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Nietzsche and Iqbal on Nihilism and Religion

***Sher Zada**

****Shuja Ahmad**

Abstract

Both Nietzsche and Iqbal have made a philosophical and critical analysis of the role of religion in human life. Nietzsche, in his critique of religion, has declared religion as one of the important factors of nihilism; hence, to successfully counter nihilism, he has suggested the total abolition of religion and the rejection of all sorts of religious beliefs.

Iqbal's critique of religion, on the other hand, was not an attempt to reject religion in totality, by considering it to be a responsible factor of nihilism, for he thought, that it is not a religion in itself which leads society towards nihilism, instead, it is human's incorrect interpretation of religion, that can plunge the world into nihilism.

This paper attempts to make a comparative analysis of Nietzsche's and Iqbal's critical approaches toward religion, by arguing that, though both Nietzsche and Iqbal were critics of religion, however, the nature of their criticism was different. Nietzsche thought that the very nature of religion is that it causes nihilism in the world; hence, he suggested that, to avoid this undesirable destiny, mankind should abandon its faith in religion. Whereas for Iqbal, religion in itself does not cause nihilism, instead the fault is rooted in human interpretation. Since religion, according to him, provides a metaphysical anchorage to humanity; therefore, instead of discarding religion, humans should reinterpret and reconstruct religious thought in the light of contemporary knowledge, by avoiding such interpretations of religion, that can and do lead the world toward nihilism.

Key Words: Christianity, Decadence, Decay, Determinism, Extremism, Fatalism, Islam, Nihilism, Religion, Sectarianism

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*Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Peshawar

Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, Email: sherzada@uop.edu.pk

**Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Peshawar

Introduction

The history of the religious aspect of mankind, since time immemorial, has revealed that “human beings are spiritual animals”, for mystery and wonder seem to be essential components of their experience (Armstrong 1999, 3). Like most human activities, religion too can be misused and misinterpreted, to use it against the interests of others, however, it as a whole, has served humanity; for the very objective of religion is the establishment of a “viable social order” based upon ethical and socio-moral foundations (Rahman 1989, 25). Moreover, religion has played a significant intellectual and cultural role throughout human history, though the fact cannot be denied that its intellectual and cultural role, of course, has been drastically affected by pluralistic and secularistic developments (Qazi 2008, 3,4). The use and misuse of religion, during different historical periods, have often resulted in the advent of nihilism, which has expressed itself in the form of fanaticism, extremism, sectarianism, violence, chaos, and social instability in different societies. As a result, throughout the history of philosophy, different thinkers have realized the need for a critical scrutiny of the very nature of religion, to apprehend the very grounds rooted in the domain of religion that cause nihilism, and have attempted to suggest remedies and the ways out. Among such philosophers, Nietzsche and Iqbal occupy an important position.

Both Nietzsche and Iqbal have made philosophical and critical analyses of the role of religion in human life. During this process of philosophical evaluation, they arrived at two distinct conclusions, Nietzsche thinks of the role of religion to be negative and destructive¹, since it brings nihilism into the world, whereas Iqbal believes it to be positive and constructive, for religion, by providing a metaphysical anchorage, as he believes, can help mankind to counter nihilism. Nietzsche and Iqbal were highly conscious about the advent or [even the presence²] of nihilism in the world. Since nihilism is highly destructive for all human societies; therefore, Nietzsche and Iqbal have made discussions about important factors that serve as root causes of nihilism and have worked on strategies to counter or overcome this destructive phase of human history. In this regard, Nietzsche’s philosophy of Will to Power, Overman, Eternal Recurrence, etc., and Iqbal’s philosophy of Khudi/Human Ego, Mard-e-Momin, and Ijtihad can be quoted as a few examples.

Nietzsche’s Critique of Religion

Nietzsche was highly concerned about the fast forthcoming era of Western nihilism and thought that Western society is going to plunge itself into a highly destructive nihilistic situation in the next two hundred years (Nietzsche 1968). Nihilism refers to a situation, state, or condition when the highest nobler values

are “devalued” (Allison 1977, 121), or it is a “radical repudiation of values, meaning and desirability”, an era in the history of humankind, when highest nobler values “devalue themselves”, a belief about life, when life has been declared to be absurd or ridiculous, that is to say, “not worthwhile” (Nietzsche 1968, 7,9,23), or to make it simpler, nihilism refers to a condition, when life becomes meaningless or “not worth living” (Reginster 2006, 08). Moreover, nihilism may also be referred to as a state of tension, which causes an imbalance between what humans need or want and how the world appears to be (Carr 1990, 85). The disposition of this nihilistic situation would be the lethargy of life, where people will find all things shallow, empty, and meaningless (Norman Melchert 2019, 573).

