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Table of Contents

The Essentiality of Social Justice: An Analysis from three Abrahamic Faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam	<i>Najiah Athirah Jamaluddin</i> <i>Wan Mohd Azam Mohd Amin</i>	5-20
The Role of Islamic Political Parties in an Islamic State: An Analysis of <i>Jamaat-e-Islami</i>	<i>Syed Mohamed Usman Ghani</i> <i>Thameem Ushama</i>	21-40
Sufism Network in the Malay World: A Historical Overview	<i>Amy Nadirah Yacob</i> <i>Ismail Mamat</i>	41-59
Exploring AbdulHamid AbuSulayman's Views on the Contemporary Challenges towards Higher Education in Muslim Countries	<i>Nur Irdina Hakimah NorAzali</i> <i>Nur Suriya Mohd Nor</i>	61-79
Iqbal's Antagonism towards Pseudo-Mysticism	<i>Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak</i> <i>Hayatullah Laluddin</i> <i>Mahathir M M Yusoff</i>	81-97
Theosophical Elements in Iqbal's Magnum Opus "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam": A Preliminary Review	<i>Shaik Abdullah Hassan Mydin</i> <i>Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak</i> <i>Mahathir M M Yusoff</i>	99-116
Mashā'ir in the Early Islamic Sources: the Role of al-Azraqi's "Akhhbar Makkah"	<i>Spahic Omer</i>	117-131
تهذيب الأخلاق عند يحيى بن عدي بناء على قوى الإنسان الثلاث Refinement of Characters According to Yahyā Ibn 'Adī based on Three Faculties of Human Soul	<i>Irfan Farid Taufik</i> <i>Wan Mohd Azam Mohd Amin</i>	133-178

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If there is a usage of Quranic verses or Hadith from Prophet P.B.U.H., it only needs to be done by translation only.

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

Shaik Abdullah Hassan Mydin *

Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak **

Mahathir M M Yusoff ***

Abstract

Theosophy is a discourse on the divine wisdom of God behind all created things. In this study, the researchers have scrutinised the theosophical elements found in Iqbal's thought process, particularly in his magnum opus "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam". The central themes of his masterpiece revolved around subjects like God, nature, the human ego and civilization. As a mystic, Iqbal has never failed to embed spirituality on issues pertaining to human survival in the modern world. As a Muslim philosopher, Iqbal emphasised a great deal of lofty religious ideals. With regard to the human ego, Iqbal believed that it has its origin in God. As such, it has some godly attributes to a lesser degree than what is possessed by God. Man's God-given minuscule attributes like intelligence and creativity are in no way equal to that of God. Man identified as an ego in Iqbal's philosophy must recognise the position of God and at the same time, he has to subdue the forces around him in order to actualize the latent potentials that are there in his psyche. This research has revealed the fact that as a thinker, mystical poet and religious reformer, Iqbal's ideas were anchored in the divine wisdom of the Qur'an. In addition, all of Iqbal's theosophical ideas have relevance to the demands of the modern world. As a theoretical study, the researchers have adopted the content and textual analysis methods in their effort to interpret the relevant data to this research.

Keywords: Theosophical Elements, Magnum Opus, Iqbal, Reconstruction, Islamic Thought

Introduction

As a religious text, the Qur'an is replete with information on human nature and man's inner dimension. Besides the Qur'an, the Hadith (the words of

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the Prophet) also provides much information on man and his natural disposition, very particularly the one that says that man is born in a state of purity without any stain of sin (Original Sin). Though Muslims are enriched with the knowledge of man through these primary sources of the religion, nevertheless such information is dispersed and scattered, particularly in the 114 chapters of the Qur'an. As such, in order to understand the subject on man in a comprehensive manner, one has to rely on close scrutiny on the scholarly works done by experts on the primary sources of Islam. Thus, Iqbal as a modern scholar and a Sufi built his concepts on God, man and the universe based on the Qur'anic and Sunnah perspective. Iqbal's call for man's dynamic participation in worldly life is very relevant to what has been stated in the Qur'an.¹ Moreover, through his work, Iqbal emphasized that all philosophical thoughts should be based on the lofty spiritual values advocated by Islam. For Iqbal, the human ego that originates from God inherits some of God's attributes like intelligence and creativity to a lesser degree. Man's God-given minuscule intelligence and creativity, can in no way be equal to God's attributes. A human being identified as an ego in Iqbal's philosophy must recognize the position of God and subdue the natural forces around him in order to actualize his latent potential.

