

EXPLORING THE CONVERGENCE OF  
KNOWLEDGE, INTUITION, AND  
REALITY- A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
IQBAL AND MULLA SADRĀ'S  
PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the striking similarities between the philosophical views of Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Mulla Sadrā, particularly in their understanding of the relationship between knowledge, religious experience, and reality. Iqbal, in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, emphasizes that both thought and intuition spring from the same source, complementing one another in grasping reality. Similarly, Sadrā, a prominent Muslim philosopher, believes that intuitive experience, or *mushabada 'aqliya*, is a higher form of intellectual truth, transcending pure rationalization. Both thinkers agree that rational methods alone cannot fully capture the truth and that intuition is necessary for a complete vision of reality.

The article also discusses the dynamic nature of reality in Iqbal and Sadrā's thought, highlighting their shared belief in change as a fundamental principle of the universe. Iqbal's view of dynamic reality aligns with Sadrā's theory of *al-haraka al-jamhariyya* (substantial motion), where existence is seen as continuously evolving towards higher forms. Both thinkers stress that intuition and reason are not opposed but are complementary, each serving to enhance the understanding of reality.

Furthermore, the article compares Iqbal's and Sadrā's approaches to Sufism and mysticism. While both are inclined towards intuitive experience, they do not advocate for a purely mystical approach without philosophical grounding. The article concludes by reflecting on the convergence of ideas between Iqbal and Sadrā, particularly their shared emphasis on the cognitive aspect of intuitive experience and the evolution of existence, despite differences in their engagement with Sufism.

## Sadrā and Iqbal

Iqbal in his first lecture of *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* describes the relationship between knowledge and religious experience. He points out that religion stands in greater need of a rational foundation of its ultimate principles than even the dogma of science. He continues, “But to rationalize faith is not to admit the superiority of philosophy over religion.....Nor is there any reason to suppose that thought and intuition and essentially opposed to each other.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Iqbal, they spring up from the same source and complement each other. One grasps Reality piecemeal, the other grasps it in its wholeness. The one fixes its gaze on the eternal, the other on the temporal aspect of Reality. Both seek vision of the same Reality which reveals itself to them in accordance with their function in life. Iqbal confirms Bergson’s view that intuition is only a higher form of intellect.

Iqbal’s view is that in order to secure a complete vision of Reality, sense-perception must be supplemented by the perception of *Qalb* (قلب), i.e., the heart. The heart is a kind of intuition or insight which brings us into constant aspects of Reality other than open to sense-perception. However, it is not a mysterious faculty, it is rather a mode of dealing with Reality in which sensation, in the physiological sense, does not play any part. Yet the experience is as concrete as any other experience. The total Reality which invades our consciousness as an empirical fact has other ways of entering our awareness. Religious experience is a fact like any other fact of human experience

Iqbal proceeds to describe the characteristics of mystic experience. It is immediate, unanalysable, highly objective and incommunicable like all feeling, untouched by discursive intellect. But like all feeling, it has a cognitive element. It is the nature of feeling to seek expression in thought. Feeling and idea are non-temporal and temporal aspects of the same experience. According to Iqbal, “Feeling is as much objective fact as is the idea”.<sup>2</sup> At the same time he says, “Thought or idea not alien to the being.”<sup>3</sup>

(The above-mentioned views of) Iqbal has striking resemblance with Sadrā concept of intuitive experience. Sadrā al-lin al Shirazi (979/80—1571-72A.D), more commonly known as Mulla Sadrā, was a great and original thinker. According to the list of Sadrā's works given by the editor of his book—*Al-Asfār Al-Arba* (vol. I, ebran, 1958) in his introduction to the work, Sadrā wrote 32 to 33 treatises.

His contribution to Muslim philosophy is immense, and his influence in Persia, Afghanistan and Indo-Pak subcontinent cannot be ignored. Iqbal has mentioned his name in his writings.

Sadrā like Iqbal was trained to be a philosopher. He retired to seclusion partly because he was not sure about the philosophical truths. He regarded purely rational method as superficial and extrinsic. He was, therefore, in search of a method that would transform merely rational propositions into experienced truths. In his “confession”<sup>4</sup> he expressed this desire to reach certainty.