To summarize, nihilism is a situation in the history of humanity, when religious, social, political, ethical, and aesthetical values disappear from life for people have lost their desires for higher and nobler values of life. This nihilistic attitude results in a vacuum of hopelessness and stagnancy, where it becomes extremely difficult for humankind to make progress in life. The dominant factors, which will cause nihilism in the European or Western world, according to Nietzsche are: religion (specifically Christianity), Conventional Morality, which he refers to as Slave Morality, Democracy, Socialism, Darwinism, Modern State or the New Idol as Nietzsche calls it, Indecent Haste of the modern man and Belief in God. Since the scope of this article allows a debate concerning Nietzsche’s fear about the role of religion as a potential causal factor of nihilism. The upcoming section will deliberate upon Nietzsche’s critique of religion by analyzing his ideas about religion as a causal ground of nihilism and the remedies that he suggested to counter this unsought fortune.

During his critical evaluation of religion, Friedreich Nietzsche, who is mostly valued for his thorough and radical critique of “metaphysics, morality and religion” (Small 2010, 1), declared religion, to be an important factor of nihilism and to effectively counter it with success, he has suggested the total abolition of religion and rejection of all sort of religious beliefs. Nietzsche’s philosophy addresses that nihilism in large part results from the demise of the Christian worldview (Reginster 2006). Christianity, especially Christian morality, he believes, is responsible for the advent of nihilism in the Western world because of beliefs such as: equality of man, pity/mercy/sympathy, remaining contented in the present vocation, no emphasis on resistance against evil and wickedness, original sin, and promotion of otherworldliness at the expense of this world preaching negation rather than affirmation of life. Nietzsche’s critical attitude towards Christianity is reflected in his expression, where he said that the time

has come when we have to pay for having been Christians for two thousand years (Nietzsche 1968).

Christian teachings suggest the equality of all humans (Nietzsche 2005). Against equality of man, Nietzsche writes, “Men are not equal. Nor shall they become equal!” (Nietzsche 1978). Rather than thinking in terms of the equality of man, he believes that there are different ranks of people. All individuals are not equal, since they differ from each other on moral, intellectual, and physical grounds. How can the moral and immoral, intelligent and fool, stronger and weaker be equated? This idea of equality, introduced by Christianity for the first time, is very dangerous and destructive for humanity because it violates the natural order of humans. In reality, people according to Nietzsche, are divided into the natural order of good and bad, competent and incompetent, brave and coward. Since humans possess distinctions concerning their character and personality; hence, we have to treat them differently. The main responsibility of humans is to counter nihilism to bring nobility into the world. According to Nietzsche, nobility demands sacrifices- one must raise oneself above the average to fight for it (Nietzsche 2005).

Similarly, in Christianity, enormous importance has been given to love, mercy, and sympathy, and one can call Christianity to be “the religion of pity”. For Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, pity is the opposite of life-affirming emotion. As pity negates life- it is the practice of nihilism. The unhealthiest thing in the age of unhealthy modernity, according to Nietzsche, is Christian pity. It is because of this strong belief in pity, that no resistance against evil is suggested in Christian teachings. Nietzsche interprets Jesus as someone incapable of resisting evil (Nietzsche 2005, 6, 7). Christianity negates resistance against evilness in the world, whereas during some moments in life, it becomes highly necessary to show resistance. Will to resist becomes the fundamental principle of life, as “life is a consequence of war”. An active and dynamic role on the part of an individual is demanded to achieve nobility and overcome nihilism, rather than accepting things passively as is preached in Christianity. One must show resistance and to show resistance, one must first become strong and powerful as “life itself is the will to power” (Nietzsche 1968, 33, 37). Christianity preaches active pity for all failures and weaknesses, which is more harmful than all vices (Nietzsche 2005). Christianity is essentially a “religion of weakness” (Glenn 2004, 575). Weakness leads to nihilism; hence Nietzsche suggests that we should abolish religion to achieve nobility.

