

EXPLORING IQBAL'S VISION OF
CONSCIOUSNESS: BRIDGING MYSTICISM,
SCIENCE, AND PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into Sir Muhammad Iqbal's exploration of inner religious experience, focusing on his philosophical views on consciousness, ego, and mysticism. Drawing upon both Newtonian physics and Quantum mechanics, the article examines the intersection between science and spirituality in understanding consciousness. Iqbal's concept of ego and self aligns with modern definitions of consciousness, challenging both materialism and dualism, and highlighting the limitations of reductionism in explaining consciousness. The article further explores the complexities of consciousness, emphasizing Iqbal's belief that science and religion may eventually converge. It also analyzes Iqbal's views on mystic experiences as a higher form of consciousness, examining how these experiences transcend physical limitations, allowing individuals to connect with the Ultimate Reality. Through references to modern scholars, mystic traditions, and quantum theory, the article situates Iqbal's metaphysical ideas within contemporary discussions on consciousness, aiming to synthesize scientific, philosophical, and mystical insights into a unified theory of consciousness.

Iqbal's thoughts on inner religious experience are spread over several chapters of the *Reconstruction*. We need to articulate some basic information on Newtonian physics and Quantum mechanics (Heisenberg's theory of wave front).

There is exists an ambiguity of various terms such as ego, self, consciousness, mind, cognitive systems, mental state, psyche and soul. All these terms mean the same thing. Indeed, the exact meaning of some of them is not very clear. However, to simplify our task, the word consciousness will be used which now dominates the recent literature on the subject. In fact, in our opinion, Iqbal's use of the word ego and self fully satisfies the characteristics of consciousness. We were led to this conclusion, when Iqbal explicitly stated that the path towards understanding of ego passes through consciousness.¹

Inasmuch as consciousness is concerned, there is little doubt that we are standing on the crossroad of materialism and dualism. The difficulty lies in the fact that none of these creeds provides us with a full appreciation of the exact nature of consciousness. Whatever has been discussed so far, makes it clear that most of the ideas presented lie at the intersection of science and philosophy. The path carved by science leads to the thicket of brain, where most neurobiologists admit that they do not yet know how and where consciousness arises. The other path winds through philosophy which has been nurtured by ancient as well as modern ideas. The question we are going to raise is that: Do the two tortuous paths have a meeting point? It was the hope of Iqbal that *"the day is not far off when religion and science may discover hitherto unsuspected mutual harmonies"* ². As the knowledge stands today and the way its frontiers are expanding, it appears almost a certainty that the dream of Iqbal will be realized in the coming decades, though in the present state of our knowledge only a few indications point in this direction. We will amplify these indications and leave it to the reader to draw his own conclusions. For this purpose, as Scott (2000)³ remarks, "we must construct consciousness from the relevant physics and biochemistry and electro-physiology and neural assemblies and cultural configuration of mental states that science cannot yet explain." To this may be added the metaphysical construct leavened with faith embedded in the edicts of the revealed knowledge.

Iqbal was right when he remarked, "classical physics (Newtonian) has learned to criticize its own foundations. As a result of this

criticism the kind of materialism, which it originally necessitated, is rapidly disappearing.”⁴ Some physicalists do agree with this viewpoint. Yet, the enthusiasm which quantum physics generated with its probabilistic occurrence of conscious events, turned the physicalists into reductionists, who believed that everything including consciousness can be explained through the laws of physics. This does not seem to be the whole truth, since more recently a number of physicalists have started challenging the reductionist approach. We will cite a few examples.

Walter Elasser, a theoretical physicist (1966)⁵ following Niels Bohr (1933)⁶ developed ideas about biology. He wondered at the “immense number of possible structures at each level of biological hierarchy which far exceed the number of organisms that actually exist.” It was, therefore, difficult to develop biological laws by averaging over identical individuals. Organisms were said to be radically inhomogeneous, because, “they contain structure within structure within structure, at any level from grossly macroscopic to molecular one.” This suggests that different configurations in very small dimensions may eventually, in time, transform (evolve) into macroscopic configurations. Such a process which runs through the whole fabric of biology cannot be validated through the presently known laws of physics. It is perhaps because of this reason that Erich Harth (1995)⁷ comes out with a severe criticism of physicalists in the following words:

To say that all of human affairs are describable and explainable in strictly physical terms, is sheer nonsense. It is equally nonsensical to assert that introducing such elements as political philosophies or laws, or a climate of opinion, means resorting to some kind of mysticism. We cannot expunge such concepts from a discussion of social dynamics. It must be apparent to all but the most simple minded reductionist that the attempt to construct a true physical theory of society would be a foolish undertaking.

