

PROBLEMS OF MUSLIM MYSTICISM

Dr. Abdul Khaliq

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Tel: 92-42-36314510, 99203573,
Fax: 92-42-6314496
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Dedicated to my grandchildren Talha,
Haris, Owais and Arslan

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FOREWORD

It gives me immense pleasure to appreciate the commendable work accomplished by Professor Dr. Abdul Khaliq in producing this book on the subject *Problems of Muslim Mysticism*. This is his third book of the series as he has already authored and published *Problems of Muslim Theology* and *Problems of Muslim Philosophy*.

The Author, in this book, has precisely dealt with religiously based mysticism, in general, and Muslim mysticism, in particular, which shows his in-depth study and research work carried out on the subject. He has rightly described mysticism as a mode of knowledge and *ma'rifat* of Almighty Allah. The true knowledge of God belongs to "Friends of God" *Aulya Allah*, alone, who behold God in such a way that He reveals to them what He reveals to none else in the world.

Mystic develops in himself an attitude of transcendence in the affairs of the world and this world loses for him its primacy as he always keeps higher ideals before him.

In this book the characteristics of mystic experience and the ways in which it takes place are highlighted. Muslim mysticism or Sufism influenced by cultural environment, Sufism as distinct from prophetic consciousness, Islamic ethics and its mystical dimensions are the subjects given adequate treatment.

The Author does not claim to be a mystic as, according to him, he has not attained the mystic consciousness; nevertheless, being a professor of philosophy, he has developed an esoteric sense to find out the truth. He has endeavored to produce this book on the intricate and interesting subjects which may be useful for the readers in general and, more so, for the students of philosophy who may be interested in the subject.

I am sure that Dr. Abdul Khaliq would keep his interest alive in producing such like wonderful and valuable books on diverse philosophical subjects.

Manzoor Hussain Sial

Former Judge, Supreme Court of Pakistan

PREFACE

In 1988 my *Problems of Muslim Theology* appeared. In the Foreword to that book I promised to my readers that I would be bringing forth two more books on allied subjects—one on the *Problems of Muslim Philosophy* and the other on the *Problems of Muslim Mysticism*. Subsequently, *Problems of Muslim Philosophy* was published in 2002. Towards the fulfilment of my initial commitment the *Problems of Muslim Mysticism*, that is in your hands, is the last one of my ‘Problem’ series.

Mysticism in its capacity as a knowledge-yielding discipline, we are aware, is different from theology as well as philosophy. The latter both are, by and large, rational in nature involving an amount of conceptualization and reasoning and, sometimes, simply rationalization; they are thus more or less subject to discursive and analytical treatment. The former, on the other hand, is perceptual rather than conceptual in character as it is basically an experience. Despite this, we, in everyday discourse, do talk of, for example, ‘mystic’ approach to the problem of good and evil’, ‘mystic’ view of God-man-universe relationship, ‘mystic’ interpretation of various verses of the Qur’an and of the sayings of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and so on. These are, almost by common consent, genuine problems in their own right and fit subjects of discourse on which volumes have been written. But, most evidently, all such writings, if they must be true to themselves, have to be referred back again and again to the phenomenon that mystic experience is. We

may apply the adjectival epithet 'mystic' to whatever we choose to, the ultimate reference will always be to the experience from which mysticism as a way of thought and action derives its entire significance and its entire justification. Incidentally, it is due to this distinction between philosophy and theology, on the one hand, and mysticism, on the other, that the use of the word 'problems' in relation to the latter is derivative and indirect whereas in relation to the former it is primary and direct. Mysticism, in the capacity of a gnostic experience as such, *i.e.* by virtue of its own indigenous character, admits of no problems whatever. The problems begin to arise and take shape when an ordinary mystic interested in philosophy or a philosopher interested in mysticism tries to answer certain philosophical questions with the help of a robust wisdom, an enlightened vision, that is necessarily rooted in an intimate experience. This distinction must be kept in mind while reading the title of this book and while going through the contents of the book itself.

I am not a mystic since I do not claim to have attained 'mystic consciousness' as this term is officially defined. But, nevertheless, I do have in me an esoteric sense: in fact every person, I think, has more or less of this sense. I am rather a student of 'Philosophy' and to advocate this discipline to my students is my profession. In this capacity I feel an urge from within to undertake the search for truth about everything that I come across. I can even say that I am professionally duty-bound to do so. With humble admission of my limitations but happily encouraged and constantly guided by my inward sensor; and also equipped with the philosophical seriousness of my 'quest for truth', I have ventured to write this book. It is for my readers to see for what it is worth.

The first chapter will be devoted to the nature of mysticism in a broad outline and to some of the identifiable ways in which mystic experience takes place. The account given is rudimentary. It scrupulously avoids a description of intricacies and subtleties of the mystical path of which a lot has been written by the specialists.

The second chapter has as its subject-matter the institution of Muslim mysticism or Sufism. Indigenous sources of the same have been traced, besides of course recognizing the fact that various Muslim mystics were duly influenced by their respective cultural environments. Different stages through which Sufism evolved in its historical development will be described in brief.

The third chapter comprises a quick survey of the essential characteristics of mystic experience on which almost all the mystic theoreticians agree. As a necessary addendum to this survey a distinction will be made between mystic experience and prophetic consciousness.

The fourth chapter, which is titled 'Islamic Ethics and its Mystical Dimensions', will start with the elaboration of the essential features of mystic/sufi ethics. This will be followed by an account of positive as well as negative moral values that a *salik*, the sufi on the mystic path, must take care of so as to move step by step towards his final realizations. Also will be identified and explained some of the technical terms used by the sufis for their various stages/states on the way.

Mystics, by and large, are Unitarians as regards their ideal of God-consciousness. The fifth chapter will, accordingly, identify some major shades of Unitarianism in Islam. Different regular views in this regard will be explained with specific reference to their most outstanding advocates from among the Muslim thinkers. Relevance of each one of these views to Sufism will particularly be identified.

The sixth chapter, which will be the final one, is 'Logic Science Mysticism and Philosophy'. It will commence with an elaboration of different kinds of truth alongwith the specific criterion for each one of these truths. Special emphasis will be laid on the nature of religious/mystic truth. With the mystic nature of truth specified, some of the problems of Philosophy of Religion will be taken up and discussed and the characteristically mystic approach towards the solution of these problems highlighted.

Towards the close of the book, a few words will be spent on an exercise in recapitulation and on bringing out the need and value of assimilating 'the mystic attitude' by a Muslim, by man as such and by the modern man, in particular.

Lastly, an apologia! Contents of various chapters, as we go through them, refer on many occasions to 'mysticism'/'mystic' experience in general— for instance, replies have been attempted to 'how does mystic experience take place?', 'What are the characteristics of mystic experience?', 'How does mysticism compare with science and logic?', and so on. This appears to be a disloyalty to, and an undue stretching of, the title of the book which augurs for a study of 'Muslim' Mysticism specifically. But really there is no such disloyalty involved in view of my declared conviction that mysticism is an attitude common to all religions; and whatever is affirmed of mysticism is, broadly speaking, true of Muslim mysticism as well. However, during my elaboration of various concepts, views and doctrines I have taken care to cite references, examples, supporting incidents, observations and quotations only from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* and from the history of Muslim/Islamic mysticism.

Abdul Khaliq

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Towards, as well as during, the writing of this book I have benefited from my occasional exchange of ideas with the students as well as faculty members of the departments of Philosophy at the Punjab University Lahore and the G.C. University Lahore where I have taught post-graduate classes and supervised M.Phil/ Ph.D. research for more than four decades by now. Dr. Naeem Ahmad and Dr. Ali Raza Tahir among them I consulted most frequently. Fortunately, they both share with me a genuine interest in various aspects of sufi thought. Dr. Tahir, in addition, helped me in tracing some references and in the understanding of a few abstruse Persian statements, verses etc. that I came across. Prof. Muhammad Jalil ur Rahman, himself a profound and prolific writer on subjects of popular interest, appreciated, and agreed in most of the cases to, the way I put forth my argument. I am indebted to him, I am also beholden to Prof. Yusuf Shidaee— philosopher, poet and critic—whose active help and suggestions for improvement during my various research endeavours, including the present one, have been an invaluable asset for me. He is an ally and a friend whom I have learned to trust. I owe special thanks to my teacher Justice (®) Manzoor Hussain Sial who, despite his own multifarious engagements, found time to go through the entire manuscript of the Book and write a Foreword to it. Last but not least, I acknowledge my obligation to Mr. Suheyl Umar, Director Iqbal Academy Pakistan, who accepted the

manuscript of the book for publication. It is a matter of pride for me to be associated with the Academy as the author of a book.

The way my children – and then my grandchildren – have always been a great help to me is unique. Innocently unmindful of the seriousness of my academic concerns and of the absolute concentration of attention that is normally required for one's writing of a research article or a book, they have ever continued to 'interrupt' me in my study off and on. However, at the same time, they have been conveniently ignorant of the fact that I enjoy their 'interruptions' which rather invigorate and strengthen me. Temperamentally, I am so constituted that when no one else of my family is in the house and, particularly, when none of my small children are around to 'disturb' me, my thought currents very soon get fatigued and paralysed and I become almost incapable to do any serious academic work. So a bundle of grateful thanks for the kids to whom I dedicate this book.

A.K.

PROBLEMS OF MUSLIM MYSTICISM

MYSTICISM AND THE MYSTIC EXPERIENCE

Bertrand Russell in his book *The Problems of Philosophy*¹ wrote at length about the distinction between two kinds of knowledge: ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ and ‘knowledge by description’. In non-technical parlance, and specially for our present purposes, we can say that the former is one in which ‘the known’ is some object or person or event etc. whereas in the latter case it is some proposition or statement. In our everyday discourse we say **I know my father** or **I know the way to my college**: this is knowledge by acquaintance; and also **I know that my brother is an honest person** or **I know that bodies expand with heat**: this is knowledge by description. ‘Knowledge by description’, specially when it relates to the behaviour of nature or to the meaning of various concepts, is a matter of expirico-intellectual formulations and so obviously liable to improvement or even replacement in case more evidence becomes available regarding the relevant ideas or matters of fact; on the other hand, ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ is primary, direct and immediate and so does not have a similar possibility of ‘improvement’ etc.

‘Knowledge by acquaintance,’ further, is evidently of two kinds. Either it is the knowledge of an object, an event etc. or it is the knowledge of a person. In other words, the epistemic relationship between the knower and the known is either an

I-it relationship or an I-thou relationship. If the I-thou, the person-to-person, knowledge-experience is the one in which, the subject being man himself, the object is God (Who in His own right is of course a Subject also at the same time), it is described as *ma'rifat* (gnosis) as distinct from all other forms of knowledge. It is this way of knowledge which in general amounts to what is variously known as 'mystic experience', 'mystic consciousness', or 'mystic awareness'. This, I admit, appears at first sight to be a flat, simple statement about the meaning of a concept that is extremely profound. Anyway, I take it as a convenient device to start with. In fact this entire book comprises amplification of various aspects, as well as the inherent richness of content, of mysticism and mystic experience. It should, however, at least be hurriedly emphasized that no gnostic has ever claimed, or can ever claim, that he has known God as He actually is: it is a patent and general psychological fact that, for one thing, there is an element in every I-ness, whether human or Divine, which is entirely insulated. The core of subjectivity in every person is characteristically his own subjectivity and cannot be shared or assimilated or even grasped by the subjectivity of any other person. So there are at the most only lower and higher degrees of the *ma'rifat* of God, not simply because God is a Person but more so because He is the Most Unique Person. Absolute Uniqueness of the Divine further specifically implies that the degree to which a man's *ma'rifat* of Him can extend heavily depends on His grace and favour. "True Knowledge of God", says the well-known Egyptian sufi Dhu'l Nun, "belongs to the friends of God (*auliya' Allah*) alone, those who behold God with their hearts in such a way that He reveals unto them what He reveals not to anyone else in the world."²

Despite the above, *ma'rifat* is only one, although the most important, aspect of mysticism, which, besides being a mode of knowledge, is a style of life also. God-knowledge by man would colour his life in such a way that he develops in himself an attitude of transcendence insofar as the affairs of

the world are concerned. He, of course, does not necessarily become a recluse nor does he hate the world: what simply happens is that the world of space and time loses for him its primacy of significance in the face of nobler ideals—in fact in the face of the Ideal *par excellence*. Having the nobler ideals persistently in view, he of course does live as a responsible citizen of the world but at the same time *lives in it as if he is not living herein*.

Mysticism, as defined above, is almost the common feature, the inner/ esoteric dimension, of all religions. There are Christian mystics, Hindu mystics, Buddhist mystics, and so on; and they are known by different names. A Muslim mystic is called a *sufi*, a Christian mystic, a monk, a Hindu mystic, a *sadhu*, a Buddhist mystic, a *bhikshu*, and so on. There are, of course, some so-called non-religious ‘mysticisms’ too which may be anchored in some stance of metaphysics or some reasoned-out philosophical point of view. However, in the present book, we shall only be concerned with the religiously based mysticism, in general, and Muslim/Islamic mysticism, in particular.

Persons called, in ordinary language, ‘religious persons’ can roughly be divided into three classes³. Majority of them, most evidently, are religious on authority; meaning to say, they have an unconditional, unreasoned conviction regarding certain beliefs and doctrines to which they pay allegiance at the behest of a prophet, a holy man or a spiritual guide; their belief system is claimed to be insulated against, and absolved from, any logic that may apparently be required of the believer for its support. Another class comprises those who seek to provide rational support for religious beliefs, either directly through rationalization or indirectly through reasoning. They are the theologians and the philosophers who thus construct a rational metaphysics which replaces the unreason of the laymen. Arguments for the existence of God, the Ultimate Reality, the *raison d’être* of all religious beliefs, is an indispensable component of this metaphysics. To the third, the elitist, class of religious persons belong those who

are the men of experience, the mystics, who, with the involvement of their whole being, claim to have discovered the Ultimate Reality and everything that emanates from that Reality. It is here that metaphysics is replaced by psychology. What the laymen accept on authority and what the philosophers reason about the mystics see, have a personal experience of, and have an encounter with. 'Allama Iqbal has quoted in this regard the words of a Muslim sufi: "no understanding of the Holy Book (*i.e.* the Qur'an) is possible until it is actually revealed to the believer just as it was revealed to the Prophet (p.b.u.h),"⁴ I am incidentally reminded here of the subjectivist stance of the great German philosopher Kant. What has been said here about the personal, experiential character of the religious phenomenon was recognized by Kant in regard to the moral phenomenon when he observed that 'a principle of moral conduct is morally binding on me if and only if I can regard it as a law that I impose on myself'.

The above classification of religious people can be appreciated and reviewed from another angle also. Those belonging to the first two classes can, in general, be collectively called the 'men of belief', whereas those of the last class are the 'men of faith'. 'Belief' and 'faith', which are most often carelessly regarded as interchangeable in meanings, have in fact quite different connotations. Believe, the verbal form of belief, is propositional in character. Its predicate is always a synthetic proposition, *i.e.* the proposition having a contingent truth only. So it comprises tentative knowledge which is thus liable to rejection/replacement/improvement, when more evidence becomes available. 'Believe that' statements evidently are more so than 'believe in' statements as in the latter the predicate of the verb, to all appearance, does not happen to be a proposition; however, 'believe in' statements can easily be reduced to, and seen as cognate with, 'believe that' statements. Thus, in the final analysis, 'belief', in all of its uses, continues to be a hypothetical and tentative form of knowledge. The case with 'faith' is otherwise. Faith is

not a verb nor does it have a verbal form so that we may be justified to say 'faith that' (followed by a proposition). 'Faith' is always 'faith in'—most often—a being having, or supposed to be having, personal characteristics. In the religious context, it is 'faith in God' (and, by implication, faith in the entire scheme of things that is Divine) or 'faith in the Unseen'. 'Faith' has neither sense experience alone nor reason and argument alone as its base: it is the most sound and genuine form of knowledge in which the whole being of the man of faith is involved. Being thus comprehensively rooted, it is irrevocable and irreplaceable unless the personality of the man of faith itself goes through an entire metamorphosis. In the essentially religious context, it is, in the words of Iqbal, "a vital way of appropriating the universe... (it) is not merely a passive belief in one or more propositions of a certain kind; it is living assurance begotten of a rare experience. Strong personalities alone are capable of rising to this experience".⁵ It is this experience which is the stage of 'discovery' attainable by the religious elites, according to Iqbal, and it is this experience which is the necessary component— if not the whole— of the mystic or the religious consciousness of God.

Iqbal's definition of faith as *living assurance* begotten of a *rare experience* is paradoxical. **Ordinarily**, a piece of knowledge that is grounded in experience with its contingent character is necessarily probable only, more or less, and is never absolutely sure; conversely, only that piece of knowledge which is purely rational is axiomatic and sure. To say in regard to faith that it is an 'assurance' which at the same time grows out of 'experience' would thus be a contradiction in terms. But really that is not so. Firstly, the faith experience is not an 'ordinary' conscious experience: it is a 'rare' experience; secondly, the 'assurance' is not the ordinary certitude that is guaranteed by the strict observance of the rules of logical reasoning: it is a 'living assurance' *i.e.* the assurance in which not our logical faculty only but rather our whole being is involved. Let us briefly demonstrate below these qualifications. Before, however, we do so; one

preliminary observation will be in place: faith has always an element of unseeness in it. The Qur'an uses faith (*iman*) and 'faith in the Unseen' (*iman b'al-ghaib*) almost interchangeably.

Nature, as we encounter it in our everyday life, comprises various levels of existence and every level of existence has its own regulative principles and laws of operation. The lowest level of existence known to us is the material world of physical sciences. Higher than this is the level of life which is the subject-matter of biological sciences. Then there is the psychologists' world of mind and consciousness. The highest level with which we all are conversant is the realm of morality, the realm of the sense of accountability, which is characteristically human. All these realms have, as their governing principles, recognizably different sets of laws. However, these various realms do not exist side by side in mutual independence, having nothing to do with one another. They rather interact so as to bring out the character of nature as an organic unity: hence the concept of nature as a universe rather than a multiverse. In this mutual interaction, when a higher realm with its own laws superimposes itself and registers an impress upon the lower realm, the operational laws of the latter undergo a change. This changed state of affairs, being the consequence of a superimposition is alien for the lower realm, something 'unseen' for it; but, at the same time, the lower has a 'living assurance' of the higher as it is very much a part of its own experience. A seed, for example, that is placed on the table is a material object for all practical purposes and, by and large, would behave in accordance with the laws of physical nature. When, however, it is concealed underground and is provided with appropriate environment, it stands subjected to biological laws and begins to grow spontaneously. This principle of life, despite being unseen, entirely alien to the nature of the seed as a material object, is a matter of very intimate organic concern to the seed which it cannot possibly deny (suppose for a moment that it has consciousness!): its denial would in fact amount to the denial of its own being as it presently is. Take another

example. A sacrificial animal, for instance, must be flabbergasted and shaken to the very roots of its being with amazement when a man, who had always looked after its welfare in every respect, one day forcibly and ‘callously’ lays it on the ground and with a big sharp knife in his hand is all out to slaughter it. Despite its ignorance of the laws of behaviour characteristic with a human being in terms of his responsibility to God and despite the fact that it cannot give a name to these laws, it does have an assurance of them: an inkling that may amount to a ‘living assurance begotten of a rare experience’, as Iqbal would describe it. Now, in the theistic religious context, God is a person and thus He has His supreme purposes and plans that He continues to work out in the universe. He has His own laws of behaviour which have the likelihood of being superimposed on all the laws which are operative in various realms of the universe as they are known to us. When a person experiences such a superimposition of the laws of Divine behaviour on the laws of visible existence he has all the likelihood of having a living assurance of God, the Unknown. This phenomenon is implied in Hazrat Ali’s well-known saying: I have recognized my God through the disruption of my plans⁶. It is this living assurance of the Divine— the superiormost stage of religious consciousness— which is *iman* (faith)— interchangeably, *iman b’al-ghaib*(faith in the unseen), of the Qur’anic terminology. And it is exactly this that is connoted by, what Iqbal calls, the stage of ‘discovery’. We can as well call it the state of mystic consciousness for which the term used in Muslim mystic literature is *ma’rifat* (gnosis)

However, the transposition by man from the experience of nature to the discovery of the Divine, as laid down above, is not a mechanical process readily available to everyone. Most of the people just go by physical nature insensitive to the metaphysical currents with which it vibrates. It is only the very rare, the elite, among human beings who can justifiably claim to have attained the capability to look around with ‘seeing’ eyes the eloquent pointers to God that are spread

everywhere. We shall describe in the next section how an individual can prepare himself for putting forth that claim.

II

The simple question is: how does mystic experience take place? What advice can we give and what course of action can we recommend to a novice in the field of mysticism so that behaving accordingly he can confidently proceed to prepare himself for, and tend to be a sufficiently qualified recipient of, mystic experience. In fact avenues to Divine gnosis are unlimited in number. 'In whichever direction you turn there is the face of God'²⁷ is a very eloquent observation made by the Qur'an. When a number of mountaineers resolve to reach the highest of the high, starting from any point whatever at the foot and moving upward they are all faced towards the peak of the mountain and, given the sincerity of purpose and an immaculate resolve, they all are likely to reach it sooner or later. Anyway, this immense variety of the ways to God can perhaps be roughly categorized into three classes: at least Muslim mystics have mostly followed either the one or the other of these ways as their major *modus operandi*: In other words, mysticism can be said to have three major kinds *viz.* purgatory mysticism, speculative mysticism and love mysticism. The main immediate objective common to all these kinds is to come out of, and transcend, one's space-time-bound individuality and, consequently, acquire a feel of participation in the Unfathomable, the Indeterminate so as to be qualified for mystic experience. Before we proceed further it should be emphasized that these three ways are neither mutually exclusive nor, necessarily, collectively exhaustive.

Purgatory mysticism aims at *tazkia-e nafs* (literally, purification of the soul), at the cleansing of one's self from all sorts of crust and its riddance of all overlayings that have, with the passage of time, robbed it of its original glory and luster. In fact God had entrusted His own soul to man: it is

this trust in man, this theomorphic character of his person, of his self or I- amness that is to be taken care of. "Truly he succeeds who purifies it, and he fails who corrupts it"⁸, says the Qur'an.

The above, incidentally, leads us one step back to the perennial philosophical problem: what is the nature of human self? What does it really mean when, for instance, someone says; 'I am'? 'Allama Iqbal in his *Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam* has made a distinction between the efficient self and the appreciative self of man⁹. The former, according to him, is the one which lives in serial time whereas the latter lives in pure duration. We can as well call them the apparent self and the real self, the phenomenal self and the noumenal self, respectively. Incidentally, both of these selves taken together are two aspects, two levels or two stages of the self that necessarily has the character of existence, whether this existence is temporal or non-temporal. This 'self' recognized as a real, tangible existence is incidentally opposed to the formal 'I' or self which in fact is not supposed to have any veritable existence: rather it is only an instrument of linguistic convenience and at the most has a referential import in our everyday discourse. Propositions like 'I am going to school', 'I woke up early in the morning', 'I hope to become a professor in later life', and so on are simply viable assertions of mental or physical processes that occur in different spatio-temporal contexts— that's all. The pronoun 'I' (or, for that matter, 'he', 'you' etc) just makes the assertions grammatical appropriate and convenient. There is obviously no emphasis in all such propositions on the independent, substantial existence of an I-amness or a self. Identification of the formal 'I' with the substantial 'I', or a transition from the former to the latter, which is sometimes erroneously made is exactly the fallacy committed by Descartes, a Continental rationalist and the founder of modern European Philosophy, in his well-known dictum *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am). Descartes was in search of 'the indubitable principle' which may be provided to Philosophy as its foundation so that its entire edifice may

be safely erected on it. He deliberately started doubting everything that he could possibly doubt so that he might incidentally come across, on the way, that which does not have any possibility at all of being doubted *i.e.* which is transparently certain. He came across this phenomenon in the act of doubting itself. From the state of affairs that everything (for example, 'there is sky above and earth below', 'I have a body', 'two and two make four' etc.) can be doubted it necessarily follows that doubting itself cannot be doubted: doubting is an axiomatic truth. Now doubting is a form of thinking. "I (formal 'I') think", he said, "therefore I (substantial 'I') am". The 'I think' which accompanies every thought is, Kant later on rightly observed in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, a purely formal condition of thought and a transition from a purely formal condition of thought to the ontological substance is logically illegitimate¹⁰. Anyway, even if we hold that this implicative statement is valid and that the antecedent conclusively supports the consequent, the 'I' that is affirmed in the latter as a substance is the thinking/doubting mind only— howsoever ephemeral or otherwise this 'substance' may be— and not the self of man as such, as said above, that must be conceived as the psycho-physical unity of the human organism.

Hume, the British empiricist, we are reminded here, also once undertook a search for the self of man as comprising his mind— not, of course, as a thinking, arguing substance in particular, as was the case with Descartes, but as a sentient being in general. He outrightly admitted his failure. "When I enter most intimately into what I call my self", he wrote, "I always stumble on some particular perception *i.e.* some particular mental content or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception". He thus concluded that there is no such thing as self and that a person is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions"¹¹.

As opposed to the sectional attempts referred to above, the self of man which is addressed by the mystic — whatever

be the method that he chooses to adopt for the realization of his characteristic experience — is the man as such.

We referred some time ago to three kinds of mysticism. The first one of these, *i.e.* purgatory Mysticism, aims directly at purgating the self regarded as the organismic unity that man is, of all alloy and rust that has been deposited on it as unnatural accretions. God, the mystics are of the opinion, is not hidden from us. He in fact is the most evident Being and the most truthful Existence. He is nearer to man than his own life-vein,¹² says the Qur'an. The Qur'an further says: He (God) is with you wherever you are¹³. One of His Beautiful Names is *Al-Mubin* which means 'the Manifest' and 'also the One Who makes all things manifest'. The actual state of affairs is that it is we who are veiled from Him. Through our oblivion and carelessness and our infatuation for the world we continue to corrupt ourselves so that our vision is rendered opaque and our genuine epistemic capabilities are gradually paralysed and crippled. The mystics, to begin with, assign to themselves the duty to attend to the work close at home, to undo the error that has unfortunately been committed already before any positive advances can be attempted and before ultimately the incoming of the Divine can be aspired for. The importance of this eradicated process can be demonstrated with the help of an interesting story from Book I of the *Mathnavi*¹⁴ of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi. The story describes a contest in painting that was once held between the Greek and the Chinese painters. Two opposite walls of a big hall were allocated, one each to the Greeks and to the Chinese, to display their workmanships. A curtain was hung between them so that both could work unwatched and undisturbed and work independently. The Chinese worked hard and painted a beautiful picture on the wall with a number of colours put at their disposal. The Greeks, on the other hand, used no colours: they simply removed all filth, rust and dust from their wall, rubbed it, polished it and made it absolutely bright. On the judgment day, when the curtain was raised, the entire work of the Chinese was reflected on

the wall of the Greeks; it rather looked lovelier there because of the brightness and sheen of the background. The Greeks won the contest.

The problem raised in the beginning of the above discussion still remains unresolved and requires to be revisited. How to determine, in the context of a human organism, the denotation of the 'self or 'I-amness' that has a tangible, veritable existence and that is recognized as such so that the incumbent of that self can undertake its purification of all 'rubbish' in the socio-moral and spiritual sense of this term. This is a difficult question to which the psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists have given a staggering variety of answers but have not been able to arrive at any agreement. We need not enter into any details about the merits as well as demerits of these answers, firstly, because that will be beyond the scope of the present book, and secondly, that is not likely to lead to any indubitable thesis. In modern times, even Allama Iqbal, whose religio-philosophical thought derives almost its entire significance from the concept of self or ego as well as the factors responsible for its integration/disintegration, has not been able to give its ostensive/denotative definition. He says:

اقبال بھی اقبال سے آگاہ نہیں ہے
 [Iqbal himself does not know who Iqbal (as
 a self) is]¹⁵

For him ego as a finite centre of experience is real though its reality is too profound to be intellectualized. Consequently, he has given a variety of descriptive statements only and this is the maximum that, we hold, can be done with a recognizable amount of indubitable assurance. "The life of the ego"¹⁶, he says, "is a kind of tension caused by the ego invading the environment and the environment invading the ego. The ego does not stand outside this arena of mutual invasion. It is present in it as a directive energy and is formed and disciplined by its own experience"¹⁷ "Reality of the ego",

he further says, lies in its “will attitudes, aims and aspirations”.¹⁸

Reality of a person’s self or ego, as Iqbal has very truly remarked in the quotation just recorded, comprising his will-attitudes, aims and aspirations, ‘purgation of the self’ (*tazkia-e nafs*) would boil down to the purification of these will - attitudes etc which during our life career in this world are likely to be tarnished by disvalues attendant upon an exclusivist, myopic view of the world and an in-depth infatuation for its material wealth, benefits and pleasures. Necessarily retaining contact with the environments that we must inhale and with the world that we must live in, we should learn to see things against a deeper immaculate perspective. A mystic journeyer should, in all earnest, initiate his endeavour comprising the cleansing of the self of all alloy, and assimilation of higher and higher values instead, desire for which is, of course, congenitally ingrained in our Divinely inspired nature. An elaborate description of these negative as well as positive values that are emphasized by mysticism, in general, and by Muslim mysticism, in particular, will be made in the chapter No.IV below.

The second major way to God-consciousness is contemplation — contemplation over the physical nature without, contemplation over the nature of the *nafs* within and contemplation over the rise and fall of nations. All these phenomena comprise the *ayat* (signs) of God, in the terminology of the Qur’an itself: The Qur’anic verses too are the *ayat* so we must contemplate over the contents of the Qur’an also. Muslim mystics, who, by and large, opt for this way to God, derive inspiration from the following and similar other verses of the Qur’an:

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and the life which he gives

therewith to the earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth— are indeed signs for a people that are wise (2:164)

And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variations in your languages and your colours; verily in that are signs for those who know (30:22).

And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on the earth; behold! in that are signs indeed for those who reflect (45:13)

On the earth are signs for those of assured faith, as also in your own selves: will you not then see? (51:21)

Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up by them? (47:24)

Those, who, when they are admonished with the signs of their Lord, droop not down at them as if they were deaf and blind ..., are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven....(25:73 -75)

It is evident from the representative verses quoted above that a very conspicuous tenor of the Qur'anic teachings in general is that observation of nature and its various aspects is a sound basis for God-awareness. Reference, in this connection, is sometimes made to Prophet Abraham's (p.b.u.h) intellectual journey from nature to God. The Qur'an says:

When the night covered him over, he saw a star. He said: "this is my Lord". But when it set, He said:" I love not those that set" When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said: "this is my Lord". But when it set he said:" unless my Lord guide me I shall surely be among those who go astray". When he saw the sun rising in splendour he said: "this is my Lord. This is the greatest (of all)". But when it set he said: "O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allah. For me I have set my face firmly and truly towards Him Who created

the heavens and the earth and never shall I give partners to Allah “(6:76-79).

Similarly, when Prophet Moses (p.b.u.h) expressed his desire to see God he was directed first to visit a mountain and observe its behaviour¹⁹— a phenomenon of nature in its own right. Inspired by such intimate nature-God relationship, Allama Iqbal succinctly remarks that a physical scientist busy in the study of nature is as well involved in the act of prayer seeking nearness to/encounter with God.²⁰

The above, in general, is a cosmological-cum-teleological approach to the being of God. Besides, the underlined portion of verse at no.4 alludes to an ontological approach *viz* the idea of God in my mind itself proves the veritable existence of God. It should be read with the following Qur’anic verse:

When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam from their loins— their descendents and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): Am I not your Lord— they said: “Yea, we do testify” (This) lest you say on the Day of Judgement: Of this we were never mindful” (7:172)

This statement of the Grand Covenant has a symbolic significance. It implies that a living assurance of the existence of God is congenitally ingrained in the nature of man so that now when he looks within, he is immediately assured of the existence of God.

The Qur’anic mode of naturalistic metaphysics delineated here should not be confused, as has been done by some Muslim thinkers, with the traditional *a posteriori* and even *a priori* arguments for the existence of God, namely, the Cosmological, the Teleological and the Ontological²¹. All these arguments have, ever since religious people began to think, been offered as proofs for the existence of God on the ground of an analysis of various phenomena of nature both within and outside man. As strictly logical proofs they have all been criticized and found defective on many counts. Strictly speaking, there can be no conclusive argument for the existence of God or, for that matter, for the existence of the

Absolute Ultimate Reality — howsoever that reality be conceived. In a logical argument, we know, the conclusion, as a rule, is necessarily less comprehensive than its premises. God is *ex-hypothesi* the Most Supreme, the Most Ultimate, the Highest Being. How can His existence be the conclusion from any premises whatever! Besides, had there been a proof for the existence of God and, by implication, for the entire scheme of things that is Divine, that would amount to depriving man of the freedom to choose between what to believe and what not to believe, between what to do and what not to do. This freedom is very much central to the Qur'anic teachings and extremely dear to God. Freedom is in fact the defining characteristic of the human person, the bearer of 'moral responsibility' of which he alone, in the entire world, is the trustee and that also by his own free choice.

If thus there is no stringent and compulsive premise-conclusion relationship between the study of nature by man and his conviction regarding the existence of God, how exactly to conceive the character of this relationship so that his freedom of choice also remains intact, Let us refer back once again to the Qur'anic verses just quoted above. We find that various phenomena of nature have been called the *ayat* which literally means 'signs' (of God). Now the process of transition from signs to what these signs signify has a validity of its own: signs, by their very definition, are in fact meant to signify! However, in this process, it is primarily man's own initiative, his vision and imagination that is at work: observation of nature and its various phenomena furnishes simply an occasion for that. Qur'anic view, in general, of a transposition from nature to God can be understood with the help of an example²² borrowed from I. T. Ramsey. Suppose, he says, there is a person whose geometrical sense is so constituted that it is simply conversant with straight lines and has no knowledge of curves, and hence of circles, and I have to make him aware of what circularity is. I shall ask him to draw with a ruler in hand a series of polygons one after the other, each time on the space of same dimensions and each

time adding one side more to the last figure drawn. If this process goes on there will come, sooner or later, a 'point of disclosure'. He will realize with a flash of insight that he is approaching an entirely new kind of figure in which there will be no corners and no straight lines. This projected figure is the circle which— as long as he insists on the use of the ruler that alone is available to him— he will never actually reach. The circle, in this context, Ramsey calls 'the infinite polygon'. This phrase implies that we may add as many sides as we like to our polygons but still the difference between the circle and the polygon nearest to it will be as wide as between the Infinite and the finite. Despite all this, the circle is definitely relevant to the more-and-more-sided polygons and presides over the whole series. On the same analogy, nature is relevant to the existence of God but it cannot be equal to Him nor can it furnish a sufficient proof for His existence.

Insofar as the Qur'anic description of historical events and of the stories of the rise and fall of nations is concerned, they are a sort of reminder to man as to how Divine scheme of things worked in the past, particularly, in human situations. Nature, human as well as non-human, comprises in a way the habits of God; and the habits of God never change. So, the stories are not only creative of God-consciousness among the readers but also are the eloquent indicators of the law that if human beings repeat their behaviour in similar circumstances in future, the consequences too will repeat themselves. Hence their moral lesson as to how man ought to behave, individually as well as collectively!

Inspired by the Qur'anic emphasis on contemplation by man over the phenomena of nature without as well as within himself, sufis make it a point to inculcate in themselves such virtues as *tafakkur* (thinking), *tadabbur* (contemplation), *mubasaaba* (self-examination), *muraqaba* (deliberation) *dhikr* (recollection) and so on.

Third kind of mysticism is termed as Love Mysticism. It is specially by virtue of inculcating in themselves love or '*ishq*

that a section of the mystics prefer to seek proximity to, gnostic awareness of, God. Most of the sufi poets, in particular, of various languages belong to this category. Describing diverse colours and shades of lover-Beloved relationship, they have produced volumes of fascinating poetry that has always captivated the readers as well as the listeners with enchantment. *Khauf-e Khuda* (fear of God), which has generally been taken to be the meaning of the Qur'anic concept of *khashyat*²³ (fear) of God, commonly used in orthodox religious circles as an 'honorific' phrase as if by virtue of its own right, needs to be understood in the appropriate perspective. The stipulation involved here is not that one should be afraid of God. The concept rather simply means that one should be afraid of the painful consequences of His own wrong-doings which, as promised by God, will definitely be worked out for him: God has taken upon Himself not to go against his own promises! If, on the other hand, a person lives his life in subservience to God's will as he should, there is absolutely no occasion to fear Him. He is rather to be loved by man because, to those who do so, He immediately responds with His love for them. His love for His servants, as a popular saying of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) goes, is seventy times more than the love of a mother for her child. "The fear of Allah", says Abdullah Yusuf Ali," is the fear to offend against His Holy Law, the fear to do anything which is against His Holy Will. Such fear is akin to love; for with it dawns the consciousness of Allah's loving care for all His creatures"²⁴.

Some love-mystics have made a distinction between *ishq-e majazi*(metaphorical love) and '*ishq-e haqiqi*'(real love). They recommend that one on the mystic path must, as a preliminary step, develop in himself an infatuation for some handsome person, male or female, and appreciate him/her with raptness of concentration and fullness of attention. This will sufficiently train him so as to conveniently proceed from the love of the visible, that is naturally much easier to inculcate, to the love of the Invisible, the Unseen. "Beholding

in many souls the traits of Divine beauty, and separating in each soul that which it has contracted in the world”, says Jami, “the lover ascends to the highest beauty, to the love and knowledge of the Divinity, by steps of this ladder of created soul”²⁵. Incidentally, this process brings to our mind the process of a mystic’s evolution from *fana fi’ al-sheikh* (annihilation in the *murshid*) to *fana fi’ al-Rasul* [annihilation in the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)] and then on to *fana fi’ Allah* (annihilation in God) which most of the Muslim mystics recommend, directly or by implication. Some of the advocates of mundane love did successfully benefit from this experience and were ultimately able to pass on to the love of God, but some of them unfortunately got stuck up and entangled in the material reference and could not go beyond it. Thus the sufis who choose to adopt this avenue towards Divine love must scrupulously guard themselves against this impending catastrophe. They should be very careful in their appreciation of, and involvement with, the worldly beauty and must consistently keep in their minds the ideal of Absolute Beauty and be single-mindedly determined and resolute towards the realization of the *Summum Bonum*.

Like ‘purification of the self’ and like ‘contemplation on God and His manifestations’, ‘Love of God’ has always worked for the spiritual journeyer as a dependable way of deliverance of his phenomenal self and the realization by him of his Divine self. The sentiment of love, by virtue of its very nature demands from the lover more and more of self-sacrifice and more and more of the development of fascination for the beloved. There is a popular saying according to which man is with the one whom he loves (المرء مع من احب). There is another adage which says that your love for something (or someone) makes you blind and deaf (حبك الشيء يعمي ويصم) *i.e.* your beloved tends to claim all of your affective, cognitive and conative faculties. So a mystic lover of God sheds off all his personal likes and dislikes, desires and aspirations, aims and objectives and permits them to be

Divinized. He looks at and appreciates every thing from the Divine point of view. In the terminology of the Qur'an he is steeped in the colour of God, the Beloved; and after all, whose colour is better than His colour! (2:138)

The Qur'an in a number of its verses has advocated love of the men of faith for God and, reciprocally, has promised His love for them. It has in fact recognized this phenomenon as one of the characteristic marks of the men of faith. For instance, it says:

...the men of faith are overflowing in their love for Allah (2:165)

Say: if it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, your kindred, the wealth that you have gained, the commerce in which you fear a decline and the dwelling in which you delight are dearer to you than Allah or His Messenger (p.b.u.h.) or the striving in His cause— then wait until Allah brings about His decision: and Allah guides not the rebellious (9:24)

Besides, there are verses in which God promises love for the good doers, the penitents, the just, the pious, the patient and those who are committed to, and pleased with, Him.

