

Iqbal's Critique of Wahadat-al-wujud :

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Date of Submission: 01-12-2017

Date of acceptance: 09-12-2017

I. Introduction

The ontocosmological doctrine of Wahadat-al-Wujud (Unity of Being) advanced by Ibn Arabi is apparently diametrically opposed to the philosophical position of Iqbal. The philosophy of Ego so powerfully underlined by Iqbal is a powerful critique of the redoubtable Ibn Arabi. *Wahadat-al-Wujud* emphatically negates the importance of individuality and there lies the crux of the conflict. Iqbal is vehemently opposed to the doctrine of the Unity of Being of Ibn-Arabi to the extent that he calls his *Fusos-al-Hikam* as the compendium of atheism and blasphemy. Iqbal's wide studies in history, sociology and philosophy convinced him that the deteriorating condition of Islam was due to importation of Platonic and neo-Platonic ideas, which regarded the world as a mere illusion not worth striving for. These ideas corresponding to those based on the Vedanta found their culmination in the doctrine of Wahadat-al-Wujud as formulated by Ibn Arabi ostensibly with reference to certain verses of the Quran.

This doctrine engendered the belief in an Immanent God and the whole world as His emanation. Therefore a pantheistic doctrine was substituted for a personal and transcendent God of Islam. Ideas based on this doctrine, according to Iqbal, sapped the energies of the people spurring a life of activity and exertion. The doctrine of Wujud asserts that everything that exists can only exist because it is an aspect of Divine Reality and hence an aspect of Divine Unity itself.

For Iqbal popular mysticism was mere means of exploiting the ignorance and credulity of the people. About the downfall of *Ummah*, Iqbal was of the view that the masses of Islam were swayed by the kind of mysticism which blinked actualities, enervated the people and kept them steeped in all kind of superstition. It gradually and invisibly unnerved the Will of Islam and softened it to the extent of seeking relief from the rigorous discipline of the laws of Islam. His teachings can't be understood without having a close look into Iqbal's life, and factors that influenced him. Since the age of four, Iqbal had been hearing about Ibn-Arabi and his work (*Fusus* and *Futuh*). Owing to this mystical influence in the early periods of his poetic production, Iqbal exhorted mainly Hindu masses of India to discard their old gods and worship the motherland.

There is a consensus that Iqbal also subscribed to the doctrine of Wujud until at least 1907, the year in which he submitted his doctoral dissertation. (In the Introduction, Iqbal has paid a glowing tribute to Ibn-Arabi). Iqbal's admiration for Arabi was not the outcome of his two years of research for his dissertation, but was the product of the philosophical orientation he inherited from his parents and from his early teachers. Probably he had completed the better part of his doctoral research before he arrived in Europe. Iqbal's subsequent studies carried him farther away from Ibn-i-Arabi. Writing his foreword to the first edition of *Asrar-i-Khudi*, in 1915, Iqbal repudiated Ibn-Arabi's philosophy of Wujud. He complimented Ibn-Taimmiyya and Wahid Mahmud for raising their voice high against the life –negating impact of Al-Arabi. Also he advised his readers to look to the western nations of Europe in order to learn the meaning of life. By virtue of their will to action, the Western nations are pre-eminent among the nations of the world. For this reason and in order to appreciate the secret of life, their literature and ideas are the best guide for the nations of the East.

Among the western nations he singled out Britain with the plea that the world is indebted to the British for their pragmatism and their ability to comprehend situations more sharply in comparison to other nations. For this reason, no high –flown philosophic system, which fails to stand up in the light of the facts, has gained popularity in England. Therefore the works of British thinkers have a place of their own in the world literature. After benefiting from British ideas, the mind and the heart (philosophy and literature) of the East must revise their intellectual legacy. It seems imperative in this context to explore the genesis of the Sufi doctrine *Wahadat-al-Wujud* and make a brief scrutiny of the channels through which it flourished, before focusing on the expostulation of Ibn-Arabi. Although it is not possible to draw a distinct line of demarcation between Sufism and metaphysics, it can be said that the doctrine of *Wujud* does not have as much connection with *Sufism* as it has with metaphysical problems, which owing to the passage of time and to different environments and circumstances have been mixed with Sufism and has turned into theoretical problems most intricate and difficult