Sadrā emphasizes the point that the nature of existence and its uniqueness can only be experienced, the moment you conceptualize it, it ceases to be existence and becomes an essence. Yet Sadrā has employed a number of sophisticated rational arguments to prove the above-mentioned view. This leads us to the conclusion that for him, mystic truth is essentially intellectual truth and mystic experience is a cognitive experience. But this intellectual truth has to be lived through to be fully realized. If intellectual truth is only entertained as rational propositions, it will lose its essential character.

Sometimes the afore-mentioned point of view leads to the impression that in order to understand Sadrā's philosophy an understanding of Sufism is a must. However, Sadrā no-where asserts that one should be a Sufi in order to be a philosopher. Sadrā unlike Ibn Arabi (who otherwise, is a model for him) adopts a thorough-going rational and philosophical method. In fact, he disapproves of philosophy without intuitive experience, but at the same time does not like pure Sufism without philosophical training.

The question arises: What does Sadrā means by experience? He is no talking about Sufi or mystic experience, which is only ecstatic or ethico-estatic, but about an intuitive apprehension of truth or rational experience (مشاهده عقلي). This he opposes to pure rationalization, superficial logical reasoning and rational

disputation. He insists that purely logical reasoning cannot dispute direct perception or intuitive experience.

Sadrā says, “Demonstration, indeed, the way of direct access and perception in those things which have a cause. This being the case, how can demonstration and direct perception can contradict each other? Those Sufis who have uttered (in defence of experiences of man like Ibn Arabi) words like ‘If you disprove them by arguments, they have disproved you by their experience’ are actually saying, ‘if you disprove them by your so-called arguments.....; otherwise, correct rational proofs cannot contradict intuitive experience.”<sup>5</sup>

This shows that intuition for Sadrā does not mean denial of reason. It is higher form of reason—a more positive and constructive form than formal reasoning.

To sum up, there seems to be a close resemblance between Iqbal and Sadrā’s point of view. In this respect we should keep in mind the following affinities:-

- (1) For both of them intuitive experience is a cognitive experience Here they differ from the thinkers like Ghazali, for whom mystic and intuitive experience is ethico-ecastatic, i.e., without any intellectual content.
- (2) Both Iqbal and Sadrā believe that the purely rational method is not sufficient to achieve the knowledge of truth and Reality.
- (3) Both search for a method to attain certainty.
- (4) Iqbal and Sadrā do not reject reason altogether. Sadrā, for example, gives a number of rational arguments, in order to support the content of his intuitive experience. Similarly, Iqbal maintains that religion stands in need of rational foundation of its ultimate principles. Iqbal also proposes the philosophical test, in order to prove the significance of the religious experience.
- (5) Both Iqbal and Sadrā agree that intuition and reason are not opposed to each other. Iqbal compares them to great rivers which have the same source. Similarly, for Sadrā intuition is a higher form of intellect. But he asserts that reason without intuitive experience is empty and superficial. Thus Iqbal and Sadrā maintain that reason and intuition complement each other.
- (6) Both have an ambivalent attitude toward Sufism. Some

consider Sadrā a Sufi. But he was not a Sufi or a supporter of Sufism in the usual sense of the word. Iqbal also seems to have an inclination towards Sufism; because, mystics experience is intuitive, yet he does not approve of all forms of Sufism.

So far we have been discussing the affinity between Iqbal and Sadrā in respect of their views about intuition and reason. But another significant analogy can be drawn. Iqbal in his lecture—“The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam”, says, “The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change.”<sup>6</sup> He also maintains that change is one of the greatest sign of God. Similarly, in “The conception of God” while discussing atomism he arrives at the conclusion that nothing has stable nature. In the very first lecture Iqbal points out that the Muslim rejected the Greek concept of the universe; because, it was fixed and determined. There were no creative possibilities in their conception. Iqbal believes that the Islamic concept of the universe is dynamic.

A similar dynamism is present in Sadrā’s theory of existence. He asserts that movement not only occurs in the qualities of things but in the very substance. He calls it substantial movement (الحركة الجوهرية). This doctrine of Sadrā is an important contribution to the Muslim philosophy. It transforms the fixed grades of al-Suhrawardi into systematic ambiguity of existence. The reason is that grades of being are no longer static and fixed, but more continuous and achieve higher forms of existence in time.

