
IS MYSTICISM COMPATIBLE WITH MODERN SCIENCE? CASE STUDIES OF IQBAL AND STACE

M. Maroof Shah¹, Manzoor A. Shah^{2*}, Bilal Ahmed Dar³ and Saleem Iqbal⁴

¹ *Rajbag Colony, Nagbal, Ganderbal, Kashmir, India, 190006*

² *Department of Botany, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, J&K, India, 190006*

³ *Department of English, Beruwah College, Budgam, Kashmir, India*

⁴ *Department of Veterinary Physiology, FVSc &AH, Alusteng, Shuhama, India*

(Received 4 September 2011)

Abstract

Stace, one of the most influential mystical philosopher of the twentieth century who distinctively defended mysticism vis-à-vis modern scientific challenge and whose perspective on the autonomy of both mysticism and modern science has been widely debated, shares with Iqbal mystical approach as well as deep respect for modern scientific methodology and Philosophy. Both appropriate the claims of modern science in their interpretation of knowledge and existence claims of religion. Both argue for compatibility thesis. Both are for reconstruction/reinterpretation of traditional theological claims in the light of modern scientific developments. Both assume independent grounding for religion and science. Both adopt the argument of religious experience to prove the empirical (scientific) character of religion. Despite all this both differ in their formulation of the argument of religious experience and the relationship of God to the world and certain other important points. A comparative study of the two philosophers will thus be profitable as certain problematic areas in Iqbalian position will also get foregrounded. Distinct strengths in Stace's presentation derive from the fact that he rejects ad hoc compromises on both sides, provides quite an independent grounding for both of them, is not ambiguous and takes a more consistent and comprehensive view of both the disciplines. If we accept essential insights of Stace Iqbalian case for compatibility gets proportionately weakened. The perennialist approach to the question of relation between religion and science though in certain respects quite divergent from Stace's however concurs with him in questioning Iqbalian approach.

Keywords: duality, Iqbal, mysticism, modern science, perennialist, Stace

1. Introduction

Mysticism and traditional Metaphysics that grounds traditional religious or wisdom traditions have been stupendous problems for modern scholarship. Theological Modernism has been especially embarrassed by the claims of religion and mysticism and has been ingeniously attempting to reconcile divergent epistemic and cognitive universes of modern science and traditional

* Corresponding author, e-mail: mashah75@yahoo.com; phone: +9596191292

religion. The champions of Traditions have been very critical of the grand narrative of modern science, its epistemology, its methodology and exclusivity. However religious modernists have been attempting to reread religion rather than question fundamentally scientific weltanschauung though some of them have been doing a bit of both these exercises. However amongst religious modernists mystically inclined thinkers have come closest to appreciate the radical nature of the claims of traditional religion against modern criticisms although in the process conceding some truth to its central claims and by taking recourse to symbolist interpretation of key theological statements make the process of reconciling between faith and reason easier. W.T. Stace, one of the most important theorizers of mysticism and ardent champions of it in the twentieth century, has articulated a defence of religion and mysticism against modern detractors especially those invoking modern science. His views and the framework he has developed understanding relationship between religion and science are highly provocative, illuminating, consistently and lucidly expressed and deserve far more attention than they have received. Understanding him properly is alone enough to blunt the cutting edge of much of polemical work on either side on the debate from fundamentalist religionists and atheist scientists or rationalist thinkers. His approach has important resemblances with another influential mystical philosopher from another tradition, Muhammad Iqbal, and in fact is much more consistent and helpful. In this paper we analyze certain important points for comparative study of two responses to the problem of modern science which are essentially framed by mysticism of respective thinkers and appraise both from a more traditional mystical standpoint of traditionalist perennialist school who are known for their sharp views regarding modernity and modern science. Taking up study of respective conceptions of role of reason, response to claims of naturalism and treatment of mystical experience in Iqbal and Stace, the paper shall proceed to make comments from perennialist perspective on mysticisms of selected thinkers to foreground similarities in approach and touch upon some of the limitations of their reconciliatory theses and suggest more creative ways of engaging with the huge problem that modernity in general and modern science in particular pose to traditional understanding of religion.

2. Iqbal and Stace: stating their basic position

Although neither Iqbal nor Stace would whole heartedly subscribe to this modern view of reality as they are essentially mystical thinkers, but their thought does reveal deep influence of modern rationalist-naturalist-evolutionist world view. Stace, unlike Iqbal, has hardly any grudge against the world view of modern science which is a vision of the world as completely governed by blind natural forces and laws, which are wholly indifferent to moral and spiritual ideals (although he would also defend the vision of the world as a moral and divine order positing an eternal order as opposed to the order of time also but at the cost of rejecting much of traditional metaphysical wisdom and

theology in the process) and he affirms in his classic work *Time and Eternity* his unflinching commitment to naturalism. He doesn't see outright contradiction between his notorious article titled 'Man against Darkness' in *The Atlantic Monthly* (Sep. 1944) and his later mystical philosophy. However, he did continue to refine his views and in fact did renounce evolve and in fact was ever evolving though he came to, largely Stace also offers some very profound insights on the vexed problem of relationship between religion and Science which could be profitably deployed against critics of religion. He says: "The question of the relation of God to the world is, after all, a question; that is, it employs words and concepts. Necessarily it speaks of the language of 'is' and 'is not'. But God neither is nor isn't. Therefore He is neither in relation nor out of relation with the world. All these words 'relation', 'is', 'is not' and indeed all words, belong to the language of the natural order. They are appropriate only to it, have meaning only for it. They are the vocabulary of the natural order. The language of distinction, of discrimination, of logic, of propositions, of concepts. Hence the answer to all theological problems is either silence or metaphors. And the true answer is silence, namely the silence which is God Himself The function of religious language is like that of aesthetic language, and is entirely unlike the function of scientific language. The failure to understand this is one cause of the conflict between religion and Science. Scientific language is descriptive, religious language evocative. Hence if religious language is understood as if it were scientific, it is taken as describing facts, and these alleged facts are seen, sooner or later, to be untrue." [1]

In order to understand this formulation we need to discuss some key concepts deployed by Stace and allude to Iqbalian views in lesser detail assuming the continuity of the present paper with the former paper on Iqbal and Compatibility Thesis published in EJST [2]. Iqbal's position though stated in detail in the above cited paper may be briefly restated here to allow us to proceed for a comparison.

