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# IS RELIGION COMPATIBLE WITH MODERN SCIENCE? AN APPRAISAL OF IQBAL'S MODERNIST COMPATIBILITY THESIS

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## Abstract

Iqbal engaged with demythologizing, rationalist (as distinguished from intellectualist), reductionist, evolutionist, secularist orientation of modern scientific thought from the perspective of Muslim theology and philosophy and was in turn, like certain other Muslim modernists, influenced, in varying degrees, by all or some of these elements. Iqbal's attempt to reconcile otherwise divergent epistemic and cognitive discourses of Islam and modern science makes him one of the key contributors to the now familiar debate on religion and science though his contribution has not received due consideration from scholars. The aim of the present study is to appraise his central thesis that there are great affinities between what are often perceived to be warring worldviews of Islam and modern science. He focuses on the methodology of modern science and important philosophical ideas generally upheld by modern scientific community and seeks to appropriate them in his view of Islam. Limitations of Iqbal's response to the challenge of secular science are also pointed out. Importance of his approach for modernist thought is emphasized.

*Keywords:* compatibility thesis, demythologization, intellect, Muslim modernism, modern science, Perennialist perspective

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## 1. Introduction

Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938) is amongst the few widely known important modern Muslim philosophers who have seriously reckoned with the problem of modern science in relation to traditional Islamic worldview. He was the shaping influence on much of Muslim modernist approach and wrote an unprecedented work on the question of reconstruction of Muslim religious thought in view of the challenge from modernity and modern science. However he has not been systematically approached as a contributor to the debate on

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religion and science by either Muslim or Western scholarship although he had important ideas that he formulated with great force and put forward in his seminal work written in English. He could be profitably compared with some leading Western thinkers who have worked on the problem of religion vis-à-vis modern science. He brings insights from largely ignored Muslim theological and philosophical resources to critique and appropriate thought currents informed by modern science. He comes up with some provocative ideas that are of interest to historian of science and philosopher of religion. The paper attempts a critical appraisal of his thought focussing particularly on his arguments for compatibility thesis. It particularly takes up his mature prose work in which alone he had the opportunity to clearly and systematically express himself on the subject under discussion. He is compared and contrasted with W.T. Stace, one of the important mystical philosophers (as Iqbal was a Sufi thinker primarily) who had been similarly intensely interested in the problem of modern science vis-à-vis religion. Like Stace Iqbal, although not a professional scientist or a philosopher of science, was nevertheless deeply concerned with the question of science. Iqbal's modernism and his reconstructionist project derive directly from his response to modern science. His is an original and unique appropriation of modern science in Islam.

## 2. Modern science and Modernism in Theology

It hardly needs arguing that modern science with its commitment to reductionist, evolutionist, demythologizing, empiricist, rationalist methodology and philosophy has contributed to secularist modernist outlook. Modernist Christian theology has seriously tried to appropriate the claims of modern science and to reconcile faith and scientific intelligence. This has led to great concessions to modernist spirit and in the process renouncing much of the traditional wisdom and sometimes even sacrificed the very *raison d'être* of religion. The basic assumption of modernist Christian theology has been that traditional religious thought needs to be drastically reinterpreted and reconstructed to appeal to modern sensibility. The modern outlook or modernist sensibility is taken as something given, as something that is here to stay, something that can't be wished away or rejected as perversion and thus as something vis-à-vis which one has no option but to adjust oneself to. According to modernists, if religion has to survive and not appear irrelevant, it must be rethought in the light of modern developments in the fund of human knowledge. Christianity has been hit hard by the advent of modernism. Secular theology is simply unthinkable in traditional Christian world view. But under the impact of modern science all sins have been committed, even the sin of denying the Sin altogether. God has been declared dead under the impact of modern science. The eclipse of traditional religion is attributable to a great extent to the onslaught of modern science. Modernism in religion is a response to and an appropriation of the challenge of modern science. Many a religionists desperately sought to modernize religion itself to see it survive the deadly onslaught. Looking

retrospectively when the official orthodoxy of modern science stands challenged on many fronts and surrounded by a galaxy of marginalized/alternative sciences that have successfully challenged its hegemony, one may harshly judge many modernists' obsession with modern science and getting overawed by it. One may not now feel great force in modern science's claims and may not see sufficient warrant for the reconstructionist thesis.

Although the term modernism suggests that any one who takes the norms of modern thought and life as decisive in his interpretation of the matter would be a modernist, the term in fact has an almost exclusive reference to religious thought. It is a very diffuse term and in the context of religion it refers more to a general pattern of thinking than a sharply defined ideology. One may loosely refer to a modernist as anyone who takes post-medieval scientific and philosophical Western thought, the Project of Modernity and Enlightenment – the Modern Science in short seriously and attempts to appropriate it in his own world view, more usually taking a heterodox stance with regard to his own tradition and attempting to reinterpret or even reconstruct the latter in more or less the image of the former. His attitude towards his own traditional past is dictated or sharply influenced by modern thought patterns or what is loosely referred to as modern outlook. Although it is difficult to explicitly characterize modern outlook itself vis-à-vis its implications for religion (and there are contradictory views on the same), one may refer to it as complacent attitude towards the post-medieval antitraditional outlook of secular modern man.

