



**MONASH** University

**THE RATIONAL AND METAPHYSICAL NOTIONS OF  
PROPHETHOOD AND THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD IN  
THE THOUGHT OF SAID NURSI AND MUHAMMAD  
IQBAL**

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## ABSTRACT

The theological notion of Prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and the Prophet Muḥammad has been subjected to an intense theoretical enquiry since the Enlightenment. The emphasis on rational thought and reason (*'aql*) was prevalent in this period. While some scholars focused on tradition (*naql*), a number of others focused on reason (*'aql*). Said Nursi and Muhammad Iqbal engaged both *'aql* and *naql* in their prophetologies, orientating more towards reason (*'aql*). This thesis argues that the prophetologies of the modernist Muslims were lacking the balance of the metaphysical with that of the rational. In contrast, Said Nursi and Muhammad Iqbal retained this balance in their prophetologies by including the metaphysical aspects of prophethood. Through a textual analysis of the major writings of Said Nursi and Muhammad Iqbal, this thesis explores two unique responses to this theological dilemma in the modern era, and highlights the similarities and differences of their prophetologies in contrast to their modernist contemporaries.

## **DECLARATION**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

## **PUBLICATIONS DURING ENROLMENT**

### **Published Book Chapter**

1. 'Man's Struggle with Mortality and His Quest for Rediscovering God: Finding Spirituality in Generation Y.' In *God, Man and Mortality: The Perspective of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Edited by Hasan Horkuc, Tughra Publications, New Jersey, September, 2014.

### **Forthcoming Book Chapter**

1. 'Approaches to Prophethood and the Prophet According to Said Nursi and Muhammad Iqbal.' In *Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur*, Editor of Series: David Law, Sunny Press, 2016 (Publication Expected).

## **NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND CALENDAR**

Transliteration/Romanisation of Arabic, Turkish, Persian, words in this research follows the Library of Congress (ALA-LC) standard.

The dating follows the Western (Christian) calendar.

## DEDICATION

To the most, prized, loved and also to the most misunderstood man in history – Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh). May these findings open a new understanding of him.

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## INTRODUCTION

This research compares the ideas of two outstanding Muslim scholars of the twentieth century, Said Nursi (1877-1960) and Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938). Although they were both contemporaries, two points differentiate them: firstly, they came from opposite ends of the Muslim world; and secondly, they used two different genres to express their views. Nursi's works offer a theological exegesis of the Qur'ān. Iqbal's works are literary compositions in his poetry but also include his essays and speeches. While Iqbal was known in his native country and in the West, Western academics as well as the scholars of the Turkish Republic have ignored Nursi until recent times.<sup>1</sup> The influence of Nursi on Turkish society and thought is staggering. A figure such as Nursi, whose thoughts have shaped and will continue to shape a plethora of Muslim communities, and the founder of arguably one of the largest faith based social movements today, ought to be considered in greater depth. This study acknowledges recent academic interest in Nursi, and hopes to introduce Nursi, his life and works in light of these recent studies, while surveying the construction of his views of prophethood (*nubuwwa*) in Islam focusing on his works.

There have been greater studies in South Asia and Western academia discussing Iqbal's life and works. However, these are lacking a thorough assessment and hence some key ideas of Iqbal are still only partially understood or remain unassessed.<sup>2</sup> Even more rarely has a comparative study been undertaken on great Islamic thinkers, particularly of the twentieth century. Certainly no comparative study of Nursi and Iqbal has been attempted on the notion of prophethood. It is certain that these two influential thinkers require particular study. However, this begs the questions: why should these two scholars be studied and what is the importance of such a study in relation to prophethood?

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<sup>1</sup> Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim. *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. Albany: Suny Press, 2003, p. XI.

<sup>2</sup> Mustansir, Mir. *Iqbal: Makers of Islamic Civilization*. London: IB Tauris, 2006, p. X.

Comparative studies provide the opportunity to assess each thinker against a contemporary. Both Nursi and Iqbal were dwellers of the modern age, and thus a comparative analysis of how they responded to their changing contexts theologically, politically, individually and philosophically will be also assessed. The question of why one should study their views of prophethood as opposed to other topics still remains open. Firstly, in Islamic theology, after the central notion of divinity and Oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), lies the notion of prophethood (*nubuwwa*).<sup>3</sup> The Islamic creedal statement mentions Muḥammad's name (as a messenger) second only to that of God. It thus holds a paramount significance in Islamic theology (*kalām*). It is therefore surprising that of the current studies on Nursi and Iqbal, much has been discussed of their notion of religion in general, as well as their socio-political views; however, this very important concept of *nubuwwa* and the Prophet Muḥammad has been largely ignored. Secondly, this is a topic that has not been researched at all in the recent emerging studies on Iqbal or Nursi. It is the intention of this comparative study to bring to light, not only their life and work, but also importantly their conceptualisation of prophethood and Muḥammad in the twentieth century. The similarities and differences will illustrate the impact of these thinkers upon their respective audiences, as well as the understanding of Islam in the modern age.

This research is a significant contribution to contemporary theological studies in Islam since Prophet Muḥammad is central after God to Islam and Muslims; how they understand him is therefore crucially important, especially in order to address contemporary problems. Since this study takes a comparative approach towards two distinct Islamic intellectuals living in the same period (Nursi and Iqbal), the research will also examine the influence of the two thinkers on their respective societies: the Turkish society in the post-Ottoman era and the society of Indo-Pakistan in the post-Mughal and pre-partition era. Thus, it will shed

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<sup>3</sup> After the Qur'ān, Prophet Muḥammad is a key figure for adherents of the Islamic faith. Understanding him means understanding Islam and Muslims.



further light on the nature of revivalist movements in these regions resulting from their views on prophethood. The research will also explain how a Muslim society is shaped, by examining the views on prophethood of the two thinkers and their relations with the context of their communities. The study is important in order to understand the Islamic concept of prophethood and the significance and vital role of Prophet Muḥammad according to Nursi and Iqbal. That is, if Muḥammad is understood properly with the ‘binoculars’ of today’s context, then Muslims may reconcile his example with modern life and his conditions, and a lot of the existing gaps between mainstream Muslims and the existence of extremists in Muslim societies due to a ‘misreading’ of the Prophet, will be addressed. The research will therefore examine whether Nursi and Iqbal achieved this proper understanding and analyse where their ideas are aligned and/or diverge. The study is also significant for it has the potential to propose additional methods that can be implemented to contribute towards understanding prophethood today in mainstream Islam. Thus, this study will also contribute to mainstream Islamic theology.

## **I Statement of the problem**

Due to the rising influence of Protestantism in the Muslim world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>4</sup> a greater emphasis on scripture became evident as Muslims preferred to focus solely on the Qur’ān. Subsequently, a neglect of the rational approach developed, stemming from a deficiency in grasping the scriptural context and transcendental meaning of the Qur’ān, as a result of an overemphasis on the Qur’ān without the inclusion of the Prophet in the deliberations. While matters pertaining to spiritual life and the heart were addressed, the rationale explaining those concepts were absent. Nursi and Iqbal have thus been among the few exceptions of scholars who have resisted this shift and have focused on Prophet Muḥammad’s relationship with God, the universe and every human being.

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<sup>4</sup> See Browers, Michaelle L., and Kurzman, Charles. eds. *An Islamic Reformation?* Lexington Books, 2004.

Additionally, although there has been contention between reason (*'aql*) and revelation (*wahy*) since medieval dialectics on this topic, in modern times a new wave has entered discussions with the rise of rationalism and positivist thinking. Muslim reformists were also influenced by these ideas. Due to its relatedness to prophethood, reason and revelation were debated once again. The extent of continuity of the medieval position or the position of the modernists will be assessed in Iqbal's and Nursi's works.

This research will assess the role of *'aql* (reason) and *naql* (tradition) from Nursi and Iqbal's perspectives by analysing of their works, and answering the questions: what is the concept of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad constructed by Nursi and Iqbal, and how is it relevant for contemporary Muslims? In addition, this research will illustrate how both scholars' approaches and interpretations on prophethood have contributed to mainstream society as well as the compatibility of modernity and Islam, which, if properly extrapolated to lay Muslims, will result in an aversion of radicalism.

This research aims to contextualise, compare and contrast the approach of Iqbal with that of Nursi on the notion of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad. The key sources of the study will consist of the translations of the major works of Nursi, the *Risale-i Nur* (Treatise of Light), and those of Iqbal, *Kullīyat-i Iqbal* (Complete Collection of Iqbal's Poetry) and *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.

## **II Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to outline the Islamic concepts of prophethood and the Prophet Muḥammad as articulated in the writings of Nursi and Iqbal.

This study will also achieve the following additional objectives:

- To assess Nursi's and Iqbal's resistance and contribution towards the prevalent use of reason (*'aql*) in contrast to tradition (*naql*) by their co-religionists.

- To critically examine their texts' content and methodology in light of classical and contemporary cohorts' discourses on prophethood and the Prophet.
- To inspect their inclusion of the spiritual and mystical dimension of prophethood and the Prophet.
- To analytically compare and contrast the differences and similarities of traditionally educated Nursi with Western educated Iqbal, and ascertain how this may have impacted on their individual conceptualisation of *nubuwwa*.

A critical examination of contemporary Western scholars on Nursi and Iqbal and their works will also be included in the study.

### **III Scope of the study**

This study will introduce and focus on the works of Nursi, particularly the *Risale-i Nur*, as an important exegesis of the Qur'ān. This work has been translated into English and other languages. The *Risale-i Nur* collection has been an important text in preserving and re-expressing the traditional knowledge and 'idioms' from the Ottoman era.<sup>5</sup> They are an amalgamation of traditional Islamic sciences, including theology and spirituality, which are mainly organised thematically. According to Thomas Michel it is 'the most read book after Qur'ān and Hadiths' in the post-Ottoman Turkey.<sup>6</sup> It will also consider all the works of Muhammad Iqbal (*Kullīyat*) in Persian and English. Iqbal's works have been influential not only in South Asia, but also increasingly in Western philosophical studies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> On the preservation of traditional idioms from the Ottoman past, see Mardin, Serif. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1989, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> Michel, Thomas. *The Prophets: A Blessing for Humankind*. <http://www.thomasmichel.us/prophets.html>. See also Michel, Thomas. 'Grappling With Modern Civilization: Said Nursi's Interpretive Key.' *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers*, Istanbul, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Farrar, Adam Miller. 'Conceptions of Religion: Exploring the Converging and Diverging Religious Philosophies of Muhammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche.' PhD diss., The College of William and Mary, 2010.

Due to the researcher's language competencies in the Persian language, with an intermediate level of Arabic and elementary levels in Turkish and Urdu languages, the original Persian, Turkish, Urdu and Arabic sources will be consulted for both scholars, with a critical assessment of the emerging scholarship on Nursi and Iqbal and other scholarly material relevant to the topic of prophethood and the Prophet Muḥammad.

#### **IV Structure of the dissertation**

The main task of this study is to compare and contrast Nursi and Iqbal's views of prophethood and Muḥammad. They use different genres and methods to express their views, despite being contemporaries. Iqbal wrote more literary works, including poetry but also academic essays. In his *Kullīyat-i Iqbal* and in the *Reconstruction* his main ideas are outlined. By contrast, Nursi wrote a Qur'ānic exegesis amounting to 6,000 pages of commentary, a more theology-based approach. To rectify this limitation in methodology, I will divide the study into three sections.

In the first part, in relation to Nursi and Iqbal, a purposive survey of the available literature on the *kalām* schools, philosophical and mystical discourses of *nubuwwa* will be conducted. The key focus will be how *nubuwwa* was constructed in Islamic scholastics. A closer examination of the contentious issue of the role of human reason and divine authority (revelation) will be assessed, especially in light of the introduction of Hellenistic philosophy in medieval times into the Muslim world. The major contentions between the various schools of *kalām* (theology) including the Ash'arī,<sup>8</sup> Māturīdī,<sup>9</sup> Mutazilite,<sup>10</sup> Shiite<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Asharism is the name of a philosophico-religious school of thought in Islam that developed during the fourth, tenth and eleventh centuries. This movement was 'an attempt not only to purge Islam of all non-Islamic elements that had quietly crept into it but also to harmonize the religious consciousness with the religious thought of Islam.' It laid the foundation of an orthodox Islamic theology or orthodox *kalām*, as opposed to the rationalist Kalām of the Mu'tazilites; and in opposition to the extreme orthodox class; it made use of the dialectical method for the defence of the authority of divine revelation as applied to theological subjects. See Sharif, Mian Mohammad. *A History of Muslim Philosophy: With Short Accounts of Other Disciplines and the Modern Renaissance in Muslim Lands*. Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2001, pp. 220-43.

and medieval philosophers,<sup>12</sup> will also be conducted. Whilst demonstrating the interconnectedness of reason and tradition, the various schools also bear geo-political and social influences upon their times. This is significant as in the first section the literature also assesses modern revivalist scholars like Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), Rashid Riḍā (1865-1935) and Muṣṭafā Sabrī (1869-1954). In the modern period, Europe’s ‘Enlightenment’ influenced the Muslim scholars; thus, reason and rationalisation of theology and religion became prominent in the modernist Muslim thinkers’ works. The first section is essential, as it will create the necessary theoretical framework within which sections two and three can be assessed, situating Nursi and Iqbal in the medieval *kalāmist* discourse as well as the modern reform movement.

In the second part, Nursi and Iqbal will be discussed in light of their individual historical contexts. The purpose of this section is to consider the importance of their life, times and works. Due to limited literature on Nursi, there will also be an outline of the academic study on him and the *Risale-i Nur*. Through a textual analysis of the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi’s enunciation of prophethood will be established and juxtaposed with his medieval

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<sup>9</sup> Māturīdī School is the theological school that is named after its founder Abu Mansur al-Māturīdī (Imam Māturīdī) (853-944), whose systematic theology, which is close to the Ash’ari theology ‘*aqīdah*. The term also denominates the school of *kalām*, or systematic theology, of those who follow Al-Maturidi’s theology. Thus, ‘Maturidis’ or Māturīdī School refers to the adherents of this theological position. The Māturīdīs and Ash’aris are the two foremost schools of systematic theology that are recognised by Sunni Islam.

<sup>10</sup> A theological school within Islam that emerged in 700 CE, Mutazilites were controversial as they over-rationalised and challenged orthodoxy; their creed was adopted and supported by the Abassid Empire, and led to the persecution of many well-known Sunni scholars.

<sup>11</sup> The Shia or Shiite represents the second largest denomination of Islam. Adherents of Shiite Islam are called Shias. ‘Shia’ is the short form of the historic phrase Shī‘atu ‘Alī meaning ‘followers’, ‘faction’, or ‘party’ of Muhammad’s son-in-law and cousin Ali, whom the Shia believe to be Muhammad’s successor in the Caliphate. Shia Muslims believe that just as God alone appoints a prophet, only God has the prerogative to appoint the successor to his prophet. They believe God chose Ali to be Muhammad’s successor, infallible, the first caliph (khalifa, head of state) of Islam. Muḥammad, before his death, designated Ali as his successor. The Shia faith throughout its history split over the issue of the Imamate. The largest branches are the Twelvers, followed by the Zaidi and Ismaili. All three groups follow a different line of Imamate. See Jafri, S. and Husain M. *Origins and Early Development of Shi’a Islam*. London: Longman, 1979.

<sup>12</sup> Islamic philosophy, as the name implies, refers to philosophical activity within the Islamic milieu. The main sources of classical or early Islamic philosophy are the religion of Islam itself (especially ideas derived and interpreted from the Qur’ān), Greek philosophy that the early Muslims inherited as a result of conquests when Alexandria, Syria and Jundishapur came under Muslim rule, along with pre-Islamic Indian philosophy and Persian philosophy. Many of the early philosophical debates centred around reconciling religion and reason, the latter exemplified by Greek philosophy. One aspect which stands out in Islamic philosophy is that, the philosophy in Islam travels wide but comes back to conform with the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*. See Sheikh, M. Saeed, and Mian Mohammad Sharif. *Islamic Philosophy*. Delhi: Ishk Book Service, 1982.

predecessors and modern contemporaries in the light of *'aql* and *naql*. For Iqbal, particular emphasis will be placed on his prose work, the *Reconstruction*, as well as his letters and speeches. Lastly, the volume of his major literary hermeneutical display of his ideas on prophethood in the *Kullīyat* will also be assessed.

In the final section, there will be a comparative analysis of the ideas of Nursi and Iqbal on prophethood. While particular attention will be placed upon the textual pronouncements, their historical and intellectual contexts will also be referred to where necessary, to see how their particular circumstances shaped their ideas on prophethood and to assess the impact of their thought upon their respective societies.

In conclusion, a critical assessment of the impact of their ideas of prophethood in the *kalām* discourse and revivalist discourse will be positioned and their bearings assessed.

## **V Debates over prophethood within Islam**

A critical and comparative study of Nursi's and Iqbal's notions of prophethood and the Prophet Muḥammad necessitates a survey of the development of this concept from the inception of Islam. This began with the completion of Qur'ānic revelation in the seventh century CE to its continuing development and classification in the classical period; its revision and codification in the creedal texts in the medieval period; and then through all the theological and philosophical argumentations of its various aspects until the modern period of reform in the light of Nursi's and Iqbal's use of reasoning and revelation.

An examination of Nursi and Iqbal's views on prophethood requires an understanding of the primary texts of Islam and their definitions of prophethood. In Islam, prophethood is the principal subject of authority and concern after the Qur'ān, due to the Prophet's

*Sunnah*.<sup>13</sup> It has achieved this significant place in Islam due to the Prophetic tradition: ‘I leave behind me two things, the Qur’ān and my example, the *Sunnah*, and if you follow these you will never go astray’.<sup>14</sup> While the Prophet was alive, all issues were resolved through him; however, after his death in 632 his companions realised the immediate difficulty in coming up with rulings. Consequently, this *ḥadīth* became authoritative in preserving the prophetic way, tradition or *Sunnah* in order to maintain the initial ethos of Islam as exemplified by the Prophet.

