

Muhammad Iqbal

**Essays on the Reconstruction of
Modern Muslim Thought**

**Edited by H. C. Hillier and
Basit Bilal Koshul**

EDINBURGH
University Press

2015

of each epoch generated their own founding myths and metaphysics, even though there was also a succession of ideas, or what we would call the continuity and discontinuity of thought. When Iqbal offered some brief outlines of the ideas of pioneering figures who, in one way or the other, had renovated religious thought in Islam in the past, he was clearly trying to urge Muslims to find the optimal set of ideas for the human condition as experienced in his day. In his critical readings of scripture, theology, prayer, philosophy, and ethics in his pioneering lectures published as *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal offered hints and delicately suggested pathways that he hoped others would pursue. The world of Islam, he proposed, 'should courageously proceed to the work of reconstruction', which was more than 'mere adjustment to modern conditions of life' (Iqbal 1999: 142). Encouraging the next generation of thinkers, he wrote with hope but also categorically that

[t]he task before the modern Muslim is therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past. Perhaps the first Muslim who felt the urge of a new spirit in him was Shah Wali Ullah of Delhi . . . The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us. (Iqbal 1999: 78)

The Human Person and the Paradox of Revelation

Iqbal made the notion of the self a keystone concept for Muslim selfhood. He rehabilitated the Persian notion of *khudi* by divesting it of its negative meanings of selfishness and egotism, two prevalent meanings in Persian and later Urdu uses of the term. He subverted *khudi* into an affirmative and constructive rendering. Iqbal reconstructed and then redeployed *khudi* in multiple uses and forms, making it the centrepiece of both his poetic and political aesthetics. In this sense, Iqbal produced an intellectual masterstroke by repetitively brandishing the notion of selfhood and the self as the essential element of the human condition to his multiple audiences. Bereft of self and selfhood, the human was a mere husk. But his intellectual gesture was carefully calibrated; it was a reflexive one, caught between the security of tradition and the self-questioning impulses of modernity. He was fully aware of the

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The Human Person in Iqbal's Thought'

Ebrahim Moosa

University of Notre Dame, United States

Henri Bergson, the renowned French philosopher, wrote that each philosopher has only one great thing to say. This may also be true of Muhammad Iqbal (1875–1938) who greatly admired his French contemporary. In his own writings on poetry, philosophy, and politics, Iqbal had a singular preoccupation: the self or selfhood, called *khudi*, but that would be discussed in today's lexicon under the rubric of personhood, the human person, or the human condition.

Iqbal's contribution to modern Muslim philosophy and thought was not only his relentless effort to understand the impact of modernity on Islam and Muslims, but his writings also reveal his own titanic struggles to come to terms with a modern Muslim self and the construction of personhood in the early twentieth century. Iqbal was fully aware that ideas and concepts and the lifeworlds that humans inhabit were not givens but rather constantly constructed: societies were retooled conceptually and technologically; communities were constantly reconstructed in tandem with the evolution of the imaginaries and spirits of individuals.

Therefore, Iqbal could confidently appeal to Muslims to construct a new thought. He wrote challengingly saying: 'Nor can the concepts of theological systems, draped in the terminology of a practically dead metaphysics, be of any help to those who happen to possess a different intellectual background' (Iqbal 1999: 78). He fully understood the fact that the lived conditions

fact that to question or alter the inherited notion of the self would have multiple cultural and philosophical implications. But with one eye on history, he was fully aware of how Muslim mystics, philosophers, and the pious in every age forged a notion of the self. Since he frequently referred to al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Rumi, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche he was not unaware of their roles as architects and thinkers who devoted their energies to understanding the human person and the human condition. It was an issue that preoccupied individuals and societies in the modern age and still persists. For most of the twentieth century, scholars of religion, philosophy, and literature, indeed nearly all thinkers in the human sciences, social sciences, and even in the natural sciences spilt a good amount of ink on one subject, namely, the theme of the human self.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that in his many poems and in his path-breaking text *Reconstruction*, all of these efforts cumulatively indexed Iqbal's mutating voice to explain how the self worked in the world. In his use, *khudi* traced how selfhood navigated the world. His was not an illusory, abstract, mystical, or merely philosophical construction of selfhood but a concrete search. As part of Iqbal's metaphysical apparatus, *khudi* aroused the mythopoetic stratum in culture. Here, the categories 'true' and 'untrue' were inapplicable. For *khudi*, in Iqbal's usage, referred to a non-empirical reality. *Khudi* was now part of a new metaphysical constellation that the Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski (2001: 2) described as a 'non-empirical unconditional reality'. As an organ of culture, metaphysics is an extension of humanity's mythical core that Kołakowski characterised as the concern 'with the absolutely primal conditions of the realm of experience; they concern the quality of Being as a whole (as distinct from object); they concern the necessity of events' (1).