Moreover, in Christianity, according to Nietzsche, an exaggerated emphasis has been given to achievements and successes in the life of the hereafter and this

material world is usually ignored. This overemphasis upon the life of the hereafter at the expense of worldly life has caused absolute fatalism in Christianity in the form of beliefs like the doctrine of original sin and an emphasis upon the need to remain contented with the present vocation. Christianity injects pessimism rather than overcoming it; as a result, causes nihilism. Being an existentialist, Nietzsche believes that humans, being unique wonders of nature, are not like factory products whose character is fixed and pre-determined. Instead, they are personally responsible for their character and personality as they shape and reshape their character and personality because of their own free will³. To achieve salvation in the life of the hereafter, one must crush and exterminate bodily desires according to Christian teachings, so the Christian teachings, according to Nietzsche, preach “hatred of the body”. However, since these desires are natural; therefore, one cannot eliminate them. Nietzsche identifies Christians with anarchists and declares them to be the destroyers of the very values of life, for he thinks that the only goal and/or the only instinct of Christians “is to destroy” (Nietzsche 2005, 56, 60).

Finally, Nietzsche declares ‘belief in God’ as preached by religions (like Christianity), to be one among the responsible factors of nihilism. He says that religion is a kind of feeling of fear and terror at oneself, and God, the holiest of all names, “weakens, teaches weakness, infects with weakness” (Nietzsche 1968, 34). God, for Nietzsche, does not exist, because this God is anti-self-overcoming and life-denying. He says that given the approaching period of nihilism, it is important to abandon this belief in God because belief in God not only kills and suppresses the free will and liberty of man but also breeds a kind of dependency on human character. As a result, man becomes lethargic- cannot play a vigorous, active, dynamic, and energetic role in building his character and personality, and shaping the collective life as well.

To play an energetic, vigorous, active, dynamic, and vibrant role in shaping and reshaping our personal as well as collective lives, we must overthrow that belief in God, to which we were accustomed to in the past. This is the time to confidently declare, that God, which we have previously worshiped is dead for all purposes. God is dead, since we being his murderers have killed him (Nietzsche 2001, 119, 120). Nietzsche’s declaration, of the death of God, sets mankind free; hence, each individual can become his or her being, superman (Jackson 2014). Nietzsche ultimately restricts man to immanence by setting him exclusively before the future possibility of an earthly *Übermensch* who is without God (Jaspers 1965).

Man has become independent and free for shaping his life and character with his own will and choices. With a religious attitude and belief, man always looks towards God for overcoming problems of his life without adding his due share, due to which his values and nobility are suppressed. As a result, he cannot fight with vigor and strength against evils. This overdependence on God results in determinism and pessimism by negating the dynamic and free nature of humans. Hence, it is important, Nietzsche suggests, to discard belief in God. He says that in order to redeem the world, we repudiate God and our responsibility to Him (Nietzsche 2005).

But Nietzsche also saw that God's death poses a grave problem. Religious roots have fed the Western culture for almost two thousand years. What will happen if these roots no more sustain their life, when the source of their values dries up? The threat is nihilism. The problem of God's death and the advent of nihilism are indeed directly related⁴ (M. I. Iqbal 1998). The disappearance of all the shadows of God will take a long period. Man's initial response may be one of encouragement and relief but in the end, due to the absence of God, man's own culture will undergo a period of destruction, rupture, revolution, and downfall, an astonishing logic of dread, a sun's eclipse unlike any yet known on earth (Nietzsche 2001). Nietzsche has now to struggle against nihilism by forging a new meaning to life. This fight for a new meaning of life took a surprising turn, that is to say, Christianity itself, which had saved the Western culture from nihilism until now, is accused by Nietzsche, as the greatest nihilism of all. Therefore; belief in God as preached by Christianity, he thinks, also leads us towards nihilism.