Philip Anderson (1972)⁸, a condensed matter physicist, expressed similar views. He argued that:

the reductionist hypothesis does not by any means imply a ‘constructionist’ one. The ability to reduce everything to simple fundamental laws does not imply the ability to start from those laws and reconstruct the universe. In fact, the more the particle physicists tell us about the nature of fundamental laws, the less relevance they seem to have to the very real problems of the rest of science, much less to those of society. The constructionist hypothesis breaks down when confronted with the twin difficulties of scale and complexity.

In the same vein the Nobel laureate Murray Gell-Mann, in his book: *The Quark and the Jaguar* (1994)⁹ remarks that “the concept of theory of everything is a misleading characterization unless ‘everything’ is taken

to mean only the description of the elementary particles and their interactions. The theory cannot, by itself, tell us all that is knowable about the universe and the matter it contains, other kinds of information are needed as well.”

Some of the criticism we have cited in the preceding paragraphs on the fixity of reductionist approach about the physical basis of consciousness gives us a clue that their understanding is flawed, if not completely wrong. So much so that even our acceptance of the physics of matter is beset with a number of caveats.

When Iqbal was formulating his thoughts on the *Reconstruction*, the only fundamental particles known at that time were electrons, protons and neutrons, of which the atoms are made of. However, it is now known that neutrons and protons are constructed through the bricks of most elementary particles named Quarks (Gell-Mann, 1994)¹⁰. Given the fact that quarks are the most elementary particles, it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that all physical objects, living or non-living, including man are made from Quarks. This raises the question:

(a) where do the quarks come from,
(b) what was the state of matter before the big bang, which, through the condensation of matter, existing prior to big bang, resulted in the emergence of the universe and

(c) as we have shown earlier, the universe is under constant expansion (now experimentally verified), which means that there is a continuous showering of quarks from within or without the universe. On this count, philosopher Barry Dainton has made an interesting observation which is reproduced below from his book: *Stream of Consciousness (2000)*¹¹:

The idea that physical space is itself the product of interaction among pre-spatial particulars is one that physicists have been toying with. Although the spatial dimensions we are familiar with are commonly supposed to have originated with the big bang. If the physical has the pre-spatial ingredients, this could easily have predated the big bang, and perhaps explain why it occurred at all. Suppose these same pre-spatial ingredients are responsible for the generation of consciousness, a proposal which cannot be rejected out of hand, given the non-spatial characteristics of at least some sort of experience. This supposition leads to the striking conclusion that consciousness turns out to be older than matter in space, at least as to its raw materials.

This statement may be analyzed in the context of Iqbal's vision of the “Directive Force (Amr)” which, according to him, has been operating prior to the incident of big bang and continues to perpetuate subsequent to the emergence of the universe. Of further interest to us is the identification by Iqbal of Divine time and Divine

space in which the mystic lands himself in periods of mystic experience. Unfortunately, neither the mathematics nor the physics of today are yet able to provide a satisfactory answer for the kind of time-space order that prevailed prior to the big bang. Is it not true as Iqbal implicitly conceives, that mathematics and physics have not been invented by man, they only discovered them? In fact, laws of physics accompanied the emergence of the universe when condensation of matter was taking place. How? We have no answer, except that we have to turn to the “Directive Force”, as insisted by Iqbal.

More explicit statement on this subject is that of Swanson (1994)¹², who proposed the idea of *agnostic materialism*. The same is reproduced below:

The idea that mind-body problem is particularly perplexing flows from the unjustified and relatively modern faith that we have an adequate grasp of the fundamental nature of matter at some crucial general level of understanding, even if we are uncertain about many details. Agnosticism is called for because it seems so clear that this cannot be right if materialism is true. (1994: 105).

Equally important are the views of another philosopher, McGinn (1991)¹³, who in his book: “Consciousness and Space”: presents the following remarks:

That the brain must have properties other than those currently recognized, since these are insufficient to explain what it can achieve, namely the generation of consciousness. The brain must have aspects that are not represented in our current physical world view, aspects we do not understand, in addition to all those neurons and electrochemical processes. There is, on this view, a radical incompleteness in our view of reality including physical reality.” (1995: 157).

On the basis of this valid criticism on the reductionist position by eminent scholars of the same profession, we can make a statement that there is incompleteness in the physicalists view regarding consciousness which they leave entirely to the neuronal activity of the brain.