### **3. Muslim modernism**

There is hardly any such thing as Muslim modernism in sight in the sense one sees Christian theological modernism. There is hardly any counterpart of secular theology or radical theology in Islam. Hardly any Muslim philosopher has seriously taken that infamous declaration of Nietzsche. The Muslims, in general, have not paid much heed to Darwin and Freud or they haven't been much understood. The metanarrative of modern science has not been seen in the same light by Muslim theologians and intellectuals as by their Western counterparts. The Muslim intelligentsia, in general, has not given much heed to the grand claims of modern science vis-à-vis religion. They have generally taken a superficial and complacent view of the matter. Modern science has hardly been a problem for them. They have believed that modern science and Islam are not only compatible but the former owes origin and inspiration to the latter. They have even attempted to find some scriptural warrant for evolution. There is hardly any important scientific theory or discovery that they can't see precognized in the Quran. Muslims, in general, thus have no difficulty in reconciling modern science with their faith. Needless to say, this is a form of escapism. Moreover, this attitude has contributed to their resistance against theological modernism or any drastic reconstructionist thesis. Islam avoided the fate of modern Christianity. It made no major concession to modernism. Of course there has been a class of intellectual elite who turned away from their

traditional roots and championed secularist cause citing modern science and modernity as the cause of this alienation. Some of the great names in Muslim modernist circles quote Darwin and company in defence of their apostasy. There were certain attempts made in the direction of integrating divergent perspectives of modernism and traditional Islam. The problem of modern science and its disturbing implications for traditional thesis didn't go totally unrecognized. But the solutions suggested lacked intellectual vigour and depth and thus couldn't gain currency among Muslims. However Iqbal is amongst the very few important thinkers who has given serious attention to the problem and attempted to come up with a closely reasoned response. He is the representative voice of Muslim modernism to whom we can turn for understanding the modern Muslim mind battling secular rationalistic movement embodied in modern scientific thought.

#### **4. Iqbal as a modernist**

Iqbal, perhaps the most influential Muslim thinker of Indian subcontinent argued for Islamic conception of God vis-à-vis modern scientific and philosophical developments. His is an original, unique and bold though heterodox defence of Muslim theism against its detractors. His philosophy of religion developed under the influence of modern scientific and philosophical thought hasn't received much critical attention from philosophers of religion. Hailed as a progenitor of modernist Muslim theology by many a critic his reinterpretation/reformulation/reconstruction of traditional religious thought in light of modern developments of knowledge in contemporary idiom is of interest to not only students and scholars of Islam but also of religion and comparative religion in general. He could well be compared to Christian modernists, modern mystical philosophers and even in certain respects to demythologizers as he tried to appeal to modern man and Muslim who has been highly influenced by scientific positivist empiricist evolutionist outlook of modern science and modernist *Weltanschauung*. His primary concern was spiritual interpretation of the Universe in the face of materialist mechanist positivist thesis that draws heavily from modern science. The *Reconstruction* makes Iqbal one of the most important intellectuals of modernist Islam. His unique contribution in appropriating modern science and its methodological and philosophical premises in Islam has however not been duly appreciated. His more or less demythologizing, evolutionist, empiricist, inductionist, rationalist reading of Islam constitutes his unique contribution in the development of modernist Muslim thought that has been primarily formulated in response to modern scientific thought. His *Reconstruction* is an attempt in the direction of appropriating modern scientific thought in Islam. His brilliant insights in this context need to be foregrounded and critically evaluated.

It is strange that Iqbal is hardly referred, not to speak of being discussed in detail, as a contributor to modernist response to modern science or Islamization of knowledge. This paper attempts to draw the attention of scholarly community to his significant, original and distinctive contribution to 'Islam and Science' debate, to Muslim modernist thesis that Islam and Science are compatible and even complementary. By way of introduction and general plane of this paper we mention here a few important points of Iqbalian contribution in the general context of compatibility argument the detailed discussion of some of which is presented in this paper:

- 1 Attempting to provide consistent theory of modernist reconstructionist response to modern science.
- 2 Providing a sophisticated philosophical version of compatibility thesis.
- 3 Rereading Muslim intellectual history on anticlassical modernist lines.
- 4 Appropriating for the first time in Muslim history and in quite compelling fashion modern Physics in Islamic or spiritual interpretation of the Universe.
- 5 Quite a consistent defence of evolution and rereading Islamic intellectual history for the purpose. In this connection he had to reread metaphysical/philosophical content of Islam. His philosophy of self and time and history fit quite nicely with evolutionary thinking.
- 6 Providing a possible theological/metaphysical foundation for Islamic modernism.
- 7 A bold step in the direction of formulating new *kalam* (Theology) that Muslim modernists like Sir Syed, Amir Ali and Abduhu desperately wanted for accomplishing their purification/reinterpretation of traditional religious thought.
- 8 Quite a novel interpretation/defence of the idea of finality in Islam that involves linking it with the birth of modern age and inductive intellect.
- 9 An attempt to prove modern European culture as part/continuation of Islamic culture itself. This is an attempt to bridge the East and the West by foregrounding Western spirit of Islamic tradition.
- 10 A critique of certain attempts that posit a distinct identity of Islamic science. For him Science is universal, objective, rational and by virtue of these characteristics already Islamic. Though an independent venture of human spirit it is a sort of prayer. The question of values doesn't arise in Iqbal's perspective in the conventional sense. As Islam rejects the sacred/secular dichotomy so scientific observation is subsumable as an act of prayer.
- 11 A bold exercise in absolute *ijtihad* (creative reinterpretation and application of normative principles embodied in original scripture or canon in changing or evolving conditions) not only in the domain of law but in other domains of religious thought as well. A methodology for practising science without fearing any censuring from any religious Inquisition. A reassertion of a version of Ibn Rushd's argument for validation of scientific and philosophical enterprise in Islam.