Iqbal is amongst the most influential Muslim thinkers of the 20th century who realized the great significance of the problem of modern science and tried to appropriate it in his largely mystical understanding of religion or Islam. His response to modern science, especially its methodological and philosophical assumptions, is unique, unprecedented and provocative. His modernist rationalist demythologizing approach to traditional religion is conditioned by modern science and scientific *weltanschauung*. His belief in modern scientific project seems at times unshakable and greatly conditions his approach to religion. His is perhaps the only significant consistent modernist approach to and appropriation of Islam in the colonial period of the Indian subcontinent. The post-Renaissance scientific and Enlightenment project he takes so seriously and approaches so sympathetically that he legitimizes the whole project within Islam and interprets birth of Islam as the birth of inductive intellect. His whole philosophy and interpretation of Islam reveals influence of modernist scientific outlook. His belief in evolution with its methodological naturalism, his critique of classical spirit, his empiricist defence of religion, his demythologization of

the legend of the Fall, his epistemology, his privileging of becoming over being, time over space, deed over idea or contemplation, his understanding of prophetic and mystical experience, his elevation of scientist to the post of sagehood, his philosophy of ego, his rejection of traditional cosmology, his interpretation of man's vicegerancy, his belief in a growing Universe, his characterization of intuition as developed intellect, his interpretation of Muslim culture and civilization, his critique of 'Magian' supernaturalism, and 'worn out' or 'practically a dead metaphysics' of present day Islam – all these reveal the influence of modern science on him. His view of modernity is not unTillichean and has remarkable resemblance with some advocates of demythologization. Modern science he approached in a celebratory spirit with great confidence that its affinities with Islamic worldview would soon be discovered. However due to his commitment to mysticism and philosophy of ego he evolved his own creative synthesis of faith and reason or religion and science which although inspired by mysticism makes large concessions to naturalist modern science. Due to his philosophical and theological dualism that coloured his unorthodox approach to Sufism he is led to take certain positions that can hardly be sustained in the face of relentless attack from antitranscendentalist modern science. As the discussion on selected themes in his work below will show, his case is not as strong and consistent as that of Stace though both fail to do full justice to mysticism and its traditional understanding across cultures in articulating their responses to modern science.

3. Scope of conceptual intellect

For such a mystical philosopher as Stace and many religionists 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. We quote Stace at length to put the problem of relationship between religion and Science or intuition and intellect to put Iqbalian position in a context.

Stace states that the intellect (by which he means conceptual intellect) operates by means of concepts and this necessitates separation, discrimination and analysis. It can't transcend subject-object duality. It is finite. The finite mind can't comprehend the Infinite. Religious experience is unconceptualizable, ineffable.

"Intellectual understanding must have some material to work on. Some raw experience must be fed into the meshes of its machinery. Now this implies the separation of subject and object. The intellect is the subject and what is fed into it is its object. Thus it is of the very nature of intellect to invoke the subject – object opposition. But in the mystic experience this opposition is transcended. Therefore the intellect is incapable of understanding it. Therefore it is incomprehensible, ineffable ... It is not only the separation of subject from object which is transcended, but all separation. To say this is only to say that mystic experience is beyond the capacity of the intellect to handle since it is the

very nature of the intellect to operate by means of separation discrimination and analysis.” [1, p. 40].

Iqbal takes almost Stacean view of intellect in his poetry but in his lectures titled *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* he posits non-discursive aspect of reason and thus Stace’s and his views on intellect are not quite similar. 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. Iqbal’s 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. This ambiguity makes any comparison between his views and Stace’s as well as the perennialist’ difficult. But here we have generally used the term intellect as conventionally used in the modern discourse of Philosophy and Philosophy of religion rather than in the perennialist sense unless otherwise stated. Both Iqbal and Stace use the term intellect not in this traditionalist metaphysical sense so here we have also generally used the term as more or less equivalent to *ratio* or reason. That is sharply distinguishable from intuition.

Stace sees no warrant for any attempt to make sense of religion, to make it comprehensible, to make peace between religion and scientific intelligence, between the mystic and the logician [1, p. 42]. For him God is Mystery or He is nothing [1, p. 9]. No attempt of rationalist, logician or philosopher can make God comprehensible or remove the contradiction therein. There is no escape from antinomies of the intellect. The tradition of the negative divine, of which Iqbal hardly takes note, asserts that God is incapable of being apprehended by concepts. “Thus to the intellect, He is blank, void, nothing. You can’t attach any predicate to Him, even the predicate ‘existence’ because every predicate stands for a concept so that to affirm a predicate of Him is to pretend that He is apprehensible by the conceptual intellect. He is apprehensible in intuition only.” [1, p. 42] Only by that intuition wherein the distinction between subject and object is transcended. In Stace’s words: “But this at once implies that all propositions about God, including “God is” and “God isn’t” are false. For all propositions operate through concepts. And all propositions are the work of logical intellect. The same conclusion is reached as a result of the statement that the intuition of God is transcendent of the subject-object division. For ‘existence’ involves that division. It is that which is an object, or possible object, of thought. Finally, the same conclusions are implied by the infinity of God. For the infinite is ‘that than which there is no other’. But to exist means to be one of the many things which stand in relation to one another and which thus systematically related, constitutes the Universe.” [1, p. 62]

Stace points out that there is irresolvable contradiction in all rational philosophical approaches to the Ultimate. If we take the Ultimate as one and infinite and then try to rationally understand it at philosophical level (as Iqbal does) there arises a contradiction. Stace points out this contradiction as follows:

“The precise contradiction to which it leads, is that the world both is and isn’t identical with God, Brahman, Substance, the Absolute - or whatever the Ultimate is called. The contradiction is ultimate and irresolvable. It arises because of the following logical necessity. The Ultimate, being infinite, can have nothing outside it. Therefore the world can’t fall outside it. There can’t be any difference, any otherness, as between the Absolute and the world. Therefore the world is the Absolute. But the Ultimate, being one, is relationless without parts, without division, without manyness. The world, on the other hand is the arena of manyness, division and relation. Therefore it is not the Absolute, isn’t contained in it, falls outside it.” [1, p. 87]

Stace shows how this contradiction arises in Vedanta, Spinoza, Hegel and Bradley.