Khudi was nothing less than the language of metaphysics, which Bergson (1912: 24–5) described as the 'science, which claims to dispense with symbols'. As a metaphysical category, *khudi* is what one would grasp without expression, translation, or symbolic representation in Bergson's view. 'There is one reality, at least', Bergson said, 'which we all seize from within, by intuition and not by simple analysis. It is our own personality in its flowing through time – our self which endures. We may sympathize intellectually with nothing else, we certainly sympathize with our own selves' (ibid.).

Metaphysical reflection on the unconditioned reality helps us make sense of the world of experience. It is also how our conditioned reality becomes intelligible to us. Iqbal's usage of *khudi* then is metonymical, signifying both the unconditioned and conditioned reality: both divine-like and life-like. *Khudi* as unconditioned reality nourishes life (conditioned reality) in all its complexity and actualisation in flesh and blood. In Iqbal's view, *khudi* is about inseminating being in order that it may manifest new forms of life: ontology. Iqbal did not provide any detailed account of ontology, but neither is it absent in his writing. Indeed, ontology, the question of being in the world, pervades his poetics and is never absent from his horizon. What really interested him was to probe questions that exceeded the constraints on how one may live. Together with what one may do, Iqbal's central questions were embedded not only in *Reconstruction*, but also in his poetry and his political activism. In many ways Iqbal would have endorsed Gilles Deleuze's understanding of philosophy: it does not consist of knowing, nor is it inspired by truth. The prime task of philosophy for Iqbal was to open up new vistas of thinking.

The new thinking that Iqbal envisaged was to seek 'a spiritual basis' for society (1999: 142). This is how he made his clarion call. 'Humanity needs three things today', he said; it required 'a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis' (ibid.). On what grounds would such a remarking of humanity take place? Well, as Iqbal put it, 'pure reason' and 'pure thought' were both inadequate to light that 'live fire of living conviction which personal revelation alone can bring' (ibid.). So the search for selfhood then was certainly not restricted to only an individual programme but also a larger societal programme. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Iqbal thought of spirituality as a civilisational programme, and that inspiration came directly from the teachings of Islam itself.

While Iqbal was pessimistic of Europe's leadership role in the ethical advancement of the human community, by describing Europe to be 'the greatest hindrance in the way of man's ethical advancement', he was nevertheless optimistic of the effervescence and the 'awakening of Turkey' under Kemalist impulses at the beginning of the twentieth century (ibid.). While

Iqbal could not predict the trajectory of Turkey's subsequent future, he nevertheless was a firm believer in the potential of Islamic teachings. In contrast to European civilisation, Islam possessed something revolutionary. In his words:

The Muslim, on the other hand, is in possession of these ultimate ideas on the basis of a revelation, which, speaking from the inmost depths of life, internalizes its own apparent externality. With him [the Muslim] the spiritual basis of life is a matter of conviction for which even the least enlightened man among us can easily lay down his life; and in view of the basic idea of Islam that there can be no further revelation binding on man, we ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated peoples on earth . . . Let the Muslim of to-day appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve, out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam. (Iqbal 1999: 142)

The centrepiece of that unique Islamic teaching is revelation. In revelation the human person can realise his or her self-fulfilment. But one will have to be patient in order to grasp Iqbal's particular sense of what he meant by 'revelation'. For Iqbal, the human person was a spiritual being, a believing animal, whose spirituality is realised in revelation. It is crucial to grasp Iqbal's concept of revelation. He articulates it in different ways. The subject of human formation, he believed, was the 'human soul' (2000: 621). But what is going to be the inspiration and the *matériel* that will educate and shape the soul? What animates not only human beings, but all of creation in a universal mode? In Iqbal's view, 'inspiration' is a universal property of life (1999: 100). Inspiration, in his view, is the way that humans make contact with the root of their own being (Iqbal 1999). Where does Iqbal derive this insight from? It originates from his commitment to Islam and the teachings of Islam. Revelation in Islam is a product of inspiration (*wahī*), he explained. In this way, revelation becomes metonymy for inspiration; whether vegetative and animal growth or a human being receiving 'light from the inner depths of life', these are cases of inspiration of varying character according to the needs of the recipient or the needs of the species (*ibid.*).

But the most interesting, if not the most controversial, part of Iqbal's

idea, is his commitment to the artefact of revelation, namely inspiration. In other words, for Iqbal, the Qur'an stands for a certain maturity of inspiration. And the poesis or the making of the idea of mature inspiration is one that he pursues in terms of human 'full self-consciousness' that is equally dependent on human resources. It is this inspiration to fully rely on one's self, internal resources, and energies that Iqbal sees is fully manifest in the Qur'an: the big picture for him that emerges from the Muslim revelation is the emphasis on nature and history as sources of human knowledge or sources of the self (*ibid.*).