He carried forward Sir Syed's unique contribution to Quranic exegesis who had endeavoured to reinterpret Muslim theology to make it compatible scientific ideas. But he was not ideal candidate to accomplish the task as he didn't have the first hand knowledge of Western canons of thought, its philosophical and scientific tradition. Iqbal alone among his other distinguished contemporaries could contribute something substantial in this direction as he had first hand knowledge of both traditional Islamic and modern Western thought. In fact he has provided broad outlines and a rational methodology for making Islam a 'scientific religion'. He has in effect followed Ibn Rushd in his problem of reconciling *ma'qul* (demonstrative truth) with *manqul* (scriptural truth). He was convinced that clock cannot be turned back, that modernity is here to stay, that modern man cannot unlearn developments in the fund of knowledge during past few centuries and that one cannot afford to ignore the challenge of modern science. He was also convinced that Muslims need to seriously understand the nature of modern challenge and that they have ample but unexploited resources to meet the challenge and that this necessitates absolute *ijtihad* in various matters besides law. His *Reconstruction* could be read as an exercise in absolute *ijtihad* in order to appropriate modern scientific and philosophical heritage. Retrospectively we are in a better position to see if and how far he has succeeded/erred in his *ijtihad* on certain issues.

These background assumptions and methodology have led Iqbal, like Sir Syed, into a radical reinterpretation of Theology and some highly unconventional positions on major issues. Like Sir Syed he more or less accepted evolution and symbolically/allegorically interpreted certain references to supernatural in his lectures. He managed to avoid the strictures of conservative orthodoxy by presenting his views in difficult philosophical rather than easily understandable theological format. This however contributed to neglect of his thought also as he was not understood by masses or even the generality of *ulema* (scholars trained in traditional Islamic sciences). Unlike Sir Syed and certain other modernists he doesn't subscribe to modern apologetic view – bordering on heresy for more traditionally grounded scholars – that reduces religion to 'piety without content' or 'morality touched with emotion'. Identifying religion with morality as intellectual content of doctrines is sacrificed or explained away is one response to the devastating critique of traditional religious theses. Like Sir Syed he has paid glorious tribute to European thought and culture. He emerges a stauncher rationalist than Sir Syed when he comes to appropriate Islamic metaphysics. He rationally treats the Absolute. Even the Infinite can be captured by thought. Jinns, angels, Hell and Heaven are appropriated from a perspective that modern sensibility could easily accept. Rather than impose a naturalistic paradigm from without on the Quran he sees the latter itself advocating a sort of naturalism, the 'Quranic naturalism'.

He has attempted to reckon with or appropriate all the important thought currents of modern science and the philosophy inspired by it that have some bearing on religion. Such representative modern figures as Darwin, Freud, Jung, Comte, Fraser, Einstein, Russell and Whitehead are considered in his

*Reconstruction* that attempts a conciliatory approach to modern sensibility and thought structures. He independently but critically approaches all of them as well as classical Islamic scholarship for his proposed reconstructive endeavour.

Despite his modernism Iqbal has consciously attempted to be strongly rooted in his own tradition though from a perennialist perspective it entails a plain contradiction. For all his rationalism he remained at heart a mystic and a traditional Muslim. In fact the foundation for his conciliatory approach is his argument from mystic experience that is formulated in the backdrop of modern empiricist paradigm as we will be discussing later in detail. His concept of religious experience if valid would make his compatibility argument quite formidable. However, as we will see, the way modern concept of religious experience as distinct from meditation, prophetic *wahy* (revelation), metaphysical realization and prayer is typically modernist construction. It is crude appropriation of what traditionally is understood by the concepts of meditation and *irfan* as *tasawwuf* explicates the term. Iqbal's approach to religious experience from individualist dualist theological and philosophical perspective forms a problematic part of his whole attempt of formulating religious thought in modern scientific and philosophical terms as will be argued later by a comparative study of him and Stace, the latter being generally considered one of the most important and influential mystical philosophers of the twentieth century and whose conception of religious experience comes in many respects quite close to traditional Islamic (Sufi) conception of the same. In fact Iqbal has been accused of betraying modernist rationalist cause and reverting to tradition or orthodoxy, especially during his later life. In fact he is a class of his own and emerges neither a fundamentalist neoconservative nor a pragmatic liberal nor a modern secularist but a sort of 'inner radicalist'. His response to modern science could be understood from this inner radicalist perspective. He is for a creative synthetic dynamic response to it. Against the pragmatists like Afghani who are satisfied with a vague belief that Islam and modernity are not in conflict and don't examine such issues closely he seriously examines the question of compatibility and even proceeds to reconstruct religious thought if need arises. Iqbal, being better versed in modern scientific and philosophical thought currents, was better qualified than his illustrious contemporary intellectuals and scholars to embark on serious reconstructive work.