With reference to the foregoing, this small-scale academic paper is an explorative work that dwells on Iqbal's magnum opus '*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*'.² This monumental work of his is nothing more than a compilation of his lectures delivered at the academic forums. The whole 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. It was in these lectures that Iqbal lucidly expressed his philosophical thoughts which are based on the teachings of the Qur'an. Moreover, through these lectures, Iqbal ventured on to explain in philosophical terms how the Qur'anic concepts pertaining to Islamic values should be translated into the cultural contexts of the Muslim communal life.³ Since Iqbal is an ocean of a person who discusses 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 ego in relationship

¹ Al-Qur'an 28:77 (Sheikh Abdullah Basmeih, *Tafsir Ar-Rahman interpretation of the meaning of the Qur'an*. (Putrajaya: Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2007).

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

³ C. A. Qadir, *Philosophy and science in the Islamic world*, (London: Croom Helm Ltd, Provident House, 1988), p.169.

with God, nature and civilization. Upon identifying Iqbal's ideas in the "Reconstruction", the researchers will refer to the Qur'an, to validate whether his ideas are in line with the *Tawhidic* teachings of the Qur'an.

A Brief Biographical Sketch of Iqbal

Iqbal the poet-philosopher, who was well known as Allama Mohamed Iqbal, was born in Sialkot northern India on 22nd Feb.1873. The root of his ancestors goes back to the region of Kashmir in the Indian subcontinent. Before their conversion to Islam, his ancestors belonged to the upper-class Brahmin of the Hindu caste system. Iqbal's ancestors were converted to Islam after listening to the religious teachings of Syah Hamdani, a pious religious personality who lived during the time of the last ruler of the Mogul dynasty. After the fall of the Mogul empire, Iqbal's ancestors migrated from Kashmir to Sialkot.¹

Both of Iqbal's parents were pious and upright Muslims. Nur Muhammed who was Iqbal's father was a tailor by profession. As a religious man who practiced Sufism, Iqbal's father contributed immensely to the cause of the Muslim society that had pathetically lost all political and social standings under Hindu rule. As a young lad, Iqbal received his elementary education from his father and was later sent to a Sufi scholar by the name of Mir Hasan. It was from this scholar that Iqbal learned the Islamic sciences, Arabic and Persian. When Iqbal finished his primary level of education, Mir Hasan recommended Iqbal to enroll at the Scottish Mission School. Many biographers of Iqbal have acknowledged that the contribution of Mir Hasan in moulding Iqbal's character cannot be denied. As recognition of the great contribution of his teacher, later in life when Iqbal became an established poet, he wrote a short poem praising the stature of his good teacher.²

Upon completing his studies with excellent results at the Scottish Mission School in the year 1895, Iqbal went to study at the Government College in Lahore. It was there at the Government College, Iqbal as a budding poet, had the opportunity to read his poems to a gathering of students and academicians. His poems not only lured the intellectual circle of the academia but also got the attention of the local newspapers and magazines, especially *Makhzan*, an Urdu journal. One of his well-known poems on the Himalayas published in this journal introduced Iqbal to a

¹ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, *Konsepsi pendidikan akhlaq menurut Muhammad Iqbal*, (Aceh: Fakultas Tarbiyah Institut Agama Islam Negeri Jami'ah Ar-Raniry, 1992), p. 40.

² Pravina Bhim Sain, *Remembering our leaders*. Vol.7. (New Delhi: Children's Book Trust, 1989), pp.34-35.

wide circle of admirers all over India.¹ During the time when he was studying at the Government College, Iqbal was close to one of his teachers, an English man by the name of Sir Thomas Arnold. In Sialkot, it was Mir Hasan who had a great influence on Iqbal, who taught him the past intellectual heritage of the Muslims. In Lahore, it was Thomas Arnold, a cultured English man who introduced Iqbal to many of the positive aspects of Western culture and civilization. It has been mentioned by many researchers of Iqbal, that it was through his acquaintance with Thomas Arnold that Iqbal learned to be a critical scholar. As an appreciation of the contribution of this English teacher, later in life Iqbal dedicated his doctoral dissertation to the good name of Thomas Arnold.²

