The Dialogue Between the Eastern Spirit and the Western Thought in Muhammad Iqbal Personality

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Abstract

The article considers a new, non-traditional form of dialogue: a dialogue between the Eastern spirit and Western thought. There are some thinkers in whose personality can be investigated the highest level of the dialogue between the East and West and can be cognized the Truth. The author comments on this type of dialogue on the basis of the ideas of Muhammad Iqbal. In other words, this is the dialogue in the inner world of a person who can unite the Eastern wisdom, faith and the Western thought.

The article consists of two parts. Firstly, the author studies the essence of the Eastern spirit and the Western thought. The attention is focused on the role of faith in the formation of spirit and mind. Secondly, in the article, there are investigated two main directions of the non-traditional dialogue: I and society, Creator and human being. It helps to consider the human being from the divine/inner and material/external world.

The conclusion of the article once again highlights the important ideas of this non-traditional dialogue which gives a possibility to unite two opposite poles – the East and West.

1. Introduction

Since the 18th century, the Eastern and Western thoughts have moved to different poles. Each of them lived and developed its values and moved even further. The advantage in technology and science of the West gradually forced the East to obey the West and accept its values. The XIX century is the second Renaissance in the Eastern countries. The XX century as the continuing of the Renaissance can be characterized as the period rich in ideas, new currents and revival of the spirit. That is why only in XX century the East is able to introduce itself as the side of the dialogue. It was the attempt to establish a bridge between the poles. However, the fate of the dialogues was decided at the beginning by the increasing authority of the Western thought, large-scale activity and destructive spirit. The Eastern thinker who understood this true resorted another kind of dialogue: between the wise Eastern spirit and the progressive Western thought. Allama Muhammed Iqbal said:

For Westerners intelligence is the stuff of life,
for Easterners love is the mystery of all being.
Only through love intelligence gets to know God,
love’s labours find firm grounding in intelligence;
when love is companioned by intelligence
it has the power to design another world. [1]

This tendency can be observed both in Azerbaijan and in India. Azerbaijani thinker Ali bey Huseynzade described this process: “let us become with Turkic blood, Islamic faith and French clothes”. In contradistinction of traditional dialogue this kind of the dialogue took place in the personality of a human being: between his/her thought and spirit. There were personalities who could become a leader for its nation and could reveal and save its identity among other nations and become an example for all the humanity. The success of this non-traditional dialogue between the Western thought and the Eastern spirit is that it happens on the basis of Islam. Thus, this dialogue can be assessed as the definition of the national identity in the Islamic Ummah, on the one hand. On the other hand, Islamic principles and Truth are introduced as the best basis for the reunification of the different poles. It can save the humanity from the deep hostility. The Holy Quran said: “Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within
glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light.” (Quran 24/35)

Indeed, the aim of this dialogue is to find the Perfect Truth and present it to humanity. Consequently, the aim of Allama Iqbal is to find the Light which helps to illuminate the way to unity and Truth. He said:

In both worlds, everywhere are the marks of love; man himself is a mystery of love.

Love’s secret belongs not to the world of wombs, not to Shem or Ham, Greece or Syria:
a star without East and West, a star unsetting in whose orbit is neither North nor South. [2]

2. **Language as the keeper of the national spirit**

The first thing in the process of the keeping of the national spirit and identity is the language. Only native language is able to discover the inner power, potential, talent of the nation. Heidegger wrote: “Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home” [3]. And Salahaddin Halilov said that “language is the model of the world” – the inner world of a nation. Consequently, the language is the immanent phenomenon and the manifestation of “Ego”, at the same time reflection of the external world in Ego. Therefore, language is the keeper of the two worlds. That is why the thought and language should complete each other. Their imbalance can be destroy the harmony of Ego. The language can be the speaker of the thought or can be the guiding of the thought. There are some scientific fields where the language must be a “servant”. However, in humanitarians it is impossible and tragedy for national spirit. For example, today the English language not only exceeds other languages, but can also direct thoughts. The thinkers and philosophers who know this principle can keep the balance between language and thought through his/her spirit.