## **5. Compatibility thesis**

There are many ways of putting the compatibility thesis – not all of them compatible with one another – some naïve and some quite sophisticated. The defence of compatibility thesis has generally been a rule amongst the Muslim intellectuals as well as the ulema. One form of compatibility thesis is just an assertion of a negative thesis that Science and religion (Islam or the Quran) aren't incompatible. There are also what might be called the strong and the weak versions of this compatibility thesis. The strong version states that not

only are the Quran and Science compatible but that many important discoveries of modern science have been also anticipated or precognized by the Quran and this is extrapolated to prove divine authorship of the Quran. Thus the tables are turned against the enemy i.e., modern science. It is appropriated in the service of religion. Some of the well known and well advertised cases of conversion to Islam are cited to substantiate this strong version of compatibility thesis. Far fetched meanings and interpretations are invoked in this connection. The Quran is read to provide evidence of precognition in as diverse sciences as Embryology, Microphysics, Geology and Meteorology. Hardly any discovery passes without its being read in the Quran which had hinted of it fourteen centuries ago. Some go to the extent of predicting certain discoveries from their reading of the scripture. There is no question of any conflict between the Quran and modern science. Needless to say that this strong version doesn't bother about deeper issues of methodologies, philosophies and world views of Islam and modern science. It also doesn't bother to see the actual historical record of the relationship between them. It just notices certain parallels between the Quranic verses and certain discoveries of modern science and jumps to the conclusions. Inherent contradictions and conceptual confusions in this compatibility thesis are obvious to any serious student of either Islam or Science and needn't be discussed here.

There is another version of this compatibility thesis defended by many Muslim scholars according to which both Science and religion are valid ways of approaching or knowing Reality at different levels. The Quran is the word of God and Nature (that Science studies) is His work. There can't be any conflict between the two. They must, on *a priori* grounds, be compatible. They complement each other as their domains are different; thus the possibility of any conflict is beforehand removed. The modern scientific notions needn't be read in the Quran. Science can't be allowed to stand as judge over religion. One shouldn't confound the boundaries of the two. This version may also necessitate reinterpretation/reconstruction of the traditional religious thought in the light of developments in human knowledge. It reiterates the thesis of basic compatibility in uncompromising terms but doesn't stretch this to absurd limits of declaring that there is no need to worry for traditional Theology, that the Quran has predicted most of the modern scientific discoveries, that religion could rest contented complacently in its closed universe and that religion can interfere in the realm of Science. There is something like this which may be called as the weak version of compatibility thesis that is largely shared by Iqbal. This will now be discussed.

## **6. Iqbal's version of compatibility thesis**

Iqbal differs from many other defenders of this weak version which precisely constitutes his originality and unique contribution. He, unlike most other modernist Muslims who defend compatibility thesis, duly cognizes the implications of this approach and adopts his strategy accordingly. He goes to



the root of the problem and addresses varied ramifications and implications of the compatibility thesis. He addresses core issues and advances bold and original views of his own. If we grant his basic thesis that Islam is the birth of inductive intellect and scientist is sage then entirely new approach to the problem of relation between Islam and Science could be developed. Presently we will be attempting to identify basic points of Iqbalian compatibility thesis. He ventures to reconstruct/ reinterpret the traditional heritage of Islam and also critiques the official, orthodox scientific attitude vis-à-vis religion to arrive at his grand synthesis.

Iqbal in his preface to his *Reconstruction* seems to accept in principle the veracity of scientific attitude and paradigm. He takes modern science as given, as something that is there to stay. Religion, he grants, must look scientific in its own right to be respectfully reckoned with by the modern man [1]. Then he accordingly attempts 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” [1]. He is hopeful that “Religion and science may discover hitherto unsuspected mutual harmonies” [1]. Thus he is seriously concerned with proving compatibility of Islam with Science. This is also because modernism is committed to empiricist rationalist scientific outlook and methodology and strongly demands religion or for that matter any discourse to be constructed in its own image or at least in a way that doesn’t conflict with its spirit or infringe on its domain. Modern man seems to be irreversibly conditioned by the post-Renaissance inductionist rationalist scientific outlook or values to which religionist may feel compelled to make due adjustments. Iqbal accepts the challenge and accordingly proceeds to build a case for compatibility between Science and religion. Iqbal’s approach is multifaceted and multipronged (and sometimes even contradictory) and quite involved. Some of the fundamental points will be considered in this paper.

Iqbal isn’t interested in deriving this or that fact or recent scientific discovery from a far fetched interpretation of the Quran to substantiate his compatibility argument. He hardly ever uses the now fashionable mode of argumentation that argues compatibility on grounds of Quranic precognition of modern discoveries. He nowhere uses the expression, in his *Reconstruction*, that the Quran had predicted this or that recent discovery 1300 years ago. He can’t be charged with facile Bucaillism, to use Ziauddin Sardar’s expression. (Bucaillism is the position that, overstressing the views of Maurice Bocaile, French author who wrote a popular book *The Quran, the Bible and Science* [2], states that key scientific discoveries from as diverse fields as Embryology and Cosmology have been precognized in the Quran. This position is not unique to few Muslim scholars. Certain Hindu, Jain and other scripturalists have made similar claims with respect to their scriptures). He avoids the pitfalls of those modernist Muslims who argue for the scientific miracle of the Quran. He, however, could well provide an inspiration (and has in fact provided in certain cases) for such attempts of proving compatibility as that of Harun Yaha, Zakir Naik, Rashid Khalifa, Fatheehullah Khan (all of which are influenced by

Bucaillism to certain extent) and others. Indeed his loyal disciple and biographer, Khaleefa Abdul Hakim, once asked him that if Islam's purport is what he had advocated in his lectures which even great scholars and intellectuals in this advanced age are unable to understand then how could have the first addressees of the Prophet have understood it [3].