to understand. The evidences corroborate the fact that doctrine of *Wujud* made its way into Sufism through neo-Platonism, established as an independent school of thought in the third century A.D as the result of interpretations and commentaries of Plato's ideas. The ideas of Neo-Platonism uphold that "Existence" is actually 'One' and that existence alone is the main source of all other existences and finally have to go back to that "One Existence", the whole world has emerged from. Whatever exists is merely a reflection of the One Being and does not have a permanent existence of its own. In Sufi terminology this doctrine is called 'HamaUst'. If God and universe were the same, God can't be attributed with anything. Any interpretation of God as 'Existence', 'Being', 'Essence' or 'Life' is incomplete; God is above all these attributes.

Furthermore, thought cannot be made applicable to God, as it presupposes two things, the thinker and the object of thought. Thought necessitates the precondition that the thinker requires a state of mind other than that which exists within himself. This leads to dualism, which is against the fundamental Islamic concept of Tawhid (Unity). The harmonizing of Greek philosophy with Islam begun by al-Kindi was continued by al-Farabi and completed by Ibn-Sina. It is generally believed that the doctrine of *Wujud* entered in the Islamic mysticism through the efforts of Dhun-L-Nun of the Egypt (D.861). Following him, the well-known Persian mystic Abu-Yazid of Bistam, became the leading exponent of pantheistic philosophy, highlighting the doctrine of *Wujud*. The conflict between the extreme form of Sufism and Shariah (the canon or law of Islam) came to a head on collision in the time of the well known mystic, Hussein Ibn mansoor-al-Hallaj, whose life was sacrificed at the alter of the Shariah. However, it was the Islamic scholar Sheikh Muhy-al-Din- Ibn-Arabi, a Spanish –Arab, who successfully brought in vogue the pantheistic monism. Ibn-Arabi firmly believed that things pre-exist as ideas (Ayan –tahbitah) in the knowledge of God whence they emanate and whither they return. The world is merely the outer aspect of God, who is its inner aspect. Between the essence and attribute, (God and the universe) there is no real difference according to Arabi. To search for God beyond this universe, the true mystic in fact has to be guided by the inner light. Ibn-Arabi insisted with utmost assurance that pantheistic monism was the only true interpretation of Islam. He sought support of his assertion in the Qur'an and in the traditions of the prophet Mohammad. For instance the Qur'an says, 'And we are nearer to man than his life-artery'. He believed that this verse of the Qur'an implied that 'God Himself is the limbs and parts of the body of the servant'. Interpreting the tradition (He created Adam in the image of Himself), he said that man possessed all the attributes of God. This pantheistic theory (*Wujud*) popularized by Arabi had a deep impact on contemporary Sufis and also on those who came after him. Gradually the principle of this doctrine became so common among Muslims that almost all learned people with an inclination toward Sufism came under its spell. The Arabic, Persian and Urdu Poets who pretended to be Sufis interjected these ideas into their verses. In this way Muslim mysticism was Hellenized, and the real spirit (*Tawhid*) of Islam generally vanished. These alien Platonic and Neo-Platonic ideas became familiar among Muslims because of Ibn-Arabi, and in a true sense he alone was responsible for their popularity. Iqbal believed that the root cause of the negation of '*Khudi*' for individuals and nations was an unhealthy impact of pantheism, the doctrine of *Wujud*. His elegant verses repeatedly pointed out that as long as the Muslims focused their attention upon realizing their '*Khudi*' they were crowned with glory and power; their decline started with the loss of '*Khudi*'. Only the nation, according to him, which realizes the value of its self and makes it strong can survive in this world. The crux of Iqbal's thought is '*Khudi*'. Therefore, contrary to Ibn-Arabi, gnosis of God is dependent upon the realization of self, maintenance of self and the firmness of the idea of self. Qur'an asserts that God has created the universe as Real and with the purpose.1 (Qur'an, 29, 44). At another place it says that "If you follow the right path which may be different from ancestor's path, you will not harm those who follow the wrong path. After all human actions are judged according to Allah's Law of *Mukafat*" (5:105)2.