This is how Iqbal arrives at this insightful conclusion but one missed by many of his readers or a reading that is frequently suppressed by his admirers. His moral anthropology cum archaeology suggests to him that prophetic consciousness was developed during the 'minority of mankind', one marked by a certain economising of individual thought. This was another way of saying that ideas and choices generated by prophetic consciousness at this stage of humanity's development were regulated and therefore human beings were provided with 'ready-made judgments, choices, and ways of action' (Iqbal 1999: 100). This, he explained, was the product of the 'ancient world' that he nevertheless admired for its remarkable systems of philosophy. But this ancient world also had several drawbacks, among them the fact that it was primitive, governed by suggestion, highly abstract, and laced with vague beliefs and traditions that provided few resources to deal with the 'concrete situations of life' (*ibid.*). Continuing with his moral anthropology, Iqbal argued that with the birth of reason and the advent of a critical human faculty everything changed. Human beings after the event of reason, especially with the help of inductive reason, were in a position to regulate non-rational modes of consciousness. The arrival of reason for Iqbal marked the beginning of the modern world.

Where did Islam stand in relation to these developments? For Iqbal, the Prophet of Islam stood at the crossroads of the ancient and the modern world. In terms of the 'source of revelation', the Prophet Muhammad belonged to the ancient world of concreteness, where revelation provided norms for the concrete situations of life (Iqbal 1999: 100–1). However, in terms of the 'spirit of his revelation' the Prophet Muhammad belonged to the modern world. Thus, the birth of Islam coincided, in his view, with the birth of the 'inductive intellect' (*ibid.*).

This is what Iqbal found so attractive in the story of Islam because, in this account, he discovered what he called the 'idea of finality' of prophecy. The prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad pointed to nature and history as 'sources of human knowledge'. In the substance of the Muslim revelation, Iqbal discovered a very interesting idea, namely, the realisation of prophecy to abolish itself. 'In Islam,' Iqbal explained, 'prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition.' He continues: 'This involves the keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings; that in order to achieve full self-consciousness man must finally be thrown back on his own resources' (ibid.). The idea of finality, as Iqbal called it, also meant the abolition of hereditary kingship and priesthood. Philosophically it was a move that brought humans back to nature and history, reason and experience as the core sources of human knowledge.

The 'idea of finality' was meant to create 'an independent critical attitude toward mystic experience by generating the belief that all personal authority, claiming a supernatural history, has come to an end in the history of man' (Iqbal 1999: 101). The purpose was to create 'fresh vistas of knowledge' in the domain of the inner experience of human beings. The goal was to stop looking towards the sky for new ideas, and to begin looking towards the self and the human person as the location for the sources of life. Iqbal's desire was to shift the Muslim gaze towards self-dependence and the making of the Perfect Man. The doctrine of finality of revelation was also meant to curb the excessive messianic tendencies that were introduced into Islam due to its contact with Magianism. Such tendencies, Iqbal believed, created a 'false view of history' and he was thankful that the North African thinker, Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), thoroughly debunked the revelational basis for such an idea in its psychological effects (115).

Self-fashioning

Under cover of his poetry, Iqbal is perhaps more explicit about his philosophical aspirations and ambitions for reconstruction. In *Poems of Persia*, Iqbal invites his readers to join him in a journey of 'revolutionary changes in the world of thought and action' (Mir 2003a: 6). In one poem he makes reference to two crucial referents in Islamic and Persian mythopoeisis. The first mythopoeisis is a Qur'anic reference to 'two worlds' – 'the imperceptible

world' and 'the perceptible world'. Both referents are, in my view, parallel to what I previously described as unconditioned reality (imperceptible world) and conditioned reality (perceptible world).

The second myth is an allusion to the 'world-revealing cup' used by Jamshid, the legendary king of ancient Persia. It was a cup of clairvoyance that allowed the king to see all the events around the world. As Mustansir Mir explains, the implied contrast was for Iqbal's own and more capacious wine-pitcher to overshadow Jamshed's cup. How? Jamshed was obsessed with his cup, which signified his personal power and privilege. By contrast, Iqbal wished to selflessly share his entire pitcher, not only a cup-full, with the world. Not only did he share with this world but also with the other world. So while Jamshed could only gaze on the material world, Iqbal – in order to open up – could reflect on both the seen and the unseen world – the conditioned and unconditioned reality. The poem itself now clarifies.

Both worlds may be seen in the wine-pitcher I have!
Where is the eye to view the sights I see?

There will come another man, possessed, who will shout *hit!* (*Hit!*) in the city;

Two hundred commotions will arise from the obsession I have.

Do not worry, ignorant one, at the approaching darkness of nights-
For, the scar of my forehead sparkles like stars.