As is evident from the above, the Qur'anic concept of love is reciprocal between man and God: those who love God are loved by Him in response. We can just imagine how close to God will be a loving person who has become His beloved at the same time!

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali in his *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* has worked out a relationship between knowledge and love²⁶. The most intimate and the most authentic form of knowledge — the *ma'rifat* of the sufis (which almost amounts to *iman* in the Qur'anic context)— comes as a logical consequence of the love of God, according to him, but ordinary knowledge is its antecedent. In our everyday life, sentiment of love, he says, has four aspects or dimensions or, we can say, it may be attributed to four causes which are as follows:

1. **Self-love**, My love for myself is inborn with me I instinctively love my life and whatever I-think belongs to me like my body, my wealth, my family, and so on.
2. **Love of a benefactor** . I love those from whom I receive benefits. Being a desire for the life and security of those who minister directly or indirectly to my desire for self-preservation, it is an extended form of self-love. It is not a love of the benefactor for his own sake: it may evaporate when the benefits cease.
3. **Love of beauty**. Beauty is loved for its own sake irrespective of any benefits that accrue from the beautiful. I have an innate aesthetic sense by virtue of which I appreciate beauty wherever it is observed in material objects, in the phenomena of nature, in concepts and ideas, in human beings and their behaviour and so on.
4. **Love based on affinity between two souls**. Good souls are by nature attracted towards one another. Same is the case with evil souls. Birds of a feather flock together, goes a popular saying. A pious person has a tendency to be close to the pious ones, whereas a wicked person feels at home in the company of the wicked ones.

Now all these rationales of love at the level of human beings, according to Ghazali, are equally the rationales of man's love for God even against the context of the knowledge of His Being and Attributes that is ordinarily available to us. I love Him because He is the very creator of my self which I love and of all that I need for its preservation and perfection; man cannot achieve any thing without His grace and beneficence. Secondly, I love Him because He is the greatest and the most supreme Benefactor. Unlike human benefactors who may have certain ulterior motives of self-interest in view He does not expect from His creatures anything in return of His immense bounties which it is impossible to count and measure. Thirdly, I love Him because He possesses the qualities of power, knowledge and beauty and, as the Qur'an says, is the bearer of all the Beautiful Names.²⁷ 'God is beautiful and loves beauty'²⁸ is a saying of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.). Fourthly, I love God because being the bearer of the Divine soul which He breathed into me²⁹ as such and

being His vicegerent³⁰ on the earth, I have an esoteric liaison with His Person. Correspondingly, the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) has advised us to keep this liaison ever fresh by making a continued conscious effort to assimilate the attributes of God to the maximum of our abilities.

Further bringing out the importance of man's all absorbing love for God leading to His *ma'rifat*, Ghazali points out that it is the lovers of God who will be rewarded with the vision of God in the life-hereafter because they will be satisfied with nothing less than that: that will in fact be the superiormost happiness meted out to the residents of Paradise. Muslim mystic Sirri Saqti reports that he once dreamt of the Doomsday: God was asking His angels, 'who is this man?'. They said, 'Thou knowest best'. Then God said to them, "He is *Ma'roof al-Karkhi* who is intoxicated with love of Me and will not recover his senses except by meeting Me face to face"³¹.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Chapter V, *passim*

² Fariduddin 'Attar, *Tazkarat al-Anhya*, Urdu translation, p. 79.

³ *Vide* 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp.143-144.

⁴ *Ibid* p.143.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.8.

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⁷ Qur'an, 2: 115.

⁸ *Ibid*, 91: 9:10.

⁹ 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* pp. 38-39.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 329-330.

¹¹ David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, Book I, part IV Sec.6.

¹² Qur'an, 50:16.

¹³ *Ibid*, 57:4

¹⁴ The *magnum opus* of Rumi which has exercised great influence on later mystics.

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- ¹⁵ ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat-e Iqbal* (Urdu) p 93/77.
- ¹⁶ ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.79
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.82
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.83
- ¹⁹ Qur’an, 7:143
- ²⁰ ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit*, p.73
- ²¹ Cosmological argument starts from the phenomenon of causality or the phenomenon of movement in the universe and infers therefrom the existence of God as the Uncaused Cause or the Unmoved Mover of everything; Teleological argument seeks to prove the existence of God as an Intelligent Being on the basis of the signs of order and purposiveness in the universe; Ontological argument concludes the existence of God as a Perfect Being from the premise of the idea of a Perfect Being in my mind.
- ²² I.T. Ramsey, *Religious Language– an Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases*, p.69
- ²³ Qur’an, 98:8
- ²⁴ ‘Allama ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary*, note no.6234.
- ²⁵ Quoted by R.A. Nicholson, *Mystics of Islam*, p.110.
- ²⁶ Qur’an, 2:138.
- ²⁷ *Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din*, Vol. IV, *passim*.
- ²⁸ Qur’an, 20:8
- ²⁹
- ³⁰ Qur’an 38:72
- ³¹ Farid al-Din ‘Attar, *op.cit*. p.161

MUSLIM MYSTICISM (*TASAWWUF*) ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION

Mysticism, as we have already seen, is a universal human concern as it is the indispensable, inherent aspect— call it, if you like, the esoteric edition— of every religion. Muslim/Islamic mysticism popularly goes by the name of *tasawwuf* and one who upholds and practices it is known as a *sufi*.

As to the word *sufi* there is an immense variety of opinions among the critics, scholars and historiographers as to its etymology. Some of them are of the opinion that it is derived from Greek word ‘theosophy’ which literally means ‘Divine wisdom’; a theosophist is one who aims at the direct knowledge of God by means of spiritual ecstasy and contemplation. Some consider it to have been derived from

(*suffa*) which means a ‘raised platform’. *Ashab-e suffa* (people of the raised platform), during the times of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.), were those who for most of the time sat on an elevated space in the Prophet’s Mosque and kept themselves busy in the remembrance of God, uttering formulas of His praise and glory, offering prayers etc. As sufis of all times too are characterized by— besides other things— an attitude of transcendence in regard to the affairs of the world, so they are called by this name. Some others say it is derived from (*safa*) which means cleanliness. Sufis are known for

specializing in cleansing and purifying their selves of all rubbish. Hence their name! Some others derive it from

(*saff*) which means rank or row. Sufis, they say, are so called because they are considered to be the people of the first rank or because, as regards their congregational prayers, they are always in a hurry to reach the mosque in order to be able to occupy a space in the first row or because on the Doomsday they will be the first ones to enter paradise. Still some others relate the word to (*Sophists*), a school of thought in

Greek philosophy that flourished around 500 B.C; the Sophists stood for the thesis that man's self or I-amness, rather than any objective reference, is in general the criterion of truth in relation to both facts and values: man is the measure of everything. Sufis too hold that man's real I-amness alone is capable to know the Truth. However, the most widely accepted opinion popular with a number of both Eastern and Western scholars is that is derived from

(*suff*) which means wool. The sufis got this name, it is said, because they generally loved to wear woollen dress as in olden times it was regarded as the symbol of simplicity, resignation and content This is, for instance, the view expressed in Abu Nasr al-Sarraj's¹ (d.988) *Kitab al-Lumma'* one of earliest texts currently available. Ibn Taimiyya, Ibn Khaldun,, R.A. Nicholson and many others agree with this derivation. Ali Hujveri (d.1063), the author of *Kashf al-Mahjub*, again one of the earliest books on *tasawwuf*, even records a hadith² in this regard:

Make it binding on you to wear the woollen dress; you will find the relish of faith in your hearts

And also³

The Holy prophet (p.b.u.h.) used to wear woollen dress

However, Ali Hujveri's own view is that the word صوفى is derived from صفا.⁴ While giving arguments in favour of his opinion, he strongly refutes those charlatans who, by just wearing woollen clothes or patched frocks, pose as if they are the sufis.⁵

As already emphasized, mysticism is the basal element of every religion. By virtue of its very definition, 'religion' as such has a metaphysics, the element of the 'Unseen' being one of its necessary components — in fact the indispensable component which determines the character and the *modus operandi* of all other components. Now a major section of the religious men, as we know, have an attitude of only a blind, unreasoned belief in 'the Unseen' and, specifically, in the Ultimate Reality necessarily having personal characteristics—whatever name they give to that Reality — Who presides over both the seen and the unseen worlds. There are some others who seek to build up a logical ground so as to rationalize their belief-structure. There are, however, the elitist few among them who develop the ambition to come into direct contact with the Ultimate Reality. "It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from the fetters of the law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness"⁶. It is this ambition which characterizes the mystic attitude in general. These three classes of religious people have existed side by side during all times. They have had unfortunately the tendency to look askance at each other's methodologies although all these methodologies are valid and justified in their respective rights. Mysticism thus is as old as religion itself; however, naturally, the particular mystic stance of every religion derives its inspiration, its itinerary and its socio-moral agenda from that particular religion. Islamic mysticism or Sufism, accordingly, is rooted in the source book of Islam, *i.e.* the Qur'an. The sufis, in general, would accept an esoteric understanding of the Qur'anic teachings in place of their exoteric interpretation

and understanding regarded to be sufficient by the men of *Shari'ah*. A difference in this connection is sometimes made between the philosophical, the theological and the mystical approaches to Qur'an studies. For a philosopher, with his hair-splitting temperament, all the verses of the Qur'an are allegorical in nature and so their meanings are to be searched for and discovered; for a theologian some of the verses are allegorical whereas the others have indubitably clear, plain meanings; for the sufi— as regards the ideal state of affairs— none of the verses need to be subjected to an analytical approach for the discovery of their meanings: the entire Qur'an has its meanings transparently clear. These three categories of the seekers of religious truth would quote in their favour the Qur'anic verses 39:23⁷, 3:7,⁸ and 11:1⁹, respectively. The sufis, who have sanctified their vision and have thus acquired the capability to look at everything with Divine effulgence, read the Qur'an and immediately are likely to understand what the Author of the Qur'an means. It is this level of comprehension to which a sufi referred when he said: "no understanding of the Holy Book is possible until it is actually revealed to the man of faith just as it was revealed to the Prophet (p.b.u.h.)"¹⁰. And, incidentally, it is specially against this level perhaps that we can fully appreciate the Qur'anic judgment that

There is not anything fresh or dry but is (inscribed) in a Record Clear () (6:59)

The thesis regarding the grounding of Sufism in Islamic teachings does not of course stand contradicted even if we find— and we do find— that the word was not in use by any section of the Muslims during the earliest times of Islamic history. The sterling, patent fact is that the sufis, as they have been described, got the sanction of their views, specially of the way of life they lived, from the Qur'an and possibly they did exist even during the life-time of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) irrespective of the fact that they did not use that

particular name or any other special name for themselves or for others of their class. Enumerating the responsibilities of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) the Qur'an says that he was required to teach his people 'the Book' and also '*hikmah*' (wisdom)¹¹. Here 'wisdom' is supposed to connote the implied and hidden meanings of various verses of the Book (*i.e.* the Qur'an) to which the sufis of all times have been fond of referring. They would derive their elitism *vis a vis* the ordinary religious orthodoxy by quoting the verse:

Whosoever is given *hikmah* he is in fact given abundant good (2:269)

Sufis find a support for their declared esotericism as well as for the mystique that qualifies their utterances from such verses of the Holy Qur'an as:

He (Allah) is the first and the Last, the Evident and the Hidden (57:3)

For Allah is the East and the West; so whichever way you turn there happens to be the face of Allah (2:1156)

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth (24:35)

When you threw pebbles, it was not you who threw them; it was rather Allah Who threw (8:17)

He is with you wherever you are (57:4)

Besides, there are many sayings of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) which can be quoted in support of their esotericism and also in support of their only a barely minimum essential involvement with the world. According to one hadith, God says:

I was a hidden treasure; I wished that I may be known, so I created the universe¹².

According to another, He says:

Man, by virtue of his supererogatory prayers, comes closer and closer to me so that I accept him as My beloved; and when I make him My beloved, I become his ears with which he hears, his eyes with which he sees and his hands with which he holds¹³.

Further, the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is reported to have said:

The world is the likeness of a dead body and those who run after it are no better than dogs¹⁴.

These and innumerable other *abadith* of this kind, along with the Qur'anic evidence quoted above very eloquently allude, directly or indirectly, to the inwardist, God-intoxicated way of life that has been the hallmark of the sufis, in particular, and of the mystics of all religions of all times, in general. The mode of life that the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) himself lived was, to a seeing eye, a model for the mystics to emulate, Simple, honest, straightforward, humble in his social behaviour and having a keen sense of accountability to God, he would spend greater part of his nights in prayers and in addressing petitions to God for the welfare of his *ummah*. He would go into self-imposed seclusion and remain in that state for days together in deep meditation. He was not, of course, in favour of renouncing the world, he rather took it seriously for what it is worth. According to him this world is a sort of bridge to the world yet to come, so it cannot be bypassed. It has to be journeyed through but journeyed through with care so that one does not falter on the way¹⁵. Or, alternatively, it can be analogized to a sowing field which is to be actively and properly managed so that the crop duly grows ready to be reaped in the Hereafter¹⁶. There are no indicators to the effect that he ever had an impassioned involvement with the world here and now. Imam Ghazali, in his *Kimya'-e Sa'adat*, carries out a discussion¹⁷ as to whether a person actively embarked on the path of Sufism should get married or not. After giving an elaborate account of the merits as well as the demerits of both the alternatives he builds up the point of view that he should marry (and of course should carry out all that a

married life implies) but (broadly speaking) should live as if he is not married at all. This means that constant, on-going journeying on the mystic path should be his primary concern and every day of his life should be better than the previous one on the spiritual scale of values: his point of view being thus one-dimensional in the core of it, all the other activities of this world find their own ways to be serviceable towards the fulfillment of that concern.

The above reference reminds us of the ascetic pietism of the earliest times of the religio-cultural history of Islam. The keynote of the orthodox Islamic teachings, as we all know, is the performance of good actions with a sense of accountability to God and to none else. With some Companions (*Sihabah*) and some of those who followed them this sense specially deepened into the interiorization of the moral motive with lesser and lesser concern for society. The asceticism of the early times, whatever its intensity, was petic through and through and was guided and disciplined by the domineering principle of God-centeredness. This ascetic pietism, incidentally, further got its impetus from two sides. Firstly, it arose as a reaction to the environment of luxury and worldly enjoyment that came to prevail among the Muslims during, to all appearance, the secular life and attitude of the Umayyed rulers. This in fact invoked world-avoiding tendencies among the '*ulama*' and sufis alike; secondly, it was a necessary reaction to the theological school of kharijism and the political controversies that it raised. God fearing persons considered it safe to adopt a non-committal attitude and resort to quietism against the entire controversy between the Kharijites and the Shi'ites.

Given the fact that in the history of religions there has always been a section of people who rise above the level of the populace and earnestly seek to have a "living assurance (of the Ultimate Reality) begotten of a rare experience"¹⁸, as indicated above; and given the evidence also just quoted that the Qur'an and *Sunnah* adequately support the so-called mystic episteme as well as the code of conduct characteristic

with them, there is no justification of the view of some critics that as the word *tasawwuf* has no origin in the Qur'an the institution connoted by it is an alien plant grafted in the soil of Islam¹⁹. After all what is there in a name! The patent truth is that what ostensibly '*Tasawwuf*' refers to is indigenous to Islamic culture. The fact as to when exactly the term *sufi* was used in the history of Islamic religious thought is irrelevant and off the point. There are a number of distinct Islamic institutions and branches of knowledge like *Tafsir*, *Fiqh*, *ʿIlm al-Kalam*, *Asma' al-Rijal*, *ʿIlm al-Nujum*, etc. which were not recognized as such during the life-time of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and even for some time later: this does not mean that the grounds of these are not present in the Qur'anic text and in the conduct of the earliest Muslims or that they are un-Islamic. So is the case with Islamic mysticism or Sufism.

Some Muslim scholars,²⁰ who agree that what is implied by genuine Sufism is duly emphasized by the Qur'an also but have somehow a distaste for the word *tasawwuf* or *sufi*, are of the opinion that the Qur'an has a more comprehensive term *ihsan* in place of what *tasawwuf* stands for; so the currency of the latter in Islamic literature, according to them, has obliterated the view of the Muslims regarding the importance of the former. I do not feel agreeable to this view particularly insofar as the Qur'anic teachings are concerned. The Qur'an nowhere uses *ihsan* as an independent technical term so that it may indisputably be construed that it is a level of excellence which can favourably be compared with, say *Islam* or *iman* and which, maybe, is higher than them. It is only verbal and adjectival forms of the word *ihsan* that have been used by the Qur'an and its root meaning is simply "the doing of good works"

In order to emphasize that *ihsan* is a stage of spiritual excellence higher than ordinary faith, the protagonists of this concept refer to the Qur'anic verse:

On those who believe and do good deeds of righteousness there is no blame for what they ate (in the past), when they guard themselves from evil, and believe and do good deeds of

righteousness-(or) again guard themselves from evil and believe
 or (again) guard themselves from evil and do good () for
 Allah loveth those who do good () (5:93)

However, this verse, as we see, does not imply that *ibsan* is a level of spirituality higher than that of *iman*. We may as well derive from the verse 3:260 that *itmeenan* connotes a conviction more impeccable than that implied by *iman*, but we generally do not do so. Relevant part of this verse reads as follows:

Behold! Abraham said: My Lord! Show me how Thou givest life to the dead. He said: dost thou not have faith (*iman*)? He said: Yea! but that my heart be satisfied. ()

Anyway, a *sufi* does exhibit in his character what is implied by *ibsan* and what is implied by *itmeenan* and so on.

In view of the fact that the teachings of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* provide an adequate domestic structure on which the *sufis* build up the edifice of their characteristic views and attitudes as demonstrated above — besides, of course, the universalism in them insofar as they belong to the institution of **mysticism** that is common to all religions— the entire controversy that has sometimes been very hotly pursued *viz a viz* whether Sufism can be traced back to Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Neo-platonic, Persian, Manichean, and/or even Chinese mysticism etc. is out of place. Of course when any two cultures meet they do influence each other as regards their various conceptual frameworks and behaviour patterns. So when Muslim mystics happened to live with Christian mystics or Hindu mystics and so on, the formers did assimilate some practices and ways of behaviour from the latter (as did the latter from the formers) *albeit* the crux of their epistemology, ethics and spiritualism remained the same as it was indigenous to mysticism. Hamilton Gibb²¹ has very justifiably referred to three principles that govern the transfer of culture from one nation or class of people to the other. No culture, according to him, would incorporate in itself certain

traits of thought and behaviour from an alien source unless the former

1. has already these traits in it in their potential form;
2. has certain auxiliary tendencies which help these traits develop and mature; and
3. has a structure of its own values, emotional dynamics and aesthetic standards which is in consonance with the latter.

Thus whatever impact Christians, Buddhists and others had on Sufism was not at all by way of any unnatural, coercive interference. However, it is of course a fact that during the times of the downfall and degeneration of the Muslims, impostors and masqueraders appeared among the class of sufis who, devoid of the esoteric element, which in itself is undoubtedly hard to achieve and harder still to sustain, were complacent with, and regarded mysticism as entirely amounting to, the exoteric customs, rites and practices whether they were of their own or whether they were borrowed from elsewhere. Due to these charlatans the institution of Sufism itself fell into disrepute. Consequently many attempts off and on have been made to point out unguine accretions to it and to reinstate its original purity and luster.

In regard to the question as to when actually the word was used for the first time during the cultural history of Islam distinctively marked by estoricism, piety, disinterested benevolence and so on— the qualities that have characterized genuine mysticism of all religions of all times— the answer is difficult to find. There have been immense differences of opinion among the researchers. Some, Abu Nasr al-Sarraj being one of them, are of the view that the word was in vogue for men of excellence and virtue even in the pre-Islamic times and later continued to be current during the times of *tabi'in* and *tab' tabi'in*²². To the objection that, if this is the case, then why the class of sufis, by this name is not traceable during the life-time of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) he replies that, during his times, to be a *Sihabi* (Companion)

had such a uniquely honorific status that no one ever thought of calling himself or any one of the faithful by any other name. However, Sayyid Ali Hujveri in his *Kashf al-Mahjub* does trace the use of the phrase *ahl al-tasawwuf* (the upholders of *tasawwuf*) to the times of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) as he records one of his sayings²³:

He, who listens to the call of the people of *tasawwuf* and yet does not take their words to be true, is listed in the eyes of God as belonging to the negligent ones.

Anyway, the most moderate— also the most common— opinion in this regard is that the first one in Muslim history for whom the title *sufi* was used was Abu Hashim who lived during the Umayyad period.

Whatever be the true story about beginnings, Muslim/Islamic mysticism, has (as is necessarily the case with any living institution!) a history starting from where it was— like a newborn child who is close to nature, purest in form and spirit. So, Sufism, to begin with, was nearest to the Islamic teachings. In later days this purity began to be compromised due to various cultural impacts from elsewhere and still later, due to the whole class of impostors who feigned to be the recipients of Divine gnosis but actually they were not. This has provided a field for researchers who tried very hard to distinguish the genuine from the ungentle in mysticism against the perspective of Qur'an and Sunnah.

Qushayri, in his *Al-Risala Al-Qushayriyya*, has given an account of the characteristics of a genuine *sufi*²⁴. To begin with, he says that a genuine *sufi* harbours absolutely no doubts about the soundness of the way he has chosen to follow and has an immaculate confidence and an immaculate conviction that all the three dimensions of his relationships *i.e.* with God, with other human beings and with the world at large, which he keeps up and advocates, are better than any other that may ever be recommended. Out of these a *sufi*'s relationship with God is of course of basic importance because the other two relations are derived from it. About his

concept of, and relationship with, God, Qushayri makes the following observations:

1. A sufi's faith in God is a kind of living assurance, irrevocable and irrefutable and has no element of doubt about it.
2. Inspired by this basic conviction, he develops a total sense of resignation: when he does something, he has a feeling that it is not he himself who is doing it but in fact God is doing it all, He has an existential awareness that he perpetually lives with, and in, Him.
3. The sufi firmly holds that the will of God is supreme and, in the face of it, his own personal will simply does not exist.
4. Sufi's relation to God is absolutely uncontaminated and absolutely pure and direct: it does not have any material reference.
5. Man-God relationship being such, it absolves the sufi of all sorts of absorption by the worldly affairs.
6. The sufi has a feeling that he has been created for nothing and for none except God.

As to the down-to-the-earth attitude of the earliest sufis towards other human beings and the world at large they regarded themselves bound to perform all the duties enjoined upon them by the *Shari'ah*. They had as their role model the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) who carried out all the necessary mundane activities — with of course an ever-present keen sense of accountability to God. *Sunnah* invariably provided guiding principles of life for them. However, they were distinguishable from the ordinary orthodox Muslims. The latter, the letter of the *Shari'ah* laws being the be-all as well as the end-all for them, were always busy in determining various nuances of the law, as it is operative in public and private life, discriminating between what is *halal* and what is *haram*, what is *farḡ*, *wajib* or *mustahab* and so on; whereas for the former there is a spirit of the *Shari'ah* laws also. This, by and large, is the well-known difference between *Shari'ah* and *Tariqah* or between *Shari'ah* and *Haqiqah*. The earliest sufis made it a

point to obey all the *Shari'ab* laws but at the same time insisted that the spirit, the *Haqiqah* of these laws should also be taken care of: both of these, the letter as well as the spirit, should operate in mutually intimate relationship and in perfect cohesion. They were adamantly against the cult that became popular with the degenerate sufis of later times viz: *Shari'ab* laws are legitimately operative only as long as a person has not established contact with Reality; the moment he establishes that contact, they become inoperative and in fact entirely useless for him. Further, as regards *Shari'ab* laws, the genuine sufis of the earliest times denied themselves the concessions and conveniences which are ordinarily permissible within the broader framework of these laws. They would maintain an extremely high level of conformity with the laws: even the slightest deviation could for them only be expiated by a long penance. In the annals of *sufia'* and *auliya'* we find such incidents as 'so and so was late in joining the congregational prayers and missed the first *takbir* (*takbir-e ula*) and on this failing wept for days together' or 'such and such used to spend whole nights performing supererogatory prayers or reciting the Holy Qur'an'. And so on. Broadly, this is what the Sufis call *jihad b' al-nafs* (war with one's own self) and even regard it as of greater value than war with the enemy in the battle field:

بڑے موذی کو مارا نفس امارہ کو گر مارا^{۲۵}

(If you have overpowered the insinuating self in you, you have in fact defeated the most pernicious adversary of yours)

Fear of God's displeasure, in general, and fear of the hell-fire, in particular, of which very elaborate descriptions are given in the Qur'an, were the guiding principles of the behaviour as well as the overall general attitude of the earliest sufi (incidentally it is some such characteristics of religious life that lead to the inculcation and maturation of exclusivist ascetic tendencies in the sufis of later days and consequently to the gradual opacity of the original luster of spirituality!).

They were steeped in God-intoxicatedness and in an inviolable urge to be the closest ones to the Islamic teachings. They were not theorizers nor would they philosophize: they would simply act and be soulfully passionate. The philosophical problems such as how to get initiated into the mystic path, how to traverse this path, what are the various stages involved and their respective defining characteristics during the mystics journeying towards the highest goals of spiritual excellence, and so on, however, did arise with the passage of time. With such introduction of conceptualization into the realm of mysticism various orders emerged among the sufis like the *Qadiriya*, *Chishtiya*, *Naqshbandia* and others and every sufi chose to align himself with some one of these orders. In *Kashf al-Mahjub* is available, perhaps the first recorded, indication of the order-consciousness of the sufis.²⁶

The institution of preceptor-disciple relationship, latent among the early sufis and obvious among the later ones, is considered to be of very great importance for the acquisition of desirable results. In general, whenever we propose to undertake an epistemic probe into a field which is so far alien to us or whenever we have to learn doing something which we already know not how to do or whenever we have to be what presently we are not, we are all pupils and we all need a guide or a teacher who is already an expert in the relevant field. Out of these three classes of pupils, in the first two the relationship between the expert/the consummate and the initiate, the beginner, is ordinarily that between a teacher and his student. This relationship, to a very large extent, is reciprocal and is discursive in character. The teacher passes on information to the pupil and the latter can pose counter-questions to the former if the concepts used in this transaction need to be further clarified. A lot of 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' process is involved in the mutual discussion so that the process of learning moves forward satisfactorily. The third class of pupils is the special class of learners as they seek to learn how to metamorphose their very being. Sufis-in-the-making belong to this class. A sufi needs,

as already explained, to realize his true self, the Divine self, that is there in him as the primordial trust, so that, getting thus been coloured by Divinity, he finally has gnosis or the *ma'rifat*, as the technical term goes. This being the nature of his sacred goal, an ordinary teacher would not be able to lead him aright. He rather needs a preceptor who issues precepts, guidelines and orders, and he himself is the disciple who is to submit to these guidelines and just obey. An oath of allegiance (*bay'at*) to the preceptor is to be contracted by a person before he is to be accepted as a disciple. In the ordinary teacher-student relationship, of basic concern are some concepts and ideas which need to be clarified by dialogue and by mutuality of discourse. In preceptor-disciple relationship, on the other hand, no concepts are involved: hence no mutuality of discourse. It is only a one-way relationship. The preceptor is supposed to be a person who has already gone quite far ahead on the path towards the discovery of his true self and, as a consequence, towards God-consciousness and has himself experienced the difficulties, the ups and downs and all the whereabouts of the path. It is these experiences which the preceptor would try to induct in the novice, his disciple, provided the latter is determined to bear with the former and promises not to waver and stagger on the way. The preceptor orders; the disciple must carry out without ever giving himself the right to refute, object or counter-question, because the former knows the path and the latter does not. In fact denying to the disciple the right to say 'no' is otherwise also a necessary initial part of his training. His habit of not saying 'no' to his preceptor will lead him to always saying 'yes' to the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and this, to an unconditional commitment to, and total resignation in favour of, the Divine will. It is this last stage which amounts to being coloured with the colour of God and looking at every thing from the Divine point of view. These are the stages in sufi terminology of *fana' fi al-sheikh*, *fana' fi al-Rasul* and *fana' fi-Allah*. Every one of these stages, especially the last one, has its own immense wealth of

details which the sufi going through them best knows. When the sufi becomes so absorbed in the stage where he has a living conviction that he as a human individual has identified his will with the will of God, that is the stage of *baqa' bi Allah*.

As to the essential qualities of a preceptor which would make him a befitting guide to lead his disciple through his 'mystic journey', technically known as *suluk*, Shah Muhammad Zauqi in his *Sirr-e Dilbaran* enlists the following three:²⁷

1. he should be pious and God-fearing and should be a passionate follower of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*;
2. he should be a man of vision, intelligence and a robust commonsense;
3. he should himself have had completed various stages of *suluk* under the guidance of his own preceptor and should consequently have been granted a formal permission to accept disciples.

Let me parenthetically make an observation here. I have held that Sufism originally derives its entire inspiration from the Qur'anic teaching; and the Qur'an, we know, lays a very great emphasis on the use of reason. Those who do not make use of their observational and rational faculties will be answerable to God on the Day of Judgement for this failure²⁸. The Qur'an condemns such persons and likens them to the beasts; they are even worse than them²⁹! Now, does not this unreasoned obedience to the preceptor amount to the suspension of the rational faculty by the disciple? Answer to this question is 'yes' as well as 'no', 'Yes', because, when a novice in the full day light of commonsense and with conviction and confidence goes to the preceptor with the request that he may be accepted as his disciple and his request is granted, the preceptor, to begin with, may assign him for quite some time, paltry jobs like dusting the room, cooking meals, cleansing utensils, mending clothes, and so on, which, obviously, have nothing to do with his proposed spiritual agenda. But he cannot and should not refuse to carry out all these activities despite the fact that his ordinary rational

judgement would not be in favour of them. The discipline requires that he is not to reason why. He has just to obey—that's all! This unconditional, compulsive obedience, however, psychologically helps the disciple get out of the personal, individualist, egotistic frame of reference and this, as shown above more than once, is an essential element of preparation for the in-coming of the Absolute. Answer is 'no' because the suspension of the rational judgement by the disciple is only an impermanent, transitory phase: it is a necessary prelude to the restoration of reason at the more genuine and healthier level. Reasoning faculty of an ordinary man-of-the-world, we know, functions in more or less subordination to his mundane desires, his personal sentiments and emotions and his momentary likes and dislikes—to be brief, his superficial or efficient self; consequently, he is likely to make errors. The faculty of judgement of the disciple must be liberated from the clutches of his superficial self so that he can reason truly and rightly. First and the earliest step for the *salik* towards this liberation is to suspend his will in favour of the will of his preceptor, the second step is to do so in favour of the will of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.); and then onwards to identify his will with the will of God. Having thus realized his Divine *i.e.* true self he can safely exercise his reason as the Qur'an requires that he should; and now his reasoning will never go erratic. Dual emphasis of the Qur'an

1. on the use of the faculty of reason and understanding in regard to its own text³⁰ (also in regard to the phenomena of nature within as well as outside man, as recommended by the Qur'an itself); and
2. on the fact that, for the understanding of the Qur'an, its reader's supra-rational commitment of faith to God³¹ (which amounts to the 'realization of his Divine self—interchangeably, identification of his will with the will of God), is necessary

speaks volumes for the correct perspective against which alone reason can operate rightly and fruitfully also.

Anyway, what I have said above regarding the suspension of reason that is operative under the suzerainty of personal desires and then gradually moving towards the realization of my true self, with reference to which alone the reasoning faculty ultimately stands liberated, is not exactly a chronological process so that when the earlier stage of the process is over only then the later stage occurs. The 'when-then' sequence here is non-temporal like the way a logical argument is structured: the conclusion in an argument, we know, follows the premises in a non-temporal sequence. Distaste for bad reasoning and desire for good reasoning are simultaneous occurrences, negative and positive aspects of the same phenomenon.

As God is Infinite and Absolute, so journey towards Him is a never-ending process. It is extremely arduous too, involving difficulties of both kinds: renouncing what is humanly near-impossible to renounce and assimilating that which needs herculean efforts to assimilate. So the journeyer on the Sacred Path is never to lose heart and has to be always up and doing. But that by itself is not adequate. In order that his efforts actually bear fruit also he indispensably needs Divine grace which is hopefully made available to those who harbor good intentions and are sincere in their endeavours. *Maqam* (station), in the sufi terminology, is the stage which the sufi, to all appearance, attains as a consequence of his own efforts whereas *hal* (state) amounts entirely to the grace and blessings conferred on him by God. *Maqamat*, as they are due to human effort, are limited in number; *ahwal* know no limits in their ascending grades of excellence as they are due to Divine conferment. According to Ali Hujveri, *tauba* (repentance) is the beginning of the series of *maqamat* and *rida'* (absolute satisfaction with the kind of life and existence in which God keeps the sufi) is the last one of the series. The intermediary *maqamat* have variously been described by different mystics as *warf* *zuhd*, *faqr*, *sabr*, *tawakkul* and so on.

Tracing the relationship between *maqamat* and *ahwal*, Hujveri observes that *rida'* which is the last one of the series of the former, is the point from which starts the ascending series of the latter: end of the one is the beginning of the other. *Ahwal* have been variously described as *muraqaba*, *qurb*, *mahabbat*, *khauf*, *raja' shawq*, *uns*, *itmeenat*, *mushahada*, *yaqin*, and so on. Some of the mystic writers have ventured to argue that, as there is no limit to the ascending series of *ahwal*, a sufi or *wali* may get equipped with a level of excellence higher than that of the prophets. However, a genuine writer, cogitating within the limits of *Shari'ah* would firmly deny this. Prophets are the chosen ones among human beings, according to the Divine scheme of things. After all prophethood and its excellences too are due to the grace of God which knows no limits and only God knows how much of his grace and favour He has to dole out to whom.

Preceptor-disciple relationship referred to above generally does not exist in isolation. Every such relationship belongs to a *silsilah* (an order, a chain or a pedigree). From among his disciples every preceptor grants *sanad-e fazilat* (certificate of excellence) to some who therewith acquire the right to assume the role of preceptors and induct their own disciples into the *silsila* and so on. Thus various *salasil* or orders (as well as sub-orders) of the mystics, come into being. All these orders have mutually slight differences here and there in regard to devotional practices, methodology of guidance and training techniques. Researchers have enumerated scores and even hundreds of these orders. T.S. Termingham in his *The Sufi Orders of Islam*³² concentrated upon eight principal orders that flourished in various regions of the Islamic world. From among these, *Chishtiya*, *Subrawardiya*, *Qadiriyya* and *Naqshbandiya* gained firm roots in the Indian Sub-continent in around 12th/13th centuries. We do not intend to go into a description of these orders and their mutual differences as that will take us beyond the scope of this book. Presently, however, let us give a brief history of the development of *Tasawwuf* i.e. Islamic Mysticism.

Dr. Abu Saeed Nuruddin in his Doctoral thesis published as *Islami Tasawwuf aur Iqbal* (Urdu)³³ has enumerated five stages in the historical development of the institution of Sufism. In what follows I have, by and large, followed the pattern set by him.

Irrespective of the fact as to when in Islamic history the word *sufi* or the word *tasawwuf* first came into vogue, what these words stand for, *viz* the esoteric dimension of Islam, had been present throughout history among a section of the Muslim community. From the very life of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and from the lives of his Companions scores of examples of what we call mystic attitude or mystic virtues can be quoted. Fairly high degree of religious commitment, God-fearingness, sin-apprehension, penitence, duty-consciousness in respect to God as well as to other human beings, devotion to spiritual causes, steadfastness, patience, otherworldliness (not of course, ‘renunciation of the world’), sometimes denying to themselves even the smallest concessions which are normally made available by the people of *Shari’ah* for themselves, and so on, are the hallmarks of Sufism as it flourished during the initial period of its historical development. The Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) would stand in long supererogatory prayers night after night till his feet got swollen with stress. He himself would, and asked everyone of his companions to, pray to God as if he is face to face with Him. Despite the excellence of his stature as a prophet he, in all humility, would perpetually beseech God for absolution and forgiveness. He is reported to have once said:

Be in the world as if you are a stranger or a journeyer.³⁴

His companions, who were always passionately eager to follow him in every respect and who were ever ready to receive his directions for compliance, too were a beacon light for the *ummah* insofar as the observance of the pith, the inherent spirit, of Islamic teachings is concerned. One of his *ahadith* says:

My companions are like the guiding stars: whomsoever from among them you follow you will be led to the right path.³⁵

In pursuance of the life of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) his Companions were thoroughly marked by abstinence, content, patience, chastity and an extremely inostentatious and simple living. This earliest period in the historical development of what was later to be known as *tasawwuf* extended roughly upto the middle of the 7th century.

The second period, the period of the *Tabi'in* has its span extending onwards to about the middle of the 8th century. Hasan Basri (d.728) is the most outstanding personality of this period. Ovais Qarani may too be included here as, though he was alive during the life-time of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h) he did not have an occasion to meet him: so, technically, the title of *sihabi* cannot perhaps be given to him. Anyway, both of them are specially known for the possession and propagation of two basic sufi virtues— love for God and horror of the Day of Judgement. They had a number of contemporary mystics too from among all of whom they occupy a singular, outstanding position. They had an impact on subsequent times and were immensely respected and frequently quoted by the sufis who came later. Ovais Qarani is in fact regarded as one of the pioneers of the sufi way. He had a passionate love for God and would always be busy in His remembrance; and he would never be oblivious of his impending death, having a living assurance that it may occur any moment. The Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is reported to have known him as he once said: The breath of the merciful (*nafas al-Rahman*) comes to me from Yemen³⁶ He had a desire that he meet his death while fighting for the Divine cause; this desire of his was ultimately fulfilled. Many statements have been quoted from him, like

While going to sleep be sure that death is over your head; while awake be sure that death is very much before you. Never regard sin as an insignificant activity.

My God! I seek your refuge from the eyes which exceed in sleeping and from the belly which exceeds in the consumption of food.

(Addressing Hazrat Uthman and Hazrat Ali who visited him in Qaran:) Day of Judgement is near. On that Day I shall meet you again and that meeting shall never come to an end. I am preparing for that Day.³⁷

Hasan Basri too was a symbol of piety, God-consciousness and an existential conviction regarding the Day of Judgement with all its awe and dread. Once he is reported to have met a person who was weeping. He asked him why he was doing so. His reply was: 'I have heard that in the Hereafter a man of faith will stay in hell to pay reparations for the sins committed by him for as long as one thousand years before he is allowed to go to heaven. I weep, with the fear that maybe I myself am that person'. On this Hasan Basri expressed his wish: would that I am that person because I shall be fortunate enough to go to heaven *only* after one thousand years of punishment in the Fire!³⁸ Hasan Basri would always offer prayer to God with the absolute sense of his presence before Him.

Next period of the historical development of Sufism was that of *Atba'-e tabi'in* which extended roughly from the middle of the 8th century to the middle of the 10th century. This period is very important as during it the term *sufi* came into vogue, Sufism became almost an institution and a system of technical terms began to be introduced for the description of its epistemology, ethics and metaphysics. There is some difference of opinion as to who was that person for whom the title of *sufi* was used for the first time. However, the view on which most of the researchers agree is that it was Abu Hashim who died in 776.

As sufis now started to be recognized as a class of people almost independent of , and recognizably distinct from, the ordinary class of the men of *Shari'ah*, they felt the need of a place besides the mosque which for the Muslims has ordinarily been the point of all religious ceremonies. This new

place has been known in sufi literature as *khanqah* on the pattern of Christian monasteries. *Khanqah* was used for imparting lessons in sufi lore and culture, for mystic exercises and for the remembrance of God.

