

An Analytical Evaluation of the Signification of ‘The Development of Metaphysics in Persia’ in the Advancement of Allama Muhammad Iqbal’s Theo-Philosophic Ideas

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Abstract

Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) is a versatile thinker of the modern Muslim world. Although he was born in Sub-Continent but his thought crossed all the barriers of color, creed, race and land. Syed Jamal Din Afghani (1838-1898) was the 1st person who set the foundation of the renaissance of the modern Muslim world. Iqbal preceded and accelerated Syed Jamal al Din Afghani’s movement of reformation with his sagacious approach in a new way with new dimensions. He used both the mediums ‘prose’ and ‘poetry’ to present his thought. His poetic work is in Persian and Urdu languages while his prose work is in English, Urdu and Persian. He was a theologian, philosopher, mystic poet and politician. His 1st research work is his doctoral dissertation under the title ‘The Development of Metaphysics in Persia’. This research work is the 1st outcome of his intellectual endeavors during his stay in Europe from 1905 to 1908 in England and Germany. A common viewpoint of Iqbal scholars about this research work of is that ‘it is outdated and

has no value in Iqbal's thought and literature now'. The last and final philosophical work of Allama Iqbal is under the title 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'. From 1st to final philosophical work there are many others his valuable books in poetry and prose. In this article our aim is to analyze the said views about his doctoral thesis and to find out the significance of his 1st philosophical work in the development of his thought.

Key Words: Metaphysics, Development, Thought, Change, Theology, Philosophy, Sufism

I. Introduction

Change is the basic principle of this universe. Beauty of life and thought lies in change and dynamism. Despite evolution in thought and change in initial and final work, the all work of a thinker has its specific role and place in the understanding of the thought structure and personality of the thinker. Allama Muhammad Iqbal is a versatile and live thinker. He is a philosopher of change. We find a continuous evolution in his thought. 'The Development of Metaphysics in Persia' is his 1st research work and doctoral dissertation on which he got his Ph.D. degree in 1908. He died in 1938. The change in ideas of a live thinker like Iqbal is inevitable. But we cannot negate the importance of this work in his thought. Despite that some valuable Iqbal scholar admitted its significance role in his work, there is a general opinion regarding this work of Iqbal that it is outdated. This article is an effort to fulfill this gap between two different standpoints.

I.1 Research Questions

- Is the 1st research work of Iqbal is outdated?
- Is it having any relevance with present age?
- Is it contributed to introduce the development of metaphysics in Persia?
- Is it having any relation with his final work?
- Is there any role of this research in the development of Iqbal's thought?

I.2 Research Objectives

- Introduction of the 1st research work of Iqbal in the perspective of the time
- To analyze the views of the scholars about the 1st intellectual work of Iqbal
- To determine the importance of this book in Iqbal's thought
- To search out the relation of this 1st intellectual contribution with his later thought

As we have mentioned above the 1st scholarly contribution of Allama Muhammad Iqbal is under the title 'The Development of Metaphysics in Persia'. It was written by him during his stay in Europe from 1905 to 1907.¹ Actually to obtain the degree of B.A. from University of Cambridge, Iqbal presented his research work titled 'The Development of Metaphysics in Persia' in March 1907. Later on, following the direction and guidance of his teacher and mentor Prof. Arnold, after developing and enriching above mentioned research work, he presented it in the Munch University of Germany for Ph.D. and got the degree of doctorate in 1908.² This book is comprised of an introduction, five chapters and conclusion. Author divided it in two main sections. First section is about pre-Islamic Persian thought.³ In this section Iqbal discussed the thought of three main ancient Persian thinkers i.e. Zoroaster, Mani and Mazdak. The second part is about the post-Islamic era of Persian thought. In this section Iqbal discussed three main intellectual movements i.e. Theology, Philosophy and Sufism, which nourished in Persia. In this part in theology, he discussed the basic approaches of Mutazalites and Asharites. In philosophy he described the philosophy of two main Persian philosophers Ibn Maskawaih and Avicenna. While in Sufism he at first tried to provide the Quranic justification of Sufism and further illuminated the prominent Sufi schools which evolved in Persia, along with the introduction of their masters. Although this research work of Iqbal is consist of 149 pages only but he tried to develop a link in the development of Persian thought from ancient times to modern age i.e. from Zoroaster (1200/1300 BCE to

the thinkers and movements of 20th century AD. It will be sufficient to understand the scholarship of Iqbal and to know the value of this work that he has discussed round about 144 renowned scholars and their ideas in 149 pages of this book.

