

Iqbal's Critique of Western Conception of Time: A Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract

This manuscript investigates Allama Iqbal's astute critique on materialism and its concomitant mechanistic worldview, which interprets the cosmos as a fixed and immutable entity. This paradigm has been progressively undermined and, as of today, has been largely repudiated even within those intellectual circles that once fervently upheld it. This situation can be traced back to the intellectual legacy of the 17th century, marked by the emergence of novel scientific methodologies and philosophical frameworks introduced by luminaries such as Descartes, Galileo, and Newton. However, it is essential to recognize that no philosophical or scientific perspective can be regarded as definitive, as our comprehension of philosophy undergoes significant radical shifts and fluctuations. As knowledge progresses and new avenues of inquiry are explored, alternative perspectives, likely more robust, become conceivable.

The Modern theory of relativity in physics supports Iqbal's standpoint by depicting matter not as a static substance, nor reality as an unchanging entity-views commonly associated with Classical materialism and classical Greek philosophy-but rather as a system of interrelated events, characterized by a dynamic void and continuous creative evolution. Time is characterized as subjective and objective, as well as sequential in nature, and is not an absolute. However, Iqbal enriches this interpretation by introducing the notion of 'duration' in conjunction with linear time, positing that 'reality deep in its inner being lies, perhaps the dream of a new birth' and 'Time represents a free creative movement, and reality possesses a spiritual essence'. So this distinctive viewpoint challenges the constraints of Western philosophical thought and presents a novel framework for understanding the concepts of time and reality.

Keywords: Absolute, Creativity, Dynamic, Ego and Time

Introduction

The time of modern man has been negotiating and witnessed an ever increasing and accelerating pace of change. The modern period of human history has especially been characterized by scientific discoveries and technological innovations. These discoveries and innovations have, in course of time, led to sweeping horizontal and profound vertical changes in various fields of life-society, polity, economy, culture, education, philosophy and literature. The advanced technologies have not changed the structure of our environment; they have also reshaped our religious, moral and aesthetic values. Our age seems to be authenticating the philosophy of flux as advanced by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus. Infact, most of the recent western philosophical trends such as *Empiricism*, *Pragmatism*, *Dialectical Materialism*, *Realism*, *Bergsonianism* and *Positivism* etc. deem change as real. Change implying temporal sequences do invite our attention to serious philosophical consideration of time. The starting point of such a

consideration leads us to the acceptance of the reality of time premised on acceptance of the reality of change.

Iqbal was a creative artist of exceptional depth and sophistication. He was not only well-versed in philosophical systems of east and west, he was also abreast of modern scientific developments as well. He was fully cognizant with the theoretical implications and practical consequences of the acceptance of reality of change, which acceptance entailed a radical perspective on the problem of time. The following couplet from the *Bang-e-Dara* brings out Iqbal's keen awareness of the problem under consideration:

سکون محال ہے قدرت کے کارخانہ میں

سبات ایک تغیر کو ہے زمانے میں

Rest is impossible of the natural order of things

Only change is changeless in time (A. Ansari, 2004, pp.69-71).

It was not the philosopher Iqbal who recognized the significance of time; instead, it was the poet within him that encouraged the philosopher to seek the immediate fact of experience. As a young poet, he envisioned the destructive nature of time. Over time, this vision expanded, and he came to understand time as not only a force of destruction but also a principle factor for the creation of novelty and uniqueness. Then the poet of beauty, longing for union with its eternal source, is attracted by the increasing rhythm of life is not repetitive; it is creative of new forms. Thus the poet conceived continuous struggle and conflict in the process of life (Malik, 1974, p.250).

Historical background of Time and Change

The problem of the reality of change and time has given the most serious consideration by Iqbal. Of course, he has not advanced a systematic exposition of the problem under consideration. However, he has advanced significant insights with regard to change and time in his numerous prose and poetic writings. In his book the '*Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*' Iqbal has referred to various Islamic and Western thinkers whose views on time are somehow relevant and different from Iqbal's perspective on time. For example among Muslim philosophers, he refers to the *atomism* of Asharites, Ibn-e-Hazm's critique of the *atomistic* perspective on time and views on such Muslim philosophers as Ghazali, Tusi, Rumi, Dawani, Jahiz, Miskhawaih, Mullah Baqir, Ibn Rushd and Iraqi etc. Amongst western thinkers he has referred to Zeno, Plato, Aristotle, Newton, Einstein, Kant, Nietzsche, MC. Taggart, Bergson, Russell, Cantor Eddington, James Ward, Spengler and William James etc. In the light of his new understanding and interpretation of time, Iqbal tries to explicate and re-interpret Islamic ideas in accordance with Modern philosophical and scientific disciplines. He is fully convinced that his radical perspective on time is consistent with the basic teachings of Islam. He is sure that his perspective on time entailed huge practical consequences and socio-political implications for the world of Islam (A. Ansari, 2004, pp.70-71).

