



## Revisiting Epistemological and Psychological Composition of Religious Experience

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### Abstract

The impact of Carl Jung and William James on the early 20th-century Indian subcontinental semi-philosophical and semi-psychological tradition is examined in this article. To analyse and assess these traditions, a qualitative research design was used. Relevant documents, academic works, and philosophical literature were examined to provide context-rich understanding. Iqbal made a concerted effort to use intellectual and psychological frameworks to legitimize religious experience, notably referencing the concepts of William James. But significant confluences resulted from this integration, especially between prophetic and non-prophetic experiences, which diminished the uniqueness of Islamic Religious thought in the end. This attitude has open mindedly and happily accepted the fictitious versions of religion but this acceptance is disastrous and lethal than the explicit denial. To ensure the preservation of Islamic thought, it is crucial to approach Western philosophical ideas with caution and avoid conflating religious experiences. A re-evaluation of Iqbal's intellectual legacy is necessary to understand religious experiences from a non-Western perspective.

**Keywords:** Carl Jung, William James, Iqbal, Religious Experience, Islamic Thought

### 1. Introduction

In Indian subcontinent, a semi-philosophical and semi-psychological tradition, inspired by William James and Henri Bergson, emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The underpinning thought to this tradition was that man's religious and spiritual structure is in danger due to advanced scientific and experimental studies, and to get rid of this fear without taking him out of the sphere of scientific and logical reasoning, the concept of man should be presented with such capabilities and situations by which it could be easy to argue that consciousness of a man possesses such qualities that are beyond experimental investigation. In this context, to prove man a religious and spiritual being, a clinical so to speak a rational investigatory effort was done to analyze under the title of religious and mystical experiences (James, 1902). This whole process actually started after the acceptance of modern epistemic dominance, and in this process, it has been striven to make sure that modern mind, which is the outcome of dominant scientific discourse, would not be persuaded towards the negation of religion and metaphysics. Here in subcontinent, we have two major figures who tried to implement this approach: Sir Syed and Iqbal.

As far as the matter of Sir Syed's influences on Muslims of Subcontinent is concerned it can be said that there is nobody in his competition in this tradition. However, his methodology was developed under the submissive inspiration of the Western discourse. Iqbal's case is different. Firstly, he had more knowledge of West than Sir Syed. Secondly, he was also very critical about it and unlike Sir Syed, was not a blind follower of West. Thirdly, Iqbal was very much aware of the laws of rise and fall of civilizations. Though, Sir Syed was also aware of the functional principles of formation of civilizations, and his expression about it was more powerful than Iqbal. But his knowledge was limited and he was also not very interested in the ideological construction of civilizations. That is the reason Sir Syed overlooked the religious whenever he took it as a subject. Whereas, for Iqbal, it was a matter of concern that how a religious person is to be maintained at conceptual and functional levels in an unsuitable atmosphere of modern era. That is why he tried to create a space for a religious person in a world created by modern epistemology and modern ideas and presented the portrayal of religious belief in the light of modern philosophical and psychological paradigms. In order to carry out this task, he took the responsibility of defending the religious concept of man. He borrows some key principles from William James, Whitehead, and more particularly from Bergson. Meanwhile the immediate risk emerged that religion and religious beliefs has to depend on pure subjectivity to affirm themselves. Due to which, some ordinarily mysterious attraction was sparked in the modern mind but it failed to convinced the modern mind in fullest form.

### 2. Literature Review

William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) is an important work in the psychology of religion, examining personal religious experiences through a pragmatic approach. Celebrated for its inclusive analysis of various spiritual phenomena, the book has significantly influenced the study of religion. However, critics argue that it overlooks communal aspects of religion.

Carl Jung's *Psychology and Religion* (1938) explores the intersection of psychological theories and religious experience, offering a reflective analysis of how religious symbols and myths relate to the unconscious mind. Jung argues that religious experiences are expressions of archetypal images from the collective unconscious, linking individual psychology with universal spiritual themes. Critics, however, have debated Jung's interpretations, suggesting that his approach might overly emphasize psychological constructs at the expense of the historical and cultural context of religious practices.