During this third period, unfortunately, the earlier criterion of piety *viz* rising above and transcending the world was gradually and imperceptibly being replaced by ‘renunciation of the world’ The patent Islamic view is that the world is a sowing field for the harvest to be reaped in the hereafter or that it is *dar al-‘amal* (the place of action) for which rewards and punishments will be doled out in the next world that is *dar al-jaza’* (the place of recompense). The underlying philosophy implied here is that the comforts as well as the discomforts of this world are evanescent and also devoid of ultimate sense and meaning: the ultimate significance belongs to the treatment meted out to each and every individual by God in the world that is yet to come. This philosophy was transformed now, for all practical purposes, into the attitude of total abnegation of the present world alongwith its conveniences, and its renunciation. As the pioneer of this attitude the name of Ibrahim b. Adham. (d. 776 or 790) is mentioned who left his royal palace, got attired in the dress of a *derwish* and away from the din and hustle of human society went into non-human environments, searching for the Divine. In line with his reclusive stance he is reported to have once said: ‘when a man marries he embarks on a ship and when a child is born he suffers shipwreck’; and also ‘when a *faqir* gets married he, as if, leaves the solid ground and mounts a sea-boat and when he gets his very first child, he is drowned’:³⁹ He is considered to have been the first one among the sufis to have enumerated the stages of *zuhd* (asceticism):

1. renunciation of the world
2. renunciation of the happy feeling of having achieved renunciation

and

3. regarding the world as so unimportant that it does not deserve to be looked at⁴⁰

Concept of the love of God, which has always been an indispensable element in the doctrinal structure of the sufis, also assumed a new dimension during this period. Earlier, as in accordance with the Qur'anic teachings, love of God was tagged with the observance of *Shari'ah* and obedience to the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.). The Qur'an says addressing the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.):

Say (to the men of faith): If you love God, then obey me; (consequently even) God will love you (3:31).

Now, 'love of God' became direct and unconditional. This exclusive God-intoxication is very obviously present in the attitude and sayings of Rabi'a 'Adviya (d. 801), a renowned mystic woman. She intensely worshipped God— neither for fear of hell nor for securing a place in heaven but only to carry out the requirements of love for God. Once, addressing the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) in dream, she said: "Could there be anyone who would not value friendship with you! But love for God has so much engulfed me and so thoroughly absorbed me that there is left no space in my heart for enmity against, or friendship towards, anyone else."⁴¹ In continuation with this attitude towards more and more of exclusive involvement with the being of God, and under the influence of Neoplatonism which was made available to the Muslims in Arabic translations during the Abbasid rule (750 –1258), among the sufis of this period strict theism of the Qur'anic teachings started to be gradually draped with pantheistic colours.

In a way, a tendency towards pantheism is implied in the very nature of Sufism and particularly in the nature of mystic experience. It is one of the characteristics of this experience, as we shall see in the next chapter, that it necessarily involves the passivity of its recipient who is, as if, entirely overshadowed and overpowered by its Divine object. As long as the experience lasts and even for some time after it is over,

the incumbent has the conviction that only God is and nothing else is— not even he himself. Even those mystics and also those religious thinkers who carry mystical underlayings in their nature and at the same time expressly hold on to theism and profess it in so many unequivocal words, cannot avoid giving to their readers an impression of pantheism. As regards this ambivalence the example of ‘Allama Iqbal of our own times— an advocate of religious experience as an authentic way to acquire knowledge— immediately comes to our mind. In his almost maturest thought expressed in the *Reconstruction* he builds up a well-thought-out case for the view that God is a Person or Ego, the Great I Am, but at so many places in the book we get an inkling of the view that all is God or that God and the universe are two aspects of the same reality. For instance, as regards man-God/nature-God relationship, he says:

what we call nature ... is only a fleeting moment in the life of God ... Nature is to the Divine Self as character is to the human self.⁴²

Beyond Him and apart from His creative activity, there is neither time nor space to close Him off in reference to other egos.⁴³

God (is) the omnipsyche of the universe.⁴⁴

Further he records a saying of Ba Yazid Bistami apparently with approval. A disciple of his remarked: ‘there was a moment of time when God existed and nothing else existed beside Him’, Bayazid’s reply to this was: ‘it is just the same now as it was then’⁴⁵ Whether Iqbal is to be bracketed as a theist or as a pantheist is a controversy that has been carried on for years and has not been finally settled even to this day. Some, recognizing both of his positions as partly valid and partly invalid, have been compelled to use a third term ‘panentheism’ for his position which means that ‘the world is not *identical with* God... nor *separate from* God... but in God.⁴⁶

During this period of the history of Muslim mysticism, Dhu al-Nun Misri (d. 859) happened to be an enlightened thinker. Influenced by neo-Platonic thought, he was specially impressed by its pantheistic ideas and tried to incorporate them in his own mystical views. He referred in this connection to a well-known extra-Qur'anic revelation according to which 'man, because of his supererogatory prayers gets nearer and nearer to God so that He becomes his eyes with which he sees, his hands with which he holds...' One of his own sayings is:

The sentiment of love for God ultimately unites man with God. Man is submerged in the being of God. His self does not remain his own but becomes a part and parcel of the self of God.⁴⁷

Bayazid Bistami (d.874), quoted just a few lines above, was another notable celebrity of this period. He touched the borders of extremism in regard to his pantheistic/incarnationist views when he said:

I am holy; how great is my majesty!⁴⁸

Some of his other sayings are:

Once I asked God: O Lord, how can I reach you. God said: in order to reach Me first divorce yourself three times.⁴⁹

Like casting off the old slough by a snake, when I came out of Bayazid, I saw that to be a lover and to be a beloved are two roles of the same being because in that capacity we can only see the One.⁵⁰

I witnessed many stations. However, when I looked at myself I found myself at the station where God is⁵¹

I went round *Ka'ba* for a number of years. But when I reached God, *Ka'ba* started circumambulating me.⁵²

Junayd Baghdadi (d.910) occupied a very distinguished status among the sufis and pious men of his times. Ali Hujveri gives him the title of *sheikh al-masha'ikh* in *tasawwuf* and *imam al-*

a'immah in *Shari'ah*. The following speak eloquently for his pantheistic views:

Once he fell sick and started praying to God for recovery. Immediately he heard a voice: who are you to intervene between man and God?⁵³

Gnosis is a kind of test, he said. A person who thinks that he has attained the gnosis of God is mistaken because He Himself is the Gnostic as well as the One Whose gnosis he claims to have had.⁵⁴

In the first two periods of the historical development of Sufism described above the 'sufis' although in most of the cases not expressly so called, were as we have seen, just men of *Shari'ah*— only they were extra-ordinarily stringent in the carrying out of *Shari'ah* laws and so recognizably outstanding and distinct from the ordinary men of faith. But there was no occasion of any conflict between them. Sufis' more and more of distate for this world, intensive besottedness for God with an existential awareness of His ever-presence, forced obliviousness of everything/everyone besides Him and so on were the 'innovations'— if we can call them so— that characterize the period of *atba'-e tabi'in*. These virtues were, of course, all psychologically grounded, immediately or remotely, in the basic Islamic sentiment of immaculate allegiance and uncompromising commitment to God. However, for the simple reason that they were innovations not so intensely known to the earlier sufis a conflict began to arise between, as they were called, 'the men of jurisprudence' and 'the men of experience'. The sufis who belonged to the latter class regarded themselves as the men of esotericism or 'inwardism' whereas the formers were considered as the men of apparentism or 'outwardism'. The two classes occasionally developed mutual suspicions and started looking askance at each other. It is incidentally in this atmosphere of mutual distrust and even intolerance, which had become quite common, that Hassain b.Mansur al-Hallaj was tried for his so-called heresies, found guilty, and sent to the gallows.

Mansur Hallaj (d.922) was born in Iran. He was fond of travelling and during his journey to Baghdad took a vow of allegiance at the hands of Junaid Bughdadi and became his disciple. Like his preceptor he too had pantheistic tendencies. To all appearance signifying man's identity with God his celebrated saying *ana haqq* literally means 'I am the Truth'. He argues:

When a person goes through self-culture, and the performance of good actions alongwith the avoidance of evil actions becomes his second nature, he acquires 'the station of *muqarrabeen*. When this second nature is further consolidated he gradually transcends the limitations of manhood. When this transcendence further consolidates he is united with the being of God. At this stage he obeys none; others obey him instead. His words and actions become the words and actions of God Himself.⁵⁵

Mansur Hallaj was arrested twice due to his 'heretic' views. After one year of his first imprisonment he escaped. Second time he was arrested and remained in custody for eight year till he was hanged for his utterances, particularly insofar as they alluded to the phenomenon of *bulul* or absorption in the being of God.

Fourth period of sufi history mentioned by Dr. Nuruddin is the one that extends roughly from the 11th century to the middle of the 13th century. During this time we come across some Muslim mystico-philosophical thinkers and theoretians who were not only practicing mystics themselves but who also carried out a thoughtful analysis of such problems as 'what mysticism or mystic experience is', 'how can we differentiate between genuine mysticism and ungenueine mysticism', 'how can mysticism be justified from the Qur'anic point of view', 'how is mysticism relevant to the idea of perfect manhood in Islam', 'what is mystic metaphysics', 'what are the moral values specially emphasized in mysticism', and so on. Out of these thinkers there are at least four who occupy outstanding positions in their respective rights *viz.* Ali

Hujveri, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi, and Jalal al-Din Rumi.

Sheikh Ali bin Usman al-Hujveri, popularly known as Data Ganj Bakhsh, lived in the 11th century. Born in Ghazni, he visited a number of places, met various sufis of his times, and ultimately settled in Lahore where he died and where his final abode has ever since been frequented by his devotees in very large numbers, day in and day out. Besides being a practicing mystic of recognizable stature he was a religious scholar as well, possessing thorough knowledge of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. He is reported to have written a number of books, both in prose and verse, some of whose titles have been discovered and identified but none of them is actually available except *Kashf al-Mahjub*. This book is recognized to be the first one in Persian prose written on the subject of Sufism. It covers various aspects of the subject like the etymology of the word *sufi*, distinction between real Sufism and what only masquerades as such, historical development of this institution, various stages through which a novice goes during his journeying on the path, an explanation of technical terms used by the sufis for the communication of their views and experiences, and so on. The over-all temper and tenor of the book is reconciliatory and purely academic and not prejudicial and sectarian. Writers on the theory and practice of Sufism have generally differentiated between *fana'* and *baqa'*, *sabr* and *sukr*, permissibility and impermissibility of ecstasy caused by music etc. Ali Hujveri has sympathetically formulated arguments that can be offered in favour of either of them and has consequently tried to strike a rapprochement between them. He has also undertaken a brief study of different sufi orders that existed in his times and the characteristic distinctive features of these orders.

Ali Hujveri's contemporaneous and later writers on the subject of Sufism have been generous in their admiration of *Kashf al-Mahjub* for its profoundness and authenticity. They have also extensively benefited from it in their own writings. Nizam al-Din Aulya wrote in reference to it: if someone has

no *pir* (spiritual guide) of his own, a study of this book will provide him one.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111) enjoys a prominent and outstanding position in the history of Muslim thought. He was, at the same time a philosopher, a theologian, a jurist, a mystic, and all of these *par excellence*. The guiding principle in all these roles that he performed was his 'dispassionate search for truth' on which he would make no compromises and would not at all be satisfied with half-truths. He started his formal education in ordinary schools but by virtue of his inquisitive nature and hard work soon made his mark as a person well-read in all the current branches of knowledge and his fame as a scholar in the Ash'arite tradition spread far and wide. He was only about 34 years of age when Nizam al-Mulk offered him the Chair of theology at the Nizamia Academy of Baghdad. This was a very coveted position of honour in the then Muslim world. Ghazali accepted the appointment.

As a professor at the Academy, Ghazali was a complete success. Students thronged to his classes in order to listen to his thought-provoking discourses and brilliant lectures. But soon he started having doubts in his mind about the various courses that he was teaching. In fact, in the face of the incisiveness of his research acumen and his academic vision, the contents of these courses appeared superficial to him. This doubtful state developed into a kind of mental ailment with him. He became a sceptic—even an agnostic. His eloquence began to falter and he lost self-confidence. Unable to continue his teaching job, he resigned. For about eleven long years he remained away from active social life in order to find out the basic truth/truths so that possibly he was able to re-affirm his knowledge on firmly established grounds. During this time of withdrawal, he met various knowledge-claimants of truth, undertook ascetic practices, went through contemplative sessions, and so on. He has related his story of the search for truth in his autobiography *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (literally, 'the deliverer from error') that he wrote about five years before his death. Introducing this book he writes:

“The search for truth being the aim which I propose to myself, I ought in the first place to ascertain what the bases of certitude are. In the second place I ought to recognize that certitude is the clear and complete knowledge of things, such knowledge as leaves no room for doubt, nor any possibility of error”.⁵⁶ Under the auspices of these guidelines Ghazali started with sense-perception which is recognized by the empiricists as the only reliable source of knowledge, and, after examination, found it unreliable because it often deceives us; illusions and hallucinations are the events that we so often encounter in our everyday life. No eye can perceive the movement of the shadow, he says, but still the shadow moves; a small coin would cover any star yet the geometrical computations show that a star is a mass vastly larger in most of the cases than even the whole of our earth. After sensory knowledge, Ghazali turned to the so-called axiomatic principles of reason and doubted the validity of even these. Is ‘ten’ more than ‘three’? Can a thing be and not be at the same time, or be both necessary as well as impossible? How can one answer these questions with certitude? As errors of sense can be recognized by reason so there may be an epistemic tool still higher which can correct ‘obviously self-evident’ rational judgement in case they go erratic. Ghazali also considered the possibility that our life in this world is a dream long-drawn-out in comparison with the world hereafter; and when we—ordinarily stated— ‘die’ we in fact wake up from that dream. Then, may be, we shall realize the ‘follies’ of our judgments in the life therebefore. The matter is of transposition from one spatio-temporal universe to the other and the consequent metamorphosis of the entire perspective, and even the entire overhauling, of value judgements.

For a number of years Ghazali remained in a state of painful vacillation between moments of belief and disbelief, moments of the conviction which was his original mental equipment and doubt which engulfed him during his career of orthodox religious thinking and observance of religious practices. Ultimately he was delivered from this disturbing

state of affairs by the *taufiq*, the grace, of God which he calls *nur-e Ilahi* (Divine light). He says “This (*i.e.* the truth) did not come about by systematic demonstration or marshaled argument but by a light, *nur*, which God Most High cast into my breast. That light is the key to the greater part of knowledge. Whoever thinks that the understanding of things Divine rests upon strict proofs has in his thought narrowed down the wideness of God’s mercy. From that light must be sought an intuitive understanding of things Divine. That light at certain times gushes forth from the springs of Divine generosity and for it one must watch and wait”⁵⁷. This *nur-e Ilahi*, for Ghazali, amounted to the conviction that mystic experience alone is the method which can be cognized as the valid claimant of the discovery of truth⁵⁸. Equipped with the realization of this epistemic tool, all his beliefs, to which he subscribed earlier in his life, were re-instated. His positions as a philosopher as a theologian and as a jurist besides, mysticism can be recognized as the undercurrent of them all and his basic love throughout the rest of his life.

Sheikh Mohyi al-Din Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240) commonly known as Ibn-e ‘Arabi was born in Spain. He belonged to a family well-known for its piety and its mystic tendencies of which he had his own share. He was a well-read, widely travelled person and wherever he went he made it a point to meet the mystics and the learned men living there and have academic discourses with them. He himself was as well one of the most prolific writers. He wrote on various subjects but most of his books are on mysticism both in regard to its theory and practice. The most important of these are *Futubat-e Makkiyya* and *Fusus al-Hikam*. The latter, specifically, contains an elaborate description of his characteristic stance in Sufism *viz* *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being). This doctrine in regard to Unitarianism, which had for some time already been among the sufis in a nebulous form, is present in the richness of its details in the views of Ibn ‘Arabi who gave psychological as well as logical justification for it, besides quoting scriptural evidence from the Qur’an and the sayings

of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.). All this is, however, despite the fact that the term *wahdat al-wujud* was not used by Ibn ‘Arabi himself. Against the perspective of his views Ibn ‘Arabi formulated, for the first time, in his *Fusus al-Hikam* the concept of *Insan-e Kamil* (the Perfect Man) which got currency in later Muslim thought. Abdul Karim al-Jili wrote an independent book on this concept.

Ibn ‘Arabi’s concept of the Unity of Being, which will be explained in some detail later on⁵⁹, has been subjected to scathing criticism by some later thinkers like Ibn Taimiyya, Ibn Khaldun and specially by Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi. However, despite this criticism it continued to become more and more popular among the sufis, particularly among the sufi poets of all languages who decorated its descriptions with stylish phraseologies and beautiful, fascinating imageries.

Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273), another thinker of this period, too enjoys like Ibn ‘Arabi an honourably grandiose image among the Muslim mystics and mystical thinkers of subsequent times. He is not only one of the greatest sufi poets of the Muslim world but also, as regards the depth, diversity and comprehensiveness of his thought, one of the best in the mystic literature of the entire world and one of the most widely quoted in the mystical works of all languages. In our own times, ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the philosopher-poet of Pakistan, was deeply influenced by him and accepted him as the venerable guide and preceptor in his religio-mystico-philosophical thinking⁶⁰.

Rumi got his early education from his father Sheikh Baha’ al-Din. Later on he was put under the supervision of Burhan al-Din, one of the very close disciples of the Sheikh. Burhan al-Din gave to his ward lessons in mystical theory and practice for almost nine years but this long period of instruction could not register any recognizable impact on the esoteric growth of the pupil. However, there occurred an event⁶¹ which entirely metamorphosed— as with a *coup*— his personality. This event was his accidental meeting with the great Shamsuddin Tabrizi. Rumi was so much overawed and

spellbound by his mystical stature and the incisiveness of his 'inward eye' that he became almost a new man. He said goodbye to formal teaching practice and went into seclusion, practicing austerity and mysticism; and, with his single-mindedness, achieved higher and higher stations on the sufi path. He has to his credit three books: *Mathnavi Ma'navi*, *Divan Shams Tabriz* and *Fih ma Fih*. The first two are in verse whereas the last one is in prose. In all these books he has dilated upon all the problems in regard to mysticism, its epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and so on. They are undoubtedly an invaluable addition to mystical literature of the world. They have bestowed immortality on their author and have rendered indelible the imprint of his views in the annals of history.

The greatness of Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi in a way lies in the fact that despite his recognition of mystic experience as an authentic source of knowledge, he did not unnecessarily reject intellect as a mode of knowledge in its own right. His overall attitude is organismic and reconciliatory. In *Mathnavi* specially, he has not only struck a compromise between 'aql and 'ishq but has also harmonized various so-called contradictions of individual and social life into a creative synthesis.

Like Ibn Arabi, Rumi too has been interpreted as an upholder of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being). However, we cannot outrightly call him so without qualification because he has a very soft corner for Theism also: In some verses of his poetry he expressly says that the final fate of man is not to be immersed into the being of God as a drop of water is immersed into the sea but, abiding by the Prophetic (p.b.u.h) injunction

(assimilate the attributes of God),

man should continue to morally enrich his personality more and more. Rumi has also offered the concept of *Insan-e Kamil* (the Perfect Man), giving elaborate details of his qualities in a number of highly inspired verses. He also calls him *Mard-e Khuda* (the Divine Man)⁶²

In the very brief and cursory account given above, I admit, many important names have been left out. This is due to the fact that we actually planned to concentrate less on personalities and more on just indicating the development of Sufism or Islamic mysticism from the extremely straightforward and rigorous observance of *Shari'ah* on to the recognition of it in its esoteric and inwardist essence as almost an independent institution with its own spiritual itinerary as opposed to the exotericism of the *fuqaha'* and the men of *Shari'ah* and still onwards to the grandiose, systematic exposition and mapping out of the sufis' epistemology, metaphysics and ethics.

Every rise is destined to have a fall and every advance has a retreat woven into its very constitution. So, Sufism, after having attained its structural grandeur, pomp and luster, as detailed above, was bound to have a process of depreciation and decline. Sufi writers of subsequent times had, by and large, a great impact on themselves of the views of Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi— at least superficially. Following the footprints of these and some others of their class, pantheism became fashionable with them, particularly with the sufi poets among them. Among the so-called practicing sufis there were left very few who were men of *Shari'ah* also in their views as well as in their behavioural patterns. Most of them simply put up a sufi appearance in order to win the appreciation and allegiance of other people and consequently reap worldly benefits. Unlike some sufis of early times for whom the view that 'God is all' symbolized their God - intoxicatedness as well as their extreme personal humility, for the degenerate sufis, pantheism became a license to be absolved of *Shari'ah* and, particularly, of the worship of God. If 'all is God and God is all' how can we still assert our identity to be in a position to pray to God as the Supreme Other and to act with a sense of accountability to Him! There appeared a maddening crowd of charlatans and impostors who twisted the sacred 'logic of inwardism' of the good old days in their favour and believed that, as they have attained the core of the

spirit of *Shari'ah* (irrespective of the fact whether they have actually done it or not), the entire outward garb of *Shari'ah* laws has become irrelevant for, and so inapplicable to, them in their everyday life. Thus was created in theory the unfortunate unbridgeable gulf between *Shari'ah* and *Tariqah*, between the *ẓahir* and the *batin* of the Islamic teachings.

Besides, there developed among the self-acclaimed sufis of this period of decadence a tendency towards 'renunciation of the world' regarding it a virtuous act by itself (or a virtuous inactivity!). As we have already seen above, the earliest sufis avoided unnecessary involvement with the world and tried to transcend it and have a feeling of distastefulness for it; but for them this negative stance was complementary to their positively keen sense of accountability to, and fear of, God. For the masqueraders of later times, on the other hand, it was no less than an end to be pursued for its own sake. The more one was oblivious of this - worldly concerns, of the rights and duties relevant to it, the nearer was he to God!

Breaking up of the historical development of Muslim mysticism into various periods one after the other, each one having its own special characteristics, as delineated above, is not a hard and fast, a neat and clean story as it may at first sight appear to be. The account should at the most be taken as a rough indicator of the over-all direction in which the thoughts and attitudes of the Muslim mystics moved from an extreme simplicity of structure to an organizational magnificence and then on to the stage of decrepitude and degeneration. If we choose to observe minutely and in detail there may have been living certain mystic practitioners/theoreticians whose views would not exactly fit in well with the set of features shown to be the defining characteristics of the periods to which they chronologically belong. Likewise, the abysmal picture of the status of sufism in the period of decadence that extends to the present times, as drawn in the concluding paragraphs above, I have absolutely no intention to deny that there may be some individual cases of genuine sufis during this period. The

proverb ‘every cloud has a silver lining’ contains a patent, indubitable truth. During the course of the historical development of Islamic thought and practice an age that may ordinarily be characterized as more or less the ‘dark age’ in terms of spirituality, there may have been certain luminaries— as exceptions to the rule— who would remind one even of the good old days of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and his Companions .

Notes and References

¹ Abdullah ibn Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Yahya abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Tusi. He is reported to have written several books but none except *Kitab al-Lamma*’ is currently available. This book has been widely quoted by later sufi writers.

²

Prof. Reynold A. Nacholson (tr.) *Kashf al- Mahjub*, p. 45.

³

, *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁵ *Ibid*, Chap.IV: ‘On the Wearing of Patched Frocks’

⁶ ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.143.

⁷ Allah has revealed the Most Beautiful message in the form of a *Book Consistent with Itself* () (39: 23)

⁸ He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book; in it are verses *basic* or *fundamental* (); they are the foundation of the Book. Others are *not of well-established meaning* () (3:7).

⁹ This is a Book with *verses basic or fundamental* () – further explained in detail () (11:1).

¹⁰ ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.*, p.143.

¹¹ Qur’an, 2:129.

¹²

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¹⁷ *Kimiya'-e Sa'adat*, tr. by 'Allama Zulfikar Ali, pp 223-228.

¹⁸ This is how 'Allama Iqbal defines *iman*, Cf. *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.87.

¹⁹ See Muhammad Iqbal, *Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, pp.76-77.

²⁰ The reference here, in particular, is to a writing by Dr Asrar Ahmad *Haqiqat-e Tasannuf* (Urdu) (translated into English by Dr. Basit Bilal Koshal and later revised by Dr. Absar Ahmad : *The Reality of Tasannuf in the light of the Prophetic Model*.)

²¹ 'Islamic Quarterly', April/July, 1959, p.61.

²² Vide M.M. Sharif (ed), *History of Muslim Philosophy*, article by Dr. Hamiduddin, Vol. I, p.314.

²³ *Kashf al-Mahjub* (tr. by R.A. Nicholson), p.30.

²⁴ M.M. Sharif (ed), *op.cit*, p.317 Cf. *Al-Risalat al-Qushairiyya*, Urdu translation by Shah Muhammad Chishti, pp 42-43.

²⁵ *Kulliyat e Zauq*

²⁶ Sayyed Ali b. Usman Hujveri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, Urdu translation by Abul Hasanat Muhammad Ahmad Qadri, Chapter XIV.

²⁷ Sayyid Muhammad Zoqi, *Sirr-e Dilbaran* (Urdu), pp 103-106. This book is an excellent reading in the enumeration and explanation of sufi terminology.

²⁸ Qur'an, 17:36.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 7: 179.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 47: 24, 51:21 etc.

³¹ *Ibid*, 2:1-2

³² T.S. Termingham, *The Sufi Orders of Islam*.

³³ Abu Saeed Nuruddin, *Islami Tasannuf aur Iqbal*, (Urdu).

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³⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p.28.

³⁷ Sheikh Fariduddin Attar, *Tazkarat-al Aulya*, (Urdu translation), p. 10.

³⁸ Quoted from *Kitab al-Lumma'* by Annemarie Schimmel, *op.cit*. p.37.

³⁹ Annemarie Schimmel, *op.cit*. p. 41

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.37.

⁴¹ Sheikh Fariduddin Attar, *op.cit*, p.43.

⁴² 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit*. p.45.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.52.

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- ⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.110
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 53.
- ⁴⁶ Dr. Naeem Ahmad, *Iqbal Ka Tasawwur-e Baqa'-e Dawam* (Urdu), rendered into English, revised and edited by Dr. Abdul Khaliq as *Iqbal's Concept of Death, Immortality and Afterlife*, p.91.
- ⁴⁷ Sheikh Fariduddin 'Attar, *op.cit.* p.80.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 87.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 99
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.100.
- ⁵¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *op.cit.* p. 47.
- ⁵² *Ibid*, p. 47.
- ⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 58.
- ⁵⁴ Abdul Majid Daryabadi, *Tasawwuf-e Islam*, p.38.
- ⁵⁵ Quoted in Annemarie Schimmel, *op. cit.* p.66.
- ⁵⁶ Claud Field, *The Confessions of Al-Ghazali* (being the English translation of Al-Ghazali's *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*).
- ⁵⁷ Montgomery Watt, *The faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali*, p.25.
- ⁵⁸ It is interesting to record that Ghazali's pioneering book on mysticism is titled *Mishkat al-Anwar* which means 'the Niche for Lights'.
- ⁵⁹ See below the Chapter titled '*Tawheed and its Relevance to Sufism*', pp. 137-143.
- ⁶⁰ Refer to Dr. Naeem Ahmad, *op.cit.* pp. 148-164.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.149
- ⁶² Refer to an excellent article in this regard by Khalifa Abdul Hakim 'Rumi Nietzsche and Iqbal' in Taj Muhammad Khayal (ed), *Iqbal as a Thinker*.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MYSTIC EXPERIENCE

In the first chapter above we tried to bring out in bare outline the nature of mystic experience and also the different modes as to how this experience takes place. In the account that follows we shall identify and explain the characteristics of mystic experience which will throw further light on its nature. Writers on the subject have given various enumerations of these characteristics. We shall concentrate only on those of them which are most commonly recognized. Before, however, we do so let us make a blanket observation: mystic experience, despite its apparent qualitative similarity to ordinary sense experience, is essentially different from sense experience because, as already explained,

1. it takes place only when the mystic transcends the ordinary efficient self and realizes his essential I—amness; and
2. it has as its object the Singular Other Person Whose likeness in any sense, at any level, is *ex hypothesi* unthinkable

Keeping this observation firmly in mind, let us now point out and elaborate the major characteristics of the experience of the Ultimate Reality that all mystics, whatever be their religious background, claim for themselves. These characteristics are as follows:

Ineffability or Incommunicability

All sensory experiences that a person has, whether visual, auditory, tactual etc. necessarily go through two stages for the purpose of yielding 'knowledge of the perceivable external world'. Firstly, receiving of sense images by an individual through his different bodily receptors; and secondly putting an interpretation by him on these images. Sensations by themselves are the raw material of experience, a content without a name, an absolutely private something with the person who receives them. They become capable of being formulated and described in the form of propositions only when the recipient gives a meaning to them with the help of his past experience and his commonsense. **By and large**, the same is true of the religious experience of the mystic—provided, of course, we do firmly keep in mind the differences between the two as mentioned in the opening paragraph above.

We are reminded here of the concept of 'internal senses'¹ of man corresponding to his 'external senses'. Whereas the latter are related to the state of the external world of matter the former are relevant to the world within which too is equally, if not more, important as the ordinary object of our epistemic activity in this world. The internal world comprises a person's imagination, his memory, his evaluative responses, his ideals, aims and aspirations. In continuation with, and on the analogy of, this concept, we can have an inkling of what we may call a 'mystic or a religious sense'. Going deep inmost into my own self and reaching the core of my I-amness I acquire a vision, a feel of the Invisible, the Infinite, the Ultimate, which like all other senses, can develop into discursive knowledge only when subjected to interpretation by the mystic. Without the act of interpretation done it is absolutely unspeakable, unsharable. "The vision is there", says Plotinus, "for him who will see it".² "The interpretation which the mystic... puts on the content of his religious

consciousness”, says Iqbal, “can be conveyed to others in the form of propositions but the content itself cannot be transmitted”³.

To have perceptual knowledge (senses + interpretation) is one thing and to convey it to others is another thing. In order that communication takes place, two conditions, besides the act of interpretation, must be fulfilled between the speaker and the listener. They should have (a) community of language as well as (b) community of experience⁴: in the absence of these conditions whatever the speaker says would still be a monologue, a soliloquy and nothing more. The first condition requires that both should be conversant with the language that is being used. If one describes his experience in Greek language and the audience are ignorant about that language, it would be ‘Greek before ladies’ as the proverb goes: obviously no communication will take place. The second condition requires that the listener must have gone through an experience similar to the one that is being described to him. Suppose there is a person who does not at all know what coldness is. There is no way to make him understand it except, for example, by taking him into a cold room and telling him that this is what coldness is!

So far it has been agreed that the content of an experience— whether it is the experience of a table, the experience of my headache or my gnostic experience of the Ultimate Reality— cannot be communicated to others. When, however, an interpretation is put on the content, every experience has all the likelihood of being expressed in the form of meaningful statements or propositions. Propositions being the only means through which communication is made, we have already said that they must be couched in a language – verbal, pictorial, ostensive, or whatever— which the hearer understands. In other words, the language symbols that are used must have a conveniently sharable uniqueness of reference between those who are involved in mutual exchange of information:

Now the problem is that human language, in general, is fashioned against spatio-temporal material context. It is not at all made to express the mental, the spiritual and the metaphysical. When we describe these concepts, as very frequently we have to, the words and the symbols that we use are necessarily drawn from the material world. We, for example, talk of *sharp* intelligence, *transparent* honesty, *blurred* consciousness, *contaminated* spirit and so on. All these qualitative words are symbolic. They have basically a sensuous material connotation whereas the objects qualified are non-sensuous. In order to understand the non-sensuous concepts as such we will have to desymbolize in our mind these qualifying symbolic words. Now this would not be very difficult for me to do if I myself am independently acquainted with the objects thus qualified or described. I know what 'honesty' is; consequently, I shall make a workable sense to myself of 'transparent honesty'. I know what 'headache' is (or at least what 'ache' is), so I shall somehow understand the nature of your headache howsoever it is described to me. But, if a person is not at all thus already conversant, the process of desymbolization would become difficult, almost impossible—and so the object symbolized incomprehensible for me. You cannot, for example, make a born-blind man understand what redness is or a born-dumb person what the notes of music are. Use of the symbolic language would not at all be helpful in such instances. Analogical is the case with a mystic's gnostic experience of God. When the mystic tries to describe his experience he will have to use symbols drawn from the material world. Says Ghalib:⁵

ہر چند ہو مشاہد حق کی گفتگو بنتی نہیں ہے بادہ و ساغر کے بغیر

(even if it is a description of the vision of God, we cannot help referring to such words as the wine and the wine-cup)

The verse of course uses a simile unfortunate for the present context but the basic truth that is highlighted here is valid *viz*, the unique happiness, consolation and peace of mind that the

vision of God engenders can, in the last analysis, only be described with reference to carnal pleasures. The symbols used by the mystic for the description of his gnostic experience cannot be understood by a layman. They are likely to be understood only by one who has himself had a similar experience.

However, even here we must be careful about a genuine difficulty. God is Infinite and Absolute and every mystic at one particular moment of time is at the one or the other particular level of his journey towards Him. Hence the level at which one mystic is stationed or thinks that he is stationed may not be, and most probably will not exactly be, the level of the mystic he is talking to. Prof. J.B.Pratt is only partly right when he says: "To be sure all the mystics of every land and century may in one sense be said to speak the same language; they understand each other and no one else fully understands them"⁶. As regards difficulties relating to the exact appreciation by a mystic of the nature of his experience and to the mutual difference among mystics relating to their appreciation it is pertinent to quote an incident related by Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi in his *Maktubat*, reproduced in English by Allama Muhammad Iqbal⁷:

The experience of one Abd al-Mu'min was described to the Shiekh as follows:

Heaven and Earth and God's Throne and Hell and Paradise have all ceased to exist for me. When I look round I find them nowhere. When I stand in the presence of somebody I see nobody before me: nay even my own being is lost to me. God is infinite. Nobody can encompass Him; and this is the extreme limit of spiritual experience. No saint has been able to go beyond this.

On this the Sheikh replied:

The experience which is described has its origin in the ever varying life of the *Qalb*; and it appears to me that the recipient of it has not yet passed even one-fourth of the innumerable "Stations" of the *Qalb*. The remaining three-fourth must be passed through in order to finish the experiences of this first "Station" of spiritual life. Beyond this "Station" there are other

“Stations” known as *Rub*, *Sirr-e Khafi*, and *Sirr-e-Akhfa*, each of these “Stations” which together constitute what is technically called ‘*Alam-e Amr*’ has its own characteristic states and experiences. After having passed through these “Stations” the seeker of truth gradually receives the illuminations of “Divine Names” and “Divine Attributes” and finally the illuminations of the Divine Essence”.

Thus Prof. Glassgow is very right when he says that “the main difficulty of communication lies in the non-availability of a suitable language and ... if mystics were supplied with a greater number of words or a larger vocabulary (they) could no longer think of the experience as ineffable and incommunicable for it could be described and the language could be understood by **those who have had a similar experience**”⁸. So it is in fact not only an inadequate vocabulary that stands in the way of communicating by a mystic his experience to another mystic (not to speak of communicating it to the non-mystic!) but also the community of experience itself. If two mystics are at the same level of mystic consciousness, which would be an extremely rare—almost impossible of realization—phenomenon, then alone perfect communication between them can take place.

Besides the academic difficulties pointed out above, that render mystic experience more or less incommunicable to others, some Muslim mystics themselves refer to another dimension of the problem. It is reported that once some ‘*ulama*’ asked the mystic Ibn ‘Ata’ as to what is the problem with them (*i.e.* the mystics) that they have devised a terminology of their own which is not ordinarily understandable by the laymen: do they want to conceal the truth (which would not be morally advisable!) or is there something wrong with their experience because of which they do not want to make it public (for fear of censure!). His reply was: ‘Our behaviour and our point of view is very dear to us. Our exclusivism and our possessive instinct does not allow that we share it with others’⁹. Anyway mystics are not professional psychologists so that they scientifically undertake

their introspective studies and report them to their colleagues. There are temperamentally the people who just acquire their experience for personal bliss and happiness (*ashab-e hal*) rather than being the ones who would sit round the table, enter into dialogue with others and try to share mutually their respective discoveries (*ashab-e qal*).

William James rightly calls this the 'negative' characteristic of mystic experience¹⁰.

Noetic Quality

We have seen in quite some detail in the first chapter above that mystic experience is 'subjective' in a very rarefied and refined sense of this term. This refined connotation of subjectivity entirely precludes the view that it amounts to an absolute retirement by the mystic into the mist of his personal privacy. Paradoxically, he can rather validly claim 'objectivity' for his experience in the sense that, despite being subjective, it has a genuine knowledge-yielding character. "Mystic states", says William James" are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, full of significance and importance".¹¹

This characteristic of mystic experience is evidently directly relevant to its incommunicability: they both in fact belong to the same family. Seen closely, the former is the more basic of the two because only if mystic experience is understood to have cognitive value we can talk of its possibility/impossibility of being communicated to others; if, on the other hand, it does not have that value, there is virtually nothing there so as to be passed on to others or held back from them.

Noetic or knowledge-yielding character of mystic experience has been adamantly denied by a section of thinkers interested in the evaluation of religious concepts. Bertrand Russell, for example, who is an untiring critic of religion, is all praise for mysticism and mystic experience but has denied that this experience has any cognitive content at

all. The positive contribution of mysticism, he says, lies simply in a fine and noble emotional attitude which it lends to the truths already established on scientific grounds. Essentially, he goes on to say, it is little more than a certain intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe¹². Similarly Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, a 19th century neo-Mu‘tazilite religious thinker of the Indo-Pak sub-continent, makes a very bold statement in this regard in one of his essays titled *Mukashafa*¹³. He writes that the apparently assured position of various gnostics in regard to their pronouncements that ‘they have seen something which is not open to ordinary observation’ or that ‘they have known the secrets of creation or of heaven and hell’ or that ‘they have identified themselves with one of the attributes of God’ is in every case the figment of their imagination and the result of their infatuation with, and a sustained attention to, what they suppose to have discovered. These experiences, he says, have no ontological significance whatever.

Scepticism of the class of thinkers referred to above indicates an unfortunate basic lacuna in their thinking. They appear to be convinced in their heart of hearts that sense experience is the only epistemic mechanism in regard to the knowledge of the ‘other’, howsoever we may define this ‘other’. This conviction is myopic and deficient and so unjustified. The ‘Other’ that God is as the object of the gnostic experience of a mystic is *ex-hypothesi* beyond space and time. ‘Objectivity of God is not like the objectivity of a table or a chair which are spatio-temporal realities. The latter objectivity is likewise known by the I-amness of an individual that grows out of its spatio-temporal context *i.e.* by his efficient self, as Iqbal calls it. In order to have gnosis of God the gnostic too must, after a strenuous training, earn a deliverance from space and time and transcend these frames of reference. Objectivity does have various levels and, correspondingly, subjectivity too which cognizes it operates at various levels of self-culture.

Further, God is not an ordinary knowledge object: He is at the same time, a Subject also, a Person, the Supreme Ego, the Great I Am — Absolutely Unique by Himself. The most intimate way to know another person in this world is to sympathise with that person, be one with him, metaphorically speaking, and try to look at him from his point of view, *i.e.* look at him as he would look at himself. On this analogy a mystic seeks to get coloured with the colour of God and realize his true self which has been fashioned after the nature of God so that he acquires— more or less— the capacity to realize the ideal of seeing God from His point of view (the phrase ‘more or less’ is important here because God being Absolute and Infinite, the ideal is surely incapable of complete realization).

How can a naturalist who, with his habit of looking at the outer world of space and time, is devoid of this kind of personal refinement, appreciate and understand a mystic’s claim about his experience as a knowledge-yielding methodology!

Immediacy and Unanalysability

How do we get our knowledge of the external material objects like tables and chairs or of the internal physiological states of our bodies like thirst and hunger which too in a way are external to us. In other words, what are the constituent elements of, and the stages involved in, an act of sense perception. Perception, to all appearance, is an immediate and direct simple experience but actually it is a complex phenomenon which is analyzable into psycho-physiological and rational elements. Initially, the perception receives through bodily receptors certain sense impressions from the external world. These impressions immediately reach the brain through sensory nerves. The brain then interprets the undifferentiated messages, conveyed through these impressions, with the help of past experience and rounds

them off in the form of spatio-temporal unities and thus the act of perception takes place.