Furthermore, after Prophet Muḥammad, two vital sources of his authority ended; ongoing revelation and his unique ability to exemplify his messages on a daily basis. A historian may assume, perhaps, that a leader capable of keeping revelation alive might have had the best chance of inheriting his movement, like Paul and Christ; however, no Muslim has ever claimed that position (receiving revelation) nor did Muḥammad undeniably designate any other type of successor.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, prophethood as a concept became an immediate matter of concern in the early history of Islam immediately after the passing of the Prophet.<sup>16</sup> The controversy of ‘false prophets’ became problematic during the caliphate rule of Abu Bakr (d. 634),<sup>17</sup> who had to confront the threat of the appearance of other tribal figures who claimed prophethood and continuing guidance from God. These claims corresponded with the secession of the Bedouin tribes, who were part of the *umma*, the Muslim community centred then around Medina by 630.

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<sup>13</sup> The *Sunnah* is the normative practice of the Prophet Muḥammad. It is derived from the words, actions and tacit approvals and disapprovals of the Prophet. The *Sunnah* is the second most important source of authority and legislation in Islam after the Qur’ān. Scholars of Islamic jurisprudence base the foundation of the *Sharī‘a* on four primary sources: the Qur’ān, the *Sunnah*, the consensus of the scholars (*ijmā‘*), and analogical reasoning based on established precedents (*qiyas*). See footnote for explanation of *Sharī‘a*.

<sup>14</sup> In another translation it states “this is that Book (Quran) with which Allah guided your Apostle, so stick to it, for then you will be guided on the right path as Allah guided His Apostle with it.” Al-Bukhari. *Sahih Bukhari*, Book 9, Vol. 92, Hadith No. 374.

<sup>15</sup> Madelung, Wilferd. *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 3. See also *Islamic World Encyclopedia Britannica*, retrieved 11 May 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Islamic-world>.

<sup>16</sup> The notion of prophethood already existed even in the earliest phases of Islam and referred to in many verses of the Qur’ān and the prophetic traditions.

<sup>17</sup> Madelung. *The Succession to Muhammad*, p. 13.

The problematic nature of prophethood thus emerged in this early phase of Islamic history. However, it was through the leadership and political astuteness of Abu Bakr (d. 634) that the concept of *khātam al-anbiyā*,<sup>18</sup> or the seal of prophets, was reemphasised, as was the end of any subsequent revelation and prophethood.<sup>19</sup> The issue of ‘false prophets’ became problematic in every century including the twentieth century, and therefore is discussed by Iqbal mainly, and Nursi to an extent. Their contentions against prophethood will be assessed in Chapters Three and Four. Thus, the scholarly inquiry in this area also increased, and early Muslim thinkers and scholars immersed themselves in extrapolating Qur’ānic verses and traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad, very carefully, in order to codify and develop Qur’ānic exegeses or creedal documents of faith.

Islamic theology has a more definitive concept of prophets and prophethood; the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīth* were both authoritative in establishing the school of belief or ‘*aqīdah* in early Islamic history. These, as well the early Qur’ānic exegetes, were instrumental in outlining the Islamic belief in prophethood. Moreover, one of the essential pillars of Islamic belief entails believing in *nubuwwa* (prophethood). Thus, believing in *tawḥīd* (unity and existence of God),<sup>20</sup> which is the foremost pillar, can only be achieved through belief in *nubuwwa*. Defining *nubuwwa* is crucial in understanding the development of the concept by the *mutakallimūn*,<sup>21</sup> or theologians, over time. There are three key concepts in

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<sup>18</sup> *Khātam al-Nabiyyīn* (sometimes decreed as *Khātam an-Nabuwwah*) is a title used by the Qur’ān to describe the Islamic Prophet Muḥammad as the Seal of the Prophets. ‘Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of God, and the seal of the Prophets and God has full knowledge of all things’ (Qur’ān, 33:40). According to Islamic theology it is understood to mean that Muḥammad is the last in a series of prophets who were chosen by God to deliver the divine message of Islam. It is also stated in the early creedal texts that Muḥammad received the final revelation from God, in the form of the Qur’ān, and it was intended for all mankind, for all time. There are many Qur’ānic statements and hadiths stating ‘The chain of Messengers and Prophets has come to an end. There shall be no Messenger nor Prophet after me.’ (Sahih Muslim).

<sup>19</sup> Madelung. *The Succession to Muhammad*, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Tawḥīd* or the concept of Divine Oneness and unification is part of Islam’s main key belief and part of creed. See Winter, Tim. *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> A scholar of *kalām* or Islamic theology is referred to as a *mutakallim* (plural *mutakallimūn*). For more on Islamic theology *Kalām* and *mutakallimūn*. See Winter. *Classical Islamic Theology*, 2008; see also Wolfson, Harry Austryn. *The Philosophy of the Kalam*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1976.



formulating this discussion: *rasūl* (messenger), *nabī* (prophet) and *nubuwwa* (prophethood). Their etymological and lexical definitions will be discussed, as well as their usage in the scriptural texts, in order to ascertain how these definitions shaped early Islamic theological thought on the institution of *nubuwwa*. The Qur'ānic words for *nabī* or prophet and *rasūl* or messenger have defined scriptural meanings. There are numerous verses that explicitly mention the names *rasūl* or *nabī* in the Qur'ān – their etymological meanings and significance will be outlined in Chapter Two.

In the era following the development of creedal texts, such as those of Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Ṭaḥāwī (843-933) or Imam al-Ṭaḥāwī and Imam Nasafī (d. 1310), there was initially no discussion in the early *kalām* texts of *nubuwwa* evident in the early *mutakallimūn*. In fact, *kalām* was not emphasised in scholarly discussions and was arguably developed in response to the rise of heresies in Islam, such as the Mutazilite founded by Wasil ibn Ata (d.748) and even earlier. According to Ibn Khaldūn (d.1406), the earliest discourses in *kalām* that were theological in nature were during the reign of Abasid Caliph Harun Rashid (786-809), where the splendour of this science began.<sup>22</sup> However, due to many internal and external factors affecting the Islamic cultural and intellectual worlds, the array of discussions on *nubuwwa* were undoubtedly introduced and included as an integral part of *kalām*. The main factors leading to the increased attention of Islamic scholars were due to the theological debates with Jews and Christians, the Shiite understanding and their notion of *imamate*,<sup>23</sup> *nubuwwa* in the understanding of the Mutazilites, the thoughts of philosophers in this subject (*nubuwwa*), and Brahmanism (Hindu) and their *nubuwwa* understanding.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibn Khaldun, 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Ibn Muḥammad, Franz Rosenthal, N. J. Dawood. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1967, p. x; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*.

<sup>23</sup> The belief that *imams* (leaders) represent Prophet Muḥammad and have similar attributes such as *isma* (infallibility) and thus they also represent prophethood.

It was amidst these religious cultures in world history that Islam emerged in the Arabian Peninsula. Within a few decades towards the beginning of the *hijra*<sup>24</sup> Muslims were in contact with ancient civilisations and their religious and cultural beliefs. In order to flourish, the emergent Islamic cultural civilisation, which was primarily based on the monotheistic convention of *tawḥīd*, had to respond to these currents approaching her territory.

The definition of prophethood is important due to the expansion of Islam and coming into contact with other religions that had similar notions of prophethood. Therefore, Muslim scholars needed to explain this from an Islamic perspective, based on primary texts. As Islamic rule expanded eastwards, past Persia towards India and China, Brahmanism posed a new threat to *nubuwwa*, which was fundamentally linked to the *tawḥīd* concept of unity and Oneness of Divinity in Islam. Against Brahmanism, the whole institution of *nubuwwa* was defended.<sup>25</sup> The theologians or *kalāmists* also defended the importance of the essential attributes and messages of *nubuwwa*. One unwavering treatise was written by the famous Imam al-Baqillani (950-1013) who was revered for his defence of *nubuwwa* against Brahmanism and Trinitarianism by the early *mutakallimūn*.<sup>26</sup>

The response to Brahmanism and Trinitarianism was not unique; indeed one of the greatest pieces of evidence for *kalām* scholars were the signs of history that alluded that every nation had experienced the institution of *nubuwwa*, including great civilisations such as

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<sup>24</sup> Hijra refers to the historical migration or journey of the prophet Muḥammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina between 21 June and 2 July in 622 AD. See Fazlur Rahman, *Chronology of Prophetic Events*, Karachi: Shaikh Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd, 2001, p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> See Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din. (before 1209) *Muhassal Afkar al-Mutaqaddimin wa-'L-Muta'akhhirin min al-'Ulama' wa-'L-Hukama' wa-'L-Mutakallimin* (*The Harvest of the Thought of the Ancients and Moderns*), Cairo: np, 1905; Adiseputra, Aloysius. *The Doctrine of the Impeccability of the Prophet as Elucidated by Fakhr Al-Din Al-Razi*. McGill University, 1981, pp-30-35.

<sup>26</sup> See Imam al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd al-Awā'il fī Talkhīs al-Dalā'il*, for a greater discussion of al-Baqillani's most famous work, in which he expands on the doctrines discussed in the *Insāf* and refutes un-Islamic creeds such as Trinitarianism and Brahmanism. (Retrieved on 24 May 2013 from [http://sunnah.org/history/Scholars/ibn\\_al\\_baqillani.htm](http://sunnah.org/history/Scholars/ibn_al_baqillani.htm)); Abu Nu'aym Ahmad ibn 'Abd-Allah al-Isbahani. *Dalā'il Al-Nubuwwah*. Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1986; Al-Bayhaqī, Aḥmad I.H, *Dalā'il An-Nubuwwa Wa-Ma'rifat Aḥwāl Šāhib Aš-Šarī'a*. (trans. Aḥmad Ṣaqr), Cairo: Maṭābi' al-Aḥrām at-tuġġāriyya, 1970.

Ancient Egypt, Persia, China and Greece. This was to be Islam's unique interpretation of this aspect of prophethood.<sup>27</sup> It was the introduction to Hellenistic thought that fused the scholastic enquiry into *nubuwwa* further. Therefore, from its early inception, the powerful discussions on the role of the rational mind and reason (*'aql*) and its co-existence with revelation and tradition (known as *naql*) became topical.

## **VI Theoretical framework and methodology**

Notwithstanding the challenges and difficulties of identifying the correct methodology for Islamic studies, this study adheres to the following theories and research methods.<sup>28</sup> Theologically based research is rooted in a tradition and is bound to theorise and conceptualise the concept of divinity within that tradition.<sup>29</sup> This research is primarily based in hermeneutical approaches to Islamic theology.<sup>30</sup> It is theology based, as its key subject matter (*mawduh*) of prophethood is essentially part of classical *kalām* (Islamic theology). Moreover, the focus of the broader subject matter in Nursi and Iqbal's writings concerns the relationship between humans and God, humans, society, and the understanding of their relationship with God. They are suitably situated within theological and eschatological studies, particularly in the works of Nursi. As mentioned above, the framework of this study is primarily theological; however, it also draws significantly on the insights, tools and concepts of history, philosophy and sociology.

Thus, after surveying the construction of prophethood in Islamic theology, and situating Nursi and Iqbal among this discourse, I will conduct a critical assessment of Iqbal's *Kullīyat, Reconstruction*, speeches and letters, and Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* separately, and

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<sup>27</sup> Izutsu, Toshihiko. *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*. California: University of California Press, 1984, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Martin, Richard C. *Islamic Studies: A History of Religions Approach*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996.

<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* London: Duckworth, 1988, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, Lamprey, Jerusha Tanner. *Never Wholly Other: A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Oxford University Press, 2014; Watt, W. Montgomery. *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985; Winter. *Classical Islamic Theology*, p. 136.

then perform a textual analysis of these key texts. I will also consult Nursi's earlier writings in Arabic, called the *Shuaat* that examines this topic in depth. I will be particularly looking at these two intellectuals' ontological descriptions of prophethood. By applying the method of textual analysis, I will analyse their convergences or divergences, from the *kalām* tradition, as well as the modern reform movement of the twentieth century.

Finally, I will conduct a hermeneutic comparison of their ideas of prophethood, assessing their similarities and differences in their project of defining *nubuwwa* and the Prophet Muḥammad in contemporary times. Hermeneutic interpretations of the key texts written by Nursi and Iqbal will be examined in light of theological and literary studies. A hermeneutic approach is preferred in this research as it has a centre that ensures it is grounded, as opposed to a critical approach, which provides a positivist methodology but does not have a centre and therefore is not grounded.<sup>31</sup> I will then extrapolate new definitions of *nubuwwa*, as augmented by Nursi and Iqbal.

Any concept or theory is really an abstraction or explanation of reality.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it is also of benefit to define the main subject matter of prophethood, not just theologically within the texts, but also to examine, observe and analyse how the two thinkers have influenced and shaped their societies in terms of prophethood. This will be the final 'pragmatic application' of their definitions to assess and measure the effectiveness of their respective theories.

Iqbal predominantly communicated his ideas through poetry, philosophical essays and articles. Nursi mainly wrote a theological exegesis of the Qur'ān. As Iqbal and Nursi have used different genres there may be some criticism of my research methodology on the basis

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<sup>31</sup> Ahmad, Irfan. 'Immanent critique and Islam: Anthropological reflections.' *Anthropological Theory* 11, no. 1 (2011): 107-132.

<sup>32</sup> Alatas, S. Farid. *Concept Formation in the Risale-i Nur*, Istanbul: Istanbul Centre for Science and Culture, 2011; Alatas, S. Farid. "A Khaldunian Exemplar for a Historical Sociology for the South." *Current Sociology* 54, no. 3 (2006): 397-411.

of an inconsistent genre in the assessment of the two scholars' works. The reason why have I chosen this approach while it seems insufficient; it is the only way to address the issue of bringing to light different responses resulting from the influence of 'aql (reason) to prophethood and the Prophet in the twentieth century.

## **VII The role of reason ('aql) and revelation (wahy)**

The objectives and the theoretical framework highlight the need to examine *nubuwwa* through the spectrum of reason and revelation. Arguably, from its introduction until the modern period, rational argumentation has been included in all dialectics in all areas of *kalām* and in particular on prophetology. The evidence of this impact on the modern scholars will be outlined in the coming chapters, which will also address how Nursi and Iqbal grappled and responded with reason or 'aql' in their argument for prophetology in Islam. The *kalām* scholars, within their varying schools, dealt with certain key issues regarding *nubuwwa* including the role of 'aql (reason), the impact of *nubuwwa* on civilisation, *nubuwwa*'s connection to other essentials of belief and in particular end of life, the notion of need for *nubuwwa* by humans, and the overall benefit of prophethood to humanity. Adhering to revelation alone was deemed 'dogmatic' in other religious traditions; however, it was always understood in Islam that *wahy* (revelation) and 'aql (reason or logical explanation) went hand-in-hand: that is, God the All Wise would not formulate a book or revelation that would be against human reason. It was this argument that early Islamic scholars discussed while approaching revelation.<sup>33</sup>

The fact that many scholars pondered over hundreds of verses calling for thinking, understanding and appeal to 'aql meant there was no room for dogma or dogmatic

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<sup>33</sup> See Poorsina, Zahra. 'Systematization of the Uses of 'Reason in Al-Ghazzali's Works.' *Philosophical-Theological Research*, 2009; Lawson, Todd, ed. *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought: Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt*. London: IB Tauris, 2005.

attitudes.<sup>34</sup> Evidently, (reason) *'aql* can comprehend (revelation) *wahy*. Thus, early on this became a topical issue in the *kalām* dialectics. The scholars discussed the possibility for reason (*'aql*) without the guidance of revelation. Through considering the Qur'ānic story of Abraham as he tried to find God through examining the stars, moon and sun, it becomes apparent that *'aql* can discover truths that reveal to the existence of the Divine being or God from evidence in the universe: in this way one can deduce that there is a Creator.<sup>35</sup>

The different *aqidah madhabs* or theological and philosophical schools had slight variations in their approaches to the issue of the need and benefit of prophets. Each school reflected their theological grounds in discussing this concept. Muslim philosophers' understanding of *nubuwwa* extends further than that of the Mutazilites: for them understanding *nubuwwa* with *'aql* was more emphasised.<sup>36</sup> For the philosophers, the intellect is the key to unlock all the dimensions of getting to know God and hence, it is enough to use the intellect alone. The main philosophers of Islam and their understanding of *nubuwwa* can be found in *Madinat al-Fadila* by al-Farābī (d. 950),<sup>37</sup> *Al Risāla fī nubuwwa* by Ibn-Sīnā (d. 1037)<sup>38</sup> and *Fashl Maqal Manyeejul* by Ibn Rushd (d.1197).<sup>39</sup> Thus, a philosopher can decipher what is good and what is bad through the intellect; since the intellect can do so, there is no real need for prophethood and divine guidance.

Still, the philosophers say that the essentials of belief are compatible with human intellect.

The intellect can therefore understand the truths of revelation. They further contend that

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<sup>34</sup> Netton, Ian Richard. *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: Critical Concepts in Islamic Thought*. London: Routledge, 2006, pp 5-14. Walbridge, John. *God and Logic in Islam: The Caliphate of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Qur'ān, 6: 76-79. The Qur'ānic verses used in this thesis are always Ali Unal's translation, unless otherwise cited. Unal, Ali. *The Holy Qur'an*. New Jersey: Tughra Publications, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Many of the philosophers including Ibn Rushd, Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Fārābī contend that philosophers are better than prophets.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Farabi and trans. R. Walzer. *Al-Madina al-Fadila (The Virtuous City): Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abu Nasr al-Farabi's Mabadi' Ara Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

<sup>38</sup> Ibn Sina. *Risala fī Ithbat al-Nubuwwa: The Proof of the Prophecies*. Michael Marmura Philosophical Texts and Studies II. Dar al-Nahar, 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Rushd (Averroes), and Hourani, George Fadlo. *Kitab Fasl al-Maqal: On the Harmony of Religions and Philosophy*, London: Luzac, 1961.

both the prophets and philosophers perceive the truth, with the exception that the prophets have power or divine enlightenment to convey the message, in addition to understanding the realities like the philosophers. The prophets therefore have the responsibility to proclaim this message to their people. They received the content of this message through revelation. Even though philosophers may have the ability to understand the truth, they cannot know or understand the time, nature and specific requirements (i.e. amount) of religious duties, but prophets can explain the religious duties and the particularities of the practices. Conversely, the philosophers maintain that these devotional practices can be grasped by the intellect; however, the details can only be known through revelation.