Nihilism will result in the devaluation of values; hence, revaluation of values will be required. Although Nietzsche liked the master morality of the epic heroes of Homer, because of their love for life, self-assertion or affirmation; however, it would be wrong to think that he merely desires to get back again to that morality. We are left with no going back. Humanity needs to go beyond 'good and evil'. With this thought in mind, we are then ready to consider the Nietzschean conception of the Overman. But where to look for that end? Nietzsche advises us to remain faithful to the earth rather than looking into the world beyond earthly existence. Nietzsche calls such individuals to be the blasphemers of the earth (Nietzsche 1978) who look into otherworldliness for their salvation. The death of God has resulted in a weariness of life where we find everything empty, shallow, and meaningless. Nietzsche tries to convince us that God's death will result in the change of everything and that nothing will remain the same. The Death of God is then the name for a transitional phase which he calls nihilism

(Haase 2008). In response to this meaninglessness caused by the death of God, Nietzsche, rather than asking for a reinterpretation of religion, suggests its abolition and desires in its place, “the overman to live” (Nietzsche 1978, 79).

Iqbal’s Critique on the Misinterpretation of Religion

Allama Muhammad Iqbal, like Nietzsche, too has grasped the presence of nihilism in the Muslim world⁵. He realized that the root cause of decadence, downfall, and decay in the Islamic world is nothing else but nihilism, which is present in different forms and shapes. Iqbal’s prose and poetry, rich with philosophical content, contains expressions, which point towards metaphysical, epistemological, religious or mystical, moral, and political nihilism. His philosophical and poetical thought is a response to the problem of nihilism in its various dimensions (Yilmaz 2016). These different categories of nihilism have caused stagnancy, rigidity, and orthodoxy in the Muslim world, whose final outcome was socio-political decadence and decay in Islamic civilization.

Iqbal’s critique of religion, as compared to Nietzsche’s, was not an attempt to reject religion in totality, by considering it to be a responsible factor of nihilism, for he thought, that it is not religion in itself, which brings nihilism, instead, human’s erroneous interpretations of religion, as grounded in different negative influences, do so. Therefore, to avoid nihilism, Iqbal, instead of suggesting an absolute rejection of religion, attempted to reconstitute religion by reconstructing and reinterpreting religious thought [Islamic thought]. He was optimistic about the constructive role of religion in the modern world. The primary concern of his philosophy of religion was the reconstruction of Islamic thought in the modern and postcolonial context, for he thought of Islam as a “universalizing and postcolonial religion” (Majeed 2009, xxv). Using his religio-philosophic speculations, Iqbal formulated a discursive terrain, where he endeavored to politicize religion [Islam] in a postcolonial context, dealing with important issues like social justice, legitimate power, and ethical or moral life. His project of the politicization of religion was an attempt to challenge the hegemony of the cultural and political norms of the Western world (Buck-Morss 2003, 3), a civilization, which according to Iqbal was at the threshold of destructive nihilism.

Iqbal’s philosophical and intellectual maturity, after his return from Europe, with a fresh attitude, neither Eastern nor Western, made him to conclude, that if on the one hand, the lop-sided substantial growth of the West was unspiritual and unethical, on the other hand, the Eastern religiosity was a dull and “life-thwarting force” (Sharif 1966, 1619). He laments about Eastern man (D. J. Iqbal 2004) and says that medieval mysticism, by influencing his religious life, has taught the

Eastern man false repudiation. Moreover, it also has made, the Eastern man, perfectly satisfied with his ignorance and spiritual slavery (A. M. Iqbal 2004). The enormous influence of medieval mysticism on the spiritual outlook of Muslims has deprived their understanding of religion (Islam) as a dynamic way of life with a practical approach. The outcome was the advent of nihilism in the Islamic world.

Iqbal says that although Greek thought has widened the viewpoint of Muslim thinkers, however, on the whole, it has concealed their “vision of the Quran”. He believes that Socratic teachings have given importance only to the ‘world of man’, for he thought that the ‘proper study of man is man’ and has negated the world of stars, plants, and insects. However, according to Iqbal, the true spirit of the *Quran* is to see Divine inspiration even in the humble bee. Moreover, the *Quran* repeatedly invites its readers to observe the everlasting change of winds, the modification of days and nights, the starry heavens, the clouds, and the planets, which swim through-out infinite space. Being a true disciple of Socratic philosophy, Plato despises sense perception and says that it leads only to mere opinion instead of real knowledge. But for Iqbal, the *Quran* considers ‘hearing and sight’ as the most valuable Divine gifts from God and takes them to be accountable before God for their activities in this world. Iqbal believes that the *Quran* is essentially anti-classical and this point, according to him, was completely missed by the early Muslim learners of the *Quran*, under the “spell of classical speculation”. These earlier interpreters of the Muslim world have read the *Holly Book* in the light of “Greek thought” (A. M. Iqbal 2004, 11).

