's thought to desire that which is beautiful and good (which is incidentally *ihsān*, also a Sufi goal) prepares man for a life of action, which in turn nurtures the ego.

To associate pantheism with *waḥdat al-wujūd* and Sufism may largely be credited to early Western scholarship. Unfortunately, even Muslim scholars, who should have been in a better position to appreciate the difference, followed this trend.⁴⁷ It appears that Iqbal was influenced in this respect by Nicholson whose view he accepted with astonishing naivety. Now that more research has been dedicated to this field, in particular to Ibn al-ʿArabī, such misconceptions have largely been cleared.

Pantheism is a distinct philosophy from *waḥdat al-wujūd*; the one sees God only as an impersonal principle immanent in nature while the other sees a personal God who is both immanent as well as transcendent. Iqbal himself subscribed to this view.⁴⁸ In his early career he was of the view that Bisṭāmī and Ḥallāj were influenced by pantheism, however in *The Reconstruction* he concedes to the fact that Ḥallāj never denied the transcendence of God,⁴⁹ and that their ecstasy was inspired by a unitive experience of "the Infinite passing into the loving embrace of the finite."⁵⁰ Iqbal's description of mystic experience in *The Reconstruction*⁵¹ further indicates that not only did he have insight into the process of self-realization but of his having had a personal experience of this kind. Iqbal's

"...treatment of Ḥallāj, with whose work he became acquainted through Louis Massignon's books, show an extraordinary insight into the phenomenon of the enthusiastic mystic who has achieved an experience that every faithful person is entitled to reach, but which is denied by most of the common believers, who cling only to the word of the revelation, not recognizing the spirit."⁵²

Iqbal's Critique of Hellenic-Persian Mysticism

In "Islam and Mysticism," Iqbal takes to task those people who preached an esoteric doctrine that was beyond the *sharīʿah*. In his view these were

pre-Islamic Persian mystic beliefs that found their way into the body of Islam as it passed through Persia and Central Asia.⁵³ The question therefore arises if Sufism is an esoteric doctrine? Fazlur Raḥmān does not agree that Sufism can be defined as the esoteric aspect of Islam as it implies something that is deliberately kept hidden such as the secret doctrines of the Baṭīnīs. In his view this nomenclature falls short because it does not entail any religious experience.⁵⁴ One may say that Sufism is the attempt to discover the Hidden in the manifest. Sufism is not an esoteric doctrine, and as Iqbal does not mention Sufism or in fact any other doctrine specifically, it is possible that he may be alluding to Ismā'īlī beliefs, which espouse esoteric teachings.

He rejected Hellenic-Persian mysticism as self-mystification and nihilism that shut its eyes to the facts of life.⁵⁵ Iqbal was also critical of Hellenic thought as the world is seen either as a necessary emanation in neo-Platonism, or as an independent, pre-existent eternal principle, while he upheld the Islamic belief of creation *ex nihilo*.⁵⁶ In his view matter was a form of spirit, which was the ultimate principle.⁵⁷ He was critical of Plato because for him the world was an imperfect reflection of the world of ideas and therefore unreal, and matter existed as an independent principle, not derived from the Ideas. According to W. T. Stace, "Ideas and matter stand face to face in Plato's system, neither derived from the other, equally ultimate, co-ordinate, absolute realities. This is sheer dualism."⁵⁸ The Naqshbandiyyah Mujaddidiyyah claim a similar belief, though in their view this world does not have any substantial reality, the only Reality belonging to God.⁵⁹ According to their doctrine the *wahdat al-shuhūd* (unity of perception) which they developed as a reformed substitute of the *wahdat-al wujūd* more in keeping with orthodox Sunni theology, the world is not-being, with Being reflected on its non-existence. Thus not-being somehow is a principle that exists. Sirhindī's dualism is based on a distinction of Essence and Attributes that leans heavily on Māturīdian theology. It is this theology that Iqbal considered as Magian.