Iqbal makes very insightful remarks in his analysis of the relationship between religion and Science. Though it appears that Iqbal’s position is essentially Stace’s but he contradicts his own position. He unambiguously states that religion and Science deal with different domains or orders of reality. He rightly sees in intuition the indubitable foundation of religion. He sees faith not as a passive acceptance of one or more propositions (of logical conceptual intellect) but a vital appropriation of the whole Universe [3]. He criticizes the more rationalist camp of theologians Mu’tazillites for conceiving religion merely as a body of doctrines and ignoring it as a vital fact and taking no notice of non-conceptual modes of approaching Reality and reduced religion to a mere system of logical concepts [3, p. 4]. Iqbal’s distinction between *ishq* (love) and *‘aql* (reason) is in conformity with the ‘way of two compartments’ or Stace’s position. He writes about Ghazali’s breaching of intuition and thought that

“Ghazali, finding no hope in analytic thought, moved to mystic experience and there found an independent content for religion. In this way he succeeded in securing for religion the right to exist independently of Science and Metaphysics. But the revelation of the total Infinite in mystic experience convinced him of the finitude and inconclusiveness of thought and drove him to draw a line of cleavage between thought and intuition.” [3, p. 4]

Iqbal, however, tries to refute the charges of Stace and others that thought is essentially inconclusive and can’t capture the infinite. As he writes: “Both Kant and Ghazali failed to see that thought, in the very act of knowledge, passes beyond its own finitude. The finitudes of Nature are reciprocally exclusive. Not so the finitudes of thought which is, in its essential nature, incapable of limitation and can’t remain imprisoned in the narrow circuit of individuality. ... It is mistake to regard thought as inconclusive, for it too, in its own way, is a greeting of the finite with the infinite.” [3, p. 5]

He explicates the nature of thought as he understands it at another place in his *Reconstruction*. Criticizing the ontological and teleological arguments he states: “And the reason of their failure is that they look upon ‘thought’ as an agency working on things from withoutIt is however possible to take thought not as a principle which organizes and integrates its material from the outside but as a potency which is formative of the very being of its material.

Thus regarded thought or idea isn't alien to the original nature of things; it is their ultimate ground and constitutes the very essence of their being, infusing itself in them from the very beginning of their career and inspiring their onward march to a self determined end." [3, p. 25]

Although our present situation necessitates the dualism of thought and being as Iqbal also notes but he is convinced that thought and being are ultimately one. This, he hopes, could be shown if we carefully examine and interpret experience, following the clue furnished by the Quran, which regards experience within and without as symbolic of a reality described by it, as "the First and the Last, the visible and the invisible" [3, p. 25]. Thought has a deeper moment through which it synthesizes the elements of experience by employing categories suitable to the various levels which experience presents (these levels he identifies as the level of matter, the level of life and the level of mind and consciousness) [3, p. 26]. Thought is as much organic as life and in its true nature, is identical with life [3, p. 42]. Iqbal sometimes attributes non-discursive aspect or element to thought or intellect. This is a possible route to link it to intuition as has some parallel in traditional Muslim philosophical attempt to connect reason and intuition. If one concedes non-discursive aspect to it Stace's sharp distinction of thought and intuition and thus his analysis of relation between religion and Science cannot be consistently or fully deployed to critique Iqbalian position. However unfortunately there are many ambiguities in Iqbal's conception of reason and one is put in a difficult position while approaching him. This leads to certain contradictions as the terms are not always properly defined or consistently used in the same sense.

Our point is that there is no smooth travelling from the conceptual intellect to intuition. However Iqbal takes non-discursive view of intellect but it is not clear how this view will link reason and intuition and Iqbal unfortunately does not explain in detail.

4. Duality of natural and eternal orders

Stace too seems to contradict straightforward naturalist position implied in *The Atlantic Monthly* by granting that the order of eternity is real and makes its presence felt in the natural order though it he looks elusive regarding the implication of such a position. We will discuss in some detail Stace's position on two orders.

Stace writes: "The mystic lives in both orders, that of eternity and that of time. But this dual existence gives rise to confusion of the one order with the other. For the pure mystic consciousness there is no world at all. It is pure illusion. For the pure natural consciousness there is no God and no divine. They are entirely illusory.... Since there are two orders of being, there are therefore two solutions of every metaphysical problem, the naturalistic solution and the mystical solution. Each is in its own way right, absolute and final. They seem to contradict one another, but this contradiction occurs only as a result of the confusion between the two orders. If the divine order is, in the minds of men, as

it almost always is, brought down into the natural order and supposed to be a part of it, then a contradiction arises. God is thought to be one being among other beings, though He may be the cause of these other beings. His existence then becomes a superstition against which the scientist, the naturalist or the philosopher has to fight. This being can't be found anywhere among other beings either by telescopes or by rational arguments or inferences from other beings. This confusion, this taking of the eternal order for a part of the natural order [and the vice versa, which Iqbal especially advocates], is the source of all skepticism; and of the whole conflict between science or scientific naturalism, and religion. For as soon as the divine is thus put within the natural order it is seen that it can't be found there. That it doesn't exist there, and so its reality is denied. All efforts to compromise between science (or philosophy) and religion are puerile attempts to divide the world of existence, the natural order, (empirical order or the order of concrete experience) into areas, of which one is to be assigned to science, the other to religion. The true way to resolve the conflict is to realize the difference of the two orders. It is then possible to give to each the whole of what it claims and not merely some ungenerously clipped off portion." [1, p. 78]