You take me as your companion, but I am afraid

That you are not up to the tumult and uproar I have raised. (Mir 2003a: 3)

Iqbal was not content to be a philosopher in the guise of analytic philosophy; he was impatient with learned accounts of ontologies and epistemologies, even though he had mastered this discourse in *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*. His soul was instead saturated in another kind of philosophy, a nomadic approach that pursues big questions, such as: how may one live? It is a philosophy that approached life with an ontology that offered untold possibilities, rather than ready-made solutions. In *Secrets of Selfhood (Asrar-i Khudi)*, he writes: 'The dust of my being is brighter than Jamshed's cup; It is privy to the world's yet unborn events' (Iqbal cited in Mir 2003a: 3).

Crisis and Creativity

One may say that Iqbal was fond of raising the siren. He was a philosopher in the style of an intellectual. In the words of the novelist and literary critic Umberto Eco, 'an intellectual is anyone who is creatively producing new knowledge'. Echo says,

A peasant who understands that a new kind of graft can produce a new species of apples, has at that moment produced an intellectual activity. Whereas the professor of philosophy who all his life repeats the same lecture on Heidegger doesn't amount to an intellectual. Critical creativity – criticizing what we are doing or inventing better ways of doing it – is the only mark of the intellectual function. (Eco cited in Zanganeh 2008: 103)

Critical creativity was the leitmotif of Iqbal. His project was to reconstruct religious *thought* instead of philosophy. In this sense, Iqbal's work has some synergy with the ideas of Deleuze. As Todd May pointed out, Deleuze distinguished thought from knowledge. Knowledge is the recognition and understanding of identities, a task that analytic philosophers have espoused. 'Thought, by contrast, in the view of Deleuze explains May, 'does not identify and so does not give us knowledge. It moves beyond what is known to the difference beneath, behind, and within it' (2005: 21). A thinker, or a thinker-philosopher like Iqbal, was not interested in representing reality; but in the tradition of Karl Marx, he was more interested in changing reality. But, in another sense, Iqbal was also unlike Marx. For him, the deepest revolution he sought began within the self, not in material conditions. He often sought out the differences between and among things, in order to show that difference, hence creativity, was being itself: *khudi* itself is difference, movement, and creativity. In *Reconstruction*, Iqbal remained tentative in his conclusions, and that was deliberate: he was more interested in pushing the boundaries of thought by raising still more questions to highlight some interminable problems (aporias) in law, theology, spirituality, and ritual.

Iqbal always asked the disturbing question, probing the limits of the conditions of possibility in nature and the political, wildly protesting the powers of the day. First, in questions of nature and science, he did not subscribe to a static universe. There is, he wrote, no

pre-existing eternal scheme or structure in which individual events have already found their proper places, waiting as it were, for their respective turns to enter into the temporal sweep of history . . . The world regarded as a process realizing a pre-ordained goal is not a world of free, responsible moral agents; it is only a stage on which puppets are made to move by a kind of pull from behind . . . there is a progressive formation of fresh ends, purposes, and ideal scales of value as the process of life grows and expands . . . The world process, or the movement of the universe in time, is certainly devoid of purpose, if by purpose we mean a foreseen end – a far off fixed destination to which the whole creation moves. (Iqbal 1999: 44)

For Iqbal, it was not only the conditions of colonialism that he so passionately resisted. He railed against the stasis in Muslim thought, which its incurably orthodox gatekeepers further aggravated and some of whom he frequently targeted in his passionate satire. For him, the crisis of Muslim thought was continuous. In that sense, Iqbal would have concurred with the French thinkers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994: 82) who argued that 'philosophy thus lives in a permanent crisis'. The two French thinkers said that philosophy 'does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by the truth', adding that 'it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure. Now, this cannot be known before being constructed' (ibid.).

Iqbal's overall concern was with 'thought' and its reconstruction. In doing so, he was drawing on a notion of a prophetic messianism evident in Sunni religious thought. This is not to be confused with Magian messianism with its gnostic dramaturgy of a world-historical struggle between good and evil, an idea that Iqbal vigorously opposed. Twelver Shi'ism also possessed a messianic dimension in the expectation of the return from occultation of the pristine political-spiritual leadership of the imam, but Shi'i theology has no notion of centennial renewal. However, Sunni Islam found the appeal of centennial renewal alluring. In order to nourish the practices of salvation (*din*) with the prophetic impulse, a report attributed to the Prophet Muhammad stated: 'Indeed, at the beginning of every century God dispatches to this confessional community (*ummah*) a person who will renew its *din* – salvation practices (religion)' (Abu Khalil 2015). Another report said: 'God shows

benevolence to the people who are part of His order of salvation (*din*) at the beginning of every century by dispatching a man from my family who will clarify to them matters related to their salvation practices (*din*)' (al-Azdi, hadith no. 4291).