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Paul Roubiczek's *The Misinterpretation of Man* (1949) critiques traditional psychological and philosophical approaches to understanding human nature, arguing that they often misrepresent the complexity of human behavior and thought. Roubiczek challenges prevailing theories by emphasizing the need to revisit these approaches. His work is notable for its critique of reductionist interpretations of human nature, advocating for a holistic approach that considers individual and societal dimensions.

Charles Taylor's *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (2003) revisits and expands upon William James' foundational work by examining contemporary religious experiences in light of modern philosophical and sociological developments. Taylor presents that case that offers a critical update to James' ideas, suggesting that while James' framework is still valuable, it needs to be adapted to address core religious and cultural dynamics.

### 3. Material and Methods

A qualitative research design was used throughout the writing process to investigate and evaluate the issues related to the impact of Carl Jung and William James on the early 20th-century Indian subcontinental semi-philosophical and semi-psychological tradition. Comprehensive examination of scholarly works, philosophical texts, and pertinent documents yielded additional insights and a contextualized knowledge of these approaches and their consequences. The study attempted to reveal the underlying meanings, interpretations, and consequences of these traditions and attitude as expressed in the literature, employing an interpretive methodology.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Since the 19th century, scholars across philosophy, psychology, and social sciences have sought to reimagine and reinterpret the concept of man which was second stage of the Enlightenment Project (Roubiczek, 1949). To a great extent Modernity succeeded in forming the world according to it, through presenting a new world view. Then, to make this success more meaningful it started creating new paradigms to construct the concept of man. The desired outcome couldn't have been achieved by merely disconnecting the world from its classical framework unless a new concept of man was introduced, requiring a comprehensive system that could be the corner stone idea of modernity. Kant has essentially tried to preserve the classical perspective of concept of man, universe and their mutual relation, but it seems that later on his mission was stopped by powerful means. Since Kant is considered to be the greatest key figure in the classical tradition of philosophy, so he was the last figure in this tradition who primarily divided the whole order of being and knowledge and defined its whole and components by theorizing it ideological certainty and mathematical fixity. Modernity appeared to be regulating things from the beginning and to get rid of old definitions. That's why the biggest dilemma of modernist thinkers was; they blocked all the ways for themselves to give an objective account of things. Therefore, to create any kind of relation between mind and objects, there were no such definitions available that were required for this purpose on principle grounds. In this way, they incorporated Kant's influential philosophical concepts into their framework (Roubiczek, 1949).

The way Kant in an ineffective manner, defined universality of human consciousness as a combination of some fixities, similarly, many angles of psychological and rational studies in the century were used to define rational and physical existence of human consciousness to examine the individual being presented as an exemplar of objective truth, and consider whether his character aligns with their psychological and mental formulation or not (James, 1902). That sort of 'clinical' research has gradually started believing that human being is comprised of few complex mechanisms, and though, in some ways resembles integrated existential and conscious forms, but it is almost impossible to find any resemblance with permanent and transcendent 'idea' (Fromm, 1941).

This method, in fact an attitude, of studying 'man' has anticipated a lot that it was so difficult to reinforce any idea to maintain the classical concept of man. Now any idea about man became totally unexpected which was not a result of analysis and scrutiny of self and mind. This approach harmed the metaphysical structure of consciousness and religious axioms had become mere imaginative utopia. In this challenging context, some individuals attempted to reframe the metaphysical and religious aspects of the classical concept of man, redefining them in modern terms. In this manner such work has been done in the field of psychology that could have been successfully accomplished that man's religious existence with its conscious effort can play a decisive role in establishing its history. In fact, the ultimate end of these efforts to prove the existence and religious consciousness of man was to incorporate some parts of classical concept of man in modern concept of man, and to make it widely accepted and relevant to contemporary society. There was an essential error in these efforts; it was that the modern concept of man was not being rejected to prove the relation between man and religious facts. Instead by considering modern concept of man as a whole, particular components of religion were taken to adjust in that whole. Above all, those components were not even being placed at the center of this concept. Rather, this new concept was being expanded by assigning a subordinate and secondary position to those components (Whitehead, 1929).