The driving force of this movement is ‘*Ishq*’ or cosmic love, which impels everything towards a more concrete form. Sadrā believes that each of the intellectually and spiritually perfected members of the human species will become a species unto himself in the hereafter.

Sadrā<sup>7</sup> thinks that in the Quran itself there are a number of verses establishing the thesis of change in substance. For instance, “When you see the mountains, you think they are stable, but they are fleeting just like clouds.” (Quran, XXVII, 88). In order to illustrate the perpetual flux,<sup>8</sup> he quotes the following Quranic verses: He (God) is everyday in a new mode.” (Quran, LV, 29).

The similarity between Iqbal and Sadrā’s afore-mentioned doctrines of concept of change, and ‘*Ishq*’ as the driving force of evolution and perfect man’s emergence is obvious. Iqbal as we

know, believes in the dynamic nature of reality, leading to the evolution of a more spiritual selfhood of men and the great potential of 'Ishq' in stimulatory the inner sources of spiritual energy which finally leads to creativity and evolution. Iqbal also quotes the above-mentioned second Quranic verse in "*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*" to establish change as the ultimate principle. His exact words are: "The Quranic view of the alternation of day and night as a symbol of the ultimate Reality which appears in a fresh glory every moment, shows the tendency in Islamic metaphysics to regard time objective."<sup>9</sup> However, Iqbal<sup>10</sup> more often presents another verse in support of the thesis of change, and that is related to the phenomenon of the succession of day and night.

To sum up, there is a thought-provoking resemblance between some of the views of Iqbal and Sadrā. The question arises: Is it sheer coincidence or does it show the influence of Sadrā on Iqbal? The latter possibility does not seem plausible; because, in Iqbal's writings the references to Sadrā are rare.

No doubt he is acquainted with his name and with some of his views. In *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, he does not attach much importance to him. The study of this book shows that he has not studied Sadrā seriously and thoroughly; because, for Iqbal Sadrā's most important doctrine concept is "identity of subject and object." He does not appear to be aware of Sadrā's theory of existence, the principle of systematic ambiguity of existence and the idea of substantial change— Sadrā's most revolutionary notions. This leaves with the former possibility, i.e., the affinity between Iqbal and Sadrā may be due to the fact that sometimes two minds working independently reach the same conclusion or conclusions in their intellectual search. In the field of psychology James—Lange theory of emotions, is an example of the he phenomenon.

### **Sadrā and Ibn Arabi**

Ibn Arabi (July 28, 1165–November 16, 1240) is considered one of the greatest theosophist and mystic whose full-fledged philosophical expression of the esoteric mystical dimension of Islamic thought is incomparable. His birthplace is *Tai*. His early education centre was Sevilla, which was considered centre of Islamic culture and learning. Ibn Arabi stated there for thirty year the studies with various mystic masters who found in him a young man of great spiritual inclination and extraordinary intelligence. During this period he traveled a lot to various cities of Spain and

North Africa in search of great Sufis. One of those trips he had the dramatic encounter with the great Muslim Aristotlean philosopher—Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) at the city of Cordoba. Ibn Rushd asked for this meeting, for he had heard a lot about the brilliant young Ibn Arabi. It was arranged and according to the traditions, he was highly impressed by his intellect and mystical depth.

In 1198, he had a vision and was commanded to travel to the East. Thus he began his pilgrimage first to Mecca (1201) where he received the divine command to write his major work “*Al-Fatubat*”, which was completed much later in Damascus. The full title of the book was— “*Al Fatubat al-Makkiyyah*” (The Meccan Revelation). The book is not only an encyclopedia of esoteric Islamic sciences as he understood them but also revelation of his own inner life. His conclusions were based on his mystical experience. In Mecca he also compiled his *diwan* (collection of poems— “*Tarjuman al Ashwaq*”, with a mystical commentary.

After Mecca Arabi visited Egypt and Anatolia (*Qonya*) and from there he traveled to Baghdad and Aleppo (Syria). However, he settled down in Damascus, teaching and writing and stayed there till his death. In Damascus he started and completed his another well-known work— *Fusus-al-hikam* (The Bezels of wisdom) in 1129. The book consists of twenty-seven chapters.