Over the centuries, Muslims felt addressed by Providence to revitalise their faith for the betterment of the people who covenanted with God through Muhammad's faith community. Certain threads of dystopic thinking in Islamic thought also adopted as an article of faith a belief that, after the halcyon days of the Prophet Muhammad, religious morality would steadily decline. Yet other Muslim thinkers placed the emphasis on the forward-looking momentum of another teaching of the Prophet, which said: 'The parable of my community is like that of rain. One never knows whether the best part of a rain shower is at the beginning of it or at the end of it' (al-Ramhurmuzi 1968: 105–6).

Acknowledging the plethora of reform movements that had seized the Muslim world over the centuries, Iqbal offers both commentary on intellectual and social developments and also adds his own voice. With extraordinary perceptiveness at the beginning of the twentieth century, Iqbal understood the challenges facing modern Muslims. Armed with Western and Islamic metaphysics as well as knowledgeable in modern science, he recognised like his medieval forbear, the polymath Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), that 'when verities change, there is a need for redefinition' (al-Ghazali 1997). Iqbal realised that the Muslims of his age were ill-equipped to meet the challenges of their time. Their faith, as well as their claim to be heirs to a mosaic of Islamic cultures, Iqbal believed, constituted the cultural assets of Muslims. Yet, absent the 'probing of the spade in the dark loam', as the pre-eminent Jewish thinker of pre-war Germany Walter Benjamin put it, these ancient cultural and intellectual treasures of Islam could easily wither (1978: 26). In order to prevent the atrophy of the resources of Muslim civilisation, Iqbal imagined that only an act of translation and a series of conversations in counterpoint between the present and the past could keep the tradition alive. In one sense reconstruction at the analytical level was Iqbal's keyword for translating Islam into the present and in another sense it meant contrapuntal thinking, in other words, fostering a dialogue with tradition over time. In another sense, it was a radical project in reconstruction and reform of religious thought that would challenge many tenets of Muslim orthodoxy.

Miraculously, Iqbal, unlike many other scholars, has been saved from imprecations of heresy by Muslim orthodoxy.

With breathtaking candour and enormous courage, Iqbal traced the scope of his project *Reconstruction*. He stood out among those modern Muslim thinkers who understood the horizon of the reconstruction of religious thought that had to occur at both the metaphysical and epistemological levels, or, to put it differently, at the level of both unconditioned and conditioned reality. Iqbal's ontology was one of difference, in which the future must be concerned with experimentation, in order to experience the new and untold possibilities. He was clearly enchanted by the notion of becoming, a thread he identified in the writings of early Muslim writers, especially the scholar of the Maghreb, Ibn Khaldun.

But it was the Qur'an, Iqbal believed, that really expressed an anti-classical spirit that combated the idea of eternal recurrence or the unreality of time evident in Greek thought. Iqbal searched for the spirit of creation and boldly discounted modes of thinking that impeded creativity. 'Eternal recurrence is not eternal creation,' he objected, 'it is eternal repetition' (Iqbal 1999: 113).

Islam could not be 'inimical to the idea of evolution,' Iqbal wrote. By this ambiguous phrase, he at least meant social evolution. Despite advocating the need to 'rethink the whole system of Islam,' Iqbal also cautioned:

Only we should not forget that life is not change, pure and simple. It has within it elements of conservation also. While enjoying his creative activity, and always focusing his energies on the discovery of new vistas of life, man has a feeling of uneasiness in the presence of his own unfoldment. In his forward movement he cannot help looking back to his past, and faces his own inward expansion with a certain amount of fear. The spirit of man in its forward movement is restrained by forces, which seem to be working in the opposite direction. This is only another way of saying that life moves with the weight of its own past on its back, and that in any view of social change the value and function of the forces of conservatism cannot be lost sight of. . . . No people can afford to reject their past entirely; for it is their past that has made their personal identity. And in a society like Islam the problem of revision of old institutions becomes still more delicate, and the responsibility of the reformer assumes a far more serious aspect. (Iqbal 1999: 132)

Ibn Khaldun's notions of social change together with echoes of Bergson and Heidegger on time and being, all resonated in Iqbal's long passage cited above. The question is this: is Iqbal conflicted or is he self-consciously holding on to the antinomies of the human condition and thought? I think it is the latter. Surely the element of the messianic and centennial reformer trope was effervescent in Iqbal's thought. And, he was always identifying major figures that he hoped or thought may undo the burden of history and give the green light for the forward movement of thought and practice. Among such people he recognised the eighteenth-century polymath and thinker Shah Wali Ullah of India. And Wali Ullah's natural successor, in his view, was none other than the enigmatic Iranian thinker and activist, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. The much-rhapsodised Afghani's attention, Iqbal lamented, was unfortunately divided. If only Afghani's efforts were 'devoted entirely to Islam as a system of human belief and conduct, the world of Islam would have been on a much more solid ground today' (Iqbal 1999: 78). Afghani, he thought, spent too much time as a political activist squandering his precious genius when in fact his talents were needed to dream and imagine a better Muslim future in the realm of the reconstruction of intellectual thought.