In Iqbal's view Persian thought was a victim to dualism of being and not-being, or light and darkness, matter and spirit.⁶⁰ Iqbal believed in the unity of thought and being,⁶¹ matter is derived from spirit, it is not independent. However in certain places Iqbal's own philosophy appears to end up in a pluralism of egos or wills, each will or self an independent and exclusive unit. The more independent, the higher its status in the scale of existence; the highest being is God, for His independence is Absolute, He "can afford to dispense with all the worlds."⁶² Man who cannot achieve such independence is highest according to his proximity to God. Yet man is never seen as separate from God, an independent

entity. "There is no waking up without You from Non-being's sleep, No being without You, No non-being with You,"⁶³ and "If you desire to know the secret of eternity, Then open your eyes to yourself, For you are many, you are one, You are concealed and you are manifest."⁶⁴ Now Iqbal himself is talking in *wujūdī* terms! Alḥaq makes the claim that Iqbal, who started his career as a champion of Sufism, radically changed his position after his return from Europe, and became an "apostle of orthodoxy."⁶⁵ The above citation taken from *A Message from the East* however was published in 1920, after Iqbal had returned from Europe and therefore goes against Alḥaq's claim.

To sum up, Iqbal is critical of Hellenic-Persian mysticism for it ends up in dualism, and sees the world as an illusion. We observed that the *wahdat al-shuhūd*, under the influence of Mātūrīdian theology makes some attempt at establishing a form of dualism, and also teaches the unreality of the world. It may be added that while Iqbal himself is critical of dualism, he vacillates between pluralism and unity of being. [There may be pluralism in existence while Unitarianism in overriding goal/objective of all existence]

Iqbal's Critique of Persian Literature and Poetry

In Iqbal's view the literature and poetry of the Iranians, specifically Ḥāfīz, had the effect of inducing a state of apathy and inactivity. It was due to such literature that the Muslims of the 19th century had lost all enthusiasm of life along with the loss of their power and prestige. The poetry of Ḥāfīz had the effect of inducing a state of intoxication (*sukr*). Iqbal, in a letter to Sayyid Sulaimān Nadwī pointed out that the Prophet had educated the Companions in the state of sobriety (*ṣaḥw*). *Sukr* was profitable only after the wearisome stations of action (*'aml*) had been passed. In all other states *sukr* did to the soul what opium did to the body.⁶⁶

The publication of the *Asrār-i Khudī* in which Iqbal openly criticized the popular Ḥāfīz, caused pandemonium; Iqbal was called an enemy not only of Sufism but also Islam.⁶⁷ Consequently Iqbal deemed it wise to withdraw and omit those lines that had injured the feelings of Ḥāfīz's admirers. Khwājah Ḥasan Nizāmī initiated a heated debate on the *Asrār*. In defense, Iqbal categorically stated that he had no enmity at all with the Sufis but in fact considered himself the dust of their feet,⁶⁸ maintaining however, that un-Islamic elements had entered in certain circles of Sufism and it was his intention to expose them. This was a consequence of taking Greek Philosophy as the frame of reference for investigating reality and trying to justify Islamic beliefs in its light.

The effect of mixing philosophy with religion was that God was seen as inhering in creation, a Hindu Vedantist philosophy that was alien to the spirit of Islam. Referring to Ishrāqī mysticism Iqbal pointed out that such mysticism attempted to justify *Qur`ānic* beliefs in the light of dualist pre-Islamic Persian religions. One may point out here that the fallacy of this endeavor is that instead of measuring the relative according to the absolute, man's conception of truth is made the standard by which God's word is verified, virtually putting the cart before the horse!

From the above therefore one may say that Iqbal's critique cannot be taken as a critique of Sufism *in toto*; he was critical of the Persianisation of Islam such as Muslim Philosophy influenced by Greek thought, of Muslim theology as influenced by the Magian culture (being dualistic) and some of the Sufi schools which had fallen back on Magian type of religious experience. He was also critical of Baha'ism and Qādiānism which were "the two forms which the modern revival of pre-Islamic Magianism has assumed."⁶⁹ He approved of devotional Sufism which in his opinion alone tried to understand the importance of inner experience as a source of knowledge.⁷⁰ According to Raḥmān, the Mu'taẓilah had been described as the Magians of the Muslim community for their belief in the freedom of the will. With the introduction of philosophy into Shī'i theology in the thirteenth century by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 673/1274) and his pupil Ibn-al Muṭahhar al-Hillī (d. 726/1325), Shī'i theology has maintained the freedom of the will, as has Māturīdian theology in contradistinction to Sunnī Ash'arite theology.⁷¹ Ironically this very same Magian theology that Iqbal is critical of is the one that preaches the freedom of the will!

