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Iqbal's Antagonism towards Pseudo-Mysticism

Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak*

Hayatullah Laluddin**

Mahathir M M Yusoff***

Abstract

Ever since time immemorial, there has been a constant search in people of all religious traditions to unravel the mystery of how man arrived on this planet and what should be his ideal relationship with God and other life forms. Though all religions have their rituals and doctrine to explain the God-man relationship, for some the hunger and thirst to understand God at a much deeper level take them to the path of mysticism. For such people, religion is the outward journey of man towards God, while mysticism is the inward journey of the human soul towards the Absolute. Although mysticism is good as a soul elevating experience, nevertheless at times it can take people away from the reality of life into the otherworldliness causing problems to their earthly existence; obligation towards family, society, nation and humanity. The present study was geared towards understanding Iqbal's views on mysticism. As a mystic-poet and philosopher, at one point in time in his life, Iqbal took great interest in Islamic mysticism (*Tasawwuf*); particularly ideas presented by Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) a 12th-century Sufi scholar. Later, after his travel and studies in Europe and his eventual involvement in politics, Iqbal took an antagonistic stand against some aspects of Sufism. Through this study, the research team investigated why he disagreed and criticized some aspects of Sufism. Relevant data to the study were collected from print and internet sources. As a qualitative study, the content and textual-analysis methods were used to analyze the pertinent data.

Keywords: Iqbal, Antagonism, Towards, *Tasawwuf*, Pseudo-Mysticism

Introduction

Since people's relationship with God, the unseen world and eschatology are of varying degrees, zealous individuals who are deeply engrossed in

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spirituality go beyond the ordinary practices in their religion; seeking mystical experience to understand the secrets of God and the otherworldliness. Such a group of people not only exists in Islam but also in other religions as well. This study on Islamic mysticism was focused on the ideas of Iqbal in relation to Sufism of his time. Very particularly, the discourse of this study focused on Iqbal's initial approval and his later rejection of some aspects of Sufism. Pivotal to the discussion of the study was to analyze some of the pitfalls of Sufism from Iqbal's perspective. Besides that, the study also looked into the strength and weaknesses of Sufi practices in the context of the modern world. Finally, the study conducted an appraisal of Iqbal's criticism of pseudo-mysticism or Sufism.

Political And Social Milieus during Iqbal's Time

During the time when Mohamad Iqbal (1877-1938) was a rising star in the new horizon of the Muslim world as a mystic philosopher and thinker, the condition in almost all Muslim countries looked gloomy without any hope of sovereignty of their own. Witnessing the Muslim Ummah under the subjugation of the Western imperial powers brought weariness to Iqbal the poet of emancipation. Well-read in the history and civilization of the world, he realized that the decline of the Muslim civilization all started with the fall of Baghdad in 1258.¹ The last of the great Muslim empires to fall was the Mogul and Ottoman. In analyzing some of the factors that caused the Muslim empires to crumble, Iqbal among others highlighted factors like the fatalistic way of thinking, the doctrine of self-denial, European colonization, blind imitation of the West, etc. Particularly, the doctrine of self-denial had the hardest blow on the Muslim masses. It dwindled their spirit for a true Islamic Jihad in the areas of education, social, economic and politics. In Iqbal's understanding, the word *Jihad* stands for striving for excellence, self-improvement, hard work and conquering of new ideas. In lamenting the sorrows of the Muslim World involved in their political struggle for independence, Iqbal wrote poems like *Tasvir-e-Dard* (Portrait of Pain) and *Nala-i-Yatim* (The Sighing of an Orphan).² Iqbal felt emotionally disturbed to witness the fall of Tripoli into the hands of the Italians in 1911, the Balkan Wars between 1912-1913 and the British conspiracy that led to the disintegration of the

¹ M.G. Husain (ed.) (1996). *Psychology and society in Islamic perspective*. New Delhi: Genuine Publications & Media Pvt. Ltd, p. 4.

² Javaid Iqbal in Muhammad Iqbal, (1992). *Stray Reflections*. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, pp. 10-11.