Using another line of thought developed by Barry Dainton (2000)¹⁴ we can arrive at the same conclusion, though in a somewhat modified form. The philosopher approaches the problem by taking into account the philosophy of phenomenalism initiated by Husserl (1900)¹⁵. In doing so, his analysis takes note of: (a) phenomenism per se; (b) experience; (c) understanding; (d) awareness; (e) unity of consciousness; (f) phenomenal space; and phenomenal time. All these aspects have been discussed in the perspectives of consciousness. The same are also addressed in relation to physicalism as well as dualism, however, without committing himself

completely to any one of these creeds. Though he does not subscribe to the Cartesian type of substance dualism, yet maintaining that the only merit of dualism in any form lies in the fact that it implies unity of consciousness (see also Iqbal on unity of consciousness). This constitutes a substantial part of his thesis designated as phenomenal consciousness, in which he sees its ultra organic “relationship with experience.” By experience he means “states or items with a phenomenal character.” To be able to build his arguments, he, like Iqbal, draws distinction between “experience of understanding and perceptual experience.” The former in the words of Iqbal means inner religious experience, even if generalized, it amounts to introspection; the other, however, is the same which Iqbal calls normal experience (verifiable, sensible). What is phenomenism, however? A brief analysis of this philosophy will be in order for the reason that it may give us some clue as to whether science and philosophy do really have a meeting ground as predicted by Iqbal. In the process of developing an understanding of phenomenism, we will also make reference to the related issues, for example, experience, thought, awareness and understanding.

The discipline of phenomenology may be defined initially as the study of structures of experience (emphasis: experience) or consciousness. More exactly, it is the study of phenomena; that is, appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience and the meanings we draw from it. Accordingly, phenomenology studies – “conscious experience” – as experienced from the first hand point of view (subjective). This field of philosophy has its own firm footing among other philosophical thoughts. Not surprisingly, it can be distinguished, or related to, other main fields of philosophy, namely, ontology (the study of being); epistemology (the study of knowledge), logic (the study of valid reasoning) and ethics (the study of moral values), among others. Since Edmund Husserl’s logical investigations (1900)¹⁶, this philosophy has been extensively debated in the 20th century and the debate continues unabated. (see, for example: Martin Heidegger)¹⁷. In order to pursue phenomenology in terms of experience or consciousness, we have to have our focus on: (a) pure description of lived experience, (Husserl, 1991)¹⁸, (b) interpretation of type of experience in relation with the contextual features, especially social and linguistic (Hermeneutics: Heidegger¹⁹ and others) and (c) the form and type of the experience. We have no intention of going into details of philosophy of phenomenology but will make an attempt to draw from it only to the extent that as to how it interprets experience (categorizes)? ; (b) how, if at all, it bridges the gap between science and philosophy? (c) how this can be

related to religious experience Introspectively? (d) how is unity of consciousness embedded in this philosophy? and (e) what is meant by phenomenological space and time? Answers to these questions may help us in constructing a unified theory of consciousness *sans* pure physicalism (reductionism).

We strongly emphasize that what makes an experience conscious is certain awareness one has of the experience while living through or performing it. As has been referred to earlier, Dainton distinguishes perceptual experience (sensible), from experience of understanding (non-sensible). Whatever the case may be, the introspection or inner awareness has been a subject of considerable debate in spite of Locke's (1897)²⁰ notion of self consciousness on the heels of Descartes' sense of consciousness. It does not mean as Bernato²¹ argued that awareness of experience is a kind of inner observation, as if one were doing two things at a time. In our opinion we consider such an experience as what Iqbal calls higher order perception of one's mind in operation, or, put in other words it is a higher order thought about one's mental activity (note how phenomenology comes out in support of Iqbal's views on consciousness). All this means that awareness, experience and consciousness should be placed within a single parenthesis, and further that it not only explains the unity of consciousness emerging from stream of consciousness, but is also an individuated subjective phenomenon— beset with intentionality. For a detailed discussion on the origin and development of phenomenology reference may be made to some interesting nineteenth-twentieth century works, such as: William Jame's *Principles of Psychology*; Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927)²¹ among others. From what we have been presenting on phenomenology, though briefly, we come to the conclusion that Rene Descartes in his epoch making "Meditation on First Philosophy" (1641) had argued that minds and bodies are two distinct kinds of being or substances with two different kinds of attributes or modes: bodies are characterized by spatio-temporal physical properties, while minds are characterized by properties of thinking (including introspection in the absence of stimuli from external physical objects). Centuries later, phenomenology would find, in the works of Bernanto and Husserl that mental acts are characterized by consciousness and intentionality, while natural sciences would find that physical systems are characterized by mass and force, ultimately by gravitational, electromagnetic, and quantum fields. Where do we find intentionality and consciousness in quantum electromagnetic— gravitational fields remains an enigma for

the physical order of this world. That is the mind-body problem today.

We have drawn the attention of the reader to the philosophy of phenomenology for the precise reason that by whatever name it may be called, it lies at the heart of mind-body problem. We close the discussion on phenomenology by referring to the works of Nagel (1970)²² and Searle (1983, 1991)²³. Nagel argued that “Many philosophers pressed the case that many qualia (pain, color cognition) are not addressed by a physical account of either brain structure or brain function. Consciousness has properties of its own. And yet, we know, it is closely tied to the brain. And, at some level of description, neural activities implement computation. In the same vein Searle argues in his book: *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (1991) and *Intentionality* (1983) in the following words:

Consciousness and intentionality are essential properties of the mental states. Our brains produce mental states with properties of consciousness and intentionality, and this is all part of our biology, yet consciousness and intentionality require ‘first person’ ontology. Computers simulate but do not have mental states characterized by intentionality (computers process symbols and symbols lack meaning, that is, no “semantics”). Thus Searle categorically rejects materialism and functionalism, while insisting that “mind is a biological property of organism like us: our brains secrete consciousness.