Instead of cashing on the now fashionable argument from alleged precognition of certain scientific ideas and discoveries in the Quran Bucaillism would like, Iqbal, in his *Reconstruction* goes to the root of the issue and attempts to prove a case for compatibility on basic methodological and philosophical issues between Islam and modern science. He considers the compatibility problem and leaves many such details that might problematize his thesis as if of no account but asserts his case on the supposed basis of certain general convergences in approach and their basic claims. Iqbal's attempt to prove the rational and empirical approach of the Quran could be seen as an attempt in this direction. He is thus more interested in the similarity of approaches and basic philosophico-methodological issues than in reinterpreting the Quranic verses in accordance with the latest scientific knowledge. He avoids direct confrontation between the religious and the scientific perspectives by separating their domains [1, p. 1]. We now take up his defence of religion (Islam) conceived in response to the incompatibility thesis.

## **7. Iqbal's appropriation of Rationalism and Empiricism**

Iqbal starts his first lecture with the assertion that faith has something of a cognitive content [1, p. 1]. He admits the need of rational foundation of its ultimate principles and thus a rational metaphysics [1, p. 2], and accordingly sets out to prove Whitehead's assertion that the ages of faith are the ages of rationalism [1, p. 2]. He asserts that thought and intuition are organically linked to each other and that there is no essential opposition between them and following Bergson claims that intuition is only developed intellect [1, p. 2]. He interprets the Prophet's prayer "God! grant me knowledge of ultimate nature of things!" in hitherto unprecedented sense as a search for rational foundations in Islam [1, p. 2]. He admits the jurisdiction of Philosophy and Science in testing the religious hypothesis and his second lecture is devoted to apply it, although he does warn that religion must be judged on its own terms thus granting certain autonomy to religious discourse. As thought is capable of conclusive knowledge and appropriating the infinite [1, p. 5], nothing could escape its critical scrutiny, not even mystical or religious experience. Iqbal appropriates the latter in rational terms. God too could be comprehended or apprehended by means of thought in its deeper moment. The Ultimate Reality reveals its character through Nature [1, p. 3]. Even sense perception does provide a clue to the nature of the Ultimate Reality [1, p. 3]. God is percept and not a concept, as Iqbal quotes Ibn Arabi approvingly in this connection [1, p. 144]. God is, in a certain sense, object of man's knowledge or could be contacted in the scientific observation of nature [1, p. 72]. Empirical and rational foundation of faith couldn't be more

emphatically stressed. A mystic or a prophet is a scientist in his own right; religion too seeks concrete experience as a point of departure [1, p. 20]. Iqbal writes: "The Quran recognizing that the empirical attitude is an indispensable stage in the spiritual life of humanity, attaches equal importance to all the regions of human experience as yielding knowledge of the Ultimate Reality which reveals its symbols both within and without" [1, p. 12].

He also writes that sense perception has an important role in securing a complete vision of Reality [1, p. 12]. He is quite assertive about the proposition that religious (mystical) experience is cognitive and yields knowledge of God. Heart (inner intuition) sees and "its reports, if properly interpreted, are never false" [1, p. 13]. The knowledge yielding potential of religious experience makes it, in a way, department of science, albeit a special science of the spirit. Religion could be scrutinized (of course with the proper methodology) like any other department of human experience and knowledge. It is interesting to note that Iqbal rejects the rationalistic proofs of God's existence in favour of the empirical proof. God is thus not to be argued for but experienced like the phenomenal world. The world of Nature both veils and unveils Him. It is His symbol. It yields knowledge of His behaviour. Studying nature means studying God's behaviour. All the diverse levels of experience reveal God as far as He is immanent in the world of experience. Iqbal's pantheism could well be seen as an attempt to establish empirical foundations of faith. It could well be seen as a response to the positivist challenge of Science. Iqbal is anxious to refute the positivist critique of religion through its own tools. If science is verifiable knowledge, demanding concrete experience as its point of departure, so is religion. It is Iqbal's interpretation and modernist appropriation of the idea of the finality of prophethood in Islam that secures reason's supremacy. The claims of science (inductive science) are given divine legitimacy [1, p. 101]. The post-prophetic age will subject to critical scrutiny of reason the non-rational or mystical modes of consciousness. The Prophet of Islam has vetoed all supernaturalism and miracle mongering. No mystic can now claim supernatural authority [1, p. 102]. Critical reason and science are the arbiters from now on. There can't be a stronger argument for the compatibility thesis. Space and time, the categories in which conceptual thought operates (and Science deals with), are interpretations that thought puts on the creative activity of God. His divinization of time and repeated emphasis on change as the symbol of God could be read as examples of his attempt to bridge the gulf between traditional religion that posits timeless eternity beyond the order of time and reason's domain of time (and space). His anticlassicist interpretation of Islam is appropriation of modern scientific spirit in Islam. Iqbal brilliantly appropriates modern spirit (rationalistic, inductionist, demythologizing) in Islam. His is a unique attempt of reconciliation of otherwise widely divergent epistemic and cognitive universes of traditional Islam and the modern West. Scientist is a mystic in the act of prayer in his synthetic perspective.