Ottoman Empire between 1902-1914. As a response to all the political upheavals in the Muslim world, Iqbal wrote poems like; *Bilad-i-Islamiah* (the land of the Muslims), *Wataniat* (Nationalism), *Tehzib-i-Hazir* (Modern Civilization) and *Huzur-i-Risalat Ma'ab Mein* (In the Presence of the Sacred Prophet).¹

As a way out of this awful situation for the Muslims, Iqbal proposed a new philosophy for the strengthening the Muslim ego. As such, he came up with his own theory on personality development. In developing his theory, Iqbal eclectically integrated dynamic ideas taken from Western philosophers, past Muslim scholars, the Islamic Holy Scripture and the beautiful teaching of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). These combined ideas of the East and West became his newly found philosophy, which he called the 'Khudi Philosophy' (Philosophy of the Ego). Any avid reader of Iqbal will detect that this philosophy shows itself up in almost all his writings, mainly in the Reconstruction, *Asrar-i-Khudi* and *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*. Iqbal during his time had the conviction that his Philosophy of the Self would be able to release the Muslims from their malaise and other misfortunes they were subjected to by the European colonizers. Moreover, he also believed that with the strengthening of their personality, the Ummah's dignity could be restored, and this, in turn, would enable the Muslims to engage in productive activities that would yield positive results that can bring them closer to their honoured position as mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith.²

Mysticism during Iqbal's Time

As a consequence of Western imperialism in Muslim lands, Muslims living in India and other regions of the world wanted to find peace and solace by venturing into spiritual circles conducted by Sufi scholars. To Iqbal, this sort of an act means none other than an escapism from the social and political realities of the day. Such people were not willing to acknowledge the fact they have lost dominance of their own land and country to the external forces. In addition, they were not prepared to accept the fact that they were being colonized and treated as slaves in their own homeland. Iqbal's objection to Sufism was not an outright rejection at all as he was an un-proclaimed Sufi in modern-day clothing. What he really opposed was the pseudo-mysticism preached and practiced by some Sufi scholars who zealously called for the negation of the 'Self'/ Ego. Iqbal's concept of the human ego development was a non-confirmative one with what had been

¹ Sanusi bin Junid, *Iqbal and Muslim Unity*, Intellectual Discourse, 2002, Vol 10, No 2, pp. 115-124.

² Lini S. May (1974). *Iqbal: his life and times*. Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, pp. 93-94.

popularly preached by the Sufi scholars of his time, particularly in India. After conducting a serious investigation on the doctrine of self-denial/self-annihilation (*fanā'*), religious seclusion (*'Uzlah*), *Wahdatul Wujud*, and other aspects that call for the abandonment of active participation in worldly activities; be they political, social or economic preached by some Sufis, Iqbal presented an anti-thesis to some of the Sufi teachings. According to him, such teachings run quite contrary to the ideal teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. He also came to the conclusion that the *Wahdatul Wujud* concept has its roots in other foreign philosophies that are alien to Islam; like Pantheism.

As a philosophy, Pantheism has its roots in Neoplatonism a philosophy pioneered by Plotinus (204/5- 270 C.E.), which preaches mystical ideas on the existence of God, man and the universe. One of the famous teachings of Pantheism states, "God is everything and everything is God". This statement has gained acceptance in many religions and cultures of the world. The pantheists believe that everything in the universe is the manifestation of God. In modern times, in the West, some aspects of Pantheism have attracted a great number of adherents to its doctrine, namely Spinoza (1632-1677), Bruno (1548-1600) and Hegel (1770-1831).¹ Another aspect of Pantheism states that the highest objective and ideal in the life of an individual is to lose one's individuality in the Absolute. In tracing the time period in which the doctrine of Pantheism entered the Sufi circles in the Muslim world, Abu Sayeed Nuruddin (1978) is of the opinion that it entered during the peak of the Islamic civilization. When Islam spread to many parts of the Arabian Peninsula; particularly to Iraq, Iran, Palestine and Egypt, Muslim scholars translated many old manuscripts in the areas of philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, etc. from foreign languages, mainly from Greek, Persian and Indian into Arabic. Along with such works of translations, ideas of Neoplatonism, Vedanta and Buddhist philosophies found their way into Sufism, giving rise to what Iqbal called pseudo-mysticism.²

In analyzing the teachings of Pantheism, Iqbal came to an understanding that some of its concepts are very similar to what one finds in the Vedanta and Nirvana doctrines that call for a pessimistic approach toward life. The two preach the message that this worldly life is nothing more than a Maya (illusion). In realizing such ideas have entered the

¹ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak. *Iqbal's Theory of personality: a contrastive analysis with Freud*, (Saarbrücken: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013), p.34.

² Abu Sayeed Nuruddin. *Allama Iqbal's Attitude toward Sufism and his unique philosophy of khudi-self*. (Dacca: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1978), p.21.