As modern philosophy founded these new approaches, so that is why, in whole or parts, there was no possibility of revival of religious consciousness. However, in psychology few great figures like Jung and William James took the responsibility to carry out this task. Jung suggested that an authentic wholeness should be found in man in which there should be a possibility to get consciousness emerging out of emotions, feelings and religion. A non-historical past was assumed for man, in which, it seems that Platonic Ideal world was attempted to absorb in the

geography of human world. So, to speak, the status of objective ideal world was shifted to human consciousness. A hypothesis was formulated that rationality, imagination, and concepts are merely reflections of an archetypal 'idea' that exists beyond the bounds of our known consciousness, rendering it imperceptible and incomprehensible to us. A non-historical and non-experimental, yet an active unconscious was constructed and by means of complexities it was striven that God and religion are merely an 'idea' emerging of that collective unconsciousness. That's why, it was endorsed that all forms of religious beliefs and Idealism are not transcendent to man but are actually interwoven in him. So, the gist of all these thoughts is that consciousness doesn't import religious beliefs from outside but are product of it. It seems to be a well-made plan of Jung and the rest that Meta-physicality of consciousness should be ensured in such a way that its experimental behavior doesn't feel estranged. According to Jung, the metaphysical concepts of consciousness that influence character development are not derived from the external world, but rather generated by those conscious forces that are beyond man's abilities of understanding and will. In Jungian discourse God is 'Subjective Being', in fact an 'idea'. And this Idea often ensures its presence in the dark center of consciousness like 'a-priori' and as a result, ascendancy of knowledge and moral depth arises in the personality and the man desires to link several parts of his life to that Idea. This desire is so plain and natural that this concept of God becomes acceptable through any perspective. But nonetheless it remains an 'idea', which doesn't allow man to imagine that God exists as transcendent reality, as a creator, as a lord, and as a deity. He is a 'Subjective God' which causes the of various levels of human imagination. Maximum benefit that can be taken from Jung is that if God's existence is not proven, even then, from this concept about Him, some constant demands of 'Being' and consciousness can be fulfilled and the basic shades of man's life changes due to its effectiveness. That's why Jung gives great importance to interpretation and analysis of dreams, especially those dreams, that are religious and spiritual in nature. Under Jung's influence, religiosity and spirituality became synonymous. This means inner sublimation of self was considered as religiosity/spirituality. This process leads us to the point where there is no room for religion in its actual terms. It doesn't define the existence of God and institution of prophet-hood even at a minor level. Although this kind of esoteric religiosity affirms the significance of spiritual realms, but in doing so, it destroys all the structures of religion. This type of spirituality makes religion completely unnecessary and irrelevant. This is the outcome that might not be resulted even by a stubborn empiricism. For Jung, a spiritual ambiance is necessary in human self but it doesn't matter whether it contains God or not. Precisely, this concept of self, formulated by Jung, further blurred the acceptance of religion. So much so, that the analysis of religious personality became a subject matter of clinical psychology. Now there was no reason left to call religious concepts and states as 'abnormal' (Jung, 1991).

On the other hand, William James also tried to make religious composition of human self, universal. He made many religious states, which he named as experiences; a subject of his authentic clinical study, and tried to discover that the dynamics responsible for these states are not merely an 'idea' but have their own existence. That means that system of religious states and experiences is not besieged 'self', rather it is being formed by some external means. William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* came forward as a major anti-thesis in the history of modernity in which attempts have been made to break the permanent presumptions of a modern mind. The result of this struggle was that religious consciousness and its entire data was declared as knowledge and considering God for reasoning and argument as mere fallacy, to some extent was weakened too. But still here exists the issue as it was existed in Jungian approach. William James also considers religious states as spiritual and mystical states and does not distinguish between the conditions and situations of prophet and non-prophet.