According to Iqbal, Islam is not against the application of reason in religious affairs, as in Islam, the pursuit of rational foundations, can be traced back to the Prophet himself, whose frequent prayer was, ‘God! Grant me knowledge of the ultimate nature of things. Works of later mystics and non-mystic rationalists have made an important contribution to the Muslim culture. These works reveal the limitations of their age along with their desire for an articulate scheme of ideas and their enthusiasm for whole-hearted commitment to truth. Iqbal thinks that the purely rational and philosophical speculation of these mystic and non-mystic rationalists have made the different Islamic theological and religious movements less fruitful (A. M. Iqbal 2004).

As said earlier Greek thought has both positively and negatively influenced Quranic studies and various schools of scholastic theology. Ghazali has revolted against classical thought and based religion upon a more unsafe basis of philosophical skepticism, which Iqbal believes is not in concord with the Quranic spirit. Ibn-e-Rushd, while taking influences from Aristotle, has introduced the

doctrine of the immortality of Active Intellect, which Iqbal thinks is opposed to the Quranic view of the destiny and value of the human ego. As a result, Ibn-e-Rushd has lost the vision of a fruitful and great idea in Islam and has helped in the growth of such a philosophy, which makes distinctions between man's vision of God, his vision of himself, and that of the universe around him.

Among the Muslim thinkers, Ash'arites were more constructive as they anticipated some recent types of idealism, yet on the whole, their aim was the defense of the orthodox position with the weapons of Greek dialectics. *Mu'tazila* has confined religion to a mere scheme of logical concepts or a body of dogmas or doctrines and ignored it to be a dynamic fact. By taking no notice of non-conceptual means of apprehending Reality, they ended in a purely negative attitude. Iqbal believes that *Mu'tazila* has failed to realize that in the realm of both scientific and religious knowledge, total liberation of thought from "concrete experience" is impossible (A. M. Iqbal 2004, 11-12). For securing an ample and comprehensive vision of Reality, sense perception must be complemented by a direct connotation with Reality because it reveals itself within the *Qalb* (heart), which the Quran describes as *Fa'ud*. Iqbal himself elaborates, that the heart is a type of insight or inner intuition, which in Rumi's beautiful words, nourishes "rays of the sun" and establishes our contact with those aspects of Reality, which are not open "to sense perception" (A. M. Iqbal 2004, 11-12, 21).

Iqbal argues, Kant's Critique exposed the limits of human reason, Ghazali's philosophical skepticism did the same job in the world of Islam. There is however a fundamental difference between Kant and Ghazali. Kant denied the knowledge of metaphysical realities like God, while Ghazali was enthused with mystic experience and discovered a sovereign content for religion. However, Ghazali was convinced about the finitude and inconclusiveness of thought due to the revelation of the total Infinite in the mystic experience of an individual. As a result, he draws a line of difference between intuition and thought. Iqbal believes, that Ghazali failed to see that intuition and thought are "organically related". The idea about the essential finitude of thought, and its incapacity to apprehend the Infinite, according to Iqbal, is grounded in an erroneous notion of "the movement of thought in knowledge" (A. M. Iqbal 2004, 13).

Under the negative influences and effects of classical Greek thought in its metaphysical and epistemological aspects, the Muslim mind remained ignorant of the true spirit of the *Quran* till modern times and remained static. This stagnancy has resulted in decadence, decay, and nihilism in the Islamic world. Iqbal believes that the real message of the *Quran* in its multiple dimensions suggests activeness, vitality, and dynamism. The Muslim thought needs

reconstruction and revival on lines that are consistent with the essential message of the *Quran*. The main task of Iqbal's *Reconstruction* is the revival of Muslim thought to resist decadence and overcome nihilism.

