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Allama Iqbal And James Ward's Conception Of God: A Comparative Review

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Abstract:

Iqbal started to value Mc Taggart's view on the idea of personal immortality. He also noticed the resemblance between James Ward's belief in theistic pluralism and Rumi's metaphysical ideas. Shortly after, Iqbal chose Rumi as his spiritual mentor and embraced the concept of theistic pluralism. Rumi became his lifelong mentor, as he had foreseen key concepts from Nietzsche and Bergson. Iqbal realized that Rumi had a connection with James Ward on one end and with Nietzsche and Bergson on the other. Rumi is a proponent of evolution, liberation, the eternal nature of the self, and the potential for the destruction of the old to make way for the new, similar to Nietzsche. God is seen as an entirely free creative force. He is a limitless power and a force of creation. Iqbal understood that things can be derived from this force, yet the force itself cannot be derived from stationary entities. The force is the origin, while stationary entities are merely the result, becoming stagnant as they are derived from the force through limited thought and static concepts.

Keywords: Mc Taggart's view, metaphysical ideas, Ward's belief, Allama Iqbal, Nietzsche, creative force, stationary entities, existence.

This article aims to explore the understanding of God through the perspectives of Iqbal and James Ward. M.M. Sharif, in his piece "Iqbal's Conception of God" (collected papers, v.1), notes, "Iqbal is both a philosopher and a poet, making it challenging to classify him as either a poet-philosopher or a philosopher-poet. His collection of writings leans more towards poetry, with a greater number of poetical pieces compared to his philosophical ones. Although a significant portion of his poetry is highly refined, his philosophical writings, which include only two, differ in nature. One is historical in nature, while the other is more academic in its approach. Despite this, both works demonstrate a cohesive thought process and a consistent theme." In my opinion, I believe Iqbal's journey begins as a poet, which is evident from his extensive poetic output. His philosophical endeavors are divided into two categories: historical and academic. Yet, both areas of his work show a cohesive theme and thought process. His poetry and philosophy are both regarded as exceptional, suggesting that his poetry might have influenced his philosophical views, and vice versa. Here the scope of my research is confined to his philosophy, particularly his conception of God. Iqbal's philosophy and his idea of God have passed through three periods of development and it is very difficult to draw a clear line between these periods. However, each period bears a few features by which it is distinguishable from the others.

The initial phase, spanning from 1901 to 1908, is a time when Iqbal views God as the embodiment of Eternal Beauty. This concept of Eternal Beauty encompasses the essence of all existence, manifesting in the dynamic nature of everything. It is the driving force behind the physical world, the catalyst for growth in flora, the instinctual nature of animals, and the volition of humanity. Eternal Beauty is the foundational, intrinsic, and perfect principle behind all entities. God is omnipresent and encompassing, akin to the vastness of the ocean, while humanity is merely a single droplet within it. He is comparable to the sun, and humanity is analogous to a candle. The existence we experience on Earth is fleeting, similar to a bubble or a spark. This notion is deeply rooted in Platonic philosophy, as understood by Plotinus, and embraced by the early Muslim Scholastics, Pantheism in its entirety, and pantheistic mystics such as Iqbal.

The subsequent phase of Iqbal's psychological growth spans from 1908 to 1920. In this phase, he shifts his perspective on the difference between the manifestation of beauty in objects versus the love for beauty itself. Initially, he viewed beauty as timeless and as the ultimate and direct reason behind all love, desire, and action. However, by the second phase, there's a significant

shift in his understanding. He begins to develop a stronger belief in the everlasting nature of love, desire, and the pursuit or action.