It isn't that Stace denies omnipresence or immanence of God or the irruption of the supernatural into the world of space and time. His following remarks are much in the Iqbalian vein: "We can't hold that the divine intersects the natural only at that one point which is the consciousness of the saint. We must surely believe that the divine interpenetrates the natural everywhere. The divine order must intersect the temporal order at every moment of time and at every point of space. For this is demanded by the intuition of the 'omnipresence' of God. We can't at present see how this is possible." [1, p. 79]

Iqbal's panentheistic interpretation of the Quran is in line with his views on intuition and thought. He sees God as percept. God reveals and veils Himself through the world of nature. It is His symbol. Space and time are interpretation we put on God's creative activity. The Universe is deeply connected with the life of its Maker. God doesn't encounter the world from without or His other. He encompasses all existence. The phenomenon of change is His symbol as the Quran repeatedly affirms. The order of Eternity isn't something cut off from the order of time. Eternity can't be disjointed from concrete experience. God is always involved in a new activity. His immanence is much emphasized by Iqbal. He sees Eternity in time. The supernatural sustains the natural and is always 'interfering' with the order of nature or the order of time. The world of matter is the external manifestation of the Spirit. The world of matter and energy isn't in any way separate or incommensurable with the world of the Spirit. Nothing is profane. All is holy ground. At certain places Iqbal comes close to transcending dualism. He rejects or transcends dualisms – thought-intuition, body-soul, matter-spirit, God-world, Nature-Supernature and scientific-mystical dualisms. In his own version of Islamic tawhidic world view the order of nature and the order of supernature, the order of time and the order of eternity and thus various dimensions or domains of knowledge aren't sharply

distinguishable or unbridgeable. Iqbal rejects Stace's rigid binary oppositions. He has attempted to reconcile all dualities and contraries in the appreciative Self and its vision of eternal now. The appreciative self or ego appropriates the whole Universe and God, time and eternity. By appropriating/assimilating the attributes of God man becomes the only reality that there is. God does not appear to be the creator of the Universe in classical theistic sense of the term.

Iqbal has attempted to reconcile or synthesize all the domains of experience. God is revealed in all the realms or degrees of existence as he conceives everything as a form of ego and God as the Ego that grounds everything though is a separate individuality also, a move that makes him almost a dualist and lends him into many problems that Stace's more nuanced position (which is fundamentally monistic though respectful of claims of dualism at a certain plane). However, Iqbalian position isn't without its own difficulties as his underlying theology and metaphysics is not completely Unitarian. If he had really transcended dualist perspective he would have solved all 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 fully subscribe to although appropriates for his purposes. Mystical realization that Iqbal defends and Stace identifies as lower state of mystic experience 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. Iqbal's position on reductionism and cognitive significance of mystic experience calls for more discussion to foreground the contrast between him and Stace.

5. Analysis of Mystic Experience

It is only in the recent past that the argument from religious experience in modern empiricist format has been put forward. Iqbal, anxious to woo and placate modern man, abandons the traditional arguments of proving God and takes hold of the new one — the way of religious experience. The religious experience could be interpreted in trans-theistic or non-theistic terms as it has been in the history of religion. This is resisted by Iqbal but fully accepted by Stace. One could well problematize its cognitivity as the term is usually understood. The reader is referred to Aslan's excellent discussion of the issue from both Islamic as well as purely philosophical perspectives in his paper 'What is wrong with religious experience' published in ICMR [4].

Iqbal, like Stace, builds his case for religion or transcendence on the alleged basis of what he calls religious experience and, not quite unlike Stace, attacks scientist's reductionist approach to mystic experience and argument from origins. He says: "Nor is it possible to undo the spiritual value of the mystic state by specifying the organic conditions which appear to determine it.

Even if the postulate of modern Psychology as to the interrelation of body and mind is assumed to be true, it is illogical to discredit the value of mystic state as a revelation of truth. Psychologically speaking, all states, whether their content is religious or non religious, are organically determined.” [3, p. 18]

He further points out that the organic causation of our mental states has nothing to do with the criteria by which we judge them to be superior or inferior in point of value [3, p. 19]. The scientific form of Iqbal's faith in the Quran's inductionist spirit, its naturalism and thus rationalism supposedly dictates his interpretation of religious experience. We will now examine Iqbal's explication of general characteristics of mystic experience. Iqbal says: “The first point to note is the immediacy of this (mystic) experience. In this respect it doesn't differ from other levels of human experience which supply data for knowledge. All experience is immediate. As regions of normal experience are subject to interpretation of sense-data for our knowledge of the external world so the region of mystic experience is subject to interpretation for our knowledge of God. The immediacy of mystic experience simply means that we know God just as we know other objects.” [3, p. 14]

Iqbal makes another point that although thought is reduced to minimum in mystic experience, and has unanalyzable wholeness, this difference doesn't mean discontinuance with the normal consciousness, as William James erroneously thought. He thinks that it is the same reality which is operating on us in either case [3, p. 15]. He further makes the point that the mystic state is a moment of intimate association with a Unique Other Self that momentarily suppresses the private personality of the subject of experience [3, p. 15]. He raises the question of organic cause of religious experience and answers that “Our judgment as to the creations of genius isn't at all determined or even remotely affected by what our psychologists may say regarding its organic conditions.” [3, p. 18] He argues for the empirical criterion: “By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots”. However his overall position is still vulnerable to scientific critique, unlike that of Stace because of his empiricism and heterodox understanding and interpretation of mystic experience. His analysis of religious (mystic) experience reveals influence of Science and its rationalist and empiricist outlook. He is accordingly anxious to posit continuity between thought and intuition. There is a great difference between Stace and Iqbal in their treatment of mysticism. They especially differ in their respective views on relating mystic experience with other experiences or the order of time. The compatibility thesis is closely linked with the question of religious experience and its relationship to the other ways of obtaining knowledge. And Iqbal responds to it by making an analogy with our knowledge of other selves [3, p. 15]. All this assumes that the subject remains a subject despite momentary transcendence of subject-object duality. For Iqbal the immediacy of our experience in the mystic state isn't without a parallel. It has some sort of resemblance to our normal experience and probably belongs to the same category [3, p. 15-16].