Introspection, *i.e.* my perception of the internal world of my mind and consciousness, is different from ordinary sense perception. In the former the unity of the person is divided into two: one plays the role of the subject *i.e.* the percipient and the other of the object that is perceived. So, introspection has got its own complexities besides those of ordinary sense perception. Suppose I want to know what goes on in any mind when I am happy or what it psychologically is to be in a state of happiness. Now this can only be known through introspection. However, the additional difficulty in this case is that, when I decide to introspect and, more so, when I actually do that— my ordinarily knowable mind not being a tangible something but just a stream of consciousness— by that time my state of happiness which I proposed to perceive must have undergone a change: it must have subsided or even extinguished altogether. Instead of knowing my happy state of mind I just perceive the remnants of that state and interpret them for the sake of invoking the memory of the original state of happiness. This is what interpretation boils down to in this case. In other words, introspection does not lead to the perception sought but only to the remembrance of a past event. Thus a perception of my own mind as such, despite the usual activity of interpreting certain sense data, is not possible.

Anyway, when perceptual experience does take place, of course as a result of the interpretation of sense data, it, to all commonsense obviousness, is simple, direct and immediate. During the experience the percipient is neither at all aware of its compound structure nor of its component, constituent factors. It is only when he thinks back and carries out the analytical activity that he discovers the genealogical stages which consummated into that experience. Mystic experience and the knowledge— ‘gnosis’, to be exact— that it yields too is immediate. However, there is an enormous difference between the mystic perception and the ordinary sense

perception. Unlike the latter the former is not susceptible to analysis even when we try to contemplate over it after it has already occurred. We discover no act of interpretation involved. Allama Iqbal¹⁴ does not appear to be right when he strikes an analogy between mystic experience, on the one hand, and our every day sense experiences, on the other. He writes that “as regions of normal experience are subject to interpretation of sense data for our knowledge of the external world, so the region of mystic experience is subject to interpretation for our knowledge of God. *The immediacy of mystic experience simply means that we know God just as we know other objects*”¹⁵ (italics mine). However, he is right when he says that “the ordinary rational consciousness, in view of our practical need of adaptation to our environment, takes that Reality piecemeal ... The mystic state brings us into contact with the total passage of Reality”¹⁶.

Iqbal points out that mystic experience is immediate and, unanalysable because ‘discursive thought is reduced to a minimum’¹⁷ in that experience. The fact is that it is not simply reduced to the minimum, it is rather absolutely absent. I quote here a saying of Ibn Arabi which Iqbal has inadvertently referred to in support of his own views. The saying, as he puts it, is: “God is a percept, the world is a concept”¹⁸. The saying in *Arabic* original as traced by M. Saeed Sheikh in *Fusus al-Hikam* is,

.¹⁹ The closest English translation would be: “the created world is rationally understandable and the True, the Real (God) is the One of Whom we can have a feel, the One of Whom we can have a gnosis”– a direct, immediate awareness– which I have elsewhere termed as a knowledge by acquaintance of the Person that God is. Now a feeling at the most sophisticated level as well as knowledge by acquaintance (as distinct from knowledge by description) is absolutely exempt from any element of discursive intellect. There is of course a background to all this but that background only

serves as an occasion for, and not a constituent element in, such knowledge.

Writing on the subject, Iqbal brings in the analogy of my knowledge of the minds of other persons²⁰. It is obvious that I do not have a specific sense in this respect just as I have the five well-known external senses to know the material world around, internal organic senses to know the state of my own body within and the sense of introspective reflection to know the states of my own mind. I know other minds indirectly through the physical movements of other people similar to the movements that I make as a conscious person. Iqbal agreeably quotes Prof. Royce who is of the opinion that we are sure that other people have minds because they respond to our signals, give reply to our questions and enter into dialogue with us. Iqbal makes a reference here to the Qur'an also which, according to him, substantiates the same line of argument. The Qur'an says:

And when your Lord saith: Call Me; I respond to your call (40:60)

And when my servants ask thee concerning Me, then I am nigh unto them and answer the call of him who calls Me. (2:186)

It is clear that whether we apply the physical criterion or the non-physical and more adequate criterion of Royce, in either case our knowledge of other minds remains something like inferential only. Yet we feel that our experience of other minds is immediate ... All that I mean to suggest is that the immediacy of our experience in the mystic state is not without a parallel. It has some sort of resemblance to our normal experience and probably belongs to the same category²¹.

The above analogical argument is not entirely valid. We may, if we like, establish a premise-conclusion logical relationship in the realm of our knowledge of other minds; that will be in perfect order. But the same cannot be done in the case of the veracity of mystic experience. There can be no logical argument for knowledge of the Divine Being in which any phenomenon that we encounter in nature is accepted as

the premise. Phenomena of nature are only pointers to, an occasion for, our gnostic awareness. The latter in itself remains independent, immediate and unanalysable. As to the Qur'anic statements regarding God's responding to the calls of men and His acceptance of their prayers, which have been quoted by Iqbal, they are statements of faith. And there can be no logical relationship and no process of inference between a statement of fact and a faith-statement.

Transiency

Mystic experience as such is evanescent and temporary lasting for a few seconds or, may be for a few minutes. In fact our consciousness is so constituted that it is always in a flux, a flow, a change without succession. William James talks of 'stream of thought' or, interchangeably, 'stream of consciousness':

The manner in which trains of imagery and consideration follow each other through our thinking, the restless flight of one idea before the next, the transitions our minds make between things wide as the poles asunder ... all this magical imponderable streaming has from time immemorial excited the admiration of all whose attention happened to be caught by its omnipresent mystery²².

Bergson, the well-known creator of the concept of *élan vital*, says:

I work or I do nothing, I look at what is around or I think of something else. Sensations, feelings, volitions, ideas— such are the changes into which my existence is divided and which colour it in turn. I change then without ceasing.²³

Even when I deliberately tend to some specific object or idea, the focus of my attention continues shifting between various aspects of the object etc: what is in the periphery comes to the centre and what is in the centre goes to the periphery the very next moment. This is a plain psychological fact which simply cannot be denied— and this fact is true of all conscious experiences including the mystic experience.

Despite the hard fact that mystic experience is highly impermanent, the mystic, due to the sacred repose, bliss and happiness that characterizes his experience, does have a strong desire that it may become perpetual. He has the most ardent wish that the time should stop for him. It is this wishful thinking that finds expression in the remarks made by Abdul Quddus Gangohi, a great Muslim saint: “Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) of Arabia ascended the highest heaven and returned. I swear by God that if I had reached that point I would never have returned”²⁴. Despite such a determinate desire the sufi must suspend his extra-ordinary unitive experience and come back to the ordinary level of consciousness. Mystic experience, when thus faded, however, ‘leaves a deep sense of authority after it has passed away’, says Iqbal. In fact it metamorphoses his being and colours his entire personality. The spiritual consummation once registered by him shows off itself through his behaviour, through his words, through his very presence to all those who happen to meet him; and they essentially share with him an amount of the Divine grace that he has attained. How beautifully says the poet:

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(One single moment in the presence of the friends (of Allah) is better than one hundred years of sincere, unostentatious obedience to Him)

Sayyid Ali Hujveri has written a full chapter in his *Kashf al-Mahjub* on *subbat* (companionship), laying down its rules and principles and the mannerism required of it. A novice in the way of *suluk* must, according to him, prefer to remain most of the time in the company of his *sheikh*; solitude is likely to prove dangerous for him. This companionship, needless to say, must be for purely spiritual and for Godly reasons and not at all for the sake of any inferior motives whatever. While in attendance in the company of the preceptor, the disciple should be scrupulously considerate towards his fellow-attendants – respectful to the younger. Ali Hujveri has given

detailed accounts, under separate heads, of the protocols and etiquettes to be adopted by the disciple while staying with the preceptor and while traveling with him, respectively²⁶.

Passivity

We have seen in the previous chapter how a person goes through a lot of wilful, concentrated effort and an active schedule of hard labour as a result of which the ground stands prepared for the incoming of the Divine grace and the eventualization of mystic experience. But as and when this experience occurs the will of the mystic stands retired. It is held in abeyance “and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power”²⁷. “To the mystic”, Iqbal says, “the mystic state is a moment of intimate association with a unique other Self, transcending, encompassing and momentarily suppressing the private personality of the subject of experience”²⁸. The subject of experience — despite being, to all appearance, a normal, living human being, conscious and active— is passive for all practical purposes. It is the Experienced Object Who is doing all to the subject of experience. According to a *hadith qudsi* recorded in *Sahih Bukhari*,

God says... My devotee continues approximating Me till I love him; and when I love, him I become his ears with which he hears, his eyes with which he sees, his hands with which he holds, his feet with which he walks. If he prays to Me for something, I grant him the same.

Notwithstanding the veracity of the above, it should, parenthetically be recorded that modern psychologists have— from a purely psycho-physiological point of view— emphasized that every sort of passivity of experience is in fact also a form of activity. For instance, R. S. Woodworth, taking the word ‘activity’ in a very broad sense *i.e.* as inclusive of motor, cognitive as well as emotional activities, says that “any manifestation of life can be called an activity. No matter how passive an individual may seem to himself in watching a game

or listening to music he is really carrying on an activity". He is very right when he says that "the only way to be completely inactive is to be dead"²⁹.

As regards the characteristic of 'passivity', Dr. Muhammad Maruf has tried to strike an analogy of religious/mystic experience with certain other ordinary experiences. He writes that the former is by no means alone in this respect. "This characteristic it ... shares with some other types of experience which can hardly be called 'religious'. The condition of the mystic when in trance is, for example, very closely comparable to that of an aesthete who is completely engrossed in the appreciation of a beautiful landscape or a piece of painting... Similar is the condition, at least in body, of the spectator who is fully absorbed in watching, say, a game of cricket for he, no less than either the aesthete or the mystic, becomes unmindful of his surrounding and of himself"³⁰.

The analogy worked out by Dr. Maruf is unfortunate. The difference between mystic/religious experience, on the one hand, and the experience of the aesthete or of the spectator of a cricket match, on the other, is of basic nature that really matters. The former is the gnostic experience of God, the Person Who acts in response and transforms the personality of the gnostic by saturating him through and through with His own colour, whereas the latter do not imply such a response: they only relate to mundane situations which, of course, do absorb almost his entire attention.

In the above perspective, we can say that the mystic experience, besides being passive in the sense of being totally involved with the Divine, is at the same time active also insofar as the mystic is very much on the receiving end. He may not positively contribute but he at least does constantly receive.

State of Union

State of union with the Divine Object is still another characteristic emphasized by a number of writers on the subject. What exactly that phenomenon is which amounts to

a mystic's realization of the ideal of Supreme Experience and thus a living assurance of the Being of God? And what does this experience entail insofar as man-God relationship is concerned. This phenomenon, as we go through the history of mystic literature, had been interpreted in terms either of the two aspects that it may possibly have. The mystic seeker after truth, we have known— whatever the path that he adopts for his journey³¹— is, in the last analysis, involved in taking off from, and transcending, his private individuality and realizing the Divine spark within himself. This amounts to a transposition from his efficient self to his appreciative self. He tries to rise above the qualities of his individual person that make him a man-of-the-world and to assimilate the attributes of God in order to be steeped in His colour. When this phenomenon takes place to the extent to which, of course, it is possible for it to take place, the Divinized self has a tendency to get intoxicated by shedding off his personal consciousness and to be lost in the being of God. This is the state of *suker* in the terminology of sufism and the resultant metaphysics is obviously that of Pantheism. Or he happens to come out of this state and arrive at the state which sufis call *sabih*³² wherein he regains his normal consciousness and develops the assurance that his self has been enriched by the assimilation of Divine attributes. The resultant metaphysics in this case is that of Panentheism. So the state of Union with the Divine amounts either to being one with Him or to being an associate and a friend of, a co-worker with, Him. It is either the experience of 'being entirely absorbed in God' or the experience of being with God: either the phenomenon of *fana fi' Allah* (extinction in God) or that of *baqa bi' Allah* (living with God). These two kinds of phenomena will be revisited, elaborated and discussed in detail in the chapter on 'Tawheed and its Relevance to Sufism'.

Uniqueness

Uniqueness is a quality that perhaps need not have been treated independently as it runs throughout, and is a

necessary mark of, all the characteristics that have been enumerated above and explained. It has been consistently emphasized that mystic experience, despite its apparent similarity with ordinary sense experience, is essentially different from the latter. We continue to use for it the blanket term 'experience' for want of a distinctly appropriate word.

What exactly 'uniqueness' is! *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* defines the word 'unique' as 'that which has no like or equal, being the only one of the sort'³³ Prof. F. H. Bradley in his *The Principles of Logic* observes that uniqueness has two aspects—positive and negative:

- a) as to the negative aspect, he says that "one denies that this thing, as far as it is unique, is one of a kind, sort or description, so as to be or become an instance or example. The thing may be 'such' in certain respects but it cannot be 'such so far as it is unique and hence it does not admit of another such';
- b) as to the positive aspect it is, "in my judgment, the same as undividedness or self-containedness . It is the positive, inseparable oneness of 'what' and 'that'. These aspects are taken as being in the thing so that neither, as far as the thing is unique, can for any purpose leave the other"³⁴. In other words, in that which is unique, existence and essence are identical; or, what would be the same thing said in another way, it exists necessarily and by virtue of its own right.

Given the above meaning of uniqueness, we can easily demonstrate that the Qur'anic concept of God, Who is the Object of a sufi's gnostic experience, is the concept of the Unique Being. "There is nothing whatever like Him", (42:11) says the Qur'an. Perhaps the most representative set of *ayat* available in the Qur'an in this regard are those that comprise *surah Ikbilas*:

Say: He is Allah, the One and Only. Allah is the Eternal, the Absolute. He begetteth not; nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him (112:1-4)

God is One and the kind of oneness that He is unparalleled, having no examples. The 'ones' that we

encounter in our everyday life are the ‘half of two’ etc. or ‘two times of one half’ etc. or the ‘first cardinal number in a series’, and so on. God’s oneness belongs to none of these meanings: it is unrelated to any other concept whatever. He is really the One and Only. He is eternal and timeless, without any beginning or end; He is absolute, unbound by any spatio-temporal determiners; He is the individual without qualification, without any ifs and buts. The apparently most closed-off unity of the human individual, we see, is violated by his tendency towards reproduction: reproduction is the “building up of a new organism with a detached fragment of the old. Individuality ... harbors its own enemy at home”³⁵. Perfect Individuality of God is absolved of this violation. The *surah* ends up with the summary statement ‘And there is none like unto Him’.

Uniqueness of mystic experience is necessarily implied by the uniqueness of the Object of this experience. We have already seen in the first chapter above how, in order to have *ma’rifat* of the Divine, the sufi has to transcend his ordinary, space-time-bound phenomenal self and realize to the maximum possible degree the noumenal, the real, the Divine self within him. In order to have gnosis of the Unique, the gnostic must himself become unique, **more or less**. Hence the uniqueness of the mystic experience!

II

The account of the characteristics of mystic experience will not be complete unless we also make some observations about the nature of prophetic revelation or, what has also been known as, prophetic experience. These observations will be in place as they will define the respective statuses of both these phenomena *vis a vis* each other. In opposition to the orthodox, to which we, by and large, subscribe, some philosophers have boldly put forth the thesis that the two have only quasi-experiential differences; by virtue of

qualitative essence they are, in the last analysis, mutually analogous. This thesis will be explained and examined as we proceed.

Before, however, we do so, let us find out what is the plain Qur'anic point of view regarding the nature of prophethood and prophetic experience.

Prophethood, according to the Qur'an, is an office of honour, responsibility and spiritual excellence of a very high order which is absolutely due to Divine grace. It is conferred on whomsoever God pleases to confer. God's choice and pleasure is not at all shown to be the necessary consequence of any efforts made or any tests cleared, by the person concerned, towards that direction. The Qur'an says:

Allah chooses messengers from angels and from men and when a message comes to them they say: we will not believe till we are given the like of that which Allah's messengers are given (22:75)

Allah best knows where to place His message (*i.e.* whom to depute as His prophet) (6:124)

Further, it appears to be in accordance with the Qur'anic scheme that a prophet is the prophet — is prophet-in-the-making, to be exact — by birth insofar as, for one thing, he is congenitally a bearer of the qualities essentially required for this position, *viz.* nobility of character, impeccable will to realize the objectives of whose validity he once stands convinced, and so on. However, before he is formally installed to the office of prophethood, he goes through a period of intense preparation which, broadly speaking, amounts to an impassionate search for the Truth. This preparation too is due to the prerogative of God and an essential part of His own plan and providence. The Qur'an has referred to this phenomenon in case of some of the prophets. To the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) the Qur'an says:

And He found thee wandering and He gave thee guidance (93:7)

That is to say, before prophethood was formally conferred on him he kept himself busy in sessions of serious pensiveness and meditation over the errative beliefs and evil ways of the idolatrous society in which he was born and as to how they could be reformed. He would often retire to the cave *Hira*, about three miles away from Mecca, with the minimum amount of food with him and stay there for days together in contemplation and prayers. It is there that the first Divine message was revealed to him. Similar kind of thoughtful wandering and preparation for prophethood has been described by the Qur'an in the case of Prophet Abraham. (p.b.u.h)

When the night covered him over He saw a star. He said: "this is my Lord" But when it set, he said: "I love not those that set".

When he saw the moon rising in splendour He said: "This is my Lord". But when the moon set he said: unless my Lord guide me I shall surely be among those who go astray.

When he saw the sun rising in splendour, He said; "This is my Lord. This is the greatest (of all)". But when the sun set, he said: O my people, I am indeed free from your (guilt of) giving partners to Allah.

For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth and never shall I give partners to Allah(6:76-76)

This account, of course, does not imply that Abraham, before his prophethood actually did worship the stars, the moon and the sun. The "thrust of Abraham's reasoning... is directed against the superstitious beliefs of his people and demonstrates their folly of worshipping stars and other heavenly bodies. As such his statements may be seen as premises of his argument against polytheism rather than as stages towards his (own) spiritual enlightenment"³⁶. Period of preparation in the case of Prophet Moses (p.b.u.h.) has been stated by the Qur'an in some detail:

And We have (O Moses) already been gracious to you another time. When We sent word to your mother saying, 'put him into the ark and cast him into the sea, and the sea shall cast him on

the shore and an enemy of Mine and his shall take him (and bring him up); and I bestowed on you love from Me that you may be brought up under My eye. When your sister walked up and said: shall I show you who will take care (of the child), then we returned you to your mother that her eye might be cheered and that she might not grieve. And you did kill a man, and we saved you from the trouble and We offered other opportunities so that you may test your capabilities. Then for years did you stay among the people of Median. It was after all this that you came up to Our measure, O Moses: and I have chosen you for Myself. (20:37-41)

The orthodox position that in a way prophethood is by birth and that a person before his formal deputation to that position goes through an amount of preparation which in most of the cases is apparently engineered by himself and deliberately targeted by him towards the realization of the objective of prophethood has stupefied a section of religious thinkers into holding that prophethood— of course, given the inborn talent for the same — is acquirable by human effort (and so they bring down prophethood close to mysticism!). Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, for example, belongs to this class of thinkers³⁷. Prophethood, according to him, is in general an in-born capacity like, for instance, the in-born capability of a poet, an artist, an orator and so on. All of them— if their innate capabilities are to fructify— have to save these capabilities from getting atrophied through disuse and to positively develop them by constant practice and effort: and this is, in their opinion, what the prophets also do.

Equating the maturation of prophetic talent with that of the talent of a poet or an artist etc. would amount to the desupernaturalization of Divine will and a violation of its autonomy. Ordinarily, no doubt, potentialities ingrained by God in every class of objects and persons take their own course of realization in accordance with their respective laws of nature sometimes identifiable by human beings. But in special situations God manifests, rather superimposes, His own will *vis a vis* ordinary laws of nature. This is what Divine

revelation to His prophets is. It is, literally, a revelation, the impact of something new, a disclosure by God as a Person to the chosen ones among human persons of His own modes of behaviour, His purposes and plans, His likes and dislikes and so on. How can the higher after all be entirely comprehended and explained in terms of the lower. “*Wabi*”, G. A. Pervez rightly says, “is a gift of God which He bestows on the man whom He selects. *Wabi* is not a prize which a man can win for himself through his own efforts. By developing his latent powers man cannot qualify himself for *nubumwat*. The *nabi* does not discover truth: it is disclosed to him... The *nabi* has not the slightest inkling of the revelation before he actually receives it.”³⁸

What is the nature of prophetic *Wabi* or revelation? How exactly is it ‘sent down’; meaning to say, how does God communicate with the prophets. According to the Qur’an *Wabi* is in fact a generic term and is available to all classes of being and existence— from material objects to plants, to animals and to ordinary human beings and on to the prophets. It literally means ‘inspiration’ or ‘guidance’ or ‘a hasty suggestion’ to behave in a particular way. *Wabi* to non-humans refers to the laws of the specific levels of existence according to which they necessarily **do behave** in order to prove themselves to be true to their beings whereas to humans it is, by and large, a sort of commandment— direct or indirect— as to how they **ought to behave**.

As regards the process of revelation to the elitist class of human beings the standard Qur’anic verse is

It is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a messenger to reveal with Allah’s permission what He wills: for He is Most High, Most Wise (42:51)

Here three modes of *Wabi* are clearly distinguished:

1. An inspiration, a suggestion put by God into the heart of a person by which he understands the substance of the message.

3. A message in the form of a vision which carries a deeper significance and is symbolic of a reality behind.
4. Revelation through a messenger– angel Jabriel.

The last one is the highest form of revelation. The orthodox unanimously believe that it is this form which comprises Divine speech in human language comprising the Qur'anic text as it is now with us. So the Qur'an was revealed not by essence only but by words also. Thus by virtue of source it has been entirely external to the subjectivity of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.). It is obviously in regard to this readable, verbal form specifically that God has taken upon Himself to save it in all its originality.

We have without doubt sent down the Message (*i.e.* the Qur'an); and we would assuredly guard it (from corruption) (15:9)

The Qur'anic certification of the unlettered nature of the Holy prophet (p.b.u.h.) is interpreted by some thinkers as a guarantee of the immunization of revelation from all internality. “Were the purity and virginity of the soul not to exist, the Divine word would become”, says Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “in a sense tainted with purely human knowledge and not be presented to mankind in its pristine purity”. “The Divine Word”, he says, “can only be written on the pure and untouched tablet of human receptivity”.³⁹

The above is the broad Qur'anic statement in brief about the nature of the institution of prophethood and the way prophetic revelation used to be ‘sent down’. According to this view, as we have seen, prophethood as regards its ‘initiation, development as well as consummation, is exclusively and entirely due to the working out of the Divine will and plan. Further, according to it revelations from God to the prophet are literally **revelations** to him, *i.e.* pieces of information etc. amounting to an absolute disclosure or unveiling.

During medieval times, Muslim Philosophers– specially Farabi and Ibn Sina– under the impact of Greek thought, however, gave an interpretation of prophetic revelation in the light of their cosmology and consequently brought it very

close to mystic experience. According to their over-all world-view, the essential attribute of God is knowledge or thought rather than will. We are aware that Plato had described God as the Supreme Principle of Rationality. Aristotle called Him 'Thought Thinking Thought'. Plotinus conceived of Him as a pure Understanding, pure *Nous*, the One Who is beyond all determinations and attributes: He does not act; He simply is. Following this line of thought, Muslim Philosophers were convinced that God did not create the universe *ex nihilo* by a volitional act: it rather emanated from him, proceeded from Him by logical necessity just as rays emanate from the sun or just as corollaries of the definition of a triangle follow from the definition. God, according to them, is the only necessary Being. He knew Himself as such and, by virtue of this, the First Intelligence emanated from Him. From the First Intelligence, by a similar process, the Second Intelligence emanated. And so on till the ten Intelligences were completed. Tenth Intelligence, which is also known as Active Intellect, and identified with the angel *Jabriel*, is for them the former as well as the informer of the world. It is the former of the world insofar as it generated the first matter (*hayula*), being the basis of the four elements which ultimately constitute the entire furniture of the universe. It is the informer of the world insofar as it is the dispenser of forms to the world. It is the source of the existence of human soul and of all sorts of ideas that furnish this soul. All innovative concepts of the philosophers, sufiistic inspirations and prophetic revelations are due to the agency of this Intellect. A prophet's contact with the Active Intellect is, of course, the most intimate according to the Muslim Philosophers; he almost internalizes it.

There are some modernists too among the Muslim religious thinkers who interpret and explain the Qur'anic concept of prophetic experience of revelation so as to bring it down to the subjectivist level of mystic experience. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, for example, who claimed to have enunciated a new *ilm al-kalam*, said that a prophet's heart is the mirror

which reflects the theophany of Divine illumination. It is his heart itself which carries the message to God and then returns with the Divine message. He is himself the being from whom the sounds of God's speech emanate; he himself is the ear which hears the wordless and noiseless speech of God. From his own heart gushes forth like a fountain the revelation and then it descends on him. No one makes him speak: he speaks on his own and then declares on his own that he does not speak out anything of his own desire and that whatever he says is a revelation from God that is revealed to him.

Further,

His (prophet's) spiritual experiences ... are all the result of human nature. He hears his own speech by his physical ears as if somebody else is saying something to him; he sees himself with his physical eyes as if another person is standing before him⁴⁰

‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal, the philosopher-poet of Pakistan, in an ostensibly similar strain, says that a prophet is

a type of mystic consciousness in which unitary experience tends to overflow its boundaries and seeks opportunities of redirecting or refashioning the forces of collective life. In his personality the finite centre of life sinks into his own infinite depth only to spring up again with fresh vigour to destroy the old and to disclose the new directions of life.⁴¹

He goes on to point out that in fact revelations of a prophet are a sort of ‘contact with the roots of his own being’.⁴²

Among the moderns Allama Iqbal particularly seeks to emphasize in detail that prophetic revelation and mystic experience are qualitatively the same.⁴³ Also, both the prophet and the mystic alike must return from their respective supreme experiences to the ordinary spatio-temporal level of existence. The only difference— and that difference is only extra-experiential— he says, is that the return of the prophet is creative of fresh ethical values for the society whereas that of the mystic continues to be cognitive only: he continues to live the after-effect of the repose of his unitary experience.⁴⁴

As opposed to the reductionist stance delineated above, the fact, we hold, is that there are genuine essential qualitative differences between a prophet's experience of revelation and a mystic's God-consciousness. The most basic difference between them is that mystic experience is, by and large, consequent upon human effort. Irrespective of the fact that while scaling higher and higher *maqamat* during his *suluk* the mystic does receive the matching *taufiq* from God, a sufi, on his own part, must always take initiatives and seriously do his home work. Further, given the frailties of human nature a sufi can only go to some extent towards his gnostic accomplishments. He cannot attain perfection in this regard absolutely speaking but simply just the 'more or less' of it. There must possibly be attainable a lot many still higher levels than the presumably highest level that he has actually attained. Prophetic experience, on the other hand, does not have a similar human component deliberately contributed by its recipient. It is entirely due to God Himself. The heart and soul of the prophet is just on the taking end. God being uniquely perfect His doings are uniquely perfect too, devoid of all infirmities and inadequacies and immune against any comparability to the apparently similar doings of human beings.

Another difference is that, the occurrent state of affairs in regard to mystic experience being the one described in the above paragraph, a sufi never has/should have a total confidence about the status and level of experience that he thinks he has attained. Even two sufis talking to one another have a difficulty of mutual understanding. A conversation in regard to this phenomenon has already been recorded above. A prophet, on the other hand, has sterling confidence in what he receives in revelation and passes it on to his people. He harbours no doubts about, and is never required to be sorry for, this entire process. So unsuspected and aboard are his verbal revelations that, in respect of the Qur'an specifically, God has taken upon Himself to preserve it for all times to every syllable of it.

Last but not least, the mystic has the content of his experience, *i.e.* the experience as such, on which he focuses his entire attention. When, for instance, he later on is called upon to describe the gnostic experience that he has attained, he simply explains what did he observe, how did he feel, etc. His language will of course be symbolic, all his statements being prefixed, overtly or covertly, by an 'as if'. Prophetic revelation, instead, does not relate to the content or the actuality of the experience but rather to its fruit, the outcome or the net-result, which comprises the message that he receives during that experience. This distinction between a mystic and a prophet corresponds respectively to their conceived societal roles and objectives. A mystic primarily hankers after self-enlightenment which, after it has been attained – to some degree of course– does spread its effulgence to those who meet him or sit in his company and makes them enlightened too. The primary– in fact the assigned– aim of a prophet being the deliverance of the people, to whom he is deputed, of evil ways and making them better human beings, he receives for them, during his experience of revelation, ready-made rules and principles of good behaviour. Incidentally it is due to this difference between a mystic and a prophet that the former faces the problem of communication, as explained above,⁴⁵ whereas the latter, the recipient of various judgments and dos and don'ts, has no such problem. A prophet is in fact ordained to effectively convey to his people what is revealed to him and that is the primary objective of his prophethood: whether they are actually reformed by his efforts is secondary⁴⁶.

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- ² Quoted by A.E. Affifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din Ibnul 'Arabi*, p.119
- ³ 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.20
- ⁴ *Vide*, Prof. K. G. Sadiq, 'Iqbal on God', *Al-Hikmah*, Vol. V, pp.33-49.
- ⁵ Asadullah Khan Ghalib, *Divan-e Ghalib* (Urdu).
- ⁶ *Religious Consciousness*, p.338
- ⁷ 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* p.153, vide *Maktubat-e Rabbani*, Vol-I, letter No.253
- ⁸ 'Philosophy' (Journal) July, 1957, p.239.
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- ¹⁰ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p.371.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, p 346
- ¹² *Mysticism and Logic*, p.3
- ¹³ Muhammad Isma'il Panipati, *Maqalat-e Sir Sayyid* (Urdu), Vol.1 pp.110-113.
- ¹⁴ 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* Cf his distinction between the 'efficient self' and the 'appreciative self' of man, pp.38-39.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.14
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.15
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.15
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.144
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, Chapter No.VII, Note No.4, p.202.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, pp.15-16.
- ²¹ *Ibid*, p.16.
- ²² *Principles of Psychology*, Vol I, p.550
- ²³ *Creative Evolution*, p.3.
- ²⁴ Quoted by 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* p.99.
- ²⁵ Jalal al-Din Rumi, *Mathnavi*.
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- ²⁷ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p.372
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- ²⁹ R.S. Woodworth, *Psychology: A Study of Mental Life*, p.3
- ³⁰ Dr. Muhammad Ma'ruf, *Iqbal's Philosophy of Religion*, pp.138-139.

- ³¹ See above, Ch. I.
- ³² For an explanation of *Suker* and *Sabv* see below, pp. 128-129.
- ³³ A. S. Hornby, *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, p.1100.
- ³⁴ *The Principles of Logic*, p. 647.
- ³⁵ Henry Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.14
- ³⁶ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: text translation and commentary*, p. 314, Note No. 898.
- ³⁷ See Muhammad Ismail Panipati (ed), *op.cit.*, Vol.13, pp.68ff
- ³⁸ *Islam A Challenge to Religion* pp.114-15
- ³⁹ *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, pp. 43-44
- ⁴⁰ Muhammad Isma'il Panipati (ed) *op.cit.*, Vol. 13, pp.68 ff
- ⁴¹ 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* p.100
- ⁴² *Ibid*, p.125
- ⁴³ *Ibid*, p.101
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- ⁴⁵ See above pp. 76-78
- ⁴⁶ *Cf.* Qur'an, 5:67

ISLAMIC ETHICS AND ITS MYSTICAL DIMENSIONS

Socrates, the wise man of antiquity, is reported to have said that 'knowledge is virtue'. He did not simply mean to say that for the performance of virtuous actions it is necessary, as a prelude, to know what virtue is. Nor did he only mean that knowledge of virtue contingently and as a matter of habitual practice leads to the performance of virtuous actions. He, in fact, put forth the identification of knowledge with virtue. They, according to him, are two aspects of the same phenomenon: to know the good is to do the good, and *vice versa*. The relationship between them is of logical necessity and of simultaneity rather than of causal expediency. By identifying virtue with knowledge Socrates also implied that vice is ignorance, *i.e.* the absence of knowledge. According to this line of thinking no one would ever commit an evil act knowingly, wrong-doing being a nescient act, a product of the lack of knowledge

View regarding the identification of virtue with knowledge and, conversely, vice with ignorance, does not appear to co-ordinate with our ordinary experience of human behaviour. It is a matter of common observation that sometimes we know that an act is good but we don't feel inclined towards it; and sometimes we know that an act is evil but still we prefer to do it. Poet Asadullah Khan Ghalib referred to this phenomenon when he said:

جاننا ہوں ثواب طاعت و زہد پر طبیعت ادھر نہیں آتی

(I know that obedience to God and the virtue of continence are prized activities but still, by temperament, I do not feel like going that way)

In fact, Socrates, on the one hand, and Ghalib, on the other, were respectively stationed at two different levels of epistemic vision. In the latter case mutual conflict exists in the moral agent between reason and emotion so that they pull him in opposite directions or, what would be the same thing, rational judgements in such cases are impure as they are blurred by emotions and feelings. In the former case, on the other hand, reason has established its supremacy over emotions so that rational knowledge is uncontaminated and pure and so it confidently and safely translates itself into corresponding actions. However, 'rational knowledge' of Socrates is not analytical and discursive so as to represent only the logical nature of man; it is, on the other hand, synthetic and organismic so that it represents the whole man *i.e.* truly man as such, by virtue of his definition as a rational being. Synthetic reason of Socrates is very close to the mystic intuition of a sufi who too is interested in the discovery of the true human self in himself which, in turn, provides the guarantee for the authenticity of his knowledge and the compulsive, irresistible correspondence of his everyday behaviour with that knowledge.

The Qur'an has used three terms connoting three levels of knowledge *viz.* *'ilm al-yaqin* at the first *i.e.* the lowest level, *'ayn al-yaqin* at the comparatively higher level and *haqq al-yaqin* at the highest level. The first one is the result of reasoning or inference, the outcome of man's application of the power of judgement and his appraisalment of evidence; the second one gets whatever authenticity it has from our sense experience; the third one is entirely free from the possible errors of judgement as well as from all sorts of sensory illusion: it is absolutely sure without qualification, without any ifs and buts.

‘Ilm al-yaqin is knowledge by absence; *‘ayn al-yaqin* is knowledge by presence; *haqq al-yaqin* is the knowledge that primarily issues forth not from the external state of affairs but from the authenticity of the being of the one who acquires it in regard to what exists. I know that fire burns because I have a scientific knowledge of the nature of fire in that regard or because I have witnessed this phenomenon with my own eyes or because fire has burnt my own finger. These three are the examples of the first, the second and the third levels of knowledge respectively insofar as my knowledge of mundane existence is concerned. To the mystics, who are *ashab-e hal* (the men of living assurance) belongs the third level of knowledge.

Haqq al-yaqin being the most authentic level of certitude, when related to the being of God and the entire scheme of things Divine as its object, is very close to what the sufis mean by the term *ma‘rifat*. *Ma‘rifat* (gnosis), as different from ordinary knowledge which is discursive in character, amounts to the sufi’s Divine experience attained with the innermost depths of his person. Another Qur’anic term, perhaps not very much different from both *haqq al-yaqin* and *ma‘rifat* is *iman* or, more characteristically, *iman b’al-ghaib*. Concept of *iman* (faith) has already been explained above in some detail *vis a vis* the concept of belief^f. Allama Iqbal has rightly described *iman* as a “living assurance begotten of a rare experience”². Further, it will be in place here to reiterate the necessary relationship between *iman*, on the one hand, and the actions that correspond to the nature of the being in whom it is reposed, on the other: The Qur’an almost invariably mentions *iman b’ Allah* (faith in God) in conjunction with *a‘mal-e sabih* (good actions). Sufis are the claimants of paramount conviction engendered by their Supreme experience and also the advocates of a behavioural policy which, by implication, befits that conviction.

In view of the above, obviously one characteristic of mystic ethics as a discipline is that it is stringent and determinate in character and is not at all a matter of free

rational calculation in the ordinary sense of the term 'free'. It necessarily and inviolably issues forth from, and is in fact complementary to, the mystic experience itself. In other words, the latter provides the entire justification for the former. Broadly speaking, it is a psychological fact that every cognitive activity of man has a conative aspect also: all ideas have an in-built tendency to translate themselves into the corresponding actions. However, bond between knowledge and action has various degrees of strength depending upon, among other factors, the level of the authenticity and the cogency of knowledge. Knowledge released by mystic consciousness being, in principle, the most authentic, its bond with the corresponding behavioural pattern is the strongest. In fact, the more consummate the mystic experience becomes the more excellent and the more genuine happen to be the morals which it engenders.

Traditional science of Ethics, we know, is man-centered. It has been defined as a social discipline which has as its concern the nature of relations among human beings: hence there is no ethics for a solitary man who lives absolutely by himself. Mystic ethics, besides its as well implied social bearings, is, on the other hand, basically God-oriented and is essentially conceived in regard to the mystic's way to God. This may be regarded as the second important characteristic of mystic ethics. Content-wise both negative and positive moral values—the values that are to be discredited and the values that are to be adopted—are, by and large, the same in both these ethical stances: only the sense of direction as well as their respectively relevant stresses and strains happen to mutually differ.

Thirdly, in the context of mysticism, negative values have precedence over positive values. What is not to be done logically comes before, is in fact a pre-condition for, what is to be done. What is to be eliminated comes before in order to make room for what is to be acquired. A religious person holds that with more and more of our involvement with the world as such at the cost of the remembrance of God and the

pursuit of the ideals of moral and spiritual excellence for which our worldly life is just a means, a crust is deposited on our primordial, heavenly-inspired souls that renders them hazy and blunted. This crust on the souls is to be rubbed off and the state of oblivion removed so that their original glow and luster stands restored before any positive advances can be made for the ultimate in-coming of the Divine. This 'before-after' sequence is, however, not chronological but logical: actually both must go together.

This third characteristic of sufi ethics may give an impression to the casual reader that Sufism is ascetic by nature. However, the impression is not justified. Avoidance of the world, obliquely proposed here, is evidently not to be taken as an end in itself but only as a means. *Salik*, the journeyer on the path of Sufism must live in the world, enjoy all the rights that are granted to him and perform all the duties enjoined upon him as a member of the society to which he belongs, but, of course, all the time with a sense of accountability to God. According to the teachings of the Qur'an a decent living here and now and also the realization of the Divine are important by virtue of their respective statutes: they in a way, are complementary to each other: The Qur'an asks its readers to pray for their well-being as regards both of them.

Lord, give us what is good in this world and also what is good in the next world... (2:201)

Obviously and to all appearance a truly religious person, being all the time a man-in-the-world, must constantly endeavour to transcend the world and be truly a dedicated seeker of the moral-cum-spiritual goals.

Sufi path (the *suluk*) is arduous and ever-continuous towards higher and higher levels of excellence which have none as *the highest* achievable level. So it needs a lot of courage and patience and an unswerving perseverance. Sometimes one is likely to grow weary and get tired while on the way and decide to give in: that will be hazardous and incur him the

loss of even that which he has already gained. So, once he has decided to be on the way, he must always be up and doing despite all the odds that may come from without or from within his own being. Every step forward is an achievement to be seriously reckoned with and is to be scrupulously guarded as such.

Mystic ethics being God-oriented— not only as to its consummation but also as to its initiations— the *salik*, the sufi wayfarer, in order to assure himself a safe and smooth journey, needs, and so must perpetually invoke, the help of God, His *taufiq*, at every step. The Qur'an says:

Whosoever will let him take a (straight) path to his Lord. But ye will not, except as Allah wills. (76:30)

Even the prophets used to implore God for help in order to execute the job that they were Divinely assigned to carry out. Prophet Shu'ayb (p.b.u.h.) is recorded to have said to his people:

I only desire (your) betterment to the best of my power. And my *taufiq* can only come from Allah. In Him I trust and unto Him I look (11:88).