### **Main Doctrines (A Comparative Review)**

The fundamental thesis of his philosophy is the doctrine of unity of being (*wahdat-ul-wajud*). However, he makes distinctions between “*haqq*” (Truth) and self-manifestation (*Zubur*) or creation (*khalq*) which is ever new (*jadeed*) and in perpetual movement. Thus it unites the whole creation in a process of constant renewal. At the core stand dark cloud (*ama*) or mist (*bukbar*) as the ultimate principle of things and forms, intelligences, heavenly bodies, elements and their mixtures that culminate in Perfect man. God flows throughout the universe and manifests Truth. He also mentioned the primordial principle of potentiality which generates archetypes and then the actually existing things in the universe. He names this principle as “*unsur*” (matter).

It is said that Ibn Arabia has more impact on subsequent Muslim philosophy than Suhrawardi. Therefore, in latter Muslim thought the effort is to synthesize Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi’s philosophy. This syncreticism spreads to Asia Minor and Indo-Pak subcontinent.



Mulla Sadrā superimposed Ibn Arabi's mystical thought on Aristotelean Illuminationist synthesis of Mir Damad who was the favourite teacher of Sadrā even when in later period of his life Sadrā had difference of opinion with him in philosophical views. Sadrā's emphasis was on the priority of being. Al-Arabi argument for the unity of being within which being differ only according to perfection and imperfection. All beings are graded manifestation of the Pure Being. All beings possess His attributes with varying degree of intensity. For Sadrā like Arabi existence of Being is pure and absolute, and manifest itself in different beings. He considers it "systematic ambiguity"; because, existence is not static but in perpetual movement from the less perfect to the more perfect.<sup>11</sup>

Sadrā's doctrine of Nature asserts that everything except God has been generated temporally as well as eternally. According to some historians of Muslim thought the above-mentioned doctrine is an elaboration of what al-Arabi calls Nature or Prime matter. Both the thinkers seem to agree that the matter of the corporeal things has the power to regenerate and to assume new forms. For them Nature is permanent activity which links the eternal and the temporal. For Sadrā the flow of Nature is upward. Al Arabi in a slightly different way and terms maintains that the flow of Nature unites everything by its continuous movement. In short, Sadrā and Ibn Arabi introduce the dynamic dimensions to their system of thought.

As it has been mentioned in the previous section of this work that Sadrā's theory of existence presents the thesis that nothing is real except existence or being. To repeat his own words, "To sum up, the fact that in reality nothing exists except being."<sup>12</sup> This thesis can lead to the conclusion that; "everything which exists is the reality or the Ultimate reality which in theistic philosophical terms means that, "All things are Divine or parts of the Divine or the Ultimate Reality." In short, assertion of the philosophy of Pantheism. But we have already discussed while narrating his life story that he has to face such an uproar and devastating criticism from the Ulema,<sup>13</sup> that he decides to reflect and to reconstruct his thought, which can be categorized as—Existential Monism, instead of pantheism.

Ibn Arabi is also one of chief exponents of unity of being or *Wahdat-ul-Wajud*. According to him only God is pure and absolute Being. He created (*Khalq*) existents or beings from within. Therefore, the later are not separate from Him in reality. They exist

within Him. They are manifestations of His Being. Whatever we observe in the universe is God Himself. Ibn Arabi thinks that the world and the objects within it are the reflections of the light of God. These objects do not exist in themselves. These creations are Time (*Debr* ٤٢) or the world or universe. The universe is the apparent form of the Absolute Being and it is the universe of possibilities and perpetual creation. Ultimately, for him God, world and man become just three aspects of the same concept.

The above-mentioned views of Ibn Arabi clearly indicate that he is an upholder of Monism, but his Monism is not Sadrā's Existential Monism. It is clearly Pantheistic Monism. Therefore, in spite of his great caliber as a theosophist, thinker and literary figure, he is considered the most controversial personality in the world of Muslim thought.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of the Perfect man has been discussed by most of the Muslim philosophers and mystic thinkers. Most<sup>15</sup> of them have firm belief that the Holy Prophet (Pbuh) Muhammad was the Perfect man. This idea is very old and followed continuously by the Muslim thinkers. Perhaps inspired by Ibn Miskawaih. Ibn Arabi and Al-Jili have also described the personality attributes of the Perfect Man. Jalal-ud-Din Rumi however, criticized Ibn Arabi's concept of the Perfect Man. According to Ibn Arabi the first emanation from the *Haqq* (Absolute Being) is reality or truth of Muhammad (Pbuh) or the light of Muhammad (Pbuh) and that is *Kalma Taubeed*.

