

Iqbal`s theory of knowledge

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Abstract

Iqbal`s philosophy of knowledge has a special significance for his whole philosophical system. Too much stress has usually been placed on other aspects of his thought, overlooking that all these have their footing in it. His famous theory of “ego” is base on the feelings of “I am ness” and his philosophy of religion is embedded in a type of consciousness. Broadly speaking, a theory which distrusts the capacity of reason to give us knowledge of reality and relies on some other source for it is called intuitionism. It is chiefly associated with the names of Henry Bergson and Iqbal Bergson holds that our intellect or reason which works with its concepts is not fitted to reveal reality, as it is in itself.

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Introduction

A thorough study of Iqbal`s system of philosophy will reveal that Iqbal cannot be classed under any of the three schools of philosophical thought: Empiricism, Rationalism or intuitionism. In his theory of knowledge sense perception, reason and intuition are all combined within an organic whole. Rationalism as held by Iqbal, is not based upon logical categories or mere abstract representation. He says rationalism if not divorced from concrete reality represents the truth. Thus while Iqbal embraces rationalism, he is not prepared to justify if at the cost of sense perception. He consequently criticizes Socrates, Plato and the Mutazilites on account of their abstract thinking. He appreciates Kants approach to the problem in so far as he tries to effect on compromise between rationalism and empiricism by maintaining that whereas the matter of knowledge comes from experience, its form is contributed by reason.

Locke and Kant come to the conclusion that the range of real knowledge is strictly limited. Kant held that our knowledge is limited to phenomena. Against this view of Kant, Iqbal holds that reality is knowledge and one can know it through intuition. Iqbal vigorously maintained that reality is an organic whole. The visible world with its flux and shifting phenomena is organically related to the ultimate reality. Therefore, for the purpose of knowledge one cannot depend on purely contemplative circuit, ignoring the world of matter, because it is the mental phenomena of the concrete that makes it possible to pass beyond the concrete.

Iqbal thus adumbrates neither reason nor sense perception exclusively. Sensation, according to him, being a chaotic jumble, cannot led to reality. It is reason that imparts harmony to the chaotic jumble of sensations and moulds it to knowledge-yielding patterns. Thus sensible reality is only a symbol of the ultimate reality and the empirical attitude would bring us into contact with it. Iqbal thus consider Sense-perception of the first importance. No doubt, these are to be supplemented by the perception of heart.

According to Quran

The Quran, recognizing that the empirical attitude of an

indispensable stage in the spiritual life, humanity attaches equal importance to all the regions of human experiences as yielding knowledge of the ultimate Reality which reveals its symbols both with and without. One indirect way of establishing connections with the reality that confronts us in reflective observation and control of its symbols as they reveal themselves to sense-perception; the other way is direct association with that reality as it reveals itself within. The naturalism of the Quran is only recognition of the fact that man is related to nature and this relation, in view of its possibility as a means of controlling her forces, must be exploited in the interests, not of unrighteous desire for domination, but in the nobler interest of a free upward movement, movement of spiritual life. In the interests of securing a complete vision of Reality. Therefore, sense-perception must be supplemented by the perception of, what the Quran describes as fuod or Qalb i.e. heart.

Thus knowledge according to Iqbal is a progressive ideal, starting from the knowledge provided by sense-perception and ending with the knowledge provided by the heart. Iqbal has conveyed the idea in the following couplet.

“The knowledge of truth is gained first through the senses and then through direct realization. The ultimate stage cannot be encompassed within consciousness”.

Thus intellect infused with intuition gives celestial and divine knowledge. Therefore, an attempt is made throughout his poetry to maintain harmony between intellect and intuition. Intuition in itself to Iqbal was a kind of higher intellect. Man in the development of his self hood has to equip himself from both the aspects of knowledge, one cannot be separated from the other.

Iqbal maintains that knowledge is essential for the establishment of connection with external reality. It is not of much use to man if not employed for the purpose of advancement of his self; for if knowledge gained is not used in the development of the self, the self is bound to loose its richness and the spirits is sure to be hardened within itself.

*Science is an instrument for the preservation of life.
Science is a means of establishing the self.
Science and Art are servants of life.
Slaves are born and bred in its house* ^[27].