In essence then, phenomenology provides a kind of umbrella on biological, physical and social processes associated with consciousness and thus can be considered as a good candidate, though partially, for constructing a unified theory of consciousness, provided that we can neatly integrate it with Dennet’s hypothesis of neural assemblies, Eccles’ theory of Action Potentials including probabilistic traffic of afferent and efferent messages along the synaptic zones, world 2 of Popper related to soul or consciousness, and finally, Iqbal’s interpretation of Directive Force (Amr Rabbi). Most interesting part of this philosophy is the identification of phenomenal space and phenomenal time as having their existence independent of serial time and space, with characteristics to be discussed later.

Regarding relationship between consciousness and quantum theory, the theory in the hands of physicalists as well as dualists has taken different interpretations. One such interpretation, which is of interest to us, and which is likely to have great significance when we make an attempt to up-date Iqbal’s views on consciousness, ego and self, has been put up recently by Pratt (1977)²⁴ in his article: *Consciousness, Causality and Quantum Physics*. As we have explained earlier, the standard interpretation of quantum physics

assumes (a) indetermination, (b) quantum systems exist, objectively only when they are being measured or observed; (c) whereas mathematical description of the quantum world allows the probability of experimental results to be calculated with high degree of accuracy, there is no consensus what it means in conceptual terms. Thus, according to the uncertainty principle “the position and momentum of a subatomic particle cannot be measured simultaneously with accuracy greater than that of Plank’s constant”, (d) the particle can never be at rest, but is subject to constant fluctuations even when no measurement is taking place, and that “these fluctuations are assumed to have no causes at all”. In conclusion, it follows from (a) – (d) that quantum world is believed to be characterized by absolute indeterminism, intrinsic ambiguity, and irreducible lawlessness.

Taking exception to this classical view of quantum physics Bohm (1993)²⁵ and Bohm and Peat (1989)²⁶, expressed the view that abandonment of causality had been too hasty: “It is quite possible that while the quantum theory, and with it indeterminacy principle, are valid to a very high degree of approximation in a certain domain, they both cease to have relevance in new domains below that in which the current theory is applicable.” In our opinion, this is a highly intriguing statement which plunges us from science straight into metaphysics. This means nothing but an ontological interpretation of quantum theory, rejecting the two major assumptions of the theory, namely, absolute indeterminism and objective existence of quantum systems only when they are measurable and observable. Does this mean, as Bohm (*op. cit.*) suggests “that the quantum events are partly determined by subtler forces (presently unknown) operating at levels deeper than the known physical reality? We believe that this concept of Bohm brings him closer to the concepts of Eccles (synaptic fields) and that of Iqbal (Directive Force).

Physicalists tell us that a quantum system is represented mathematically by a wave function which is derived from Schrodinger’s equation. The wave function can be used to calculate the probability of finding a particle at any particular point in space. However, if wave function is assumed to provide a complete picture of quantum system, then this would mean that between measurements the particle dissolves into nothingness, and is probably present in different places at once. It has been agreed that wave function collapses in a mysterious way – violating the Schrodinger equation. This has no explanation in the classical quantum theory at the micro-level; though, it operates precisely at

the macro-level. We have brought this concept into discussion for the reason that theorists claim that “collapse of wave function is caused by consciousness thereby creating reality.” The theory also emphasizes that “only self conscious being such as ourselves can collapse wave function. In view of the above, it should be legitimate to assume that “the whole universe must have existed as ‘potentia’ in some transcendental realm (Directive Force) of quantum probabilities until self conscious beings evolved and collapsed themselves and the rest of the branch of their reality into material world and that objects remain in a state of actuality only so long as they are being observed by humans (Goswami, 1993)²⁷. The other view that even non self conscious organisms or even electrons can cause wave function collapse, has also been put forward (Herbert, 1993)²⁸. Whatever may be the case, the fact remains that the idea of wave packets spreading out and collapsing is not based on hard experimental evidence. Accordingly, we are inclined to go along with Bohm’s ontological interpretation that wave function gives only ill-defined and unsatisfactory notion of wave function collapse. Alternately, he suggests the real existence of particles and fields: “particles have a complete inner structure and are always accompanied by a quantum wave field; they are acted upon not only by classical electromagnetic but also by a subtle force, the quantum potential, determined by quantum field (Bohm and Hiley 1993)²⁹; Bohm and Peat, 1989³⁰; Hiley and Peat, 1991)³¹.”