2. A Misconception About the Significance Of 'The Development of Metaphysics in Persia' In Iqbal's Thoughts

Generally, there is a misconception about this treatise which is the 1st research work of Iqbal. A general but superficial perception about this intellectual work of Iqbal is that 'it has no signs of maturity. It has no worth in the literature of Iqbal. Now it is outdated and has no value etc.'. As we have mentioned above that this research was done in the 1st decade of the 20th century in England and Germany (1905-1908). Iqbal came back in Sub Continent in 1908. This book published 1st time from London in 1908 under the title: The Development of Metaphysics in Persia: A Contribution to the History of Muslim Philosophy. Before analyzing this misconception let us see some glimpses of the ever 1st review on this book. This review was published in 1908 in London at the time of the 1st edition of this book.

This little work had been authored by an Indian scholar who had studied and earned degrees form the universities at Cambridge and Munich. He has not only read the subject keenly and had a grasp on it but he has unusual aptitude which is rare among Oriental scholars that how to employ the Western Critical method on the knowledge. Thus, he has delivered a significant overview of the history of metaphysics at Persia. Thought his attempt was synoptic and incomplete yet it has importance and worth to believe. This work exposes author's scholarship. We aspired that afterwards this work which had been dedicated to Prof. T. W. Arnold, a new yet comprehensive work would be followed.⁴

We can quote the complete review here. So, we are giving below the main points of the reviewer in our own words:

Iqbal has discussed and illuminated scholarly different important theological, philosophical and mystical systems and movements of pre-Islamic era of Persian thought to the post Islamic Persian thought right from Zoroaster (The 1st original thinker of Ancient Persia) to the post Islamic latest Persian thinkers and movements of the 20th century. In this research he developed an appropriate and logical link and relation among all. The research of such kind done by Iqbal very was a very difficult job because he had to encircle the most complex and subtle problems of thought in a thesis within a limited time span. In Persia these problems were discussed in different periods of time by the scholars of different creeds, philosophies and ideologies. But he dealt with this difficult job nicely.

The 2nd difficulty in this regard was that the indulgent in metaphysical speculation was an innate characteristic of the Persians. He had to understand, cover and analyze the thousands of years of metaphysically oriented race's history with in a book which was less than two hundred pages but he did successfully. At that time Persian philosophy and metaphysics of Persia was an unexplored area in research, for researchers and specifically for the West. The basic books related with this topic were in Arabic and Persian. In this regard the material in English was the littlest. This was another distinction of Iqbal that although in this perspective his journey was on a virgin soil but he achieved the goal. Another distinctive feature of this research was that Iqbal successfully tried to present oriental studies in modern language and terms which was rare at that time.

The reviewer ended his observations with following remarks:

“Shaikh Iqbal deserves high praise for what he has accomplished. The immediate result of his labor is considerable, and he has laid a solid foundation for further research”.⁵

3. Allama Iqbal's views regarding this research work and misunderstanding of some scholars

In 1927 Mir Hassan al Din requested Iqbal to translate this book in Urdu. Iqbal gave him permission to translate with views that “I had written this

book 18 years ago. Meanwhile many new aspects have been discovered on me. I also have a change in my ideas. Now in German language new books have been written about Ghazali and Tusi which were not available at the time of my research. I think the maximum of this book requires reevaluation and improvement. I suggest you should write down a book on this topic rather than to translate it.⁶ Further in a letter he said 'I wrote a book about Persian philosophy. That was a sketch only. I wanted to write a comprehensive book on this subject but due to the lack of time I could not do.'⁷ From above remarks of Iqbal some scholars mistakenly derived the conclusion that Allama Iqbal's this research work has no more value. The confusion and misconception of such kind emerges only at that time when we try to understand a piece of work without the reference of the context. And that happened in this case. Iqbal produced this work 1907 which published in 1908. He gave these remarks in 1927. What can we expect other than these remarks by a live and dynamic thinker like Iqbal after 18 years of that work at the mature age of his thought?