Four distinct levels involved in the availability of *taufiq* to the sufi as a moral agent have been mentioned by writers on the subject or, we can say, *taufiq* for its actualization in totality manifests itself in four ways:

Firstly, *hidayah* (guidance), which in general is the most basic concept of the Qur'anic teachings. The Qur'an is the Book of Guidance, *par excellence*. Introducing itself, it says:

This Book (*i.e.* the Qur'an) is not to be doubted. It is a guidance (*huda*) for the righteous who have faith in the Unseen ... (2:1)

In plain words, *hidayah* means the capacity to discriminate between good and evil, between the desirable and the undesirable, between what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. The moral agent with the limited knowledge of facts and values at his disposal can go only to some extent and his calculations and judgements have all the possibilities

to go erratic. The initial light in this regard can only be provided by the all-knowing God Himself. The Qur'an says:

But it is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you; and you love a thing which is bad for you ... Allah knows and you know not. (2:216)

The awareness, in the final analysis, as to where lies the desirable path — which thus comes from God alone — is naturally the basic and the most preliminary theoretical requirement for the mystic journeyer. The first step, needless to say, has always to be taken in the right direction otherwise every subsequent step will take him farther and farther away from the destination originally conceived. The Divine enlightenment made available to those who deserve it has, of course, got its own degrees of clarity depending upon the inherent capability and the level of preparedness of the recipient.

Secondly, there is *rushd* (direction). One, who has had the *academic* knowledge of the desirable as distinct from the undesirable, may *practically* have many desirable avenues before him and thus may still be bamboozled: he may still not know exactly which avenue to select and in which direction to go. Unless this state of indecision is eliminated no advance towards the performance of the moral act can be made. Divine *rushd* removes the state of indecision and gives the sense of direction to the moral agent. The Qur'an says:

Let them answer my call and put their trust in me that they may walk in the right way (*yarshudun*) (2:186)

Resolution of the war for supremacy among various desirable avenues and the development of an inclination towards the realization of **the desirable one** is due to Divine grace and favour. This is *rushd*.

Thirdly, *tasdid* (setting aright). It is that aspect of the *taufiq* of God which makes the body of the moral agent agreeable to move on the path which has been made uncontrovertibly clear. It is a matter of our everyday experience that sometimes

lethargy and love of ease in regard to the movement of relevant bodily organs hampers the realization of what ought to be realized and the corresponding action does not actually take place. The person has all the wish to act but lacks the go-ahead, the *himmah* (determination) tending towards making up one's mind, with the seriousness of resolve. The Qur'an has used various derivations of this root-word at a number of places. In *surah* Yusuf, for example, it is said:

She tended (*hammat*) towards him and he himself would have tended (*hamma*) towards her had he not been shown a clear sign by his Lord (12:24)

Fourthly, there is *ta'id* (confirmation) which renders the external circumstances congenial, favourable and sometimes positively helpful for the actual performance of the moral action. The Qur'an speaks of providing *ta'id* to those who undertake *jihad* in the way of God by sending to their help *Ruh al-Quds* (the Holy Spirit) (2:87, 253) and the forces that they did not see (9:40):

But Allah strengthens (*yu'ayyidhi*) with His aid whom He will. Surely in that there is a lesson for such as have eyes to see (3:13)

Relevant to the above account, it would be very interesting to refer here to the genealogy of a moral action performed as, in general, traced by moral psychologists. They have referred to six steps or stages involved in this connection. 'Need' is the most rudimentary stage. It is the unconscious tendency towards the performance of a desirable act. Reclining of a plant towards sunlight, winking of the eyes in animals and human beings, inhaling and exhaling of breath are activities very useful, rather indispensable, for the maintenance of healthy life of their subjects. But a subject in all such cases may be conscious neither of what it /he is doing nor of the objective that is being realized thereby. **Appetite** is a conscious tendency although an awareness of the objective thereof is not present. A hungry dog roaming about in search of food and a lion pouncing upon his prey are expressions of appetite.

The dog and the lion necessarily know what they are doing but they do not have in their consciousness the concept of the maintenance of life as the aim of their acts. **Desire** is a tendency characteristic with human beings; so, essentially, it has a moral connotation. At the level of desire, man is conscious of the action that he performs as well as of the desired goal. He in fact deliberately sets an objective before him and then deliberately seeks to adopt practical means for its realization. Incidentally, every desire belongs to a universe. The concept of the 'universe of desires' on the analogy of the well-known concept of the 'universe of discourse' was put forth by J.S. Mackenzie in his *Manual of Ethics*³. It means that there are various groups of desires which hang together. Every person lives in various universes of desires during various phases of his everyday life. A person, for instance, happily attending a marriage ceremony is in one universe of desires. This universe changes altogether if, during that jubilant mood, he gets the news of the death of some dear one and proceeds to join the funeral procession. It is a matter of common experience that every one of us has different sets of desires, variously, in the company of his friends, at home with his wife and children, at the university with his professors and with his fellow-students in the university cafeteria and so on. Anyhow, there is an underlying, persistent core recognizable in all the various universes of desires in which a person lives. It is this persistent core which, in ethical terminology, is the character of that person. Maralists define character as the universe of desires in which one habitually lives. It should be parenthetically pointed out here that a man's character is not a finished product: it rather continues to evolve as long as he lives. 'Either-or' conflict sometimes occurs between various desires (or we may say between various universes of desires). Theoretically, taking into consideration the means at our disposal, our own capabilities, some higher sentiments involved, etc. we ultimately are in a position to declare one of the contending desires as the victorious one. This winning desire is the **wish**.

However, like desire, even wish by itself would not lead to the corresponding moral action. 'If wishes were horses beggars would ride' is a popular saying that is very eloquent. We also talk of 'wishful' thinking of the day-dreamers. Transcending the level of wish and the academic speculations that sustain it as well as the motives and the intentions that justify it, one has to be practical and with a down-to-the-earth approach be determined to translate into action the decision regarding what should actually be done. Alongwith the mental components, he has to make his bodily organs agreeable to co-operate and— insofar as his vision works— be assured that the external circumstances will be friendly with him. This is the level of **will**. Will, thus conceived, is the basic determiner of the moral worth of man's conduct. Irrespective of whether or not will is actually able to produce the willed action it is by itself sufficient, according to moralists, to make the person responsible and accountable. If the will is good, the action is praiseworthy; if it is bad the action is condemnable.

To the above enumeration of various stages specially mentioned by J.S. Mackenzie⁴ let us add an observation. For a morally good individual the ideal state of affairs is that his good will actually produces the good action in the social set-up to which he belongs. The realization of this ideal would incidentally affect an identity between the 'individual good' and the 'social good'. However, this last level, the level of **morally good action** is not possible to achieve, as we know, without the availability of certain meta-subjectivist forces-in-operation. The individual, by himself, has evidently very little or absolutely no control over the circumstances, both human and non-human, in the external world at large.

From among the above account of different stages leading to a good action as enumerated by moral psychology, desire, wish, will and action by and large correspond to the four levels of *taufiq* mentioned earlier above *viz.* *hidaya*, *rushd*, *tasdid* and *ta'id*, respectively.

Equipped with an uncompromising commitment and a strong determination, as well as guarded and strengthened by

the grace of God, which is necessarily, and in fact exclusively, available only to the soldiers-in-arms of the religio-moral ideals, the mystic proceeds forward, slowly and steadily with the carefully measured steps. The mystic journey thus taken upon is perpetual and never-ending. There is always an excellence above every excellence achieved. ‘The ultimate goal is towards thy Lord (53:42), says the Qur’an. The journey being thus towards the Divine, it can have no point where it may be supposed to end. God is Absolute and transcends all limits, specifications and determinations!

We have already referred to Ghazali’s intellectual life history⁵. It was during his eleven years’ journeying in search of the method for the discovery of truth (which he ultimately found in mystic experience) that he wrote in Arabic his stupendous *Ihya’ Ulum al-Din*⁶ (Revivification of Religious Sciences). Consequently, this Book comprises, by and large, a resuscitation and reconstruction of Islamic theory and practice from the orthodox as well as esoterically religious, *i.e.* the mystical point of view. His account of positive and negative moral values, the virtues and the vices⁷ has also been carried on in the same spirit. Details of sufist-Islamic ethics that follow are heavily indebted to this account which is quite elaborate and perhaps the most well-known among all the available writings on the subject. Before, however, we proceed it would be interesting to notice that Ghazali has described moral disvalues that are to be discredited before the moral values that are to be assimilated. This is an indicator of the fact, already referred to above, that the former (along with the ‘love of the world for its own sake’ which is their spring and source) should be recognized to have precedence — of course, not chronological necessarily but logical — over the latter. An oblique justification that is sometimes sought to be derived from this scheme of things for the cult of the ‘renunciation of the world’, unfortunately popular with a section of the Muslim mystics, is strongly repudiated by Ghazali himself in the chapter devoted to the description of

expressly social virtues⁸. Here he argues that renouncing the world is a grievous sin for a person who has dependents upon him, whom he is duty-bound to support. Further, he recommends such qualities as self-respect, dignified posture, good facial appearance and so on which presuppose a social set-up and a man's contacts with other individuals. Elsewhere, writing in support of music, he says "gaiety and sport refresh and clear the heart and bring relief to the tired mind... rest prepares a man for work and sport and gaiety for grave and serious pursuits"⁹. So the world with its conveniences is not to be avoided: it should rather only be transcended. Worldliness, *i.e.* love of the world for its own sake— as it has been emphasized more than once in the above pages— is in fact the root from which all the multifarious evils, which have been detailed below, spring.

Ghazali starts with vices which are directly connected with specific organs of the body. One such organ is the stomach. Intake of food is of course a biological need but too much of it, besides being the cause of so many physical diseases, generates a number of moral evils and spiritual deprivations. "Eat and drink", says the Qur'an, "but be not prodigal. Verily He does not love the prodigals" (7:31). Over-eating blunts intellectual capabilities. It causes too much of sleep which, for one thing, is a wastage of time. It necessarily leads to morbidity of mind rendering the individual incapable to distinguish between good and evil. Also a glutton who is always on the look out to have something available to him for eating gradually becomes oblivious of the pangs of hunger that are experienced by those in society who have really nothing/very little to eat. Only those who themselves are sparing in their eating habits would tend to carry out their religious duty towards the beggars and the deprived ones (51:19). Further, lavishness of eating habits will require more and more of money for the acquisition of which the person concerned sometimes ignores the distinction between fair and foul means of earning.

To this category also belong the vices that are related to the sex instinct. This instinct guarantees in man nothing less than the very preservation and prolongation of his race. It is one of the most powerful instincts — if not **the** most powerful one — in man; its distractions from the right path are accordingly the strongest and the most heinous ones also. Wanton, lustful wandering of the eyes by both men and women and unnecessary display of beauty by them— by the latter in particular— which are perhaps the earliest stages of the violation of sexual propriety, have been prohibited by the Qur'an:

Say to the believing men and women to turn away their eyes (from what is unlawful) and to restrain their sexual desires. This will make their lives pure ... Say to the believing women to turn their eyes away (from temptation) and to preserve their chastity; to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed; to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their refinery except to their husbands, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their stepsons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women servants, the women they possess, male attendants lacking in natural vigour and children who have no knowledge of sex. And let them not stamp their feet in walking so as to reveal their hidden trinkets (24: 30-31)

Adultery comes at the stop of such violations:

And do not come near adultery for it's a shameful deed and an evil, opening the road (to other evils) (17:32)

The adulterer and the adulteress shall each be given a hundred lashes. Let no pity for them detain you from obedience to Allah ...And their punishment be witnessed by a number of believers (24:2)

Another chunk of such vices are those which relate to the tongue, the organ of speech. Talkativeness, using obscene language, ridiculing, abusing and cursing others belong to this category. Telling of lies and making false promises too are condemnable. Back-biting is also a serious violation of the

legitimate role of the organ of speech. The Qur'an warns against these disvalues in a number of its verses.

Allah does not like foul words in public except by a man who is truly wronged (4:148)

Those who slander such of the believers as give themselves freely to (deeds of) charity as well as such as can find nothing to give except the fruits of their labour— and throw ridicule on them— Allah will throw back their ridicule on them: and they shall have a grievous penalty (9:79)

And the parable of an evil word is that of an evil tree; it is torn up by the root from the surface of the earth: it has no stability. (14:26)

Successful indeed are the believers who... turn away from vain talk (23: 1-3)

Believers, let no man mock another man who may perhaps be better than himself. Let no women mock another woman who may perhaps be better than herself. Do not defame one another, nor call one another by nicknames. It is an evil thing to be called by a bad name after embracing the true faith ... do not backbite one another. Would anyone of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Surely you would loathe it (49: 11-12)

Believers, when you converse in private do not speak with wickedness and enmity and disobedience towards the Apostle but with justice and piety ... Secret counsels are the work of devil who thereby seeks to annoy the faithful (58:9-10)

Vices related to the faculty of hearing are in a way complementary to the vices of the tongue. Most of the words that are prohibited to speak are also prohibited to listen to. One should avoid the company of those who are busy in indecent conversation, in slandering and back-biting others and in ridiculing Islam and the Muslims. They are the uncivilized, the uncultured, the unmannered ones for whom the Qur'an says that the faithful, when encountered by them, say goodbye to them and leave them alone (25:63). Also the faithful are prohibited to unnecessarily probe into the affairs of others and build up stories about them (49:12). The Qur'an has also

condemned unwarranted secret counselling and whispering into the ears of others (58:10).

Apart from the disvalues which are specifically localized, Ghazali goes on to enumerate those which more obviously emanate from the imbalances of the entire personality of an individual. One group of such disvalues are those which arise out of self-assertion. Sentiment of self-regard displayed within proper limits is of course a very important instinct of the human person. The lack as well as the excess of it should, however, be discouraged. The former amounts to the loss of personal dignity and self-respect [this loss is ‘not’ to be confused with ‘humility’ (*‘ijz*) which is positively valuable in the eyes of God] which is not at all a recommendable state of affairs. Too much of self-assertion, on the other hand, leads to a number of moral disvalues, anger (*ghadab*) being one of them, Anger is invoked when a person’s desire, good or bad, is not fulfilled. It is also occasioned when another person has in his possession something which the former claims for himself. Anger mostly leads to envy (*hasad*) and malice (*hiqd*) but sometimes to emulation. In the case of envy and malice, the angry man feels seriously disturbed over the possessions of the other and desires that they should be lost to him; in the case of emulation the anger turns, to the benefit of the angry man, into the passion in him to make concerted efforts to acquire those possessions for himself too: this is of course a desirable state of affairs. Look at the following verses of the Qur’an relevant to this set of vices:

And swell not thy cheek (in pride) at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth for Allah loveth not any arrogant boaster. And be moderate in thy pace and lower thy voice: for the harshest of sounds without doubt is the braying of the ass. (31: 18-19)

Verily He loves not the arrogant (16:23)

And the servants of Allah Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility (25:63)

Say I seek refuge with the Lord of the Dawn... from the mischief of the envier when he envies(113: 1-5)

And hasten to earn the forgiveness of your Lord and a Paradise ... for those who curb their anger (3:133-134)

Another set of vices are those that arise out of man's love of wealth (*hubb al-mal*) and love of position (*hubb al-jah*). Desire to have more and more of wealth is good provided it is legitimately earned and provided that the share in it that is prescribed for others is duly recognized and dispensed with. Similarly, love of position is not bad if it would help a person be in a better situation to help others and disseminate virtues at large. But, if wealth and position are sought for their own sake and as ends in themselves, they very easily drift into positive disvalues of character. The former leads to dissipated behaviour, avarice, selfishness, miserliness, ignoring the rights of others and practically being disregarding of the Life Hereafter; the latter leads to pride, hypocrisy, an unguine feeling of prestige, a topsy-turvied sense of values and hatred for others. Love of 'religious position' for its own sake, specially, leads to self-deception of a very serious nature. Look at the following verses of the Qur'an:

There are some who declare: 'We believe in Allah and the Last Day', Yet they are not believers. They seek to deceive Allah and those who believe in Him: but they deceive none save themselves, though they may not perceive it. They have sickness in their hearts which Allah has increased. They shall be sternly punished because they lie.

When it is said to them: 'Do not commit mischief in the land', they reply: 'we do nothing but good'. But it is they who commit mischief, though they may not perceive it.

And when it is said to them: 'Believe as others believe', they reply: 'Are we to believe as fools believe'. It is they who are the fools, if only they knew it (2: 8-13).

The hypocrites shall be cast in the lowest depths of the Fire: there shall be none to help them (4: 145)

But he who is a greedy, miser and thinks himself self-sufficient ... We will indeed make smooth for him the path of misery (92: 8-10)

Woe to every backbiting slanderer who amasses wealth and counts it, thinking that his wealth will render him immortal. By no means! They shall be flung to the Destroying Flame. Would that they knew what the Destroying Flame is. It is Allah's own kindled fire which will rise up to the hearts of man. It will close upon them from every side by towering columns. (104: 1-9)

The above is in brief an account of the vices, the negative values recognized in Islamic thought, in general, and by the Muslim mystics in particular. All of these vices, as stated above, derive in general from the love of the world allowed to develop and mature for its own sake. So in order to renounce and disown these values for making positive advances instead, **this world** is to be transcended in favour of that which transcends it, *i.e.* **the other world**. An other-worldly attitude towards our contacts with the world here and now is to be adopted by the sufi for journeying towards sacred heights: in order to take off and move upwards we of course must leave the ground! In simple words, we can say, a sufi takes upon himself to do whatever he has to do in the capacity of a man-in-the-world with of course a keen sense of accountability that he will have to face, on the Day of Judgement, to the Lord of that Day

In view of the above, the first virtue that the sufi has to adopt is that of *tauba* (repentance). *Taubā*, being the borderline value between prohibitions and inducements to moral life, has three aspects. It means

- a) realizing the fact that one has committed sins;
- b) being sorry for, and ashamed of, these sins; and
- c) making a firm resolve not to repeat them in future.

A person who thus repents will have all his previous sins forgiven and wiped off by God as if he never committed any sins¹⁰. Not only this: Allah has promised to transform his evil deeds of the past into good deeds (25:70). The Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is reported to have once said that a person who

repents becomes as pure and innocent as if he is just born to his mother¹¹.

Repentance has, by and large, more of a negative connotation, implying turning away from some thing that is undesirable. Abstinence (*zuhd*) has almost equally both negative as well as positive meanings: the latter meaning is in a way a rationale for the former. One who forsakes the worldly rubbish may be motivated to do so by the fear of Divine punishment or by the prospect of the pleasures of the hereafter or by his disinterested love for God. The last one is the highest degree of *zuhd*. We are reminded here of an episode related to the renowned mystic woman Rabi'a Basri. Once she was rushing forth with a glass of water in one of her hands and a flame of fire in the other. When asked why was she doing so and where did she intend to go, she replied that she was going to burn away paradise with the flame of fire and extinguish the fire of hell with water so that people lead an upright life neither in the hope of the one nor for fear of the other but simply for the sake of Divine goodwill¹².

Zahid is nearly equivalent in connotation to *faqir* (the contented one— literally, the poor man) which is another word repeatedly used in sufi literature. A *faqir* like a *zahid* is one who is pained when worldly conveniences and comforts are made available to him because they have all the likelihood to tempt him away from his way to God. As regards man *vis-à-vis* worldly wealth some lesser terms are also used by the sufis in order to clearly bring out and demonstrate their own elitist point of view. For instance, *radi* is the man who is neither pleased at its possession nor pained at its loss and when he has it he does not of course positively hate it; *ghani* is one who desires to get it but does not actively pursue this desire; *haris* is one who has a very strong desire to get it but somehow or other is unable to do so; *mudtar* is one who, being in the state of deprivation, is agitated to his roots and thoroughly disturbed.

Inculcation of the twin virtues of repentance and abstinence and the determination to stick to them requires a

lot of effort on the part of the sufi. Feelings and passions being a part and parcel of the personality of a human individual and he being impatient by nature and despondent when evil befalls him (70: 19-20), the temptations towards an involvement with the world at the cost of the path that he has chosen for himself, continue to assert themselves off and on. He has to resist them. This resistance, which has a negative as well as a positive meaning— not to submit to temptations and also be adamant to stick to your path— amounts to patience (*sabr*). Patience, as explained in sufi literature has got three levels: patience in relation to the performance of religious duties, patience in relation to abiding by the inhibitions promulgated by *Shari'ah* and patience in relation to sufferings and difficulties encountered on the way to God. The last one is the most difficult level of patience and the noblest one too.

Gratitude (*shukr*), in usual parlance, is complementary to patience. A person exercises the latter when he is in difficulty and the former when he is graced with relief. However, in the itinerary of a sufi, gratitude is a standing virtue. One has always to be grateful to God. Even when one is in trouble that too envisages an attitude of gratefulness to Him as He has after all saved him from what could be a more serious trouble for him. All benefits, all good fortunes and all advancements to higher and higher levels of spiritual excellence accrue from God. Attitude of gratefulness to Him is not only a recognition of the truth of these states of affairs but also at the same time a petition to Him to grant the petitioner still more. If, on the other hand, a person is ungrateful to Him that will amount to the repudiation of this truth and hence a grievous sin. The Qur'an says:

If you are grateful, I will add more (favours) unto you; but if you show ingratitude, truly My punishment is terrible indeed. (14: 7).

In the beginning of this chapter we referred to the purification of self as the basic initial requirement of the sufi way. As it is the self itself which registers the acquisition of all

positive values, the sufi must attend to it again and again and keep assured that it does not under any circumstances, go erratic and misbehave. The process of this perpetual surveillance has various steps and stages: assigning a task to the self (*musharatab*), watching over the self (*muraqabah*), taking critical account of the self (*muhasabah*), punishing the self (*mu'aqabah*), exerting the self (*mujahadah*), upbraiding the self (*mu'atabah*) and so on. All this amounts to *jihad-e akbar* (the bigger war in the way of God), war in the battle against the enemies of Islam being a *jihad-e asghar* (the smaller war in the way of God). Single-mindedness (*ikhlās*) is the fruit of the self thoroughly pruned, tamed and mastered. An adequately fashioned I-amness is one-dimensional in its outlook. It has only one ulterior objective, namely, to achieve nearness to God and to be saturated in Divinity more ad more; all lesser objectives are weeded out.

The phenomenon of the unified self seeking proximity to God, Who too is absolutely One, immediately and very conveniently leads to the quality of truthfulness (*sidq*), a virtue with a very comprehensive connotation. The bearer of this virtue will be true to himself. This means that his thoughts, his words and his actions will be in total harmony with one another. He will not tell lies and will not simulate. Liars, says the Qur'an, are cursed by God (2:89) and the hypocrites will be consigned to the worst regions of the hell (4:145). Nor will he, inspired by mundane motives, conceal what he considers to be the truth. He will also be true to others. All humans being the family of God, he must normally be at peace with his fellow members of the family and have an attitude of benevolence towards them. He must be fair in his social dealings and never try to delude and deceive others. He would, of course, be honest, kind, loving etc. but, in addition, he must be *transparently* so in order that the fragrance of these virtues spreads everywhere. A truthful man will also be true to the Divine scheme of things insofar as he must carry out his activities with a sense of accountability to God. He must of necessity carry out His

commandments and also enrich himself by assimilating in his person the moral values idealized in His Beautiful Names (*Asma' al-Husna*). Such a tri-dimensional meaning of the value of truthfulness, according to Iqbal, in fact requires a three-pronged test for the veracity, truthfulness and authenticity of one's self. He put, in this connection, the following set of beautiful verses in the mouth of his spiritual guide Maulana Jalal al Din Rumi

زند یا مرد یا جان بلب از سه شاہد کن شہادت را طلب
 شاہد اول شعور خویشتن خویش را دیدن بنور خویشتن
 شاہد ثانی شعور دیگرے خویش را دیدن بنور دیگرے
 شاہد ثالث شعور ذات حق خویش را دیدن بنور ذات حق
 پیش این نور ار بمانی استوار حی وقائم چون خدارا خود شمار^۳

(Whether you are living or dead or suspended between life and death seek a confirmation of your state from three witnesses. First witness is your own consciousness: it is looking at yourself in the light of your own consciousness. Second witness is the consciousness of the other: it is looking at yourself in the light of the consciousness of the other. Third witness is the consciousness of God: it is looking at yourself with the consciousness of God. It you remain steadfast before this light consider yourself eternal and firm like God).

Seeking by a person of witness from the consciousness of God amounts to transforming his good will into , what can be termed, 'holy will', at which level his personal choices in the moral realm become identical with what God would wish that he choose for himself. It is this identification which Iqbal appears to recommend when he says:

خودی کو کر بلند اتنا کہ ہر تقدیر سے پہلے
 خدا بندے سے خود پوچھے بتا تیری رضا کیا ہے

(Ennoble and dignify your self to such a high level of excellence that every time a destiny is to meet him God would ask him as to what is his own choice).

Very close to the identification of his will with the will of God is the stage at which the sufi abandons himself to God

in complete trust and merge (not simply identify) his will in (with) the Divine will. “(The sufi) no longer finds his own powers and personality to be self-sufficient and has allowed God to dominate his life ... he considers himself as a dead body moved by the Divine grace and is content that the Divine strength should replace his own human weaknesses”.¹⁴

II

We have given above a survey of the sufi itinerary in regard to various attainments that he registers and various levels of progress that he goes through during his journey towards the realization of his objectives. In the following let us give and very briefly explain some of the concepts involved in this connection for which specific technical terms are available in sufi literature.

Fana'(فناء), **Baqa'**(بقاء)

In the third chapter above we wrote about the characteristics of mystic experience. One of these characteristics, we said, is the passivity of the mystic¹⁵ during the brief span of the time he is absorbed and engaged in his experience: he is on the receiving end so that all his actively cognitive, conative and affective tendencies are held in abeyance. In ordinary language it may be said that it is the sufi who is the ‘agent’, the ‘subject’ of the experience but actually it is not so: he is only the metaphorical agent; the real agent is God Himself Who, of course, is at the same time the Being Who is being experienced. This can be explained by citing an analogical example of the phenomenon of death. We say ‘Mr. X has died’ as if Mr. X is the agent of the experience of his death whereas, as a matter of fact, it is death itself which has overtaken him. The phenomenon of self-effacement and self-annihilation of the sufi in the face of the all-absorbing, all-encompassing Being of God is *fana'* or, more-specifically, *fana' fi'Allah*. The state of the loss of the very awareness of

self-annihilation is known as *fana' al-fana* in sufi terminology. Every sufi, of course, must come out of this experience which, by its very nature, cannot persist for long¹⁶. However, when he does come out, he is likely to remain, for all practical purposes, in the state of stupor and oblivion for some time and, in some cases, even for the whole of his life. However, some sufis are an exception. The exceptional sufi regains normal consciousness— but now of course at the more authentic plane. Thoroughly enlightened by effulgence that his experience has generated, saturated by the colour of God, the Object of his experience [after all whose colour can be better than His colour! (2:138)], and enriched by the assimilation of Divine attributes, his personality has stood metamorphosed, Coming out of his absorption in the Being of God, he now subsists with Him. This is *baqa' b' Allah*. He subscribed to the religion (of Islam) before the gnostic experience; now he lives religiously.

Mujahada(), Mushahada()

The sufi, as we have already seen, goes through a lot of effort carrying on *jihad-e akbar i.e jihad* against his own self, cleansing it of all impurities and Satanic inclinations and furnishing it instead with qualities of good character., This constant, strenuous labour independently requires of him a lot of perseverance and patience. *Mujahada* is necessary, though not the sufficient, condition of *mushahada*, the contemplative vision of God. The latter is a reward of the former which is entirely upto God as to when and how He grants it. It is due to the grace of God rather than something which the sufi can claim to have earned by himself.

Maqam (), Hal()

Each one of this pair of terms stands for a specific type of the level of development the sufi journeyer goes through. The distinction between them roughly corresponds to the one that holds between *mujahada* and *mushahada*, referred to above.

Maqam (station) is the stage during the spiritual advance of the sufi which is achievable by dint of his own efforts. *Hal* (state), on the other hand, is the stage which is the result of Divine grace and favour of which the sufi is only a recipient. *Maqam* is achieved whereas *hal* is conferred. The former belongs to the category of acts; the latter belongs to the category of gifts. These two, according to sufi theoreticians, do not generally intersect, nor do they run parallel to each other. Sufi writers are generally of the view that the series of *maqamat* ends where the series of *ahwal* begins. According to Ali Hujveri, for example, *tauba* (repentance) is the first of the series of *maqamat* whereas *rida* (absolute satisfaction with God) is the last one. As to the series of *ahwal*, they begin with *rida*¹⁷; but as the *ahwal* are entirely due to the grace of God, only He knows where lies the end of this series for a particular sufi. Ali Hujveri here cautions the sufi against being impatient in regard to his accomplishments¹⁸. He should not be in a hurry to scale various *maqamat* one after the other. Every *maqam* has certain proprieties and obligations attached to it. Until he has fulfilled the entire set of these obligations, so far as it is humanly possible for him to fulfill, he should not try to move to the next higher one. If he is unduly eager in this regard the ground of his soul will not be sufficiently prepared to receive the grace of God in terms of various *ahwal*.

Sukr() Sahv()

Sukr literally means intoxication and rapture whereas *sahv* means sobriety. The former is a state which a sufi during his journey on the mystical path comes across when he is practically taken out of himself: his human attributes are obliterated and he is completely absorbed into the Being of God. The latter, on the other hand, is a state when the sufi regains his consciousness and now becomes aware of himself in 'the life in God'; and all his attributes, transformed and spiritualized, are restored to him. In the history of Sufism

some regard the state of *suker* and some, the state of *sahw* as superior in terms of spiritual excellence. The advocates of *suker* are led by Bayazid Bistami. They say that “sobriety involves the fixity and equilibrium of human attributes which are the greatest veil between God and man, whereas intoxication involves the destruction of human attributes like foresight and choice and the annihilation of man’s self-control in God so that only those faculties survive in him that do not belong to the human genus; and they are the most complete and perfect ... The attribution of a man’s act to God is better than the attribution of God’s act to a man, for in the latter case the man stands by himself, while in the former case he stands through God”¹⁹. If the mystic experience of Unity as advocated here is publicly declared as, for instance, was done by Mansur Hallaj, it can dumbfound the beginner and create confusions in his mind. Bayazid, for this reason refined the art of speaking in *isbarat* (literally, pointers) *i.e.* in the cryptic style of language which only the experts can understand.

Junayd Baghdadi and his followers, on the other hand, prefer sobriety to intoxication. Their line of argument is this: “Intoxication is evil because it involves the disturbance of one’s normal state and loss of sanity and self-control; and in as much as the principle of all things is sought either by way of annihilation or subsistence or of effacement or affirmation, the principle of verification cannot be attained unless the seeker is sane. Blindness will never release anyone from the bondage and corruption of phenomena. The fact that people remain in phenomena and forget God is due to their not seeking things as they really are”²⁰. It is due to his doctrine of sobriety that Junayd is held in veneration by the sufis as well as by the men of *Shari’ah*:

Bast (), Qabd ()

Bast literally means ‘to get wider’ or ‘to get enlarged’. Technically, it is the experience of the extension of the sacred feeling of enthusiasm, a complacent ease and happiness which may consequently, develop into a sort of ‘cosmic consciousnesses’. It is, in general, a state of the perpetual incoming of Divine grace and favour. *Qabd*, on the other hand, means constraint and compression of the soul. It is a state of arrest and stagnation in which avenues of further spiritual progress appear to be obstructed and blocked. Taking both *bast* and *qabd* at their respective face values, the former is decidedly a more desirable state than the latter; but some sufis regard the latter as superior to the former. Junayd Baghdadi, for instance, is reported to have held that “when He (*i.e.* God) presses me through fear He makes me disappear from myself, but when He expands me through hope He gives me back to myself.”²¹ It is thus for him the transposition of man from his private individuality to Divine possession— even if this transposition is a transitory phase— would give excellence to the state of *qabd*.

Shathiyyat()

Shathiyyat are the theopathic locutions or paradoxical statements sometimes made by the sufis. They are the utterances which in all obviousness are in contradiction with the Qur’an, in particular, and the Islamic *Shari‘ah*, in general. They are said to be proclaimed by the sufis in an ecstatic state or may be during moments of their absorption in the being of God. For instance, on listening to the Qu’anic verse

[truly strong is the grip of thy Lord (85:12) Bayazid

Bistami cried out (my grip is stronger). Similar is the well-known utterance of Mansur al-Hallaj (I am the

Truth). Another sufi is reported to have said

(my empire is greater than the empire of God). And so on²².

Much has been written on this subject justifying the sufi utterances

- i. by bringing out and explaining their hidden, esoteric meanings which turn out as not to be in conflict with *Shari'ah* teachings; and, when no such meanings are available,
- ii. by absolving the sufis of, and declaring them pardonable for, what these utterances stand for as they were compulsively made by them in a passive, evanescent mood during their journey on the mystic path.

Waqt()

Waqt literally means time. For the sufis it is a technical term meaning 'the present moment'. It is the 'moment' in which he is granted a certain mystical state. The sufi, as required by that state, completely resigns himself to the 'eternal now', being absolutely oblivious of the sequential character of time divisible into past, present and future. Memory of the 'gone by' as well as ideation into the 'yet-to-be', both being distractions, are entirely harmful. A sufi who loses 'time' loses a lot. Ali Hujveri quotes Junayd who said: "I saw a dervish in the desert, sitting under a mimosa tree in a hard and uncomfortable spot and asked him what made him sit there so still. He answered: 'I had a 'time' and lost it here; now I am sitting and mourning",²³. A sufi is thus sometimes known as *ibn al-waqt* (son of the moment). The prophetic saying *li ma'Allah waqt ...*²⁴ (I have a time with God) is sometimes referred to by the sufis in order to elucidate their own experience of breaking with serial time and reaching the timeless eternal presence with God.

Majzub()

Majzub literally means 'the captured one' or the attracted one'. Under the shock of a mystical vision or in general, as a result of the strong impact of any psychological experience the *salik* sometimes gets his normal senses deranged and he apparently behaves like a mad man. According to Farid al-Din Attar, some of such persons may be those who "are set free by God from their state as slaves and live in perfect loving union with Him"²⁵. In accordance with this observation, a *majzub* may be one who does not travel through all the stages of the long mystical path but early on the way he is enraptured by *jazba* (attraction by God) which exalts him on to the state of ecstasy. Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi, however, refuses to regard a *majzub* even among the sufis correctly so called because they are not in a position to abide by the *Shari'ah* laws: they do receive spiritual illumination by the grace of God but do not reap the full fruit of this illumination as they are not able to supplement it with their personal efforts.²⁶

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- ¹ See above Chapter 1, pp.3-9. Also see Dr. Abdul Khaliq, *Problems of Muslim Theology*, Chapter 'Faith and Actions'
 - ² 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, P.87
 - ³ J.S. Mackenzie, *Manual of Ethics*, p.34
 - ⁴ *Ibid*, Chapter I, Book I
 - ⁵ See above Chapter 2, pp. 64-66.
 - ⁶ *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* is in Arabic. It was abridged by Al-Ghazali himself with some minor alterations in his *Kimya'-e Sa'adat* (Alchemy of Happiness) written in Persian.
 - ⁷ *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, Part 4 Chapters VIII to XVI.
 - ⁸ *Ibid*, Chapter XVI
 - ⁹ *Ibid*, Part 2, Chapter VIII

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¹¹ Margaret Smith, *Rabia the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints in Islam*, p.98

¹² Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp.38-39

¹³ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat-e Iqbal* (Farsi), p 20/492.

¹⁴ Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazali the Mystic*, pp.167-168

¹⁵ See above Chapter III, pp. 89-90.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-89.

¹⁷ Ali Hujveri, *Kashf al-Mahjub* (English translation by Prof. Reynold A. Nicholson), pp. 180-183

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.185

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Quoted from Al-Ghazali by Annemarie Schimmel, *op.cit.*, p.129

²² See Sayyid Muhammad Zoqi, *Sirr-e Dilbaran* (Urdu), pp.232-237

²³ Ali Hujveri, *op.cit.*, p.368

²⁴ Badi'uz Zaman Faruzan Far, *Abadith-e Mathnavi*, No. 100.

²⁵ Quoted from Fariduddin 'Attar's *Mantiq al-Tayr* by Annemarie Schimmel, *op.cit.* p. 19.

²⁶ Article by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in M.M. Sharif (ed), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Vol. I, p.356.

TAWHEED AND ITS RELEVANCE TO SUFISM

Islamic teachings as advocated in the Qur'an, are absolutely clear on *Tawheed* (Divine Unity) ordained as, in principle, the central article of faith, its violation being the only sin which God has categorically taken upon Himself not to forgive:

Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him: but He forgiveth anything else to whom He pleaseth: to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed (4:48)

However, the exact nature of the concept of *Tawheed/Wahdat/Abadiyyat* itself has been viewed and appreciated from different points of view; and, by implication, various stances of God-man-universe relationship have been conceptualized. Identification and explanation in detail of all these stances as such will not presently be attempted as that will take us beyond the scope of this book. In what follows only four major schools of thought in this regard — and these too in their broadest outlines — will be appraised. In order to further discipline our account these schools will be considered with particular reference to their widely acknowledged representative advocates among the Muslim thinkers. Against the context of the subject-matter of the book in hand the underlying objective of this exercise is to highlight the respective attitudes of these schools of thought towards Sufism and or

to discover the role of sufi experience in the formulation of each one of them.

Terminology used for various Unitarian standpoints current in the Western religious literature like ‘Pantheism’, ‘Theism’, ‘Deism’ etc. does not fit in well with the views of Muslim thinkers on whom we propose to concentrate. So we have used/devised Arabic nomenclature as follows for this purpose:

1. *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Essentialism)

It is represented by Sheikh-e Akbar Muhyi al-Din Ibn ‘Arabi for whom ‘substantial existence’ by virtue of its **essence** is one and it belongs to God alone. Everything/everyone else, he holds, is just a manifestation of His Being.

2. *Wahdat al-Shuhud* (Unity of Apparentism)

It is represented by Mujaddid Alf-e Sani Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi for whom Solitary Divine Existence is just what it may **appear to be** so to a mystic: it is not the ontological truth.

3. *Wahdat al-Fitratiyyah* (Unity of Naturalism)

It is represented by Sir Syyid Ahmad Khan for whom the concept of **the laws of nature** is the one basic tool with which every phenomenon, including the so-called miraculous Divine doings in the spatio-temporal world, can be explained.

4. *Wahdat al-Inniyyah* (Unity of Egotism).

It is represented by ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal for whom egohood (*kbudi*, **I-anness**) is the one salient principle that characterizes the Being of God as well as all that is there in the created universe including human beings.

Let us now deal with these points of view one by one in some detail. Before, however, we proceed let it be made clear that the upholders of these views, all of them, would derive their respective sets of arguments, as we propose to demonstrate during the elaboration of their standpoints, from various verses of the Qur’an and perhaps none of them did so absolutely without any justification! Qur’anic view itself regarding Divine Oneness is pristine and comprehensive and

so it does make sufficient room for all of its shades highlighted above. However, still it cannot be compartmentalized and entirely confined to any one of these or to any other conceivable humanly-devised point of view. Anyway, a study of these four schools of thought with their acclaimed Qur'anic bases will incidentally give to the reader some inkling of what the Qur'an proposes to put forth regarding its concept of *Tawheed* as the unequivocally pivotal principle of Muslim faith.