In the year 1899, Iqbal graduated from the Government College with an M. A. in Philosophy. In recognizing his mastery of English and Arabic and also taking into consideration of his future intellectual development, Thomas Arnold recommended Iqbal to pursue his studies at the Cambridge University in England. Accordingly, Iqbal became the first son of India who was given a place to study at Cambridge. In Cambridge, he took some courses in moral philosophy under the guidance of Dr. Mc. Taggart and Dr. James Ward. As a student of Mc Taggart, Iqbal shared many similar views with his teacher in the areas of philosophy and mysticism. During his early days in Europe, Iqbal like his teacher Mc Taggart, was more of a pantheist in his concept of God. Upon finishing his course in philosophy, Iqbal intended to embark on his doctorate programme at Munich University. Over at Munich, to earn his doctorate degree he conducted research in the area of mysticism and wrote a dissertation entitled 'The Development of Metaphysics in Persia'. Prof. F. Hammel was the supervisor who guided him all throughout his research. Upon getting his doctorate degree, Iqbal returned to England to study Law at Lincoln's Inn. While doing his bar, for a short while he also attended lectures at the School of Political Sciences.³

All throughout his stay in Europe, Iqbal used to meet Western scholars to discuss matters pertaining to education and philosophy. In realizing Iqbal's great potential, Western scholars would often invite him to deliver lectures on matters related to Islamic civilization. Starting with his lecture at Caxton Hall, Iqbal delivered a series of captivating lectures at many different venues in the UK. In many of the lectures that he delivered, he highlighted the shortcomings of Western civilization. His thought-

¹ Syed Abdul Wahid, Introduction to Iqbal. (Karachi: Pakistan Publications, 195_), p. 3.

² Ashraf Nurdin, *Pujangga Iqbal*. (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional Pte. Ltd. 1985), pp. 10-12.

³ Djohan Effendi & Abdul Hadi W.M. (eds). (1986). *Iqbal: Pemikir sosial Islam dan sajak sajaknya*, (Jakarta: PT. Pantja Simpati (Anggota IKAPI), 1986), pp. 28-29.

provoking lectures even caught the attention of the Western media. In a way, going to Europe brought many changes in the psychological makeup of Iqbal. 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 change of mindset took Iqbal to a new level all together. This new Iqbal can be seen in his philosophy and poetry as he dedicated himself to 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 much-needed peace, security and prosperity. In sharp contrast to his thoughts, he also witnessed that the Muslim world had many shortcomings due to the reason it failed to uphold the true spirit of Islam found in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

While assessing the situation in the Muslim lands, Iqbal found out that the people were caught in the meshes of superstitions, inactivity and ignorance. According to him, the prevalence of such scenarios in a way caused the Muslims to dwindle in their spirit of living a dynamic life that promises development and progress. In realizing the many shortcomings of the Muslim Ummah, Iqbal wanted to bring an Islamic Renaissance by directing his philosophy and poetry towards the awakening of the Muslim Ummah from its deep slumber and malaise towards realizing the demands of the modern world. As a result of his studying in Europe, his new message to the Muslims was aimed at calling them to renounce all backwardness and to have a positive attitude toward scientific knowledge and exploration in broadening their horizon of thinking. Iqbal became an advocate for scientific research in the Muslim world of his time. In many ways, his call for the Muslim Ummah to celebrate science and technology resembled that of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of the Aligarh University of India.¹

After identifying the problems battering the Muslim Ummah, Iqbal without any self-proclamation took on the role of a religious reformist. It was his intention to revive the Muslim Ummah of its religiosity towards Islam and to restore its dignity and glory which were once enjoyed by it during the Golden Days of Islam. This role of Iqbal as a religious reformer was recognized by many scholars in Iqbal. Having an attitude of total belief and dedication for a rightful cause, and for a higher purpose in life was seen in Iqbal as a preparation for the task of bringing

¹ Syed Latif Hussain Kazmi, *Philosophy of Iqbal (Iqbal and Existentialism)*. (New Delhi: A.P.H Publishing Corporation, 1995), p. 6.

change. Bilgrami (1996), in his writing on Iqbal was able to capture Iqbal's passion and compassion in wanting to change the mindset of the Muslims of his time. For the many positive contributions of Iqbal to the Muslim Ummah, Bilgrami feels that it is not an exaggeration on his part to call Iqbal the "Renaissance Man" of the Muslim world.¹