Iqbal studied under Mc Taggart and James Ward at Cambridge from 1905 to 1908. Meanwhile, he also delved deep into studies of Rumi in connection with his Ph.D thesis in the Cambridge University. Influence of Mc Taggart and James Ward on Iqbal did not continue after his return from England. He was a pantheistic mystic while there. Mc Taggart wrote a letter to Iqbal on the publication of Nicholson's English translation of his *Asrar-e-Khudi*. "Have you not changed your position very much?" inquires Mc Taggart, and adds: "surely, in the days when we used to talk philosophy together, you were more a pantheist and mystic"¹. Iqbal himself quoted this remark in his article, which proved that he regarded it as true. In 1908, Iqbal began to appreciate Mc Taggart's conception of personal immortality. He also began to see the similarity between the theistic pluralism of James Ward and the metaphysical thought of Rumi². A little afterwards, Iqbal adopted Rumi as his spiritual leader and he became a theistic pluralist. Rumi was his life long guide because he had anticipated some fundamental ideas of Nietzsche and Bergson. Iqbal came to know that Rumi had affinity with James Ward on one side and with Nietzsche and Bergson on the other. Rumi believes in evolution, freedom, eternity of the self and possibilities in the destruction of the old for the construction of the new like Nietzsche. And he believes in movement as the essence of reality, and in intuition as the source of knowledge like Bergson. Iqbal was impressed very much by Bergson's *elan vital* in which the sentiment of self-regard was taken as the core of human personality. All these ideas are a part of Iqbal's philosophy in the second period.

یہ آفتاب کیا، یہ سپہر بریں ہے کیا!
 سجا نہیں تلسل شام و سحر کو میں
 اپنے وطن میں ہوں کہ غریب الدیار ہوں
 ڈرتا ہوں دیکھ دیکھ کے اس دشت و در کو میں
 کھلتا نہیں مرے ستر زندگی کا راز
 لاؤں کہاں سے بندہ صاحب نظر کو میں

During this period, Iqbal shifted his perspective from the fluidity and everlasting nature of the will to doubting the permanence and eternalism of beauty. This shift propelled him away from the principles of Platonism and towards a pantheistic view of the divine. In his poetry collections, *Bang-e-Dara* and *Bekhudi*, Iqbal developed innovative philosophical ideas. His new philosophy conceptualizes the individual as the active epicenter of desires, quests, endeavors, decisions, strength, and deeds. This personhood transcends temporal existence, instead viewing time as a dynamic aspect of one's being. For Iqbal, the perception of the individual as the essence of life is what defines existence. The universe, rich with sensory experiences such as time, space, the realm of emotions, thoughts, and ideals, is seen as the outcome of one's essence. His views align with those of philosophers like James Ward and Fichte, who argue that the self 'creates' its own transcendent attributes for self-improvement. Iqbal rejects the notion that beauty is synonymous with divine perfection, holding instead that beauty is a reflection of the self's capacity to create aesthetic and ethical values. His focus shifted to praising divine oneness rather than divine beauty. The embrace of oneness was crucial for Iqbal's pragmatic approach, as it fostered a sense of collective purpose and resilience in both individuals and societies, amplified strength, fostered ambitions, hopes, and dreams, and eliminated any fear directed towards anything external to the divine.

In the spiritual realm, God is mirrored in the limited aspect of the individual but not in the tangible reality we perceive. Our journey towards God must start from within ourselves. The quest for the divine is dependent on the exploration of one's own identity. It is unfruitful to request God's favor through pleading or dependence, as it reveals a lack of strength and reliance. To approach God in a respectful manner, we must align our approach with our own self-respect. Individuals can connect with God through their personal determination. They can grasp God's presence as a hunter would with his prey. God expresses a desire to be united with humanity, as equally so, humanity seeks His presence. There's a limit to how much one can encompass Him without losing oneself entirely. However, one's connection to God should involve internalizing His qualities. As individuals internalize these attributes, their ego matures, elevating their spiritual status to the level of exemplary divinity. This realization of divinity was a central understanding Iqbal developed during this period of his intellectual evolution.

From 1920 to his death, is the third period of Iqbal's mental development and it is regarded the period of his mental development and maturity. In other words, it is a time of change in his philosophical thoughts although the idea of Reality as self is still prominent. My research is confined to Iqbal's conception of God, therefore, all other aspects of his philosophical system are ignored at present and an account of his views about God is given.