The Bohm’s arguments say that particles are guided by quantum potential and provide connection between quantum systems. This represents a vast energy pool, recognized by standard quantum vacuum, underlying the material world. Very little is known about quantum vacuum (zero potential field) but its energy density is astronomical (10^{108} J/cm³). It is on this basis that he postulates: “It is quite possible that while the quantum theory, and with it the indeterminate principle, are valid to a very large degree of approximation in a certain domain, they both cease to have relevance in new domains below that in which current theory is applicable. It is interesting to note as stated by him that observation is not a necessary test for proving the existence of quantum world when it lies beyond its measurable domain, i.e., below the recognized quantum world. He, therefore, rejects the positivist view that something that cannot be measured or known precisely cannot be said to exist”. In other words, he does not confuse epistemology with ontology (compare this with Kant’s critique of pure reason).

After having addressed monistic materialism and dualism in the context of consciousness, (ego, self), now, in the same context, it will

be worthwhile to explore the possibility of whether insight into mysticism can be of any help in enhancing our understanding of the physical and biological intricacies involved in unfolding the mystery of consciousness. Setting aside the postulate of reductionists for a while, we turn to biologists and find out how they have found solution to the complicated biological phenomena such as the structure and function of genes. Without exception their approach has been to analyze the simplest variant of a complex structure and then seek an answer to the functional properties of a complicated system. Probably the most famous is the well known humble bacterium *E. Coli*. Its simple gene structure has allowed us to understand much of the gene functioning of complex species (opening up the field of genetic engineering). Similarly, many biologists have turned to the “memory” of a simple sea slug to understand our own more kaleidoscopic memory. In the same vein, as Iqbal has insisted in the *Reconstruction*, the real solution of the thickest of consciousness may be available in mystic experience. The question for us then is: what is mystic experience? How it operates and being individualistic, how can it be generalized? We will take these questions in the same order.

In recent years Robert Forman (1996)³² has succinctly addressed the question: Why mysticism? In his opinion

mysticism represents a simple form of consciousness. Usually our minds are enormously complex streams of thoughts, feelings, sensations, wants, snatches of songs, pains, drives, daydreams and, of course, consciousness itself, more or less awake of it all.

This is all “noise” and “detritus”. The task of a mystic is: (a) to clear away the noise to the extent possible; (b) to accomplish this he uses some forms of “meditation” or “contemplation”, (c) to recycle mental subroutine and thus systematically reduce mental activity; (d) to slow down the thinking process and to have fewer or less intense thoughts; and (e) to cause reduction of attention (minimize) to bodily sensations taking him away from fantasies and day dreaming. By using the techniques listed at (a) – (e), there is an inner calmness that prevails leading to complete silence inside. This is a perception and thought free state. Both mental and sensory contents evaporate into nothingness. In spite of this prevailing calm, a mystic “emerges confident that he has remained awake inside, fully conscious.” In Iqbal’s words this is what he calls higher consciousness. In both cases this level is “wakeful and contentless (non-intentional?). We have put a question mark on the word non-intentional for the reason that in our opinion the status of non-intentionality is subject to scrutiny - to be discussed later.

Now we discuss what Iqbal has to say about mysticism. We will now summarize his views, in particular, on finite-infinite contact happening through what he calls mystic experience. According to him, "It is especially in the period of 'discovery' that metaphysics is replaced by psychology and religious life develops an ambition to come into contact with ultimate Reality." He has recognized several features of this phase.

First, the epistemological structure of this experience is different from the normal (sensible) experience.

Second, it is erroneously assumed that it is life-denying process.

Third, for scientists it is "opposed" to "empirical outlook of our time."

Fourth, religious experience in its higher form "recognized the necessity of experience as its foundation long before science learnt to do so. In this regard, therefore, the only difference lies in the qualitative nature of experience. And as Iqbal says, "So it (religious experience) is a genuine effort to clarify human consciousness, and is, as such, as critical of its level of experience as Naturalism is of its own level." This ingenious line of argument, it may be observed, describes a circle around consciousness and experience. Indeed, Iqbal is trying to convey to us that in the mystic state there are long term shifts in epistemological structure which take the form of sequential quantum leaps in experience. This aspect has extensively been explored by Forman (1996)³³. According to him, the first step is "an experience of a permanent interior stillness even when engaged in thought and activity. This is a state in which one is aware of one's awareness while simultaneously remaining conscious of thoughts, sensation and actions. This has been called a dualistic mystical state (DMS). In the second phase it is described as a perceived unity of ones own inner experience. – the so-called "Unified mystical state" (UMS). This culminates in pure conscious experience (PCE) or what Iqbal states as higher conscious experience (HCE). Both ending up in a unified mystical state (UMS). It appears to us that a thought of high intensity (for example, a sustained ambition to come in contact with Ultimate Reality) may contribute to the persistence of the unitive mystical state. Similar views have been expressed by Williams (1995)³⁴ and Chalmers (1995)³⁵. Taken together, in agreement with Iqbal (1930)³⁶ and Forman (1995)³⁷ we are inclined to draw the conclusion that advanced mystical experience results from PCE with elimination of Sensible activity and a relatively high intensity of a unitive desire to sense its own quiet interior character more and more fully. Going a step further, Forman (op. cit.) distinguishes between apophatic and kataphatic mysticism. The latter is associated