Iqbal says that Islamic religious thought, during the last five hundred years, has been "practically stationary" (A. M. Iqbal 2004, 14), which is not in accord with the dynamic nature of a genuine religion. Religion in its true sense according to him is a dynamic force, which opposes an ascetic approach in life based on the ideals of self-negation, self-abnegation or renunciation, and self-abandonment. Islam with its essentially progressive and practical outlook by preaching the philosophy of action, has appealed to Iqbal more than all other religions of the world. He thinks that the Muslim world, by assimilating the harmful trends of self-negation and self-abandonment from other Indian and Semitic religious systems, has lost the true spirit of Islam in favor of alien ideas. Iqbal says that the Muslim thinkers by borrowing these foreign ideas had come under the harmful influences of the Hellenistic doctrines of Pantheism based upon Vedanta. Moreover, they saw life as Maya, i.e., a mere illusion, which led them to seek joy and happiness in Nirvana; hence, they have lost the vision of energies of a dynamic society as conceived by religion of Islam during the times of prophet of Islam. This has resulted in passiveness and stagnancy in the Muslim world, whose penalty is now faced by Muslims in the form of backwardness, decadence, and decay [nihilism] (Khan 1977).

While criticizing Islamic mysticism in his present-day Muslim world, Iqbal says that because of the influence of Hellenic-Persian mysticism, Islamic mysticism, presently, preaches passive contemplation, inaction, quietude, and self-annihilation. He says that the self-mystification or nihilism, which is nothing more than looking for Reality in quarters where it has no existence is a physical indication about the "decadence of the Muslim world". He says further that in every age, such a decadent attempts to seek shelter behind nihilism and self-mystification, as is revealed by the intellectual history of the ancient world (Sherwani 2015, 154). Iqbal says that by recognizing the contact of the ideal with the real, Islam says 'yes' to the "world of matter" and suggests exploring the ways of its mastery, to determine a base for a realistic guideline of life (A. M. Iqbal 2004, 16).

Iqbal claims, the general empirical attitude of *Quran* has stimulated in its followers the feeling of respect and admiration for the actual making them the founders of modern science. In an age, that has renounced the visible as of no value while searching for God, the awakening of the empirical spirit is a great achievement. He says that our deep and thoughtful contact with the temporal

fluctuation of things train us for an “intellectual vision of the non-temporal”. The reality, according to Iqbal, lives in its appearances, and man to sustain his life in an obstructing environment, cannot afford to overlook the evidently visible. Iqbal has criticized the cultures of Asia and the entire ancient world because they advanced Reality wholly from “within”, and “moved from within outwards”. According to him, this approach has given these Asian and ancient cultures only theory without control and power, and a durable or solid civilization can never be founded upon mere theory (A. M. Iqbal 2004, 20).

In his doctoral dissertation, while referring towards different intellectual debates in the history of Islamic philosophy that took place amongst various schools of thought existing between 8th and 12th centuries, Iqbal writes that such era in the intellectual history of the Muslim world was a period of mysticism, rationalism, skepticism, “heresy-forms”, where the “human mind” persuaded by the rising force of subjectivity has rejected all “external standards of truth” (A. M. Iqbal 1908, 38). These lines reveal Iqbal’s critical approach towards pure reason as taken independent of perception, epistemological skepticism, and distorted form of mysticism or ascetic Sufism, which he calls lower or degraded Sufism⁶. During all these rationalistic, skeptical, and mystical debates among Muslim intellectuals, the subjective dimension of Reality was preferred over the objective dimension that Iqbal thinks is against the very spirit of the *Quran*. Calling these forms of heresy, he is referring to nihilism in its epistemological and religious form. Iqbal believes, that in the history of Islamic philosophy, the main idea which emerged as a result of centuries-long debates, is that rationalism in its pure form leads to “skepticism, pantheism, thus atheism and fatalism” (Yilmaz 2016, 39).

For Iqbal, Islam envisages all humanity as a unity- he conceives Islam as a universal religion. But Islam during his time had become static, rigid, and narrow because of a fossilized religious dogmatism (Sharif 1966). He points out the following factors to be responsible for the state of stagnancy and immobility about the Law of Islam, i.e., *Shariah*:

1. The intellectual debate between the Rationalist movement and Conservative Thinkers, i.e., *Mu’tazilah* and Ash’arites, where the conservative thinkers thought that the rationalist movement was undermining the very foundations of Muslim society by denying the eternity of the *Quran*. They feared the stability and integrity of Islam as a social Polity; hence, utilized the binding force of *Shariah* by making their legal system as rigorous as possible.
2. The rise and growth of ascetic Sufism, while allying with rationalism, has emphasized the distinction between Appearance and Reality. Coming under the

influences of non-Islamic character, it has preferred other-worldliness by denying the significance of concrete reality and preached self-negation instead of self-affirmation. Iqbal says that this speculative dimension of ascetic Sufism has attracted and finally absorbed the best minds of the Islamic world, and as a result, the “intellectual mediocrities” were generally controlling affairs of the Muslim state (A. M. Iqbal 2004, 133). The Muslim masses with their higher caliber for guidance found their salvation in the blind following of the Islamic legal schools.