It is on this Quranic view that Iqbal has based his philosophy of 'self' which is an eternal reality, a binding force for the scattered and unlimited states. It is salient force which is anxious to come in action. The self is strengthened by taking part in His creative activity. Other factors which have positive impact on self are Love, Faqr, Sabr and Living on lawful earning. For Sufis Faqr stands for the renunciation of the worldly desires, not to live on people's alms and favors. Iqbal rejects this kind of Faqr. His Faqr is dynamic and has the potential to subdue the earth and heaven. He also rejected the notion of Sabr prevalent in Sufism as it indicates the passivity and toleration of all injustice. Therefore moral ideal of man is not self-negation but self-affirmation. His capacity and potential for self-realization is not like drop of water which passes and loses its existence. It is rather like drop of water which becomes a pearl in the sea. Therefore, Iqbal doesn't seek union between Creator and creatures as is advocated by the Sufis. Iqbal remarked that how he can meet God, for, 'I am the servant and He is Lord'. My relation is only that of servant. If God is coming to meet me I shall run far away because if the ocean unites with a drop of water, it certainly loses its existence. The station of union or the absorption into God claimed by devotees under the influence of *Wujud* is but a transitory stage. Servant hood is perpetual since God is God and man is His creature.

Iqbal believes that servanthood is the highest achievement of man freeing him from all bondage. For Iqbal God's servant is elevated and nourished by His love; even the accomplishment and appropriation of Islam

is dependent upon love. It is dangerously unacceptable to associate any animate object with the unity of God. The Qur'an asserts : "Verily thou (Muhammad) art a human being ,it is revealed to thee that verily thy God is One God ,those who have desire to meet their God should do good deeds in the service of God, none else should be associated with Him" (Qur'an: 17-110)³.

Iqbal's conception of Tawhid corroborates with the Sufi proposition of Hama- Az -Ust (All is from God). After creation man became independent, he attained this status because of the mercy of God .Had there been no God, Iqbal believes man's existence also would not have been possible. In this context Iqbal seems to be highly influenced by the theory of Sirhindi who believed that "the last station of a devotee is not *Wahadat-al-Wujud* but (*abdeyat*) the stage of servanthood (*Maqam-i-abdeyat*), in which the devotee (salik) realizes and experiences his true self.Iqbal criticized vehemently the theory of *Wujud* so much so that he called it blasphemy as it diverts the minds of Muslims. While elaborating the spirit of new times, Iqbal championed creative activity and struggle as the true expression of man's essence; being convinced that world is not something to be merely seen or known through concepts but something to be made and remade by continuous action. "The ultimate aim of the ego's quest is not to see something but to be something, the end of ego's quest is not mere emancipation from the limitation of its existence. It is the vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego and sharpens his will (Reconstruction, p. 1971)⁴. He asserted that mysticism ruined the true egos creative freedom and therefore medieval mystic formula could not satisfy a method for recognizing truth⁵.

Iqbal based his whole world view on intense faith and believed in the inescapable connection of God with man and nature .His philosophy, therefore reflected the progressive tendency to renounce the blind following of the orthodox dogmas and to develop and nourish the creative activity of man's reason through recognizing his own dynamism and will.

References

- [1]. Quran
- [2]. Ibid.
- [3]. Ibid
- [4]. Iqbal Mohd., *Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam*, Sh. Mohd. Ashraf, Oriental Publisher and Distributor, Delhi, 1985.
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International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 4593, Journal no. 47449.

Dr,Shazia Zafar khan "Iqbal's Critique of Wahadat-al-wujud :". International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention(IJHSSI), vol. 6, no. 12, 2017, pp. 14-16.