Iqbal’s Impact On Ali Sharaiti’s Thought: A Comparative Analysis

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Introduction

Iqbal and Ali Sharaiti, the two thinkers who may be counted amongst the most influential social reformers of contemporary Muslim Ummah and their thought can help us steer the past and face the challenges of new century. They have creatively appropriated Islamic tradition; The person who is fully imbued with the thought of Iqbal and Ali Shariati, would be aware about the fact, that Muslim Ummah went through one of its most difficult and agonizing phases during their time and it is obvious that the prevailing conditions of any particular society are instrumental in shaping the ideas of every social philosopher who attempts to study it. Ali sharaiti, an eminent contemporary social reformer of Iran, was highly inspired from Iqbal’s philosophy and thought, in his formative years; he was influenced by many people including Frantz Fanon, Jamul-ul-Din-Afgani, Taleqani, and Above all Muhammad Iqbal. From Sharait’s readings it seems that he was more influenced by Iqbal than any other scholar, whether in the East or the west. The greatest success of Iqbal, “wrote Sharaiti, “that Iqbal relying upon the rich cultural heritage of the old and the new, he built a model which he considered to be his school of thought. That model was Islam. This is the reason for his importance and his success in our society and our century.”

Referring to Iqbal’s efforts to influence reform, Sharaiti pointed out that, though Iqbal was a mystic in nature, he did not believe in seclusion. He believed in continuous efforts and activism. Following the footsteps of Iqbal, Sharaiti called for restructuring of Islamic ideology. After studying the Quran, Sharaiti was too able to formulate his theory in social and development. Many factors affect change in society. However, Sharaiti found many references in the Quran which state that it is Al-Nas (The people) or the masses, which are the prime movers of revolution. It is the collective human will which is of primary importance and not the individual will. Like Iqbal, Sharaiti, urged people to return to the Quran and to study it intently; Islam is a movement of masses. It opposes oppression, imperialism, and exploitation. The individual does not have the option to overlook injustice in the world. An awareness of Islamic ideology would set man, the individual and the collective masses in the right direction. Iqbal, according to Sharaiti, understood the very heart of the
Islamic message. He was an aware anti-imperialist who worked diligently to free the Muslims from the yoke of British power and control. His goal was the establishment of a Muslim state based upon the concept of the Ummah. Iqbal, did not look at Pakistan as a country, but as a first step towards the creation of an Islamic state.

Describing the persona and message of Iqbal, Dr. Shariati writes, “Iqbal is a multi-faceted individual, he thinks like Bergson, He loves like Rumi, He plays the songs of his faith like Nasir Khusraw. He fights with colonialism for the liberation of Muslim nations as Sayyid Jamal had done. He endeavors to save civilization as Tagore had tried to do from the tragedy of calculating reason and the pest of ambition. Like Carrel, he holds the hope and the aspiration to be able to revive love and the spirit in harsh life of modern man. Like Luther and Calvin, he makes his goal the revival of his religious thought and an Islamic Renaissance in this age.”

In his book Ma-Wa-Iqbal, (we and Iqbal) Dr. Shariati poses the question: “How can we, in truth, speak about Iqbal?” Then he answers it, “We must first find our ‘self’? Jalaluddin Rumi once said: I put forth fourteen reasons to prove the existence of God to a group of people. Shams Tabrizi responded by thanking me on behalf of God and adding that I should, instead, prove my own existence as God needed no proof!” Dr. Shariati observes that Shams’ advise is a general and lasting rule for understanding our “self” and “what we seek,” before speaking about God, religion, civilization, culture, ideology, knowledge, responsibility, ways, ideals, rights, great men and schools of our world, and history and how all these construct,” Dr. Shariati observes, “If one were to reconstruct the form of Islam which has been made to degenerate in the course of history, re-assemble it in such a way that the spirit could return to a total body, transform the present dazed elements into that spirit as if the trumpet of Israfil were to blow in the 20th century over a dead society and awaken its movements, power, spirit, and meaning, it is, then, that exemplary Muslim personalities will be reconstructed and reborn like Mohammad Iqbal.” Describing the traits of Iqbal, Dr. Shariati observes, “He is a great mystic, with a pure spirit, delivered of materiality and, at the same time, a man who respects and honors science, technological progress, and the advancement of human reason in our age. He regards reason and science in the very sense they are understood today as allies of love, emotion, and inspiration in the evolution of the human spirit, but he does not accept their goal.”