جس بندۂ حق میں کی خودی ہو گئی بیدار
 ششیر کی مانند ہے بڑندہ و بڑاق
 اس کی نگہ شوخ پہ ہوتی ہے نمودار
 ہر ذرے میں پوشیدہ ہے جو قوت اشراق

According to Iqbal, "God is, Reality as a whole" and it is essentially spiritual-spiritual in sense of being an individual and ego"¹. He is regarded to be an ego, the absolute Ego. He is absolute because He is all-inclusive and there is nothing outside Him. The Absolute Ego is not static like the universe as conceived by Aristotle but is a creative spirit, a dynamic will or a living energy. There is nothing besides Him to put a limit to Him. He is absolutely free and infinite but not infinite in the spatial sense because spatial infinities are not absolute. His infinity is intensive, not extensive, and consists in the infinite inner possibilities of His creative activity. His being a free living energy with infinite creative possibilities means that He is omnipotent. Iqbal asks, "Does not individuality imply finitude? If God is an ego and as such an individual, how can we conceive Him as infinity? The answer to this question is that God cannot be conceived as infinite in the sense of spatial infinity. In matters of spiritual valuation mere immensity counts for nothing. Moreover, as we have seen before, temporal and spatial infinities are not absolute."¹ Discussing the ultimate Ego with reference to space and time Iqbal continues:

"And this is only another way of saying that space and time are interpretations which thought puts upon the creative activity of the ultimate Ego. Space and time are possibilities of the Ego, only partially realized in the shape of our mathematical space and time. Beyond him and apart from His creative activity, there is neither time nor space to close Him off in reference to other egos. The ultimate Ego is, therefore, neither infinite in the sense of spatial infinity nor finite in the sense of the space-bound human ego whose body closes him off in reference to other egos. The infinity of the ultimate Ego consists in infinite inner possibilities of his creative activity of which the Universe, as known to us, is only a partial expression. In one word God's infinity is intensive, not extensive. It involves an infinite series, but is not that series."²

God is an absolutely free creative spirit. He is an omnipotent energy and a creative movement. According to Iqbal things can be derived from movement but movement cannot be derived from immobile things. Movement is original and static things are derivative and they become static because they are derived from the movement by finite thought working with static concepts. Modern Physics supports this concept, which reduces all physical things to mere centres of energy. Is the Ultimate Ego constantly changing if He is an all inclusive movement? No, because, the change cannot be predicated of Him in the sense in which it is predicated of us, as a serial change. But in another sense Yes, because, change is an attribute of His in another way.

The serial change, in our view, implies want limitation or imperfection. Whereas the Absolute Ego is the whole of Reality. He is not surrounded by an alien universe. So, change as a movement from one imperfect form to a perfect form or vice versa, is inapplicable to Him. Therefore, the conception of serial time does not apply to Him. He is a continuous creation, so changes only in the sense in which a continuous creation or continuous flow of energy can be said to change but change as continuous creation does not imply imperfection. Iqbal does not conceive perfection as a final stage of completion. Such a stage must be characterized by inanity. To think of Him as perfect in this sense is to make Him, as utterly inactive, motiveless, stagnant neutrality and an absolute nothing. Iqbal means by a perfect individuality, like Bergson, an organic whole. God is perfect in this sense and His perfection implies the infinite scope of His creative vision. The Absolute Ego follows no process of reproduction in Him, from His perfection. He is absolutely perfect and unique, cannot be conceived as procreating. He, therefore, has no progeny. Aristotle and Ibn-e-Hazm¹ conceive Perfection as a final stage of completion but Iqbal does not agree with them." His perfection also implies "the infinite scope of His creative vision". His "not-yet," therefore, means the infinite creative possibilities of his being"¹.