Iqbal was unable to free himself from the Sufistic heritage. "His imagery, like that of most Turkish, Persian, or Urdu poets, is largely colored by Sufi symbolism: as much as he detested the kind of entralling, "otherworldly" mysticism that he thought was hidden behind Ḥāfiz's beautiful verses, he himself used the whole fabric of Sufi imagery in his poetry, though he often re-interpreted it."⁷²

Iqbal who is an exponent of the will refers to the will that must of its own freedom submit to the law (*sharī'ah*). The human will first submits then is transmuted by love and what he calls ego-sustaining acts. "Imān is not merely a passive belief in one or more propositions of a certain kind; it is a living assurance begotten of a rare experience. Strong personalities alone are capable of rising to this experience and the higher 'Fatalism' implied in it."⁷³ This indeed is a very enlightening statement; it shows that Iqbal acknowledges that faith is based on mystic experience, and involves a transmutation of the will (which is what Sufism aspires to

achieve). One may say that the injunction of adding “*inshāllah*” (God-willing) when expressing an intention is indicative of this process. As the Muslims of Iqbal’s times were steeped in fatalism, Iqbal takes ‘poetic liberty’ to re-establish the correct balance. As Sufism is the inner vital element of religion, it was necessary to free it from certain misconceptions that threatened to misguide conduct. “Conduct, which involves a decision of the ultimate fate of the agent cannot be based on illusions. A wrong concept misleads the understanding; a wrong deed degrades the whole man, and may eventually demolish the structure of the human ego.”⁷⁴ For him therefore struggle and effort through ego-sustaining activity was concomitant to life; inactivity and inertness to dissipation and death.

Schimmel comes to the conclusion notes that “More than once Muḥammad Iqbal attacked the ‘Pīrism’ and backwardness of the so-called ‘spiritual leaders’ of the Indo-Pakistani Subcontinent; yet a closer study of his work makes it clear that he himself follows quite closely the Sufi thought of the classical period.”⁷⁵ One may say that he is not critical of the concept of annihilation *per se* which is a prelude to subsistence, but of its Buddhist/ Hindu version of complete dissipation of personality. Furthermore, one cannot say that he rejects the *wujūdī* doctrine in essence, but its intellectual pantheistic interpretation that was probably prevalent during his time. Iqbal’s thought must be taken with reference to his time. He quotes Halīm Pāsha, whose view is that Islam after coming into contact with various cultures and religion needed to de-toxify itself.⁷⁶ Iqbal himself is of a similar view.⁷⁷

He divides religious life into three parts; i.e., ‘Faith,’ ‘Thought,’ and ‘Discovery’⁷⁸ that may be seen as corresponding to ‘Islam,’ *īmān*’ and *iḥsān*.’ It is in its third aspect that religion is given the unfortunate name of Mysticism.⁷⁹ This is the most important part of religious life for “it is in contact with the Most Real that the ego discovers its uniqueness, its metaphysical status, and the possibility of improvement in that status.”⁸⁰ However this domain itself was subject to the status quo that the Muslims found themselves in. The latter-day representatives of Sufism were applying methods ill-suited to modern man. In his view the need of the day was a method that was “physiologically less violent and psychologically more suitable to a concrete type of mind.”⁸¹ Like Shāh Walī Allāh and Sir Sayyid Aḥmad, he too called for a fresh interpretation of theology, keeping in view the modern trends of thought in science and philosophy. Sufism in his view was “essentially a system of verification—a spiritual method by which the ego realizes as fact what intellect has understood as theory.”⁸² Iqbal would visit the shrines of saints to obtain their blessings; thus there is record of his visiting the shrines of Nizām

al-Dīn Awliyā, Shaykh al-Hujwīrī, Shāh Muḥammad Ghauth, Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, Ḥakīm Sanā‘ī and the shrine of the father of Shaykh al-Hujwīrī.⁸³

In the light of the above it would be justified to make the conclusion that Iqbal was not a critic of Sufism, but somewhat a Sufi himself. Dr. Khalīfah ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm in his book *Fikr-i Iqbal* makes a similar observation. He points out that within Sufism; there are many Sufis who differ from each other in minor aspects. He examines different facets of Sufism and Iqbal’s thought and comes to the conclusion that the same standards by which Rūmī is called a Sufi can be applied to Iqbal.⁸⁴ He points out that Iqbal has his own ideas of Sufism; he is thus a great admirer of Rūmī and yet a critic of Ibn al-‘Arabī, (though in essence both have the same beliefs). Iqbal at times is full of praise for Mujaddid Alf-i Thānī.⁸⁵ He is however critical of the outdated methods perpetuated by the Sufis of his day, he is critical of Persian mysticism, which makes a distinction between the phenomenal and the real, in the inner and the outer, and a mysticism that denies the *sharī‘ah* and claims to be esoteric. He favored a fresh interpretation of Islamic metaphysics that took due regard of the more recent developments in modern thought and wanted a revision of Sufi methods that were physiologically less violent and psychologically more suitable to modern concrete modes of thought;⁸⁶ such a Sufism would be closer to the original form of Islam and not its Persianised version.