Discussing the advice of Iqbal to humanity, Dr. Shariati writes, “The greatest advice of Iqbal to humanity is: Have a heart like Jesus, a thought like Socrates, and a hand like the hand of a Caesar, but all in one human being, in one creature of humanity, based upon one spirit in order to attain one goal. That is, Iqbal himself: A man who attains the height of political awareness of his time to the extent that some people believe him to be solely a political figure and a liberated, nationalist leader who is a 20th century anti-colonist. A man who, in philosophical thought, raises to such a high level that he is considered to be a contemporary thinker and philosopher of the same rank as Bergson in the West today or of the same level as Ghazzali in Islamic history.”

Dr. Shariati expounds on the influence of the West on Iqbal. Dr. Shariati points out that Iqbal understood the West from close quarters, he became familiar with the civilization, culture, society, and history of the West, yet he escaped from being captured by the West. Dr. Shariati observes, “Iqbal ascends to the highest intellectual summit in the West and understands the value of European science and technology, the nature of Iqbal’s thought is derived from a nation which is historically and culturally characterized by fineness of sentiments, tenderness of imagination, purity of spirit, idealism of heart, illumination, and inspiration. With such an intellectual background, spirit and outlook, Iqbal has turned to Islam and he is competent enough to reassemble and reconstruct the dispersed and disintegrated elements of Islamic intellectual schools.”
Commenting on Iqbal’s masterpiece “The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,” Dr. Shariati observes, “But his greater masterpiece is in realizing his full and multi-dimensional self, that is, the integration of a total Muslim, in his own person.” Commenting on Iqbal’s message Dr. Shariati writes, “Iqbal’s message is this --- we should light a fire in our hearts, rekindle the flame of faith, Gnosticism, and great human love in our soul in order to become better acquainted with the essence of existence, the meaning of soul, the secret of nature, and the ultimate objective of being.” Describing Iqbal’s aspirations about Pakistan, Dr. Shariati observes, “Iqbal wished Pakistan to be a new, great experiment in the 20th century Islam. He wanted it to be an India that has brought European civilization within itself. This is an ideal Islamic society. He himself was such a man, an Eastern heart with a Western-trained mind, that is, a knowledgeable and reconstructed Muslim.

Dr. Shariati discussing Iqbal’s ideology, observes, “It is he who gave ideological consistency to Sayyid Jamal’s revolutionary uprising. He gave deep, intellectual roots to his fertile and sturdy tree. Return to the East? After becoming familiar with our age, after moving through the highest horizons of Western thought, and after years of mixing and learning in schools of thought whose masters were wondrous genius’ of the new culture such as Hegel, Nietzsche, Kant, and Goethe, this invulnerable hero of European thought, philosophy, and culture, threw it all down at the feet of the Rustom of poetry --- Rumi --- to blind him with the dazzling light of the arrow of love.”

Dr. Shariati has an eminent reading on Iqbal’s philosophy and thought. His scholarly work enables readers to understand Iqbal’s message in the context of historical perspective and relate it to the contemporary world. Like Dr. Annemarie Schimmel’s scholarship on Iqbal, Dr. Shariati has also used a holistic approach in analyzing Iqbal’s work. Dr. Shariati has developed deep into Iqbal’s mind and soul and presented his message in simple and lucid form for readers to understand Iqbal’s pivotal role as the leader of contemporary Islamic resurgence.

References