In Ibn Arabi's scheme of emanations; though, reality of Muhammad (Pbuh) is considered the genus of all objects, connecting them with the Absolute Being. But as Dr. S. M Abdullah<sup>16</sup> has pointed out he makes the distinction between reality (*haqq*) of the Holy Prophet and self of the Prophet. Therefore Rumi's objection against his view seems justified that He becomes just a metaphysical reality.

It is further pointed out that the universe, man, and God creates the impression that all three are separate entities, but actually those three are not separate for Arabi, because; the Absolute Being is the sole reality, the self is only emanation or manifestation of Ultimate Reality or the Absolute. The Perfect man, for Ibn Arabi,<sup>17</sup> is an idea which he has cut off from that of the Prophet and has done it at the beginning of his system. Hence the Perfect saint can also identify himself with the Perfect Man completely and becomes himself the Vicegerent Lord of the Universe.

Sadrā also presents the idea of Perfect Man who is the end product of the dynamic movement of the existence which is upward. In the Perfect Man the contingent and the Eternal meet. It does not mean, however, that the mixture of the contingent Eternal being become God or the Absolute Pure Being.

While discussing the epistemology of Sadrā, it has been pointed out that philosophical truths has to be experienced. Here the question arises: What is meant by experience according to Sadrā? Definitely it is not mystic experience, but an intuitive apprehension of truth. He insists that when something has been Known by intuitive experience it cannot be disputed by purely logical reasoning. It may not bestow new knowledge, but bestows intuitive certainty to the thought content.

On account of the afore-mentioned view Sadrā's attitude is very different from those Sufis who claim that their experience has no thought content. They do not deal with philosophic or intellectual propositions. Therefore, they end up in ethico-ecstastic ideal. This is not Sadrā's point of view. According to Fazal-ur-Rehman,<sup>18</sup> here he differs from Ghazali in this respect. Sadrā's model is Ibn Arabi who has used Sufi terminology, but has thorough intellectual content.

In the world of Fazal-ur-Rehman<sup>19</sup>, "Under the influence of Ibn Arabi, Kalam, philosophy and Illuminationism was synthesized in Sadrā."

Still Ibn Arabi's method is not strictly speaking—philosophical. He uses analogies, images, symbols and stories in order to describe his thoughts. Sadrā, on the other hand, uses philosophical and even rational method which is called by him, 'Rational Perception' (مشاهده عقلي). He condemns philosophy without intuitive certainty and Sufism without philosophic training.

Concluding the comparison between Sadrā and Ibn Arabi it would be appropriate to observe that in certain respects both the thinkers' doctrines and concepts are convergent, but on certain issues divergence is obvious, and it is divergence which makes them genuine and original.

## Notes and References

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<sup>1</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1962, p. 2, 3.

- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 21, 22.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 31.
- <sup>4</sup> Sadrā, Mulla; *Al Asfar al Araba*, Tehran, ed. M. Rida al Muzaffar), p. 8, lines 3-8.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., I, 1, p. 307, lines 15ff.
- <sup>6</sup> Iqbal, M., *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 148-148.
- <sup>7</sup> Sadrā, Mulla, *Al Asfar*, I, 3, p. 108, line 3; p. 109, line 1.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., I, 3, p. 116, line 14.
- <sup>9</sup> Iqbal, M., *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1962, p. 142, line 2.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp.14-16.
- <sup>11</sup> In this context of study Sadrā's theory of Existence in this book's first part.
- <sup>12</sup> *Sadrā had to face opposition from Shia clergy.*
- <sup>13</sup> Sadr-ud-Din Shirazi, *Al Asfar al Ara'bab*, Part I, Vol. I, Trans. Urdu by Manazar Ahsan Gilani, Osmania University, Deccan, 1941, p. 19
- <sup>14</sup> Dr. S.M. Abdullah, Ibn Arabi and Iqbal in the book *Ijaz-e-Iqbal*, 2004, Sang-e-Meel, Lahore, p. 152
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 155
- <sup>16</sup> A. Schiimmel, *Gabriel's Wings*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963, p. 120
- <sup>17</sup> Fazal-ur-Rehman, *The Philosophy of Sadrā*, State University of New York Press, 1975
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.