Conclusion

Alḥaq makes the claim that Iqbal started his career as a free thinker with “Sufi inclinations,” then radically changed his position after his return from Europe.⁸⁷ Dates of publication of the works cited in this write-up do not support this claim. As demonstrated Iqbal at the beginning of his career considered mysticism as a system of verification⁸⁸ while towards the end of his career he emphasized the importance of mystic experience as the discovery of the ego of its ultimate nature. This experience is not a “conceptually manageable intellectual fact; it is a vital fact...that cannot be captured in the net of logical categories.”⁸⁹ For him this experience is the product of an active engagement with ones environment rather than a withdrawal from it. It is the product of effort and struggle, of ego-sustaining activities rather than world-negation. It would therefore be more appropriate to maintain that Iqbal did not reject Sufism, but rather aimed at its reformation. This was due to the different need of the time. To examine his views out of the context of his times is to do an injustice to him.

Notes & References

¹ Muhammad Iqbal, "Islam and Mysticism," *The New Era*, Lucknow, 28 July 1917, pp. 250-51, as cited in *Speeches Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, pp. 154-6, compiled and edited by Latif Ahmed Sherwani (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1995), p. 155, hereafter cited as Iqbal, *Speeches and Writings*.

² Shuja Alhaq, *A Forgotten Vision. A study of human spirituality in the light of the Islamic tradition* (Lahore: Vanguard Books Pvt. Ltd., 1996), p. 89, hereafter cited as Alhaq, *Forgotten Vision*.

³ Muhammad Iqbal, "The Doctrine of Absolute Unity as expounded by Abdul Karim al-Jilani," *Indian Antiquary*, Bombay, September 1900, pp. 237-46, as cited Iqbal, *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 77-97, p. 78.

⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, (Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbal, nd), pp. 83-89, hereafter Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics*.

⁵ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Secrets of the Self (Asrār-i Khudī)*, trans. R. A. Nicholson (Lahore: Farhan Publishers, 1977), p. xxiii-xxiv, hereafter Iqbal, *Asrār-i Khudī*.

⁶ Iqbal, "Islam and Mysticism," *The New Era*, Lucknow, 28 July 1917, pp. 250-51, as cited in *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 154-6, p. 154.

⁷ Akhtar Rāhī ed., *Iqbāl, Sayyid Sulaimān Nadwī kī Nazar Main (Iqbal Seen through the Eyes of Sayyid Sulaimān Nadwī)*, (Lahore: Bazm-i Iqbāl, 1978), p. 126, hereafter Akhtar Rāhī ed., *Iqbāl, Sayyid Sulaimān Nadwī kī Nazar Main*.

⁸ Sufism influenced by the doctrine of *wahdat-al wujūd* or unity / oneness of being.

⁹ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ed. and annotated by M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986), p. 143, hereafter cited as Iqbal, *Reconstruction*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹¹ Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics*, p. 83.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Iqbal, "Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal," *The Hindustan Review*, Allahabad, 1909, as cited in *Speeches Writings*, pp. 97-117, p. 101.

¹⁴ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 76.

¹⁵ Iqbal, "Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal," *The Hindustan Review*, Allahabad, 1909, as cited in *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 97-117, p. 102.

¹⁶ "Whatever may be the final fate of man it does not mean the loss of individuality." Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 93.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁸ *Qur'an*, 5:35.

¹⁹ Iqbal, *Asrār-i Khudī*, pp. xxv-xxvii

²⁰ Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics*, p. 87.

²¹ Iqbal, "Islam and Mysticism," *The New Era*, Lucknow, 28 July 1917, pp. 250-51, as cited in *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 154-6, p. 154.

²² Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics*, p. 83.

²³ Jāvaid Iqbāl, *Žindah Rūd (Living Stream)*, (Lahore: Ghulām 'Alī Publishers, 1983), pp. 219-220, hereafter Jāvaid Iqbāl, *Žindah Rūd*.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 220.

²⁵ Khalīfah ‘Abd al-Ĥakīm, *Fikr-i Iqbāl (The Thought of Iqbāl)*, (Lahore: Bażm-i Iqbāl, 1968), p. 417.