Iqbal as a Muslim politician was deeply involved in the Muslim affairs in India. As a visionary leader, Iqbal proposed a homeland for Muslims. Iqbal envisioned a free state for the Muslims to live without any intimidation from the other races of India. According to him, his envisioned homeland will be a place whereby Muslims would be able to practice freely their Muslim way of life. Moreover, this land will cater for the blooming and flourishing of the Islamic culture. All of Iqbal's hard work and strenuous efforts in politics were highly appreciated and praised by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, one of Iqbal's friends who played an important role in the Muslim League. As an appreciation of Iqbal's great contribution to the Muslim League, upon hearing the death of Iqbal, Jinnah mourned the death of his friend in the following words:

I am extremely sorry to hear the sad news of the death of Sir Mohammad Iqbal. He was a remarkable poet of worldwide fame and his work will live forever. His services to his country and the Muslims are so numerous that his record can be compared with that of the greatest Indian that ever lived.²

In the year 1924, Iqbal the poet-philosopher, thinker and statesman started to suffer from kidney problems. Not only that, in 1934 Iqbal who was known as the poet with the 'golden voice,' lost his voice due to an ailment in his throat. From that point in time, his health started to deteriorate. In 1935 due to poor health conditions, Iqbal declined an invitation from Oxford to be its Rhodes lecturer. Although he was suffering from poor health conditions, he never showed a lack of enthusiasm in his work as a Muslim scholar. He managed to maintain his reputation and prestige as one of the most creative, prolific and progressive Muslim scholars of his time.³ On the predawn of 21st April 1938, Iqbal breathed his last. He was buried in the compound of the Shahi Mosque of Lahore, Pakistan. Later a mausoleum was erected in recognition of Iqbal's great contributions to the Muslim Ummah. It has been highlighted by many

¹ H.H. Bilgrami, *Glimpses of Iqbal's mind and thought*. (Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1966), pp. iv-v.

² Mohamed Ali Jinnah & Waheed Ahmad, (1992). *The nation's voice, towards consolidation: Speeches and statements*, (Lahore: Quaid-i-Azam Academy, 1992), p. 249.

³ Syed Abdu Vahid.. *Introduction to Iqbal*. Karachi: Pakistan Publications, 195_, p. 8.

writers on Iqbal that before the great poet departed from this world, he wrote the following lines in his poem:

The departed melody may or may not come,
The zephyr may blow again from Hejaz or not!
The days of this Faqir have come to an end,
Another seer may come or not.¹
Even as I depart from this world,
Everyone will say 'I knew him',
But the truth is, alas! that none knew
Who the stranger was, or what he said, or whence he came!.²

In remembrance of Iqbal's great service to humanity, many of his works have been translated by prominent scholars into many languages of the world; French, German, Arabic, Persian, Russian, Italian, Malay, etc. This has been done in the hope that Iqbal's works will be appreciated and benefited by people in their own countries. Ever since the establishment of Pakistan to the present-day Iqbal has become an iconic figure to his own people and to the Muslim world at large. Iqbal who has been seen as a seer, reformer, poet, philosopher, mystic, barrister, statesman and educationist, was exalted to the position of a spiritual father when Pakistan was established as an Islamic nation in 1947. Ever since the world came to witness his intellectual potential, his philosophy and ideas have been researched by many in the East and West. Works by and on Iqbal have benefited people all over the world, Muslims as well as non-Muslims.³

The Concept of Man in Iqbal's Philosophy

Though Iqbal as a young Muslim scholar had the opportunity to pursue his philosophical studies in the West, he was not at all influenced by the ideas on human nature as perceived by Western scholars, especially as what had been conceptualized by Darwinism and Marxism. Iqbal's ideas on human nature are purely based on the ideas stated in the Holy Qur'an. Iqbal in his ideas on man referred to the famous story of the origin and 'fall of man' found in the Old Testament and the Qur'an. Based on his understanding of the Qur'an, Iqbal believed that Adam and Hawwa were forgiven of the transgression committed during their time in *Jannah*.⁴ Besides that, he also

¹ Abdulla Anwar Beg, *The poet of the east: Life and work of Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal*, (Lahore: Khawar Pub. Cooperative Society, 1961), p. 50.

² Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Glory of Iqbal* (Trans. Mohammad Asif Kidwai). Lucknow: Islamic Research and Publications, 1979), p. i.

³ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, *Iqbal's theory of personality: A contrastive analysis with Freud*, (Saarbrücken: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013), pp. 224-225.

⁴ Al-Qur'an 7:23 (Sheikh Abdullah Basmeih, 2007).

believed that their coming to earth was not a punishment for their transgression, and this world should not be seen as a “torture hall” prepared for Adam and his progeny. Moreover, Iqbal was of the contention, that during the time Adam was in *Jannah*, he was still in a primitive state that did not require him to respond to the challenges that came from the environment. As such, at the time when Adam was in *Jannah*, he did not feel the human needs, the ones that were necessary for the flourishing of the human culture. In his opinion, he thought that the ‘fall of man’ had certain positive aspects in it.¹ 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:

- 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.²

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.*”³ 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 creation of God, Iqbal referred to verses of *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*: 30 and *Sūrah Al-An‘ām*: 165. Besides man being 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

¹ Muhammad Iqbal. (1996). Op. cit., pp. 67-68.

² Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak. (2013). Op. cit., p. 250.

³ Al-Qur’an 20:122 (Sheikh Abdullah Basmeih, 2007).

explained by some Muslim scholars, the word *Amānah* can be interpreted as ‘intelligence’, ‘the Qur’an’, ‘the office to the vicegerency’, while to a few others it either meant the total sum of all the dos and don’ts that are stated in the *Sharī‘ah* or the *Mithaq* (the covenant). As for Iqbal, the word *Amānah* means human individuality or personality. Despite the many shortcomings of man, Iqbal deemed man superior in his 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).¹

Furthermore, Iqbal believed that man is not a static being. By relating to the Quranic message that the universe in which man lives is one that is constantly growing every minute and every second, Iqbal applied the same to state that in man there is constant growth. By reading Iqbal’s philosophical ideas on the human personality one can understand that he highly valued the role, potential and creativity of the human mind. Iqbal’s ideas on man perfectly reflect the message found in the Qur’an.² With regard to the ancient philosophical issue of the human mind and body relationship, Iqbal differed in his viewpoint compared to the various ideas presented by medieval Muslim scholars, and early Greek and modern Western philosophers. Iqbal did not agree to the bifurcation of man into two separate entities, which have a point of contact, but in their nature, these two are opposed to one another. To him, the mind or soul and the body show unity in their working in the real world otherwise known as reality.³

Man, as the vicegerent of Allah has been imbued with the many godly attributes. Due to this reason, Iqbal feels that the ideal believer in God should be one whom he calls the co-worker with God. Since Allah gave this world to man as a raw and unfinished product to deal with, it becomes the duty of man to beautify and ameliorate what is unfinished. This idea of man being the co-worker with Allah has been stated by Iqbal in one of his poems in *Payam-i- Mashriq* (Message from the East):

You made the night and I the lamp.
You made the clay and I the cup.
You made the deserts, forests, mountains high,
I flowerbeds and orchards and the park.
It is I who grinds the mirror out of stone.
It is I who makes from poison, antidote.⁴

¹ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak. (2013). Op.cit. pp. 88-94.

² Muhammad Iqbal. (1996). Op. cit., p. 58.

³ Ibid. p. 122.

⁴ Annemarie Schimmel. (1998). *The secrets of creative love: The work of Muhammad Iqbal*, (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1998), pp. 26-27.

Being the co-worker of Allah, man has to be an active individual who is strong in his will to further develop what has been given to him by God. In this sense, Iqbal in many of his poems has asked man to take a vital role of being in possession or in control of his environment. Furthermore, Iqbal believed that it is the duty of man to bring forth the riches from the belly of the earth to be utilized for his spiritual development. In order to do this, man must equip himself with knowledge, science and technology. As man has been taught by God and given the faculty of naming things and forming concepts, it should be this gift of God that man must use to his advantage to gain dominance over the world of matter for his own spiritual upliftment.¹ 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 decisions 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 the following verse: "*...Allah surely does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in their hearts.*"²

Iqbal further explained that man who has been given creative intelligence should avoid all passivity in life, including an attitude of leaving everything to destiny. To Iqbal, life means living courageously in the midst of the forces of nature. He also reiterated that a passive surrender to destiny does not befit the nature of Allah's vicegerent. In turn, such an attitude can reduce the spirit (ego) of man from gaining a higher level of growth.³ By considering all of Iqbal's views on man, one would be able to construct a comprehensive picture of man, which is, without doubt, a positive one. His ideas also give one the actual reason as to why man has been created and put in an exalted position. According to 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

¹ Muhammad Iqbal. (1996). Op. cit., pp. 9-10.