Yet Iqbal's admiration for Afghani signified at least two things. Afghani was indefatigably devoted to political reform and transformation, beginning with imperialism and seeking an end to Muslim totalitarianism. What Iqbal admired in Afghani was this revolutionary thinker's 'insight into the inner meaning of history of Muslim thought and life', which was combined with a 'broad vision engendered by his wide experience of men and manners' (1999: 78). Someone like Afghani would serve as the living link between the past and the future. Aware of the momentous changes that occurred in the course of history, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Wali Ullah and Afghani signified for Iqbal two influential men across two centuries and two geographical regions of Islamdom: East and West, South Asia and the Middle East. Each espoused pan-Islamic visions: one primarily from Delhi, while the other was more itinerant, working at times from Cairo, and then Paris, and then Beirut, and finally from Istanbul.

Aware of the way in which science, technology, and new political systems had not only changed the world but also the conception of the human person, especially by way of the major breakthroughs in modern science

and the social sciences, Iqbal acutely understood the challenge that modern knowledge of his day posed to the Muslim tradition. As a cosmopolitan figure commanding multiple knowledge traditions in philosophy, law, and literature, Iqbal was equally aware of his responsibility as an intellectual. He was responding to an 'urgent demand by attempting to reconstruct Muslim religious philosophy with due regard to the philosophical traditions of Islam and the more recent developments in the various domains of human knowledge' (Iqbal 1999: xxi). He was not only optimistic that the moment in which he lived 'was quite favorable to such an undertaking' but he envisaged some kind of conciliation between religion and science (ibid.). However, Iqbal argued that

there is no such thing as finality in philosophical thinking. As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views, and probably sounder views . . . are possible. Our duty is carefully to watch the progress of human thought, and to maintain an independent critical attitude towards it. (Iqbal 1999: xxii)

But this hopeful aspiration would also be the most elusive dimension for Muslim thought in the twentieth century and in the beginning of the twenty-first.

History and Prophecy

The cornerstones of Iqbal's thinking were based on the need to foster a sense of history and grasp its spirit, to develop an acute sense of the time in which one is living and also have a sense as to how one both continues with the past and differs from it in terms of thought. But more importantly was his invitation that Muslims must take philosophical thinking seriously. Yet Iqbal's idea of history cannot be delinked from revelation already discussed above and the idea of prophecy, which deserve some repetition in order to understand the radical edge of Iqbal's reformist thought and a subject least attended to in Iqbalian scholarship.

Human agency for Iqbal was cast in the image of the superman of history or the Perfect Man, *al-insan al-kamil*, an image derived from the mysticism Muhi al-Din Ibn Arabi. The Perfect Man, whom Iqbal calls the man of faith, was a figure of adventure, boldness, and courage. Why? Because the Perfect

Man is the one who relied on intuition. Intuition is the essence of instinct and the essence of reason. Iqbal used many terms to describe intuition – love (*ishq*), certainty (*yaqin*), and faith (*iman*). Intuition enabled a certain kind of transgressive behaviour and the questioning of established norms that could pave the way to both realise the potential of the human person in our age and to make the human comprehensible in relation to tradition. For this reason, Iqbal battled with the doctrine of predestination, the absence of reason in Muslim theology, and the obscurantism of the gatekeepers of religion. In *Psalms of Persia*, he occasionally defies God, objecting to the divine privilege to award paradise at will and not on the basis of the good deeds performed by humans and their just deserts. In these lines, he bares his passion and predicts that he will face the scorn of theologians who failed to understand the complexity of faith.

I am a sinner with self-respect, I will take no wages without labor;
I am scarred because my fault has been put down to His decree.

Through the bounty of love and ecstasy, I have taken thought to such heights,
That, reaching behind, I can pluck the eyes of the world-brightening sun.

Since the First Morning, I have been a drawer of wave and vortex;
When the sea becomes calm, I invoke the storm for help.

A hundred times before now, too, I have lit a fire under the world's feet;
My high and low notes burn the world clean of peace and tranquility.

I have danced before I idols and worn the holy thread, so that
The *shaykh* of the city may become a man of God by calling me a heretic.

Now they run away from me, now they associate with me;
In this desert, they do not know whether I am hunter or prey.