Another characteristic of mystic experience is ineffability. Iqbal grants this but appropriates it in his own characteristic way so that Psychology and the categories of conceptual intellect could have a say in this connection. The dualism of subject-object relationship is not transcended. As he observes: "Mystic states are more like feeling than thought. The interpretation which the mystic or the Prophet puts on the contents of his religious consciousness can be conveyed to others in the form of propositions, but the content itself can't be so transmitted The incommunicability of mystic experience is due to the fact that it is essentially a matter of inarticulate feeling, untouched by discursive intellect. It must, however, be noted that mystic feeling, like all feeling, has a cognitive element that it lends itself to the form of idea. In fact, it is the nature of feeling to seek expression in thought. It would seem that the two-feeling and idea-are the non-temporal and temporal aspects of the same unit of inner experience." [3, p. 18]

Iqbal declares that religion starts with feeling, although it also strives after Metaphysics, and he says in this context: "The mystic's condemnation of intellect as an organ of knowledge doesn't really find any justification in the history of religion" [3, p. 18]. Iqbal makes another key point in his interpretation of mystic experience, with which mystical philosophers like Stace will not agree. He does not accept the key assertion of Stace that in the divine moment there isn't complete break with serial time. "The mystic state in respect of its uniqueness remains in some way related to common experience." [3, p. 18] We may now make certain comments on his characterization or interpretation of mystic experience.

Iqbal claims that in respect of immediacy of experience mystic experience can't claim any special status. It doesn't differ from the other levels of experience which supply data for knowledge. A mystic knows God just as we know other objects. All this presupposes subject-object duality. There can be hardly any comparison between our experience and knowledge of other objects, other selves and even our selves and our 'experience' and 'knowledge' of God. There is no experiencer or experienced in the usual sense of the terms in mystic experience. There is no subject to experience any object called God. God is not an object of any experience. We can't have any knowledge of Godhead which is unknowable. God can't be caught in the net of time or the net of experience. We can't experience God as nothing, as Beyond-Being. Godhead isn't personality. He isn't the Ego in the sense Iqbal understands the term. Indeed Iqbal hardly acknowledges the vital distinction between Being and Beyond-Being, God and Godhead. His Absolute is God the Absolute Ego, the creator God. It isn't the impersonal 'It', or Nameless Nothing or the Unconditioned Suchness. He absolutizes his own concept of personal God, conceived as Ego (the term ego could be applied only to personal God, not to the Absolute). Nontheistic, nondual and nature mysticisms could hardly be appropriated from Iqbal's perspective. Indeed the tradition of negative divine, as Stace defines and explicates the term, hardly figures in Iqbal's explication of the mystic experience. Iqbal could well be charged with marginalization of the major part

of mystic tradition of the world. His proposed object is to discuss mystic experience in its most general terms but he ignores Buddhist, Zen and Hindu mysticism and what in general is called Nature mysticism. He foregrounds theistic interpretation of mysticism and that too is his own brand of theistic mysticism. That can't even be called Muslim mysticism because he rejects 'Unity of Being' or *Wahdatul Wujud* as traditionally explicated by the vast majority of Muslim mystics. He has been staunchly against making mysticism a philosophy but he in his lectures has himself philosophized mysticism. He doesn't remain contented with mystic experience as silence, as revelation of God, as ineffable, as something with which the intellect has nothing to do. He makes it a cognitive (philosophical) discourse—knowledge yielding discourse. He applies the philosophical test to mystic experience. He thinks that science of Psychology could be relevant in understanding mysticism. Postmetaphysical spiritual writers such as Wilber's, Osho's and Krishnamurti's writings on mysticism, for instance, show Iqbal's construction of the same in sharp contrast. Trans-theistic and even 'atheistic' interpretation of mysticism (e.g., that of Jainism) isn't even once referred to by Iqbal. Mystics and most mystical philosophers have emphasized discontinuance of mystic state with ordinary or normal consciousness. William James represents the orthodox opinion of both mystics and mystical philosophers in this connection and Iqbal's critique of him is clearly untraditional. Thought isn't just reduced to minimum but totally transcended in mystic experience. All thought constructions, logic and space and time must cease for the unknown, the God to be revealed. God is known only when 'I' disappears, when one passes through the stage of *fana*, when the experiencing subject is gone and the consciousness of duality completely ceases. One must cease to be to 'know' God.

Gnosis in traditional Sufism lies in knowing that God can't be known. The Sufis characterize *marifa* (gnosis) as *hairat* or state of wonder or being lost. Our knowledge of God, if we go by the reports of mystics, isn't comparable to our knowledge of other objects. Indeed God can in no way be construed as an object. There is no knower to know God in mystic experience. Distinction of knower and known, subject and object disappear. God is known only through God; only God's eye can perceive God as Eckhart and Abu Yazid have put it in their own ways. Many objections to concept of religious experience and its claim to know God or prove existence of God as expounded by Dewey, Freud, C.B. Martin, J.L. Mackie, Flew, and others lose their cutting edge if we don't reduce the classic account of mystic experience to modern concept of religious experience. It is the 'about' word in the assertion that 'mystic knows about God' that is most problematic. Construing God as an object of perception or apprehension, as a self with whom personal relationship could be established, absolutizing the determination of or primary hypostasis of Absolute as Being or personal God as Absolute (i.e., not distinguishing between God and Godhead), insisting on the autonomy or separateness of knowing subject, taking knowing subject as somehow outside God's infinitude, and all other related notions that take dualism for granted are basically problematic and vulnerable to criticism,

and in this connection the critics of theism and concept of religious experience are not wide off the mark. Indeed one could well argue that mystic experience is perhaps not an experience at all. This point is best made by such (post)modern Indian mystics as Krishnamurti and Osho. Neither is it a vision of something. God isn't a thing and there can be no vision of one who is best described by *neti neti*, Beyond Being, Non-Being or Nothing. He is ever unreachable for all practical purposes. He is the 'hopeless quest' in Whitehead's phrase. He is unknowable. His immanence doesn't make Him any more knowable. Existence remains mysterious and the tradition of negative divine is an expression of this mystery, this unknowability of existence as Stace has forcefully argued in his *Time and Eternity*. Unknowability of self connotes the unknowability of God. We now quote some authorities on mysticism and mystical philosophy to explicate the traditional conception of mystical experience and contextualize modern concept of religious experience to which Iqbal more or less subscribes.