² Al-Qur'an 13:11 (Basmeih, 2007).

³ Muhammad Iqbal. (1996) Op. cit., p. 10.

potentials of the human ego, he can lead a more dynamic and productive life in this world and attain felicity in the next world.¹

Besides the many positive things said by Iqbal on human nature, he lamented the situation man has been pushed into in the modern world, particularly referring to the conditions in the West. To him, such a situation is non-confirmative to the true purpose for which man has been created. Though he agreed with the spirit of the scientific research in the West, he was not happy with the people's philosophy of life, which was one that is detached from religion. According to him, though man in the West gains superiority with science and technology, his life lacks inner peace and harmony. To Iqbal, the reason for this is the attitude of the Western man of going after worldly things at the expense of neglecting his spiritual needs. Iqbal being a critical thinker on what was happening to humanity made a fair assessment of the situation and stated his unbiased criticisms of people wherever they were. Besides explaining the shortcomings in the West, he also explained the false notion prevalent in the people of the East in facing the world. Diametrically opposite to the situation in the West, people in the East, particularly the Muslims were entangled in the web of pseudo-mysticism. Instead of taking an active role in developing the world, which is designated by God, they were doing quite the opposite.² In concluding his criticisms against the East and the West with regard to their attitude towards life, which was either inclined to the material world or the spiritual needs, he made the following comments:

The European man of wisdom does not possess a wakeful heart,
although he possesses a wakeful eye.³

Believe me, Europe today is the greatest hindrance in the way of
man's ethical advancement.⁴

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 life.⁵

By stating the above, Iqbal called on man to lead the ideal life for which he has been created. By going through his ego philosophy, one would sense that Iqbal called for a life that strikes a balance between man's

¹ Ibid. pp. 9-10.

² Ibid. pp. 148-149.

³ Bazm-i-Iqbal. *Iqbal*, (Vol. 18, Issues 1-4). (Lahore: Bazm-i-Iqbal, 1969) p. 510.

⁴ Sir Muhammad Iqbal, *The mysteries of selflessness: A philosophical poem (Rumuz-e-Bekhudi)* (Trans.A.J. Arberry), (London: John Murray, 1953), p. xii.

⁵ Muhammad Iqbal & K.G. Saiyidain, K. G. *Iqbal's poetry*, (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995), p.19.

spiritual and worldly needs. Having such an approach can cater for the ego's growth and development. Iqbal also believed that the ideal situation for man's progress will be an approach that merges the two good qualities found in the people of the East and West. By complementing '*Dhikr*' or spirituality of the East with the '*Fikr*' or intellectual knowledge of the West we can produce the ideal man propounded in the Qur'an. Iqbal realized that ever since the fall of the Muslim empires, Muslims have been lagging behind the European nations in the areas of science and technology.¹

Man and his Environment

In reading through Iqbal's poetry and philosophical works one would discover that he emphasized a great deal on the relationship between man and the environment. He explained that man and his physical environment have a close-knitted relationship. In this relation, man and his environment struggle to dominate one another. Sometimes the environment would be able to penetrate the ego and weaken man, and at other times the ego would be able to defeat the environment and strengthen its position.²

In Iqbal's idea, the calling of man to conquer the material world is not a call meant for man to behave like 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 evil desire and 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 and distribute it to other fellow human beings.³ Further reading of Iqbal's philosophy, reveals the fact that to him nature is not something that occupies the world materially. To him, like man, nature is also a handiwork of the Ultimate Self, through which He shows the 'I-am ness. Metaphorically, he explained that nature to the Ultimate Self is like what character is to man. In other words, nature can be seen as God's creative activity otherwise known as God's habit. As such, the state of this relationship between man and his environment is one that is full of tension. In further elaborating his ideas on man and his environment, Iqbal pointed

¹ Sheikh Akbar Ali, *Iqbal his poetry and message*, (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1988), p. 103.

² Muhammad Iqbal. 1996, Op cit. p. 82.