Iqbal could well be seen as the first influential Muslim thinker who tried to cash on the idealist interpretation of modern Physics for his spiritual interpretation of the Universe. He indulges in what the positivist philosopher of science Phillip Frank calls the philosophical use of Science. His primary motive seems to be to carve a niche for religion in an otherwise secularist scientific world view. He appropriates in his second lecture of *Reconstruction* Eddington, Whitehead and other influential interpreters of modern Physics in to argue the case of religion. He offers ingenious explanation of prophetic and mystical experience that modern man conditioned by modern developments in psychology finds quite plausible. His attempt of reducing prophetic experience to mystical experience is in line with modern appropriation of concept of religious experience. By denying any qualitative distinction between prophetic and mystic experiences [1, p. 101] Iqbal tries to placate modern empiricism and verificationism. Modern Psychology could develop a method to understand the nature of religious experience according to Iqbal. The traditionalist metaphysical approach to prophetic experience differs sharply from the Iqbalian one and it is the latter only that modern science could appropriate without much difficulty. The prophetic *wahy* can't be subsumed under any head with which modern Psychology is familiar. Revelation corrects intuition from the traditionalist perspective. For Iqbal revelation doesn't appear capable of independent cognitive claim over and above to that of intuition. There is hardly anything special about *wahy*; it is universal property of life [1, p. 100]. The prophetic non-rational mode of consciousness must now be inhibited in the interests of inductive reason [1, p. 101]. Modern inductionist spirit wouldn't demand anything more. The following views of Iqbal reveal a heavy influence of modernist inductionist spirit: "The Prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world.... The birth of Islam.... is the birth of inductive intellect. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life can't forever be kept in leading strings; that, in order to achieve full self consciousness, man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Quran, and the emphasis that it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge are all different aspects of the same idea of finality." [1, p. 100]

Interpreting the Prophet as psychiatrist is quite interesting and concurs with the modernist spirit. (Iqbal is for critically scrutinizing mystical religious experience. This leads to reductionist psychologizing of what essentially transcends merely psychological realm. Iqbal seems to be adopting a sort of modern psychological methodology in interpreting the Prophet's encounter with Ibn Sayyad, the psychic Jew.) There is something smacking of heterodoxy in approaching mysticism from thoroughly scientific viewpoint. Yet Iqbal fully advocates this approach and applauds Ibn Khaldun for the same [1, p. 101].

Freud too comes to be sympathetically appropriated in this connection [1, p. 19]. Iqbal's psychological approach is his unique contribution to the debate on 'Islam and Science'.

## **8. Iqbal and the way of two compartments**

Iqbal opts for the familiar 'way of two compartments' to meet the challenge from modern science. He argues that Science can't be in conflict with religion because their domains don't overlap. They interpret two different data of experience. Religion aims at reaching the real significance of a special variety of human experience. To quote him: "Religion isn't Physics or Chemistry seeking an explanation of Nature in terms of causation; it really aims at interpreting a totally different region of human experience – religious experience – the data of which can't be reduced to the data of any other science" [1, p. 20].

However Iqbal is anxious to secure an empirical foundation for religion. Science too claims to deal with the whole of experience. Couldn't the scientific *weltanschauung* conflict with the religious *weltanschauung*? Science does study religious experience as an experience and does try to appropriate it or explain it away. The cognitive claims of religion and that of Science (especially Psychology and Physics) could conflict or may appear to as the history of the relationship between the two in the Christendom demonstrates. Iqbal isn't unaware of this aspect of the problem and adopts various strategies to deal with it. His main argument is to deny science's claim to form an all-comprehensive *weltanschauung*. I quote his formulation of the question and his response to the same: "The question, then, is whether the passage to Reality through the revelation of sense perception necessarily leads to a view of Reality essentially opposed to the view that religion takes of its ultimate character... to which they are applied" [1, p. 33].

Iqbal points out in this connection that notion of cause and mechanism, though applicable at the physical level, aren't operative at the biological level [1, p. 34]. He argues for vitalist reading of Biology and rejects mechanistic one. He points out that in the scientific process the ego's standpoint is necessarily exclusive, whereas in the religious process the ego integrates its competing tendencies and develops a single inclusive attitude resulting in a kind of synthetic transfiguration of his experience [1, p. 155]. Thus Iqbal seems to reject all philosophical appropriations of Science. The world view or ideology created in the name of Science is necessarily subjective, sectional and thus can't be relied on. The full fledged positivist philosophy stands rejected. However Iqbal himself tries to appropriate Science in his philosophical framework. He tries to cash on modern Physics for his spiritual (idealist) interpretation of the Universe. However it also seems that Iqbal rather than facilely interpreting science in religious or idealist terms is basically refuting materialist appropriation or interpretation of science rather than asserting an idealist one. This is clearly evident in his appropriation of Einstein's relativity. Although he

states that the theory of relativity destroys the view of substance as simple location in space, he doesn't directly argue for his spiritual interpretation of Reality from relativity. He observes: "Personally, I believe that the ultimate character of Reality is spiritual; but in order to avoid a widespread misunderstanding it is necessary to point out that Einstein's theory, which as a scientific theory, deals only with the structure of things, throws no light on the ultimate nature of things which possess that structure" [1, p. 31].