Nevertheless, according to the great Muslim philosopher Ibn-Sīnā, humanity's need for *nubuwwa* is clearly established.

The messengers honour the Shariah they themselves convey, they introduce and set the laws, the prophets are important as how the eye lashes are important to human kind, if we leave human kind alone without divine guidance, they cannot leave their ego aside and come to an agreement, as each describe what's true according to their own perception. Similarly, each defines what's *zulum*, wrong doing or *adalat*, justice, based on their own personal perception, resultantly, this necessitates the prophethood for human kind.<sup>40</sup>

The Māturīdī and Ash'arī theological schools of thought represent the understanding of the *Ahl al-Sunnah's*<sup>41</sup> notion of prophethood, which was over time accepted by the majority of the Muslim community (*umma*).<sup>42</sup> Both schools have correspondence on the notion of *nubuwwa*; overall, they contend that *nubuwwa* is a merciful bestowal of God to humanity. The following points encapsulate their understanding of *nubuwwa*: the institution of *nubuwwa* is necessary and beneficial to humankind, therefore it is praiseworthy not blameworthy, since God did not speak directly with every individual – He chooses some of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibn Sina. *Al-Ilahiyat min Kitab al-Shifa*, Cairo: Vol 1. np, 1960, pp. 441-442; Hussain, Mohammad Yousef. 'The Doctrine of Being in Ibn Sina's Metaphysics.' *Islam and the Modern Age* 3, Vol. 1. (1992); and Ibn Sina. *Risala fi Ithbat al-Nubuwwa: The Proof of the Prophecies*. Michael Marmura Philosophical Texts and Studies II. 2nd ed. 1991, p. 80.

<sup>41</sup> *Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jamaah* literally translates as 'people of the *Sunnah* and the community'.

<sup>42</sup> Māturīdī, Abu Mansur M. *Kitab Tawilat al-Qur'an*. Beirut: np, p. 67; Al- Ash'arī. *Al- Ibanah'an Usul al-Diyanah*. Cairo: np, 1986, p. 115.

them to speak to and, through them, to convey His message. The speech or word of God is Eternal as well as beyond and exalted above any other word or words. For these two schools, there is a dire need for prophets to inform people about this word and to guide them to God, because humanity needs to know their Creator in the correct way.<sup>43</sup>

Contrary to the Mutazilite view, and more so that of the philosophers, the *Sunni* position posits that it is not correct to establish the *'aql* in the place of *wahy* or *nubuwwa*, because the intellect cannot comprehend how to perform worship in the prescribed form, the amount and duration of *ibadat* worship. Furthermore, they assert that since it is obvious that the intellect cannot meet all the needs of humanity, therefore the necessity of *nubuwwa* cannot be denied.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the intellect itself can accept or validate the benefit of *nubuwwa*, because without prophets humankind will be destructive, causing corruption in society, due to their inability to resist or control egoistic impulses. On their own they can never discover the type of *ibada* that may please God and also that may establish a virtuous civilisation. The prophets can carry out all these needs, because they receive a divine set of laws and regulations.

The main theological schools of *Sunni*, the Ash'arī and Māturīdī, contend that all civilisational and technological progress as well as all art depend on *nubuwwa*. They further deduce that the prophets in actuality establish the foundations and bases of all civilisations and humanity's progress throughout history that has therefore always depended on the prophets.<sup>45</sup>

According to Ash'arī, *nubuwwa* is necessary to know God and all the religious responsibilities. The intellect cannot know by itself (not without *wahy*), however, it can

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<sup>43</sup> Māturīdī. *Kitab Tawilat al-Qur'an*, p. 67; Al-Ash'arī, *Al-Ibanah 'an Usul al-Diyanah*, p. 115.

<sup>44</sup> Bazdawi. *Ahl al-Sunnah Aqayeed*, p. 131.

<sup>45</sup> Ar-Razi, Fakhr ad-Din and Katibi, 'Ali b. 'Umar al-Qazwini. *Al-Mufaṣṣal Sarḥ al-Muḥaṣṣal*. Leiden: Brill On Line, 1272, p. 157.



strengthen humanity to know God.<sup>46</sup> Intellect cannot determine the importance of knowledge of God and its benefit in the hereafter; only revelation can provide this guidance to humanity. Al- Ghazālī (d.1111), also an Ash‘arīte scholar, shares the same idea in his book *Al-Iqtisad*.<sup>47</sup> The Ash‘arīte School also admits that without *wahy* (revelation), the intellect cannot know God as the most All-Wise. According to al-Jurjānī (d. 1413),<sup>48</sup>

The deeds of human kind are vast this makes it impossible for the ‘*aql* alone to identify which one is good and which one is bad without divine guidance. If God wants He can change the course of events or their rulings, if He does so only the ruling will be different.<sup>49</sup>

*Sharī‘a* determines the consequences of the conduct of a liable person; since God created humankind, He taught them how to worship Him.<sup>50</sup> This can be learned through religion and *wahy* sent through *nubuwwa*. According to this view, all the legal rules have divine origins, in other words they depend on *nubuwwa*. The religious duties cannot be established through reason; rather, they are learnt with the assistance of divine revelation or *wahy*. Categorically, Ash‘arīte scholars posit that God explained that punishment comes after information in order to set the rules clearly and clarify that nothing is binding for God.

Māturīdī scholars can be distinguished from the Ash‘arītes on two main ideas. Firstly, the former argue that even if God did not send prophets to humankind, the unaided intellect could still find the Creator and this is most necessary for humankind. It is therefore

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<sup>46</sup> Sharif. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, pp. 319-338.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Ghazzali, Ahmad and ‘Abdu-r-Rahman, Abu Zayd. *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates and Their Properties: A Critical and Annotated Translation of These Chapters in Al-Iqtisad Fil-I‘tiqad*. New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994, p. 39.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Jurjani, ‘Ali ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Ali al-Sayyid al-Sharif. *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif fī ‘ilm al-Kalām*, Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Sa‘īda, 1907, pp. 182-184.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>50</sup> *Sharī‘a*, refers to the Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of the Qur’ān, and the traditions of the Prophet (Ḥadīth and *Sunnah*), covering all aspects of a Muslim’s life, prescribing mainly religious related (90%) as well as secular duties and sometimes retributive penalties for law breaking. Kamali, M. Hashim. *Shari‘ah Law: An Introduction*. Oneworld Publications, 2008, pp. 1-4.

humankind's responsibility to find God through the intellect, even if God sent no revelation. The founder of the Ḥanafī School of Law, Nu'mān Ibn Thābit (699-767) (henceforth Abū Ḥanīfah), states in support of this that 'the one who perceives the miracles in the universe and the signs that indicate God's existence and unity, there is no excuse for them'.<sup>51</sup>

Using the verses 14:10 and 88:17, the Māturīdī school of thought affirms that God gave abilities such as thinking, analysing and deducing to humankind in order to know Him. Thus, these verses indicate that even if there is no one who is inviting to arrive at God's existence, the intellect must find its Creator. They further deduce that *kufūr* or disbelief is *haram* (not permissible) according to general consensus; every intelligent person knows that *kufūr* is not what God accepts or wants, so it should be abandoned, in order to desist from *kufūr*. Faith or *īmān* is necessary (*wājib*) for humanity; resultantly, an intelligent person has to achieve *īmān*, which is a natural result of having intellect.

According to the Ash'arī and Māturīdī, religious obligations require prophets; if no prophets are sent, the people will not be accountable in the afterlife. In extension to this, the Māturīdī posit that they will still be accountable for belief in God, which they maintain is *wājib* (necessary).<sup>52</sup> Even though this is the case, we need to understand the role of *'aql* and *wahy*. *Wahy* determines the good and bad, and for Ash'arītes the intellect cannot do this alone. However, the Māturīdī states that the intellect can determine what is good and what is bad, especially those that are universal in nature. If something is deemed as good by the intellect, God commands those things; however, they maintain that no one can say

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<sup>51</sup> Imam Bazdawi *Ahl al-Sunnah Aqayeed*, p. 299 there is an inherent interconnectedness of the legal schools with those of the theological. The adherents of the Hanafī legal school, which is most dominant, also follow the Māturīdī theological school. Renard, John. *Islamic Theological Themes: A Primary Source Reader*, 2014. Internet resource.

<sup>52</sup> See Renard, John. *Islamic Theological Themes: A Primary Source Reader*, np, 2014. Internet Resource; Terzić, Faruk. "The Problematic of Prophethood and Miracles: Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī's Response." *Islamic Studies* (2009): 5-33, and M. A. Sahin. "Questions for Today: Prophethood." *The Fountain Magazine*, Vol. 3, 1993, pp. 22-27.

without *nubuwwa* that humanity can find the truth. *Nubuwwa* is necessary for the unity of humanity and also for the avoidance of the arrays of views of what is good and what is bad. In other words, the finding of intellect is not always consistent with *wahy* – some intellects may but others may not. Due to different intellects, *nubuwwa* is necessary to unite all the people and various views; therefore, it is *wājib*. The difference is that the '*aql* may know things as good and bad, but the conduct is also good and bad – this is the command of God. Thus, *kufūr* or disbelief is evil, and is also prohibited. This formulates the major opinion of the *ahl al Sunnah*.

The pre-eminence of '*aql*, in the hermeneutics of *nubuwwa*, became the central theme in the reform movement of the two Sunni reformers, Abduh and Riḍā. Thus, the discussion regained ascendancy in the modern period once again. The modern aggression against religion in general, and Islam in particular, was due primarily to the issue of '*aql*. Like the Sunni reformers, Nursi and Iqbal addressed this contention against Islam by incorporating logical argumentation, reason and philosophy in their theological works, or literary expressions, in the case of Iqbal.

Therefore, Nursi and Iqbal used '*aql* to dispel this criticism against prophethood. The nuances of their ideas on prophethood, as well as the methodologies they employed, will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four. Further, this conceptual comparative study of the two scholars hopes to demonstrate how the influential scholars, thinkers and social revolutionaries addressed the '*aql*–*naql* issue in light of *nubuwwa*, and examine to what extent they diverted away from *naql* or '*aql* and how the positivist nature of their philosophies influenced and shaped their ideas and thoughts of prophethood.

The study will therefore critically analyse how the two scholars' methodology of applying '*aql* and *naql* differed, and also highlight how they diverged from other contemporaries like Riḍā and Abduh on these matters, and to what extent they were similar. These will be

further assessed in the forthcoming chapters that will critically analyse Nursi and Iqbal on their method of conceptualising prophethood, which is an integral part of Islamic theology, and assess their success in effectively relaying this to the modern reader. Thus, this research argues that Nursi and Iqbal use *'aql* more than *naql*, in their theological arguments regarding prophethood. This will be further examined in Nursi's and in Iqbal's works in Chapters Four and Five.

### **VIII The argument and outline of the dissertation**

The Introduction outlines the main position of the thesis, that it is a critical study of Nursi and Iqbal's view on prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad. It presents the research methodology and theoretical framework. In two sections of the Introduction it surveys the historicity of the constructed development of the notion of prophethood in *kalām* (Islamic theology), and the finally it introduces the reason (*'aql*) and tradition (*naql*) discourse, to provide a context for the analysis of reason and tradition in the works of Nursi and Iqbal.

Chapter One reviews the contemporary discourse and its contentions on prophethood in Islam, with a particular focus on the issue of *'aql* and *naql*. This research argues that Nursi and Iqbal use *'aql* more than *naql* in their theological arguments regarding prophethood. This will be examined in their works in Chapters Four and Five respectively. Chapter One also outlines the major issues concerning the study of prophethood as well as showing how they relate to Nursi and Iqbal. It highlights the existing gap in the literature with regard to the comparative analysis of Nursi and Iqbal's ideas on prophethood.

Chapter Two outlines prophethood and prophetology in Islam, surveying the development of the concept of *nubuwwa* (prophethood) in Islamic theology. It outlines the major issues concerning prophethood, and defines the key terms related to it. The issues and terms will be critically assessed and examined.

Chapter Three examines Said Nursi and Muhammad Iqbal in their own historical context amidst other modernists and critically examines the socio-political, cultural and intellectual environment that they belonged to and how this shaped their thought and methodologies. This will be examined closely to highlight the influences in their thought and the genre and mode of their writings.

Chapter Four will then proceed to discuss and assess the hermeneutics of prophethood employed in their major works and their response to the philosophical developments and orientalist critiques, by particularising the focus to five key theological and rational arguments used to construct their prophetologies, in order to assess the extent of the predominance of '*aql* in their thought. These are: need; possibility and essentialness of prophethood; miracles; Divine revelation (*wahy*); *ḥadīth* and *Sunnah* and the finality of prophethood. The common responses to the issue of '*aql* and finality of prophethood will be examined as well as the significant differences in their ideas, and methodology of discussing *nubuwwa*.

Chapter Five will be an in depth study of Nursi and Iqbal's mystical and literary writings on prophethood, suggesting the ingenious way modernist Muslim scholars have woven the mystical and spiritual tradition along with rational thought as presented in their works. The findings will be discussed at the conclusion of the individual chapters excluding Chapter One. For example the theological and philosophical aspects will be discussed in the conclusion of Chapter Four and the spiritual and mystical dimensions in the conclusion of Chapter Five. However, the Conclusion provides an overall summation of findings from the previous chapters, develops deductions and indicates further possibilities of research in the field.

## 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the span of 1400 years much has been discussed on the issue of prophethood and Islam, commencing with the inception of the Islamic classical period (700-1400) right through until the contemporary period. The intellectual enquiry on prophethood ranges from theology, philosophy, history and sociology. Each discipline provides new definitions and arguments, and all scholars have much to say. However, this research will focus on the major contentions to the ‘common’ projection of prophethood in Islam. This will provide a good basis to analyse the aim of the thesis: the comparison of Nursi and Iqbal.

The parameters of this research are restricted to a critical review of the key scholarly discourses on prophethood. The main emphasis of this literature review explores the modern scholarly response to prophethood and prophetology in Islam, to better situate Nursi and Iqbal both among their contemporaries and their predecessors. Accordingly, the discussions will centre on modern Islamic scholars, such as Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), Rashid Riḍā (1865-1935) and Muṣṭafā Sabrī (1869-1954). This will be followed by a critical synopsis of relevant emerging studies, such as John Renard’s, *All the King’s Falcons*, Fazlur Rahman’s *Prophecy* and Ahmad Siddique’s *Prophethood in Islam*, which will assist to situate the broader context and definition of the issues that have surrounded and are surrounding the area of prophetology today. The distinguishing factor of these texts is their depiction prophethood as it has developed in recent deliberations.

This research will not cover all the existing scholarly discourse in this field, but rather will highlight the main deliberations based on the nature of ‘prophetic intelligence’ in connection with divine revelation (*wahy*) and tradition (*naql*). The issue of miracles and its redefinition in the modern period will also be explored. The understanding of *rasūl* (messenger), *nabī* (prophet) and particularly the notion of *Khātam al-Nabiyyīn* (seal of the prophets) were all ‘problematic of prophethood’ in the twentieth century, according to

Faruk Terzic and others.<sup>1</sup> The review of the existing literature will firstly address the contemporary academic studies on Nursi and Iqbal. Due to a lack of existing academic works on Nursi and his notion of prophethood, all existing material will be reviewed. As far as is known, only few studies have discussed the notion of prophethood in Nursi's works in length with detailed analysis in the English language.<sup>2</sup>

Due to greater material available on Iqbal, this review will be refined to assess the key foundational works in the English language that are relevant to his thoughts on the topic, and discuss his understanding of the concepts of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad. There are only three articles (two of which are conference proceedings and one a journal article) that discuss Nursi and Iqbal in a comparison.<sup>3</sup> None of these compare their views on prophethood. Although the 2013 Symposium on Said Nursi nominated 'prophethood and the *Risale-i Nur*' as its key themes, nevertheless Nursi and Iqbal's views on prophethood have still not been assessed extensively. While some of the literature has considered their individual works in light of *nubuwwa*, no detailed critique of their ideas on prophethood and the Prophet has been undertaken.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Terzic. "The Problematic of Prophethood and Miracles," pp. 5-33; Badawi, Zaki. *The Reformers of Egypt: A Critique of Al-Afghani, 'Abduh and Ridha*. nc, Berks, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the 10th International Said Nursi Symposium: 'The Role and Place of Prophethood in Humanity's Journey to the Truth: The Perspective of the *Risale-i Nur*' (Turkey, 22–24 September 2013), which produced some emerging scholarly enquiry in this area, there were no other extensive research on prophethood in Nursi's thought with few general exceptions: Aytaç, Ahmet. "Prophethood in the *Risale-i Nur*, (Said Nursi'nin Peygamberlik Anlayışı)." *Thesis On Nursi Studies*, (2011); Dogan, Serdar. "The Influence of Modern Science on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Thinking." *Islamic Sciences* 12, no. 1 (2014): 3; Dadoo, Yousuf. "The Institution of Prophethood for three Sunni Scholars: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Imam Ghazālī & Shah Wali Allah." *International Bediuzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)* 2000 Retrieved on 11.06.13 from <http://www.iikv.org/academy/index.php/sympeng/article/view/1004/1809>; and Khalil, Imaduddin. "God's Messenger (pbuh) in the *Risale-i Nur*." *International Bediuzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)*, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> See Jalalizade, Jalal. "A Comparison of the Thought of Bediuzzaman and Muhammad Iqbal." *International Bediuzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)*, 1995; Mohammad, Yasien. "Predestination and Free Will In The View Of Iqbal And Nursi." *International Bediuzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)*, 2000 and Leaman, Oliver. "Nursi's Place in the Ihya Tradition." *The Muslim World* 89, no. 3-4, (1999) 314-324.