According to Iqbal, The Quran is *anti-classical* in nature and several verses emphasise that it is the duty of Muslims to reflect on these signs and not to pass by them as if they were blind and deaf. This description of the universe as dynamic in origin, as finite but capable of increase, is totally against the whole tenor of Greek philosophy which influenced early Muslim philosophy. In reality the view of Reality as envisaged by the Greeks is totally static; quite differ with what the Quran describes it as the conception of life as a creative, continuous and dynamic process is totally foreign to Greek temperament. Even if some thinkers, like Heraclitus, regarded movement and change as real, it is not creative and dynamic change but circular which has no beginning and no end. Everything in the world is

recurrent, eternally rotating and governed by a *cyclic motion* and Parmenides regarded motion is *unreal* and *illusory* (Iqbal, 2016, pp.3-4).

Zeno, the ancient Greek philosopher, approached the problem of space by questioning the movement within it. His arguments are well-known in philosophy, challenge the reality of movement. Iqbal writes Zeno's proof in favour of unreality of change and movement is based on wrong notion of time:

“What is an indivisible act of change, when divided into component parts, becomes a series of motionless acts and thus we are led to a conclusion that is absolutely paradoxical. What, in reality, Zeno is able to prove is not the unreality of change and motion but the inadequacy of this spatialized time to grasp the nature of change. This conception of Time is the result of our practical necessity.” He says in reality change is everywhere?

Iqbal again says:

“The act of movement, i.e. movement as lived (reality) and not as thought (mathematics), does not admit of any divisibility. The flight of the arrow observed as a passage in Space is divisible, but its flight regarded as an act, apart from its realization in Space, is one and incapable of partition into a multiplicity. In partition lies its destruction.”

Iqbal says that the Muslim thinkers from the al-Ash'arite school demonstrated that space and time cannot be infinitely divided. According to their view, space, time, and motion consist of indivisible points and instants, which cannot be further subdivided. By doing so, they established the possibility of movement and the existence of infinitesimals. If space and time have a limit to their divisibility, movement between two points in space becomes possible within a Finite time. Furthermore, the Ash'arite concept of infinitesimals has been validated by modern mathematics. Max Planck's 1905 theory posits that the universe is discrete at the quantum level. In the realm of singularities, Planck Time and Planck Length are so minuscule that further subdivision is impossible. Thus, physical understanding is only attainable Post-Planck era, which undermines Zeno's arguments as refuted by Planck and Bertrand Russell (Ibid., pp.35-37).

Iqbal quotes Qur'anic Verse in support of the dynamic universe:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ١٩٠

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding (Al-Quran, 3:190).

In view of the same, he appreciates the ancient Buddha's emphasis on change and is severely critical of Plato who underlined the reality of eternal universals and castigated change to be only an illusion. Iqbal was convinced of the dynamic nature of reality. He accepted the all-pervasive reality of change on multiple layers of human experience as physical, intellectual, cultural, social and political. Man had got to come to grips with phenomenon of all pervasive change. He cannot afford to be a silent spectator of the sweeping vertical and horizontal changes across. In his numerous writings Iqbal has installmentally assembled a powerful critique of Plato's philosophy. In his Mathnawi '*Secrets of the Self*' Iqbal has categorically brought out the pernicious impact of Plato on the development of Muslim Thought. Plato's *theory of Ideas* underlines the illusory character of the physical world and the ultimate reality of *Ideas* and *Universals*. Iqbal thinks that the Muslim mind was deeply poisoned by Plato's philosophy of unreality of the world, clearly implying the unreality of time as well:

نزندا جان را عالم احکام جوش است

مرده دل را عالم اعیان خوش است

Sweet is the world of phenomenon to the living spirit

Dear is the world of ideas to the dead spirit (Ansari, 2004, pp.77-78).

For Plato, e.g., the Ultimate Reality, the world of ideas is static, immutable, lying above and beyond the world of change and becoming. Change and movement meant for him unreality. But then the question is how this change and movement which characterize this so-called unreal world come about. Plato is unable to give any satisfactory answer and it is to remove this defect in Plato's theory, viz., the absence of dynamism, and Aristotle postulates God as a principle of movement, as the *Prime Mover* of the Universe. But the nature of Reality conceived by Aristotle is equally inadequate to explain what he wants to explain. God, according to him is, no doubt, the *Prime Mover* but His activity is nothing short of inactivity. Aristotle himself calls it '*an activity of immobility.*' He is Himself *unmoved*, removed from this world of pain and suffering, change and becoming, sun shines and storms, and having no sort of Principle that does nothing and therefore is nothing (Dar, 1965, pp.200-01).

Iqbal and the Western Thinkers

Iqbal on Newton's Absolute Time

Newton advances the view of nature as *Pure Materiality*, for him, space is an absolute void which is dotted by micro and macro objects across the universe. Iqbal raises objections to Newton's description of time as something which in itself and from its own nature flows equally Iqbal writes:

"The metaphor of stream implied in this description suggests serious objections to Newton's view of time. "We cannot understand how a thing is affected on its immersion in this stream, and how it differs from things that do not participate in its flow. Nor can we form any idea of the beginning, the end, and the boundaries of time if we try to understand it on the analogy of a stream." Moreover, if flow, movement, or '*passage*' is the last word as to the nature of Time, there must be another Time to Time the movement of the first Time, and another which Times the second Time, and so on to infinity (Iqbal, 2016, pp.73-74).

Again Iqbal writes:

"The criticism of the foundation of the mathematical sciences has fully disclosed that the hypothesis of a Pure Materiality, an enduring stuff situated in an absolute space, is unworkable" (Ibid., pp.34-35).