³ Ibid., p. 12.

out that man has to subdue the demands of the environment in order to build a strong personality. On the contrary, man will have a weak personality when the human ego is defeated by the environment. Iqbal (1953) lucidly explained this tussle between the human ego and environment in his anthology of poems known as the *Rumuz-i- Bekhudi*.¹

Man and Civilization

Iqbal as one who was well-grounded in religion and well researched in the state of mind of the people in the East and West was a brave scholar who spoke his mind through his speeches, poetry and philosophical writings. In assessing the boldness of Iqbal in calling for a change in the East and West, R.A. Nicholson who translated his *Asrari-Khudi* into English very aptly wrote in his introduction to Iqbal's work (1983): "Iqbal is a man of his age and a man in advance of his age; he is also a man in disagreement with his age."² Nicholson's words well explain Iqbal's nature and philosophy in life. He describes Iqbal as one who was critical of what he read in the bygone history, and civilization and of what he observed in the unfolding of events during his lifetime. Nicholson's words rightly described Iqbal's personality as a Muslim scholar who aspired to see change and progress within the Muslim society of his time.

Any avid reader of Iqbal's philosophy and ideas on science will discover that though he was deep into spirituality, he also spoke on man's contribution to human 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 fails to preserve or maintain his greatness by being creative, innovative and prolific. Moreover, Iqbal believed that it is pretty much normal for one civilization to learn from the other. Normally, the civilization that comes later will learn all that is positive and dynamic from the earlier civilizations. As a good example, Iqbal explained in his magnum opus how the Islamic civilization benefitted from the ideas taken from the Greek, Persian and Indian civilizations. Likewise, he also explained how the Western scholars and scientists benefitted from ideas borrowed

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

² Muhammad Iqbal, Iqbal, Muhammad, *The secrets of the self (Asrar-i-Khudi)*, (Trans. Renold A. Nicholson,), (Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1983), p. xxxi.

during the heydays of the Islamic civilization, otherwise known as the Golden Age of the Muslims (750-1258).¹

In analyzing the strength and weaknesses of the Western and Islamic societies, Iqbal identified what was wrong in both societies. In Western society, Iqbal found out that the culture there deprives the European man of his vision and soul for spiritual life. As such, Iqbal further ventured on to think that this modern European culture has lost its piety in the race for modernization. As a result, this loss of piety has caused his soul to lose the purity of conscience, high thinking and refined taste in his life. In another place in his poetry, Iqbal made the following statement:

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 life.²

In assessing what was happening to the Muslims, Iqbal through his poems stressed that the teachings of the medieval mysticism in the East were wrongfully calling the Muslims to live a life of renunciation of this world in order to gain merits and felicity in the next world. Iqbal who could not find any justification for such teachings in the Qur'an or in the life of the Prophet of Islam called for vitality and dynamism through his poems and philosophical writings. In particular, he called for the banishment of the teachings of the *Wahdah al-Wujūd* that preaches that the ideal status of an individual in his highest level of spirituality is to get his ego drowned in the ocean of God as a form of union with the Ultimate Ego (God).

Further reading of Iqbal's ideas, will reveal the fact that generally the Muslim Ummah of his time was caught in the web of pseudo-mysticism and failed to follow the true spirit of Islam found in the dynamic teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Iqbal who realized the problems of the Muslim Ummah wanted to bring about an Islamic Renaissance by calling the masses to relieve themselves from the meshes of superstition, mental lethargy, immobility and ignorance. His effort as a poet-philosopher and a religious reformer was aimed at awakening the Ummah from its deep slumber to a state of consciousness in executing its mundane duties in a more productive and dynamic manner. In addition to this, he also opposed the Muslims for their state of withdrawal, renunciation and easily feeling defeated in facing the challenges of life. Iqbal vehemently opposed those who took religion to be a sort of escapism and plainly resign to the fatalistic concept of life. As opposed to all these serious problems of his time, Iqbal

¹ Muhammad Iqbal, 1996, Op. cit., p. 6.