Muhammed Iqbal wrote his “Reconstruction of religious thought in Islam” in English because his aim is to convey his thought for all humanity. English language is the universal method and speaker of his logical thought. However, the spirit of the work is Muslim and Eastern. English orientalist Reynold Nicholson who translated the “Asrar al-Khudi” wrote in his preface for the English version of the book: “Iqbal has drunk deep of European literature, his philosophy owes much to Nietzsche and Bergson, and his poetry often reminds us of Shelley; yet he thinks and feels as a Moslem, and just for this reason his influence may be great” [4]. Indeed, in the poems, letters of Muhammed Iqbal where he appeals to his nation are in his native language. Here the language is the speaker of his spirit. The Creator gives all knowledge to the spirit of the human being. Iqbal writes: “From another point of view, the process of creation, lasting through thousands of years, is a single indivisible act, ‘swift as the twinkling of an eye’. It is, however, impossible to express this inner experience of pure duration in words, for language is shaped on the serial time of our daily efficient self. Perhaps an illustration will further elucidate the point” [5]. Naturally, the best transfer of the nation’s spirit is its native language. The logically systematized knowledge and the historical, religious and moral true that are not only for a nation but for everyone in the world must be in the current and dominant language. That is why Iqbal introduce Islam and its principles in English. However, there is an important moment. The thought should develop and rise to the philosophical level in order to govern the perceptive and dynamic potential of the language. The philosophical level of every field in science or humanity can be only achieved through national thought and national spirit. As Gibran Khalil said: “Language is but one manifestation of the power of invention in a nation’s totality or public self. But if this power slumbers, language will stop in its tracks, and to stop is to regress, and regression leads to death and extinction” [6]. Thus, the philosopher can exalt the national ideas to the universal level and open the corridor between his nation and humanity. It is an important fact that the alien language, thought and society are not dangerous for the spirit that is on the philosophical level. Iqbal wrote:

1. **از خودی مگذر بقا انجام باش**
   bash anjam boga mağızar xudi əz
   “Do not abandon Self! Persist therein!”

2. **قطره نی می باش و بحر آشام باش**
   bash asham bohri va bash mi katrai
   be drink sea and be water drop
   “Be a drop of water and drink up the ocean!”

3. **تو که از نور خودی یا ندته نی**
   tabendei xudi nur i az toke
   introduce self light from you
   “Glowing with light of Self as thou art,”

4. **گز خودی ممحکم کنی پانده نی**
   payendei kuni mohkem xudi gar
   endure you be strong self if
   “Make Self strong, and thou wilt endure” [8].
It is impossible to say it in English and for English man! This truth is for this nation and should be said only in its native language. The first aim of Allama Iqbal is to wake his nation. It is not an accident that as Hegel said, “not only German thought and philosophical traditions but also the possibilities of German language exalt the German philosophy” [9]. Or Azerbaijani philosopher Salahaddin Khalilov wrote: “When the harmony of language is destroyed it can impede the development of philosophy. The limitation of the language can limit the thought” [10]. Consequently, Iqbal’s poetry and its wisdom save his nation and its spirit.

3. Western thought – the dominant power of modernity

Muhammed Iqbal studied in Europe and knew the Western thought very well. Reynold Nicholson also noted this important detail. If we look from a different angle we can say that when the person with strong and wise spirit absorbs the dominant thought of modernity his strength increases. Through his non-traditional dialogue Muhammed Iqbal wants to transfer this power to his nation.