Einstein on Newton's Absolute Time

Newton's theory of the Absolute separability of space and time is thoroughly repudiated by Einstein. Einstein's Theory of Relativity deems such a separability of Space-Time is impossible. For Einstein, Reality is comprised of four dimensional continuum i.e. that means three dimension of space and one dimension is time, it also inseparably includes matter and motion. Space is comprised of all its events and objects whereas changes and motions are included in time. Only in abstraction can Space-Time manifold be regarded as changeless and motionless.

Iqbal on Einstein's theory of Relativity

Iqbal was fully abreast of late 19th and early 20th century physics and mathematics. In his book '*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*', Iqbal has cited numerous Western scientists and even mathematicians with a view to illustrating his conception of time. He has advanced his understanding of the philosophical implications of Einstein's Theory of Relativity in the following words:

"First, it destroys, not the objectivity of nature but the view of substance as simple location in space-a view which led to materialism in classical physics. 'substance' for modern physics is not a persistent

thing with variable states but a system of inter-related events....secondly, the theory makes space dependent on matter. The universe, according to Einstein, is not a kind of island in an infinite space. In the absence of matter the universe would shrink to a point”.

According to Iqbal, Einstein’s Theory of Relativity does not throw any light on the ultimate nature of things. Secondly, Einstein’s Theory of Relativity does not treat Time as a free creative movement. Consequently, his theory regards future as already given and accepts *determinism* (Ibid., pp.37-39).

In view of the same Einstein’s Theory of Relativity cannot explain the Real nature of time. Einstein’s concept of time is neither Bergson’s ‘*Pure Duration*’ nor is it ‘*Serial Time*’. Acceptance of time as a fourth dimension of Space point out by Iqbal is equivalent to acceptance of the unreality of time. Iqbal underlines that time cannot deem to be the fourth of Space-Time continuum, time cannot be conceived as the movement of a figure in a certain direction. While illustrating Iqbal’s concept of time, Prof Waheed Akhter writes:

“Movement, in theory, is always causal; Iqbal holds that the law of causality fails at the level of life and mind. At this level we need concepts of ‘ends’ and ‘purposes’. Movement, not causal, but purposive and end bound, originates from within; it’s not external to the effect. Intellect, upon which scientific theories are based, cannot apprehend and appreciate this movement. The faculty which apprehends it is called by Bergson intuition-a-self-conscious instinct. In Iqbal’s terminology its ‘Ishq’ it includes both intuition as source of knowledge and love as a creative force. Only *ishq* is capable of knowing Real Time and participating in its creative activity. Ego, the seat of *ishq*, is prior to time. It is not an accident but the source of all creativity. It is grounded in freedom and hence time, as its activity, is not deterministic. The real movement implied in Real Time, is life-force. Time as the creativity of the ego is at the back of evolution. Motion resulting in quantitative and qualitative changes creates new forms of matter and life. It’s this creative force that makes evolution purposive. Real Time is related on the one end to the Absolute ego, i.e. God, and on the other end to the finite ego, i.e. human self. Realization of this relation helps man to overcome finitude and attain immortality” (Ansari, 2004, p.85).

Iqbal and Kant on Time

Kant in his famous epistemological prognostications reaches to the conclusion that space and time are determining factors of our knowledge. The world as it exists is comprises of two things, viz; Things as they are and things as they change. We cannot understand things without space. To all intents and purposes, they are situated in space. Secondly, ongoing changes in things pre-suppose time. All changes can be apprehended with reference to time. However, according to Kant, space and time are not objective realities; they are just our modes of understanding reality. They are subjective or they are not independent of subject. Within the framework of space and time, we can only see *phenomena* and *noumena* or *thing in themselves*, are always beyond the ken of our understanding. What is ultimate real can never be available to our given *epistemological apparatus*. As knowledge of ultimate reality is impossible of attainment, metaphysics, at the very outset, is impossible of understanding.

Iqbal agrees with Kant that space and time are subjective (Hasan, 1944, pp.9-10). However, Kant’s conclusion that all our knowledge is *phenomenal* and we can never have knowledge of *noumena*, is not acceptable to Iqbal. Kant is right with regard to impossibility of metaphysics and impossibility of knowledge of *noumena*, if “normal level is the only level of knowledge-yielding experience” (Iqbal, 2016, p.182). However, in view of some vital considerations Iqbal categorically claims that it’s not the

only level. Iqbal maintains that there are various grades of being and they correspondingly determined the import of time and space. Kant wrongly assumes space and time as fixed and unvarying modes which mould and determined our knowledge. “These modes themselves admit of new meaning in relation to beings higher and lower than our selves, and consequently there may be a grade of experience in which there is neither space nor time” (Hasan, 1944, p.10).

Iqbal refers to a Muslim thinker Iraqi’s interpretation of space, viz; the Space of *material bodies*, the Space of *immaterial beings* and the *Space of God*. Even the Space of *immaterial of bodies* is different with reference to ‘*Gross Bodies*’, the Space of *subtle bodies* and the Space of *light* with its highest velocity. The Space of *immaterial beings* and the Space of *human soul* etc. is neither at rest nor as motion. Finally the *Divine Space* can be said to be free from all dimensions (Iqbal, 2016, p.136-37). We live in a dynamic and growing universe; the things are not situated in any *Absolute Space*. The space is not an objective reality, lower animals experience one dimensional Space, higher animals experience two dimensional Space and human beings experience three dimensional Space. The possibility of space being more than three dimensional cannot be ruled out.