with sensory experience and involves hallucinations, visions, auditions or even sensations like smell or taste while the former uses non-sensory language. So far, we have not attempted to relate mysticism with any particular theory of consciousness. Yet, we cannot avoid making a statement that it involves “phenomenological dualism” accommodating both normal experience and inner religious experience.

In dealing with mysticism, one question must be attended to carefully. This relates to the reliability and validity of the mystic experience, *per se*, since all mystic experiences are individualistic (first person). Would it then be justified to generalize such first person (subjective) experiences? Not necessarily, unless hard analytic approach is applied for arriving at a balanced equation for the consumption of a concrete mind. Iqbal in developing his metaphysical thesis on inner religious experience takes cognizance of this aspect. He is aware that religious experience is “incommunicable”. But “this does not mean that religious man’s pursuit is futile”. Why he makes this categorical statement? The reasons he cites have a considerable merit. First, it is only through religious experience that one can touch the heights of consciousness (ego). The same ego in daily life enters into sensible intercourse with the worldly objects around him, including the social norms. These characteristics of ego, living in serial time and absolute space, are of fundamental importance for normal experience (verifiable). This he calls “conceptually describable habitual selfhood”. There is, however another level of ego (self, consciousness) in which during inner religious experience, a stillness and calmness prevails inside, receiving no impulses from the outside world. It is a period of “discovery” - a period, in which a single desire of coming in contact with the Real entangles consciousness in its Pure form (PCE of Forman, or higher consciousness in the words of Iqbal). During this period, the self-entirely under the control of pure consciousness, divorces itself from real time and space and thrives in what Iqbal calls “Divine Time” and “Divine Space” (see for example, his reference to Iraqi in the *Reconstruction*). Further, the “unique metaphysical status, which the self enjoys under the spell of higher consciousness” is not a conceptually manageable intellectual fact; it is a vital fact, an attitude consequent upon an inner biological transformation which cannot be captured in the net of logical categories “in this form alone the content of timeless experience can diffuse itself in the time movement and make itself effectively visible to the eye of history.” This is why he quotes Mohyuddin Ibn al-’Arabi that “God is a precept, the world is a concept.”³⁸ Thus, in view of the reasons cited

above, Iqbal believes that the method of dealing with reality by means of 'concepts' is not at all a serious way of dealing with it. Citing the inadequacy of science, he remarks that "science does not care whether its electron or (quark) is a real entity or not. It may be a mere symbol, a mere convention." Further, being highly critical of science he is dismayed that science has "ignored metaphysics altogether" in so far as the discovery of ultimate nature of Reality is concerned. He, however, concedes the involvement and control of "psychological and physiological processes" in tuning up the ego (self), for an immediate contact with the "Ultimate Reality". Such an experience, Iqbal thinks, "cannot but be individual in form and content." Hypothesizing on the existence of "potential types of consciousness lying close to normal consciousness,– he asserts that "the question of the possibility of religion as a form of higher experience is perfectly legitimate one and demands our serious attention." This is an excellent array of metaphysical arguments, yet, in view of the ascendancy of modern naturalism, it may be difficult to convince a concrete mind as Iqbal remarks himself that:

Modern atomism is however, unique. Its amazing mathematics which sees the world as an elaborate differential equation; and its physics which, following its own methods, has been led to smash some of the old gods of its temple, have already brought us to the point of asking the question whether causality – bound aspect of Nature is the whole-truth about it? Is not the Ultimate Reality invading our consciousness (and thus, ego) from some other direction as well. Is the purely intellectual method of overcoming the Nature the only method?

For Iqbal the "modern man with his philosophies of criticism and scientific specialism finds himself in a strange predicament. His naturalism has given him an unprecedented control over the forces of nature." Citing the example of evolutionary theory, he rightly points out: "How the same idea affects different cultures (Rumi in the East, and Darwin in the West)? In his view, mysticism in no way is linked with renunciation. If anything, it has to be used for expanding the world view of Islam, both for the mundane and spiritual progress of life, enabling man to live soulfully.