² KG. Saiyidain, 1977, Op. cit., p. 17.

called for a true understanding of the religion that calls for all individuals, male and female to take the forward march in life towards the conquest of the material world.¹

Iqbal's philosophy also clearly portrays his attitude, which is very much in favour of science. To him, in order for man to progress spiritually, he must look into the Qur'an as the 'revealed book' from God and the universe as the 'open book' of God. To him, in many instances, Islam as a religion is not opposed to the scientific findings of the modern world. Furthermore, he believed that scientific facts and findings could complement religion in strengthening one's faith. Iqbal highlighted this point in the "Reconstruction" (1996) when he said, "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"². "The scientific observer of nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer."³

Iqbal who went to study in Europe in the years between 1905 and 1908, later through his travel to the European cities, felt fascinated by the scientific development taking place there. His fascination for scientific research is a further advancement from what he has read in the Qur'an. As a religious book, the Qur'an contains many scientific data and calls for the observation and contemplation of the wonders found in the creations of God in the universe, flora and fauna. To Iqbal, the exploration, observation and investigation done by the scientists is a kind of mystic behaviour trying to establish an intimacy with the Creator. Furthermore, he believed that the physical sciences provide a sort of spiritual meaning to men who contemplate and ponder over God's wisdom behind His creations. Iqbal also stated, that on the spiritual and philosophical levels, the observation of nature teaches him the behaviour of God. In other words, nature, which equates to God's habit, is the portrayal of His existence. Iqbal's attitude towards science is the likeness shown by scholars like Ibn Sina (980-1037), Al-Khawarizmi (780-850), Al-Biruni (973-1048) and others of the medieval era. In modern times, Iqbal's emphasis on scientific research is the echoing of what had been said by Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (1838-1897) and Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). Although Iqbal was fascinated with scientific research and exploration, unlike Western scholars, his fascination brought him closer to God and made him a devout believer in God and religion.⁴

¹ Syed Latif Hussain Kazmi, *Philosophy of Iqbal (Iqbal and Existentialism)*, (New Delhi: A.P.H Publishing Corporation, 1995), p. 6.

² Muhammad Iqbal. (1996). Op. cit., p. 45.

³ Ibid., p. 73.

⁴ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, 2013, Op. cit., p. 322.

In a nutshell, as a thinker, philosopher and humanist, Iqbal gave humanity a formula on how to co-exist and create a better world. Particularly, to the Muslim world of his time, he explained how to be on par with the rest of the world. In understanding the reasons behind their backwardness in life, he called them to give special attention to the vital elements such as dynamism, progressiveness, constructivism and creativity. One can observe that such elements were carefully interwoven in his poetry and philosophical works with the sole intention of bringing the Muslim Ummah out of their backwardness, superstitious beliefs, conservatism and passivity in life. Furthermore, he appealed to the Muslim Ummah to have an attitude of preparedness in facing the challenges of the modern world. His call towards knowledge, advancement in scientific research and progress in the material and spiritual life was a call directed to the Islamic Ummah that stretches from Morocco to Indonesia. In a way, the elements present in his philosophy were aimed at restoring the lost dignity and glory of the Muslim world.

Conclusion

In this modest review on the "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" the researchers have managed to capture some of the main themes discussed by Iqbal in his book. The research team is humble to admit that it is not an easy task to understand the whole of Iqbal's world. As such, the effort put forward by the research team to showcase some of the interesting parts of Iqbal's "Reconstruction" should be taken as mere glimpses into the more serious philosophical debate present in it. Though Iqbal did not claim to be a mystic and poet in the real sense, those who have taken a deep plunge into his ocean of philosophy and knowledge would discover that indeed he was a mystic in modern-day clothing. To better understand Iqbal, one has to read "The Reconstruction" alongside the *Asrar-i-Khudi*. The latter provides some glimpses into his ideas on the human ego, while the former explains in much detail his theory of the human ego, its origin, nature, division and how the ego operates itself in the temporal world. Furthermore, in the "Reconstruction", Iqbal also dwells on the topics of 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 humanity.

Through his writings, Iqbal highlighted the strength and weaknesses found in the people living in the West and East. To Iqbal, though the West glitters with its advancement in the areas of science and technology, it suffers from emptiness in life because of its rejection of God and

spirituality. Conversely, the East - particularly the Muslim world - suffers due to its failure to take the forward march in the areas of science and technology. Principally for the Muslims, Iqbal recommends them to make a marriage between the *Dhikir* (spirituality) and *Fikr* (science and technology) mentioned in the Qur'an. By doing so, he believes that the Muslims would be able to take a dominant position in the modern world to avoid 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, particularly to those involved in the areas of psychology, sociology, spirituality, history and civilizational analysis.

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