Muslim lands in the disguised form of Sufi teachings, Iqbal called for their eradication so that they are not detrimental to the survival of the Muslim Ummah. Moreover, he believed that if such ideas were to be followed by the Muslims, they could sap away their human potential and vitality for life. Divergent to what had been preached by the Sufi scholars of his era in the Indian Subcontinent; Iqbal summoned Muslims to embrace an enthusiastic and dynamic approach to life. In addition, he also called the Muslim masses to abandon the pessimistic approach to tackling all worldly affairs. He refuted the gloomy and pessimistic lifestyle of some Sufi teachings by making the Prophet's lifestyle an example (*Khudwah Hasanah/Uswatun Hasanah*). To Iqbal, the Prophet's biography depicts a lifestyle which is dynamic in nature that enables the Muslim Ummah to grapple with all changes and challenges it has to face for its survival. An avid reader of the *Seerah* (biography of the Prophet) will find the Prophet was at one time leading his followers in prayers at the mosque and at other times he was at the battle field as the commander who gave instruction and at another time, distributing charity, etc. At the most desperate situation of his life, he submitted himself to the will of God and never gave up hope of seeing light at the end of the tunnel.¹ Going by the Qur'anic teachings, he made Prophet Muhammad SAW as the role-model for himself and for others in the Muslim community. In calling the Muslims to use their God given inner strength that comes from within their ego, he said the following:

If he does not take the initiative, if he does not evolve the inner richness of his being, if he ceases to feel the inward push of advancing life, then the spirit within him hardens into stone and he is reduced to the level of dead matter. But his life and the onward march of his spirit depend on the establishment of connections with the reality that confronts him.²

With regard to the origin of the doctrine of self-negation, Iqbal discovered that it was one of the aspects preached by the proponents of *Wahdah al-Wujūd* (Unity of Existence). Though in the beginning, Iqbal agreed with many of the teachings of *Wahdah al-Wujūd*, which was popularized by Shaikh Muhiyiddin Ibn Al-Arabi (638/1240) an Andalusian scholar of the Islamic Golden Era, later he fervently opposed it. In comparing the teachings of Al-Arabi with that of what was preached by the Prophet of Islam, he could not get the teachings of *Wahdah al-Wujūd* to be reconciled with the true spirit and

¹ Muhammad Iqbal, *Stray Reflections*, (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1992), pp. 151-152.

² Muhammad Iqbal, *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*, (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1996), p.10.

dynamism emphasized in Islam (the Qur'an and Sunnah).¹ Very specifically, he protested against the *Wahdah al-Wujūd* that emphasized man at the highest stage of his spirituality should lose his own personality in seeking communion with God. Allegorically described, the idea of man losing his personality in God is like a drop of water that slips into the ocean of God. In Iqbal's view, such an idea was pretty much similar to the doctrine of Nirvana and not something that has been preached by the Qur'an and Prophet SAW. Furthermore, he believed that such an idea is not within the moral teachings of Islam. In Islam, though one's soul comes from God, he/she has to maintain the demarcation line that separates man from God. As such, God stays as God and man as man.²

In opposing the doctrine of *Wahdah al-Wujūd*, Iqbal proposed and supported the idea that man at his highest level of spirituality needs to absorb and inculcate in him the attributes of God, which can be later translated into good actions. In doing so, one would be able to lead a good and purposeful life as the vicegerent of God as stated in the Qur'an and Sunnah.³ In addition, Iqbal also believed that the self-denial doctrine is something foreign to the Qur'anic teachings which have crept into the pristine teachings of Islam. In his contention, total renunciation of the worldly life is something that has been spread around by pseudo-Sufi circles and it does not belong to the central teachings of the Prophet of Islam. By researching the Qur'an and Sunnah, Iqbal found out that Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) as a messenger of God had a dynamic personality, which was anchored in the teachings found in the Qur'an.⁴ Iqbal further thought that throughout his life and mission, the Prophet had always shown great vitality in toiling and struggling together with his companions to uphold the message of Islam. The dynamism found in the principle teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, made Iqbal understand that man as the *Khalīfah* (vicegerent of Allah) has a vital role to play in administering and developing this world. As such, instead of

¹ *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3 & 4, (New York: Mac Millan Publishing Co. Inc. 1972), p. 212.

² Iqbal in Abu Sayeed Nuruddin, *Allama Iqbal's Attitude toward Sufism and his unique philosophy of khudi-self*, (Dacca: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1978), p.21.

³ Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady. Iqbal and the Malay world. In Motten, Abdul Rashid (ed.). *Intellectual Discourse*. Vol. 20, No. 2. Selangor: Research Centre, International Islamic University Malaysia, 2002), pp. 161-177.