God in the traditional Metaphysics and Sufism isn't this or that; He is transcendent to all categories, to existence. He is beyond existence and non-existence. God as non-Being, as Nothing, as emptiness of emptiness, is how the tradition of negative divine describes Him. This concept is to be found alongside the concept of positive divine in all religion, including Islam (though better formulated and emphasized in their respective mystical traditions) means God can't be conceived as an object of knowledge. We can't know God as we know other things. He transcends the order of time or the order of existence, the order of finite. If *Nirvana* is translatable in terms of God or Heaven of Islam as the perennialists convincingly argue and it isn't to be identifiable with anything or whatsoever and it could well be said that God isn't an object, an ego, an independent Other Self, something that could be encountered, something with which I-thou relationship could be established, something which could be experienced as long as experiencer, the separate subject or self or ego is there. The final goal of yoga or of Sankhya, of Vedanta and Buddhism and of Islam always defies description. *Nirvana* or Heaven or vision of God is a name and a thought, but nothing can be predicated of it. It is what no eye has seen, and what has not entered into the mind of man.

For Iqbal mystic experience has an ideational content. Stace denies this and this allows him to bypass much of Science inspired critique of religion. Mystic experience gives no new empirical facts and God is not Unique other self but pure ego or Universal Self. Iqbal stops short of introvertive mystical experience and doesn't see the reality or significance of the stage of pure consciousness. His anxiety is, as is of theistic mystics generally, to guard Divine transcendence and deny identity of self and God. Stace clears the basic problem in few words which Iqbal failed to resolve for himself and this severely limited his scope for comprehensive treatment of mystic experience in nontheistic religions. "The paradox is that the 'I' ceases to be 'I' and yet continues to be 'I'. 'I' find that the dissolution of 'I', its disappearance, is not the extinction of 'I' but on the contrary is the 'I's' only true life." [5] The fear of loss of personality is quite unfounded. The loss of personality (if so it were) is "the only true life"

as Ternysson once remarked [5, p.119]. With theists we can maintain the difference between God and the finite self but reject their rejection of their identity. The paradox of identity in difference has to be underlined. It implies that future life as a loss of separate individuality while at the same time the 'I' is not annihilated but enjoys in ultimate peace [5, p. 316]. Now seen in this light when we approach Iqbal's account clearly shows that he doesn't fully realize the implications of transcendence of subject-object duality in mystic experience. For him subject doesn't cease to be a subject and God doesn't cease to be an object, the unique other Self. Man (subject) experiences the other Self (God). The experiencer and the experienced are clearly distinguishable. It is only momentarily that the private personality of the subject of experience is suppressed. Otherwise he continues to be an ego and God the Absolute Ego. It is an encounter of ego and Ego, man and God. It isn't the realization of the divinity of the Self; the realization that only the Self exists. There can hardly be any analogy between our experience of other selves and our experience of God. There is no need of interpreting mystic experience in terms of propositions. A mystic may well choose to be silent, to be in a state of choiceless awareness. The Buddha refused to compromise on this part. (It by no means follows that he was an atheist or an agnostic. He fully realized the demands and logical implications of ineffability of encounter 'with' God.) Iqbal is appropriating the order of the divine or the eternal in terms of the order of time and the order of natural. Iqbal's is primarily a rationalistic naturalistic appropriation of the supernatural and the supralogical. But in fact, the mystical state, the state of Nirvana, the state of heaven has hardly any resemblance to our normal experience as Stace and many other authorities on mysticism convincingly assert.

From an Eastern which is also traditional Sufistic perspective to talk in terms of feeling and idea while discussing mystical state is to apply the categories of the natural order to the realm where they don't apply. One can't understand mystic experience either as feeling or as thought. It isn't cognitive in the usual sense of the term cognition. It isn't knowledge yielding experience. It pertains to a state where the realm of knowledge is transcended. All knowledge presupposes the duality of subject and object. All this is transcended in the divine moment or intuition. The mystic rightly condemns the organ of reason as God the ground of Being, Bliss Eternal, isn't revealed to it. God can't be known through the intellect. He is *Al-Gayyib*, of the order of Unseen. Indeed He isn't knowable at all. He can't be an object of knowledge or experience. Only God's unknowability can be known. The inductive intellect can't envision God (and even His behaviour) on *a priori* grounds. That is why Islam says that God can't be seen in this world or the world of space-time. Mystics have dispensed with the idea and have been largely contented with the 'feeling'. God can't be felt as he can't be thought. Iqbal is unable to escape the influence of metaphysics of presence that theistic world views have overemphasized to the exclusion of what may be called the metaphysics of absence. Islam's emphasis on God's transcendence hasn't been generally perceived as connected with the tradition of

negative divine or mystical vision of God's total otherness and unknowability. It is indeed difficult to deconstruct all constructions or idolatries of thought.