Wahdat al-Wujud: Ibn 'Arabi

Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240) is widely recognized in Muslim thought as the pioneer of the doctrine that is popularly known as *Wahdat al-Wujud* (literally, oneness of Being). This is despite the fact that he himself nowhere in his writings uses this phrase to characterize his point of view. According to this doctrine, God is the only Being who exists by virtue of His own right: the overt existence of anything/anyone else is just His manifestation or self-disclosure. *Wujud* exactly belongs to God alone; it is, as if, just loaned out to the created beings in the way in which light, we may say by way of analogy, belongs to the sun and is loaned out to the inhabitants of the earth. As a consequence of this view, the world, by virtue of its essence and in the last analysis, is identical with Him. Obviously, there is no provision in such a system for *creatio ex-nihilo* as understood by the orthodox. The world can only be conceived as an emanation from God. The process of emanation as put forth by Ibn 'Arabi and his followers is this¹: The Being is at the stage of *la ta'ayyun*, indeterminate, without qualifications, insofar as every qualification is necessarily a sort of determination. In its emanative descent or determination it passes through five stages, the first two being cognitive and the last three existential in nature. In the first descent the being becomes conscious of itself as Pure Being. In the second descent it becomes conscious of itself as possessing attributes. Out of the three existential determinations the first

one is *ta'ayyun-e rubi* i.e. determination as spirit or spirits. The second one is *ta'ayyun-e mithali*, whereby the world of ideas comes into being. The third decent is *ta'ayyun-e jasadi* or physical determination. It is this determination which comprises the spatio-temporal world around us.

Psychologically speaking, the viewpoint that God alone essentially exists is natural with the mystics in general. Mystics style of living, their mode of thinking and their over-all attitude towards life and values, as we have already seen in the previous chapters more than once, are conditioned by, and firmly grounded in, their unique gnostic experience of God, the Ultimate Reality. Now one of the characteristics of this experience is that it entirely absorbs the attention of its recipient²; whatever/whoever besides Him is the potential candidate to enter into the field of his consciousness goes into oblivion and in fact He and He alone thus becomes the Veritable Existent Being for him . It is against this inherent logic of a mystic's experience that we can understand the phenomenon of *fana*³ (annihilation of the tangible existence of everything including his own self) — one of the most recurrent words in sufi terminology— and it is against this very logic that we can, in a way, justify Ibn 'Arabi's view of *Wahdat al-Wujud*. Also, it is with reference to this character of mystic experience that Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi later on appreciated, evaluated and managed to provide a soft corner for Ibn 'Arabi's characteristic concept of Divine Unity. The experience during which the sufi builds up the impression that only God really exists is, of course, evanescent and it very soon fades away⁴. The rationale for the validity of the persistent ontological stance of *Wahdat al-Wujud* is this: mystic experience is the most authentic form of knowledge, so whatever this experience *qua* experience immediately discovers is the most authentic point of view. Authenticity of the subjective perspective grants validity and authenticity to the corresponding objective, ontological state of affairs.

Ibn 'Arabi is a visionary and not a 'philosopher' in the strictly technical sense of this term. Besides the compulsive

psychological grounding of the metaphysics that he proposed, he also put forth his calculated thesis that the intellect of man, absolutely by itself, is a thoroughly inadequate epistemic tool with the help of which God-consciousness can be attained: He can instead only be known, as he says, through *kashf* (unveiling) and *shuhud* (direct witnessing).

Ibn ‘Arabi’s view of God and, by implication, of God-universe relationship is sometimes confused with, and mistaken for, what has been known as Pantheism.⁵ As a technical term used in Western religio-philosophical literature, ‘Pantheism’ stands for the substantial continuity between God and the universe. A difference must be made between the ‘essential’ identification of God with the universe, which is His manifestation (the views of Ibn ‘Arabi), on the one hand, and the ‘substantial’ identification of God with the universe, on the other. The latter view boils down to the simple postulation that ‘God is the universe and the universe is God’, both the terms being mutually synonymous and interchangeable. This was, for instance, the standpoint of the modern German philosopher Spinoza, admittedly acclaimed a pantheist. Spinoza’s well-known dictum is *Deus sive Natura i.e* ‘God or Nature’, obviously meaning to say that these two words have the same connotation and so the same denotation as well. Ibn ‘Arabi is definitely not a pantheist in this sense as he unequivocally regards God as distinguishable from His manifestations and transcendent with respect to them, despite both being essentially identifiable mutually. He says:

If you assert (pure) transcendence you limit God and if you assert pure immanence you define Him. But if you assert both things you follow the right course⁶.

So God is primarily the Reality and all else too are ‘realities’ although only in the secondary sense of this term. These realities comprise His *tajalliyat* — self-revelations or the disclosures of His attributive Names. This Reality is One as regards His essence (*Haqq*) and many as regards His

appearances (*khalq*) “Ontologically, there is but One Reality; epistemically there are two aspects: a Reality which transcends the phenomenal world and a multiplicity of subjectivities which find their ultimate explanation and ground in the essential unity of the Real”⁷. Ibn ‘Arabi himself sometimes refers to God as *Al-Wahid Al-Kathir* (The One The Many). “If you regard Him through Him”, he says (*i.e.* if you regard the Essence from the point of view of the Essence), “then He regards Himself through Himself which is the state of unity, but if you regard Him through yourself (*i.e.* from your point of view as a form) then the unity vanishes”⁸.

The fact of ‘God alone being the essentially existent Being’ or, interchangeably, ‘the phenomenal world being identical with God’— despite being the truth discovered by mystic experience as such— is, according to Ibn ‘Arabi, demonstrable also on theological grounds. It is, for instance, derivable from the identity of His *sifat* (attributes) with His *zat* (essence), which was incidentally the basic conviction of the Mu‘tazilite theologians of medieval times, the Unitarians *par excellence*. From the two premises *viz*,

1. His attributes are one with, and not over and above, His essence (as the violation of the truth of this proposition would violate His Oneness);

and

2. the world with all its paraphernalia is the *lajalli* or manifestation of the attributes of God (because the Qur’an, time ad again, describes the world as comprising the signs of, *i.e.* the significant pointers to, the existence of God)

the conclusion that necessarily follows is: the world is identical with God. Further, an *hadith-e Qudsi* (the extra-Qur’anic revelation), referring to the purpose of creation, says:

I was a hidden treasure; I wished that I may be known, so I created the creatures⁹.

The yearning of God that He be known is the yearning for self-perfection. This perfection comprises the expression or realization of His own Self through the eternal as well as temporal qualities that manifest themselves in the world process. In other words, it comprises an actualization of all the qualities that were potentially there in Him. The realization by God of His Self through His phenomenal manifestations in nature has obviously found its recognizably most eloquent exemplification in the manifestation that man is: man is certainly the acme of His creative activity¹⁰.

Talking particularly of man-God identity, Ibn 'Arabi refers to the Qur'anic verse:

We are nearer to him (*i.e.* man) than his life-vein (50:16)

God being nearer to man than his very life vein would mean nothing less than that He himself is the very essence of the limbs and parts of man as the living organism, specially of the limbs of the elitist ones among human beings who are inspired by the passion to approximate Him. This is corroborated by another well-known *hadith-e Qudsī*¹¹ according to which man, with the help of supererogatory prayers goes nearer and nearer God so that ultimately He loves him and when He loves him, He becomes his hands with which he holds, his ears with which he hears... and so on. Similarly, man is said to have been created after the image of God. The allegorical significance of this saying is that the attributes of God have been ingrained in man as the realizable ideals of moral and spiritual excellence. The Qur'anic verse 'I breathed My Soul into him (*i.e.* man)' (38: 72) symbolically refers to the same truth. Further, man is congenitally inspired with an urge to achieve closer and closer of approximation to these ideals. This instinctive drive, specially emphasized by the sufis, may sometimes get benumbed and paralysed by certain antagonistic, obliterating forces. As a reminder to keep this drive ever fresh and operative, the standing directive of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is: inculcate in yourself the qualities of God¹². Thus

when a person performs a good action he must be sure that he is abiding by the laws of the nature of his own being and, at the same time, he is carrying out the will of God.

Moral act and the awareness with which a sufi is required to perform it— in fact, broadly speaking, morality as such— necessarily requires that the moral agent must be free: unless he is free, the concept of responsibility and consequently of rewards and punishments in the Hereafter, that is one of the cardinal principles of Islamic teachings, would be without any significance. Ibn ‘Arabi’s views on this subject are, however, paradoxical. As the advocate of the Oneness of Being, he is naturally a determinist. All objects/persons and the way they all behave are plain manifestations of the Divine; hence they are what they must necessarily be. In the capacity of an advocate of the religious law of Islam as understood by the men of *Shari‘ah* he, on the other hand, upholds human freedom. He vacillates between these two positions. Man, according to him, is

responsible for his own actions and the maker of his own fate and destiny— not that he is a free agent in an ethical sense *i.e.* an agent who wills his own actions independently of any determining factor, external and internal other than himself. Man is responsible, on Ibn ‘Arabi’s view, in the unique sense that his actions spring directly from him and are *determined by his own nature* and the laws which govern it. Such laws are so fixed and so immutable that even God cannot change them. Everything is pre-determined from eternity.¹³

Man is the superiormost existent in the universe insofar as, according to Ibn ‘Arabi, he is not simply a manifestation of the attributes of God but also the one who has an urge woven into his very constitution to realize more and more of all these attributes in his own person. As sufi, characteristically a soldier of the ideals of excellence, has thus the actualization of his own ideal self as his objective, to accomplish this realization to the maximum of his capacity and become the Perfect Man (*al-Insan al-Kamil*) is the goal for which he ought to aspire. Perfect Man, for Ibn ‘Arabi, is the

one through whom the mystery of God is revealed to Himself. This alone makes the perfect man the recipient of the honorific title of being, as the Qur'an says, the 'vicegerent of God' on earth¹⁴, in the closest sense of this term. He alone can— none else, not even an angel, can — prove himself deserving of this honour for the reasons cited above. He alone can know Him in a manner which is indubitable and absolutely sure. "He is to God like the eye-pupil is to the (physical) eye ... and through him God beholds His creatures and has mercy upon them (*i.e.* creates them)"¹⁵. "It is in this sense that Ibn 'Arabi calls the Perfect Man the cause of creation... Were it not for Man (the Perfect Man) creation would have been purposeless for God would not have been known"¹⁶. It is in fact the Perfect Man to whom all that is on the earth has been subjected¹⁷. Perfect Man, besides being the cause of the universe, is also its preserver and maintainer. If the cause ceases to exist the effect too would be no more. "Doest not thou see that when he departs and is removed from the treasury of the present world, there shall not remain in it that which God has stored therein, and that which was in it shall go forth and each part shall become one with each other part and the whole affair shall be transferred to the next world and shall be sealed everlastingly"¹⁸.

Wahdat al-Shubud: Shiekh Ahmad Sirhindi

Mujaddid Alf-e Thani Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1563- 1624) put forth his concept of the Oneness of God against the context of— in fact as a reaction to, a protest against—Ibn 'Arabi's view of Divine Unity. Sheikh Ahmad's characteristic point of view is known as *Wahdat al-Shubud* as distinct from the *Wahdat al-Wujud* of Ibn 'Arabi. *Wahdat al-Shubud* or, as sometimes called, *Tawhid-e Shubudi*, is literally speaking 'apparentism' or 'cognitivism' in regard to the concept of Divine Unity. This means that God, Who, according to Ibn Arabi is the only substantially existent Being, everything else being just His manifestation, only **appears to be** so but **is not really** so. In order to demonstrate the difference between

these two positions– the Existential Unity advocated by Ibn ‘Arabi and the Cognitive Unity advocated by himself– Sheikh Ahmad gave an example.¹⁹ Suppose, he says, a person observes the sun during broad-day light. He will be firmly convinced of its existence. He will actually see on the sky nothing besides the sun as if nothing else exists. But he of course must not deny the existence of the stars. He knows very well that the stars exist and that the sun has, for the time being eclipsed and outshone them. He is sure that when the dazzling effect of the sun is over the very much existing stars will be visible to him. This is analogous to the case of a person whose attention is entirely absorbed by God when he is deeply involved in religious meditation or *ma‘rifat*, as sufis call it, he would be aware, during that experience, of nothing besides God; ontologically, however, there are existences besides Him of which he becomes aware immediately after the gnostic experiences subside and ultimately vanishes.

The difference between the two metaphysical positions pointed out above would not, as is clear, strictly fit in the ‘right-wrong’ or ‘correct-incorrect’ paradigm. Both of them are justified in their own rights, says Sheikh Ahmad himself. They, according to him, derive their cogency from their respective relevances to the two different evolutionary stages of the *salik*, the sufi wayfarer towards God-consciousness. In general, the error would only take place when a sufi actually stationed at one of the earlier stages thinks that he has arrived at one of the later stages or, having even been duped to believe that he has arrived at the final stage, discontinues his journey onwards. This latter is what according to him, happened with Ibn ‘Arabi who, at the stage of *fana fi’ Allah*, *i.e.* absorption in the being of God, regarded it as the highest high of the spiritual path and, accordingly, held on to God as the only Really Existent Being. Sheikh Ahmad says that he himself had visited that stage during his *suluk* and remained stationed thereat for many years. However, his longing and craze for ‘the higher’ and ‘still higher’ did not dissipate. Accordingly, he transcended that stage and reached the next

one which he terms the stage of *zilliyat* (adumbration). At this stage he developed the impression that the world has a being of its own though it is only the *zill* i.e. the shadow of God Who Himself is the *Asl* or the Real. Thus an inkling of duality arose in his consciousness. He began to harbour doubts about *Wabdat al-Wujud* but still had not the clarity of understanding enough to outrightly reject it. In course of time he outgrew even this stage and reached the stage of '*abdiyyat* (servitude). Having arrived at this level of spiritual elevation, he was thoroughly convinced of the error of *Wabdat al-Wujud* as a 'statement about the final state of affairs' and denounced it with a sense of spiritually awakened commitment and conviction²⁰. Now the duality of God and the world stood out absolutely clear for him. Parenthetically speaking, he realized that mystic experience **as such** has no definitive validity as to the affirmatively proud claim of some of the sufis that they have **known** the essence and/or the attributes of God. He firmly holds that neither His being nor His attributes are knowable in respect of their ontological status and character. If any valid observation can at all be made as regards knowledge of the Divine it can simply be: He is unapproachable, inexperienceable, inexplicable and unknowable²¹. Thus one can at the most assert negatively as to what **is not** the case. He is **beyond** any positive attributes that we may even ever conceive of. He is beyond all *shuyun-o-i'tibarat* (modes and relations), all *zubur-o-butun* (externalization and internalization), all *buruq-o-kumun* (projection and concealment), all *mawsul-o-mafsul* (realizable and explicable), all *kashf-o-shubud* (mystic intuition and ordinary observation); nay, even beyond all *mawhum-o-mutakhayyal* (conceivable and imaginable). He, the Holy One, is **beyond the beyond**; again, **beyond the beyond**; again, **beyond the beyond**.

In view of this privative stance put forth by Sheikh Ahmad, the rationale and the only justification of mysticism, according to him, is not that it would assure the prospect of a

knowledge of the Divine or His vision in the world here and now but simply that it provides, as a consequence of the enlightenment gleaned from the Supreme Experience, an assured ground for the sanctification of morals.

As has been seen above Sheikh Ahmad's view of "Cognitive Unity" or 'Unity of Manifestation' was arrived at by him in response to, but **broadly speaking** on the same grounds as, the 'Unity of Being' of Ibn 'Arabi. The declared ground claimed by either of them for his position was the same, *i.e.* the veracity of mystic experience. Exactly on this plane there can obviously be no arguments and no counter-arguments. However, for purposes of demonstration, fortunately both of them have corroborated the descriptions of their respective experiences with intuitively as well as theologically based rational vindication. On this plane Sheikh Ahmad tried to refute Ibn 'Arabi. The latter had upheld, like the Mu'tazilites of medieval times, that in God the *zat* (essence), on the one hand, and the *sifat* (attributes), on the other, are mutually identical; the world, being a *tajalli*, a manifestation of the attributes of God, is identical with His attributes; consequently, God is identical with the world. Sheikh Ahmad denies the truth of both the premises²³. As to the first premise he holds that God's attributes are not merely conceptually distinguishable from His essence but are rather actually and externally distinguishable. The essence and the attributes, the *Zat* and the *Sifat*, are however, co-eternal with each other and both are equally intrinsically unknowable. The second premise too is unjustified. The world does not comprise the *tajalli* or emanation of His attributes because if it were so God and the world would have been similar to each other but this, as we observe, is not at all the case. God's attributes are eternal and absolutely perfect whereas the world is temporal and also full of imperfections. If Ibn 'Arabi's thesis that the existence of the world is *manhum* (imaginary) is interpreted only symbolically so as to mean that the world does exist but the significance of its existence as compared to the existence of God is analogous to the imagination of an

object to the corresponding object that really exists, in that case the identity of the world with God, says Sheikh Ahmad, would be a logical absurdity. The world is of course temporal and contingent whereas God is Eternal and Necessary: how can they be identical with each other.

Refuting specially the so-called similarity/identity of Divine attributes to/with verbally the same attributes of human beings²⁴, who are the superiormost ones among the creatures, Sheikh Ahmad takes the example of the uniqueness of God's attribute of knowledge. From the human point of view God knows each and every object in the world and His knowledge of one object is different from His knowledge of another object. Actually, Sheikh Ahmad says, His knowledge is an atomic, eternal act with the help of which the whole process of time and the entire spatial multiplicity is laid bare before God. Similar is the case with the speech of God. "His Speech is a single, indivisible eternal Word embracing in its atomic being all the multiplicity and diversity of positive and negative commands, inspirations and revelations. The Old and the New Testaments as well as the Qur'an are not literally the Word they are rather manifestations, emanations and effects... of God's eternal and inexhaustible Speech. From the point of view of us humans, again, the Qur'an must remain the final, consummated Word of God, but from God's point of view it is only *the index* to His Speech"²⁵. Similar is the distinction between all the other Divine attributes, on the one hand, and lexically the same attributes of human beings, on the other, *e.g.* goodness, kindness, justice and so on.

The truthfulness of both the premises of Ibn 'Arabi having thus being refuted his conclusion *viz* God is identical and co-eternal with the world too loses its ground .

Further, the dos and don'ts, the *awamir-o-nawahi* given in the Qur'an for human beings as regards their behaviour in this world, as well as the promised rewards and punishments for them in the afterworld would become meaningless if it is not believed that the world has been made to exist by virtue

of its own right. Sheikh Ahmad further holds that the unreality/non-existence of the world as such would amount to the denial of God's attribute of *ibda'* (*ab initio* creation) *i.e.* of the fact that He really created the world²⁶.

Besides the logico-philosophical arguments given above, Sheikh Ahmad also refutes Ibn 'Arabi's characteristic Unityism on strictly scriptural and dialectical grounds and holds on to the Qur'an's unequivocal judgement that God is *Ghaniyy* (Sufficient unto Himself) *i.e.* independent of, and transcendent above, the world. Ibn 'Arabi had derived the inspiration for his position from the Qur'anic verse

We are nearer to man than his very life-vein (50:16)

allegedly meaning thereby that God being the very life of man is identical with him, essentially speaking. This verse, according to Sheikh Ahmad does mean that God is with man or that He is immensely near him or that He encompasses everyone/everything; however, these are only symbolic expressions: the exact nature of His nearness etc. is incomprehensible to human beings²⁷. Similarly, the saying 'He created man after His own image' does not mean that man is the personification or embodiment of the attributes of God. It only means that God and the human soul resemble each other in being non-spatial and that the soul of man administers and controls his entire body just as God runs and controls the entire universe. Advocates of man-God identity also refer in their favour to the very wise saying 'whosoever recognizes himself recognizes his Lord'. However, this saying really means that one who becomes aware of the defects, frailties and imperfections of his own nature alongwith an impassioned urge in him to realize perfection, impliedly does have a faith in a Being Who is perfect in every respect²⁸. Interestingly enough, this transposition from one's own imperfections to the existence of a Perfect God reminds of the Ontological argument for His existence put forth for the first time by St. Anselm. This argument in simple words runs something like this: As I am aware of my own being as

imperfect, I do have the idea of a perfect being in my mind. The being corresponding to this idea must exist because if it were not to exist, it would not be perfect as non-existence is obviously an imperfection. Hence (God as a) Perfect Being must exist.

As said above, *'adbiyyat* or servitude to God by man, doing by him whatever he has been ordered to do in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* and avoiding what he has been prohibited to do therein is the acme of his excellence. In that context a duly enlightened sufi would necessarily be one who is most adamant and sincere in his observance of *Shari'ah*. The touchstone of his revelations and intuitions is none but this. Consequently, Sheikh Ahmad has absolutely no soft corner for those self-acclaimed sufis who regard their so-called illuminations, views and practices as an institution parallel to the *Shari'ah* law or maybe even superior to it. As the sufis' claim to have had the knowledge or *ma'rifat* of God, he holds, that they do have it, but what exactly is the nature of this *ma'rifat*. True knowledge of God, he is of the opinion, amounts to the patent realization that He cannot be known at all. Sheikh Ahmad quotes²⁹ a saying of Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq (God be pleased with him!):

To realize one's inability to comprehend Him is the true comprehension; Holy is He Who has not kept any road to Himself open to His creatures except by way of realizing their incapacity to know Him.

As to the contention of the sufis that they have seen God in their illuminative revelations, this acclaimed experience, he says, is nothing but the projection of their own minds and the play of fantasies which they allowed to mature for their personal consolation and pleasure. Sheikh Ahmad says it is just a wish-fulfillment and nothing else³⁰: God has promised to unveil Himself to the faithful in the world hereafter and not in this world!

Wahdat al-Fitratiyyah: Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) is the well-known modernist religio-philosophical thinker of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. He strongly upheld the oneness of God after the fashion of the Mu ‘tazilite theologians of the earliest times as like them he subscribed to the view that the attributes of God are not over and above His essence but are rather identical with it. His attributes are his very essence. “God is alive”, he says, “not by virtue of His life but by virtue of His essence... He knows not by any organ of knowledge but by virtue of His essence... He hears not by any organ of audition but by virtue of His essence.”³¹ The oneness of God, he holds, is unparalleled and unique. Each and every ‘one’ that we know is the first cardinal number of a perceived or conceived series of objects or is such that it has a half or a one-third of it etc. But God neither belongs to a series nor does His oneness admit of division into parts. Faith in the existence of One God, he further says, does not amount to a blind conviction. It is rather a matter of commonsense with anyone who ordinarily looks at things and appreciates them in the right perspective. All people whether they belong to one religion or the other or allegedly to no religion at all do necessarily believe in God as **the one and only** Creator of the universe. “Man”, he once wrote to a friend, “simply cannot put God out of his mind. He pursues us so tenaciously that even if we try to disregard Him, we cannot. Similarly we ourselves are so indissolubly related to Him that even if He wishes to leave us He cannot”.³² However, if at all we need a rational argument for Divine Unity, he says, it can unequivocally be demonstrated on the basis of the character of the physical universe which is the cosmos and not a chaos. Cosmological argument is, for him the most cogent proof for the existence of God and the universe, being a homogeneous unity rather than a multiverse of a hodge-podge of objects and events, its final Uncaused Cause arrived at by this argument must Himself be the **Absolute One**³³.

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan is a naturalist. He holds that the universe in which we live is governed by certain laws which have a stringent, fixed-for-all-times character and which, by virtue of this fixity, entirely determine the behaviour of the course of nature. God created the universe and at the same time impregnated it with a set of/different sets of uniform modes of behaviour so that it is impossible for it to deviate from the prescribed pattern and go erratic: it continues to work regularly. Laws of nature, he says, are the practical promises of God and so, like the verbal promises made by Him in the Qur'an, are inviolable. They are not simply incapable of being violated by nature itself, even God — irrespective of the patent fact that He is omnipotent — does not violate them. He has, by virtue of His own choice, taken upon Himself not to go against the promises made by Him. He says:

(It is) the promise of Allah, Never does Allah depart from His promise: but most men understand not. (30:6)

No change can there be in the words of Allah (10:64)

It is He Who created all things and ordered them in due proportion (25 :2)

It is unthinkable in regard to God that He would go against His word and thus contradict Himself!

Sir Sayyid brackets his view of naturalistic determinism with his firm faith in reason as the most reliable source of knowledge. Human reason, independently by itself, he holds, can in principle discover all the laws of nature. These identifiable laws of nature comprised predetermined and inviolable causal relations to which Sir Sayyid's contemporaneous 19th century scientific climate of opinion subscribed with the commitment of almost a religious faith. These causal relations once known for certain with the help of argument and research become fundamentals for all subsequent thinking in the relevant department of the universe and so give to man perfect power of prediction as

regards the behaviour of nature. Before a sequence of two events, say X and Y, is declared to be causal in nature, Sir Sayyid says the ‘following three conditions must be fulfilled’:³⁴

(a) Whenever X is present Y must also be present, and *vice versa*

(b) Whenever X is absent Y must also be absent, and *vice versa*

(c) Whenever X varies Y must also vary, and *vice versa*

These conditions remind us of the well-known ‘Methods of Causal Determination’³⁵ given by Sir Sayyid’s younger contemporary British thinker J. S. Mill (1806– 1873). The latter gave four methods out of which three *viz.*, Method of Agreement, Method of Difference and Method of Concomitant Variation almost exactly correspond to the conditionalities a, b and c above respectively. Further, like Sir Sayyid, Mill too grants a very high degree of authenticity to his proffered causal laws and in fact regards them as methods of proof rather than as simply instruments of investigation.

Sir Sayyid refutes in very strong words those Muslim thinkers — Ghazali, and others — who think that as errors of sense experience are corrected by reason so errors of rational judgment, which are not very uncommon, are recognized and corrected by some still higher mode of knowledge such as an intuitive perception, a mystic disclosure and so on. He admits that reason sometimes does go erratic; but reason is not the private possession of any one individual: it is in fact the general mode of human comprehension. So the reason of one man, if it goes amiss, can be corrected by the reason of another man and that of one age, by that of the subsequent age. This process has ever continued and still goes on. Further, he asks, how can we ascertain the truth of a statement made on the ground of personal/private perception or how can we resolve contradictions/differences between the declarations of two so-called mystics etc. The answer, according to him, is nothing but ‘with the help of reason’ which in the last analysis alone can remove errors of perception and judgement in the broad-day light.

Nature considered to be totally bound by rationally recognizable cause-effect nexuses, reason believed to be the superiormost mode of knowledge and cause-effect sequence having been declared as a necessary relationship in nature, there is left absolutely no room for the involvement of any component whatsoever of supernaturalism in our ordinary spatio-temporal context. God is the Supernatural Being no doubt but as He acts and manifests Himself in the phenomenal world, His behaviour must be in accord and harmony with the ‘natural laws’ known/knowable by man. Hence there can be no ‘miracles’ defined as ‘direct interventions of the Supernatural Being of God into the natural course of events. Sir Sayyid is well-known for his repudiation of miracles. In his *Tafsir al-Qur’an* and in his various published articles he has tried to divest the ‘miraculous happenings’, mentioned in the Qur’an and recognized by the orthodox as such, of their supernatural aspect and propose them as ordinary natural events. He employed three ways³⁶ to do so:

- i. the way of Lexicographic (or linguistic) analysis
- ii. the way of psychologization
- iii. the way of metaphorization

The first of these methods he used, for instance, in regard to Prophet Moses’ crossing of the sea. The Qur’an states— as the text is generally translated— that he was commanded to strike the sea water with his staff and as the result of his doing so water was rent asunder to create a dry path for him and his men to walk over. The Qur’anic command

[strike the sea with your staff (26:62)] which gives to the event a miraculous colour, can also — does really— mean, according to Sir Sayyid, ‘walk through the sea with the help of your staff’. It was the time, according to Sir Sayyid’s own historio-geographical research, when the sea tide was on the ebb and Moses was asked to walk (carefully) on the marshy ground vacated by the tides with the help of his staff. Similar language-analysis was resorted to by him in regard to many

other 'miraculous' stories related by the Qur'an. As an illustration of the method of psychologization we can mention Sir Sayyid's treatment of the incident of *Mi'raj* of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) which is generally considered to be the zenith of direct contact with God which was made available to him. After a detailed discussion during which he quotes many *abadith* in his favour, he comes to the conclusion that it was just an ordinary experience in dream. Similarly, the concept of acceptance by God of the petitionary prayers of human beings has, according to him, no 'matter-of-hard-fact' significance. When in trouble and having exhausted all his efforts humanly possible for him, man is in a state of helplessness, he appeals in humility to Almighty God for the alleviance of his sufferings. Thus having given a vent to his pent-up emotions, he feels relieved and relaxed. This, according to him, is the entire meaning of the 'acceptance of prayers' by God which He has duly promised in the Qur'an. After all if I cannot help myself and if all lesser doors of help are closed to me and, consequently, as the last measure, I have addressed my appeal to the All-Powerful Diving Being: that is the maximum that I could do. So let me be peaceful now! As to the third method that comprises bringing various ethereal notions down to the earth, for Sir Sayyid *mala'ika* (angels) of the Qur'an, for instance, are not any sort of supernatural beings but only a convenient term that connotes the laws of things and of the entire course of nature. Taking a cue from the Qur'anic verse which says that angels are the executors of the commandments of God (16:50), he says that it is of course the laws of nature that happen to execute every thing in the universe. Similarly Satan has no substantial existence as an individual: words such as *Shaitan*, *Iblis* etc. used by the Qur'an only stand for evil forces and for all disvalues recognized by the Qur'an. When evil is emphasized just as a force or power to be reckoned with Satan is recognized by it to be one of the angels; when, on the other hand, the rebellious character of evil is to be highlighted Satan is said to have been created out of fire. Heaven and

hell are literally not the kind of localities with their respective paraphernalia as shown by the word of the Qur'an. All the descriptions in their regard are symbolic. Their real nature, he says, we cannot even visualize. What at the most we can say is that the heaven will be a state of perfect happiness and hell that of abject agonies and torments.

Nature, for Sir sayyid Ahmad Khan, is so authentic and reason is so supreme and reliable that the latter can prove, almost with the necessity of logical entailment, the very existence of God as the Supernatural Being on the basis of natural premises. Such a proof, as referred to above is the Cosmological Argument.⁵⁷ This argument, as we know, hinges on the phenomenon of causality in the cosmos. The universe being a cosmos and not a chaos, there is a temporally extending series of cause-effect relations therein. Every effect has a cause: with reference to the latter the former can be understood and explained. That cause itself is the effect of another cause, that of still another cause, and so on. Proceeding backwards (or upwards!) in this series, we must— as required by the propriety of understanding the universe— stop at a cause which is self-explanatory *i.e.* it does not have a cause of its own: it is the uncaused cause of its own effect and, subsequently, of the entire series of causes and effects that follows. This Uncaused Cause is God. This argument has been seriously criticized on various counts. We need not go into the details of this criticism. However, for one thing, it proves a God, Who long ago created the first effect and thus set the ball rolling and the ball still rolls on by virtue of its own momentum. Thus the argument at least suits well the kind of the Deistic concept of God-universe relationship that Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan upholds. His God is practically an absentee God because for him, here and now, all the affairs of nature are managed and controlled by the laws which have once for all been woven by Him into the constitution of nature.

The course of nature, which we live and of which, for all practical purposes, we ourselves are a part and parcel, being

independent, self-sufficient and self-explanatory, there can, for Sir Sayyid, be no entirely personal epistemic liaison of the man of the spatio-temporal world with God, the Supernatural Being. Besides, such a personal liaison would require a mode of apprehension higher than reason whereas reason, from his point of view, is the superiormost mode of knowledge available to man. We have already seen³⁸ how he explains away the unique experience of revelation of the prophets and reduced it to an ordinary psychological experience entirely grounded in, and originating from the consciousness (or the unconscious) of the prophets themselves. In an article entitled '*Mukashafa*'³⁹ Sir Sayyid has carried out the same reductionist policy in regard to the gnostic experience acclaimed by the sufis. For him what a sufi claims to observe during his experiences is nothing but a display of his whims—howsoever sacred these whims may be—on which he concentrates, and just an imaginative exteriorization of his own ideas. A sufi may assert that he has known the secrets of creation, the realities about the life hereafter, the nature of heaven and hell or that he has had *ma'rifat*⁴⁰ of the Divine— all these, according to him, are nothing but different sorts of auto-suggestion, his own cherished concepts which, firmly embedded in his mind, have been allowed to mature. Beatific vision of God on which Imam Ghazali and others have laid so much emphasis as the ideal *par excellence* of the spiritual journeyer, that will be realizable in the next world, is in principle nothing else than a reflection of the inner experience of the seer and a projection of his own desire. Audaciously, Sir Sayyid goes on to say that the Prophet Moses (p.b.u.h.) who thought he heard God speaking to him was simply displaying his imagination, an idea in his mind that he somehow managed to develop in a particular direction. In another article entitled *Waqi'at 'Ammatul Wurud* (Ordinary Occurrences) Sir Sayyid has quoted various instances of everyday events from the life of Shah Waliullah and from his own life which, as he holds, happened just by chance but which some others would regard to have been miraculously

engineered by God as an enlightenment and grace from God; and sometimes comprising His reproach over an occasional moral or spiritual failing by them.

Wahdat al-Inniyyat: ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal

‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) is popularly recognized as the Philosopher-poet of Pakistan. His major religio-philosophical work in prose is *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. In the third chapter of this book he brings out in detail his concept of God. On the basis of his discussion in the preceding two chapters (titled ‘Knowledge and Religious Experience’ and ‘The Philosophical Test of the Revelations of Religious experience’ respectively), he observes in the very beginning that ‘the judgement based upon religious experience’ (the generic term for mystic experience) as corroborated and confirmed by ‘the intellectual test of this experience leads us to the conviction that God , the Ultimate Reality is “a rationally directed creative will which we have found reasons to describe as an ego”⁴¹. Emphasizing the oneness of God ‘Allama Iqbal characterized Him as an Individual, a Person, a Great-I-Am Who exists most truly and with absolute authenticity. “Only that truly exists which can say ‘I am’. It is the degree of the intuition of ‘I-amness’ that determines the place of a thing in the scale of being. We too say ‘I am’. But our I-amness’ is dependent and arises out of the distinction between the self and the not-self... His ‘I-amness’ is independent, elemental, absolute”⁴².

God being a Person, He has His own habits and rules of behaviour. His behaviour, obviously, comprises the working of the entire spatio-temporal world that we know. “Nature is to the Divine Self”, he says, “as character is to the human self”⁴³. So organic being the relationship between the universe and God, the entire furniture of the former from the lowest state of dead matter to the highest state of human beings comprises egos and egos alone. Creative activity of God functions as ego-unities because ‘from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed’. There are, however, degrees of egohood in

nature: “Throughout the entire gamut of being runs the gradually rising note of egohood until it reaches its perfection in man”⁴⁴. There are unconscious egos comprising the material world, there are conscious egos of the animal world and there are self-conscious egos characteristic with human beings in this world. Self-consciousness, further, has its own grades, its levels being measurable by the status of the authenticity of the self involved. Iqbal has brought out the absolutely perfect individuality of God, “closed off as an ego, peerless and unique”,⁴⁵ by referring to the Qur’anic *surah Iklas*:

Say: Allah is One
 All things depend on Him
 He begetteth not and He is not begotten
 And there is none like unto Him (112: 1-4)

The Qur’an in these verses specially denies reproduction to God. Iqbal quotes Bergson who, defining ‘individuality’, says that

while the tendency to individuate is everywhere present in the organized world, it is everywhere opposed by the tendency towards reproduction. For the individuality to be perfect it would be necessary that no detached part of the organism could live separately... (In the case of) reproduction... individuality ... harbours its own enemy at home⁴⁶.

Iqbal also refers to the metaphor of light used for God in order to bring out the individualistic concept of God. The Qur’an says:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth. His light is like a niche in which is a lamp— the lamp encased in a glass— glass, as it were, a star (24:35)

The opening statement in the verse does give the impression that ‘All is God’ or that ‘God is All’ but says Iqbal, as we read this part of the verse with the rest of it that follows, “the metaphor gives just the opposite impression. The development of the metaphor is meant rather to exclude the suggestion of a formless cosmic element by centralizing

the light in a flame which is further individualized by its encasement in a glass liked unto a well-defined star".⁴⁷

Despite the above clearly laid down theistic stance of Iqbal, there has incidentally been a controversy hotly pursued among the Iqbal scholars, that is very much alive even to-day, namely, whether he was a theistic or a pantheistic thinker. To all appearance, very forceful arguments have been marshalled by those who regard him a pantheist and also by those who regard him a theist, but the swing of the pendulum is by and large towards the latter.⁴⁸ In comparison with the transparently direct statements available in his maturest philosophical thought in regard to his concept of God as a Person and in regard to his idea of the more and more well-integrated individual human self being the ideal of perfect manhood in Islam, the interpretation of some of his submissions towards bringing out what is claimed to be his pantheistic position have in our estimate a comparatively lesser value. Anyway, the potential of Iqbal's views to be interpreted either way is itself one of the defining characteristics of his unique concept of the nature of Divine Unity and, by implication, of God-man-universe relationship.

Iqbal's theistic rather than the pantheistic standpoint which, we have said, is the more outstanding one, is to all obviousness very much different from the theistic Unitarianism of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, as elaborated above. According to the latter God is absolutely transcendent—*Wara' al-Wara'* (beyond all beyonds), as he describes Him.⁴⁹ Having proposed his concept of God as a Person, and, the concept of His will-attitudes, purposes and plans that are operative in the universe, Iqbal views God-universe relationship not as one of mutual exclusiveness but as that of intimate, organic concern. The spatio-temporal universe, he says on the authority of the Qur'an, is so authentic and so meaningful (and so sacred also) towards our God-consciousness that it is immensely replete with *ayat* (signs) *i.e.* the eloquent pointers to His existence and the evidential manifestation of His supremacy and grandeur [It is very informative to note that

the Qur'anic verses themselves too are known as *ayat*!] Moreover, God has been described by the Qur'an as the Bearer of Beautiful Names which incidentally are at the same time ideals of excellence to be realized by man in his moral and spiritual life. As a soldier of these ideals man, says Iqbal, aspires to be a co-worker with God⁵⁰: God also grants assistance to, and co-works with, man provided— rather, only if— he takes the initiative:

And that man can have nothing but what he strives for (53:39)

It would be very interesting to note as to how a casual reader may compare the positions of Sheikh Ahmad and 'Allama Iqbal in regard to their respective views about the stratification of religio-mystical life of man. According to the former, as we have seen,⁵¹ a mystico-psychological experience of the Divine and what this experience immediately discovers is only a preliminary stage and not the final statement, as it is sometimes believed to be the case, about the God-man-universe phenomenon. Sheikh Ahmad, too had passed through that stage in his own spiritual journey; but then, passing through some other stages of greater and greater excellence, reached what he declared to be the final stage, *viz* the stage of '*abdiyyat* (servitude). '*Abdiyyat*, according to him, envisages the true relationship that is recommended, rather prescribed, by the Qur'an between God, the Transcendent Being, who is the *Ma'bood* and the man-in-the-world who is the '*abid*. The Qur'an says:

And I have not created the jin and the men except that they should serve Me (51:56)

The way man can carry out his servitude to God is to do what He commands him to do and to scrupulously avoid what He prohibits and thus be more and more adamant, without any ifs and buts, in his observance of the Islamic *Shari'ah* laws.

'Allama Iqbal in his enumeration of the three periods of religious life, to which we have already referred,⁵² appears to regard the final stage of Sheikh Ahmad as the first one of his

own and the stage which the latter had already surpassed and transcended as the last one of his own. Writing about the chronology of religious life, Iqbal says:

In the first period religious life appears as a form of discipline which the individual or a whole people must accept as an unconditional command without any rational understanding of the ultimate meaning and purpose of that command

Talking of the second stage of religious growth, he says:

Perfect submission to discipline is followed by a rational understanding of the discipline and the ultimate source of its authority. In this period religious life seeks its foundation in a kind of metaphysics— a logically consistent view of the world with God as a part of this view.