<sup>4</sup> Majeed, Shumaila and Amjad Waheed. "The Miracle of Prophet Muhammad's (Peace be upon him) Ascension: A Comparative study of the views of Said Nursi and Allama Iqbal." *International Bediuzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)*, 2013; Ansari, Mahsheed. "Nursi and Iqbal's Approaches to Prophethood and the Prophet." *International Bediuzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)*, 2013.

This review has been ordered chronologically and categorically. Chronologically (by outlining classical works, medieval then contemporary), and categorically by looking at literature on prophethood in general, followed by Nursi and his works, then Iqbal and his works. These are further categorised as an overview of studies on Nursi and Iqbal (due to the limited coverage of Nursi in Western academia), with a particular focus on the main texts that outline their conceptualisation of prophethood.

### **1.1 Western scholars and the concept of prophethood and the Prophet Muḥammad**

Since the advent of Islam, numerous books have been written by non-Muslims in the West on Prophet Muḥammad and his prophethood. Nonetheless, as Montgomery Watt, a Western expert on Islam, posits: ‘none of the great figures in history is so poorly appreciated in the West as Muhammad’.<sup>5</sup> In terms of the historical development of studies in the Orient or Islam, and well before it emerged as an academic discipline, Westerners had been interested in the emergence of Islam both in respect of its civilisation and its history, as well as the life of the Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>6</sup> However, these interests generally stemmed, with few exceptions, from polemical purposes that were often based on slander and denigration, rather than scientific research or an attempt at a search for the truth.<sup>7</sup> It was much later that Islam as an area of study emerged in the West, with pioneering names

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Apart from these two articles that consider both Nursi’s and Iqbal’s views on prophethood, the other papers from the symposium do not engage with the two thinkers directly.

<sup>5</sup> Montgomery, Watt. *Muhammad at Mecca*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> The centuries preceding the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> saw a gradual shift in the deliberations of the European writers, increasingly, attitudes in Europe were shifting for a more accepting and positive image of the Prophet as a ‘sage’, a ‘legislator’, and a ‘great man’. For Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) he was his model ‘law maker’ and ‘conqueror’. Even though this was a great improvement from the religious polemics that had coloured European discourse on Islam and its Prophet in the earlier eras, nonetheless, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries’ presentation of the Prophet Muḥammad as predominantly a ‘political’ and ‘military leader’ shadowed his role as an ‘envoy of God’ and a ‘model for Muslims’. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 145; Napoléon, and Henry Laurens. *Campagnes d’Égypte et de Syrie*. Paris: Impr. Nationale Ed, 1998, p 275, and Tolan, John V. “II European accounts of Muhammad’s life.” *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, 2010, pp. 243-245; Bozkurt J, *The Prophet Muhammad and Orientalists*, Londond: Lonsdale, 2009, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the pre-modernist depictions of Prophet Muḥammad and the overwhelmingly negative portrayal in most depictions see Muir, William. *The Life of Mahomet IV*, London: np, 1858-1861 - who wrote a four volume work on Islam and also see Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. New York: New American Library, 2014.



such as Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921).<sup>8</sup> Other works then emerged with methodological research conducted on the Prophet Muḥammad and Islam.<sup>9</sup> Still, the ‘Orientalist’ discourse remained dominant in these works, which had a softer tone, but retained similar assumptions, methodologies and purposes.<sup>10</sup>

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), author of the *West-East Diwan* (*West Ostliche Diwan*), was more progressive and encouraging about Islam’s contribution to society as well as its Prophet. In his poem entitled ‘Muhammad’s Song’ (*Muhammeds Gesang*) he praised the Prophet as the ‘best of creation’, a term often used in Islamic poetry.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) translated Goethe’s works into English and wrote his own history where he analysed Prophet Muḥammad within the category of great leaders who changed the history of the world.<sup>12</sup>

In recent times, an increasing number of books have been written on the Prophet.<sup>13</sup> Most of these, however, adhere to a traditional outline of his life and mission. The theological and ontological significance of Prophet Muḥammad have not been addressed in the majority of the contemporary literature. The study of theology within Islamic studies ‘was something of a Cinderella subject in Islamic studies (in the Anglo Saxon world) until much more

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<sup>8</sup> Goldziher, Ignaz and Wolfgang Behn (trans). *The Zāhirīs: Their Doctrine and their History, A Contribution to the History of Islamic Theology*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, 3-20.

<sup>9</sup> See Stubbe, Henry, and Shairani, Mahmud Khan. *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism: With the Life of Mahomet and a Vindication of Him and His Religion from the Calumnies of the Christians*. Whitefish, Mt: Kessinger Publishing, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> The use of the term ‘Orientalist’ here refers to the scholars of the late eighteenth century who during the height of Western Colonial dominance of the East and Muslim lands, who developed the Western scholarship of Islamic studies. Whilst, it is acknowledged that some made great contributions to the area of Islamic studies, many perceived Islam through the biased lens of ‘Orientalism’ that viewed Islam and the rest of the Colonial East as inferior to the Western culture and thought. See Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Dallmayr, Fred. *Dialogue Among Civilisations*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002 and Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, and John Whaley. *Poems of the West and the East West-Eastern Divan: West-Östlicher Divan: Bi-Lingual Edition of the Complete Poems*. Bern: P. Lang, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Carlyle, Thomas. *Goethe’s Works*, London: Young and Young, 1832; Carlyle, Thomas. *Heroes and Hero Worship*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1866, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> See Lings, Martin. *Muhammad: The Prophet of God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003; Armstrong, Karen. *Muhammad: The Prophet of Our Time*. London: HarperCollins, 2006; Ahmad, Irfan. ‘ Haunted by the West: Plural Narrative of a Singular Figure’, *Australian Book Review*. 2011, pp. 56-57; Brockopp, Jonathan E. *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 325 and Hazleton, Lesley. *The First Muslim: The Story of Muhammad*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2013.

recent developments'.<sup>14</sup> Emerging studies on Islamic theology and prophethood in Islam will be examined later, after considering the corpus of scholarly inquiry in the classical and medieval periods that witnessed the evolution of Islamic theology, as well its re-definition of prophethood in recent times.

## **1.2 Muslim scholars and the concept of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad in the Classical period**

In medieval times, the discourse was initially centred on theological and theosophical grounds. However, due to the intermingling of theology (*kalām*) with philosophy (*falsafa*), there was an escalating need to include *nubuwwa* in the theological discussions beyond the concept of divinity and lordship. This became a testament to the fact that *nubuwwa* formed an essential segment of the Islamic creed of faith. The early categorisation of subjects, such as attributes associated to the institution of *nubuwwa* and notably the attribute of *isma* (infallibility), emerged. Abū Ḥanīfah in his book *Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar* ('The Greater Jurisprudence') states, the prophets are infallible in regard to committing major and minor sins.<sup>15</sup> These were rapidly included as an official category of *kalām*.<sup>16</sup> Later on, *kalām* books acquired a place and formed a classification in theology for *nubuwwa*. Abu Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī (Imam Baqillani) (950-1013), in *Al-Tamhid* ('The Preface'), *Al-Irshad fī Usul al-Fiqh* ('Guidance in the Principles of *Fiqh*') and *At-Taqrīb wa'l-Irshad* ('The Proximity of Guidance'),<sup>17</sup> expands on the doctrines discussed in the *Insaf* (Equity), where he refutes the 'un-Islamic creeds', such as Trinitarianism and Brahmanism.

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<sup>14</sup> Winter. *Classical Islamic Theology*, p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> Abu Hanifa and Hamid Algar (trans). *Fiqh Al-Akbar*. Berkeley: University of California, 1972.

<sup>16</sup> See Bāqillānī, Muḥammad Ibn-aṭ-Ṭayyib and Maḥmūd M. al-Hudāirī. *At- Tamhīd fī 'r-Radd 'ala 'l-Mulhida al-Mu'aṭṭala wa-'r-Rāfida wa-'l-Hawāriğ wa-'l-Mu'tazila*. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1989; Al-Baghdadi, Abu Mansur 'Abd al-Qahir. *Kitab Usul Al-Din*. Istanbul: Matba at al-Dawlah, 1928 and *Juwani Irshad*.

<sup>17</sup> See Bāqillānī, Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib, and Muḥammad al-Sayyid 'Uthmān. *Al-Taqrīb wa-al-Irshād fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. 2012.

Furthermore, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (henceforth al-Ghazālī) (1058-1111), in *Al Iqtisad fil 'Itiqat*,<sup>18</sup> deliberated the notion of whether it is God's duty to send a prophet and he explained the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>19</sup> Further discussions of *nubuwwa* took place in Abu Abdullah Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (al-Rāzī) (1149-1209) *Muhasal*,<sup>20</sup> wherein he outlines (using rational arguments to justify orthodoxy) his main theological positions of *nubuwwa*. Similar expositions are found in Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Ḥusaynī al-Jurjānī Sayyid's (al-Jurjānī) (1340–1413), *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif fī 'ilm al-kalām*,<sup>21</sup> Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī's *Shahr ul-Maqṣid*<sup>22</sup> and *Islam Aqayed*.<sup>23</sup> These scholars exhumed logical explanations for the need and existence of *nubuwwa*. In al-Taftāzānī's book the effect of al-Jurjānī's philosophy can be seen as he tried to defend and argue against the philosophers by using logic (*mantiq*) and rational arguments.<sup>24</sup>

In the Māturīdī school of thought,<sup>25</sup> the same tradition can be perceived, starting with Abu Hanifa and Muhammad Abu Mansur al-Māturīdī's (Imam Māturīdī) (853-944)<sup>26</sup> book

<sup>18</sup> Ḡazzālī, Muḥammad Ibn-Muḥammad. *Al-Iqtisād fī 'l-i'tiqād*. Cairo: Dār al-Baṣā'ir, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar, 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd, and 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ. *Al-Maḥṣūl fī 'ilm uṣūl al-fiqh: The Gains in Knowing Jurisprudence*. Ṣaydā: al-Maktabah al-'Aṣrīyah, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Sayyīd al-Sharīf. *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif fī 'ilm al-kalām*. 8 Vols. in 4. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Sa'īda, 1907.

<sup>22</sup> Madelung, W. "Al-Taftazanni, Sa'd al-Din Masud b. Umar b. Abdullah". *Encyclopedia Islam*, Brill, (2007).

<sup>23</sup> Taftāzānī, Mas'ūd ibn 'Umar and Earl Edgar. *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sa'd Al-Dīn Al-Taftāzānī on the Creed of Najm Al-Dīn Al-Nasaḥī*. New York: Arno Press, 1980.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Māturīdī School is the theological school that is named after its founder Abu Mansur Al Māturīdī, whose systematic theology, which is close to the Ash'ari theology '*Aqīdah*. The term also denominates the School of *kalām*, or systematic theology, of those who follow Al-Maturidi's theology. Thus, 'Maturidis' or Māturīdī School, refers to the adherents of this theological position. The Māturīdī and Ash'aris are the two foremost schools of systematic theology that are recognised by Sunni Islam.

<sup>26</sup> Al Māturīdī was a Muslim theologian, scholar and expert in Islamic jurisprudence and Qur'ānic exegesis, and is considered as one of the paramount pioneers of Islamic Jurisprudence. His works are considered to be authoritative on the subject. See Cerić, Mustafa and Sharifah Shifa Al-Attas. *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi (D. 333/944)*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995.

*Kitab al-Tawhid*.<sup>27</sup> There is a similar notion, as they used logical argumentations as well as philosophy, also known as the ‘*aql*’<sup>28</sup> arguments or the traditions based on the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*, also known as *naql*,<sup>29</sup> to explain *nubuwwa*. Moreover, Ibn Ḥazm (994-1064),<sup>30</sup> Ibn Taymiya (1263-1328)<sup>31</sup> and Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406),<sup>32</sup> all gave importance to prophethood in their works. They mostly defended prophethood against the Shiite understanding and, in the case of Ibn Taymiya, also against philosophical and Sufi understanding.<sup>33</sup> Evidently, these discussions started the dialectics in Islamic thought, and *kalām* (theology) on the subject of *nubuwwa*. The main notches of these contentions among the various schools will be outlined below, in order to ascertain the development of the historical discussion on *nubuwwa*, which will contextualise the two twentieth century scholars Nursi and Iqbal’s deliberations on this matter. The key distinctions and arguments rested on the issue of ‘*aql* (the intellect) and approaching *nubuwwa* from this perspective, which was emphatically emphasised by the philosophers. The theologians more or less applied ‘*aql* in their discussions as well. Nonetheless they differentiated from the philosophers by accepting that priority is given to revelation over ‘*aql*.

### **1.3 Muslim scholars and the concept of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad in modern times**

The ‘*aql–naql*’ debate continues in the modern period albeit in new forms. The discussions at the outset seem quiet agreeable, yet the subtle nuances of their variance, such as Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905) and Rashid Riḍā’s (1838-1897) re-conceptualisation of miracles, were significant and somewhat radical in comparison to the general view on this

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<sup>27</sup> Maturidi, Muhammad M. A. M and Fath A. Khulayyif tr. *Kitab Al-Tawhid*. Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1970.

<sup>28</sup> New arguments based on logic and philosophy.

<sup>29</sup> Traditions or *naql* pertaining to the textual evidence from the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* how it explains prophethood.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Hazm. *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa-al-Ahwa’ wa-al-Nihal*, Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1985.

<sup>31</sup> Ibn Taymīyah, Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm, Salman H. Ani, and Shadia Tel. *Kitab Al-Iman: Book of Faith*. Bloomington: Iman Pub. House, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> See Ibn Khaldūn, Dawood, Rosenthal. *The Muqaddimah*, 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

topic. Contemporaries, like Muṣṭafā Sabrī, challenged these ideas early on. These three scholars are significant for this study, as they were all contemporaries of Nursi and Iqbal. Hence, they faced similar historical and intellectual contexts. Even though the nature of their works varied, nonetheless each of them addressed the issue of *'aql* and *naql*. Summarily, in the modern period, all scholars accepted the *'aql* as a given that was passed down from orthodoxy.

The pre-eminence of *'aql*, in the hermeneutics of *nubuwwa*, became the central theme in the reform movement of the two Sunni reformers, 'Abduh and Riḍā. Both stressed the moral implications for the life of the modern Muslim.<sup>34</sup> According to 'Abduh and Riḍā, prophets are needed because 'human reason alone is not sufficient to guide human beings along the right path';<sup>35</sup> therefore, God has sent prophets as 'announcers and warners, supporting them with definitive proofs of their authenticity'.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, 'Abduh is not belittling the importance of reason, in datum; he is so emphatic about it that he often projects a 'Mu'tazilite position rather than an Ash'arīte outlook'.<sup>37</sup>

Another theme that was original in 'Abduh's writings, according to his disciple Riḍā, was the 'evolutionary development of prophethood in the course of human history'. In this position 'Abduh sees prophecy as a parallel to the successive development of the revelation. Although others may have expressed the maturation of revelation; nevertheless, to postulate that prophethood evolved until its final form, Prophet Muḥammad, is to assume fault in the prophecy and teachings of the other prophets. Since it is emphatically stated that prophets are perfect in nature and sinless (as they are guided directly by God and chosen by Him) in the creedal texts and established principally in the *samiyah* studies

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<sup>34</sup> See Muḥammad 'Abduh. *Risālat al-Tawḥīd (The Theology of Unity)*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1966; Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. *Al-Waḥy al-Muḥammadī (The Muhammadan Revelation)*. Alexandria: Al Saadawi Publications, 1996.

<sup>35</sup> Riḍā, *al-Muḥammadī*, p.38; 'Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, p. 83.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Seferta, Y. H. R. "The Doctrine of Prophethood In The Writings Of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Ridha," *Islamic Studies*, 24, (1985): 139-165.

(literally translates as ‘heard things’ or knowledge received from the Divine source) of *kalām*,<sup>38</sup> this is an important point in Riḍā’s work, which he espoused in the twentieth century. However, Riḍā’s position on the evolutionary nature of prophethood has not gained ascendancy in the modern period. It seems that, in spite of popularised claims in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to the effect that the traditional concept of prophethood in Islam, can no longer be sustained, there has nevertheless been little acceptance of this by scholars of that era until contemporary times. Thus, the prevailing view of the majority remains, which is that prophets along with their messages are ‘perfect’. This defeats any notion that there was some sort of defect or deficiency in previous prophets, which required correction over time. Thus, the two modern reformists represent a new position and a new tide in *nubuwwa* studies, as they attempted to re-define these aspects of *nubuwwa* and took a position against the established orthodoxy. Nursi was also defiant against their (modernist) views on sinlessness (*isma*), miracles (*mu’jiza*) and intercession (*shfaa’*).