So is the case with time. Time is also relative to the varying grades of beings, the varieties of time can be discerned with reference to *gross bodies*, *immaterial beings* and *God*. While the *gross bodies* experience Serial Time, Divine Time is absolutely free from change and succession. “*God’s eye sees all the visible and His ear all the audibles in one indivisible act of perception*” (Ibid., p.75). God’s Time is an Eternal ‘Now’. Thus, time is relative to various grades of beings.

Thus, space and time, the forms of all experience according to Kant are not static and determined in their import. With the increase or decrease in psychic powers, their meaning undergoes change. In view of the same, the possibility of there being other levels of experience than the normal level of Spatio-Temporal experience cannot be rule out. We can readily agree with Kant’s conclusion of the impossibility of metaphysics, if there is no alternative to normal level of experience. If there is the possibility of other levels of experience than metaphysics must be deemed to be possible. Such level of experience should reveal the nature of reality as it is in itself. It must furnish us the nature of reality free from spatio-temporal determinations. Iqbal posits intuition to be such a *super-normal* channel of understanding. For Iqbal, intuition transcends perceptual and intellectual modes of understanding; it’s a unique experience of its own kind. Intuition furnishes us an understanding of reality which is beyond perception or thought (Ibid., p.18-19).

Iqbal on Nietzsche’s Periodic Time

Iqbal was, in many ways, most powerfully impacted by *Post-Kantian voluntarists*. Besides Bergson, it is Nietzsche whose *voluntarism* or *vitalism* profoundly influenced and directed the philosophical development of Iqbal. Iqbal’s *Poetic’s* and *Prose* writings are clearly imbued with Nietzschean moorings. Especially, Nietzsche’s doctrine of *will to power* and *the doctrine of Superman* seem to have oriented in Iqbal to a *voluntaristic* or *vitalistic* philosophical and religious *weltanschauung* or world view. However, presently, we are not concerned with the philosophical impact of Nietzsche on Iqbal. Our limited purpose is to bring out Iqbal’s estimation of Nietzsche’s doctrine of *Eternal Recurrence*, in so far as it implicitly or explicitly advances a theory of Time as well as a *theory of Immortality*. To begin with, in radical contrast to Iqbal Nietzsche deems *human ego* to be a *fiction*, a *mere fancy*, it is nothing but a fanciful superimposition upon our body (Qaiser, 2001, p.37). Iqbal point out that Nietzsche takes a pure intellectual view of the matter under consideration. However, for Iqbal ego is a spiritual fact and not a

fiction. It is a spiritual reality proceeding from the directive energy of God. Following, the Quran, Iqbal deems human ego or soul proceeding from the command of lord (Iqbal, 1930, p.103).

With reference to *Eternal Recurrence* and *Immortality*, we need to bring out the respective accounts of both Nietzsche and Iqbal. It may be noted that Nietzsche's concept of *Immortality* is diametrically different from that of Iqbal. Nietzsche does not believe in the *Immortality* of soul. He rather believes in purely materialistic nature of *Immortality*. For Nietzsche, it is *Eternal Recurrence* of energy centers which entails *Immortality*. His doctrine of *Eternal Recurrence* implies that all things including human beings will recur again and again in course of time. For Nietzsche, time is unending and energy is eternal and never lost, whatever goes comes back. The wheel of being is eternally rolling, what is presently happening has happened before and will happen again and again (Qaiser, 2001, pp.39-40).

The scientific authenticity of Nietzsche's *Eternal Recurrence* is hopelessly thin. Such a concept of *immortality* sounds to be horrible. According to Iqbal:

“His enthusiasm for the future of man ended in the doctrine of eternal recurrence-perhaps the most hopeless idea of immortality ever formed by man. This eternal repetition is not eternal ‘becoming’, it is the same old idea of ‘being’ masquerading as ‘becoming’” (Iqbal, 2016, p.187).

Iqbal castigates Nietzsche's doctrine of *Eternal Recurrence* to be a deeper version of mechanism. His doctrine of time as a perpetual circular movement entails an *Immortality* that is absolutely intolerable. The possible emergence of *Superman* by recourse to *Eternal Recurrence* is not going to might its terrible intolerability. Even, the so called *Superman* can never be absolutely something new. The *Superman* has emerged in an infinite number of times before us. Iqbal writes:

“Such is Nietzsche's *Eternal Recurrence*. It is only a more rigid kind of mechanism, based not on an ascertained fact but only on a working hypothesis of science. Nor does Nietzsche seriously grapple with the question of time. He takes it objectively and regards it merely as an infinite series of events returning to itself over and over again. Now time, regards as a perpetual circular movement, makes *Immortality* absolutely intolerable. And what makes *Immortality* bearable, according to Nietzsche? It is the expectation that a recurrence of the combination of energy-centres which constitutes my personal existence is a necessary factor in the birth of that ideal combination which he calls ‘*Superman*’. But the *superman* has been an infinite number of times before. His birth is inevitable; how can the prospect give me any aspiration? We can aspire only for what is absolutely new, and the absolutely new is unthinkable in Nietzsche's view which is nothing more than a fatalism worse than the one summed up in the word ‘*qismat*’. Such a doctrine, far from keying up the human organism for the fight of life, tends to destroy its action-tendencies and relaxes the tension of the ego.”