⁴ KG. Saiyidain. *Iqbal's educational philosophy*. (Lahore: SH Muhammad Ashraf, 1977) p. 75.

running away from the demands of this worldly life, man has to use his God-given potential to bring out the material wealth that lies in the belly of the earth and use it for his spiritual upliftment and development. By performing such duties and responsibilities, the *Khalīfah* of Allah should not entertain a passive attitude in life by surrendering everything and anything merely to be decided by fate (*taqdīr/ qismat*).¹

As a great humanist, Iqbal viewed critically the events happening in the East and West. In both communities, he saw something positive and negative at the same time. To the Muslims of his time, though they were observing the basic requirements of the Islamic faith, a faction of them were caught entangled in the web of pseudo-mysticism. Instead of taking the forward march in life as the vicegerent of God, they were doing quite the opposite to the real emphasis of the Qur'an. In analyzing their attitude towards life, this was what Iqbal said:

Far from reintegrating the forces of the average man's inner life, and thus preparing him for participation in the march of history, it has taught him a false renunciation and made him perfectly contented with his ignorance and spiritual thralldom.²

In a contrastive manner, Iqbal compared the Muslims of his time to the people in the West. Though he praised them for many of their good works in the areas of knowledge, modern science and technology, nevertheless he did highlight to them their shortcomings for being deluded by the materialistic approach to life. He felt that such a lifestyle has robbed their inner peace and harmony of the soul. The following quote explains his exact criticism directed at the people in the West:

Thus, wholly overshadowed by the results of his intellectual activity, the modern man has ceased to live soulfully, i.e. from within. In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others. He finds himself unable to control his ruthless egoism and his infinite gold-hunger which is gradually killing all higher striving in him and bringing him nothing but life-weariness.³

The European man of wisdom does not possess a wakeful heart, although he possesses a wakeful eye.⁴

¹ Muhammad Daud Rahbar, Glimpses of the man. In Malik Hafeez (ed) *Iqbal poet-philosopher of Pakistan*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 53-54.

² Muhammad Iqbal. (1996). Op.Cit., pp.148-149.

³ Ibid. p. 148.

⁴ Bazm-i-Iqbal, *Iqbal*, (Vol. 18, Issues 1-4). Lahore: Bazm-i-Iqbal, 1969, p. 510.

Believe me, Europe to-day is the greatest hindrance in the way of man's ethical advancement.¹

Being fair and non-bias in his evaluation of the people in the West and East, Iqbal said that one has become overly engrossed with the material things in life and the other with the spiritual matters. Iqbal puts his criticism of both societies lucidly in the following lines of his poem:

The East perceived God and failed to perceive the World
The West lost itself in the world and fled from God!
To open the eyes on God is worship!
To see oneself unveiled is life²

In a way, Iqbal's struggle in calling the pseudo-mystic scholars and the Muslim Ummah to the true teachings of Islam had some close resemblance to what Al-Ghazali (1043-1111) experienced during his time. Imam Al-Ghazali through his monumental works like '*Tahāfut Al-Falāsifah*' (The Incoherence of the Philosophers) (1963) and '*Ihyā' 'Ulūm Al-Dīn*' (n.d.) (The Revival of Religious Sciences) cautioned the Muslim philosophers of his era to follow the true teachings found in the Qur'an and Sunnah and not to blindly imitate the Greek philosophers. His clarion call was precisely directed towards Ibn Sina (980-1037), Al-Farabi (872-950), and others like them who went adrift in the wave of the philosophical thoughts of the Greeks. Besides highlighting the pitfalls in Greek philosophy, Al-Ghazali gave his approval to the Ummah to maintain all ideas of the philosophers that did not contradict the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Moreover, he had no objection to the Greek culture of knowledge and wisdom seeking, plus contemplation. All this, he thought was a prerequisite for those who want to attain the status of a wise man. Al-Ghazali, introduce the '3As' principle in taking knowledge and wisdom from other civilizations; the first 'A' refers to adopt, the second to adapt and the third refers to assimilate. Looking at Al-Ghazali's approach of taking ideas from others in today's context, it is nothing more than the 'Islamization of Knowledge' championed by IIUM and IIIT. If the ideas are alien and carry the values that are detrimental to the Islamic way of life, then we have to cast such ideas as they pose a threat to our faith and salvation in this life and in the hereafter.

Correspondingly, Iqbal too called for the true observance of the Islamic principles stated in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Through his magnum opus in

¹ Sir Muhammad Iqbal, *The mysteries of selflessness: A philosophical poem (Rumuz-e-Bekhudi)*. (A.J. Arberry, Trans.), (London: John Murray, 1953), p.xii.