Finally,

Metaphysics is displaced by psychology, and religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the Ultimate Reality. It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power and the individual achieves a free personality not by releasing himself from the fetters of the laws, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness⁵³. [italics mine]

The casual, off-hand comparative study undertaken in the above two paragraphs, when seen closely, does not of course draw the real picture of the views of our two great thinkers. Actually, there is no significant difference between their views specially in regard to the nature of the final stage of religion as conceived by them. 'Allama Iqbal's first stage of the 'obedience to law' is the stage only of the layman who observes the law as if it is externally imposed upon him *i.e* without feeling any concern for it from the innermost depth of his own being. His final stage of 'discovery' on the other hand, is the stage of the elite, which he very wisely qualifies, as quoted above, as the one in which

the individual achieves a free personality not by releasing himself from the fetters of the law but by *discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness*. [italics mine]

Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi's last stage of man's strict observance of the *Shari'ah* law was too the one which he had arrived at by already having achieved the richness of his being through his own mystical experience against whose background alone he talked of '*abdiyyat*' as the highest stage of religious life. Thus what both, in the final analysis, recommend is the enrichment of the observance of *Shari'ah* law with its anchorage in the personal experience of the Ultimate Reality.

'Allama Iqbal hesitates to call his 'discovery' stage of religious life by the name of 'mysticism' simply because of the fact that it has, by an error of judgement, generally been 'supposed to be a life-denying, fact-avoiding attitude of mind directly opposed to the radically empirical outlook of our times'⁵⁴. Otherwise, he is all praise for mysticism as a genuine experience which, being very much a dimension of human consciousness essential to higher religion, cannot be denied. In fact, in the question 'Is religion possible' posed by him in the last chapter of his *Reconstruction*, the word 'religion' stands for 'religious experience'— the blanket term used by him as inclusive of both the mystic and the prophetic forms of consciousness, which are according to him similar to each other in regard to their quality. His answer to the question raised is in the affirmative. Higher religion, he says, is essentially an experience and in that capacity it integrates the personality of the one, who upholds it, on the most impeccable grounds:

Religion, which in its higher manifestations is neither dogma nor priesthood nor ritual, can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of modern science necessarily involves and restore to him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it hereafter⁵⁵.

Historically speaking, ‘Allama Iqbal in the beginning of his intellectual career, specially before the appearance of his *Asrar-e Khudi* (Secrets of the Self) in 1915 was a passionate admirer of pantheistic mysticism. He had accepted the traditional pantheistic interpretation of the thought of Maulana Jalal al-Din Rumi and also of Mansur Hallaj. Later on, however, he began to emphasize the nature of God as a Person with Whom man as an individual can aspire to have an I-Thou relationship. He can now be said to have rediscovered Rumi as an ardent advocate of the ‘*ishq* (love) of man for a personal God and to have reinterpreted Hallaj, in the light of newer researches on him, as to have had no intention to deny the transcendence of God: his (I am the Truth) does not amount to “the drop slipping into the sea but the realization and bold affirmation in an undying phrase of the reality and permanence of the human ego in a profounder personality.”⁵⁶ Iqbal also now criticized in strong and unequivocal terms the concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* put forth by Muhyi al-Din Ibn ‘Arabi. One big declared reason with Iqbal for coming out of his pantheistic frame of reference was the acute realization that it necessarily implied renunciation of the world and an attitude of fatalism.

Mysticism, specially Theistic Mysticism, we have already seen, is man’s encounter with the Personal God and the Qur’anic concept of prayer, Iqbal rightly observes, is the formal instrument of this encounter. Prayer, as conceived by the Qur’an, is not essentially and necessarily petitionary in character so that it may amount to ‘having more’; actually it amounts to ‘being more’. Comparing ‘philosophy’ with ‘mysticism’ he says:

In thought the mind observes and follows the working of Reality; in the act of prayer it gives up its career as a seeker of slow-footed universality and rises higher than thought to capture Reality itself with a view to become a conscious participator in its life⁵⁷.

Prayer thus comprising man's transposition from temporal associations to a participation in the eternal existence, from the drudgery of worldly occupations to a meeting with God, the Ultimate Source of life and freedom, it is to be understood as 'essentially ego's escape from mechanism to freedom'. The Qur'an, according to one interpretation, refers to the possibility of such a transposition when it says:

O assembly of jinn and men, if you are able to pass through the regions of the heaven and the earth then pass through them. You cannot pass through but with authority (55:33)

The freer thus man is the more perfect and self-contained he becomes, according to Iqbal, in terms of the uniqueness of his individuality so that there remains no fear of its disintegration even in the face of the heaviest possible odds. The ideal of perfect manhood in Islam is the personage of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) as even during his vision of the Ultimate Ego on the occasion of *Mi'raj*

his eye turned not aside nor did it wander (53: 17)

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- ¹ Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, *Maktubat Imam Rabbani*, Urdu translation by Maulana Muhammad Saeed Ahmad, Vol II, *maktub* No.1. It may be interesting to compare Ibn 'Arabi's doctrine of emanation with the doctrine of emanation that was put forth by Farabi and Ibn Sina who have been known as the advocates of Theism. Their doctrine was elaborated and critically examined on logical grounds by Ghazali in his *Tahafut al Falasifa*, Chapter No. 1
- ² See above, pp. 89-90.
- ³ For a detailed account of *fana'* (and *baqa'*) see below, pp. 143-149.
- ⁴ For the nature of mystic experience as transient see above, pp. 87-89.
- ⁵ A.E. Affifi, a well-known writer on Ibn 'Arabi, for example, regards him a 'pantheist'; see his *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din Ibnul Arabi, passim*. Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his *Three Muslim Sages*, however, denies with the help of arguments this appellation to Ibn 'Arabi.
- ⁶ Ibn 'Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, p.151.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.11.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.10.

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¹⁰ The Qur'an says: We have indeed created man in the best of moulds (95:4).

¹¹ An *hديث-e qudsi* is by definition an extra-Qur'anic revelation.

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¹³ A. E. Affifi, *op.cit.* p.154.

¹⁴ Qur'an, 2 :30.

¹⁵ Ibn 'Arabi, *op.cit.* p.19.

¹⁶ A.E. Affifi, *op.cit.* p.83.

¹⁷ Qur'an, 22: 65.

¹⁸ Ibn Arabi, *op.cit.* p.20.

¹⁹ Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, *op.cit.* Vol. I, *maktub* 43.

²⁰ *Ibid*, *maktub* 160.

²¹ *Ibid*, Vol II, *maktub* 9.

²² *Ibid*, *muktub* 1.

²³ *Ibid*, Vol-III, *muktub* 26, 100,110,113,114.

²⁴ *Ibid*, Vol. II, *maktub* 1.

²⁵ *Ibid*, Vol I, *maktub* 226 [English rendering is by Fazlur Rehman (ed.) *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi*, pp.67-69]

²⁶ *Ibid*, Vol. I, *maktub* 257.

²⁷ *Ibid*, Vol II, *maktub* 60.

²⁸ *Ibid*, Vol I, *maktub* 234.

²⁹ *Ibid*, Vol III, *maktub* 122.

³⁰ *Ibid*, Vol I, *maktub* 234.

³¹ *Maqalat-e Sir Sayyid* (Urdu), ed. by Muhammad Isma'il Panipati, Vol XIII, p.3.

³² Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali, *Hayat-e Javed* (Urdu), pp.869-870.

³³ *Maqalat-e Sir Sayyid*, *op.cit.*

³⁴ See Sir Sayyid's account of the First Principles of inductive reasoning, *ibid*, Vol III. pp.286-300.

³⁵ John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Logic*.

³⁶ For this classification see J.M.S. Baljon, *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, P.73.

³⁷ *Maqalat-e Sir Sayyid* (Urdu), *op.cit* Vol III, pp.28-32.

³⁸ See above, pp. 99-100.

³⁹ *Maqalat-e Sir Sayyid*, Vol I, pp, 110-113.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 114-117.

⁴¹ 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.50.

⁴² *Ibid*, p.45.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 45.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 57.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.50.

⁴⁶ Henry Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.14.

⁴⁷ ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* P.51.

⁴⁸ See the article by B.A. Dar, ‘*Iqbal Shanas aur Funun*’ (Urdu), pp.94-110.

⁴⁹ See above, p. 145.

⁵⁰ ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* p.10.

⁵¹ See above, p. 143

⁵² See above, pp. 13-14.

⁵³ ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* p.143.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.149.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.77.

⁵⁷ *Ibid* pp.71-72.

LOGIC SCIENCE MYSTICISM AND PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy, as we know, is the study of the Ultimate nature of Reality and of the problems which are of ultimate cosmic significance. Basically, the method that the philosophers use for their enterprise is critical analysis, ratiocination and argument. Mysticism, as we have already seen, aims, on the other hand, at nothing less than a direct encounter with, a gnostic experience of, the Ultimate Being. What the philosopher only *thinks about* in a dry, cool and calculated manner the mystic *perceives*; concept of the former is a percept for the latter. The supreme, intimate experience of the mystic invigorates him with a sterling self-confidence, robust wisdom and pure, pristine cosmic vision with which to appreciate various questions relating to life and existence. So mysticism, as different from philosophy, has its own line of approach, its own *modus operandi* with regard to the solution of problems which in a way are common between mysticism and philosophy. Now, philosophy, traditionally, has given itself the right to probe into every sphere of knowledge whatever— including the sphere of mysticism and mystic experience— and judge it with its own methodology. The same right reciprocally may be claimed by mysticism *vis a vis* all other spheres of knowledge including philosophy. Being men of experience, the mystics are in fact better equipped to undertake a survey of the so-called perennial problems of

philosophy, specifically those posed by philosophy of religion, and find out the truth about them. In what follows we shall concentrate on only some of these problems and see how the logicians/philosophers try to solve them; and how the mystics, equipped with their own criterion of truth approach them. Before, however, we do so let us briefly refer in general to the distinct natures of various criteria of truth commonly recognized and the corresponding areas of study to which they are rightly applicable. Or, to put the same thing in another way, we shall identify various universes of being and existence and also the corresponding various modes of research and investigation exclusively relevant to them each.

Broadly speaking, truths are of three kinds: logico-mathematical truths, empirico-scientific truths and religio-mystical truths. The first ones are formal in nature. They are not at all relevant to, and even do not presuppose, any knowledge of the behaviour of the external world. They thrive on internal coherence and self-consistency rather than on correspondence with the facts of experience. 'A triangle is a three-sided figure', 'two and two make four', 'If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal' are all formally true statements. Given the definitions of the concepts involved and the guaranteed observance of the axiomatic rules of implication, such statements need no external evidence in order to be accepted as absolutely sure. No amount of counter-reasoning, if any, can falsify them because the basis of their truthfulness is inherent in themselves and not in any principle besides them which may be referred to. However, being entirely grounded in the principle of self-consistency, they add nothing to our knowledge of the world. We can as well call them truths of reason or just 'rational truths' *par excellence*.

As opposed to logico-mathematical truths, scientific truths are empirical in character. They are basically the truths of sense experience. Our entire gamut of knowledge about the spatio-temporal world in fact involves a process of induction, a process of going from the known in sense to the unknown

generalizations and to predictions about the future course of events. Consequently it necessarily implies what has been known as, an inductive leap— a leap in the dark, as it were. The nature of scientific truths being such, they are always hypothetical and tentative and they invariably retain an element of uncertainty about themselves: they are never absolutely sure. ‘Water has quenched thirst in the past, so water always quenches thirst’, ‘The crows that I have, or anyone else has, seen were black, so all crows are black’. ‘Sun has always risen in the East, so it will rise in the East tomorrow also’ are all the examples of empirico-inductive truths of science.

In between these two varieties of truths, *viz.* the rational truths of logic and the sense experiential truths of science, are the truths of higher religion and of mysticism. These truths, which ultimately relate to the being of God and His entire scheme of purposes and plans, are subjective in character as they derive a major, if not the entire, amount of their justification from the character and status of the person who recognizes these truths not as a rational being only and not as a sentient being only but as a being with has organic wholeness. Truths of subjectivity are like logical truths in being absolutely sure and they are like scientific truths in being facts of experience. At the same time, they are unlike logical truths in not being based on reason and they are unlike scientific truths in having absolutely no element of doubt in them. So they are like them in certain respects and unlike them in certain respects. They, in fact, occupy a no-man’s land between the two, partly participating in, and partly dissociating from, both of them. The subjective truths, as the truths of higher religion are recognized to be, are the truths of deeply personal experience— the truths of *iman bi’al-ghaib*, in the terminology of the Qur’an. We have already explained the experiential nature of *iman*.¹ One of the proclamations that an individual has to make in order to enter the fold of Islam and be one of the ‘faithful’ is (I bear witness to

the fact that there is no god except One God). So *iman* is *shahadah*, a testimony, a 'being witness to'. How can I bear witness to a state of affairs unless I have experienced it myself. The *surah al-Baqarah* of the Qur'an, starts with a prefatory note:

This is the Book without doubt. It is a guidance for those God-fearing ones **who have faith in the Unseen...** (2:2-3)

The conditions, that a person must fulfill for getting guidance from the Qur'an and, as a prelude, for the understanding of its message and its entire metaphysics, are not laid down as, for instance, a good knowledge of Arabic language, or a healthy faculty of rational analysis, or an awareness of the habits and customs of the Arabs at the time when the Qur'an was revealed, etc. All these are important in their own respective rights but of basic importance is the attainment of the supreme personal experience that is connoted by faith or *iman*. One who does not have a firm faith in God is likely to commit blunders in the understanding of the mind of the Qur'an, specially as regards its metaphysics and has every likelihood to be led astray in his behaviour despite his good knowledge of Arabic etc.

Thus, against the perspective delineated above, sufism, the esoteric dimension of the religion of Islam, would have its own subjectivist — transsubjectivist, to be more exact—approach towards the solution of various perennial problems which have been the subject-matter of philosophy, specially, of philosophy of religion. We shall presently deal with some of these problems, giving their philosophical context in some detail and also a sufi's characteristic attitude towards them.

Problem of Evil

'Why is there evil in the world?' is one of the most persistent questions faced by philosophy of Religion on which volumes have been written but to which no final or even satisfactory answer has been found so far by the advocates of this discipline. The evils that we encounter in

our everyday life are of immense varieties; they can, however, be roughly classified into the following groups:

- i) *Cosmic Evils*: earth quakes, cyclones, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions etc. fall into this category. They are caused, independently of the human will, by huge cosmic forces.
- ii) *Psycho-physical Evils*: to this class belong bodily sufferings or pains, physical diseases that sometimes develop unawares, mental unease and anguish, terror of impending death, and so on.
- iii) *Moral Evils*: these evils, by virtue of their ground and source, are characteristically human and grow out of freedom of choice of which he alone is the trustee as well as out of his sense of accountability that goes alongwith this freedom. All activities that fall short of the ideals of moral and spiritual excellence are broadly classified under 'moral evils'
- iv) *Metaphysical/Supernatural Evils*: witchcraft, Satanic insinuations, demonic mischiefs, machinations of sorcerers and magicians of which there is a lot of mention in the Qur'an are the kind of evils that emanate from mysterious sources outside the purview of man's experience and understanding and that occasionally cause immense trouble for him.

In the religious context and particularly in the context of theism (or, still more relevantly, in the context of pantheism) where God is clearly conceived to be a Person—All-Good, Omnipotent and Omniscient, Who is the cause, the reason as well as the rationale of the universe—the problem of evil assumes a serious dimension. If God is good, omnipotent as well as omniscient, there appears to be no justification for the existence of evil in the world. How can a good God Who, entirely by Himself, is all-powerful also and Who foreknows the consequences His act of creation will lead to, create a universe which perpetually abounds in evils of various kinds. These three attributes of God alongwith evil in the world cannot all of them, it is argued, mutually co-exist

without committing a logical contradiction here or there. Affirmation of Divine attributes is the basic article of faith of a man of religion and evil is an eloquent fact of our everyday experience. The former fact is irrevocable on religious grounds; the latter fact is irrevocable on experiential grounds. In the face of all this, how to resolve the predicament.

Among the religious thinkers, a Deist would dismiss the problem by saying that God, after having created the universe and the laws of its operation, has withdrawn Himself from it: hence no **here-and-now** problem of the justification of evil *vis a vis* God and His attributes; a Pantheist would say that good and evil— in general, all apparent opposites— like the thesis and the anti-thesis of Hegelian cosmology, have become one and have synthesized themselves into the constitution of the universe: hence no contradiction as such that needs to be resolved; a strict Theist of the variety, which, for example, Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi advocates, the problem simply does not emerge to be grappled with as it does not have any ‘meaningful’ relevance to the kind of man-God or universe-God relationship: man’s only function is to obey God and carry out His commandments; Panentheists alone among the religious persons are likely to feel the pinch of the problem-situation and are urgently impelled from within to resolve it. The laymen among them would of course stick to a quietist, fatalistic stance and refuse to think. However, those who have the courage to think seek to change the ordinary connotation for, or sometimes deny outright the existence of, evil in the world or/and goodness of God or/and His omnipotence or/and His omniscience and fore-knowledge. By this technique they hope to defuse the situation by rounding off its sharp corners and thus paving the way towards the solution of the problem.

First, the existence of evil! There are certain optimist thinkers who are temperamentally inclined to look at the bright side of everything and focus on it so thoroughly that the dark side, if any, fails to detract them. Leibniz is one of such thinkers. For him the present world of ours is the best

possible one, better than which could not be conceived and created. As the world is the creation of God, he says, and so less than Him, it must have limitations of every kind. It is these limitations which generate evil. So evil is not something substantial and positive. It is privative and negative and can only be understood as the absence of perfection. Leibniz further says that we have an impression that a particular thing is evil sometimes because we fail to recognize the immense good of which that so-called evil is the cause and sometimes because, in general, we take a partial view of things and fail to appreciate the goodness of the whole towards which the parts are indispensably the contributing factors. "If you look at a very beautiful picture, having covered the whole of it except a very small part it will present to your sight ... a confused mass of colours ... yet if you remove the covering and look at the whole picture... you will find that what appeared to have been carelessly daubed on the canvas was really done by the painter with very great art".² According to Nasir al-Din Tusi, a well known Muslim thinker of the 13th century, too evil has no tangible existence. It is not a positive something but just a negation, just an accident, being a necessary concomitant or a by-product of matter. Moral evils in particular, he says, are occasioned by an error of judgement or a lack of knowledge. He further points out that evil is relative and not absolute: what is evil for one man may be good for another one.³

As regards God's attribute of goodness, it is observed that He is not 'good' in the sense in which this epithet is ordinarily applied to human beings as the moral agents or to their moral behaviour. Man is called good when, having two or more conflicting desires, he freely chooses one of them that, he thinks, better conforms to the moral ideal, which is beyond him and which he has already accepted as such, and proceeds to act for its realization. Now God cannot be regarded as going through a period of vacillation and indecision 'what to do and what not to do', nor can He be conceived to have any norms or ideals — besides, and over and above, His own Being — to which His acts must conform. He, by Himself, is

the norm *par excellence* which everyone must look to for compliance. To propose that He is 'good' or that He displays 'good' behaviour', in the sense in which we understand these terms in the human context, would be inappropriate, to say the least. He simply acts, that's all we can say. The Qur'an says:

Verily when He intends a thing, His command is 'Be' and it is!
(36:82)

He is Supreme and Absolute and dependent on nothing/none else. His knowledge and His will are in fact two aspects of the same phenomenon.

God's omnipotence or all-powerfulness is also shown to have at least two clearly understood distinct meanings: the occasionalist and the naturalist. The former is accepted by the orthodox, very ably advocated by Ash'arite theologians and by Imam Ghazali, the philosopher. According to them, each and every happening in the universe is the direct act of God: not even a leaf can move without His decree. There are no relations inherent in nature itself: no object in nature has any indigenous capability to affect anything. In the so-called causal relationship, for example, both the cause as well as the effect are directly produced by God. It is His habit of uniformly producing the so-called effect immediately after the so-called cause produced by Him that gives us the impression that the cause itself is the agency producing the effect⁴. The naturalist position, on the other hand, is adopted by the upholders of the supremacy of the natural law. According to them God has created a universe which is inherently regular and not a hotch-potch jumble in which regularities may have to be introduced by Him later on. The laws of nature, as Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the naturalist, says, are the practical promises of God which like His verbal promises, He never violates. So in fact, the naturalists say, God's all-powerfulness operates in nature indirectly *i.e.* through the 'laws of nature' which, here and now and for all practical purposes, are supreme.⁵ Further, all-powerfulness of God is not considered

to be absolute as it is hedged in by certain qualifications: it does not extend to logical impossibilities nor does it extend to the violations of His own Being. The questions such as ‘can God make two sides of a triangle taken together less than the third side?’, ‘can God create another God exactly like Himself?’, ‘can God go back upon His own words?’ and so on are the questions which lack any meaning or significance, not to speak of deserving an answer in affirmation or negation. J.S. Mill, has outrightly denied omnipotence of God in order to save His goodness as well as the matter-of-factness of evil in the world⁶. Some of the modern Pragmatists have followed Mill in this respect.

As to God’s omniscience and, specially, His foreknowledge, a section of the philosophers have expressed some reservations. The orthodox have always believed that God’s knowledge encompasses everything and is not at all conditioned by any limitations whatever, whether of space or of time. However, Muslim philosophers, Farabi and Ibn Sina, we know, formulated logical arguments for their standpoint that although God knows all the particulars yet He does not know them directly: He knows them through universals under which specific sets of particulars are subsumed. They put forth this view because, allegedly, they thereby wanted to save Divine eternity and perfection. It is a matter of common experience that the particulars as such come and go: they are in a perpetual flux and change. Also, they exist in the past, the present or the future. If, they said, it is held that God knows the particulars *qua* particulars that will imply that He Himself has a past, a present and a future *i.e.* He lives in serial time; and also the changing particulars, being the objects of His knowledge, would necessitate change in His own being in the capacity of their Perceptient; and change implies imperfection⁷. Further, in our own times, ‘Allama Iqbal denied foreknowledge to God for the reason that knowledge of the so-called future events, if attributed to God, would make the chain of various events— past, present and future — as already given and God as a merely passive spectator of

these events. This will amount to the introduction of stark determinism and fixity in the universe which is against the Qur'anic concept of a growing universe and His perpetual activity of creation⁸. How beautifully Iqbal says:

یہ کائنات ابھی نا تمام ہے شاید کہ آ رہی ہے ملام صدائے کن ٹیون⁹
 (this universe is perhaps as yet incomplete because the
 "command 'be' and its compliance" is still perpetually
 operative)

All the above attempts towards the dismissal of, or at least, easing off, the Problem of Evil *vis a vis* the being of God have themselves provided an arena of heated debates among various religious thinkers. For instance, if the veritable existence of evil is denied on the ground that it is subjective only, being the consequence of a partial view of the universe or that it is just a privation, 'good' being the only substantive existence or that, in case of moral evil, it is the necessary, presupposed accompaniment of man's moral freedom which no doubt is an excellence of which he can justifiably be proud, the question that still remains is 'why at all is there a partial view of the universe', etc. Anyway, for one who is himself feeling the pinch and the unpleasantness of evil the claim that evil does not exist is simply devoid of any meaning. Similarly, we cannot just get away with saying that God is not good in the sense in which man is good. In fact man has been created after the image of God in the sense that all of His attributes, including His goodness, have been ingrained in the nature of man as his moral and spiritual ideals: and man, in his own turn, has been asked to inculcate in himself the attributes of God¹⁰. So goodness of man and goodness of God cannot be entirely irrelevant to each other. As to the omnipotence of God there is not much of strategic difference between the exercise of power directly in the affairs of the universe or indirectly through the 'laws of nature' (or, what would, in the last analysis, be the same thing, through 'His uniform modes of the exercise of power'). On the subject of the so-called universalistic mode of Divine knowledge of

particulars Imam Ghazali has marshalled logical arguments to prove that Philosophers in this regard have not been able to achieve the objectives for which the innovation was introduced by them. As regards the objection to God's knowledge of 'future' events, the difficulty rests with an ordinary man's space-time-oriented language which is incapable of fully describing the ways of God Who transcends the limitations implied by extended space and sequential time, whatever exactly be the mode of His knowledge, the Qur'an very unambiguously holds on to the thesis that "His knowledge encompasses all things".¹¹ Lastly, as regards human freedom, it has been one of the hottest subjects of discussion in the domains of religion, ethics and all the social sciences.

Avenues of approach indicated in the above paragraph have been followed and are being followed by various thinkers but none of them has arrived at any indubitable conclusions as in fact is, in principle, the fate of all problems of religion and religious metaphysics, tackled on purely rational grounds.

Qur'anic view in regard to the problem of evil, which the sufis accept both in letter and spirit, is straightforward and unambiguous. Evil, according to this view, is real because Satan, the personification of evil, is the creation of God Himself and he has been formally permitted to exploit the frailties of the nature of human beings to waylay and misguide them and persuade them to perform unseemly, immoral acts. Man, in his capacity as the soldier of the moral-spiritual ideals, has been asked time and again to guard against his insinuations and be perpetually vigilant. Besides, the enormous physical nature around may sometimes refract and grow rebellious; man has, however, been given wisdom not only to harness and control it but also to make it serve his own purposes and plans in life. Man's psycho-physical nature too has been so constituted that it occasionally goes erratic and misbehaves unawares; the abnormal state so caused has to be managed by careful diagnosis and appropriate

medication. Also, the Qur'an speaks of mysterious, metaphysical evils that may take hold of man and cause a lot of disturbance and also suggests the ways these evils can be eradicated. Despite all these antagonistic agents, bracketed with man's attempt to ward them off and defend himself against them, what is required of man on the positive plane and that for which he in fact is duty-bound is to evolve an upright, healthy, peaceful manhood. This enigmatic, ambivalent situation posed by the Qur'an can incidentally be summarized in what a poet says addressing God:

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[(O God!) You have fastened me down right amidst the waves of the river and then You say: Beware! lest your clothes get drenched]

The difficult state of affairs referred to above is, in fact, the test to which man has been put and whose clearance by him has been described by the Qur'an as the objective of his creation and of his sojourn in this world:

He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days— and His throne was over the waters— that He might try you which of you is best in conduct. (11:7)

We created man into toil and strife. Does he think that none has power over him. He will (boastfully) say: 'I have wasted vast wealth'. Does he think that none observes him. Have we not given him two eyes, a tongue and two lips, and shown him the two highways (of good and evil)? Yet he would not scale the height (of goodness) (90: 4-11)

We shall test you with some fear and hunger, with loss of life and property and crops. Give good news to the patient who in adversity, say: 'we belong to Allah and to Him we shall return'. (2:155)

Whosoever will let him take a (straight) path to his Lord. But ye will not except as Allah will (76:29-30)

And so on. Those who qualify the test are assured to get immense rewards in the form of the pleasures of paradise and

those who fail to qualify are bound to be lodged in hell, the miserable pit of damnation and torture.

How to prepare oneself, and be sufficiently qualified to pass this test?

Congenitally fired by a passionate desire to realize the ideal of moral and spiritual excellence and of perfect manhood but, at the same time, placed in an environment which most often is not very friendly, man is constantly watched by God as to how does he positively react to the distracting forces both within as well as without him. It is this reaction of man that is most important. During this exercise, which would of course continue throughout his life, man must inculcate in himself the qualities of patience and perseverance in the face of multifarious difficulties that he is likely to encounter at every step on the way. Specially, as regards the evils that are moral in nature, he has not to lose track even for a single moment and be always directed towards the goal. He must resist temptations and always insist on exercising his freedom of choice in favour of the desirable alternative till his good will becomes the holy will.¹³ He must also remain wide awake to, and guard against, the clever *albeit* secret Satanic machinations by adamantly going the Divine way already made transparently clear by the Qur'anic teachings. In the face of the stupendousness of the task, he, alongside his own initiatives, should, in all humility, invoke the refuge and help of God:

Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the Day break from the mischief of His creation, from the mischief of the night when it spreads, from the mischief of witches blowing on knots and the mischief of the envier when he envies,(113:1-5)

Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of men, the King of men, the God of men, from the mischief of the slinking prompter who whispers in the hearts of men, both jinn and men. (114: 1-6)

However, the standing Qur'anic view is that the Divine refuge and help is made available only to those who, on their

own part, continue to make effort to the maximum of their capabilities:

Allah does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their own hearts (13:11)

The sufis, like all good Muslims, have a living assurance that this world is the *dar al-imtiban* (the examination chamber), with very limited time in the chamber that is at their disposal they have to be absolutely attentive to their job and cannot afford to digress even for a single moment. Besides, in general, doing everything that is humanly possible to do as ordained by the Qur'anic teachings, they put most special emphasis on their relationship with God, on their love for, and friendship with, Him. They live perpetually in a prayer-like state as they are firmly convinced that His grace is indispensably required in every act, big or small, that they perform even on the ordinary mundane plane. Being the men of experience *par excellence* and being stationed at the level of *haqq al-yaqin* as regards the assurance that 'God is an Ally', they are happy with Him in whatever condition He chooses to keep them and He too is happy with them:

Allah is well-pleased with them and they with Him. They are the party of Allah. (58:22)

What greater reward man can aspire for!

Incidentally, one who lives an upright life, steadfast and patient in the face of various antagonistic vile and evil forces within as well as without him, alongwith the component of his commitment to the singular ideal of being at peace with God Himself makes his personality so consolidated and cohesive that even the shock of death does not cause it to be dissolved and disintegrated. He acquires a 'belonging to the meaning of the universe' and becomes immortal.

Eschatology

Philosophers, ever since the earliest times, have tried to give a variety of formal as well as informal arguments for the life hereafter. Dr. Naem Ahmad, a well-known writer on the subject, has classified these arguments¹⁴ in his book *Iqbal Ka Tasannur-e Baqa'-e Dawam*) under three heads as follows:

1. *Metaphysical arguments* From the representative thinkers who offered this kind of argument we can pick up the name of Plato among the ancients and that of Metagart from among the moderns. The main thesis of the metaphysical arguments is that the soul in man, as the principle of his life, has the veritable substantiality of its own insofar as its activities in the present day-to-day life of man are not entirely dependent upon, and conditioned by, the activities of its corresponding physical body. Being thus independent, it does not die with the death of the body: it is immortal.
2. *Moral arguments*: Moral argument was most forcefully presented in modern times by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Practical Reason*. Man, he says, has a distinct character among all the creatures in the world insofar as he alone is the bearer of an 'ought' which amounts to a sense of accountability. Accountability presupposes a freedom of choice between two or more alternatives. He invariably exercises his choice in favour of what he considers to be the good alternative or, out of two or more good alternatives, the best one. So, as a human being, man's moral ideal is the realization of the good. Kant further makes a distinction between 'moral good' and 'complete good'. Moral good, according to him, is a categorical, unconditional command, a virtue to be realized for its own sake; a complete good comprises virtue as well as an appropriate amount of happiness meted out to it. Now, constituted as we are

in this world, there appears to be no necessary connection between these two components and so their mutual confluence is not possible here and now in the limited period of time available to every individual. It would require another world characterized by an unending time. Thus an immortal life hereafter is required as a postulate of morality.

3. *Empirical arguments:* This kind of arguments derives from the findings— which are, of course, so far at the experimental stage— of parapsychology or psychical research. It has offered various avenues of evidence in favour of life after death, such as meeting with the souls of the dead through mediums, near-death observations by the dying persons, spectacles of the souls leaving their bodies, out-of-body (OOB) experiences, penetration of evil spirits into human bodies and so on. There are a number of well-equipped scientific laboratories in the Western world conducting research in these areas.

Earlier, in the same book, Dr. Naeem Ahmad had given a brief sympathetic account of those attempts that have ever been made during the historical development of human thought on the subject to prove logically that the present life is the only reality to be reckoned with and that there is no possibility of men being raised after once they meet their physical death; and also an equally sympathetic account of the possible ways in which these attempts can be countered on comparable logical grounds.

As to the exact nature of the life-hereafter there too are different points of view to which various sections of religious people/thinkers have subscribed. Various possibilities have been visualized: for instance, is it the soul-in-body or the disembodied soul that will survive man's death in this world, will every soul live on in its individual capacity or will it merge into what has been known as the world-soul, does immortality mean the immortality of the individual human

beings as individuals or only the immortality of the human race, and so on.

Among the Muslim thinkers, Allama Iqbal, in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, has undertaken a quick survey of rational arguments for as well as against immortality and has come to the irrevocable conclusion that none of them can be taken as decisively reasonable. He ends up with the observation that the conviction in regard to man's life-hereafter— as it characteristically belongs to the realm of the Unseen— is a matter of faith only.¹⁵ In one of his letters, he says:

The cast of my emotional life is such that I could not have lived a single moment without a strong faith in the immortality of human consciousness. The faith has come to me from the Holy Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h.). Every atom of me is brimming with gratitude to him ...¹⁶

Elsewhere, referring to the mode of confirmation of the fact of immortal existence of man, he observes:

In this regard there are many facts which are beyond the ken of human reason. An awareness about them grows from certain sources which have nothing to do with philosophical understanding.¹⁷

Discrediting rational approach in this regard, Hume the British empiricist writes in the same strain:

By the mere light of reason, it seems difficult to prove the immortality of the soul. The arguments for it are commonly derived from metaphysical topics, or moral or physical. But, in reality, it is the Gospel alone that has brought life and immortality to light.¹⁸

The Qur'an, as we are aware, too prescribes an "extra-rational" attitude towards the confirmation of all eschatological facts. Ascertaining man's afterlife, it does not resort to logical but to rhetorical argument that appeals to his faithful commitment to the omnipotence of God, His absolute power to do whatever He chooses to do:

Then will they say: who will cause us to return? Say: He Who created you first (17:51)

Does man think that We cannot assemble his bones. Nay we are able to put together in perfect order the very tips of his fingers. (75: 3-4)

The plain Quranic thesis is that in the life hereafter each and every human individual will be resurrected, and continue to live as, psychologically and morally, the same individual,¹⁹ personally meeting the consequences of his this-worldly activities, both good and bad.

The Qur'an, in principle, and *hadith* literature, in a variety of details, has described in a very graphic and forceful language that in the next world such and such rewards/punishments will be granted for such and such good/evil acts performed by a person in the present world. The men of *Shari'ah*, characteristically, who have in view only the letter of the Qur'anic law, earnestly seek to avoid evil acts and perform good acts with the most scrupulous attention to all their visible, physical details. For them almost the entire academic concern is the specification and identification of what is good and to what degree it is good and what is evil and to what degree it is evil; they spend a lot of their energy and time on differentiating between *halal*, *haram*, *bid'at*, *farz*, *wajib*, *mustahab*, *ji'az*, *mannu'*, *makruh*, and so on. Secondly, we generally see that those men of *Shari'ah* who, with due regard to these distinctions, are convinced that they are leading an upright life, unfortunately develop a sense of elation in themselves and consider themselves as 'deserving' (as a matter of right) of the corresponding benefits of paradise in the life hereafter; and for those whose ways they, in view of their own standards, do not consider to be upright, they develop a sense of dislike and disregard and sometimes even of derision. It is incidentally such an unfortunate attitude of the men of *Shari'ah* that occasions sometimes very deep-rooted chasms and rifts between them and, not very infrequently, leads to serious wrangling and violent conflicts.

As opposed to the analytic approach of the philosophers and the calculated, pragmatic approach of the man of *Shari'ah*, the sufis have a synthetic, organismic and passionate approach to the prospect of death and of the world hereafter. Their faith in the irresistible fact of afterlife being, of course, essentially grounded in the Qur'anic teachings, amounts to the living conviction that death is a gateway to meeting with God, the Beloved, for which meeting to get adequately prepared, they must make full use of the opportunity provided by their life here and now. Imam Ghazali, as we have already seen, regards love of, and friendship with, God as the moral-cum-spiritual ideal of a sufi in this world; those who realize this ideal here will meet Him face to face in the hereafter: that will be the highest pleasure held out to them and, in fact, to anyone of the residents of paradise. For the sufi there is practically no concern for the formal settling of accounts with God in terms of any mechanical relationship between the kind/amount of good acts and the kind/amount of pleasures of paradise (and between bad acts and the tortures of hell). Meeting with God Himself is what he aspires for and separation from Him alone is what grieves him. The episode already related above²⁰ in regard to the well-known woman-saint Rabi'a Basri's plea for the good will of God alone as the ideal of morality is of paradigmatic significance for all sufis.

The prospect of death does not terrify a sufi at all: he rather welcomes it with open arms as it brings to an end for him the days of separation and heralds the bliss of Divine companionship. There is a beautiful verse by 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal which reads.

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(I tell you the sign of the man of faith: when he is about to die there is a smile on his lips).

One of the last pronouncements of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h) made before his departure from this world was²²

[(O Allah), the Supreme Companion and Ally!]

Phenomenon of Miracles

In the annals of the mystics and the holy men of all times, of all parts of the world, we find a frequent mention of extraordinary doings/happenings attributed to them. Shams of Tabrez is recorded to have thrown the books of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi into a water tank and taken them out after some time: and they were absolutely dry! Mansur Hallaj is reported to have brought in Mecca, with the help of his spiritual power, sweetmeats from Yemen and sent down heavenly food in the middle of the desert. There are many stories of mystics living among wild animals who served them in various respects. Hagiological literature mentions a number of incidents of vicarious suffering: when the *murid* is hurt, the sheikh's body shows the traces of the suffering. The well-known saint Abdul Qadir Gilani performed a miracle by suddenly washing away the text of a philosophy book which he considered dangerous for his disciple. Such examples of unusual events can be endlessly multiplied. These events are technically known in sufi literature as *karamat*²³. When similar events are perpetrated by the prophets, a number of which have been described in the revealed literature of all religions, the term ordinarily used for them is, instead, *mu'jizat*. The Qur'an, for example, relates about prophet Moses that he threw his rod on the earth and it became a snake, active in motion; also, he put his hand under his armpit and when he brought it out it was white (and shining) without harm (or stain)²⁴. Similarly, Prophet Jesus is reported to have addressed his people:

It have come to you with a sign from your Lord. From clay, I will make for you the likeness of a bird. I shall breath into it and, by Allah's leave, it shall become a living bird. By Allah's leave, I shall give sight to the blind, heal the leper and raise the dead to life. I shall tell you what you eat and what you store up

in your houses... (3:49)

The blanket term in English used for both these phenomena is ‘miracles’. Miracles are variously described as ‘extraordinary happenings’, ‘violations of the laws of nature’ and (in characteristically religious colloquialism) ‘interventions by God into the usual course of nature’. All these descriptions obviously imply.

- i. the givenness of the laws of nature, and
- ii. the givenness of that which temporarily violates these laws.

Thus miracles are supposed to be the phenomena which comprise a fusion between the natural and the ordinary, on the one hand, and the supernatural and the extra-ordinary, on the other. The supernatural becomes, for the time being natural as it becomes a part of our sensuous experience and the natural becomes supernatural as it awestrikes us and leaves us thoroughly mystified and bamboozled.

Before we try to find out how this fusion takes place and how can it be explained and justified let us refer to at least two exclusivist points of view available in the history of Muslim thought for whose advocates absolutely no such fusion actually takes place because for them either the natural or the supernatural does not exist: one of them alone is the order of the day. One of these points of view is, for instance, that of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan for whom laws of nature are supreme and the ‘supernatural’, for all practical purposes is a meaningless concept; the other is that of the Ash‘arites theologians for whom there is a perpetual display of direct Divine activity that comprises the universe and there are no scientifically definable natural laws as such.