Iqbal rejects Wisdom Carr's view that "Relativity inevitably leads to Monadistic Idealism" [1, p. 30]. Iqbal is more interested in problematizing antireligious or materialist, mechanist, determinist and also even evolutionist (evolutionism as understood in atheistic materialistic philosophical framework) interpretation of Science rather than in building a case for religious interpretation of modern Physics. Thus he is problematizing the incompatibility thesis. There is no ground for incompatibility if we problematize the materialist, determinist and naturalistic-evolutionist interpretation of the data of physical and biological sciences. Iqbal would veto any antireligious philosophical appropriation of Science on principle because of the inherent sectional character of scientific world view.

However Iqbal doesn't consistently stick to 'the way of two compartments'. He sees much overlap between their respective domains and argues that they complement each other rather than are two separate closed discourses that don't interact with each other. As he firmly believes that Nature reveals God's behaviour and is to God as character is to human self [1, p. 45], and that science is a study of Reality and thus concerned with the Truth and thus scientist is a sage, a mystic in the act of prayer [1, p. 73] and in scientific observation Science comes close to contacting the most Real, so ideally these two modes of apprehending Reality shouldn't conflict. His pantheism especially ensures this. Religion studies *anfus* (psychic or inner world) and Science studies *aafaq* (the universe or outer world) and both of them are symbols of God. Although their methodologies differ, they are identical in their final aim. Both aim at reaching the most real through what may be called the purification of experience [1, p. 72]. Here Iqbal grants objectivity to scientific enterprise. This seems to contradict his earlier stance when he had to counter the claims of scientific *weltanschauung*. Iqbal distinguishes between experience as a natural fact, significant of the normally observable behaviour of Reality and experience as significant of the inner nature of reality and says that in the domain of Science we try to understand its meaning in reference to the external behaviour of Reality and in the domain of religion we take it as representative of the same kind of Reality and try to discover its meanings in reference mainly to the inner nature of Reality [1, p. 155]. His observations on the relationship between thought (Science) and intuition (religion) are very important in this connection. He argues that both of them spring from the same root and complement each other. To quote him: "The one grasps Reality piecemeal, the other grasps it in its wholeness. The one fixes its gaze on the eternal, the other on the temporal aspect of Reality. The one is present enjoyment of the whole of

Reality; the other aims at traversing the whole by slowly specifying and closing up the various regions of the whole for exclusive observation. Both are in need of each other for mutual rejuvenation. Both seek vision of the same Reality which reveals itself to them in accordance with their function in life. In fact, intuition, as Bergson rightly says, is only a higher kind of intellect.” [1, p. 2]

All this is brilliant and ingenious attempt of reconciliation of religion and Science, their methods or approaches as thought and intuition are respective organs of Science and religion. Iqbal has attempted to reconcile or synthesize all the domains of experience. The case for the trinity of man, nature and God is well argued by Iqbal. Thought and intuition, (or Science and religion) complement each other. Truth or reality is viewed from different perspectives. God is revealed in all the realms or degrees of existence. However, Iqbalian position isn't without its own difficulties as already noted in certain places above and further discussed below. A brief note on the background philosophy of self that informs Iqbal's whole thought and approach to any problem is in order.

## **9. Background philosophy of Self**

A few remarks on Iqbal's philosophy of self in the backdrop of which he approaches all metaphysical and epistemological problems are in order and that ultimately makes problematic his account of mystic experience and thus his compatibility thesis. We are indebted to Shahzad Qisar's metaphysical critique of Iqbal in such works as *Iqbal and Khawja Ghulam Farid on Experiencing God* [4], for the following appraisal of the concept of self. Much of the conceptual baggage of modern science and philosophy needs to be dropped if we seriously take traditional metaphysical conception of *tawhid* and the human self. From the metaphysical viewpoint 'I' is not real but an imagination though not totally groundless as 'I' is not the Reality itself but vaguely and indistinctly reflects the latter on the level of imagination. It is only a symbolic reflection of something truly real it is not the soul or *nafs* but the Spirit or Intellect which attains universal realization. The reality of the 'I' doesn't belong to man or *nafs* but to the Spirit which is the divine spark at the center of man's being identical with the unmanifest consciousness or Divine Essence. The Sufi conception of religious experience involves annihilation of self as something separate. Man ceases to be for the final goal of union which constitutes metaphysical realization. Sufism and indeed all mysticism demonstrates that man can undo the existentiating and cosmogonic process inwardly so as to cease to exist or be 'annihilated' in *fana*. It should also be remarked that metaphysical realization is not against the essential reality of 'I' or the person whose roots are contained in the Divine Infinity but dissolves its independent separate nature in the face of the Reality which alone is as Islamic *shahadah* implies before whose 'Face' all things perish according to the Quranic verse "All things perish save His Face". Once the soul or *nafs* has withered away in the experience of *fana*, the self-identity of mystic realization is transformed into the Self-identity of

metaphysical realization. Iqbal is too keen to preserve soul or self-identity and vehemently opposed its merger or transformation into Self-identity. For him it would compromise monotheism itself. In the Unitarian metaphysical conception man subsists in the Divine Consciousness as realized possibility. Originally he is nothing but a mere name of the Divine unrealized possibility. This possibility is partially realized in mystic and completely realized in the metaphysical realization. Iqbal's and modern experientialist argument for God are based on problematic view of the status of self vis-à-vis Absolute. The entire language of encounter, knowledge, I and Thou or subject and object of experience is problematic from such a strictly Unitarian view of the self/world or reality that traditional thinkers across religions seem to have taken as enunciated by traditionalist scholars. All distinctions, discourses, debates, comparisons are put in quite a different light from a strictly Unitarian viewpoint. Iqbal's philosophy being tied to dualistic assumptions is not able to arrive at a point where all disputes could be put in perspective. His attempt not to betray either Islam or modernity and sail smoothly in both the worlds fails to fully convince.