If God is a free, infinite and perfectly creative, all powerful movement, are we to say that He is all good, as Browning thinks, or that He is all evil as Schopenhauer claims. According to Iqbal, the fact of moral and physical evil stands out prominent in the life of nature. Evil arises from the conflict of opposing individuals and is relative to finite beings. Good and evil, though opposites, must fall under the same whole but we can see our way only by faith in the triumph of goodness. God is also omniscient and His knowledge is not like the knowledge of a finite being always moving round a veritable "other". There is no other for Him. His knowledge is not the same as human knowledge. Jalal-u-din Dawwani², Iraqi³ and Royce suppose the Absolute Ego as a single indivisible act of perception, grasping the entire sweep of history, regarded as a sequence of events. This is attributing to Him a kind of passive omniscience, an awareness of an already finished structure. God's knowledge is not like a mirror reflection of His all-inclusive Being. If it is supposed as a mirror reflection of a preordained sequence of events, then no chance is left for initiative, novelty and free creativeness. We conceive His knowledge as a perfectly self-conscious, living and creative activity; therefore, His activity is at once the knowing and the creating of the Object of knowledge.

Bergson says that thought is a feature of life of the Ultimate Ego and He is not pure will. He is a conscious organic growth in which thought and being are really one. This point leads us to the question of relation of time with the Ultimate Ego. Time is not external to Him. He is eternal and has a constant movement, constant change and change is unthinkable without time but His time is not a serial time in which past, present and future are essential. It is a change without succession. His time is a pure duration and the real nature of pure duration is revealed by the experience of our own consciousness. It is in the movements of profound meditation that we sink into our deeper self and reach the inner centre of experience. The states of consciousness melt into each other in the process of this deeper ego. The unity of this ego is like the unity of the germ in which the experiences of its individual ancestors exist, not as a plurality, but as a unity in which every experience permeates the whole. There is no

direction of states in the whole of the inner ego. There is a change and movement but this change or movement is indivisible. Pure time of our own true self is not a string of separate instants. It is time regarded as prior to the disclosure of its possibilities. It is time as felt, not as thought and calculated.

It is not something outside in which the ego moves. It is its inward reach, its realizable possibilities that live within the depths of its nature and are being actualised in a free creative movement. It is intensive time, not extensive. The time of the Ultimate Ego is pure. "It is His creative movement, regarded inwardly as the infinite inherent possibilities of His nature, unfolding themselves in ever-new creations. He is pure duration in which thought, activity, and purpose interpenetrate to form a unity. A unity in which the past is rolled into the present and the future exists in the form of open possibilities"¹. Iqbal says that Bergson is wrong in denying the teleological character of Reality on the basis that the gateways of the future must remain open to Reality. "He is sound if by teleology is meant the working out of a pre-ordained end. Such a view would make the temporal order of things a mere reproduction or an imitation of an already determined end. It would make pure time inapplicable to Reality. The Ultimate Ego is devoid of purpose if by purpose is meant a foreseen end, a far off fixed, predetermined destination. The Ultimate Ego is purposive but in the sense in which our own consciousness is purpose. Our unity of consciousness does not fold within itself the past but has a forward movement. It has reference to a purpose and purpose cannot be conceived without reference to future. Purpose is really nothing but a forward movement in consciousness."²

Iqbal was impressed by the philosophies of Rumi, Mc Taggart, Bergson, Nietzsche but chiefly by James Ward. Nietzsche's philosophy is Godless. Bergson's "creative impulse" is very much like Schopenhauer's unconscious purpose. But the ultimate reality for Iqbal is God, conscious and personal. "Mc Taggart finds the destiny and goal of the self in eternity and not in serial time but he is an atheist. Rumi has a lot common with Iqbal, although much of his thought can be interpreted in pantheistic terms. James Ward's influence on Iqbal is greater"¹.

Both Iqbal and James Ward reject the three traditional arguments for existence of God, discard Platonism, pantheism and Absolutism and object to regarding omniscience as fore-knowledge of a preordained reality and to applying the idea of serial time both to God and to finite self. They do all this for exactly the same reasons. Both are pluralists, theists and spiritual monists. They both uphold pan-psychism and windowed monadism. Both believe in the creative freedom and immortality of the individual. Both believe that the sensuous world is due to interaction between egos, the body is created by the mind to serve its own purpose and serial time is only an act of the mind. Both hold on exactly the same grounds and in exactly the same sense that God is an infinite, conscious, omnipotent and omniscience spirit, which is immanent in the finite egos and yet transcends them just as every organism is immanent in its parts and yet transcends these parts. For both He is a perfectly free creative spirit that limits its own freedom by creating free finite egos. For both this internal limitation is not consistent with His own perfect freedom.