An account of Muslim mystics (Sufis) is available in: *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (1963).³⁹ We will, however, confine ourselves to the experiences of only a few well known mystics whose contributions to inner religious experience in the period ranging from 8th to 12th century illuminated the firmament of the Muslim world. Among them are included: Muhasibi (701-857), Hasan of Basrah (776), Rabiah al-Basri (713-801), Bayazid Bistami (d: 874), Junaid of Baghdad (d.910), Abd al Qadir Jilani (1077-1166), Shihab al-Din Suharwardy (1144-1253), Shihab al-Din Suharwardy Maqtul (b.1153)

and Ibne ‘Arabi (b.1165), among others. One of the earliest authentic works on Sufism is available in *Kitab al-Luma* of al-Sarraj al-Tusi who died in 988 A.D.). His work has been quoted extensively by a number prominent writers on the subject (al-Qushairi,⁴⁰ Ali Hajwairi (1330-AH),⁴¹ Farid al-Din Attar⁴² and al-Ghazali⁴³).

Rabiyah al-Basri (706-859) being unique amongst early mystics, presented the doctrine of “disinterested love of God”, which served both as a motive and a goal for her. This eminently distinguishes her from her contemporary mystics who would turn to Sufism either to seek reward of paradise or deliverance from hell. She adopted the axiom “that God is worthy of worship even if there is no motive of fear or reward.”⁴⁴ It has been narrated that one day she was carrying fire in one hand and water in the other. When asked: “What does this mean?” She replied: “I am going to light fire in the paradise and pour water on hell so that both may disappear and those seeking love of God may not do so for fear of hell or reward of paradise.”⁴⁵ Thus, the object of disinterested love, according to Rabiyah was union with God. She says: “My hope is for union with Thee, for that is the goal of my desire.” Bayazid Bistami who died in 874 A.D., made an interesting statement that “a mystic can reach his goal through blindness, deafness, and dumbness”⁴⁶. This statement conveys the fact that a mystic enjoys complete inner stillness by cutting himself off from all external sensible bodily experiences. A similar mystic state has been recognized by Forman (1996) when he refers to pure conscious experience (PEE). Bistami describes his experience in the following words: “For twelve years I treated the self (ego, consciousness) in me as a smith does with his material”⁴⁷ heating and beating alternately in the fire of penance and with the hammer of blame, till it becomes a mirror. For five years I was busy polishing this mirror with different kinds of religious practices. For one year I looked within myself then I found everything dead before me and God alone living.” Attar, (132 A.H.). It may be noted that his experience of the state of unity resembled one of al-Hallaj (ann al-Haqq). “I went from God to God, until He cried from me in me, “Oh thou I, Glory to me: How great is my majesty.”⁴⁸ When I came out of myself I found the lover and beloved as one, for in the world of thought, all is one. This is why Iqbal quotes : “:God is a precept and not a concept” This precept is more vividly narrated in a state of higher consciousness identified as ascension, “As I lived through Him, I became eternal and immortal, my tongue became the tongue of unity and my soul the soul of abstraction. It is He who moves my tongue and my role is only that of an interpreter; talker in reality is He, and not I”.

Junaid of Baghdad was of mystic of different kind. Unlike Hallaj and Bistami who drank deep from their unitary experience and were intoxicated, Junaid advocates sobriety, because in this frame of consciousness, one maintains awareness of his self and does not lose sanity (as in intoxication). The story goes that when Hallaj visited Junaid, he refused to accept him as his disciple. Yet, Hallaj remarked, "O' Shaikh sobriety and intoxication are two attributes of man, and man is veiled from his Lord until his attributes are annihilated." Junaid's advocacy of the principle of sobriety *a la* mystics combined with his deep knowledge of theology, jurisprudence and ethics made him a model sufi (mystic) who was acceptable by all schools of Islamic thought. A relevant book on him: *Junaid of Baghdad* (Kazim 1995)⁴⁹ may be of interest to the reader.

A word about Hallaj at this stage would be in order because of the prevailing confusion about him between theologians and the students of mystic science. He was executed because of his two utterances: (a) "I am the creative truth." (ann al-Haq) and (b) "Destroy your Ka'bah". Iqbal defending Hallaj, indeed, thinks that "experience in the religious life of Islam reached its culmination in the well known words of Hallaj- 'I am the creative truth.' He refers to the French orientalist Massignon, whom he met in Paris. The fragments of Hallaj, collected and published by Massignon leave no doubt that the martyr saint could not have meant to deny the transcendence of God. We have already referred to the dialogue between Junaid al-Baghdadi and Hallaj. It is obvious that Hallaj belongs to the category of intoxicated mystics, which, in our opinion, though overwhelming, is not surprising. This state of higher consciousness, Iqbal thinks is "the true interpretation of his experience. It is not the drop slipping into the sea, but the realization and bold affirmation in an undying phrase of the reality and permanence of the ego (consciousness) in a profounder personality." This is indicative of "unknown levels of consciousness". We intend to place this important statement within the ambit of our unified theory of consciousness when we will make an attempt to synthesize modern advances in physics and psychology: certainly, methods are now available which may enable us to assess various levels of consciousness as "knowledge-yielding experience." There should be little hesitation in accepting the statement of Iqbal that "the concepts of theological systems draped in the terminology of a practically dead metaphysics (can) be of any help to those who possess a different intellectual background."