If in case, we consider the synthesis of religious experiences correct for prophets, even then prophetic experiences are superior to religious experiences of non-prophets, so much so that one cannot even discover a minute shared magnitude, or people having religious understanding cannot even think of such a possibility of discovery. Prophet, in the process of receiving revelation is like an embodied being of crystallized passivity and even for himself this process is not psychological experience which can enhance some dynamics of his psychological pattern. Instead, it is a historical incident in which a prophet holds the place of a character and not merely of self or mind. William James does not consider any foundational difference between a prophet, mystic, poet and eccentric, and analyzes the religious experience related to them under the same subject of scrutiny and acknowledges them for having same validity. A religious mind cannot even accept this entire discourse as having an unlikely possibility. In this, there is neither understanding nor proof of crystallized objectivity of religion and religiosity. If we accept William James' approach, then we will have to accept prophecy as capacity of every individual, which is obviously contradictory and conflicting to the essence of religion. Denial of religion does not harm so much, but this kind of acceptance does. However, certain Muslim thinkers, such as Allama Iqbal, overlooked this crucial flaw and incorporated William James's philosophy of religious experiences into their defense of religion, presenting it as a central argument. Iqbal's project of reconstructing religious thought was significantly shaped by William James's ideas, with James's influence woven into the very fabric of Iqbal's philosophical perspective. And its major theme is to consider results of religious states and experiences as a proper field of study and make it that sort of knowledge which is accepted by experimental logic and which meets every type of philosophical and clinical standards.

In the very complicated process of considering psychological or spiritual experiences of a religious man as a justified knowledge, one thing becomes apparent and that is whether a prophet or non-prophet, both have such experiences that qualify the standard of knowledge. But Iqbal's entire argument faces failure to prove that if every religious or spiritual experience is an experience formed from the relationship between subject and object, then how in this experience, both its components i.e. subject and object are involved in a process with such a certitude and fixity. Because, if said in simple words, religious experience will mean that on one hand there is God who is presenting one of his men with the states, observations and feelings through which knowledge is formed; that means whether experience is religious or nonreligious, spiritual or psychological, rational or empirical, in every condition one of its foundations is based on a corresponding object. If object is lost from any experience, then such experience can have other properties but it will not be fulfilling the necessary conditions to be considered as knowledge.

Iqbal does not pay attention to the very fact that religious experience should not be limited to subject/object correspondence and it should be explained that its origin is present outside the internal existence of man, with a mode of verifiability. Because of this, many problems arise which force to call religious experiences, merely a hallucination. Here we cannot be satisfying ourselves by making an assertion like William James that religious states and experiences yield practical and moral outcomes. Practical and moral outcomes can also produce fantastical ideas and illusions and it cannot prove that the stimulus of these results is present somewhere outside of my mind. The central issue with Iqbal's work becomes more delicate because he was writing while being in the Islamic tradition. Trying to integrate Iqbal's concepts on religious experiences into the Islamic tradition reveals a fundamental mismatch, as the core assumptions underlying his ideas are at odds with the basic tenets and doctrine of Islam, making them difficult to reconcile. Iqbal's approach faces a critical obstacle in its failure to distinguish between prophetic and non-prophetic experiences, conflating the two and likening the prophetic process to Sufi and psychological phenomena, which raises crucial questions and challenges. And the problem is not only that Iqbal completely ignores the universal and transcendental perspective about prophetic revelation, but the major problem is that he reduces the prophetic knowledge to the level of all other human knowledge. And further he infers to the point that if a prophet has access to the reality beyond sense perception and rationality, then this possibility can be applied to all human beings (Iqbal, 1930/2009). This is such an inference that a religious person would not even consider it being worthy of giving a thought. Not only in religious thought, but in fact also in the traditions of philosophy of religion, prophetic knowledge cannot be mixed with human knowledge. Moreover, the philosophical analysis of religious factuality has led to the same realization that prophetic insight is a singular gift bestowed upon the prophet alone, inaccessible to others. Furthermore, this knowledge is not the result of the prophet's own striving or decision, but rather a divine revelation beyond his control. The realization is awarded to the prophet upon achieving the level of perfect passivity. And in this realization, any type of activity does not come to practice even after going through the experience of prophetic consciousness. Viewed from this angle, a stark unbridgeable gap can be observed between prophetic knowledge and human knowledge, with the observation that in latter the conscious activity cannot be suspended entirely. Consciousness cannot give meaning to any experience occurring in the mind while being separated from functionality in terms of being active. When mental states are devoid of meaning, even initial formation of knowledge will not be possible. And on the other hand, it should be noted that not only religious but in fact all facts cannot be disconnected from this principle that their expression is limited to inner world. Unless entire process of disclosure of realities is not objective in its nature, any subjective form of truth cannot gain the level of knowledge. That is why a prophet keeps his religious data safe from any external or internal contamination and accepts the entire process of disclosure of realities with historicalness and also expresses it accordingly.