² Iqbal in KG. Saiyidain, *Iqbal's educational philosophy*. (Lahore: SH Muhammad Ashraf 1977), p.91.

the field of philosophy, ‘The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam’ (1996) he called for the resuscitation and revival of the true spirit of Islam which is necessary for the life of the ego. The spiritual life experience is important for the ego to develop into a strong personality. One noticeable difference that can be traced between Al-Ghazali and Iqbal in their ardent call for the Ummah to follow the true understanding and practice of Islam is that the former directed his call and criticism towards the philosophers, while the latter on the Sufi scholars. Al-Ghazali and Iqbal through their works in the areas of Islamic philosophy and mysticism were successful in clearing the misunderstanding that had clouded the Muslim minds during their respective times. For their dedicated efforts and invaluable contributions to revive the true Islamic spirit, the Muslim Ummah has placed both their names alongside other Muslim reformers like Ibn Taimiyyah (1263-1328), Ibn Qayyim (1292-1350), Imam Muhammad Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792) and Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (1838-1897).

Appraisal of Iqbal’s Ideas

First and foremost, Iqbal is a gifted man with many ideas and potential. He was not only a scholar but a philosopher, Sufi, poet, barrister, statesman and thinker. As one well-read in religion, philosophy and civilization, he was able to analyze the mindset of people in the East and West. As a poet of universal repute, he spoke of his ideas without any favour or fear of the condition of people in the East and West. In this section of the article, we would like to analyze whether Iqbal had a legitimate claim in going against a certain Sufi circle of his time. If there were any, can we appraise them to see whether they are in conformity with the teachings of the Qur’an and Sunnah.¹ The analysis below is a critical evaluation of some of Iqbal’s ideas on mysticism.

Iqbal, who is known as the “Renaissance Man” of the Muslim world, was right in his antagonism towards pseudo-mysticism. It has its validity viewed from the Qur’an and Sunnah perspectives. Both these primary sources call for active participation of the Muslim community in fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of a Muslim as the *Khalīfah* of Allah. The Qur’an calls the Muslims to be active not only in carrying out the rituals but also in managing the worldly affairs of an individual. A simple classification of the Qur’anic message will be to take care of the two worlds (*dunya* and *akhirah*), body and mind, individual and communal affairs, science and spirituality. Looking at the pathetic condition of the Muslim

¹ Muhammad Munawwar. *Iqbal and Quranic wisdom*. 2nd ed, (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan 1985), p.18.

world under subjugation and lagging behind other communities brought sadness to Iqbal's sensitive heart. To shake and awaken the Muslim masses from their deep 'spiritual drunkenness', malaise, and passivity towards life to the realities of the modern world, Iqbal had to come up with his own philosophy of the self/ego. Such a philosophy that preached the dynamism present in the Qur'an and Sunnah, was a thing new to the Muslim world. His new philosophy calls for the fulfilment of the "*Zikr* and *Fikr*" of the Qur'an. The former refers to all spiritual practices; like prayers, fasting, charity, etc. While the latter refers to science, technology and empirical research. To Iqbal, the scientist's effort to gaze through the universe with the help of a telescope, in a way is a form of worship as he is trying to discover the greatness of God in the world of creations. In the following lines of his poem Iqbal explained his stand on science and its importance:

In our observation of nature, we are virtually seeking a kind of intimacy with the Absolute Ego;

and this is only another form of worship.¹

The scientific observer of nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer.²

Science is an instrument for the preservation of Life.

Science is a means of invigorating the Self.

Science and art are servants of Life.³

For the survival of the Muslims in the modern era, Iqbal suggested that they should make a marriage between the *Zikr* and *Fikr* of the Qur'an. By doing so, he felt the Muslim Ummah will be strong enough to stand on its own feet. Without science and technology, the Ummah will be dependent on others. It is okay for short term dependency on others, but it won't be an ideal situation in the long run. Moreover, the poet also felt that with science and spirituality the Ummah would be able to stand tall with the rest of the world. If any Muslim community living in any part of the world fails to observe either one of the two; *Zikr* or *Fikr*, the most likely scenario that can happen to it will be; neglecting the *Zikr*, the community can suffer from moral degradation in this world and deprived of salvation and felicity in the hereafter, while in the absence of *Fikr* it can suffer in this world without good healthcare system, poor economic growth, backwardness, etc. Similar thoughts of Iqbal on the *Zikr* and *Fikr*

¹ Muhammad Iqbal, *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*, (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1996), p.45.

² Ibid, p.73.

