

Kinship in Thought Between Islam and the West.

The topic possess multidimensional aspects but I am going to put down a few examples where scientists and philosophers have shown deep kinship of their thought with Islam

I would like to start with a great name, a shining star of the West, Professor Annemarie Schimmel of Germany, who is no longer with us in this world. She narrates a story in her biography which shows the kinship of her mind with Islam. She writes of a story she read in a book of fairy tales which her mother had given to her. Speaking in her words, 'It tells a story of an Indian Guru who introduced a youth of Damascus to the higher wisdom and finally, takes him through a wonderful deep down under a well. There, in a vault full of the most precious jewels, the greatest prince of the world lay in state, and on his tomb was written "People sleep, and when they die, they awaken."' She says, "The phrase hit me like a stroke of lightning, Ten years later I heard that this phrase is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad and that it was a favourite of the Sufis, the mystics of Islam. In this moment I knew – perhaps not yet in a concrete way – that this was my path,' Among her many books she wrote *Gabriel's Wing*, the literal meaning of the name is the same as that of Iqbal's book *Bal-i Jibreel*. Through this book Annemarie Schimmel explains the state of her deep Kinship in Thought with Islam

Peter Tudvad, a well known Danish philosopher and an authority on Søren Kierkegaard, writes: "Kierkegaard wrote his perhaps most important book, *Fear and Trembling* in 1843, in which he develops the concept of the faith, taking Abraham, the Patriarch, as his model. While working with the book he read the Old Testament, but also a German translation of the Qur'an to find more information about Abraham's trial on Mount Moriah. Is it not tempting to imagine Kierkegaard taking a stroll in Copenhagen arm-in-arm with a Muslim, engaged in animated discussion about Abraham, Father of our faith."¹ He has called Abraham 'Father of our faith', we call Islam as *Shajar-i Ibrahimi* (the tree of Abraham) and we call the Muslim Nation as *Millat-i Ibrahimi* (the nation of Abraham). What another marvellous example of Kinship in Thought between Islam and the West.

When we study the philosophy of man's Ego or Selfhood, we find a startling Kinship of Thought between Muslim and Western thinkers. According to the great Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard the dynamic power of thought and feeling of the Self emerge in a person as a Vital Entity, but he regards love as essential ingredient towards development of the Self. '*Love edifies the self*', says Kierkegaard. Iqbal, in his prose as well as in his poetry highlighted the dynamic power of the Self, particularly the roll of love towards understanding and developing the self. There are so many other wonderful examples showing Kinship of thought between Kierkegaard and Iqbal, which unfortunately we have to leave due to shortage of time.

From Islam, in the words of God "Verily in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alteration of night and day are signs for men of understanding."² There are many in the West who understood and showed practical Kinship to these verses of Islam, a notable example being 'Albert Einstein', who created the Theory of Relativity which provides a vast guideline to all coming generations of the scientists and astronomers to understand and explore secrets in the 'signs' for 'men of understanding' provided by God in the universe.

¹ English translation from Peter Tudvad's introduction to the book "Kierkegaard and Iqbal" by Ghulam Sabir.

² The Qur'an 3:190

Islam, “We have indeed decorated the lower heaven with beauty (in) the stars.”³ And “It is He (God) Who created all things and ordered them in due proportion.”⁴ We find a wonderful Kinship with the ideas in these verses in a Western mathematician and astronomer named Johannes Kepler of Germany. He intuited beauty and harmony in the universe when he wrote his book, “*The harmonies of the World*”. Kepler’s aesthetic perception of the universe disclosed a musical rhythm in the movement of all the planets, which is different from planet to planet. He writes that the movement of every planet corresponds to certain notes, which he explored and quoted in the Latin musical scale ... e.g. the tones of the earth are fa and mi, and he says, “With the symphony of voices man can play through the eternity of time”.⁵ We also find Iqbal’s kinship with Johannes Kepler in his verses through which he tells us to sing with the symphony of the universe: He says, “*Kiyun chaman men bey sada misl-i ram-i shabnam hai too; Lab khush hoja sarood-i barbat-i aalam hai too*” (Why are you silent in the garden like dew’s movement: Open up your lips, you are the music of world’s symphony”).⁶

Another example of Kinship: In Islam ‘God is Light’. Dante, a philosopher intuited God as a ‘single light through every thing in the universe’. Goethe saw and confirmed this light while at his death bed saying “More Light” – the last two words with the last breath of his life.

We find an example of fantastic Kinship between Hafiz Shirazi of Iran (1320-1390), Goethe of Germany (1749-1832) and Iqbal of Pakistan (1877-1938). All the three belong to three different countries and have altogether different cultural, social and political backgrounds. Yet we find lot of kinship between their mutual thought. Goethe was a genius of his age. He had a vast knowledge of different languages of the world, including Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. While studying Persian literature he came across Divan-i Hafiz, a marvellously rich Persian poetry. He was so inspired by the thought of Hafiz Shirazi that he wrote a *Divan* in German language and named it *West-Östlicher Divan* (West-Eastern Divan). Iqbal was fired up by Goethe’s *Divan*, and in response to it he offered homage to Goethe in the shape of his book “*Payami Mashriq*” (the message of the East), in which he wrote a sentence *Dar jawab-i Divan-i shair-i Almanvi* (In reply to the Divan of the poet of Germany) In this book he pays his tributes to Goethe in these verses: ‘*Saba ba gulshan-i weimer Salam-i Ma Birasaan, Ki chashm-i nukta waran khak-i aan dyar afrokht*’, (O morning breeze convey my greetings to the happy Weimer town, the light that radiated from it has illumined many sages’ minds). In his book Iqbal first refers to Goethe’s *Divan* and then called his own book ‘a gleam of moonlight in the Eastern sky’. It was just after first world war that Iqbal wrote this book. In it he says (translated in English):

“We both have delved into the inmost heart
Of being: both of us are messages
Of life in the midst of death’s ravages;
Two daggers morning-lustred, mirror-bright;
He naked; I still sheathed, concealed from sight,
Two pearls, both precious, both unmatched are we.”

Goethe’s kinship with Islam is reflected in these precious words of his *Divan*, “If Islam means surrender into God’s will, all of us live and die in Islam.” It is one of the best examples of the Kinship between Islam and the West.

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³ Ibid. 37:6

⁴ Ibid. 25:2

⁵ Cosmos by Carl Sagan p.78-79.

⁶ Bang-i Dara by Iqbal p. 31