Thus, Iqbal's concept of *Immortality* radically and qualitatively differs from that of Nietzsche. Iqbal's idea of *immortality* is premised on a vital consideration:

“It is highly improbable that a being whose evolution has taken millions of years should be thrown away as a thing of no use!” ((Ibid., pp.115-19).

However, for Iqbal, *Immortality* is not a man's right. Each one of us is a candidate for *Immortality*, only a highly developed self can earn *Immortality*. Only a fully realized and developed self can win *immortality*.

Iqbal writes:

“Life offers a scope for ego-activity, and death is the first test of the synthetic activity of the ego. There are no pleasure giving and pain-giving acts; there are only ego-sustaining and ego-dissolving acts. It is the deed that prepares the ego for dissolution, or disciplines him for a future career. The principle of the

ego-sustaining deed is respect for the ego in myself as well as in others. *Personal Immorality*, then, is not ours as of right; it is to be achieved by personal effort. Man is only a candidate for it. The most depressing error of Materialism is the supposition that finite consciousness exhausts its object. Philosophy and science are only one way of approaching the subject. There are other ways of approach open to us; and death, if present action has sufficiently fortified the ego against the shock that physical dissolution brings, is only a kind of passage to what the Quran describes as '*Barzakh*'. The records of Sufistic experience indicate that '*Barzakh*' is a state of consciousness characterized by a change in the ego's attitude towards time and space" (Ibid., pp.119-20).

The *Immorality* of human ego can be made possible by adopting a certain mode of life. The human self needs to be brought into contact with the ultimate source of life.

Iqbal and Bergson on Time

With regard to time, Iqbal seems most akin to Bergson among Western philosophers. Bergson has used time in two senses, looking at the phenomenon of time in its superficial sense; Bergson characterized it as *Serial Time* or *Clock Time*. In its real sense time is conceived by Bergson as *Pure-Duration*-a continuous and ceaseless flow wherein everything lives and moves and has its being. The notion of ceaseless change is fundamental to Bergson's concept of *Pure Duration*. *Pure Duration* is genuinely creative always evolving newer forms. Iqbal too advances a distinction between Serial and non-Serial Time; corresponding respectively with the *Efficient* and the *Appreciative Self* of man, our *Efficient Self* is intimately linked to the spatial world. Our *Efficient-Self* reveals itself as a series of discrete states, even though its unity as a totality is not comprised, such a time can be characterized as long and short (Ibid., p.47). On the other hand our *Appreciative Self* lives in Pure Duration. Such an *Appreciative Self* is not characterized by distinctive states. Whereas the time of the *Appreciative Self* is a single 'now' The time of the *Efficient Self* is comprised of an endless series of 'nows' (Bergson, 1910, pp.90-91).

Bergson and Iqbal are agreed in their emphasis on the intuitive appropriation of Pure-Duration. Both agree that it's beyond our intellectual faculties to grasp Pure Duration. For Bergson our intellectual abstractions are barren and artificial. Such abstractions cannot fathom the organic unity of life (Ibid., p.332). Iqbal in *Gulshan-i-Raz-i-Jadid* also makes a distinction between intuition and intellect. The following lines merit special consideration in this regard:

*"Unable to perceive infinity,
The intellect just multiples pure unity,
Lame, it likes to stand still;
And blind, give up the kernel for the shell,
The stars and planets that we see Are fragments of reality-
Creations of the intellect,
Which must dissect,
We never saw time with our inner sight
And have invented year and month and day and night"* (Iqbal, 1964, p.7).

Real Time, according to Bergson, is ceaseless flow; generating continuously ever new forms unpredictable by our faculties of understanding. Iqbal also brings out that Real Time is creative rather than repetitive, Iqbal writes:

"If time is real, and not a mere repetition of homogenous moments which make conscious experience a delusion, then every movement in the reality is original, giving birth to what is absolutely novel and

unforeseeable.... To exist in Real Time is not to be bound by the fetters of serial time. But to create it from moment to moment and to be absolutely free and original in creation....Creation is opposite to repetition which is characteristic of mechanical action. That is why it is impossible to explain the creative activity of life in terms of mechanism” (Iqbal, 2016, p.50).

Difference between Iqbal and Bergson:

Bergson does not admit of teleological character of the creative evolution. According to Bergson reality cannot be said to be free and creative unless the portals of the future remains open to it. If we ascribe teleology to the creative evolution, we shall be nullifying the primordial freshness of *Pure-Duration*. Iqbal brings out that such an objection of Bergson is not tenable, for teleology does not mean working out something in the light of a fixed plane such a *pre-destinarianism* is detrimental to the freedom of God as well as of man. Teleology is not a line already drawn but a line in the drawing. It is a realization of a fresh possibilities, the world process is purposive in so far as it is selective in character. It brings itself to some sort of fulfilment, for Iqbal, “Reality is *Pure-Duration* in which thought, life and purpose interpenetrate to form and organic unity” (Ibid., p.55).