6. More comments from traditionalist viewpoint

There remain problems in Iqbalian treatment of the complex problem of conflict between religion and Science. Our analysis has shown that it can't be finally and satisfactorily resolved on Iqbalian premises. Naturalism and rationalism of modern science can't be countered by appropriating the Quran in naturalist and rationalist terms. One must adopt some sort of symbolist view of religious language to escape modern scientific criticism of it. Stace secures for religion independent basis and is, in principle, able to answer all Science inspired critique of it. Stace's approach has the merit of consistency and one needn't reconstruct Theology in every age as human knowledge progresses. Perennialists from a different standpoint reach similar conclusions regarding the independence of Metaphysics from individual sciences though they disagree with Stace's naturalism and too unbridgeable a gulf between the order of nature and the order of supernature. The ideologues of modern science would have no hesitation in accepting Stace's version. The conflict between religion and Science is resolved for good and could be accepted by the official church of science. One needn't worry about Darwin and Freud. Religion remains unchallengeable. It becomes a language game incommensurable with other discourses such as modern science. Iqbal is very anxious to appropriate and make room for or make peace with certain discoveries of modern science or advances in human knowledge. Modern science can neither contradict nor conform to the discoveries of intuition. One could well accommodate modern spirit with all its adventures in scepticism in such a view of religion. The critic of religion is silenced. Although Iqbal too has his ingenious ways to meet the challenge of Science and secure for religion an independent basis in a manner not very much unlike Stace, he has contradicted his position and also doesn't subscribe to many important conclusions of Stace. He is half convert to modern scientific project and associated naturalism and he is also not willing to go very far in the way of mysticism either, unlike Stace. It is Iqbal's attempt to find a half way house between the traditionalist mystical and the modernist scientific viewpoints, his anxiety to unify essentially parallel cognitive discourses, to see Science from the mystical point of view or vice versa, without being able to view either of them from within, and to attempt to reconcile discourses which we better keep as separate or in a way incommensurable that lead to certain contradictions in Iqbalian approach. Though it is hard to disagree with Iqbal's fundamental insights but he doesn't quite consistently work out their implications.

Stace's limitations are evident in his treatment of the relationship between the two orders. He isn't able to satisfactorily link God's transcendence (in the eternal order) with His immanence in the natural order. It is the perennialist traditionalist perspective alone that does justice to both the parts of

the picture. It is the doctrine of hierarchy of existence of which Stace has but only a vague intuition and doesn't realize the vital significance of it in building a comprehensive and consistent picture of the Universe and its relationship with God although he approaches it hazily, vaguely, obliquely here and there in his works. Iqbal too is in a better position than Stace to reconcile our intuitions of omnipresence and transcendence of God, although his panentheism seems to blur his vision to certain extent. God's transcendence doesn't get foregrounded so clearly in his panentheistic world view. Needless to say that Muslim scholasticism has also erred in going to the opposite extreme that denies autonomy of natural order that the modern science demands. Its *ad hoc* scheme in which mysterious capricious divine will is privileged to the exclusion of the other orders of existence or attributes of God isn't satisfactory either for the traditionalist religious consciousness or the modern spirit. Iqbal's insightful critique of As'harite theology and its atomism is geared towards finding a solution to the problem of autonomy of nature as demanded by modern science without forgetting its divine origin and sustenance from without.

Stace emphasizes the utter otherness of the divine and the eternal vis-à-vis the natural and the spatio-temporal order. Thus he well guards the transcendence of God but is unable to see the natural as the symbol of the eternal. The face of the Beloved is veiled rather than half revealed by positing sharp unbridgeable division between the eternal and the temporal orders. According to certain mystical traditions such as Zen and what is called as nature-mysticism, it is fully revealed. The symbolist view of nature that the perennialists such as Nasr propound is not only more faithful to the traditional religious (Quranic) approach, but it also shows us the way out of the impasse in which modern science finds itself or consistently naturalist world view faces. Modern science is riddled with certain problems that it can't solve if it is consistent to its thorough going naturalism. Such questions as the nature of matter, the nature of life, differentiation and the origin of species, baffle scientists and will continue to elude answer because their answers lie on the levels of reality that Science can't access, as Huston Smith rightly notes [6]. This is because of modern science's veto against supernaturalism and consequent ignorance of degrees of reality, to which the metaphysical scheme of Sufism alludes to in its conception of five Divine Presences. Frithjof Schuon makes similar point and as the champion of perennialist philosophy he hardly sees any possibility of marriage between modern science and traditional religion. I quote Schuon in this connection: "Scientistic philosophy is unaware, not only of the 'Divine Presences', but also of their rhythms or 'life'; it is ignorant not only of the degrees of reality and the fact of our imprisonment in the sensory world, but also of the cycles, the universal *solvo et coagula*; that is to say it knows nothing either of the 'gushing forth' of our world from an invisible and effulgent Reality, or of its reabsorption into the 'dark' light of this same Reality. All the Real is in the Invisible; it is this above all that must be felt or understood before one can speak of knowledge and effectiveness. But this

will not be understood, and the human world will continue inexorably on its course.” [7]

In view of the fact that modern science is ignorant of the degrees of reality, it is consequently null and inoperative as regards everything that can be explained only by them, whether it be a case of magic or of spirituality or indeed of any belief or practice of any people; it is in particular incapable of accounting for human or other phenomena of the historic or prehistoric past, the nature of which and the key to which are totally unknown to it as a matter of principle. There is scarcely a more desperately vain or naïve illusion – far more naïve than is Aristotelian astronomy! – than to believe that modern science, in its vertiginous course towards the ‘infinitely small’ and the ‘infinitely great’ will end up by rejoining religious and metaphysical truths and doctrines [7, p. 157].

If we grant this scathing denunciation of modern science and the latter’s fundamental limitations or prejudices it becomes clear that the way Stace approaches the problem and to which Iqbal would sometimes subscribe is thus problematic on both the traditionalist Islamic and on the purely scientific grounds. It manages to create peace between Science and religion at the great cost of compromising God’s sovereignty and His omnipotence and creating a sort of unacceptable dualism between the world of nature and that of supernature. Both Iqbal and Stace are compelled to seek the help or light from panpsychicist organicist pantheistic process philosophy of Whitehead and others to explain the origin of life and consciousness. This, although a rejection of pure naturalism and thus represents an advance from the perennialist viewpoint, is still incapable of providing the right answer. This is evident from the following remarks of Huston Smith and Daral Byrant on Process theology and modernism respectively. Smith says that although the Process theology rightly adheres to ontology as well as to hierarchy by positioning God almost infinitely above other occasions in power and worth it insists that “the line between God and the world be drawn within nature so that we can be naturalistic theists. To posit a reality that is categorically unlike nature would reopen the door to miracles, which modernity [the spirit of which much affects Iqbal and Stace] willn’t countenance. So God mustn’t be an exception to the metaphysical categories that describe the empirical world. God is their chief exemplification.” [6]