Both Iqbal and Bergson are unanimous in holding the intuition, unfolds to us new spheres of all illuminations. In contrast, the knowledge yielding by intellect is sectional, piecemeal and fragmentary because it is involved in the labyrinth of space and time. Thus knowledge through intuition is grounded in the deeper and higher self of man. It is incorporeal and eternal and leads directly to eternal reality. Knowledge through intuition means knowledge through the heart, where in we have change but no succession, pure duration but no serial time.

Iqbal warns us that it should not be construed that intuition is antagonistic to intellect. Both aim at the knowledge of Reality and differ only in the course they adopt. The intellect grasps and views certain parts of Reality as abstracted from the whole. It gives only the temporal as aspects of reality. Intuition reveals the reality in its wholeness and fullness. In *Zabur-i-Ajan* Iqbal visualizes intuition as a double-edged sword in man's hand; with one edge he invades the ultimate reality, with the other he invades the universe.

Intuition is the higher form of intellect and in order to view reality as a whole it is necessary that we supplement intuition with intellect. Unless intellect is supplemented by intuition, the knowledge would become narrow, partial and lifeless.

It is thus evident from the above that knowledge as held by Iqbal is not merely the basis of his moral and ethical system, but the foundation stone of the whole life-seen on unseen, real and ideal.

But the important point which is to be taken note of is Iqbal's improvement of the genetic account of knowledge. A genetic approach to the problem of knowledge e.g., a study of the conditions enables us to lay aside the historic rivalry between Rationalism and Empiricism and to perceive how reason and experience co-operate in building up the edifice of knowledge. Looking at the problem from the genetic point of view, we find that we have to start with a living organism or self and our environment to which it is related. The environment is full of stimuli which evoke varied responses from it. Every one of these response is accompanied by some sort of awareness which we may call experience.

As the individual organism grows, its experience also grows. This organized experience is what we call knowledge. According to this account, senses are not gateway to knowledge. They are rather the instruments with which the organism deals with the environment. Sensations are not part of knowledge but incitements of activities that terminate in knowledge. Knowledge is not the gift of any special faculty i.e. experience or reason. It is the result of interaction between a self-endowed with certain powers and the environment.

A serious drawback of genetic account of knowledge is that only emphasis the practical character of knowledge and ignores the distinguished nature of mind and heart that we value. One cannot deny that Iqbal is sceptical of the value of academic knowledge which often saps the students Vitality and fails to equip him properly for life of active striving in the service of worthy causes.

I hold that knowledge and intelligence to be cheap as takes away the crusader's Sward and shield!

It is the active quest, the yearning for achievement which give vitality to knowledge and wings to life. Yet all knowledge is not practical, there is knowledge which is contemplative, reflective and intuitive. Iqbal being fully conscious of this, very significantly remarks that intuition is the developed form of intellect. The significance of intuition has been the theme of his poetry. According to him, the higher aspects of knowledge, which should be the ultimate aim of man is based on intuition.

In his letter to K.G. Saiyidain, Iqbal elucidates his point of view:

"I have generally used the word 'knowledge' in the sense of knowledge based on the senses. It gives man power which should be subordinated to Religion. If it is not subordinated to religion, it is a satanic force. This knowledge is the first step to true knowledge, as I have pointed out in the *Javid Namah*".

"The knowledge of truth is gained first through the senses and then through direct realization. Its ultimate stages cannot be encompassed within consciousness".

"Knowledge which cannot be circumscribed within consciousness and which is the final stage of Truth, is also called Love or Intuition".

The practical explanation of Love is contained in Iqbal's philosophy of the self and its systematized exposition is contained in the letter sent to Dr. Nicholson and incorporated in his *Introduction to the Secrets of the self*, the English translation of Iqbal's *Asrar-i-Khudi*. In the same letter Iqbal has laid stress on the true function of intellect. He says: "For the purpose of its preservation and expansion it (life) has invented or developed out of itself certain instruments e.g. senses, intellect etc.....which help it to assimilate obstruction. According to Iqbal, intellect is desirable but love is more so. The former is necessary because it preserves the self and puts salutary checks on the stray ramblings of the heart. But to Iqbal love's worth is great. He glorifies love or intuition in his following verse:

(Although intellect puts little value upon the goods of love yet I have no intention of exchanging the heart-melting sign for Jamshid's throne).

The reason why Iqbal praises love or intuition so much is that intuition catches the glimpses of the ultimate reality while intellect fails to achieve that goal on account of its inherent imperfection. Love according to Iqbal, is able to know the unknowable.

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