Abd al-Qadir Jilani who lived between 1070 AD and 1166 AD makes a reference to four stages of spiritual development providing

an almost verifiable content in mystic literature. The four stages include:

- (a) Piety: when a person follows the religious law meticulously,
- (b) Reality: which is identical with saintliness. In this stage directive force (*Amr Rabbi*) is more evident and the inner voice dominates any other sensation,
- (c) Resignation: when the individual submits completely to God and
- (d) Annihilation: which is a level of consciousness merging the finite into infinite (as a precept), this is the unitive state. These stages are not different from those identified in the recent literature on mysticism (Forman 1996). For the Sheikh the onerous duty of a mystic is to lead the people to the way of God. An ideal mystic is one, “who, by example of his life and the words of his mouth helps the ignorant and misguided to the way of righteousness.” The mystical approaches adopted by Shihab al-Din Suharwardy (1144-1234 AD) and Shihab al-Din Maqtul (b.1153 AD) though more comprehensive and rigorously specified, address the stages of mysticism more or less in the same way as identified by Junaid of Baghdad.

In the history of sufistic Islam Ibn al-'Arabi's life and works have been lauded and criticized by various schools of thought. He was born at Murcia-South east of Spain in 1165 AD. His writings vacillated between pantheism and monotheistic doctrine of Islam. In finding a common fabric for the teachings of Islam, he uses esoteric language for mysticism and exoteric language for Islam. Yet, he is recognized as a pre-eminent thinker and a mystic. His mystical philosophy is a blend of thought and emotions, reason and intuitive knowledge. Again and again he refers his readers to mystic intuition. We are not concerned here with how far his philosophical and mystical ideas were in harmony with the established dogmas of Islam; indeed, we have included him in this discussion only for his views as a mystic. Reading between the lines, one can easily understand that he is a strong supporter of unity of being. He is the one who declares that “God is a precept not a concept.” Contrary to this Bayazid of Bistami and Junaid of Baghdad, speak of unity of vision, which we think is easy to explain on the basis of modern literature on mysticism and consciousness.

Mysticism continues to be a subject of extensive discussion in modern literature. Much of it, scientifically, or even from religious point of view, has developed in the lap of consciousness (ego, self). One intriguing issue which has created difficulties of interpretation and verification relates to the fact that inner religious experience,

whether in the past, or even today, constitutes unusual first hand reports of the mystics and is thus subjective. This criticism can be overcome by averaging out all personal experiences (as in experimental data). When we do so, it becomes a simple matter that there is unequivocal similarity in the experiences narrated by all genuine mystics to whichever religion they belong. The case of Muslim mystics has already been discussed. Forman (1998)⁵⁰ in his review has given an account of such experiences from mystics belonging to different faiths. Some of these reports are quoted below:

The first report is from Teresa Avila of what she calls the 'Orison of Union.'

"During the short time the union lasts, she is deprived of every feeling, and even if she would, she could not think of anything else. She is utterly dead to the things of the world I do not even know whether in this state she has enough life left to breathe. She is unaware of it. The natural action of all her faculties are suspended. She neither sees, hears, nor understands (James, 1902, p.409).

It can be seen that how similar is this statement with that of (a) Bayazid Bistami: A mystic can reach his goal only through blindness, deafness and dumbness; and (b) Attar: the more a man knows God, the more is he lost in him.

The second report is from Eckhart who also asserts the absence of sensory content as well as mental objects. The more completely you are able to draw in your powers and their images which you have absorbed, and the further you can get from creature and their images, and the nearer you are to this and the readier to receive it. If only you would suddenly be aware of all things, then you could pass into an oblivion of your own body as St. Paul did In this case memory no longer functioned, nor understanding, nor the senses nor the powers that should function so as to govern and grace the body In this way a man should flee his senses, turn his powers inward and sink into an oblivion of all things and himself. (Walsh, 1970, p.7).⁵¹

Thus, Whatever side of the lectern we sat, one thing is certain that when in a mystic state, be it the 'fourth stage' of Junaid of Baghdad, or fana (annihilation) of 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani the bodily senses are eliminated and in the stillness that ensues, it is only inner religious experience which rides on the shoulders of higher consciousness that the ego is guided towards the intellectual vision (perception) of the Ultimate ego. This may be readily accepted on metaphysical grounds and as matter of faith, yet, the question— 'how it happens', remains to be answered. This discussion leads ultimately to synthesize physical, biological and psychological evidences, to come up with a possible unified theory of consciousness and the way it controls the ego (self).

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