Iqbal underlines that Bergson was substantially wrong in assuming that *Pure-Time* precedes the person, who can be predicated of both *Pure-Duration* and *Elan Vital*. The multiplicity of objects can neither be put together or assembled nor sustained by *Pure-Time*. The following words merit serious consideration: “The multiplicity of nature, broken up into innumerable instants can only be grasped by the appreciative act of a lasting self which can build it up together in a lasting synthesis. For Iqbal, time, although an essential element in reality, is not reality itself. In Greek and Hindu thought time was bound to things visible and escape from it was possible only through self-annihilation, but Iqbal boldly introduces time into the very heart of God. God is not the Unmoved Mover; the God portrayed by the Quran is an active, changing and living God. For Iqbal, God lives both in Eternity and in Serial time.”

Iqbal imaginatively travels beyond the dimensional world, devoid of left and right or night and day. To origin of such a world is from Divine fiat. It is innocent of decay and perennially transforming. It is a perfectly beautiful world. The following lines from *Javid Namah* bring out the same:

*I passed beyond the bounds of this universe
And set foot in the undimensioned world,
A world...without both right and left,
A world devoid of night and day.
In that universe was another world
Whose origin was from Divine fiat,
Undecaying and every moment transformed,
Unimaginable, yet there clearly visible,
Every moment clothed in a new perfection,
Every moment clad in a new beauty,
Its time had no need of moon and sun* (Arberry, 1966, pp.113-14).

Bergson on Self

For Bergson, our ego is not something which is unchanging within us. A formless unchanging ego is born out of our imagination. We need some thread on which to peg our psychic states, we imagine our psychic states to be beads of a necklace. In view of the same, we suppose a solid thread to hold these

beads together. Thus, we imaginatively create, sustain and then belief in a permanent self. According to Bergson, nothing can endure through change, for nothing is unchangeable. Bergson underlines that a self is nothing but mental states continuously changing. Human self is a continuous flow of ideas, volitions, feelings, sensations, etc. we change without ceasing (Qaiser, 2001, pp.131-32).

The self, according to Bergson is not purposive. Human personality is continuously growing without ceasing. Each upcoming moment adds something new to our store of experiences. We cannot foresee as to what is going to happen in ceaselessly emerging moments. In view of the same, Bergson holds (*Elan-Vital, Vital Impulse* or *Vital Impetus*) to be the fundamental reality and prior to the self. All living beings share this *Impulse* or *Impetus* which directs all organic evolution. Human personality “is not an end itself, it is nothing but an instrument at the service of the *Elan* which gropingly seeks to conquer its freedom. Moreover, it is nothing but a temporary phase, a transitory form of the *Elan*, it has no genuine reality because it does not exist outside of itself; it is nothing but a projection, a projected shadow” (M.A.M, 1981, p.33).

As against Bergson, Iqbal advances the thesis that mental states are not chaotic but display a unity and have a centre as well as, Iqbal writes:

“Mental states do not exist in mutual isolations.

They mean and involve one another.

They exist as phases of a complex whole, called mind.

The organic unity, however, of these inter-related states or

Let’s say, events is a special kind of unity” (Iqbal, 2016, p.99).

Iqbal admits that consciousness is constant change; nevertheless it is an organizing principle as well (Ibid., p.41). Our continuous experiences retain a permanent element. More importantly, Iqbal underlines, human self is purposive. It is not entirely a forward rush without purpose, Iqbal writes:

“Thus ends and purposes, whether they exist as conscious or subconscious tendencies, form the warp and woof of our conscious experience. And the notion of purpose cannot be understood except in reference to the future. The past, no doubt, abides and operates in the present; but this operation of the past in the present is not the whole of consciousness. The element of purpose discloses a kind of forward look in consciousness. Purposes not only colour our present states of consciousness, but also reveal its future direction. In fact, they constitute the forward push of our life, and thus in a way anticipate and influence the states that are yet to be. To be determined by an end is to be determined by what ought to be. Thus past and future both operate in the present state of consciousness, and the future is not wholly undetermined as Bergson’s analysis of our conscious experience shows. A state of attentive consciousness involves both memory and imagination as operating factors. On the analogy of our conscious experience, therefore, Reality is not a blind vital impulse wholly unilluminated by idea; its nature is through and through teleological” (Ibid., p.53).

Iqbal on Self

As against Bergson Iqbal accords fundamental place to the self. While for Bergson *Elan Vital* is the fundamental Reality. For Iqbal Self precedes everything else, he goes to the extent of deeming ultimate Reality also to be a self. The centrality of human self is brought out by Iqbal in the following lines:

“The form of existence is an effect of the self,

Whatever thou seest is a secret of the self,

When the self-awoke to consciousness

It revealed the universe of thought (Nicholson, 1969,p.16).

Again, in contrast to Bergson, Iqbal lays utmost emphasis on the uniqueness and privacy of individual self. In this respect, the following words of Iqbal with reference to the Quran seem to be engaging:

“The Quran in its simple, forceful manner emphasizes the individuality and uniqueness of man, and has, I think, a definite view of his destiny as a unity of life. It is in consequence of this view of man as a unique individuality which makes it impossible for one individual to be the burden of another, and entitles him only to what is due to his personal effort, that the Quran is led to reject the idea of redemption” (Iqbal, 2016, p.95).