According to both, "God is perfect throughout His creative progress, for this purpose is progress in perfection, not towards perfection. Both hold that God's will functions through the will of the finite egos. Both believe that reason can prove the necessity of faith, but cannot turn faith in to knowledge. Both agree that belief in God is ultimately a matter of faith, though of a rational faith, that conviction about Him comes not from reason but from living, that direct communion with Him is gained only through love, and that it is only through love for Him that immortality is achieved by the finite self"¹.

Iqbal's indebtedness to James Ward is obvious from the above discussion. He was a true disciple of James Ward. But he goes beyond Ward's conception of God. Ward regards God as eternal, but fails to explain His eternity because he has no idea of time as non-serial whereas Iqbal takes his clue from a saying of the prophet of Islam in which time is identified with God.

يَوْمَ ذُنُوبِي إِبْنِ آدَمَ يَسُبُّ الذَّهْرَوَاءَ نَا الذَّهْرَ-

(حدیث قدسی۔ بخاری، مسلم، ابوداؤد)

"Deal not in invective against Time (with Time's vicissitude), Lo, Time (with Time's vicissitude) is Allah"²

Or (in other words)

"Don't vilify time, for time is God." "Life is time and time is life"

"Don't abuse time! Was the command of the prophet" (Nicholson's Translation.)

"That time is the mind of space and space the body of time." (Alexander's metaphor, space, time and deity). Iqbal's idea of perfection is not the same as that of Ward. It is partly his own and partly Bergsonian. When we compare the methods of Ward and Iqbal, we find that like the Neo-Idealists, both start from the individual experience. Both see nothing wrong with the procedure. The danger of viewing every thing anthropomorphically, is a pitfall and Iqbal and James Ward have fallen into this pitfall. Nevertheless, it is clear that what reality is as a whole must for ever remain hidden from the finite self, for how can the part with all its limitations comprehend the whole, which essentially goes for beyond its range.

Iqbal's conception of God is a corollary of his view of the nature of the Ultimate Reality because he identifies God with the Ultimate Reality. But he is a theist and not a monist of any type or a pantheist. It is not only God who is real but the egos created by God are also real and they share both the essence and the creative urge of the cosmic creator. God is the perfect Ego, the perfect self, the perfect Individual; for all created egos, individuality is an aim to be progressively realized. He agrees with Bergson but he derives his conception of God from the Holy Quran.

"Say: Allah is One:

All things depend on Him,

He begeth not, and He begotten; And there is none like unto Him".¹

God, the Ultimate Ego, is infinite but His infiniteness is not temporal or spatial but consists in the infinite inner possibilities

of His creative activity. God's infinity is intensive not extensive.

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مِثْلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكُوتٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي
زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ مُبْرَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا
شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ لَمْ تَمْسَسْهَا نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ -
(سورة النور - آية 35)

"God is the Light of the Heavens and of the Earth. His Light is like a niche in which is a Lamp - the Lamp encased in a glass - the glass, as it were a star."¹

(The Qur'an, 24:35)

Commenting on this verse, Iqbal says: "But I venture to think that insofar as the Quranic identification of God with Light is concerned Farewell's view is incorrect. Personally, I think the description of God, as light, in the revealed literature of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, must now be interpreted differently."²

Thus in the world of change, light is the nearest approach to the Absolute. The metaphor of light as applied to God, therefore, must be taken, in view of modern knowledge, to suggest the absoluteness of God and not His Omnipresence, which easily lends itself to a pantheistic interpretation. Further he says that human thought is discursive. But knowledge in the sense of discursive knowledge, however infinite, cannot be predicted of God because His knowledge is also creative of the objects' that He knows. He does not conceive of God's knowledge as Omniscience in the sense of history - past, present and future - regarded as an order of specific events in an eternal ever present "now". It was thus that Jalal-u-Din Dawwani, Iqbal and Josiah Royce conceived God's knowledge. Iqbal does not agree with them.