## 10. Reason and intuition

For many mystical philosophers intuition and intellect are totally different faculties and there is no organic link between them. The intellect is circumscribed by logical categories and can't transcend space and time and thus the road to God, the Infinite, the Eternity is blocked for it. However Iqbal takes this view of intellect in his poetry but in his *Reconstruction* he posits non-discursive aspect of reason. The term intellect in the traditionalist metaphysical perspective is not to be confused with the conceptual intellect or reason. It is transcendent universal or supra-individual faculty that directly perceives metaphysical truths. Unlike discursive nature of rational faculty it is not mediate and thus fallible but is commensurate with absolute metaphysical certainty. Iqbal comes close to this view of intellect as he argues for nondiscursive view of reason as Maroof notes and explicates in his *Iqbal's Philosophy of Religion* [5]. His promulgation of *danishi noorani* (illuminated reason) is approximation of this perennialist conception. However he doesn't consistently stick to his use of terms. He contrasts it with intuition though providing a link between the two. He comes close to using the terms conceptual intellect and intellect interchangeably.

Iqbal's problems in encountering alien epistemology and metaphysics grounding modern science are complicated by his unique philosophy of ego. It is theological dualism that is presupposed by him that is at the heart of the problem. If he had really transcended dualist perspective he would have solved most of the important problems that we are discussing. He is not a thorough going Unitarian or non-dualist when it comes to basic metaphysical and theological issue. The philosophical and theological dualism of self and Self, man and God, the world and Absolute is completely transcended in Sufi metaphysical conception of *tawhid* that Iqbal doesn't subscribe to. Mystical



realization that Iqbal defends is not able to attain to the true Unitarian perspective as Guenon and other perennialists have argued. The traditional metaphysical conception of *tawhid* as realized in metaphysical realization is not there in Iqbal's conception.

## **11. Conclusion**

We have attempted to argue that Iqbal attempts to prove compatibility on the basic methodological and philosophical issues and leaves out the details and logical corollaries or implication of this position. His inductionist empiricist reading of Islam, his attempt to read evolution in the Quran and Islamic history (he dubs Rumi as an evolutionary thinker) [1, p. 147], his seeing Western civilization as the development of certain important phases of Islamic culture and thus seeing the Islamic origin of the Renaissance [1, p. 6], his bias for the concrete, his rejection of both the traditional techniques and the traditional interpretation of Sufism, his praise of the world of matter and to cap it all his novel interpretation of the idea of finality in Islam are all geared towards proving the compatibility thesis. He reinterprets the spirit of the Quran in scientific terms rather than explains the scattered verses of the Quran in scientific terms. He can't be accused of Buciallism. He doesn't simply cash on the superficial harmony or convergence of the Quran and the science. He goes to the heart of the matter and attempts to prove compatibility at the deepest level. We can't but pay tribute to his great synthetic genius. Of course his position is problematic on various accounts but its great value in the history of modernist Islam can't be overemphasized. His attempt to bridge the West and the East by focussing on a sort of modernist reading of Islam which is seen as a bridge builder as though originating from the East has intellectual affinities with the West makes him quite interesting to the historian. He has attempted to show that there can be a creative and fruitful dialogue between Islam and modernity as he has come up with what has been called 'inner radical' interpretation of Islam distinguishing him from a variety of responses to modernity such as traditionalist, fundamentalist, neofoundationist and secularist. For the modern scientific mind and for many modern thinkers which include some influential theologians Iqbalian type of response could be the one worth considering. The secular scientific colouring of almost everything modern incapacitates modern man from sympathetically responding to traditional religious thought structures as they stand. In a world that declares itself post-Darwinian post-Nietzschean and post-Freudian where nothing makes sense except in the light of evolution and which much emphasizes material, biological and psychological roots of human personality, where science stands almost as a metanarrative everything that goes by the name of tradition is suspect, Iqbal's modernist (non-orthodox) reading of tradition is of great value. If modern man is not willing to renounce modernity with its antitraditional commitments lock, stock and barrel and still in search of a soul he would possibly see his salvation in such appropriations of modernity as that of Iqbal. To enter a dialogue with modernity on latter's terms

is possible in Iqbalian modernist reconstructionist perspective. If the West cannot fundamentally reconsider and revise its Aristotelian and then Cartesian heritage that necessitate a dualistic mode of thinking that absolutizes subject-object duality and is not quite favourably taking mystico-metaphysical outlook and is irrevocably committed to the realm of finitude and some sort of humanism Iqbal's personalist philosophy and individualist religious metaphysics has something to offer for consideration. The whole thrust of Eastern mystical worldview is against the ego as well as actions that fortify it as a separate individual entity in a tensionful state with a dialectical relation to the world and associated dualistic philosophical framework. The whole metaphysical and mystical tradition that Iqbal inherited and attempted to relate to modernity privileges contemplation over action, being over becoming, eternity and space over time, universal over individual (spirit over soul and body) and he problematizes most of these binaries and sometimes argues for reversing the hierarchies.

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