³ Muhammad Iqbal *The secrets of the self (Asrar-i-Khudi)*, (Renold A. Nicholson, Trans Ashraf), (Lahore: SH. Muhammad, 1983) p.26.

have been shared by towering Muslim personalities like Malek Bennabi (1905-1973), Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Syeikh Muhammad Abduh (1847-1905). These scholars were impressed to see the industriousness of the West with the use of science and technology. In a way, what they expressed about the West was simply the outward behaviour of hard work emphasized in Islam, and at the same time, the spiritual qualities of Islam were missing there. Conversely, in the Muslim World, they witnessed so much of spirituality was displayed in the lives of the people, but at the same time, scientific research, creativity, critical thinking, creative thinking, innovation, productivity, and many of the outward displays of good governance, etc. are all the more missing in the Muslim World. These contrastive scenarios in the West and Islamic world brought lamentation to the pure and sincere heart of Iqbal and the aforementioned scholars during modern times in the Muslim World.

Iqbal's call for active participation in worldly affairs; economic, social and political, has its approval in the Qur'an and Sunnah.¹ A complete withdrawal from worldly affairs in the life of a Muslim is not encouraged in Islam. The holy script of the Muslims calls for a balance in all human activities be they mundane or spiritual. As such, man has to strike an equilibrium in fulfilling all his biological, psychological, sociological and spiritual needs.² He has to live in this world and make the necessary preparation for his eternal abode in the hereafter. Though a Muslim has to stay focused on the *Akhirah* and his eventual return to Allah, he should not be neglectful of his duties as the *Khalīfah* of Allah in making this planet a better place for him and others. As a *Khalīfah* of Allah, he has to bind a good relationship with God, nature and fellow human beings. As a man well-read in religion and philosophy, Iqbal felt that it was his moral obligation to rectify the erroneous notion of those engrossed in spirituality and who narrowly interpreted the Qur'anic philosophy of life by limiting it only to a serious preparation of returning back to Allah. Moreover, Iqbal also felt that such individuals in their day-to-day activities showed a passive attitude towards this life. Overall, Iqbal is against such an understanding of life from the Islamic perspective. He vehemently opposed it by saying that such a notion runs contrary to the concept of *Khairah Ummah* (best community of people) in the Qur'an.³ The best community explained in the Qur'an is a community actively involved in all human activities, including commerce, social work,

¹ Al-Qur'an 2:208.

² Al-Qur'an 2:143.

³ Al-Qur'an 3:112.

charity, care for the environment, calling others to the path of righteousness, politics and world peace.

To a scholar of Iqbal's stature, *Jihad* is not only focused on an individual's endeavour to rid his/her heart from all spiritual diseases; like envy, racism, hatred, avarice, etc. Iqbal's poems also give us the understanding that *Jihad* also means the physical act of defending one's country from foreign intervention, standing up for the dignity of oneself and his/her family, and one's action to uphold fairness and justice, etc. As such, Iqbal had his highest respect for Sufis and religious personalities in the Muslim world who stood up for the liberation of their nations from colonial powers. Compared to Sufis who had renounced the world and fixed their gaze on heaven, Iqbal adored those Sufis who were not only looking towards the sky but are also involved in the social reforms of their people.

Iqbal was right when he gave a new understanding of the word '*Zuhd*'. In the old understanding of the Sufis, '*Zuhd*' means to stay away or to show a disinterested attitude toward all worldly engagements; like commerce, social gatherings, and politics. Going by the conventional ideas of the Sufis, a Muslim must give much of his attention to his religious activities like rituals and meditation. In short, they advocated a life of withdrawal from worldly activities. Sufis of this nature paid little or no attention to worldly life. They should be rightly called the 'Prophets of Doomsday' as they overly emphasized the part of the Islamic eschatology and the hereafter. In contrast to the old understanding, Iqbal's new understanding of '*Zuhd*' was quite interesting. To Iqbal, the greatest *Zahid* is not the one who runs away from material things and power. He further explained that the one who practices *Zuhd* can have money and power in his hand, but the greatness of the two does not touch one's heart. A Muslim of Iqbal's understanding of *Zuhd* will use the money and power in his possession to help and strengthen the position of the Muslims in the modern world. Simply put, a *Zahid* is he who lives and enjoys life like any other Muslim around him, but at the same time, he is somehow detached from all ephemeral things of this world, as his focused attention will be on the mission for which he has been sent to this world. Reading Iqbal's ego philosophy gives one the impression that the *Zahid* of Iqbal is one who looks pretty normal and does not display any exaggerated outward religiosity but within his heart, there is a mechanism that controls all actions and words and guides him to the correct path in life. To conclude on the concepts of *Zuhd* and *Zahid*, it can be stated here that a Muslim who has a clear understanding of the terms, *Khalīfah*, *Uzlah*, and *Zuhd*,

would be able to carry out his duties as a Trust (*Amanah*) from God in a more productive and successful manner.¹