Emerging studies in the area of prophethood and Islamic theology depicted the overemphasis on the Egyptian revivalists ‘Abduh and Riḍā, who were enthused by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897). Other modernist reformers such as Muṣṭafā Sabrī (1869-1954), on the other hand, were largely ignored.<sup>39</sup> Sabrī provided a staunch critique of ‘Abduh and Riḍā. Faruk Terzic argued that the ‘problematic of prophethood and miracles’

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<sup>38</sup> Al-sam’iyyat (literally translates as ‘heard things’ or knowledge received from the Divine source) such as prophethood, miracle and hereafter are established on the basis of God’s existence. Methodologically speaking, the classical theologians of Islam establish the necessary existence of God and in doing so they rely exclusively on rational proofs without necessarily referring to *naql* (the transmitted sources). However, they try to establish only the rational possibility of prophethood and miracles. They further reinforce it to the level of necessity by using scriptural evidence, i.e. the Qur’an and the Sunnah or records of historical occurrence. That is why prophethood, miracles and resurrection are placed in the category of *samiyat* or the so called “heard things”, referring to the fact that knowledge regarding such matters was received through revelation rather than through immediate rational argumentation as in the case of proving the existence of the Necessary Being. Sabrī, Muṣṭafā. *Mawqif Al-‘aql Wa-Al-‘ilm Wa-Al-‘ālam Min Rabb Al-‘ālamīn Wa-‘ibadat Al-Mursalīn*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> Badawi, Zaki. *The Reformers of Egypt: A Critique of Al-Afghani, ‘Abduh and Ridha*. Berks, 1976; Terzic. ‘The Problematic of Prophethood and Miracles,’ pp. 5-33.

provided insightful new research on Sabri's response.<sup>40</sup> The findings of Terzic are significant, in not only creating space for other views on prophethood in the twentieth century, but also due to its historical and contextual relatedness to both Nursi and Iqbal, who more or less dealt with the similar historical and theo-philosophical grounds, thereby making it pertinent to this research.<sup>41</sup>

Sabrī's argument is centred on the defence of the orthodox position against the 'incorrect propositions of 'Abduh and Riḍā', in particular in relation to the sending of prophets and the role of miracles to prophethood. He restated his position of siding with the majority opinion on the necessity of miracles as an integral part of prophethood. Sabrī's position may be comparable to that of Nursi and Iqbal's, and provides a useful framework from which to consider the modern debacles on the issue of prophethood. Sabrī drew attention to the 'mushrooming of books on the life of the Prophet Muhammad' authored by prominent writers, such as Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956), Muhammad Farid Wajdi (1878-1954) and Riḍā. Sabrī observed that these books 'stress the human genius of the prophet' rather than the 'God endowed excellence' of his prophethood.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Sabrī was perturbed by the 'scientific ambience' and total disregard towards the traditional discipline of *ḥadīth*.<sup>43</sup>

The position of Zaki Mubarak (1891-1952) is interesting as he warned that 'the traditional concept of prophethood will soon collapse in the wake of modern intellectual developments', and the only way to 'safeguard the notion of prophethood' is to consider it as an astonishing embodiment of 'outstanding human genius', rather than an 'extraordinary

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<sup>40</sup> Terzic. 'The Problematic of Prophethood and Miracles,' pp. 5-33.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Sabrī states "The entirely new concept of prophethood, which emphasizes ordinary qualities of the Prophet as a human being (which in time became signs of immensity and genius that may be possessed by a great leader or reformer) can in no way represent the extraordinary metaphysical quality of prophethood, which is emphasized in Islam." Ibid, p. 17.

metaphysical reality'.<sup>44</sup> In fact, Sabrī asserted that Mubarak demonstrated what other modernists implicitly mentioned (like 'Abduh and Riḍā). Sabrī's concern about this intellectual trend in prophetic studies and *nubuwwa* was that, in time, Prophet Muḥammad would eventually be perceived by Muslims 'as an Arab national leader wedded to the cause of Arab identity'. This would then affect the religious grounding of Islam, which may be 'reinterpreted as a conglomerate of human teachings, rather than as a set of transcendental religious principles revealed from above'.<sup>45</sup> Sabrī detailed the arguments for and against miracles in the twentieth century. In doing so he discussed the philosophies of European scholars such as Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), David Hume (1711-1776) and other Western religious theorists. It is important to note that Sabri's works on *nubuwwa* are unique among his fellow modern reformists, like 'Abduh, Riḍā, Mubarak and others, who were arguably influenced by positivist and rationalistic trends. They often deduced that the discussion of miracles in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* were extraordinary events that could be explainable with rational proofs. Hence, the impossibility of 'outside laws of nature' – in doing so many miracles associated with Muḥammad's prophethood were denied. This did not conform to the theological position of Sabrī and the majority. These will be further detailed, as Nursi and Iqbal faced similar intellectual traditions.

Thus, Sabrī reasserted the traditional concept of miracles and prophethood, and strived to make it 'immune from modern interpretations', which are, in his view, 'interpolations, and radical restatements of their true meaning, function and purpose'.<sup>46</sup> Sabrī tried not only to underline the importance of rational and religious approaches (*'aql* and *naql*) to the issues at stake, but also offered a common sense understanding of what should be the approach of science, 'the powerful newcomer' in the arena of modern religious studies and classical

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Sabrī, Muṣṭafā. *Mawqif al-'Aql wa-al-'ilm wa-al-'ālam min Rabb al-'ālamīn wa-'ibādat al-Mursalīn*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1981, p. 152.



theology. Thus, he seriously engaged the modernists on the issue of prophethood and miracles, and highlighted the relevant points rooted in Islamic theology. He charted his own course in these turbulent areas of discussion, providing unique intellectual discourse. However, in trying to dispel the methodology of his contemporaries, as over-rationalised,<sup>47</sup> Sabrī's failed to emphasise the compatible aspects of rationalist tradition with that of theology; this seemingly made his own approach lack rationale.

Among the modern literature on prophethood, the controversy between *falsafa* (philosophers) and *mutakallimūn* (theologians) gained much expediency through Fazlur Rahman's *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*.<sup>48</sup> The nuances of differences between the philosophers and *kalāmists* were given prominence by scholars like Fazlur Rahman, who re-ignited the Avicennian debate against al- Ghazālī on the issue of intellect, or rather, the conceptualisation of revelation or prophetic intellect (*fatānah*). He argued for 'creating room amongst orthodoxy' for the medieval Muslim scholars Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and al-Farābī and their concept of the 'Active Intellect', which is significant in his exposition on 'Prophecy in Islam' in relation to miracles, revelation and the law. On these concepts, he focused on Greek and Muslim philosophers' assessments and conceptualisation of the 'Active Intellect', as well as the ramifications for prophecy, revelation, miracles and the law.

Rahman compared the two philosophers Avicenna and al-Farābī to Ibn Hazm and al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastani (1086–1153) and Ibn Khaldūn. According to the philosophers, the Prophet receives revelation by identifying himself with the active intellect.<sup>49</sup> Further, Rahman pointed out that, according to al-Shahrastani and Ibn Khaldūn who are not considered to be heretics by the majority position, 'these prophets are identified with the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Rahman, Fazlur. *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*. London: Routledge, 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

angel'. He also posited that Ibn Taymiya, representing orthodoxy, refutes this possibility, stating it is impossible for a 'human to transcend their humanity at any point'.<sup>50</sup> For Rahman, the 'outward anxiety of orthodoxy,' as he puts it, is mainly that the philosopher's doctrine tends to make 'prophets of men' rather easily, since their 'talk of the natural capacities of the human soul does not allow any limits where ordinary humanity stops and prophecy begins'.<sup>51</sup> The fundamental gap with orthodoxy is the nature of man and the nature of the divine message. Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiya are also in the same boat, according to Rahman. Rahman's assessment was an over-generalisation of the orthodox position of 'moralists' – activists for whom great importance is placed on intellectuals. Rahman's key argument was the question of philosophers versus *mutakallimūn*, whom he refers to as 'orthodoxy'. Rahman's goal was to create a space and to legitimise al-Farābī and Avicenna's thought on the doctrine of the 'Active Intellect', in relation to revelation, miracles and the law. Concerning orthodoxy, he does so by qualifying with supporting statements from Shahrastani and Ibn Khaldūn, who are accepted by orthodoxy, but have similar views to the two in question. Due to the mere outline of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiya's position on the nature of man and revelation, Rahman failed to make a conclusive assessment either of orthodoxy or of the philosophers. The 'moral agency and activism' of orthodoxy, as he puts it, is an important position and not addressed adequately by him.

Another approach to *nubuwwa* studies is Riaz Hassan's attempt to explore the psychological process of receiving revelation and Prophet Muhammad's Prophetic Consciousness in *Islam and Society: Sociological Explorations*.<sup>52</sup> Despite its daring methodology, the book does not explicitly oppose orthodox views. Due to the nature of the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Hassan, Riaz. *Islam and Society: Sociological Explorations*. Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2013.

discourse, Hassan's categorisation of *wahy* (divine revelation) and the Qur'ān as an account of the historical memory of the Arabs, incorporating the intellectual and spiritual outlook of Prophet Muḥammad is 'daring' and not representative of the majority position on this topic.<sup>53</sup> For *wahy* is considered to be good directives to humanity through his chosen and elected prophets, so generally this notion of the Qur'ān being a reflection of Muḥammad's 'intellectual and spiritual outlook' is mostly rejected by Islamic scholars of theology, the scholars or philosophers who sought to consider prophetic intelligence *fatānah*. Fazlur Rahman and others considered Prophet Muḥammad's part, but they too were out-numbered by the *ijmā'* (consensus) of the majority of scholars. While Hassan provides a new methodology and perspective in approaching Muḥammad's prophethood, he is not dissimilar to his predecessors (Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sīnā and Fazlur Rahman), who also daringly sought similar explanations. While his explanations are sound, Hassan's conclusions are misleading or against the collective spirit of Qur'ānic or theological understanding of prophethood and revelation.

While the philosophers focused mainly on the 'doctrine of the intellect' in their discussion of prophecy, the *mutakallimūn*, on the other hand, were not entirely against reason. Nevertheless, they did not prefer to overemphasise intellect in the philosophers' concept of prophecy. Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiya were highly critical of the philosophical traditions and logic, to the extent that al-Ghazālī considered their thinking to obscure reflection overcast with darkness.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, Ibn Taymiya conceded that when an educated person closely studies Aristotelian metaphysics, he reaches the conclusion that there was none more ignorant of the gnosis of God than these philosophers.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 191.

<sup>54</sup> See Al-Ghazālī, A.H.M. Ed. Michael Marmura. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Birmingham: Birmingham Young University Press, 2002.

<sup>55</sup> Taymiyya, Ibn. '*Kitāb al-Radd 'alā al-Mantiqiyīn*.' Bombay: np, 1979.

Ibn Khaldūn posited in the *Muqaddimah* that

Man should not trust the suggestion that his mind makes, that is it able to comprehend all existing things and their causes and to know all the details of existence. Such a suggestion of the mind should be dismissed as stupid. It should be known that every person with perception, has the superficial impression that the whole of existence is comprised by his perception and that it does not extend beyond (the realm of perception), the matter is different in fact the truth lies beyond that.<sup>56</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn is not totally critical of ‘*aql* and stated that,

Intellect is a correct scale however, it should not be used to weigh such matters as the Oneness of God, the other world, the truth of prophecy, the real character of the Divine Attributes, or anything else that lies beyond the level of the intellect.<sup>57</sup>

Ibn Khaldūn provided an analogy to show the limitation of the intellect and concluded that there is a limit at which ‘*aql* stops.<sup>58</sup>

Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564-1624)<sup>59</sup> also expressed similar views about the incompetence of the human intellect to apprehend the ‘Absolute Reality’. Sirhindī maintained that:

If human intelligence had the capacity to solve this problem, the Greek philosopher’s placing trust in it would not have been misled to the dark alleys of ignorance. They would have been even more cognizant of the Supreme Being, but the fact is that they are the most blockheaded people who had taken God as a Being Impotent and inoperative.<sup>60</sup>

He further elaborated that ‘the greater portion of their work, is patently wrong and opposed to that contained in the Scripture and the *Sunnah*’.<sup>61</sup>

Another issue that was subject to concerted interchange among the scholars of *nubuwwa* was the issue of variance in the prophetic experience to that of the mystic. The two Indian

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<sup>56</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, Dawood, Rosenthal. *The Muqaddimah*, p. 37.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Also known as Imam Rabbānī.

<sup>60</sup> Sirhindī, Ahmad. *Maktubat-i Imam-i Rabbani*, Sirhind: np, 1889 Vol 3, letter No. 2, p. 33.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Muslim scholars, Sirhindī and Shāh Waliullāh al-Dihlawī (1703-1762)<sup>62</sup> influenced Nursi and Iqbal. While they agreed on the subservience of the mystical experience to that of the prophetic experience, Shāh Waliullāh was more discursive on the mystical experience and included in many of his works were accounts of his own mystical experiences of the Prophet and his descendants. Siddiqi notes that what the human being, ‘in the cold regions of an arid intellectualism can, at his best, infer is only the existence of a Prime cause, but so far as His Attributes, His Will and our relation with Him are concerned, the intellect has nothing positive to say’.<sup>63</sup> Siddiqi maintained that:

It is at this stage that man instinctively feels the need of prophethood, an agency through which man is introduced by God to a new source of experience, which provides authentic information about the Creator and His Will, the unseen real of His creation and the standard of moral and ethical valuation independent of the ephemeral changes in our environment.<sup>64</sup>

Contrary to Rahman, Siddiqi further elucidated the limitations of mystical experience and intellect in finding the ‘Ultimate Reality’. He quoted Ibn Taymiya as ‘admirable’ and followed him in his view on this.<sup>65</sup> Siddiqi observed that Ibn Taymiya is correct in his belief that the prophetic consciousness is developed with the help of the wisdom and will of God, independent of the natural operation of the human mind and heart. Further, he objected to the notion of Active Intellect, by suggesting there is a greater ‘need for a non-subjective, independent universal consciousness of a prophet’, in order to discern with ‘subjective reality and actual reality’.<sup>66</sup> In doing so, a prophet provides definitive and accurate notions concerning God and divine things determining man’s relation with them.

This further provides a definitive scheme for the individual and social behaviour. Siddiqi

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<sup>62</sup> Shāh Waliullāh al-Dihlawī (1703-1762) wrote during the time of great political and social turmoil in India when central Muslim power had dissipated. Regional autonomies besides Hindus, Sikhs and Europeans vied for power. The economic condition of Muslims had decayed through idleness and corruption. They witnessed internecine conflicts, especially between Shiite and Sunni groups as well as between adherents of some Sunni schools of law as well as between the orthodox and the populists/innovators.

<sup>63</sup> Siddiqi, Abdul Hameed. *Prophethood in Islam*. Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1968, p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> See Taymiyya, Ibn. ‘*Kitab al-Nubuwwat*.’ Beirut: Dar al Fikr, 1989; Hoover, Jon. ‘The Justice of God and the Best of all Possible Worlds: The Theodicy of Ibn Taymiyya.’ *Theological Review* 27.2 (2006): 53-75.

<sup>66</sup> Siddiqi. *Prophethood in Islam*, p. 35.

maintained that faith is, thus, the basic experience of prophetic piety and the difference between prophetic and mystical experience is paramount.<sup>67</sup> Siddiqi echoes the majority position. This study is substantial, even though much of it has not been recognised as widely as that of Rahman (his contemporary); nevertheless, Siddiqi's engagement with the modern discourse provides a critical alternative, in line with the majority position. Conclusively, Siddiqi, Ibn Khaldūn, Sirhindī and Rahman depict the ongoing interest in the 'aql and naql considerations of prophethood.

Baljon's stance on Shāh Waliullāh's assessment of the supremacy of sainthood to that of prophethood is useful.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, some of his premises are without the needed explanations and his analysis therefore bears a superficial appraisal of Shāh Waliullāh's exposition of the supremacy of sainthood over prophethood. Consequently, Baljon fails to demonstrate a thorough understanding of prophetology in Islam, due to the superficial engagement of the topic. In other studies, however, Shāh Waliullāh's position on the primacy of prophethood over sainthood, and his emphasis on the finality of the Messengership or message, is crystalised.<sup>69</sup> Shāh Waliullāh's emergence on the Indian sub-continent was after the 'reviver of second millennium' (*mujaddid alf thani*) Sirhindī. Sirhindī, stood up for the superiority of the Prophet, and stressed the need to abide by the principles of *Shari'a* and the prophetic way (*Sunnah*) in order to counter the heresies introduced by the Mughul emperor Akbar Shah (1760–1837).<sup>70</sup>

Sirhindī maintained that following even one small action of the *Sunnah* could lead even an ordinary person to ascension (*mi'raj*). Sirhindī's book *Ithbat an-Nubuwwa* ('The Proof of

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pp. 41-42.

<sup>68</sup> See Baljon, MS. "Prophetology Of Shah Wali Allah." *Islamic Studies* 9, no. 1 (1970): 69-79.

<sup>69</sup> See: Dadoo. 'The Institution of Prophethood for Three Sunni Scholars.'; Allāh al-Ḍihlawī, Walī. *A Mystical Interpretation of Prophetic Tales by an Indian Muslim: Shah Wali Allah's Tawil Al-Ahadith*. Vol. 2. Brill, 1973.

<sup>70</sup> Although a Sufi master of four different orientations, Sirhindī was seen to be critical of some of the Sufi practices in his times. Hence, he was out of favour in certain circles in Mughal India.

Prophethood’) provides a concise summary of the ‘*aql* and *naql* dichotomy.’<sup>71</sup> He adequately highlights the limitations of the ‘*aql* tradition in outlining *nubuwwa*. He equated the experiential methods of the *ahl al-taṣawwuf* (Sufis) as methodologically scientific. Sirhindī argued that just as science relies on experimentation, similarly the Sufi mystical experience through the rituals and practices of worship as taught by the Prophet can also be considered as ‘valid’ in the human experience of the *ghayb* (unknown). Furthermore, Sirhindī maintained that the philosophers accepted *nubuwwa*, as only ‘useful means to the ultimate truth’, whereas for the *mutakallimūn* belief in the office of *nubuwwa* forms the basis of one’s belief (‘*aqīdah*).<sup>72</sup> Thus, unlike Rahman (see above), Sirhindī deemed that ultimately the philosopher’s perception of the prophetic role and duty was ‘based on the supremacy of reason over revelation’, but, where convenient the philosophers borrowed from theology certain concepts such as *Sharī‘a* (divine law) and *wahy*, (divine revelation) as ‘useful ways of understanding the ultimate reality put forward by the ‘*aql* ‘reason’’. Sirhindī boldly posited that regardless of how developed mystical experiences may be because of their personal nature they cannot be universal. He observed that:

One is liable to commit errors even in the knowledge gained through mystical experience. The reason is that some of the trash, which the mystic considers of unusual importance is so imperceptibly mixed up with the revealed knowledge that the mystic finds it difficult to separate grain from the chaff. Since the errors can creep in the mystical experience, therefore, even this branch of knowledge cannot be fully depended upon. Whatever is most reliable, final, and free from all kinds of errors is the Holy Book and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet, which are based upon revelation.<sup>73</sup>

Sirhindī maintained that the prophets are the best of creation, possessing the most precious wealth of knowledge. Thus, the ‘highest lap of the mystic’s ascent is the beginning of

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<sup>71</sup> Sirhindī, Ahmad. *Ithbāt An-nubuwwa : (Proof of prophethood)*. Istanbul: Hakikat Kitabevi, 2001.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>73</sup> Sirhindī, Ahmad. *Maktubat-i Imam-i Rabbani*. Sirhind: np, 1889; Faruki, Burhan Ahmad, and Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī. *The Mujaddid’s Conception of Tawhid*. Delli: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i, 1940 and Sirhindī, Ahmad. *An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image In the Eyes of Posterity*. McGill-Queen’s Univ.-Press, 1971.

prophetic journey of spirit’, therefore, the ‘mystic can never reflect the prophetic qualities. ‘Duteous proximity’ is all that the mystics can achieve by following the prophets; for the former cannot hope of attaining the least merit to the latter, not even as much as a drop in the ocean’.<sup>74</sup> Sirhindī also emphasised, in his *Maktubat* (‘Letters’), the inability of the human intellect to fathom the secrets of the divine nature and attributes. ‘Nor can it attain the mystic stages of sanctity purity and Unity in the cognition of the Ultimate Beings’, he wrote that the ‘human intellect is incapable of finding its way to this treasure and, devoid of prophetic guidance it cannot even reach the doorsteps of the Divine mansion’.<sup>75</sup> Sirhindī demonstrates an unrelenting focus on articulating the position of the majority *mutakallimūn* on the notion of *nubuwwa*, against various social and political developments in South Asia and in the Muslim world. Sirhindī’s position caused a polarisation between some sects in India; however, the overwhelming majority were convinced of his arguments. The effects rippled to others like Mawlana Khaled al-Baghdadi (d.1827) and Nursi.