²⁶ *Qur`ān*, 55:26-27.

²⁷ *Fān* as from *fanā* to vanish, *fānī* perishable, liable to decay *Dictionary and Glossary of the Ko-ran*, s.v. “*fanā*,” John Penrice (England: Curzon Press, 1993), p. 112.

²⁸ *Yabqā*, *abqā* more or most lasting, enduring, permanent, second declension from *baqiyya* to remain that which remains or survives, permanent, constant. Ibid., s.v. “*baqā*,” p. 18.

²⁹ Junayd Baghdādī, as cited by Leonard Lewisohn, “In Quest of Annihilation: Imaginalization and Mystical Death in the Tamhīdat of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī,” pp. 285-336, *Classical Persian Sufism: from its Origins to Rumi*, edited by Leonard Lewisohn, foreword by Javed Nurbakhshi, introduction by S. H. Nasr, (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), p. 302, hereafter *Classical Persian Sufism*.

³⁰ ‘Alī B. ‘Uthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf al-Mahjūb (The Revelation of the Mystery)*, trans. R. A. Nicholson (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Pb., 1996), p. 243-6.

³¹ Ibid., p. 171.

³² Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhani, *Tamhīdāt 75*, ed. by Afif Osseiran, Tehran, 1962, as cited by Leonard Lewisohn, “In Quest of Annihilation: Imaginalization and Mystical Death in the Tamhīdāt of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī,” pp. 285-336, *Classical Persian Sufism*, p. 307.

³³ Ibid., p. 306.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 308

³⁵ *Qur`ān*, xxvii: 34, as cited by Ayn al-Quzāt, *Tamhīdāt 58*, ibid, p. 308.

³⁶ For details see *Kitāb al-Fanā* and *Kitāb al-Mīthāq* in Abdul Hassan Ali Kader, *Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd*, E. W. J Gibb Memorial Series, New Series, XXII, (London: Luzac and Company Limited, 1962), p. 152 and 160.

³⁷ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 88.

³⁸ Iqbal, *Asrār-i Khudī*, v. 1334-1336, p. 98.

³⁹ Ibid., v. 1389, p. 122.

⁴⁰ "Transmute thy handful of earth into gold, Kiss the threshold of a Perfect Man." Iqbal, *Asrār-i Khudī*, v. 340, p. 29.

⁴¹ "It was by combining Spinoza with Kant's epistemology that Fichte, Schelling and Hegel reached their varied pantheisms; it was from *conatus sese preservandi*, the effort to preserve oneself, that Fichte's *Ich* was born, and Schopenhauer's "will to live," and Nietzsche's, "will to power," and Bergson's *elan vital*." Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (Rawalpindi: Services Book Club, 1985), p. 147.

⁴² Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, n.d.), p. 554.

⁴³ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 76.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 87-88.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 42-3.

⁴⁷ For example Burhān Aḥmad Fārūqī writing in 1940 in his doctoral dissertation, translates *waḥdat-i-wujūd* or *tawḥīd-i-wujūdī* as the pantheistic conception of *tawḥīd*. Accordingly he calls pantheism the doctrine of Islamic mystics called *Waḥdat-i-Wujūd*. Burhan Ahmad Fārūqī, *The Mujaddid's Conception of Tawhid. Study of Shaikh Ahmed Sirhind's Doctrine of Unity* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989), pp. 1 and 31.

⁴⁸ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 85.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 14-18.

⁵² Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, reprint ed. (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003), p. 406, hereafter Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*.

⁵³ Iqbal, "Islam and Mysticism," *The New Era*, Lucknow, 28 July 1917, pp. 250-51, *Speeches and Writings*, p. 155.

⁵⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, edited and introduction by Ebrahim Moosa (Oxford, Oneworld Publications, 2006), p. 103, hereafter Rahman, *Revival and Reform*.

⁵⁵ Iqbal, "Islam and Mysticism," *The New Era*, Lucknow, 28 July 1917, pp. 250-51, *Speeches and Writings*, p. 154.

⁵⁶ Jāvaid Iqbāl, *Žindah Rūd*, pp. 228.

⁵⁷ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 31, and p. 122.

⁵⁸ W. T. Stace, *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy* (London: Mac millan & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 239.

⁵⁹ "God alone exists and the world that is other than God is imaginary (*mutakhayyal*) and illusory (*mawḥūm*)." Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt*, letter no. 2: 98, trans. by Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Shariah*, (London: Islamic Foundation, 1986), p. 293.