Ideas preached by pseudo-mysticism that give preference to the hereafter at the expense of the life in *Dunya* (this world) are not in line with the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. If Muslims abandon this worldly life in toto, that would be the most likely to cause their communities and nations to be ruled by others. Not only that, but it can also create economic dependency on others. Living in such a condition can be a degrading thing to the Muslim Ummah. If such a situation happens, then they would be living like slaves who are subservient to others. In such a situation, they can lose their freedom to practice the Islamic rituals, culture, and heritage in peace. Moreover, their state of living under others can be intimidating. We feel that the overemphasis on the hereafter and neglect of this worldly life and duties as the *Khalifah* of Allah is not the true idealism of the Qur'anic message. In the Qur'an, the Muslims are told to live a balanced life for this world and the next. Not only that, when they pray, they should ask God for a good life in this world and in the hereafter.² Muslims are reminded in the Qur'an that in their pursuit of a good life in the hereafter, they should not forget their duties and responsibilities in this world.³

As a poet of vitality, Iqbal is an action-oriented leader. As such, he calls for action rather than a passive submission to one's fate. He even calls the Qur'an a "Book of Deeds" which means a "Book of Action". Reading the Qur'an needs one to react. The reaction should produce change, development, improvement, transformation, etc. In his poetry and philosophy, he calls for Muslims to dive into the thick and thin of life and learn how to grapple with issues of human survival at the individual as well as at the societal levels. In all those struggles, he metaphorically explains that one should not surrender to fate without giving a heroic fight. One of those things that can pose a challenge to an individual will be his/her environment (physical and social conditions). At times, the forces of nature will try to dampen one's spirit of the ego. At such times, Iqbal calls the Muslims and their nations to stay fortified and show resilience in overcoming all those obstacles set by nature. He further explained that, by defeating/overcoming the forces of nature, one's ego can be strengthened. The ego that is strong and strengthened is the one that is

¹ Al-Qur'an 33:72.

² Al-Qur'an 2:201.

³ Al-Qur'an 28:77.

closer to God. In short, Iqbal urges the Muslims not to simply give up while living in difficulties. Iqbal also calls us to be humble to God and demand a better fate (*Taqdir/ Qismat*) as no one knows what God has reserved for us, except Him. Very different from the old concept of Sufism, Iqbal explains that the Omnipotent God, who is capable of creating thousands of fate, is surely able to give one that is the best for us. Again, metaphorically, the last thing that he urges us to do, is to get closer to God through our worship, good deeds, hard work, and supplications to the extent that God out of his Mercy asks us “What do you demand from Me O my good servant?”

With regard to religious seclusion, perhaps, Iqbal did not mean to say that there is no such a thing in Islam. He pretty well knew the story of the Prophet of Islam used to isolate himself in the Cave of Hira alone before the coming of the first *Wahy* (revelation). The *Seerah* of the Prophet explains to us that those were the days and nights the Prophet SAW spent in the darkness, stillness, and serenity of the cave, contemplating the condition of his people who were at that time deep and steep into all sorts of vices. His prayers were answered when Jibrail AS brought the first message from God Almighty.¹ After that, when Islam was established in Madinah and fasting during Ramadhan was ordained as a pillar of Islam, every year during Ramadhan the Prophet used to have ten days of religious seclusion spending more time in prayers, supplications, and seeking God's forgiveness. Besides those last ten days in Ramadhan, at all other times, the Prophet was always busy at the mosque leading masses in prayers, distributing charity and spoils of war, attending to his family, commanding an army at the battlefields, etc. The Prophet lived and dwelled among people of all faith and strata (Muslims, Christians, Jews, Bedouins, Aristocrats, and the ordinary people; the rich and the poor, etc. Iqbal as a man, who had a deep love for the Prophet, admired him in many ways. Lessons learned from the Qur'an and the Prophet SAW made him say, that the human ego cannot be strengthened and enriched in isolation. In his poems, he highlighted the importance of the individual living in the togetherness with the society. Below here is what he said on the subject of the individual ego in relation to the collective egos of the society:

The Individual exists in relation to the community.

Alone, he is nothing!

The wave exists in the river,

Outside the river it is nothing!²

¹ Al-Qur'an 96:1-5.

² Iqbal in K.G. Saiyidain, *Iqbal's educational philosophy*. (Lahore: SH Muhammad Ashraf, 1977), p. 56.