The thinkers who knew and considered the processes in the West understood the essences and importance of the development of sciences and technology. At the same time, they knew the force and increasing influence of the West. This is the main reason why the second and dominant side of the dialogue is the Western thought. For example, one of the main principles of the Azerbaycan Republic – the first democratic republic in the East was modernization. Two others were Islam and Turkic heritage. Today the Tricolour Flag of Azerbaijan symbolizes this three ideas. The modernization and westernization was the challenge of the period or the law of the “natural selection”. Azerbaijani thinker and author of the “Tricolor idea” Ali bey Huseynzade wrote: “The winner is a society that can look with open eyes, understand the spirit and demand of the time” [11]. However, the modernization does not mean alienation from own spirit and historical roots. As Huseynzade said, only our “clothes” – appearance should be “French” and our spirits must remain indispensable. The thinker calls to limit the modernization with the appearance, science and technology; to avoid imitation and to understand own situation. The previous situation of the East was difficult: the East dwelled on its history and medieval culture, do not recognize new ideas and became “raw materials” for the West. Consequently, the modernization means to cognize the real demands of the time and find a rational solution. The important detail of this process is to keep own identity and to take advantage of the national wisdom.

As the Western ideas become a priority in the East, the East evaluate its achievement from the viewpoint of the opposite pole. It is an important fact that after the Renaissance the philosophical course of the Universal Truth transfer to the West. The European thinkers adopted the Eastern scientific and philosophical ideas and developed it. Consequently, the way of the East to its roots lies through the opposite pole. Indeed, the West is strong, rich and imperious. However, the East should keep its connections with roots – the treasury of wisdom. This connection will help you keep its identity. It is the superiority that makes the West turn to the East.

There are material and scientific achievements of the West. However, every thinker with high morale and deep thought who studies in the West understood its problem: the limitation of the human being with the material world, relegation of the morality, idolization of the science and the degradation of the human being. This feeling was alien for the East where the faith and moral took very important place in the life of people. In the conversation with the great scientist and the main figure of the Western power Albert Einstein Rabindranath Tagore said: “We realize the supreme man, who has no individual limitations, through our limitations. Science is concerned with that which is not confined to individuals; it is the impersonal human world of truths. Religion realizes these truths and links them up with our deeper needs. Our individual consciousness of truth gains universal significance. Religion applies values to the truth, and we know the truth as good through own harmony with it” [12]. Indeed, the Eastern thinkers warn of the dangers of the world without the human being and the process of dehumanization. For example, Wilfrid C. Smith wrote that three things impressed Muhammed Iqbal most about Europe when he studied in England and Germany: “the vitality and dynamism of European life, the immense possibilities open to man, and the dehumanizing influence that capitalist society had on the European soul” [13]. Iqbal was a philosopher and saw the process of the crisis in the West and his first reaction was to save his people. Moreover, he saw the exploitation of the East by the West and the “pollution” of the East by poverty and war. It was great heroism to save own national values when the process of westernization washed away all national features in
its path. The thinker who understands all these problems does not let the process of dehumanizing to enter his motherland and puts alternative power in front of the opposite pole.

The image of the Western man is introduced in Nietzsche's philosophy. That is why Muhammed Iqbal appeals to him. Nietzsche is the result of the previous process of crisis and the beginning of the new kind of crisis. Iqbal feels the divine influence on his philosophy and wishes him a Muslim guide. He thinks that if this genius had a true teacher he would not have been ruined. Nietzsche knew this true but thought that the Christianity destroyed it too: “Christianity destroyed for us the whole harvest of ancient civilization, and later it also destroyed for us the whole harvest of Mohammedan civilization” [14]. Consequently, Nietzsche became a victim of the Western thought. Iqbal wrote: “Yet Nietzsche was a failure; and his failure was mainly due to his intellectual progenitors such as Schopenhauer, Darwin, and Lange whose influence completely blinded him to the real significance of his vision. Instead of looking for a spiritual rule which would develop the Divine even in a plebeian and thus open up before him an infinite future, Nietzsche was driven to seek the realization of his vision in such scheme as aristocratic radicalism. As I have said of him elsewhere:

The ‘I am’ which he seeketh,
Lieth beyond philosophy, beyond knowledge.
The plant that groweth only from the invisible soil of the heart of man,
Groweth not from a mere heap of clay!
Thus failed a genius whose vision was solely determined by his internal forces, and remained unproductive for want of expert external guidance in his spiritual life” [15]. Indeed, Iqbal explains the crisis of the dominant thought by the absence of the divine wisdom. Iqbal appeals to many European philosophers, but the Nietzsche’s philosophy introduced the importance of the main basis of non-traditional dialogue: faith, more precisely, Islamic religion.