Similarly, the prominent Indian scholar Abu’l Hassan Ali Nadwi (1914-1999) posits that the ‘history of philosophy, mysticism and religion bears witness to the fact that all those who have placed reliance on human reason or intuition to attain cognition of God have always been misguided by the figments of their own imagination’.<sup>76</sup> Nadwi also provides a good outline of the tradition-based (*naql*) exposition of *nubuwwa*. Focusing heavily on Qur’ānic verses, Nadwi structurally discusses prophethood; however, he engages less in the modern discourses, due to its initial purpose as an extended lecture on the topic of ‘prophethood and prophets in light of the Qur’ān’. There seems to be a greater void of the *falsafa* tradition altogether in his book in comparison to Siddiqi’s. Consequently, his work

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<sup>74</sup> Sirhindī, *Maktubat*, pp.87-88 and p.123.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> See Nadwi, S. Abdul Hasan Ali. *Islamic Concept of Prophethood*. Lucknow: Academy Islamic Research & Publications, 1979.



leaves vacant space for the discussion of the ‘*aql*’ or any analysis of rational thought in light of the revivalist scholars, ‘Abduh and Riḍā, or more contemporaries like Rahman. Conversely, similar to Siddiqi, Nadwi is critical of the philosopher’s position, and while his focus is primarily in outlining prophethood with textual evidence from the Qur’ān, he does not miss an opportunity to refute the minority view of the philosophers. These findings were popular when Nadwi was writing, as it was during that same era when the Pakistan Government declared the Ahmadias ‘a non-Muslim minority’ in Pakistan. This is significant, as Iqbal was from the subcontinent and he too faced similar hurdles, such as the defence of the finality of prophethood against the Ahmadi sect. This text could perhaps demonstrate how far Iqbal’s stance stretched on this topic, which preceded Nadwi’s, and how influential he was on the socio-political and ideological make-up of the sub-continent.

John Renard’s *All the King’s Falcons*<sup>77</sup> provides a literary exposition of prophethood. Renard’s focus on Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī, also known as Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī (1207-1273), provides an inimitable study of the illustrations and understanding of prophets, prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad in the mystical Sufī tradition of Islam. With a forward by Annemarie Schimmel, *All the King’s Falcons* is an important study that discusses prophethood and prophetology through the lens of mystical allegories and Rumi’s poetry, written in the thirteenth century. Renard examines the role of Rūmī in the history of Islamic prophetology, via the five headings: historical; philosophical; theological; theosophical and mystical prophetology.<sup>78</sup> He assesses ‘the dynamics of prophetic revelation’, in his second chapter ‘Flight of the Royal Falcons’ by identifying the thematic image of the ‘royal falcon’ in Rumi’s prophetology to his. He further discusses; how do the prophets relate to the world to which they are sent, what constitutes the nature of revelation and in what way are the prophets mystics as they relate to God? His careful

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<sup>77</sup> Renard, John. *All the King’s Falcons: Rumi on Prophets and Revelation*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, pp. 1-16.

analysis and well-documented chapters constitute a useful model for an examination of prophetology in many other great mystical writings of Islam and particularly it will be a useful model in examining closely the mystical prophetology of Iqbal. Renard's *All The King's Falcons*, thus, closely examines and parallels the current study, whose aim is to critically examine Iqbal's poetical expressions of prophethood. Since both Rūmī and Annemarie Schimmel are significant for Iqbal,<sup>79</sup> Renard's work provides a useful structure to discuss and compare Rūmī and Iqbal, while also referring to the Prophet Muḥammad, as a great mystical and religious figure and prophet of God.

Kenneth Cragg, in his article '*My tears into thy bottle prophethood and God*',<sup>80</sup> depicts prophethood as a type of 'suffering,' hence the 'tears' quote from Psalms to portray this constantly in his argument.<sup>81</sup> The anguish of messengers is at the 'heart of the faith', not 'the political' or 'power struggles'. These are his differentiating points between Christianity and Islam. Cragg contrasts Islamic prophetology with that of Christianity by legitimising it as 'struggled anguish'.<sup>82</sup> Cragg questions the concept of the finality of prophethood in Muḥammad, stating that the apparent 'closure of the prophetic traditions in the Bible has also puzzled thinking minds' and setting a 'hard problem for us all, Muslims and others alike'.<sup>83</sup> He is asking the theological question that if there was a need for prophets in history then, according to Cragg, should this need for prophethood 'need to be ceased?' That is to say, should prophethood need to end with Muḥammad.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Cragg becomes critical of the *hijra* (immigration) by stating this was the politicisation of 'religion and power', thus constituting a decline. Cragg, therefore, makes the theological

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<sup>79</sup> Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī was a central figure that dominated Iqbal's literary works and thoughts. Annemarie Schimmel is an expert on Iqbal as well as on Islamic studies. Both Rumi's influence upon Iqbal and Schimmel's analysis of his works will be examined in the forthcoming chapters.

<sup>80</sup> Cragg, Kenneth. 'My Tears Into Thy Bottle' Prophethood and God.' *The Muslim World* 88, no. 3-4 (1998): pp. 238-255.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 238.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, pp. 240-255.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

proposition that prophethood fundamentally entails suffering and pain, hence ‘tears’ in the way he legitimises the Christian position of the divination Christ who ‘suffered ultimately on the cross’. In doing so, he does not assess Islam’s view of the prophetic role and duty and therefore fails to discuss the *hijra*. Overall, this article attempts to highlight the Muslim-Christian understanding and discussion of prophethood, the prophetic role and the role of Jesus.

It is among this plethora of contemporary ideas that Nursi and Iqbal’s view of prophethood and prophetology will be examined within the available literature on their thought and works. Nursi and Iqbal face criticisms from the ‘traditional camp’ as well as the modernist camp. Even Nursi, who evidently comes from the traditional ‘*madrasa*’ system, was critical of the tradition he was within, yet he was also outside the modernist camp and faced critiques from the Young Turks movement.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, although Iqbal is very modern, being educated in British India and echoing many of his contemporary philosophies, he still romantically reminisces on the ‘great stories of the past’ and had many critiques from the modern camp in pre-partition British India as well as the traditional conservative camp.

#### **1.4 Said Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur***

In recent times, there has been a burgeoning scholarly interest in Nursi<sup>86</sup> including Serif Merdin’s *Religion and Social Change in Secular Turkey*<sup>87</sup> and Hamid Algar’s *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Risale-i Nur*.<sup>88</sup> These works set Nursi in his socio-political context and are the main academic literature available on Nursi since the late

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<sup>85</sup> See Azak, Umut. *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation State*. London: IB Tauris, 2010.

<sup>86</sup> See Mardin. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, 1989; Algar, Hamid. ‘The Centennial Renewer: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Tradition of *Tajdid*.’ *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Sept. (2001); Turner, Colin and Horkuc, Hasan. *The Makers of Civilisation: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Markham, Ian and Ozdemir, Ibrahim. *Globalization, Ethics and Islam: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2005.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Algar, Hamid. ‘The Centennial Renewer’ in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Sept. (2001).

1970s. The 1990s witnessed an increase in academic interest in Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*. This was due to academic symposiums sponsored mainly by the Nur community in Turkey that resulted in the translation of Nursi's major works into other languages,<sup>89</sup> as well as an increase in major academic research on Nursi. More recently, Ibrahim Abu-Rabi<sup>90</sup> edited two books that are crucial to understanding the thought and writings of Nursi, including *Islam at the Cross-roads* and *The Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur*.<sup>91</sup> Other recent scholars specialising in Nursi include Ian Markham, Thomas Michel, Ibrahim Ozdemir<sup>92</sup> and Colin Turner.<sup>93</sup> These studies explore a plethora of themes within the *Risale-i Nur*. Moreover, there has been an increased interest in the studies of Nursi in different university departments including political science, studies in the Middle East and Islam and, more importantly, in studies of theology and interfaith dialogue including Christian theological seminaries like Hartford Seminary, who have introduced *Nursian* studies into their syllabus. Others include the Nursi Chair at John Carroll University in Ohio, USA.<sup>94</sup>

The Christian theologian and writer Ian Markham has written extensively on Nursi. He has recently authored three books on Nursi – *Globalization Ethics & the Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, and *Engendered Politics & Nursi* – with chapters on Nursi in other books like *Interfaith Dialogue and Nursi* and *An Introduction to Said Nursi: Life, Thought and Writings*, which he co-authored with Suendam Birinci. The emerging new academic works

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<sup>89</sup> Nursi's works have been translated into over 40 languages. Visit [www.gencnur.com/othe.htm](http://www.gencnur.com/othe.htm) for a list of translations in other languages of Nursi's major works.

<sup>90</sup> Abu-Rabi authored two major works on Nursi: Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim. *Islam at the Crossroads*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003 and Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim. *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur*. New York: SUNY Press, 2008.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Markham, Ian and Ozdemir, Ibrahim. *Globalization, Ethics and Islam: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2005.

<sup>93</sup> Colin Turner, and Hasan Horkuc. *Makers of Islamic Civilization: Said Nursi*. Oxford University Press, India, 2009.

<sup>94</sup> Universities conducting research and who have specific interest in schools in Said Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* include Durham University, McGill University, Australian Catholic University, Hartford Seminary, Islamic University of Indonesia, University of Cairo and the John Carroll University in Ohio. For a more comprehensive list, see [www.nursistudies.com](http://www.nursistudies.com).

on Nursi show there is an increased understanding of the important contribution of Nursi and his work – the *Risale-i Nur*.<sup>95</sup>

In the following section, I will analyse the major themes and methodological structures that are discussed in the available academic literature on Nursi. After an analytical survey of each source, I will then define the source and its relevance in relation to this research topic on the ‘concept of Prophethood and Muḥammad’. Although most of the sources do not discuss this as a major theme, they shed light on Nursi’s historical context. This will assist in understanding Nursi’s ideas. I have also commented on certain methodologies used by the key scholars like Mardin, Algar and Abu-Rabi ranging across political history, sociology, theology and Middle Eastern studies. Thus, the contemporary scholarly discourse on Nursi demonstrates his abilities as an astute traditional scholar and reiterates his position within the emerging scholarship on this great literary figure and his attitudes towards Islam’s diverse intellectual history.

#### **1.4.1 An overview of modern studies**

Since there is little or no secondary material on Nursi’s notion of prophethood, a brief overview of the modern texts will be conducted. Sukran Vahide is a key author and scholar to consult in any study on Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*. She has authored two major biographies of Nursi and has translated the main volumens of the *Risale-i Nur* collection in the English language. Thus, her work has opened the study of *Risale-i Nur* to a wider audience; her articles and biographies on Nursi provide the most valuable insight into Nursi’s life and thought.<sup>96</sup> Necmettin Sahiner<sup>97</sup> is the first biographer of Nursi’s life and

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<sup>95</sup> The academic attention and research on Nursi, his life and works is still in its elementary stages, despite symposiums and conferences being held every few years in Istanbul and other international conferences in Europe, North America, Asia and Africa.

<sup>96</sup> Vahide acknowledges the works of Abdurrahman (Nursi’s nephew) whose 39-page summary of Nursi’s life was an abridged version of an earlier one published in 1918. The other major work is by Necmeddin Sahiner; together they formulated the original and official researches of Said Nursi’s biography in Turkish Language.

also one of the first Turkish academics to write on Nursi. This work is only available in Turkish and therefore, not accessible to a broader Western readership.<sup>98</sup> However it is Serif Mardin's book *Religion and Social Change in Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (1989),<sup>99</sup> as well as his other works and articles on Nursi,<sup>100</sup> that contribute greatly not only to Nursi studies but also the study of the role of Islam in Turkey.<sup>101</sup> In fact, Mardin's book *Religion and Social Change in Turkey* was the first major academic work written on Nursi in English, and has been recognised as a major contribution to the scholarship on modern Islamic movements in general and a seminal work for the study of such movements in Republican Turkey.<sup>102</sup> It is useful in understanding the place of the Nur movement in Turkey and Nursi's influential role through the *Risale-i Nur*. Furthermore, what makes Mardin's method instructive is his 'interdisciplinary' method of reading the *Risale-i Nur* and assessing Nursi's life<sup>103</sup> and his pursuit of a layered conceptualisation of issues. According to Yavuz,<sup>104</sup> Mardin's mode of writing and thinking is similar to Foucault's notion of the archaeology of knowledge. Mardin constantly moves between different layers of interpretation and units of analysis and provides a sophisticated analysis of religion and socio-economic conditions.<sup>105</sup> Thus, Mardin's mode of analysis provides a

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<sup>97</sup> The considerable body of recollections, anecdotes, and memoirs collected by the biographer Necmettin Sahiner over many years forms one of the main sources for his life.

<sup>98</sup> An enormous literature exists on *Risale-i Nur* in Turkish.

<sup>99</sup> See Mardin. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, 1989.

<sup>100</sup> See the following by Mardin: Mardin, Şerif. 'Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Shaping of a Vocation' in *Religious Organization and Religious Experience*. Istanbul: 1982; Mardin, Şerif. 'Reflections on Said Nursi's Life and Thought' in *Islam at the Crossroads*, 2003; Mardin, Şerif. 'Bediuzzaman's Understanding of Striving (Jihad) is not Armed Struggle.' in *Panel 1 Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Sozler Publications, (1993).

<sup>101</sup> According to Hakan Yavuz, 'there is no single individual in the Turkish scholarship who has shaped the debate on religion in Turkey more than Mardin'. Yavuz is a scholar from the Department Political Science, The Middle East Centre, and Utah University. See Yavuz, Hakan. 'A Response to David Commins's Review of Mardin's Religion and Social Change In Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.' In *International Journal of Middle-Eastern Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Nov. (1992), pp. 749-750.

<sup>102</sup> Commins, David. 'Book Review of Mardin's Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (Vol. 24, No. 4, November 1992): pp.749-750.

<sup>103</sup> See Abu-Rabi. *Islam at the Crossroads*.

<sup>104</sup> Hakan, Yavuz. 'A Response to David Commins's Review of Mardin's Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.' in *International Journal of Middle-Eastern Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Nov. (1992) pp. 749-750.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

rich interpretation of the multifaceted and changing phenomenon of religion and socio-political factors.

Mardin uses the tool of sociology of religion and political history. He does not separate society and religion into two autonomous poles in order to examine the relationship between them, but rather examines the role and meaning of religion in relation to profound socio-economic changes in Ottoman society. Furthermore, Mardin's use of 'idiom' and discourse indicates that Islam has been interpreted and re-interpreted over time. Thus, he asserts that Islamic identities are neither fixed nor finished,<sup>106</sup> but are subject to transmutation due to the close bonds between Islam and social forces in an Islamic society.<sup>107</sup> Another key methodology used in Mardin's works is his use of sociological concepts like microstructures. Nursi dwelled not only on micro-structures like family relations and the ties between people at a local level (not society as a bureaucratic machine), but also considered the totality of social relations in which the human element has an important place.<sup>108</sup> This, according to Mardin, is what social researchers study under the rubric of 'micro-structures' and therefore he concludes that Nursi was well aware of the effects of more comprehensive social processes.<sup>109</sup> At the base of Nursi's anxieties were the blows that these structures received during the Westernisation of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>110</sup> Due to being only a sociological assessment of Nursi and his life and times Mardin's work does not offer a framework for an indepth conceptual assessment of the theological issues that prevailed at that time. This research aims to complete this gap by assessing the theological and philosophical questions that arose due to a heightened wave of rationality at that time.

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<sup>106</sup> See Mardin. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, 1989.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> According to Mardin: 'Ottoman culture situated human relations within an Islamic framework and established institutions peculiar to it that would assist in the emergence of human values'.

<sup>109</sup> Mardin, Serif. 'Reflections on Said Nursi's Life and Thought' in *Islam at the Crossroads*. 2003; Mardin. 'Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: The Shaping of a Vocation' in *Religious Organization and Religious Experience*, 1982.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Hamid Algar was one of the first scholars to introduce Nursi to a Western academic audience and the Muslim world alike.<sup>111</sup> Algar wrote one of the first translations of the *Risale-i Nur* in the English language.<sup>112</sup> His article titled *Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Risale-i Nur*<sup>113</sup> is one of the earliest academic papers written on Nursi in Western academia.<sup>114</sup> Algar provides an overview of Nursi's context and early life including the 'Old Said' period as well as the 'New Said'.<sup>115</sup> Algar's work is important in that it reflects the academic developments on this topic in the 1970s and establishes the political context of the secular Turkish Republic after the death of Nursi. In the decade following the death of Nursi (d. 1960) there was evidence of a popular following in various provinces in the Anatolian region and even in Istanbul and Ankara.<sup>116</sup> However, there was still no official publication of the *Risale-i Nur*, even though it was readily made available to interested individuals.<sup>117</sup> I diverged from this source in two ways. Firstly in outlining Nursi's life, Algar was limited because he was writing in the decade immediately after the death of Nursi. There were still 'antagonist attitudes' from the secularists elite toward Nursi and his followers, and it was not possible for him to have access to many court documents or records so he could not make an in-depth investigation into a true account of his life. I have, therefore, resorted to Vahide and Mardin's work on Nursi to establish relevant details of his life and context. Secondly, I differ with Algar with respect to his analysis of Nursi's methodology used in the *Risale-i Nur*. While he wonders why the *Risale-i Nur* was self-proclaimed to be the 'moon of the sun of the Qur'ān' and whether he provided

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<sup>111</sup> His article on Nursi appeared in Ahmad (ed.). *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Mawlana Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi*, The Islamic Foundation, London, 1979.