3. The destruction of Baghdad (once, the Centre of the Muslim’s intellectual life) in the middle of the thirteen century, an epoch of political deterioration, has made the conservative thinkers of Islam to fear the further disintegration of the Muslim world. As a result, they have utilized all of their labor for the single point of conserving a uniform social life for Muslims. This uniform social order, they thought, is possible only by excluding all innovations from the law of Shariah. Iqbal believes that this attitude of the later conservative Muslim thinkers was against the very attitude of the early doctors of Islam. The leading idea of these conservative thinkers was social order, in which they were partly right on the ground that organizations counteract the forces of decay. Iqbal thinks that those conservative thinkers and even the contemporary *Ulema* do not realize, that the fate and destiny of people depend more upon the power and worth of individual men than an organization. He says that this over-emphasis, of thirteenth century and later legists of Islam, upon the organization as was “contrary to the inner impulse of Islam” (A. M. Iqbal 2004, 133, 134).

Like most religions, morality, according to Islam, has its grounds in Divinity, so Iqbal during his critical scrutiny of religion, has attempted to fight against moral nihilism as well. To fight against the pessimistic religious trends of his time, he countered Neo-Platonic mysticism, which has negatively influenced Islam with its “philosophy of asceticism, inactivity, and nay-saying” (Kashyap 1970, 205). Being an existentialist, Iqbal rejects fatalism and determinism and believes in the freedom of man. Iqbal initially liked the philosophies of Al-Jilani and Hegel, which he thought give satisfactory answers about the freedom and will of man, and his proper place in the universe against God and nature. But later on, he realized that the process in their systems is a closed one, and thus leads to fatalism and predetermination, which is a particular form of teleology, where the end is predetermined rather than an open one. In such a system, a man cannot enjoy real freedom and becomes a mere puppet, passive spectator, slave, or a mere means to an end. He thus loses his worth and becomes an insignificant tool that is only necessary for the self-realization of God (Sherwani 2015), (Yilmaz 2016). This, as a result, deprives man of his freedom and leads him towards fatalism and

determinism. The deterministic and fatalistic tendencies of Neo-Platonic mysticism have caused religious and moral nihilism in the Muslim world. Iqbal assigns great value to freedom, willingness, and the importance of power/strength for humans, for these help humankind to counter religio-moral nihilism.

Islam does not believe in the separation of State and Church, for a problem in one will affect the other. Iqbal's critical analysis of religion has made him aware of the political nihilism in the Islamic world. In his article, *Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal*, he highlights the factors of political nihilism and declares the religious caste system, sectarianism, and the social caste system as responsible factors for it. He says that religious and social sectarianism has caused division and disintegration in the Muslim world, which is against the very spirit of the *Quran* and the central message of Islam. Islam as a social and political ideal, being an ultimate message of freedom, liberty, and equality, is single and inseparable. Iqbal says that "there are no *Wahabies*, *Sh'ias*, *Mirzaïs* or *Sunnies* in Islam". He advises the Muslim Umma to smash the idols of class distinctions and sectarianism by letting the Muslim world "be once more united into a great vital whole" (Sherwani 2015, 117).

Conclusion

Both Nietzsche and Iqbal were immensely conscious of the advent or even the presence of nihilism in the world. Nietzsche's concern was the Western or European world, whereas Iqbal's interest was the Muslim world, though, nihilism for him was a global issue. Nihilism is an extremely harmful condition for the whole of humanity, for it endangers the very roots of civilization, in terms of socio-moral and political chaos, instability, stagnancy, decadence, and decay. It creates a vacuum in the life of humanity, where it becomes highly difficult for humankind to make positive and constructive progress. Because of such a destructive attitude of nihilism against humanity at large, both Nietzsche and Iqbal have worked on discovering its root causes. During their philosophical speculations, both Nietzsche and Iqbal realized that the role of religion, in one way or another, concerning the problem of nihilism cannot be neglected; hence, they made critical scrutiny of the role of religion in human life.