Actually, there are four main parameters for an accurate understanding of a specific piece of work of a thinker and determining its value:

- a) Evolutionary process of the development of the thought of the thinker
- b) Specific period of time in which that piece of work had been produced
- c) The value and authenticity of the produced work
- d) Logical relation of entire work of a thinker from the 1st work to final
- e) The context of the remarks

Unfortunately, above mentioned criterion has been ignored by some scholars to evaluate the 1st intellectual research work of Iqbal which caused to create misconceptions about the significance of this work in Iqbal's thought, Iqbal studies, Persian metaphysics and history of Muslim philosophy. Now we will

try to analyze the views of the scholars about the under-discussion work of Iqbal step by step.

4. Importance of the Evolution in the development of Thought

Let us see the importance, need and the role of the evolution and development of thought in the thought structure of a being according to Iqbal. Development of thought is a gradual process. Nothing happens suddenly. Logic and rationality necessitate to an evolutionary process in the growth and development of a being and thought. The phenomena of nature are its clear evident. Unnatural and gradual growth and development cannot survive for a long time. Development in thought is one of the most basic principles of the continuity of life on the planet with all beauty, variety and colors. Iqbal is a philosopher of change. For him stagnancy is death. As he says that 'thought is not static. It is dynamic by nature. Thought is like a seed of a tree which has unlimited potentials. It unfolds its potentials gradually with the passage of time.'⁸ According to Iqbal we are in a continuous flow of time and everybody has to play his rule in this ever-changing world. The value of life is with innovation, novelty and change which lead to development and creation of new ideas. So, the development in the ideas of a live and creative thinker is natural.⁹ But it does not mean that due to evolution, change and development of thought the previous ideas and work would be considered outdated or irrelevant. In fact, we can only understand the personality and thought of a thinker by developing a link between his all work. In this regard the most basic and fundamental work will be the 1st writings of the thinker. It will provide us the base to understand the roots, offshoots and outcomes of the thought of a being. Khalifa Abdul Hakeem narrated that once when I was in my student life I met with Iqbal. During the discussion Iqbal said that death does not mean the physical death. In real death means the failure of a being to accept the new ideas. We should consider a being dead who is incapable to understand the needs and demands of the time and ineligible to modify, rectify, improve and build up his thought, behavior, attitude and conduct to meet the challenges of the time. If

there is no tendency in a being to improve him then his life will be the recurrence of matter only rather than a reverent existent.¹⁰ Iqbal had a good respectful relation with Syed Suleman Nadvi. In his 10th October 1919 letter to Suleman Nadvi Iqbal writes, I want to write something about the evolutionary process and historical background of the development of my ideas. I believe that it will be very helpful to understand my prose and poetic work.¹¹ Iqbal wrote a letter to Ishrat Rahmani in 27th of November 1919. In this letter Iqbal expresses that there is not any unexceptional thing in my life. I think that only thing of my life, which may be noteworthy for others, is the gradual development of my thought. As I find time I will write on it.¹² Is it mean that every previous and initial work has no further meaning and value? This aspect was so much important for Iqbal that he mentioned it in the preface of his philosophical master piece as: It should be kept in mind that in philosophy there is nothing which can be regarded as final. The newer perspectives than the presented in the lectures are possible because knowledge is advancing and there are new vistas of thoughts are always open. It is an obligation for us to have a keen eye on the development of human thinking and sustain a critical outlook to it.¹³

To evaluate and analyze the value of evolution and development in Iqbal's thought we must have a look on the different prominent ages of Iqbal's intellectual life.

5. Different Periods of Iqbal's Thought

Iqbal scholars have divided his thought in three main ages:

- The 1st period of his thought (1901 to 1905)
- The 2nd or transitional phase (1905 to 1908)
- The final age (1908 to 1938)

Now we are going to evaluate and analyze the views of different Iqbal scholars about Iqbal's 1st research work. Meanwhile we will try to explore the value of Iqbal's this work also.