<sup>112</sup> See Nursi, Said and Algar, Hamid tr. *Sincerity and Brotherhood: Risale-i Nur Collection*. Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 1978.

<sup>113</sup> See Algar. 'The Centennial Renewer'.

<sup>114</sup> This book was used minimally in this dissertation due to it being 'out of date' as the author states in the postscript of a chapter.

<sup>115</sup> A categorisation of Said Nursi's life into the 'old' and 'new' has now been standardised in his biographies as well as historiographies.

<sup>116</sup> Algar. *Islamic Perspectives*, 1979.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. Due to an official ban placed on publishing of the *Risale-i Nur*, the academic research on Nursi, was almost non-existent, as such the secularists readily discredited attempts.



convincing proofs for the ‘modern mind of man’, what Algar fails to consider is Nursi’s unique style and expression of the already established truths of Islam and the Qur’ān.<sup>118</sup> Of relevance to this discussion is the work of a specialist on Islamic philosophy: Oliver Leeman’s consideration that Nursi’s style and exposition is hard to match, even though his arguments and content is available in other previous texts.<sup>119</sup>

Algar produced another paper on Nursi, which positioned him among the distinguished scholars of the Islamic tradition and referred to him as a *mujaddid* (reviver). This was written in light of new investigations and research, which accelerated in the next decade after the initial article written in 1970. In his article, *Bediuzzaman as the Centenary Reviver Mujaddid* (2001), Algar establishes the position of Nursi in the tradition of *mujaddid* or revivers, by sketching the great historical and scholarly personalities within the Islamic tradition that have been most influential and critical in ‘reviving Islam’ and demonstrating how Nursi fits very well in the line of *mujaddid* or revivers of the century. Since Algar’s work pioneered Nursian studies, it is important to assess. It also proves Nursi’s popular standing in the Muslim world as a renowned scholar in the modern era and the influence of his thought to the wider audiences.<sup>120</sup>

Yavuz’s book, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey: Religion and Global Politics in Turkey* (2005)<sup>121</sup> provides a good overview of the social movements relevant to Islam and politics in Turkey. He particularly looks at how the movements responded; Chapter 7 is titled ‘Print based Islamic Discourse: The Nur Movement Case and the Neo-Nur Movement of Fethullah Gülen’.<sup>122</sup> Yavuz’s discussion of Islamic movements is of relevance to this

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<sup>118</sup> See Eickelman, Dale F. ‘Qur’anic Commentary, Public Space, and Religious Intellectuals in the Writings of Said Nursi’ in Abu-Rabi (ed). *Islam at the Crossroads*, 2003.

<sup>119</sup> See Leeman, Oliver. ‘Islam, the Environment, and Said Nursi.’ In *Islam at the Crossroads*, 2003.

<sup>120</sup> Algar. ‘The Centennial Renewer’, pp. 291-311.

<sup>121</sup> Hakan Yavuz. *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey: Religion & Global Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

<sup>122</sup> This work is discussed further in chapter two and is a key text in understanding politics and religion in modern Turkish history (in late Ottoman and early Republican times). Yavuz’s book skilfully outlines the

dissertation, because he makes the critical point that the Islamic movements in Turkey should not be viewed through the lens of ‘politics’ only, but also and specifically as social movements like the Nur movement. Yavuz’s work established Nursi’s success and influence in modern Turkey’s religious and political identity. It also demonstrates through the theoretical framework, which is not confusing to ‘traditional modernist perspectives’ that Yavuz claims have a dichotomous understanding of modernity and tradition. Nevertheless, Yavuz does not discuss Nursi’s theological outlook nor does he analyse or mention prophethood in Nursi’s works and thought.

Ibrahim Abu-Rabi’s *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, which he also edited, is a critical and key text in any study on Nursi and his thought. Abu-Rabi affirms that one of the key objectives of the book is to assist the reader in understanding Nursi’s work as a modern Islamic theological text that grapples with historical and philosophical problems, and attempts to construct a Muslim identity in the modern period which meets the challenges of radical secularism. Abu-Rabi’s *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Risale-i Nur*,<sup>123</sup> provides an important recent academic research into the life and thought of Nursi.<sup>124</sup> It provides critical articles that assist in sketching the life of Nursi, including his socio-historical context, and the modernisation period in early Republican Turkey and Nursi’s reflective thought and response to the establishment of the Turkish Republic. This book brings a balance by considering the spiritual dimensions of Nursi’s life and works. The chapters relevant to Nursi’s moral and ethical framework as well as spiritual inclination are very relevant to this thesis.

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history and politics of modern Turkey in the context of the Middle East and explores relations between Turkey and the West. Yavuz argues that ‘Islamic social movements can be important agents for promoting a democratic and pluralistic society and that the Turkish example holds a long term promise for the rest of the Muslim world’.

<sup>123</sup> Abu-Rabi. *Islam at the Crossroads*, 2003.

<sup>124</sup> Turner and Hasan. *The Makers of Civilisation*, 2009.

Another important academic contribution thematically on Nursi's thought is the collection of essays on *Globalization, Ethics, and Islam*,<sup>125</sup> edited by Ian Markham and Ibrahim Ozdemir – a collaborative effort edited by a Christian theologian and a Muslim professor from the Faculty of Divinity in Ankara.<sup>126</sup> Together they examine Nursi's perspective and explore particular issues from a vantage point and establish Nursi as an influential thinker, both in Turkey and the wider Muslim world, and aim to introduce Nursi to Western academia. In this book Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars reflect upon the achievement of Nursi and apply his viewpoint to the complex issues of non-violence, dialogue and globalisation. *Engaging Bediuzzaman*<sup>127</sup> by Ian Markham, which has just recently been published and follows similar patterns to that of *Globalization, Ethics, and Islam*. In his book titled *Anatolia Junction: A Realistic Portrait of the Current Situation in Turkey* (2000)<sup>128</sup> Fred Reed explores the life of Nursi, the founder of the *Nurcu* movement in Islam. He traces the steps Nursi took throughout his life and presents the reader with a realistic portrait of today's Turkey. Thus, this book is a serious socio-political analysis of the man in context of his geography and politics. Particularly useful is Reed's description of the Islamist and Kurdish problems in Turkey. Moreover, Reed has examined Nursi through the eyes of his followers, the *Nurcus*, which provides greater insight into the sentiments of the movement. The portrait he draws of this religious leader is very positive and approaches a hagiography (or sacred biography). However, the views of Nursi's critics and opponents are not represented adequately, thus making it a limited reference source.

The contribution of the *Islam and Christian – Muslim Relations* journal's special issue on the writings of Nursi in January 2008 is of paramount importance to Nursian studies and

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<sup>125</sup> Markham. *Globalization, Ethics and Islam*, 2005.

<sup>126</sup> Ian Markham and Ibrahim Orzdemir belong to theological seminaries of Christianity and Islam respectively.

<sup>127</sup> Markham, Ian. *Engaging in Said Nursi: A Model for Interfaith Dialogue*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2009.

<sup>128</sup> Reed, Fred A. *Anatolia Junction: A Journey into Hidden Turkey*. New Jersey: Burnaby, 1999. (Originally published in 1991 by Burnaby as *A Journey into Hidden Turkey*).

provides a critical review of some of key aspects of the *Risale-i Nur* in the 14 articles that were contributed by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. The journal covers innovative research into Nursi's personal history, spirituality and theological thought. The two articles by Zeki Saritoprak explore Nursi's political and religious outlook of diversity and his contribution to the Muslim Christian relations and global peace.<sup>129</sup> The journal is significant as it introduces Nursi's works and thought to an academic audience in the English language, the research and articles were consulted and were they were further developed in Chapter Three. A more recent journal published in 2010 shows an emerging interest internationally and from different departments of Nursian studies – the *Journal of Sociology and Asian Studies* edited by Farid Alatas has over 10 articles on Nursi and sociology, making it an invaluable resource. 4 of the articles consider Nursi's impact on reconstruction of Muslim societies today particularly discussing his social-theology in relation to Muslim social and civil response.<sup>130</sup> None of these sources focus on Nursi's philosophy of prophethood.

Lasly, Ahmet Aytac's dissertation on *Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur* is a good research on this topic.<sup>131</sup> It provides a good overview of the topic from a theological perspective. The thesis is an undergraduate study and therefore the academic quality may be lacking, it is also in Turkish language making it inaccessible to English academics.

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<sup>129</sup> Saritoprak, Zeki. "Islam and Politics in the Light of Said Nursi's Writings1." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*. 19.1 (2008): 113-126; Saritoprak, Zeki. "Said Nursi on Muslim-Christian Relations Leading to World Peace." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*. 19.1 (2008): 25-37.

<sup>130</sup> Alatas, Syed F. *An Agenda for Nursi Studies: Towards the Construction of a Social Theology*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

<sup>131</sup> Aytac, Ahmet. "Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur (Said Nursi'nin Peygamberlik Anlayışı)." *Thesis On Nursi Studies*: 2011.

#### 1.4.2 Nursi's works used in the research

A significant aim of this dissertation is to expound Nursi's thought and reflections on the subject of prophethood and the Prophet; therefore, most of my research involved surveying and scanning Nursi's magnum opus, the *Risale-i Nur*.<sup>132</sup> This was a long process and involved significant amount of background reading. The readings involved close assessment of Nursi's exegesis and, in particular, *Sozler (The Words)*,<sup>133</sup> *Lem'alar (The Flashes Collection)*,<sup>134</sup> *Mektubat (The Letters 1928-1932)*,<sup>135</sup> *Şualar (The Rays Collection)*,<sup>136</sup> *Mesnevi-i Nûriye (Epitomes of Light)*,<sup>137</sup> *Ishārāt al-F'jāz fī Mazānn al-Ījāz (Signs of Miraculousness. The Inimitability of the Qur'an's Conciseness)*<sup>138</sup>, *Muhâkemat (The Reasonings)*<sup>139</sup> and *Hutbe-i Şâmiye (The Damascus Sermon)*<sup>140</sup> in order to be acquainted with Nursi's distinctive style of writing and his thought processes.

The *Risale-i Nur* collection has been an important text in preserving and re-expressing the traditional knowledge and 'idioms' from the Ottoman era.<sup>141</sup> They are an amalgamation of traditional Islamic sciences, including theology and spirituality, and are mainly organised thematically. According to Thomas Michel 'Nursi's book is the most read book after Qur'an and Hadiths'.<sup>142</sup> My approach towards the primary text has been twofold: firstly, to examine his view on prophethood from the 'aql and naql perspective; and secondly, to extrapolate his views on prophethood as a theological concept. I then conducted a focused

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<sup>132</sup> I have used both Ali Unal (Tughra and Light Inc) and Sukran Vahide's (Sozler) 2009 editions for the English translations of the *Risale-i Nur* collection through out this thesis. Where I have referred to an earlier edition or specific translation I have noted this in the footnote.

<sup>133</sup> Nursi, Said. *The Words*, 2009.

<sup>134</sup> Nursi, Said. *The Flashes*, 2009.

<sup>135</sup> Nursi, Said. *The Letters*, 2009.

<sup>136</sup> Nursi, Said. *The Rays*, 2009.

<sup>137</sup> Nursi, Said. *Epitomes of Light*, 2009

<sup>138</sup> Nursi, Said. *Signs of Miraculousness: The Inimitability of the Qu'ran's Conciseness*, 2009; Nursi, Said. *The Damascus Sermon*, Sozler Publications, Istanbul, 2009.

<sup>139</sup> Nursi, Said. *The Reasonings*, Light Inc. Publications, 2009.

<sup>140</sup> Nursi, Said. *The Damascus Sermon*, 2009.

<sup>141</sup> On the preservation of 'traditional idioms from the Ottoman past, see Mardin. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, p. 34.

<sup>142</sup> Michel, Thomas. *The Prophets: A Blessing for Humankind* from the website <http://www.thomasmichel.us/prophets.html>. See also Michel, Thomas. 'Grappling With Modern Civilization: Said Nursi's Interpretive Key.' In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers (English)* 2004.

examination of Nursi's material by reading the key sections where Nursi conceptualises prophethood. I reviewed all sections where prophethood was mentioned in order to ascertain the various contexts, patterns and ways in which the author defines this principle. The *Risale-i Nur* collection has been useful in defining Nursi's context and personal opinion. It allows us to better understand how he responded to years of exile (*gurbah*) along with the rapid socio-economic and political changes, which were occurring in the early years of the Turkish Republic.<sup>143</sup>

The *Risale-i Nur* collection is a 6,000-page commentary on the Qur'ān written in accordance with the 'idioms' of today's age and context. Since in our modern era, faith and Islam have been the objects of attacks launched under the guise of science and logic, Nursi has concentrated on proving the truths of faith in conformity with modern science through rational proofs and evidence, and by describing the miraculous aspects of the Qur'ān that relate primarily to our century. Nursi 'believed' that an essential cause in the decline of the Islamic world was the weakening of the very foundations of belief. This weakening, together with the unprecedented attacks on those foundations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by materialists, atheists and others in the name of science and progress, led him to realise that the urgent and over-riding need was to strengthen, and even save, belief. What was needed was to expend all efforts to reconstruct the edifice of Islam from its foundations of belief, and to answer those attacks at that level with a '*manevi*' or 'spiritual' *jihād*. His method was to analyse belief and unbelief, and to demonstrate through clearly reasoned arguments that it is possible to sustain faith in the modern era by

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<sup>143</sup> See Haddad, Yvonne Y. 'Gurbah as Paradigm for Muslim life: A *Risale-i Nur* Worldview' in *Islam at the Crossroads*, 2003.

following the method of the Qur'ān, which, according to him proved all the truths of existence, man and the universe.<sup>144</sup>

Nursi articulates his views in the form of easily understood stories, comparisons, careful explanations and reasoned proofs so that, rather than the truth of religion being incompatible with the findings of modern science, the materialist interpretation of those 'scientific' findings is irrational and absurd. He maintains that science's breath-taking discoveries of the universe's functioning corroborate and reinforce the truths of religion.<sup>145</sup>

The *Risale-i Nur* can be said to adopt the methodology of the Qur'ān, by its consistent discussions on God, *tawhīd*, the prophets, the Books, justice and the hereafter. Thus, it forms a logical framework that is replicated in every section of the *Risale-i Nur*. Since the Qur'ān addresses the intellect as well as humanity's other inner faculties, it directs the human to consider the universe and how it functions, in order to learn its true nature and purpose as part of creation and thus learn the attributes of its single creator and their own duties. Similarly, this resembles Nursi's method in the *Risale-i Nur*, where he explains the true nature of the universe as 'signs of its Creator' and demonstrates through arguments that all the fundamentals of belief may be proved rationally.

Nevertheless, there were some criticisms of Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur*. There is not much criticism on Nursi's outline of prophethood. Some claims made in the media suggested Nursi sought to be a 'messiah type'.<sup>146</sup> Yet his followers never viewed him as such; the criticism from the media and government can be contextualised to the times in which he lived when the secular extremism that then existed in Turkey is factored into consideration. I argue that most of the criticisms against Nursi are more political and ideological rather

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<sup>144</sup> Vahide, Şükran and Abu-Rabi', Ibrahim M. *Islam in Modern Turkey An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 323.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> See Azak. *Islam and Secularism in Turkey*, 2010.

than theological or spiritual. Despite decades of examination, no evidentiary argument connecting his theological and spiritual views has come forward against his texts. (The critical analysis of Nursi and his works will be further detailed in Chapters Three, Four and Five).

After establishing the Republic of Turkey, aggressive secularists, whose aim was the complete Westernisation of Turkey and hence the eradication of Islam from legal, social, political, economic and even family life, viewed Nursi's philosophy as rejecting modern values of reason and science, and all forms of development, innovation and progress. The secularists claimed that Nursi's aim was to bring a theocratic system to Turkey and thus destroy secularism. They accused Nursi of being against modernity and Western civilisation.<sup>147</sup> However, as he rejected the arguments from the groups both for and against modernisation, and believed that progression and innovation work hand in hand with religion.

Yvonne Haddad describes how Nursi formed a balance between these two extremes. She observes that Nursi's work calls for a strict adherence to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. However, this does not imply that the change Nursi promotes is pan-Islamist in nature.<sup>148</sup> Rather, the radical Islamic transformation that he calls for is the creation of a truly Islamic order that recognises and encourages progress through science and modern transformation.

Other criticism pertains to his spiritual piety and his views on *Sharī'a*. There were accusations that Nursi endorsed the bringing of the '*Sharī'a*'. However, the discussions in Nursi's work do not make such claims. Neda Armaner, a professor at the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Ankara, labelled Nursi as 'mentally deranged, fabricating mystical delusions and as a deviant of Islam', because she believed that he claimed the

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<sup>147</sup> Tarık Z. Tunaya, *Türkiye'nin Siyasi Hayatında Batılılaşma Hareketleri*. Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010, pp.190-194.

<sup>148</sup> Haddad. 'Ghurbaas paradigm for Muslim Life', pp. 297-313.



scientific definitions of electricity, meteorological phenomena, and physics all contradicted Islam and were therefore an expression of atheism.<sup>149</sup> This is an unfounded claim in Nursi's works. Contrary to this claim, Nursi described the radio as a 'divine bounty'. However, he asserted that radio could be properly used or misused.<sup>150</sup> (Some of these criticisms will be dealt in chapters Three and Five of this thesis).