When a word is taken out of its verse,
 It causes the sense to be lost.
 The green leaf that falls from the branch
 Loses all hopes of enjoying the spring.
 He, who does not drink from the fountain of society,
 Will find that the fire of his melodies dies out in him¹

Iqbal's call for the individual to be affiliated with the society is in line with the Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings. Total isolation from public life preached by pseudo-mysticism runs contrary to the spirit of living as one Ummah. As a member of a society, an individual needs to participate in communal activities; be they occasions of joys and triumphs, death and tragedies, reforms and improvements, etc. A life of total isolation from the community is a selfish lifestyle and a philosophy of seeking happiness and victory for the pleasure of oneself. On the contrary, seeking glory, salvation and good life in this world and in the hereafter for all is a more meaningful life and a one loved by Allah and his Prophet SAW.

Going through the doctrines of "*Nur Muhammad*", "*Wahdatul Wujud*" and other issues stated by some pseudo-mystics, one will find many reasons why Iqbal showed antagonism towards Ibn Arabi and the like of him. Perhaps Iqbal was unhappy with the over-exaggerated narratives given to the "*Bahr and Qatra*" (the Ocean and Drop) concept and the doctrine on "*Nur Muhammad*" which states that the essence of Muhammad in spirit was long before he was born. As an overflowing love of God towards the "Light of Muhammad", He created all other beings in the universe; celestial and terrestrial.

A Way Forward for Muslims in the Modern World

Any researcher into Islamic Mysticism, without fail, will discover that its history is entangled with polemical issues focused on the debate of its actual time of origin, contents, controversies, etc. Though this has been going on for ages, the one thing that the vast majority of researchers consensually agree on is that it cannot be denied that in a way the Islamic mysticism has its point of departure during the time of the Prophet SAW. Such researchers believe that the seed of mysticism which later grew into a gigantic tree has its essence in the life of austerity and good behaviour shown by the Prophet, his companions; especially the *Ashabul Suffah* and the four rightly-guided

¹ Iqbal in Ali Sheikh Akbar, *Iqbal his poetry and message*, (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1988) p. 240.

caliphs. In the basic teachings of Islam, terminologies like *Akhlaq*, *Ihsan*, *Adab*, *Insaniyah*, *Ilmu-al-Akhlaq*, etc. somehow led to the later development of Islamic mysticism. Along with the expansion of Islam to other parts of Arabia and its neighbouring regions, Islamic mysticism came in contact with elements of mysticism found in some foreign philosophies. We, the researchers believe that many of those philosophies were adopted, adapted, and integrated into what was then the Islamic mysticism. Although much of the added information into the body of Islamic mysticism went in harmony with the Islamic fundamental principles of faith, nevertheless there were certain elements that have been debated in the midst of the theologians and other branches of knowledge in Islam till to the very present time. In our observation, such debates are mainly centered on the issue of whether; a Muslim has to go to such a level of understanding and practice. Apart from that, scholars who oppose the infiltration and integration of the foreign elements in Islamic mysticism claim that it is enough for Muslims to follow what has been highlighted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and they do not see the relevance of the Muslims going into any extremity. Moreover, they are also of the opinion, if followers of such mysticism are not guided by those who are qualified masters, there is a great possibility for them to be derailed from the true path of Islam.

Pseudo-mysticism is not a phenomenon faced by the Muslim community alone, but it also exists within the Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, and other communities of the world. Besides, in pseudo-mysticism, some religious gurus also promote spirituality for monetary gains. In sensing people's hunger and thirst for God and their eagerness for a spiritual closeness to the Almighty, many of those masters who claim to be "the enlightened soul" sell some meditational techniques, mantras, talismans, etc. for a lucrative price to those who want to undergo a similar experience instantaneously. At the same time, we accept that there exist some genuine religious teachers and gurus who dedicate their lives to be at service to God and humanity.

Conclusion

Iqbal's antagonism towards the pseudo-mysticism of his time has its own validity. As a Muslim thinker, Iqbal was deeply concerned about the future of the Muslim Ummah. His opposition is mainly directed to pseudo-mystics who advocate a passive lifestyle toward all worldly affairs. His ideas on Sufism are quite interesting in the sense; that they call for Muslims to live a normal life that is productive, prolific and creative in many ways. In addition to that, he calls Muslims to find their space, relevance and

contribution, living in the modern society. As one well-grounded in Islam and philosophy, Iqbal calls for the reinterpretation of the old religious ideals, ideas and heritage in the modern context. He believes that it is acceptable for religious people to have their heads in the clouds floating with philosophical and mystical ideas, but at the same time, their feet should be firmly rooted on the ground dealing with matters that relate to the survival of the Muslim Ummah.

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