In view of Bergson’s denial of the self’ the question of Immortality of self cannot bother him. On the other hand Iqbal’s philosophy is centrally and foundationally anchored on self and, accordingly, Iqbal has laid emphasis on personal and earned Immortality of the self (Ibid., pp.111-12).

Bergson and Iqbal, both advocate two aspects of the self, viz; *Efficient Self* and *Appreciative Self*, or which may be categorized as *Social Self* and *Fundamental Self*. Bergson’s interpretation of this distinction can be brought out in the following words of Iqbal:

“The self with which psychology deals is the *Social Self* which is viewed in spatial terms. We say that states succeeded one another and can be quantitatively measured and determined. The time of the *Social Self* is the time of which we predicate long and short and can be conceived as a straight line composed of spatial points which are external to one another like so many stages in a journey. But which we look into *Deeper Self*, we find that boundaries of states gradually melt away, the multiplicity of definitely outlined feelings, volitions, images become less definite, less a multiplicity. The unity of the *Fundamental Self* is like the unity of the germ in which the experiences of its individual ancestors exists, not as a plurality but as unity in which every experience permeates the whole. This organization of the facts of consciousness is the work of time. It is time itself” (Ibid., pp.47-48).

Iqbal is in agreement with Bergson insofar as he brings out the two aspects of the self viz; the *Efficient Self* and the *Appreciative Self*. Our self is efficient insofar as it is related to the space, with daily life and external things. On the other hand, the *Appreciative Self* is recalled to us by recourse to a profound analysis of our conscious experiences or through mediation, when our *Efficient Self* is, so to say, bracketed up. This self, for Iqbal is the *Real Self*.

According to Bergson, *Elan Vital* is one and the only reality. It is identical with continuous Time or Duration. Human Self is nothing but a transitory form of *Elan*. Thus *Elan* is prior to the self. *Pure Duration* is also precedes *Human Self*. For Bergson our “personality is and selves, too, are means of freedom for the *Elan-the Elan* is *Supra-Personal* or *Impersonal*. Selfhood, therefore, is not an end in itself-it is means to attain freedom for the *Elan-for itself*” (Bergson, 1928, p.34-35).

In substantial and essential disagreement with Bergson, Iqbal deems self as prior to space and time. The very concept of time is predicated on the ego. Human ego alone can appreciate its activity in time. The ego is at the heart of all life. Life is essentially rooted in egohood. According to Iqbal:

“The Ultimate Reality as *Pure-Duration* in which thought, life and purpose inter-penetrate to form an organic unity.”

Iqbal further writes, “We cannot conceive this unity except as the unity of a self-as all-embracing concrete self, the Ultimate source of all individual life and thought”. For Iqbal, Bergson’s *Elan* is nothing but one side of the ego.

Iqbal underlines that Bergson is wrong in regarding *Pure Time* as prior to self. Iqbal has advanced the following argument in this regard:

“Neither *Pure Space* nor *Pure Time* can hold together the multiplicity of objects and events. It is the *Appreciative Act* of an enduring self only which can seize the multiplicity of duration-broken up into an infinity of instants-and transform it to the organic wholeness of a synthesis. To exist in *Pure Duration* is to be a self, and to be a self is to be able to say ‘I am’, only that truly exists which can say ‘I am’ (Iqbal, 2016, p.55-56).

Both Bergson and Iqbal regard time to be subjective though real, for an objective understanding of time turns it into *Serial Time*. Time is *Pure Duration* can only be appropriated subjectively. *Pure Duration* can be understood on the analogy of our inner experience. It is a ceaseless flow, Bergson writes:

He says “ let us then concentrate attention on that which we have that is at the same Time the most removed from externality and the least penetrated with intellectuality. Let us seek, in the depths of our experience, the point where we fell ourselves most intimately within our own life. It is into *Pure Duration* that we then plunge back, a Duration in which the past, always moving on, is swelling unceasingly with a present that is absolute new” (Qaiser, 2001, p.144).

As against objective time, Iqbal also deems time to be *subjective*. The following lines from *the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* bear out the same:

“A purely objective point of view is only partially helpful in our understanding of the nature of time. The right course is a careful psychological analysis of our conscious experience which alone reveals the true nature of time....Thus the character of our conscious experience-our point of departure in all knowledge- gives us a clue to the concept which reconciles the opposition of permanence and change, of time regarded as an organic whole or eternity, and time regarded as atomic” (Iqbal, 2016, p.76).

Iqbal says:

Our time which has neither beginning nor end, Blossoms from the flower-bed of our mind.

Look, o thou enthralled by Yesterday and Tomorrow, Behold another world in thine own heart (Qaiser, 2001, pp.144).

For Bergson Duration is a continuous Movement it is always creative and novel. Bergson writes:

“*The more we study the nature of Time, the more
We shall comprehend that Duration means invention,
The creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the
Absolutely new*” (Bergson, 1928, p.11).