4. Faith – strong bridge between the spirit and thought

Muhammed Iqbal introduces Islam in his dialogue from two viewpoints. First, he does not express a word “Islam” but the Islamic spirit is felt in every idea. This can be observed in Iqbal’s poetry in Urdu or Persian and is intended for his own nation. For example, he wrote:

“Knowledge, if it lie on thy skin, is a snake;
Knowledge, if thou take it to heart, is a friend” [16].

Every knowledge if it comes from the divine source becomes a friend and lead you to the Perfection.

“But do not seek the glow of Love from the knowledge of to-day,
Do not seek the nature of Truth from this infidel’s cup!
Long have I been running to and fro,
Learning the secrets of the New Knowledge:
Its gardeners have put me to the trial
And have made me intimate with their roses” [17].

Muhammed Iqbal concentrates the attention of his nation on the knowledge directed and governed by faith. Accordingly, he concentrates the attention of the Western man on the faith that improves and elevates knowledge. At the central of Iqbal’s philosophy is the personality of Prophet Muhammed. The philosopher analyses the essence of Islam and His contribution to humanity: “The Prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world. In him, life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction” [18]. There are clear similarities with Nietzsche who was left without any guide and his genius was destroyed. At the same time, it reminds us the thoughts of Hallaj on Ahmad and Iblis: “Here is no established mission except that of Iblis and Muhammed, peace be on him, only Iblis fell from the Essence while Muhammed perceived the Essence of the Essence” [19] Thus, the person of Prophet Muhammed helps to improve himself and “drew nearer to” Creator “to two bows or closer still” (Quran 53/9). Iqbal speaks about the Muhammedian light that illuminates the path to the Truth. He considers the Muhammedian Light as a path not only for Muslims but for all humanity. Although more years ago Hegel understood this truth: “If we want to see the consciousness of the One — not as with the Hindus split between the featureless unity of abstract thought, on one hand, and on the other, the long-winded weary story of its particular detail, but in its finest purity and sublimity, we must consult the Mohammedans” [20]. However, the dominant principles of Western thought made the human being to forget this true. Iqbal writes:

“Nowhere has it found a better literary expression than in a Persian verse which speaks of the Holy Prophet’s experience of Divine illumination:
‘Moses fainted away by a mere surface illumination of Reality.

Thou seest the very substance of Reality with a smile!’” [21]

Consequently, Allama Iqbal considers Muhammedian light not only as a Sufi phenomenon but also as an important detail of life. He writes: “Life is one and continuous. A man marches always onward to receive ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality which ‘every moment appears in a new glory’. And the recipient of Divine illumination is not merely a passive recipient. Every act of a free ego creates a new situation, and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding” [22]. Thus, the main contribution of Prophet Muhammed is to be a Perfect guide to Absolute Truth. The English researcher of Iqbal’s poetry Reynold Nicholson writes: “He is no mean poet and his verse can rouse or persuade even if his logic fails to convince. His message is not for the Mohammedans of India alone, but for Moslems everywhere” [23]. More correctly, this is for all humanity.