We have already explained the naturalistic Deism of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan according to which the behaviour of nature comprises the practical promises of God, the Supernatural Being, and, like His verbal promises contained in the revealed literature, they too are not violated by Him. No interventions by the Supernatural into the natural course of events: hence no miracles.²⁵

The Ash'arites put up the opposite stance. As a school of Muslim theology, they arose as a reaction to the Mu'tazilites. The Mu'tazilite emphasis on justice as of pivotal importance among the attributes of God, alongwith, of course, His unity, was replaced by emphasis on His power by the Ash'arites. God is all-powerful. His power is absolute and total and encompasses every thing. The Qur'an says:

Verily, Allah is powerful over everything (2:106)

He being powerful without any ifs and buts, without any qualifications and limitations, everything else is powerless—impotent, pure and simple. Nothing besides Him has in fact any nature or character of its own, as nature is nothing but a kind of power. When, for instance, we say that fire, by its nature, burns or that water naturally quenches thirst that is simply understood to mean that fire has the power to burn and that water has the power to quench thirst. This being the case, whatever happens in the world is the direct doing of God. When for, example, we observe or experience the phenomenon of water quenching the thirst of Mr. X what actually happens is that God makes Mr. X drink water and—independently— He produces the feeling of satiety in Mr. X. This, as already shown,²⁶ has been known in the West as the doctrine of Occasionalism. Thus Supernatural Being alone being active and, consequently, nature— whatever its status—being a pure passivity and impotence, the question of 'the supernatural' intervening 'the natural' does not arise :hence no miracles.

The two points of view as delineated by their proponents have, both of them, the defect of being extremist in nature. Neither of them fulfils the minimum condition as laid down above, of having the two basic characteristics of the phenomenon of a 'miraculous happening', technically so-called. One of these views is the philosophico-scientific and the other one is the religious point of view. Miracle, basically, is recognized to be a religious concept. It is in a way an indispensable constituent of religious faith and of unreasoned

commitment to the Divine scheme of things. Thus if we must undertake the project of a rational understanding of this concept then obviously neither only the scientific treatment as such nor only the religious treatment as such would be adequate by itself. What, instead, would be required is a composite religio-philosophical attitude which is further to be constantly supervised by a mystical vision that alone can weld together the two components of this attitude in a harmonious unity. Let us see how.

Laws of nature must, in principle, have an amount of regularity about them; otherwise all scientific endeavours towards understanding the natures of things would be fruitless. If things have no nature what after all would it mean to discover and understand it? The Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h.) himself is reported to have prayed: my Lord! show me the true natures of all things. To this extent, the Ash'arites were incorrect and the naturalism put forth by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan appears, in principle, to be justified. However, the universe, as it is exposed to us, is a compound structure. It does not have only one level of existence and consequently only one set of laws that govern it. Rather, it comprises various semi-independent realms and various sets of laws of behaviour corresponding to these realms. In accordance with the ordinarily recognized stratification the lowest of these is the realm of material objects which is the subject-matter of the science of physics; higher than that is the realm of life which is investigated by the science of biology; then there is the realm of psychology which deals with consciousness and its allied phenomena like intelligence, remembrance, ideation, thinking, and so on. For one who does not have the vision to look beyond the visible universe the highest realm of existence is the one which is characteristic with human beings who alone, we are almost sure, are the bearers of an ought in them and the resultant sense of accountability — however strong or weak that sense may be: ethics is the science which takes upon itself to discover the laws related to the sensibilities of good and evil, desirable and undesirable as

regards the deliberate acts performed by man. Now, every science *qua* science has in principle a firm conviction that i) its subject-matter has certain laws of operation inherent in it; and that ii) these laws can be discovered by them sooner or later: that is why the sciences continue their efforts towards that direction with confidence.

The scientific domains referred to above (and the sets of their respective laws) are recognizable as different from each other and also mutually independent in a way but they are not absolutely independent.²⁷ The universe of which they are the different domains is after all an organic unity, its various constituents bound together in mutual impacts. When any such impact takes place, the laws of the domain on which the impact is registered undergoes a change to the benefit of the laws of the domain which exercises the impact. When for instance, life acts on matter, the laws of life are introduced to matter: the former, although being alien to, and 'miraculous' for, the latter, becomes a part and parcel of the latter's behaviour. Examples of the specimens of confluence between various realms of existence are a matter of our common observation. Such 'miracles' appear to occur in our everyday, 'this-worldly' experience whenever there are borderline cases between matter and life between life and consciousness and between bare consciousness and duty consciousness.

Seen against the above perspective it is easy to explain and justify miracles in the technical sense of this term as used in the religious context. In a religious frame of reference we have a firm conviction in God as a Person with His own purposes and plans and, we can say, His own laws of behaviour. God being Supreme, these laws supersede and are capable to superimpose themselves on, all the laws of the lower realms— material, biological psychological as well as moral. Any event which registers such a superimposition is usual and ordinary as a part of visible nature in its obviously occurrent state but at the same time it is unusual, extraordinary and miraculous strictly from the point of view

of any one of the lower realms, taken by itself, on which the Divine will exercises an impact. Thus miracles, whether the *mu'jizat* of the prophets or the *karamat* of the sufis, are, strictly speaking, Divine doings. When a prophet or a sufi appears to work them it is simply due to the fact that he has attained such a level of the realization of the Divine within himself or— what would be the same things said the other way round — his will has become, **more or less** identical with the will of God.

Freedom of Will

There is a very significant event referred to in the Qur'an which must have happened at an initial stage of man's career and which was going to have a far-reaching importance for his prospective role in the spatio-temporal world as well as for his final fate. The Qur'an says:

We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to undertake it. But man undertook it— he was indeed **unjust** and **foolish** (33: 72)

These verses, firstly, talk of a trust which was offered to various creatures but none, besides man, accepted it and, secondly, it is said that man accepted it as he was unjust (to himself) and ignorant (of the consequences that the acceptance of this trust was bound to incur). Now most of the commentators agree that this was the trust of moral freedom, freedom to choose between good and evil. This freedom naturally entails a sense of responsibility on the part of the trustee, and accountability to God, the Bestower of the trust; and also, consequently, it implies every possibility of the breach of this trust by him and a liability of being punished for the same: hence man being unjust to himself in accepting the trust!²⁸ The Qur'an has a number of other verses which clearly refer to man's freedom of choice. For instance, it says.

There is no compulsion in religion (2: 256)

And say: the Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe, and let him who please disbelieve (18:29)

This Day every soul is rewarded what it has earned (40:17)

And that man can have nothing but what he strives for (53:39)

And so on.

It is in fact agreed upon by all anthropologists too that man is the only being on earth who is the bearer of an 'ought' which is congenitally woven into his very nature. He is a moral agent and freedom of will is one of the basic postulates of morality. Throughout his life man continues to make deliberate choices between what to do and what not to do. His choices may be erratic or they may be rightly directed but choices, of course, he does make. It is further agreed by them that he has in his heart of hearts a conviction that he is answerable somewhere for the choices that he makes. Man's moral freedom to choose between various alternatives, accompanied by the sense of responsibility, must incidentally, be distinguished from the licence characteristic, for example, of the freedom of lower animals who neither exercise calculated choices nor do they feel accountable for their acts. They are moved barely by their instinctual tendencies, capricious whims and emotional promptings. Theirs is the freedom, which may alternatively be termed 'spontaneity', pure and simple.

Keeping moral freedom as the necessary requirement of man and an obvious fact of his psyche aside, 'free will versus determinism' has been one of the major problems of philosophy and even of philosophy of religion. The problem discussed by thinkers, it may be pointed out, relates not to man-as-such but to man *vis a vis* his concept of God and his situation in the world. Some of the thinkers have marshalled arguments in favour of determinism and some in favour of indeterminism and still some others have made various attempts towards their mutual reconciliation as if both can go together.

Arguments in favour of determinism can roughly be classified into three groups. Or we can say that there are recognizably three kinds of determinism: socio-cultural and

natural determinism, psycho-biological determinism and religious determinism.

As to the first kind of determinism, we see that man, in his capacity as a physical agent, is very much a part and parcel of physical nature at large with all its uniform laws of behaviour and stringent cause-effect principles. In his practical life, including his religious and moral activities, he must of necessity abide by the laws of nature in general which already exist, only to be discovered and recognized but not at all to be changed or violated by him. Baron Holbach, a very outspoken materialist, is not very wrong when he says:

Man's life is a line that nature commands him to describe upon the surface of the earth without his ever being able to swerve from it, even for an instant. He is born without his own consent, his organization does in nowise depend upon himself; his ideas come to him involuntarily; his habits are in the power of those who cause him to contract them; he is unceasingly modified by causes, whether visible or concealed, over which he has no control, which necessarily regulate his mode of existence, give the hue to his ways of thinking and determine his manner of acting. He is good or bad, happy or miserable, wise or foolish reasonable or irrational without his will being for any thing in these various states.²⁹

According to a popular adage 'man is known by the company he keeps'. This adage highlights the determinists' thesis, specially emphasized by the social scientists that a man's character and conduct is fashioned, consciously or unconsciously, by the persons with whom he is in habitual social contacts. Such an impact on a person by his social circumstances starts quite obviously from the earliest phase of his life *i.e.* his home environments. The set of parents, brothers and sisters among whom incidentally a man is born, their religion, their characters, their temperaments, their philosophies of life put up an indelible life-long imprint on his behaviour and his likes and dislikes etc. Similarly, later on, his friends, his school mates, his conjugal partner, his colleagues in office, and so on continue to serve as a

convenient reference for him: most often he is positively influenced by them but sometimes he may choose to strongly oppose them. In modern times social determinism has been strongly advocated by Watson's Behaviourism put forth in early twentieth century. He claimed that he could "guarantee", given a free hand in controlling the environments, to take any normal infant "and train him to become any type of specialist I might select— doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant, chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief".³⁰

Ibn Khaldun in his *Maqaddimah* to world history has emphasized that the nature of a man's behaviours, including his psychological reactions and moral conduct, is determined by geographical, economic and religious environments to which he belongs.³¹ In the circumstances where there is economic well-being and abundance of material resources people become lethargic, evil-minded and selfish; conversely, where there is scarcity of much resources, people tend to be hard-working and mentally alert. Subscribers to the same religion develop different socio-cultural traits in different regions of the world. Similarly, behaviour patterns of the residents of rural or urban areas, of those living in cold, warm or moderate climatic conditions, can be easily recognized with mutual distinctness. And so on.

Not only that man is determined in his behaviour by various dynamics in the external world, even the criterion for passing a moral judgment on my own behaviour as well as on the behaviour of others is not uncontaminated and free: it too is culturally determined. Almost by common consent it is the conscience³² of the moral agent which is supposed to be the impartial and reliable subject to see and judge as to which action are morally good and which ones are morally evil. But the critics have rightly pointed out that conscience is not independent and so reliable in its observations: it is, by and large, the creation of environments. It differs from a man belonging to one cultural *milieu* to the one belonging differently. For a Hindu, for instance, severe pangs of conscience make slaughtering of a cow a morally abominable

act, whereas for a Muslim's conscience it is not simply morally permissible, not simply an act with a religious sanction behind it, but sometimes it becomes a positive religious duty.

As regards psycho-biological determinism a very clear example of it is the well-known thesis of Sigmund Freud, the psychoanalyst, that every act or thought or emotion of an individual is completely fixed³³. Nothing 'just' happens or happens 'freely' or 'arbitrarily', every occurrence attributed to human beings, he holds, has a sufficient, identifiable motive force behind it. Where there is no conscious motive there must be an unconscious one. Even a slip of the tongue, a slip of the pen, forgetting the name of, say, your own son and other such events which are generally dismissed as accidental or just chance happenings must be motivated by some hidden desires which are somehow being fulfilled by these events. Even dreams, for him, are not only a play of wild imagination or just a hodge-podge of ideas coming one after the other without any rationale behind them. They too are governed by unconscious desires and directed towards the fulfillment of those desires. Against the perspective of this point of view there is no room left, it is believed in some quarters, for moral freedom and consequently for the sense of accountability, the commonly recognized defining characteristic of man.

Just as a set of determiners of man's actions is supposed to be lying hidden in the innermost recesses of his psyche so another such set has been discovered by the science of genetics to be lying unawares in his biological structure in the form of tendencies inherited by him from his parents or even from his remote forefathers. Despite the environmental influences that alter, or enter into a geometrical intersection with, hereditary traits, heredity, of course, has—at least chronologically—the primary impact. Every individual in the womb of his/her mother, we know, starts his/her career as a single cell formed by the union of an ovum from the mother's ovary with a spermatozoon from the father. This

cell, with the passage of time multiplies into millions and billions of cells comprising the psycho-physical being of the individual. Parental characteristics biologically consigned to the original cell are present in all the other cells and consequently pervade the entire personality which they constitute.

There is definitely a lot of truth in the effectiveness of various socio-cultural as well as psycho-biological determiners referred to above as they have almost been universally recognized to be operative in the behaviour of man and also in the moral judgments that he makes. However, that is only one side of the picture and so does not depict the whole truth. Despite the determiners listed above, sufficient space still remains for validating the concept of 'moral freedom and responsibility'. It should be granted forthwith that man's freedom does not at all extend to the universe which is beyond the reach of man's consciousness. However, outside that universe he 'feels free' on every occasion to choose one of the alternatives and pursue it. If he so feels, musters up all his capabilities and whole-heartedly and with a full sense of responsibility goes in for the corresponding action, he is a 'morally free individual', for all practical purposes. Suppose he is still not able to actually achieve the desired result, that is besides the point. Immaculately firm intention and sincere, concerted efforts, by themselves, are adequate to declare a moral agent deserving of reward/punishment that matches the intended action.

As regards the concept of religious determinism against the perspective of the Islamic teachings, a reference is made to the Qur'anic metaphysics, particularly to God's omnipotence and His omniscience. God has been described as powerful over everything³⁴. As an allegedly necessary implication of this statement it is believed that nothing/none other than God is powerful over anything. Consequently, man would not be powerful over (the performance of) his actions, meaning to say, he is not free. This was, for instance,

the view of Ash'arite theologians. As regards God's supreme power, the Qur'an says:

Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing; and there is covering on their eyes (2:7)

So whomsoever Allah intends to guide, He expands his breast for Islam, and whomsoever He intends to leave in error, He makes his breast strait (and) narrow (2:126)

And it is not for any soul to have faith except by Allah's permission (10:100)

Allah purifies whom He pleases. (24:21)

Similarly, given God's omniscience and, particularly, His fore-knowledge, my acts do not remain 'my own' in the real sense of this phrase: after all I have to adhere to, and abide by, God's knowledge; how can I digress from, and go against, it.

Very relevant to the supreme Divine Will, that reigns perfectly, and the Supreme Divine Knowledge, that encompasses everything, is the concept of *Laub-e Mahfuḏ*³⁵ (the Preserved Tablet) on which the entire life schedule, to the minutest details, of each and every individual yet to be born was, it is believed, written and then preserved for all times for the sake of strict compliance. The Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h) is reported to have said:

God wrote down the decrees regarding the created world fifty thousand years before He created the heaven and the earth³⁶.

Also:

The first thing God created was the *qalam* (pen). He said to it: "write" It asked: "what shall I write?" He answered: "write the destinies of all things till the advent of the Hour". One who dies with a belief different from this, he does not belong to me.³⁷

The above is, of course, the strictly literalist orthodox view: those, who still hold the view that man really possesses freedom of will, try to redefine the Divine attributes of

omnipotence and omniscience as well as the concept of the fixation of the *taqdir* of every individual. They would, for instance, say that God's all-powerfulness extends not directly to the individual acts of human beings but indirectly through the laws of nature— physical, psychological, moral etc.— which, in turn specify inviolable limits that an individual cannot at all trespass in his practical life: aside from these inviolabilities, of course, man continues to enjoy freedom. Divine all-powerfulness, thus understood would leave out adequate provision for the exercise of human freedom. In modern times, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan held this view. He further was of the opinion— as was the view of 'Allama Iqbal also— that the destinies written on the Preserved Tablet comprise only the respectively specified sets of possibilities of every class of existents of which the members of those classes of objects etc. have the capability and the power to realize any one they choose. As to the fore-knowledge of God, 'Allama Iqbal outrightly denies it to God, because it would imply just a 'passive omniscience' on His part and suggest 'a closed universe, a fixed futurity'. "Divine Knowledge", he asserts, must, on the other hand, "be conceived as a living, creative activity"³⁸ Sir Sayyid Ahmad, on the other hand does uphold God's fore-knowledge but says at the same time that it does not deprive man of his freedom.³⁹ The fact that, for instance, He knows that Mr. X will commit theft tomorrow simply means that He, **by virtue of His own nature as an Omniscient Being**, knows that Mr. X will have an occasion to exercise a choice between committing theft and not committing theft and that he, as a result of the **exercise of his own freedom of choice**, will choose the former alternative.

We have given above a brief survey of various determiners of human behaviour. In each case a free-willist's strategy — howsoever strong or weak it may be — has also been worked out. Whatever be the kind of determinism and whatever be the corresponding justification for indeterminism the minimum plain fact remains that every person who ordinarily chooses to perform an action has, **psychologically speaking**, a

firm conviction that in making that choice he is free and that he could possibly have chosen to act otherwise if he had so desired. This psychological conviction by itself, I reiterate, is, for all practical purposes, sufficient to declare the person accountable for his actions and to make him deserving of the matching rewards and punishments: after all, the pleasures and pains which are almost the entire meanings of rewards and punishments respectively are only psychological states;

In fact, both determinism and freedom are hard and fast realities of human life. Both can and do, go together, let us see briefly how they **ought to be simultaneously** present in an 'act of moral freedom' in the most intimate sense of this phrase.

Man occupies a singularly unique position in the universe as he alone carries an 'ought' with him. In simple words it means that he alone is capable to act with the kind of freedom that is impregnated with a sense of accountability. This amounts to the statement that he alone is the moral being. This dual characterization of man immediately distinguishes him from animals who do have freedom but not sense of accountability. We can use for their freedom the term 'spontaneity' or 'license'. An animal is moved by its momentary feelings and impulses. Unlike man, it does not have a 'self' in the full sense of this term and so its actions lack any point of reference as such.

'Ought' of the moral agent implies an act, in which a person's self as the subject who wills is involved. Will presupposes a consciously conceived desire. In fact it presupposes a number of desires which come into conflict with one another, mutually struggling for supremacy, and in due course one of them comes out victorious. This winning desire becomes the wish of the moral agent which, in turn translates itself into a wilful resolve to perform the corresponding action.

While talking of the conflict of desires, J.S. Mackenzie has given the very meaningful concept 'Universe of Desires'.⁴⁰ A person simply does not have different desires, he lives during

different periods of his life and occasionally, even at the same time, in different universes of desires. He is a family member, a professor in the university, a subordinate to his officer, a member of the group of informal friends, a practicing Muslim, and so on. In each one of these capacities, which all of them have the potential of being moral situations, he lives in one particular universe of desires. So when desires mutually conflict, Mackenzie says, really it is the various universes of desires that contend for supremacy and in the long run one of them becomes victorious.

In an ordinary soldier of the moral ideal a lot of vacillation takes place in respect of the various universes of desires. He may be honest in one universe of desires but not so in some other universe of desires. Similar may be the case with other traits of morality like truthfulness, loyalty, affection, patience etc. If one of the moral traits is such that he adopts it, whatever be the universe of desires to which he belongs, that moral trait is said to have become a part and parcel of his character. To make all the desirable moral traits thus the constituents of his character is his ideal *par excellence* which he continues to pursue throughout his life. If the moral agent is sincere in his moral commitment and adamantly perseveres, every time there is a moral problem he in principle feels free to act but, consciously and deliberately, chooses to exercise his freedom of will in favour of the desirable and every time he is successful in combating the temptation to go in for the undesirable, his will becomes a 'good will'. When he continues to live his moral life on this pattern, this pattern becomes a matter of habit with him and like all habits it takes over him. He can still be said to have 'freedom to choose' but now he does not simply 'choose' but rather 'must choose' to exercise his freedom of will in favour of the right way. His will becomes what has been known as the 'holy will'. This is the ideal which symbolizes a compulsive simultaneity of determinism and freedom and this is the ideal which, as we have seen above in the chapter on Islamic Ethics, a sufi tries to approximate more and more.

Language of the Qur'an

True understanding of the Qur'anic language is a sensitive issue and in a way quite difficult also, almost bordering the realm of impossibility.⁴¹ The Qur'an is the word of God, the Absolute, and His *kalam* which was communicated through revelation to the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.), to be further communicated by him to his men, living in space-time context. The purity and immaculateness of this entire process of verbal communication from God down to humanity was guaranteed by God Himself Who has taken upon Himself to see that the revealed text to every syllable of it remains immune to corruption till eternity. The Qur'an says:

We have, without doubt, sent down the Message and We will assuredly guard it (against corruption) (15:9)

On the other side, insofar as human comprehension is concerned, the Qur'an is couched in ordinary Arabic language which human beings in a particular region of the world had developed over a period of time. So, language of the Qur'an, as to its meaning and significance, is Divine as well as human. Consequently, the function of identification and determination of the connotation of what the Qur'an says depends upon how closely human consciousness approximates— if is not exactly identical with— God's will and consciousness. Achievement of this approximation is a painstaking, ever-continuing process as it requires a lot of self-culture on the part of man. We shall explain this as we proceed with the account that follows. For the present, let us quote from the initial verses of the Qur'an which introduce the Book and almost serve as a preface to it:

This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt to those who fear Allah, who have faith in the Unseen... (2:2-3)

These verses clearly exclude the possibility that the understanding the Qur'anic language for the sake of getting requisite guidance from it is a mechanical process so that just any one who is adept in Arabic vocabulary and grammar etc.

can do so: it rather essentially presupposes an attunement of the reader's subjectivity in terms of his total commitment to God, the Unseen.

Some Muslim thinkers, perhaps motivated by their piety and their fear that they may not be guilty of deviation from the meanings of the Qur'anic statements that were not really intended by their Author, decided to remain closest to the word of God *i.e.* its literal, lexicographic meaning— in respect of the whole of the Qur'an, in general, and in respect of those of the verses which describe the supersensible world, including the being of God, in particular. The sect of *Mujassimah* (the anthropomorphists) are the Muslim thinkers who did so in regard to the attributes of God. The following is mainly a critique of this school of thought. Obliquely, however, it would have relevance to the entire Unseen world, talked about in the Qur'an.

The Muslim anthropomorphists, with whom the laymen, by and large, have a temperamental affinity, regard all the Divine qualities and attributes mentioned in the Quran as to mean qualitatively the same as they mean when used in human context. The Qur'an describes God as having a face, two hands, two eyes and also as seeing, hearing, moving, sitting etc. Similarly, He is one, equitable, good, powerful and so forth. Now, all these descriptions of God were understood by them literally *i.e.* just as what they mean when applied to human beings and their behaviour. Also the entire paraphernalia of heaven and hell graphically detailed out in the Qur'anic verses was for them the same in nature as we find in this world of ours. Such a naturalistic approach to Qur'anic metaphysics and eschatology in general has, however, failed to agree with the spirit of theism as such as in general advocated by the Qur'an and has invariably led to various complications, linguistic and others. When, for instance, we describe man as good we recognize that he subserves, and submits to, the authority of the moral law and that he resists temptations to ways that are undesirable or positively evil. But this ordinary connotation is not at all

helpful towards apprehending the goodness of God. God cannot be conceived as subservient to the moral law or, for that matter, to any pre-existing law whatever as He Himself is the Creator and Sustainer of all laws; nor can He harbour any temptations as that would imply imperfections and limitations on His part. Similarly, God's knowledge is essentially different from human knowledge as the former is at the same time creative of the object of knowledge whereas the latter operates in respect of objects that already exist. Divine unity itself is also unparalleled and unique. The only connotation of 'one' that we have known is that it is the 'half of two' or that it is 'the lowest one in an ascending series of cardinal numbers', etc. We have never come across the kind of oneness that God is, absolute and unrelated to any other concept which may, in any way, be prior to it. Similar is the case with all the other attributes of God. As to God's having hands, eyes etc, to say that they are like our hands and eyes would amount to bringing Him down to the level of man or, at the most, making Him a 'man-glorified'.

Due to the difficulties laid down above and encouraged by the license given by the Qur'an itself that some of its verses belong to the category of *mutashabihat* i.e. the ones that are allegorical by nature [according to the majority of the Qur'an commentators all descriptions of the metaphysical/eschatological objects, facts and events are the *mutashabihat*],⁴² analogical reasoning is apparently left to be the only way. From a knowledge of the descriptions of our visible physical world of experience including the world of human beings we can analogically move on to the comprehension of the descriptions of the invisible world including the being of God— both sets of descriptions being verbally the same. The Ash'arite theologians among the Muslim orthodoxy, we know, who had a tendency to remain closest to the word of the Qur'an but at the same time tried to avoid anthropomorphism, could go only half-way. They remained non-committal and defensive, particularly insofar as the meaning of Divine attributes is concerned. They, in fact,

adopted an intermediate position between the Mjuassimites and the Mu'tazilites. The former, as we have seen, held that the attributes of God are ascribable to Him in the very sense in which they are ascribed to human beings; the latter denied attributes as His possessions and, making Him immune to all descriptions, reduced Him to an abstract transcendence, pure and simple. The Ash'arites, in opposition to both of them, believed in real, positive attributes of God as given by the Qur'an but held that these are to be understood 'without asking how and without drawing any comparison.'

Analogy or analogical reasoning, to which most of the exegetic writers have, in principle, resorted, is of two kinds: analogy of proportion and analogy of proportionality. According to the former, two objects are analogous to each other by virtue of the similar relation of both of them to a third object known as the 'prime analogate'. For instance, healthy eating habits of Mr. X and his healthy looks have an analogical relationship between them because each one of them is related to Mr. X who alone is primarily justified to be called 'healthy'. This kind of analogical relationship cannot be recognized to hold between natural characteristics, on the one hand, and the verbally same attributes of God, on the other, because no being can, in principle, be conceived as to be prior to both God and His creatures to which/whom the relevant characteristics are applied with their primary justification.

In the analogy of proportionality a term is applied in basically the same sense to two different objects/persons but it applies to each one of them in a way appropriate to its own nature. In this sense, for instance, the epithet 'beautiful' is analogously applied to a woman, a flower and a poem as they are all of them called so only in accordance with their respective natures. When 'analogy of proportionality' is applied from man to God we would say that, for instance, man and God both are forgiving: God's relation of forgiving to the sinners, *i.e.* to those who disobey Him, is similar to that of a forgiving man to those who misbehave with him.

However, God is forgiving according to His nature and man is forgiving according to his nature. Similarly, we can say that God has got a face, hands and eyes and so on according to His nature and man has them according to his nature.

Analogy of proportionality appears to be valid, theoretically speaking. But practically it has one basic difficulty. Insofar as the objective of identifying the connotation of Divine attributes is concerned, for its realization it is presupposed that we already know the nature of God so that we may be clear as to how in accordance with that nature He possesses the attributes that are common between the two analogates. In order to know God, we work the analogy but for the successful working of analogy we must already know God. This is a case of circular reasoning, a *petitio principii*. Muslim theologians, who work on orthodox premises, have a way out of this predicament. They claim to have knowledge of God derivable from the Qur'anic propositions themselves, from, what Bertrand Russell calls, a 'knowledge by description'. On the authority of that knowledge they would perhaps say that God's having face means that He is a person, His having hands means that He is powerful, His having eyes means that nothing is hidden from Him and that He is conversant with everything, and so on

Sufis, however, are better positioned to manage a way out, as they claim to be the recipients of the knowledge of God by acquaintance rather than just a 'knowledge by description' of the men of *Shari'ah*. As the consequence of dispassionate love for Him and/or purification of his self by eliminating all unwholesome accretions and/or contemplating over His signs spread everywhere in the universe both without and within himself, a sufi acquires a living assurance of His being, a gnostic vision of His presence and a spectacular awareness of His diverse relations with man and the universe. This level of organic concern with the Divine metamorphoses his own personality and divinates his entire sense of facts and values He takes over the colour of God and looks at everything with His effulgence. Given such an essentiality of knowledge

acquired by the sufi, the process of analogical reasoning, stands reversed for him. It is the language of the Qur'an regarding descriptions about God that becomes ontologically first: the corresponding descriptions about man are rendered derivative and secondary. A sufi does not understand religious language on the analogy of human language but rather he understands human language in the light of religious language. This is known by Theologians of the World in the West as 'the analogy of grace'. Carl Barth, an advocate of this analogy says:

If we do know about God as the Creator, it is neither wholly nor partially because we have a prior knowledge of something which resembles creation. It is only because it has been given to us by God's revelation to know Him, and what we previously thought we knew about originators and causes, is called in question, turned around and transformed.⁴³

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ *Vide* above pp. 16-18.

² Quoted by Samuel Enoch Stumph, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, p 258

³ M.M. Sharif (ed), *A History of Muslim Philosophy* Vol. I Chapter XXIX by Bakhtyar Hussain Siddiqi, pp.578-579

⁴ *Vide* Majid Fakhri, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas, passim*

⁵ *Vide* Dr. Abdul Khaliq, 'Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Concept of Islam as the Natural Religion', *Journal of Research*, Punjab University Vol. XV, 1980, pp. 19-38

⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*

⁷ For an elaborate account of the controversy between Farabi and Ibn Sina, on the one hand, and Imam Ghazali, on the other, regarding the problem of God's Knowledge of Particulars see S.A.Kamali, al -Ghazali *Tabaful al-Falasifa* (English Translation). Chapter XIII

⁸ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 62-63

⁹ *Bal-e-Jibreel*.

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¹¹ Qur'an, 654:12.

- ¹² *Kulliyat-e- Urfi Sheerazi.*
- ¹³ Also see below. pp. 191-200.
- ¹⁴ *Iqbal ka Tasawwur-e- Baqa'-e Dawam* (urdu), translated into English by Dr. Abdul Khaliq, *Iqbal's Concept of Death, Immortality And Afterlife* pp 49-62
- ¹⁵ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* pp. 89-98
- ¹⁶ Quoted in *Zia Bar* (Urdu), Iqbal Number, p.50
- ¹⁷ Sayyid Nazir Niazi, *Maklubat-e Iqbal* (Urdu), p.74
- ¹⁸ David Hume, quoted in Dr. Abdul Khaliq (tr.) *op. cit.* p.58.
- ¹⁹ Qur'an, 19:95
- ²⁰ Margaret Smith, *Rabia' the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints in Islam* p. 98.
- ²¹ *Armaghan-e-Hijaz.*
- ²² Dr. Naem Ahmad, *Ayyam-e-Habib* (Urdu). p.835, and other books of *Sirah*
- ²³ *Vide*, for a detailed account on this subject, Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp 199-213.
- ²⁴ Qur'an, 20:22.
- ²⁵ *Vide* above pp. 153-155.
- ²⁶ *Vide* above p. 187.
- ²⁷ Also refer to pp.16-18 above.
- ²⁸ It is very interesting to point out that Adam and his wife in the Garden (*jannah*) were prohibited to go near a particular tree, otherwise they would be **unjust**. Also, when they did go near that trees and thus having committed their first act of free choice were asked to leave the Garden and go to the earth, they repented for being **unjust** to themselves and prayed to God forgiveness (Qur'an, 2: 35-36; 7:23).
- ²⁹ H. D. Robinson, *Systems of Nature*, Vol. I Chapter XI.
- ³⁰ J. B. Watson, *Behaviorism*, pp 82-83.
- ³¹ Franz Rosenthal (tr.) *The Muqaddimah*, Vol.1, pp. 119, 172, 167-168 etc.
- ³² *Vide* Henry Sedgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics*, pp. 191-198.
- ³³ *Vide* Robert S. Woodworth, *Contemporary Schools of Psychology*, Chapter 6, *Passim*.
- ³⁴ Qur'an, 2:2
- ³⁵ Qur'an, 2:106.
- ³⁶ *Sabih Muslim*, quoted in *Muslim Creed*, p.44.
- ³⁷ *Abu Da'ud*, quoted in *Ibid*, p.108.
- ³⁸ 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *op.cit.* pp. 62-63.
- ³⁹ *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. VI, pp. 140-145
- ⁴⁰ *A Manual of Ethics*, p.34. also see above, pp. 113-114.
- ⁴¹ For a more detailed discussion on this subject see Dr. Abdul Khaliq, *Problems of Muslim Theology*, pp. 17-38.
- ⁴² He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book; in it are verses, the *mubkamat*; the others are the *mutashabihat*. (Qur'an, 3:7)
- ⁴³ Quoted from Barth by John Macquarrie, *Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, p. 323

SOME LAST WORDS

Mysticism, it has been emphasized more than once in the foregoing chapters, is not an independent institution to be understood, appreciated and evaluated on its own grounds. It is rather to be recognized as simply the internal dimension, the esoteric aspect, of the phenomenon that religion is.

Every religion, we know, has a visible garb and also it has an invisible reality behind that garb. To all appearance, it embodies certain rites and rituals and certain doctrines and beliefs which culturally distinguish it from any other religion. The core and the pith beyond these culturally conditioned diverse appearances is the religious man's commitment to, and the desire to have a closer and closer contact with, the Ultimate Reality. It is how a man 'conceives' that Reality and how he 'contemplates' its relevance to his own destiny and to the universe around him that the schedule of his practical life in detail emanates. Those persons who practically look after, and concentrate on, only the outer, visible garb of religion are the ones who *have a religion* whereas those who, along with this, vouchsafe the pith of the religion also from which the garb outgrows, are those who *live religiously*. The latter ones are the mystics. Thus elitism of the mystics lies nowhere else than simply in the fact that their acts, their attitudes and their entire system of values are safely anchored and firmly rooted. They develop a belonging to the source from which laws and rules of behaviour that govern the day-to-day life of an

ordinary man of religion ultimately derive. In the Islamic perspective, for example, a Muslim who, as a matter of duty, offers his prayers five times a day, keeps fasts in the month of Ramzan, and so on; and also meticulously abides by all the formal conditions in regard to these practices, as these conditions are laid down in the word of the Qur'an and sayings of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.), is absolved of his duty in this respect and is duly an acceptable member of the Muslim community. But a sufi, the deeply-rooted Muslim, would be the one who as well does all this but does with God-consciousness as his perpetual ally. Made wiser with his gnostic awareness of God and the feel of His presence, the sufi, in general, is very much likely to understand the Qur'anic propositions and injunctions (and as to how these propositions etc. are relevant to man's life) and in the right perspective *i.e.* in the perspective of the will, pleasure and plan of God, Who is their author. How poorly compares with this the way of an ordinary Qur'an scholar of exegesis who is most often so absorbed in the word of the Qur'an and its various linguistic shades that he becomes oblivious of the spirit behind it. Thus sufis, in principle, are in a position to provide an authentic way to understand the spirit along with the letter of revelation.

God-consciousness of the Muslim mystic also brings about a metamorphic change in his attitude towards life and particularly towards the problems that life-in-the-world generates. It provides him a cosmic outlook, a cohesive *weltanschauung* which admits of no rifts, conflicts, and bickerings. He is at peace with his own being, at peace with the environments and at peace with God Himself. We have already seen in the last chapter above how for a person thus metamorphosed stand liquidated different problems identified by Philosophy of Religion which have not responded favourably to the logical/rational methodologies of the philosophers themselves and, consequently, they still remain unsolved for them. The sufi does not have in his armoury any special hair-splitting, objectively recognizable device of his

own: he rather encounters these problems, as we have already demonstrated, in terms of the realization of his authentic, divinely-inspired subjectivity. Anyway, problems are not only of a philosophico-metaphysical nature. Alongside these problems there is a non-ending chain of down-to-the-earth commonplace agitating issues, worries, pangs and pricks which all of us continue to face in life, How beautifully Ghalib says:

تقيد حیات و بند غم اصل میں دونوں ایک ہیں
موت سے پہلے آدمی غم سے نجات پائے کیوں

(‘Imprisonment that life is, on the one hand, and ‘the bond of grief, on the other, are mutually the same. Nothing but death can deliver man from griefs and sorrows.)

Given the psychological constitution of man, the gap between what he aspires for and what he actively achieves has always remained intact and is bound to remain so for all times to come. It is this gap which keeps an ordinary man perpetually unsatisfied and disturbed. There are a number of Qur’anic verses referring to this phenomenon of the nature of man:

Surely man has been created very impatient– fretful when evil touches him (70 : 19-20)

Man is ever niggardly (17:100)

Man is most ungrateful (17:67)

When We bestow favours on man, he turns away, and gets himself remote on his side (instead of coming to Us); and when evil seizes him, (he comes) full of long prayer (41:51)

That human nature is prone to be agonized by the ups and downs of life is thus a patent truth. The Qur’an in fact regards these tribulations as a test of the faith of man (for instance, see 2:155) which he is required to qualify not primarily by trying to do anything to them as such but by reviving his own God-consciousness and invoking his own proximity and *ma‘iyyat* (withness) to Him. Man-God mutual

witness, when realized by man, generates peace within him which is duly reflected in a tension-free, peaceful living without. When the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) alongwith his companion Abu Bakr were concealed in the cave of *Thaur* during their *Hijrah* journey to Madina and Abu Bakr felt disturbed as the enemies were prowling all around, he said to him “have no fear because Allah is **with us.**” (9:40). Man-God witness, association and friendship, on which the sufies emphasize, relieves man of all worries:

Behold: verily on the friends of Allah there is no fear, nor shall they grieve (10:62)

Thus Muslim Mysticism or Sufism plays its role as a problem–dissolving mechanism.

Shari'ah laws of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* when understood literally and interpreted rationally so as to trace their application in the changing socio-political situations have lead to the emergence of various sects and schisms among the Muslims. These sects are sometimes so sharply divided among themselves that they get involved in mutual wrangling, throwing blames on one another which not infrequently amount to declaring them as even having stepped out of the pale of Islam and become heretics. However, the elitist among the Muslims, *i.e.* the sufis, besides giving due importance to the *Shari'ah* laws, lay primary emphasis on the spirit, the esoteric dimension, of these laws and their true meaning and significance. Now the spirit of the Qur'anic teachings is, and of course must be, the same for every Muslim provided he has the eyes to see it. Muslim mystics or sufis, on the authority of their gnostic awareness of God, are fit persons not only to essentially comprehend, but also to assimilate, this spirit. By virtue of this essentialism they tend to bring all the Muslims together irrespective of their factional loyalties and sectarian affiliations. Even the followers of other religions— inspired by their own **search for truth** — feel attracted towards them, sit in their company and listen to them. It is an eloquent historical fact that the sufis

have played a far greater role in creating a good will for Islam than the plain men of *shari'ah* and jurisprudence. Sufism has thus specialized in promoting humanitarian sentiments and in creating peace and harmony between man and man. They are capable of doing so even to-day.

Modern age, we know, is the age of science and technology. With every new technological advancement, machines are taking over more and more of the functions of human beings. Modern man is getting alienated from his own self. Spectacular, inquisitive probes of human thought into the secrets of the external world including those of the outer space have made man oblivious of the need to inquire into the depth of his own being. Says Iqbal:

ڈھونڈنے والا ستاروں کی گذرگاہوں کا
اپنے افکار کی دنیا میں سفر کر نہ سکا

(Man who is successfully continuing his inquiry into the stars and their movements has not been able to undertake a probe into the expanses of his own self)

In the wake of scientific discoveries there has started a maddening race for the accumulation of material wealth and benefits. This has relegated to the background soft values of conventional morality and the still softer values of the inwardism of sufi ethics. Comforts of the body are being promoted at the cost of the comforts of the soul: peace without is being sought at the cost of peace within. "Modern man", Iqbal rightly says, "has ceased to live soulfully, *i.e.* from within ... Absorbed in the fact— the optically present source of sensation— he is entirely cut off from the unplumbed depths of his own being". (*Reconstruction*, p.148) The best way to cure this self-alienation of man lies close at home and he can work it out himself. He should simply recognize the primordial requirements of his self and then try to harmonize its present state with those requirements. Now, man, as the Qur'an says, is the only being in the universe in whom God reposed his trust (*amanat*). (33:72) This is the trust of free,

responsible personality. He is naturally required to deliver back this trust to Him. This means that whatever he does in the world, whatever he achieves in terms of material wealth, technological advancements and scientific discoveries, all his doings should be in harmony with the broader framework of behaviour recommended for him by God and— what is extremely important— with a perpetual sense of accountability to Him. That is in fact the way of every Muslim and that which a sufi adopts as his behavioral agenda in the most stringent fashion and also prescribes it for others.

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