A hear[†] that lacks warmth can ill profit from the company of a man;
Come with red-hot copper, so that my elixir can work on you. (Mir
2003b: 3–5)

The fulcrum of intuition materialised in *tauhid*, that is, divine monotheism. *Tauhid* for Iqbal was the confluence and the synthesis of multiple things –

plurality in unity. Based on a theological understanding of human beings' essential bond of servitude to God, the secular manifestation of *tauhid* in Iqbal's view becomes equality, solidarity, and freedom (Iqbal 1999: 122). For, in his view, the 'spiritual and the temporal are not two distinct domains, and the nature of an act, however secular in its import, is determined by the attitude of the mind with which the agent does it' (ibid.). What really determined the character of an act was intentionality, or what he called 'the invisible mental background of the act' (ibid.). Then Iqbal offered one of the most incisive insights in the history of political theology: 'An act is temporal or profane,' he explained, 'if it is done in a spirit of detachment from the infinite complexity of life behind it; it is spiritual if it is inspired by that complexity' (ibid.).

From his discussion on *tauhid*, Iqbal moves to a discussion of revelation and prophecy that are possibly the most interesting and creative aspects of his project. These ideas do have earlier precedents but they are recast in a new idiom. Two types of reason are encapsulated by prophecy. The first type of reason is dialectical reason, or what we would call discursive reason, where reason feeds off itself. The other type is intuitional reason, or what we could call Gnostic reason, where the reason of the person of faith is infused with angelic insight.

Prophecy is important because it is premised on this intuition, a form of reason infused by angelic insight and the imaginal universe. In his discussion of prophecy and prophetic consciousness, Iqbal is enamoured by the prophetic voice, the arbitrary and erratic voice of prophecy in human history. He sees the prophets to be the main movers of human history. Mysticism is equally attractive to him precisely since it developed the same sense of prophetic consciousness, for it derived from the same source from where prophecy derived its inspiration. For Iqbal, the foundation of human existence is not materiality, but psychological, and prophecy represents the apex of that psychology.

Yet, prophecy is not outside history but within history. Prophets transform the human world; they return from the mystical ascent to God, *mi'raj*, in a kind of pragmatic test of their religious experience. Unlike some mystics who were more interested in repetition and intimacy with the divine, prophets were more interested in remaking the world, and Iqbal serves as a ventriloquist for them when he wrote these lines:

To me, this dust bowl is better than the lofty paradise:
It is a place of desire and longing, a sanctum of fire and passion.

At one time, I lose myself; at another I lose Him;
And yet another, I find both.

What mystery is this? What mystery is this? (Mir 2006: 3-6)

What appealed to Iqbal's temperament was that prophecy embodied a particular consciousness, one that destroyed the old and creates the new. It was perpetual inspiration (*wahi*) in its creative face that dominated. Hence, inspiration, Iqbal said, was the universal property of life. Psychic energy developed prophetic consciousness; reason tried to block and inhibit the non-rational modes of consciousness. While we are governed primarily by passion and instinct, inductive reasoning made one master of the environment. Inspiration and intuition enabled one to transcend the limitations of space.

Iqbal was not closed to mystical experiences. In fact, he valued mystical experience for its close links to prophetic consciousness. The self (*nafs/angus*) and the world/horizon (*afiq*) were both sources of knowledge. But the idea of finality for him meant that in the final instance inductive reason would keep a critical check on mystic experience. But it did not mean emotion was displaced by reason, since that was not the meaning of the idea of finality. Without eros and emotion, there would be no momentum for history.

Continuous creation was for Iqbal at the centre of history. Creativity fired the imagination and must lead to creativity. Drawing on Ibn Khaldun, he argued that history was a collective, continuous movement, an inevitable development in time. History was not predetermined. In expressing this view, Iqbal went against the orthodox view that bracketed and suspended the movement of time-space in a divinely ordained notion of history, which then also produced a notion of sacred time. Iqbal was very much in favour of a notion of human agency, which prevented him from fostering a view of time that subdued the human will.

If the spirit represented the force that made things move in Hegel, then for Iqbal it was selfhood, *khudi*, a sense of immanence and dynamism. *Khudi* was at the core of our humanity and all human development was to actualise it. It is this perpetual dance between immanence and transcendence that

Iqbal so forcefully articulates that stands at the core of his writing and is expressed in this poem:

God has lost us-He is in search of us;
Like us, He feels need and is a captive of desire.

At times, he inscribes his message on the petals of tulips;
At times, he makes ecstatic chant in the breasts of birds.

He reposes in the narcissus, that He may view our beauty;
He is so adept at wooing that His looks make conversation.

The sighs he draws at dawn in separation from us
Are inside and outside, above and below, all around.

He has caused all this stir that He might observe the creature of dust;
The pageant of scent and color is but a pretext for watching.

He is hidden in every particle and yet is a stranger;
He is conspicuous like the moon and is caressed by town and street.