Analysis of William James and Iqbal regarding religious or spiritual experiences and states of non-prophet appears to be correct, though. The pattern of this experience is contrary to the prophet; being internal and subjective and with regard to them; we are able to say that spiritual experiences can be clinically explained as psychological states. The ability possessed by the psychological experiences to be shaped in the form of knowledge is also possessed by spiritual experiences and states. On their bases we can also give new dimensions and arguments to any knowledge. We cannot invent a novel claim and assertion founded on their bases, but we can increase the effectiveness of some pre-existing knowledge statement. It seems to be a great compromise to make an effort to treat religious experience as a knowledge, and the compromise is that we have accepted the new definition of knowledge and want to bring religion in the same sphere of this new definition. Any attempt to empiricize religion is a completely unexpected approach for religion itself, at any level. All these efforts were being done after admitting the state of helplessness, and necessarily leads to reductionist version of religion. Iqbal has managed to examine religious experience in philosophical terms, but in doing so, he hasn't attempted to challenge or dismantle the existing structures of knowledge and examination. Instead, they have been considered as set standards to bring religious facts and figures to their level. It is strange to believe the building; that is built on the base of 'faith on the unseen' can bring to the sphere of reasoning limited to sense perception. Instead of rational and psychological analysis of religious states and experiences, it was better to analyze the existing conditions of knowledge and reasoning in the light of collective consciousness constructed by religion, and their

'principalizaion' should be catered, which was impossible without religious consciousness and spiritual perspective. But it went totally apposite and now we are facing its consequences. The fatal consequence one resulted in the attitude towards religion; as if religion is not endowed with reason, then, there is no point in believing in it. Iqbal's this concept of religion endorses that religion needs to be: epistemologically empirical, axiologically pragmatic, and morally utilitarian.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the goals of Enlightenment project was to humanize everything even religion. The philosophical contributions of William James, and later Iqbal, who drew inspiration from James' work, proved themselves as instrumental in completing this project. The attitude of inserting religion into the cluster of science, philosophy, poetry and psychology actually does not want to change science etc., but in fact aims at altering religion. It is that staunch urge of bringing major slogan of modernity to practice which has made its major purpose to drag all human beliefs which influence consciousness and life, to empirical level, in fact, to voluntarist position. The fundamental slogan of modernity is that man is the measure of everything. Man's existential parameters will determine the limitations and facts about existence and his consciousness will determine the limitation of the knowledge of the things. Everything, whether it relates to the metaphysical realities, will have to reduce itself into the limits of the approaches of man. This is the reason every epistemological, cultural and poetic effort is merely made to coincide religion and circumstances in the direction that whatever the reality of religion is, its justification is that it makes itself to obey the orders of man.

## 6. Recommendations

To ensure the preservation of Islamic religious thought while engaging with Western philosophical ideas, scholars in the Indian subcontinent must critically examine these frameworks to avoid undermining core principles. It is essential to preserve the distinctiveness of Islamic traditions, particularly by maintaining the distinction between prophetic and non-prophetic experiences. A thorough reassessment of Allama Iqbal's intellectual legacy, especially his reliance on Western thinkers like William James, is needed to sightsee alternative ways of legitimizing religious experiences without compromising their spiritual essence. Developing indigenous philosophical and psychological frameworks rooted in Islamic metaphysics is crucial for addressing modern challenges authentically while preserving the integrity of religious knowledge. Caution is necessary when adopting foreign intellectual traditions to prevent conflating or distorting key religious concepts. Scholars should adopt a balanced approach that respects traditional religious knowledge and thoughtfully engages with contemporary intellectual currents, avoiding extremes of rejection or uncritical assimilation.

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