An important detail in the English works of Allama Iqbal is focusing the attention on rational principles. First, he considers Quran as one of three sources (Nature and History) of knowledge: “Devotional Sufism alone tried to understand the meaning of the unity of inner experience which the Qur’an declares to be one of the three sources of knowledge, the other two being History and Nature. The development of this experience in the religious life of Islam reached its culmination in the well-known words of Hallaj – ‘I am the creative truth’” [24]. It helps to study the human being as a unity of the material and spiritual worlds, at the same time, as the source of the new one – humanmade world.

Second, Iqbal takes every person out of the material world. The world of human being, especially the Western man was limited by Immanuel Kant at XVIII century. Iqbal compared Kant’s attempt, his “prophetic mission” with Ghazali’s ideas in the philosophy of Islam. He writes: “Kant, consistently with his principles, could not affirm the possibility of a knowledge of God. Ghazali’s, finding no hope in analytic thought, moved to mystic experience, and there found an independent content for religion. In this way he succeeded in securing for religion the right to exist independently of science and metaphysics” [25]. Thus, the Eastern or Islamic spirit of Ghazali lets him to left a door for a limited mind to the divine world. Consequently, both Ghazali and Kant build a wall between the rational mind and religious faith. The way of Ghazali improved the possibilities of the human as a spiritual being on the one side, but limited, even closed the rational thought in its small material world. It was the beginning or maybe the important period of the different development of the Western and Eastern thoughts. The non-tradition dialogue of Allama Iqbal took away this wall and opened new doors for rational thought to the divine world and rational possibilities for a spirit. He writes: “Whatever may be the final fate of man it does not mean the loss of individuality. The Qur’an does not contemplate complete liberation from finitude as the highest state of human bliss. The ‘unceasing reward’ of man consists in his gradual growth in self-possession, in uniqueness, and intensity of his activity as an ego” [26]. It became a rescue for a drowning person and excitement for the mind in crisis and a path to Truth. Consequently, Islam is not only a religion, but a discovery of the inner light of every human being. Moreover, the success of Iqbal’s non-traditional dialogue and its usefulness for the Western and Eastern man is that it is based on Islam.

5. Conclusion

There are some persons in the history who are a unity of previous progressive ideas and a rich source for the next periods of development. These persons can be called “knot points” of the history of thought. Azerbaijani philosopher Salahaddin Khalilov writes: “The knot points are two. First of them is the concluding of the previous line and transition to a new one. And the second of them is a branching from this point. The second one was omitted from the Kuhn’s theory. Our model of knot points and branching from this point is more universal” [27]. Such persons – knot points can change the direction of the thoughts or give a new impetus to its development. At the same time, they are guides from the crisis of mind and morality. It can be called a mission of these persons: prevent thought from moving away from the Universal idea. Muhammed Iqbal is an important figure in the history of his nation and in the history of Western thought and in the history of Islamic thought. It is true that the West that is in the crisis of mind and morality appeals to the Eastern wisdom. Carl Jung writes: “It seems to be quite true that the East is at the bottom of the spiritual change we are passing through today. Only this East... is the own psyche, constantly at work creating new spiritual forms and spiritual forces which may help us subdue the boundless lust for prey of Aryan man” [28]. Jung calls the Western man to appeal to his spirit and notes that the way to the spirit lies through the East.
is strange that the Western philosophers do not want to return to their own religion. They want to understand the faith of the Eastern man that gives big energy and deep knowledge. Jung writes: “While we are turning the material world of the East upside down with our technical proficiency, the East with its superior psychic proficiency is throwing our spiritual world into confusion. We have never yet hit upon the thought that while we are overpowering the Oriental from without, it may be fastening its hold on us from within” [29]. Indeed, the West is at the peak of his material “perfection”, that is why it is looking for a model of moral perfection in the East. Muhammed Iqbal introduced this model and did it in an original way – dialogue between the mind and spirit. He writes:

“I taught the candle to burn openly,
While I myself burned unseen by the world’s eye” [30].

Indeed, the dialogue of Muhammed Iqbal is an ideal unity of the rational thought and wise spirit in the light of Islamic prophet.

6. References

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