In this dust-bowl of ours is lost the pearl of life;
This lost pearl-is it we, or is it He? (Mir 2006: 3)

Conclusion

The human person in Iqbal's view is a sentient, believing, and ethical being that he framed in terms of a comprehensive spirituality. Yet his notion of spirituality is deeply embedded in an open-ended, almost evolutionary history of human self-realisation integrally connected to a scientific horizon embedded in nature. And the sources of the tradition are plastic to the needs of self-realisation, which for Iqbal poetically meant the resurrection of humankind:

If *khudi*/selfhood is fortified by knowledge it will incur Gabriel's envy
If it is fortified by love, then it is the trumpet of Israfil. (Iqbal 2000: 499)

In Iqbal's understanding selfhood only triumphs through love of the divine. And when selfhood is realised then it becomes equal to the resurrection of humankind. He derives this insight from Qur'anic imagery. Just as all of humanity will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment when the angel

of resurrection blows the trumpet, similarly when human beings actualise their selfhood then it is equal to a form of resurrection. But the affective self must also be equipped with learning, a quality denied to even the archangel, Gabriel. But the greater enjoyment of achieving selfhood, explained Iqbal, was in the very journey itself and in the struggle to realise the human person.

Self-making found its analogue in the story of Islam itself. The narrative of Islam, wrote Iqbal, was one of exile, estrangement, simplicity, and diversity. One high point was the sacrifice of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Husayn in the battlefield of Karbala fighting injustice. The other counterpoint is at the beginning with the readiness of Ismail, the Prophet Abraham's son, who volunteered to be offered as a sacrifice (Iqbal 2000: 500). Thus, the human person is one who riveted by passion even though this desire cannot stray too far from the demands of reason.

For Iqbal, the human being is not the measure of all things but rather 'a being that grows more perfect the closer his connection with God is' (Schimmel 1963: 382). Or, as Schimmel explains, Iqbal saw the human person as 'realizing the wonderful paradox of freedom in servanthip' (ibid.). But there are also elements of yearning for the divine without divinising the self. A poem widely remembered by many of Iqbal's devotees and admirers beautifully captures the lyrical and hymn-like yearning for the divine:

O You, the Awaited Real, for once appear in mundane garb,
For in my obeisant forehead a thousand prostrations lie astrir.

Learn to desire the tumult of love;

you are the melody, be a confidant to ears

What good is a song if it lies hidden in the quiet of the instrument's frets?

Do not be too protective of it: your mirror, is *the* mirror [the heart]
if broken, it will be more precious in the eyes of the maker of mirrors.

While circling the candle, the glowworm said,

'That vintage power to move

Is absent from *your* story of burning and missing from *my* talk of melting.'

My wretched self found no quarter in the world, and when it did find
refuge,

where do you think it found sanctuary?

I found it in Your exclusive forgiveness,
where my sin-drenched life found ultimate refuge

Now, love no longer has that fervor,
nor does beauty enjoy the charm of playful mischief;

The Ghaznavi no longer has that yearning,
nor does Ayz's tresses, possess that curl.

When sometimes I lay my head prostrate,
I hear the earth's reproach:

'Your heart is an intimate of idols,
how can *you* ever profit from prayer?' (Iqbal 2000: 398–9; Mir 2014,
emphasis mine)

Note

1. I would like to thank the editors Chad Hillier and Basit Koshul for their helpful feedback and suggestions. All deficiencies are mine alone.

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3

Achieving Humanity: Convergence between Henri Bergson and Muhammad Iqbal

Souleymane Bachir Diagne
Columbia University, United States

French scholar of Islam Louis Massignon (1883–1962) has declared that a deep convergence, or what he labelled 'a Semitic affinity',¹ existed between the philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) and the Indian poet and thinker Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938). More recently, in an important work entitled *Being Human in Islam: The Impact of the Evolutionary Worldview*, in a chapter devoted to 'Bergson and the Muslims', Damian A. Howard notes that '[r]ecognizably Bergsonian ideas subtrend a great deal of what Iqbal says and Iqbal frequently refers explicitly to the thought of the Frenchman' (2011: 59). He then raises the question of the nature of that Bergsonian presence in Iqbal's thought – a 'catalyst' he asks, 'a hermeneutical key', or 'a confirmation' – before concluding that at any rate 'Bergson's own input was decisive in shaping Iqbal's theology' and that 'Iqbal's reading of Bergson made a decisive difference' (ibid.; emphasis in original).

On the other hand, in *Iqbal: An Illustrated Biography*, Khurram Ali Shafiqe is altogether dismissive of the whole notion of a 'contribution of Western philosophy to the thought of Iqbal', which has been, according to him, 'exaggerated' (2007: 45). Declaring that Iqbal himself had a 'condescending attitude towards Western philosophers', citing Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche, he notes that 'Bergson received more courtesy' just to add that this was 'maybe because he was still alive' (ibid.).

Shafiqe needs not be so anxious and defensive as to consider that any