Nietzsche's immediate target was Christianity, however, his philosophy was at war with religion in general. He concluded that among the dominant factors of nihilism, religion, specifically Christianity, because of its extremely negative and destructive role, will finally lead the Western world towards nihilism. Since religion preaches self-denial, self-negation, and otherworldliness by negating the life of this world, it, therefore, brings pessimism, fatalism, and determinism,

which in turn causes nihilism in the world. Moreover, religion does not insist upon resistance against evil in the world and instead preaches weakness, it, as a result, destroys the very roots of life, for progress in life requires struggle and progressive struggle necessitates power, strength, vitality, dynamism, and freedom. Because of this negative attitude of religion towards life, nihilism is caused. To protect humanity against this undesired fate, Nietzsche advises the abolition of religion and all types of religious beliefs.

Unlike Nietzsche, Iqbal was optimistic about the positive and constructive role of religion in human life, for he thought that religion provides a metaphysical anchorage to humans in moments of despair. Although like Nietzsche, Iqbal too has made a critical evaluation of religion, for he thought, that though religion in its true spirit does not cause nihilism, however, its incorrect interpretations made by humans, while getting negative influences from different corners, do cause nihilism. Therefore, according to Iqbal, to counter religious nihilism as rooted in erroneous interpretations, the world needs to reconstitute religion by re-interpreting and reconstructing religious thought in the light of contemporary knowledge.

To summarize, both Nietzsche and Iqbal, while making a critical evaluation of religion, arrived at two distinct conclusions, about its role in human life, Nietzsche thought it to be negative and destructive, since it causes nihilism, whereas, for Iqbal, religion can help humanity to overcome nihilism, provided it is free from negative and erroneous interpretations.

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¹ Nietzsche's assault against religion in general and Christianity in particular has made many scholars to conclude that he was an atheist; however, there is a deep down religiosity in his thought (Jackson 2007); Young argues that he ought to be regarded as "a religious reformer than an enemy of religion" (Young 2006, 2).

² Iqbal thought that the decadence, decay and downfall in his contemporary Muslim world was nothing but a kind of nihilism, which has severely weakened the very roots of Islamic civilization.

³ Nietzsche is against the religious conception of free will, which he thinks is an absolutely crucial lie told by the weak and impotent. He thinks that this concept is the utmost disrespectful piece of deception invented by theologians with a purpose to make mankind accountable in their sense, i.e., make humans dependent or reliant on them. Nietzsche argues that there is no such thing as free will that is making man above animals (Nietzsche 2005). This idea of human freedom or free will is an innovation and interpretation or elucidation of facts made by those who sought others to be persuaded to believe that they are sinful, guilt-ridden and evil in God's eyes, since they could have done otherwise. Humans are entirely body in nature, are animals, even mechanisms. Nietzsche thinks that the ideas of free will, sin, guilt and responsibility are part of slave morality (Norman Melchert 2019).

⁴ Bernard Reginster rejects this claim. He writes, "Nihilism does not follow directly (or necessarily) from the death of God". God's death and nihilism can be directly connected, if one accept an implicit supposition that life only has a meaning, if God or any other metaphysical world exists (Reginster 2006, 9).

⁵ Iqbal like certain other Muslim modernist thinkers thought that "parts of the Islamic world had returned to the state of Jahiliyya", of nihilism and decadence (Jackson 2007), (Jackson 2014).

⁶ Iqbal is not against mysticism interpreted in Islamic Religio-Philosophical thought as Sufism. He divides Sufism into two categories, i.e., Lower or Degraded Sufism and Higher Sufism. A type of Sufism, which preaches complete other-worldliness by denying the importance of worldly life in addition to self-denial and self-negation, obscures man's vision of "a very important aspect of Islam as a social polity". Iqbal calls it lower or degraded Sufism. This type of Sufism has developed, he believes, under the impact of a

purely speculative un-Islamic character. On the other hand Sufism that gives importance to the life of this concrete world and suggests self-affirmation, self-possession and self-overcoming is in accordance with the actual spirit of Islam- Iqbal calls it Higher Sufism. It is a Sufism that seeks a direct contact with the Ultimate Real through social responsibility and communal services (A. M. Iqbal 2004, 132, 133).