For Iqbal too, *Pure Duration* is characterized by creativity and novelty. The following verses from *the Secrets of the Self* indicate such a creativity and novelty of time:

“*At one stroke thereof water gushes from the rock.
And the sea becomes land from dearth of moisture.
Moses held this sword in his hand,
Therefore he wrought more than man may contrive.
He clove the Red Sea asunder
And made its water like dry earth.
The arm of Ali, the conqueror of Khaibar,
Drew its strength from this same sword*” Qaiser, 2001, p.146).

Phenomena are the result of the creativity of Time. Iqbal says:

“*Phenomena arise from the march of Time,
Life is one of Time’s mysteries*”

Again Iqbal quotes:

“To know its root quickens the living with new life

Its being is more splendid than the dawn” (Nicholson, 1969, pp.137-138).

While explicating the creativity of *Pure Duration*, Iqbal refers to Imam Shafi with admiration for defining *Time as Sword*. Time like Sword, by recourse to its continuous and dynamic operations, overpowers all the roadblocks and creates events (Qaiser, 2001, p.146). While explaining the creativeness of Time, Iqbal refers to the following Qur’anic verses:

‘Verily, in the alternations of night and of day and in all that God hath created in the Heavens and in the earth are signs to those who fear Him’ (Al-Quran, 10:6).

‘It is of Him that the night returneth on the day, and that the day returneth on the night’ (Ibid., 39:5).

‘And of Him is the change of the night and of the day’ (Ibid., 23:80), (Iqbal, 2016, pp.45-46).

As has already been submitted, Bergson deems *Elan Vital* to be the Ultimate Reality. For Bergson, the flux of time is reality itself (Bergson, 1928, p. 363). Iqbal claims that there is neither time nor space beyond God and apart from His creative activity. For Iqbal, God as self is prior to time. Infact time of God is not separate from God; time itself is born with God’s act of creation:

“The infinity of the Ultimate Ego consists in infinite inner possibilities of His creative activity” (Iqbal, 2016, p.64).

The words of Professor Ishrat Hussain Enver amount to the same; “He is a creator from within...Creation for the Ultimate Ego is the unfoldment of his own inner possibilities” (Hasan, 1944, pp.75-76). Iqbal himself writes, “This is what Meer Damad and Mulla Baqir mean when they say that time is born with the act of creation, by which the Ultimate Ego realizes and measures, so to speak, the infinite wealth of His own undetermined creative possibilities” (Iqbal, 2016, p.77). God’s inner possibilities are unfolded without any break. There is no succession in this continuous flow. Thus God’s time is Pure Duration.

Thus, we can see that despite affinities, Iqbal’s concept of time is substantially different from that of Bergson. Iqbal’s concept of time can be fully appreciated with reference to Islamic doctrines rather than from Bergson’s philosophy of time. The following words bring out how Iqbal’s philosophy of time is so intimately linked to Islamic view and way of life:

“In the history of Muslim culture...We find that both in the realms of pure intellect and religious psychology by which term I mean higher Sufism, the ideal revealed is the position and enjoyment of the infinite. In a culture, with such an attitude, the problem of space and time becomes a question of life and death” (Ibid, 2016, p.132).

Iqbal greatly appreciated Bergson’s views on time. Such an appreciation was born out of Bergson’s close affinity to Islamic perspective on time. Iqbal thinks that Bergson’s idea of time was in close proximity with Muslim philosophy of time. Bergson’s ideas on time were presaged by numerous Muslim thinkers as well as Sufis. The following words by Annemarie Schimmel are worth quoting:

“Personally, I would rather prefer to stress the religious importance of his (Iqbal’s) ideas about time; for what he wanted was surely not to add a new system of scientific explanations to this most difficult problem, but to draw the attention of the Muslim world back to the contact with the living God. Through a revaluation of the twofold aspect of time, he aimed at an actualization of this burning but a long forgotten issue for Muslim religious life” (Qaiser, 2001, p.148).

Conclusion

Thus, we can see that despite affinities, Iqbal's concept of time is substantially different from these western thinkers. Iqbal's concept of time can be fully appreciated with reference to Islamic doctrines. Iqbal thinks that Western philosophers' conception of time, asserting that its excessively abstract and static character fails to encapsulate the dynamic and creative nature of reality. He contests the mechanistic and linear interpretations of time, as articulated by these thinkers or an extrinsic framework that is disconnected from human experience. For Iqbal, time should not be perceived as a passive dimension; rather, it is an active and vital process that unfolds through human creativity and agency. He stresses that a genuine comprehension of time resides in its intrinsic relationship with life and transformation, which resonates with his perspective of Khudi (selfhood) as an evolving and participatory phenomenon. Through his critique of Western temporal paradigms, Iqbal encourages a re-conceptualization of existence, grounded in a dynamic interaction between individual autonomy and the eternal, thereby bridging metaphysical understanding with practical existence.

Despite his adherence to Qur'anic principles, Iqbal champions the role of human initiative in transforming social, political, and economic conditions. He firmly believes in the power of individuals to reshape and revolutionize the world through their actions, making human agency central to his vision of a dynamic and evolving universe.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. Furthermore, there is no external funding received for conducting this research or the formulation of this manuscript. The study represents the author's independent scholarly work, free from any financial or personal relationships that could influence its outcomes. Upholding the integrity of philosophical discourse and the ethos of impartial investigation necessitates striking a delicate balance between the pursuit of truth and an awareness of potential biases.

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