⁶⁰ In Iqbāl's view Isḥrāqī Sufism is a reverting to Persian dualism. Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics*, p. 94.

⁶¹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 25.

⁶² *Qur`ān*, 3: 97 and 29: 6, as cited *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶³ Iqbal, *A Message from the East*, trans. M. Hadi Hussain (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1977), p. 132.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁶⁵ Alhaq, *Forgotten Vision*, p. 89.

⁶⁶ Iqbāl, cited in Akhtar Rāhī ed., *Iqbāl, Sayyid Sulaimān Nadwī kī Nazar Main*, pp. 146-147.

⁶⁷ Jāvaid Iqbāl, *Žindah Rūd*, p. 222.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶⁹ Iqbal, "Qadianis and Orthodox Muslims," pp. 197-203, *Speeches and Writings*, p. 198.

⁷⁰ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 77.

⁷¹ Rahman, *Revival and Reform*, p. 66.

⁷² Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 406.

⁷³ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 87.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁷⁵ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 406.

⁷⁶ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 124.

⁷⁷ "Empire brought men belonging to earlier ascetic cultures, which Spengler describes as Magian, within the fold of Islam. The result was the conversion of Islam to a pre-Islamic creed with all the philosophical controversies of these creeds." Iqbal, *Speeches and Writings*, p. 87-88, as cited *ibid.*, notes and references, p. 173.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 145 and p. xxi.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

⁸² Iqbal, "The Doctrine of Absolute Unity as expounded by Abdul Karim al-Jilani," *Indian Antiquary*, Bombay, September 1900, pp. 237-46, as cited in *Speeches and Writings*, p. 78.

⁸³ Abū Sa'īd Nūr al-Dīn, *Islāmī Taṣawwuf aur Iqbāl (Islamic Sufism and Iqbāl)*, (Karachi: Iqbāl Academy, 1959), pp. 219-224.

⁸⁴ Khalīfah 'Abd al-Ĥakīm, *Fikr-i Iqbāl*, p. 403.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

⁸⁶ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. v.

⁸⁷ Alhaq, *Forgotten Vision*, p. 89.

⁸⁸ Iqbal, "The Doctrine of Absolute Unity as expounded by Abdul Karim al-Jilani," *Indian Antiquary*, Bombay, September 1900, pp. 237-46, as cited in *Speeches and Writings*, p. 78.

⁸⁹ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 145.

Bibliography

- Alhaq, Shuja. *A Forgotten Vision*. Lahore: Vanguard Books Pvt. Ltd., 1996
- Ĥakīm, Khalīfah ‘Abd al-. *Fikr-i Iqbal*. Lahore: Baḥm-i Iqbal, 1968
- Hujwūrī, Alī b. ‘Uthmān. *The Kashf al-Mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*. Translated by R. A. Nicholson. Reprint edition. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1996.
- Iqbal, Jāwaid. *Žindah Rūd*. Lahore: Ghulām Alī Publishers, 1983.
- Iqbal, Muhammed. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Edited and annotated by M. Saeed Sheikh. Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986.
- _____. *Asrār-i Khudī (The Secrets of the Self)*. Translated by R. A. Nicholson. Lahore: Farhan Publishers, 1977.
- _____. *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*. Lahore: Bazm-i-Iqbal, n.d.
- _____. *Speeches Writings and Statements of Iqbal*. Compiled and edited by Latif Ahmed Sherwani. 4th edition. Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1995.
- _____. *Payām-i Mashriq (A Message from the East)*. Translated by M. Hadi Hussain. Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1977.
- Kader, Abdul Hassan Ali. *Life Personality and Writings of al-Junayd*. E. W. J. Gibb Memorial Series. New Series XXII. London: Luzac and Company Limited, 1962.
- Lewisohn, Leonard. “In Quest of Annihilation: Imaginalization and Mystical Death in the Tamhīdāt of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī.” *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*. Ed. Leonard Lewisohn. Foreword by Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh. Introduction by S. H. Nasr. London: Khaniqahi Nimatullah Publications, 1993.
- Nūr al-Dīn, Abū Sa‘īd. *Islāmī Tašawwuf aur Iqbal*. Karachi: Iqbal Academy, 1959.
- Rāhī, Akhtar. Ed. *Iqbal, Sayyid Sulaimān Nadwī kī Nazar Meiṅ*. Lahore: Baḥm-i Iqbal, 1978.
- Rahman, Fazlur. *Revival and Reform in Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1975. Reprint. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003.
- Stace, W. T. *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1962.