Darrol Byrant writes about modern scientific view of reality: “The problem with the modern study of religion is that it unfolds with a modern view of reality that is, in principle, hostile to the truth known in religion. For in the modern view, reality is wholly explicable from within, there is no Beyond that must be appealed to understand what is. Nor is there any Beyond that is mediated in the religious life of humankind. How then, can we understand religion when the implicit ontology or view of things that we bring to the study of religion rules out a priori the ontologies of the religious tradition within which religion unfolds?” [6]

Stace seems to deny cognitivity of mystic experience in the sense Iqbal would uphold it. The knowledge yielded by mystic experience has nothing to do with the order of time and this world of facts and things. It is implicit surrender of grand metaphysical claims of traditional religions. But against this Stacean view the traditionalist view is that the order of time, of things and the world is permeated through and through (and understandable or truly knowable only in relation to that) by the order of eternity or the supernatural. Ash'arite doctrine that God creates this world anew all the time and their denial of causality could be seen as appropriation of this point. It is only through God's light that we could perceive anything at all. God is the light of the world. Nothing exists save God. There is no such thing as the autonomous natural world. Naturalism does not miss the half of truth as Stace claims but the whole truth if it insists on the autonomy of nature. However, it is the most mature and profound religious genius that answers all questions on God's activity in the world and His very existence by silence. But the dangers of overemphasis on negative divine should be recognized. We must complement it with the tradition of positive divine. We can't reduce the whole edifice of religion to symbols or metaphors as Stace does, although we should guard against literalist spirit that has affected Theology throughout the history. There is a science that goes from First Principle to phenomena and is not condemned to mere silence as Stace would suggest. What is here intended is to point out that Iqbal overemphasizes positive divine and does not take enough care to distinguish the literal from the symbolic and the psychological from the metaphysical dimensions of religion. He comes close to the existential rather than the ontological reading of the Quran. Positivist elements in his thought are easily discernible. His praise for Zia Gokalp and the Kantian influence on him (his 6th and 7th lectures show unmistakable positivist spirit) are in positivist vein. Iqbal recognizes revelation's cognitive claims and attempts to reconcile them with the discoveries of modern science e.g., he defends certain key elements in the story of genesis literally and defends the Quranic claim that our Universe is a growing universe on scientific grounds. He invokes modern Physics to explain certain Quranic verses. This makes him obliged to defend certain other knowledge claims of the Quran. Iqbal makes his own position vulnerable by conceding this without properly qualifying nature of all knowledge claims in the Quran. Iqbal and not Stace will have to face the following critique by Freud, Dawkins and others of knowledge claims of religion. Here is a quote from Dawkins: "It is completely unrealistic to claim as Gould and many others do, that religion keeps itself away from science's turf, restricting itself to morals and values Religions make existence claims and this means scientific claims." [8] Stace would not accept Paton's formulation of the problem of possible conflict of religion and Science that was discussed in detail in the previous paper on Iqbal. However, Iqbal does accept it and onus lies on him to suggest an answer.

7. Disclaimer in Iqbal's poetry

To complicate our analysis further Iqbal himself deconstructs his constructions of thought in his mystical poetry. There he comes much closer to Stace. There he is least worried about the problem of compatibility. Modernist rationalist spirit of *Reconstruction* is simply not there. He embarks on war (as stated in his book *Zarbi-Kaleem*) against the idolatries of modern man that include the idols of reason and science. He rejects the scientific metanarrative on religious grounds. Space and time are *butani-wahm-o-guman* (imaginary idols). Reason's wings are clipped. It can't attain certitude or vision or know the whole. It can't see God's visage. He denounces logic chopping and ratiocination in no uncertain terms. He hardly appears as a modernist. He asserts that here is a break, a complete break with serial time in mystic experience. The mystic conquers space and time. He becomes the lord of the world. There is no day or night in his world. Serial time does appear as an illusion to the mystic. God's attributes could be internalized or appropriated by a mystic only when time, for all practical purposes, ceases to exist. Iqbal, under the influence of Bergson, almost divinizes time. It is the sign of God for him, as is the phenomenon of change. He doesn't take God's attributes of perfection and eternity in the traditional sense. Influence of Process philosophy and evolutionary thought is quite evident in him. The mystic does away with time, knowledge, man, God (understood theologically) and the world. He assimilates God or more precisely is assimilated by God. He is the pole of existence. He smells unity and thus transcends all divisions and dualities.

His grand project of linking religion and Science, intuition and intellect, mystic and scientist, time and eternity, nature and supernature, as formulated in his lectures gets problematized from within, by his poetry. He comes close to contradicting his position at many places in his *Reconstruction* also. We hardly need to point out limitations of his approach as he himself is his own critic in his poetry. He betrays his loyalty to inductionist rationalist project of modern science, its evolutionism — in short its *weltanschauung* throughout his poetry. Traditionalist religious or mystical spirit of him crops up. He takes almost all the great architects of modern science and scientific *weltanschauung* to task. We could well say that he emerges more as a mystical genius rather than a modernist Muslim ideologue of modern science. It sometimes appears that Iqbal is unable to translate his essentially mystical vision in his prose of *Reconstruction*. Modern Western philosophical and scientific notions that coloured his views in *Reconstruction* prove a distorting lens through which to project one's essential religious insights. It appears that the perennialist framework could have allowed him to express his critique of modernism and modern science and his metaphysic of love in a better way. It would have provided the vocabulary, or terminology as well as the necessary objectivity and distance for critical appraisal of modern philosophy and science and everything that constitutes modern episteme.

References

- [1] W.T. Stace, *Time and Eternity: An Essay Concerning Philosophy of Religion*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1952, 86.
- [2] M.M. Shah, M.A. Shah, B.A. Dar and S. Iqbal, *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.*, **7(3)** (2011) 29.
- [3] M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction, of Religious Thought in Islam*, Mohammad Saeed Sheikh (ed.), Adam Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1997, 87.
- [4] A. Aslan, *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, **14(3)** (2003) 299.
- [5] W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, Macmillan & Co, London, 1961, 120.
- [6] H. Smith, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, **58(4)** (1990) 653.
- [7] F. Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*, translated in English by P.N. Townsend, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1969, 158.
- [8] L. Witham, *By Design: Science of God*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, 2004, 157.