6. The Second Period (1905-1908) or the Transitional phase of Iqbal's thought

According to the above-mentioned division it is obvious that this research work was done in the 2nd age of his thought. This age is consisted of approximately three years. Although the span of this period was only three years but it played a very significant role in the formation and development of Iqbal's thought. Actually, it was a transitional period of Iqbal's thought. In the perspective of the intellectual development of Iqbal's thought the 1st period is known as the age of nationalism. The 2nd period is known as transitional and the 3rd period is known as the age of Pan -Islamism which was later preceded by pan humanism. In 2nd age of his thought, Iqbal was in Europe for three years i.e. in England and Germany. In this 2nd age to which we have named transitional period, Iqbal was between two mental states. On one side he was under the influences of 1st age. The prominent feature of this age was spiritualism, religiosity, orientalism and nationalism. While on the other side he observed the life and world in a new perspective in Europe i.e. bare scientism and materialism. These experiences and observations realized Iqbal that for development and progress of an individual and a nation and to play a leading role in the nations of the world, the study of science is also necessary along with religion. No doubt religion is fundamental and is like a nucleus but the study of philosophy and science is also inevitable. All these disciplines have a specific role in the development of an individual and society. We cannot ignore any one for the sake of other. They all have a deep link with each other. Iqbal's following standpoint describes the inevitability of this relation.

In fact, all the researches for the sake of knowledge are a kind of a prayer. Even an observer of nature is like a mystic who is in the state of prayer.¹⁴

7. The importance of that period in the intellectual development of Iqbal
Iqbal's own views are very notable to understand the importance of this period (1905-1908) in his thought. In 27th November 1919, eleven years after his return to India, he said 'in fact the way of life, unethical and immoral living, valueless culture and civilization of Europe revolutionized my thought. In other words, I can say that I realized the truth of Islam in real sense during

my stay in Europe. Actually, that atmosphere discovered on me the greatness, value, comprehensiveness, and fruitfulness of Islam. The truth of Islam which revealed on me in Europe converted me to be a real Muslim. It is a detailed story I will narrate it whenever I get a chance. I believe it will be very beneficial for people.¹⁵

8. Views of the authentic scholars regarding Iqbal's stay in Europe

An eminent Iqbal scholar Dr. S.M. Minhaj al Din viewed that 'the three years stay of Iqbal in Europe was the most important phase of his life. This stay played a very important role in his spiritual development. During this stay he decided to struggle for the renaissance of the Muslim world.¹⁶ Dr. Iftikhar Ahmad Siddiqi a renowned Iqbal scholar viewed that Iqbal's stay in Europe opened new horizon of thought on him. This research has a central position in his intellectual life.¹⁷ Dr. Ghulam Mustafa Khan an authentic Iqbal scholar was of opinion that Iqbal's stay and research work in Europe set the foundation of his all intellectual development.¹⁸ Dr. Anne Marie Schimmel an orientalist of international fame viewed that 'this work of Iqbal is the beginning of his philosophical thought. It is an acknowledged and authentic piece of work in the studies of the 'history of religion'.¹⁹ All well-known and authentic Iranian scholars, intellectuals and philosophers Abbas Mahdvi Ashraf,²⁰ Fazl al Allah Raza,²¹ Habib yaghmai,²² Syed Ghulam Raza Saeedi,²³ Dr. Ahmad Ahmadi,²⁴ Muhammad Taqi Muqtadari²⁵, Abdul Rafi Haqeeqat²⁶, Dr. Mahdi Muhaqqiq²⁷, Syed Muhammad Moheet Tabatabai²⁸, Ahmad Saroosh²⁹, Muhammad Hussain Masha'ikh Freedni³⁰ , Dr. Shaheen Dukht Muqaddam³¹ acknowledged the importance of this work of Iqbal. We are giving the gist of the opinions of a few of them here. This research work is a master piece.³² It introduced Iqbal as a great philosopher of the East in West.³³ Iqbal analyzed different religious and philosophical movements and schools in it beautifully.³⁴ It opened the new avenues of thought on him along with revolutionary changes.³⁵

9. Conclusion

Now we can say that the reasons of this misconception and misinterpretation about the 1st research of Iqbal are due to the: Study of the ideas of Iqbal in a superficial way

- 1) Partial and selective study of Iqbal's thought
- 2) Rely on the views of other people without own genuine research
- 3) Lack of comprehensive, systematic and deep study
- 4) Failure to understand the phenomenon of the natural development of the thought of a thinker
- 5) Negation of the creativity, innovation, novelty and evolution in the thought structure of a live thinker
- 6) Considering prose of Iqbal different from his poetic work
- 7) Incapability to develop the logical link between entire work of Iqbal
- 8) Consideration of Iqbal's views without keeping in mind the context

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