Iqbal criticized the doctrine of Wahdat-al-Wujud, which had been innovated by the Hispanic-Arab mystic Muhyi'd Din Ibn al 'Arabi (1165-1240). Although in his doctoral dissertation Iqbal had paid a glowing tribute to Ibn al 'Arabi, in his introduction to the first edition of the Asrar-i-Khudi, repudiated him. To Ibn al 'Arabi all "paths lead to one straight path which leads to God. The different religions were thus in his opinion identical. Ibn-al-'Arabi's Indic disciples during the sixteenth century had sought to reconcile the symbols of the poetry and other devotional Hindu songs with Muslim beliefs. In order to meet the Wahdat-al-Wujud brand Islam halfway, "the Hindus also wrote the Allopanishad". The Mughal Emperor Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi was designed to synthesize Islam with other religions and creeds, and was the triumph of Wahdat-al-Wujud in India. Iqbal believed that if this synthetic trend had been allowed to continue the distinctive culture of Indic Islam would have been assimilated into the dominant Hindu culture and would have completely disappeared from India. Iqbal came to believe that the pantheism of Ibn-al-'Arabi would dissolve their "collective khudi" in the Hindu cultural milieu. Praising the virtues of Shaykh Ahmad Sarhindi (Mujaddid Alf Thani), Iqbal says in Bal-i-Jibril:

حاضر ہوا میں شیخ مجدد کی لحد پر
وہ خاک کہ ہے زیر فلک مطلع انوار
اس خاک کے ذروں سے ہیں شرمندہ ستارے
اس خاک میں پوشیدہ ہے وہ صلابت اسرار
گردن نہ جھکی جس کی جہانگیر کے آگے
جس کے نفس گرم سے ہے گرمی احرار
وہ ہند میں سرمایہ ملت کا نگہبان
اللہ نے ہر وقت کیا جس کو خبردار

I stood by the Reformer's tomb: that dust Whence here below an orient splendour breaks
Dust whose least speak stars hang their heads,

Dust shrouding that high knower of things unknown Who to Jahangir would not bend his neck,
Whose ardent breath fans every free heart's ardour, Whom Allah sent in season to keep watch

In India on the treasure-house of Islam
(Punjab Ke Pir Zaddon Say)

Iqbal elaborated ideas of different Muslim and European philosophers and stated nothing new about God but his thoughts were different in style. As a Muslim he is monotheist; as a philosopher he is pluralist-pantheist and as a Sufi he is a pantheist but not confused like William Wordsworth. He concludes that God has existence but His existence is extensive not intensive in nature and His knowledge and power are extensive. He used a more wider term 'Pan-an-theism' than 'Pantheism' to clear the Conception of God. On the other hand James Ward is naturalist-pluralist. Iqbal says:

مکافات دیر دریں مطلق مجو
السموات نور جز نیست مطلق کہ
گلشن راز جدید

In this world of contingency don't seek the Absolute; For there is nothing absolute except Heaven's Light.
(Garden of Modern Secret)

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3. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Ashraf Press, Lahore, 1968, p-64.
4. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought In Islam, p-64.
5. Ibn-e-Hazam was a Spanish Muslim Philosopher of 11th century, disciple of Muhiyyudin Ibn-e-Arabi and author of Lam'at (Flashes).
6. M.M. Sharif, About Iqbal and His Thoughts, p-20.
7. Dawwani was a Muslim thinker of 16th century, author of the celebrated work of Akhlaq-I-Jalil.
8. Fakhar-u-Din Ibrahim of Hamadan better known by his poetical nom de guerre of Iraqi, a poet, mystic and philosopher of 13th century.
9. M.M. Sharif, About Iqbal & His Thoughts, p-24.
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