Nursi apportioned a great deal of attention to the Prophet Muḥammad in his writings, and attempted to analyse and illustrate various aspects of his life and practices.<sup>151</sup> These discussions are concentrated in seven treatises or sections of the *Risale-i Nur*: the *Nineteenth Word*, On the Messengership of Muḥammad;<sup>152</sup> the section of the *Twenty-fourth Word* that enumerates principles to assist in understanding *ḥadīths* about the signs of the end of time, and the merits and rewards of certain actions; the *Thirty-first Word* about the ascension of the Prophet; the *Nineteenth Letter*, called the Miracles of Muhammad; the *Fourth Flash*, called the Highway of the Practices of the Prophet; the *Eleventh Flash*, called the Stairway of the Practices of the Prophet and Antidote for the Sickness of Innovations; the section of the *Fifteenth Ray* about the witnesses of prophethood.<sup>153</sup>

The overview of the current literature demonstrates a clear gap in Nursian studies on the important aspect of Nursi's conceptualisation of prophethood. In Nursi's works, after God, the eschatological aspects of prophethood, the Prophet and the hereafter are the second main topics discussed. Thus, Nursi placed lot of importance on this topic, but this is at present missing from the literature. Yet a lot has been written about Nursi's political views and his views on social change and justice, but this key issue of prophethood has been

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<sup>149</sup> Armaner, Neda. *Islam Dininden Ayrılan Cereyanlar:Nurculuk*. Ankara: Milli Egitim Basimevi, 1964, p. 17.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Khalil, Immaduddin. "Gods Messenger (PBUH) in the Risale-i Nur." *Nur Web Pages*, (2006). Was useful in recognising the specific sections on the Prophet Muḥammad.

<sup>152</sup> Nursi, Said and Vahide, Sukran trans. *The Words*. Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2009, pp. 243-52.

<sup>153</sup> Nursi, Said and Vahide, Sukran trans. *The Flashes*. Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2009; Nursi, Said and Vahide, Sukran trans. *The Letters*. Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2004. This topic is discussed in various parts of the *Risale-i Nur* for example: "Tenth Word", "Twenty-Fourth Letter" and "Thirtieth Flash".

neglected. This is a weakness in the available literature and this research hopes to close this gap.

### 1.5 Muhammad Iqbal

The Lahore-born Muslim thinker, Muhammad Iqbal, had an earlier start in his influence as a thinker and philosopher than Nursi, perhaps because of his access to the English language. Being a graduate of Cambridge University in 1906, he was well versed in English, which meant his writings were more easily available to Western academics than those of Nursi.<sup>154</sup> Iqbal's advantage of having a Western education meant he was able to engage more directly with the contemporary arguments and theories about existence, ontology, Divine Being and the social theory of religion. Although not theoretically engaged in these debates, they still adversely affected Nursi, due to the debates being alive during the unsettled socio-political climate of the early Republic. His awareness of the contemporary ontological debates is thus elucidated in his *Risale-i Nur*. This is critical in the examination of the writings of both scholars, but in particular that of Iqbal in order to expound how different contexts and experiences shape new understandings and meanings.

Although in 1966, Robert Whitemore stated in an article on Iqbal that 'one would seek in vain through most of the pages of modern European and American philosophy for a mention of his name',<sup>155</sup> there has been an escalating scholarly interest in Iqbal over the last few decades.<sup>156</sup> However, there has been little or no work on Iqbal's conceptualisation

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<sup>154</sup> Nursi wrote mainly in Ottoman, Arabic and Turkish languages and due to the socio-political situation of his environment not being favourable to the distribution of his work. This will be further reviewed in Chapter Three.

<sup>155</sup> Mir, Mustansir. *Iqbal: Makers of Islamic Civilization*, Londond: IB Tauris, 2006, p. 148.

<sup>156</sup> See Majeed, Javed. *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism*. New Delhi: Routledge India, 2009.; Masood, A. Raja. 'Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, the West, and the Quest for a Modern Muslim Identity.' *The International Journal of the Asian Philosophical Association* 1, no 1 (2008); Masoodi, Tariq. *Educational philosophy of Iqbal*. Delhi: APH Publishing, 2007; Iqbal, Muhammad and Sherwani, Latif Ahmed ed. *Speeches, Writings, and Statements of Iqbal*. Michigan: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2005; Mujibur Rahman, *Iqbal: The Great Poet Philosopher of the Muslim World*. Michigan, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2004; Rashida, Malik. *Iqbal: the spiritual father of Pakistan*. Michigan: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003; Faisal Devji. 'Imitatio Muhammad: Khomeni and the Mystery of citizenship'. *Cultural Dynamics* 13(3) (2001):

of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad. To date, there has been only one journal publication written on Iqbal's conceptualisation of Prophet Muḥammad by Annemarie Schimmel. Apart from this, this topic has not been thoroughly examined I will, therefore, review the existing literature on Iqbal and situate this study among its predecessors, hoping to contribute in this new area. I will then review and summarise Iqbal's works to abstract the relevant sections of his works where the discussion of prophethood or the Prophet Muḥammad takes place in order to ascertain his ideas of the subject and to draw some analytical comparison with the works of Nursi.

One of the most prominent studies conducted in the Western world on Iqbal was by the late Annemarie Schimmel, who discovered Iqbal early on in her career as an expert in Islamic studies. Schimmel, fluent in Farsi, Urdu, Sindhi, Pashto and Arabic among the languages of Islam, played a key role in studies on Iqbal – known as Iqbālīāt – and has contributed significantly to Western scholarship on Iqbal and his thoughts. She authored a number of books on Iqbal and has inspired a wider interest in Iqbalian studies overall. In *Gabriel's Wing: A study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*,<sup>157</sup> Schimmel provides a good introduction into Iqbal's life and ideology with a particular focus on his religious life. The book contextualises the author into the geopolitical and historical context of his life and situates Iqbal in his nineteenth century climate of British India. She also extrapolates Iqbal's main ideas on divinity in relation to the ego, among other main ideas in Iqbal's

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363-371; Noorani, Yaseen. 'Islamic Modernity and the Desiring Self: Muhammad Iqbal and the Poetics of Narcissism.' *British Institute of Persian Studies* 38, (2000); Khatana, H. Manzoor. *Iqbal And Foundation of Pakistan Nationalism*. Michigan: Book Traders, 1992; Malik, Hafeez. *Iqbal*. England: Columbia University Press, 1971. Majeed, Javed 'Putting God in His Place: Bradley, McTaggart and Muhammad Iqbal', *I Journal of Islamic Studies* 4.2 School of Oriental and African Studies, London (1993) 208-236 and Ayesha Jalal. *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 630.

<sup>157</sup> Schimmel, Annemarie. *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*. Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1989.

thought.. Schimmel works on Iqbal also include: *Classical Urdu Literature from the Beginning to Iqbāl*.<sup>158</sup> This situates Iqbal as an important writer in Urdu literature.

Schimmel has authored one of the most relevant studies undertaken on Iqbal's ideas on prophethood. In her article *The Place of the Prophet of Islam in Iqbal's Thought*, she provides a good introductory study of Iqbal's main prose and literary works that discuss Muḥammad and prophethood, and Schimmel then attempts to interpret his definitions.<sup>159</sup> According to Schimmel, Iqbal's works are filled with direct references to Muḥammad and his important role, from *Asrar* to *Armaghan*, with the exception of *Payam-i Mashriq*, where only literary allusions are found.<sup>160</sup> In this sense Iqbal fits very well in the literary traditions of poets and scholars like Rūmī, Hafiz Shirazi (1325-1389), Muhammad bin Suleyman Fuzuli (1483-1556) and others. However, according to Schimmel, the eschatological aspect of *shefa't* (intercession reserved for Muḥammad only in the hereafter), that is often referred to in his predecessors' works are not discussed in Iqbal's works.<sup>161</sup> This aspect will be further detailed in Chapter Four of the thesis. Due to the partial discussion of prophethood in this article, Iqbal's position in relation to revelation and miracles, which was completely missed, will be analysed in Chapter Four. Nevertheless, this was a useful starting point for this current study, as no such precedence existed; Schimmel's article is a springboard to ascend into greater aspects and discuss in detail what she covered summarily.

In *Javid Nama* (Eternal Note) Iqbal has a conversation with Abu Mughith al-Husayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (858-922).<sup>162</sup> Schimmel discusses first the mystical tradition of Islam in

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<sup>158</sup> Schimmel, Annemarie. *Classical Urdu Literature from the beginning to Iqbāl*. Otto: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1975.

<sup>159</sup> Schimmel, Annemarie. 'The Place of The Prophet of Islam in Iqbal's Thought', *Islamic Studies* 1, no. 4 (1962): pp. 111-130.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>162</sup> Hallāj was the famous Sufi mystic from Iraq that famously made the statement '*ana al-Haq*' or 'I am the Truth' or *Al-Haq*, even though he was in an ecstatic state upon saying it he was executed for it.

the Muslim world with an emphasis in particular on Persian mysticism and poetry. This formulates a different category altogether. Iqbal, being a new disciple of Persian and Sindhi mysticism, can also be discussed in this category. Schimmel claims that ‘Iqbal discovered Hallaj’s desire to revive the Muslim mind’, as alluded in his *Javid Nama*. He traverses the heavens on his journey in *Falak-e Mushtary* (‘On the Station of Jupiter’) and he talks to Hallāj. The conversation between Iqbal and Hallāj highlight the poet/author’s wish to contextualise the unheard voices of the great Muslim thinkers and mystics who sought development and change in society. Iqbal intelligently and selectively brings forward great scholars from the East and West to revive the Islam of the Muslims in the modern world. Although not directly related to prophethood, mystical experiences with saintly figures like Hallāj dominate Iqbal’s metaphoric ‘saviours,’ which may be likened to similar prophetic duties of revival and assistance.

Hafeez Malik’s *Iqbal, Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, also provides a valuable annotated bibliography of Iqbal’s works, with seventeen essays written by a wide range of orientalist and Muslim scholars.<sup>163</sup> They are divided into ‘Biography, Politics, Philosophy, Islamic Mysticism, and Poetry’. The essays on Iqbal’s ideas of politics will be useful in contextualising his worldview and thought and will be contrasted to that of Nursi’s in Chapter Five. Although the most important parts for this thesis, the last two sections of Malik’s book on Iqbal’s mysticism and his poetry are the weakest due to lesser coverage of the two. This study is also out-dated by more recent works on Iqbal. This review hopes to fill this gap in completing a thorough assessment of current studies. Nevertheless, it is still useful as it situates Iqbal in the broader context of history and time.

Javed Majeed brings together Islamic studies and a post-colonial literary perspective, by focusing on the interaction between aesthetics and politics. In his book Majeed analyses

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<sup>163</sup> See Malik. *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, 2005.

Iqbal's 'Islamism' through his poetry.<sup>164</sup> He argues that his notion of an Islamist 'selfhood' (*khudi*) was expressed in his verse through the interplay between poetic tradition and creative innovation. It also considers how Iqbal expressed an Islamist geopolitical imagination in his work, and examines his exploration of the relationship between the modern West and a 'reconstructed Islam'. Majeed draws upon Iqbal's personal letters, which offered an insight affecting Iqbal's inner conflicts as articulated in his poetry. Concentrating on the complexity of his works, the book rejects the standard appropriation of Iqbal into any one political agenda — be it Indian nationalism, Muslim separatism or Iranian Islamic republicanism. With its analytical and in-depth critique of Iqbal's verse and prose, this book opens a fresh perspective on Islam and post-colonialism.

Mustansir Mir's *Iqbal: Makers of Islamic Civilization* also provides an important assessment of Iqbal's life, work and influence.<sup>165</sup> Iqbal's contribution to Islamic discipline and the 'reconstruction' of Islam are highlighted. Of particular use is Mir's outline of Iqbal's biography in the first chapter, which is based on the Urdu biography of Iqbal's son Javed Iqbal, called *Zindah Ruh* (The Living Stream).<sup>166</sup> This is significant, as this biography has not been translated into English or other Western languages. Therefore Mir's chapter based on *Zidah Ruh*, will be useful in assessing Iqbal's historical context and the intellectual development, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. The book is also useful for contextualising the themes within Iqbal's works, such as his philosophical and mystical ideas, his standing as an Islamic reformist, and importantly his role and capacity in 'reconstructing Islam'.

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<sup>164</sup> Majeed, Javed. *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism*. New Delhi: Routledge India, 2009, p. 16.

<sup>165</sup> See Mir. *Iqbal*, 2006; Iqbal, Muhammad and Trans. Mir, Mustansir. *Tulip in the Desert: A Selection of the Poetry of Muhammad Iqbal*. Toronto: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2000.

<sup>166</sup> Iqbal, Javed. *Zinda Rood*. Lahore: np, 1985.

### 1.5.1 Iqbal's works and writings

Iqbal, like Nursi, assigned a significant portion of his writings to the prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad, and attempted to analyse and illustrate various aspects of his spiritual and inner life.<sup>167</sup> They are mainly in: *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*,<sup>168</sup> *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*: (2005);<sup>169</sup> and his literary compositions or the *Kullīyat* as; *Asrar-i-Khudi (The Secrets of the Self)*, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi (The Secrets of Selflessness)*, *Payam-i-Mashriq (Message from the East)*, *Bang-i-Dara (The Call Of The Marching Bell)*, *Zabur-i-Ajam (Persian Psalms)*, *Javid Nama (The Book of Eternity)*, *Bal-i-Jibril (Gabriel's Wing)*, *Zarb-i-Kalim (The Rod of the Moses)*, *Pas Chih Bayad Kard (What should then be done, O people of the East)* and *Armaghan-i-Hijaz (Gift from Hijaz)*. These discussions are concentrated in various sections of his major works.<sup>170</sup>

The above titles do not refer to prophethood directly, particularly because a lot of Iqbal's ideas were depicted through his poetic collections, which constitute the bulk of his work. Nevertheless, implicit within the texts and subject matter Iqbal discusses are the prophets and Prophet Muḥammad, in some volumes more extensively than others. His speeches, letters and statements against the Aḥmadiya Movement are especially important for this research as they directly deal with the concept of prophethood and the finality of prophethood in Prophet Muḥammad. Due to these factors I will only focus on texts that discuss 'the subject of my comparison' to Nursi's ideas and critically analyse them. I will therefore focus on the volume *Asrar ve Rumuz* series, *Reconstruction of religious thought in Islam* and *Javid Nama* in greater detail.

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<sup>167</sup> Haq, Q.M and Waley, M. *Allama Sir Muhammad Iqbal; Poet-philosopher of the East*. London: British Museum Publications Ltd, 1977. Is a useful in recognising the specific sections of Iqbal works and refining my research.

<sup>168</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. (Edited and Annotated by M. Saeed Sheikh) '*Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.' Lahore: 2nd Ed, 1989.

<sup>169</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*. München: Luzac, 1908.

<sup>170</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2000.

Iqbal's discussion and portrayal of the *ahl al-bayt* (a term often used to refer to Muḥammad's household), as an extension to the 'function' prophethood is particularly relevant. Iqbal devotes a long chapter to the martyrdom of Husayn in the *Rumuz-i bekhudi*.<sup>171</sup> Schimmel observes that for Iqbal, 'the position of Husayn in the Muslim community is as central as the position of the chapter *al-ikhlas* in the Holy Book'.<sup>172</sup> In the *Asrar-e Romooz*,<sup>173</sup> there is an eloquent literary piece on Muḥammad's daughter Fatima. There are also references made in the *Falak-i mushtari* in the *Javid Nama*<sup>174</sup> to Ali, Hasan and Husayn. The correlation of the *ahl al bayt* to the 'prophetic function' in Iqbal's works will be assessed in detailed, particularly to assess his thought in general and in particular on prophethood.

In the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal's main ideological propositions are illustrated in this text, which was initially a series of lectures that Iqbal delivered in the early part of his career and was later compiled and composed in book form. Iqbal responds to the many challenges of his day that threatened the very existence of religion; Iqbal, albeit well aware of the emerging Western anti-theist philosophies and ideologies, struggles to revisit, re-evaluate and redefine the construction of religious thought in Islam. The product of this struggle is a work of invaluable insight into the arguments for the existence of religious societies. Iqbal, although modern, is a traditionalist in many ways as he values greatly the traditions of religion – Iqbal asserts that the Qur'ān is not merely a book of ideas but also and importantly a book of action.

Chapter Five of the *Reconstruction*, on 'The Spirit of Muslim Culture', deserves closer attention, as it examines not only the ruling concepts of Islamic culture, but the idea of the

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<sup>171</sup> Iqbal, *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, p. 126.

<sup>172</sup> Schimmel, Annemarie, 'Karbala and the Imam Husayn in Persian and Indo-Muslim Literature.' Vol XII *Al-Serat* (1986): pp. 29-39.

<sup>173</sup> Mir. *Iqbal*. p. 148.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*.



finality of prophethood and the nature of revelation and prophecy. It is arguably the single most important prose work that will enable this comparative research with useful insights on Iqbal's personal theological views on prophethood, prophetology in general and the significance of Muḥammad. This, chapter will be of greater relevance from the *Reconstruction* and will be examined in detail in Chapter Four. With a forward by his son, Javid Iqbal, *Stray Reflections*,<sup>175</sup> an original collection of Iqbal's thoughts and reflections on the academic books and philosophies he was exposed to at the time, serves as an important yet succinct book into the deeper thoughts of Iqbal on general socio-political attitudes of the times reflecting his context. This book is useful to get an overview of his thoughts, feelings and reflections on history, philosophy, religion, theology and society including prophethood.

According to Akbar Ahmad, Iqbal was writing against colonialism, as a 'revolutionary' wanting change in order to 'break the shackles of slavery'.<sup>176</sup> Iqbal is multi-dimensional, which is reflected in all his poetic expressions, speeches and statements. Schimmel observes that he discusses God next to Lenin and even 'converses with Nietzsche', in his literary expressions *Gabriel's Wing*.<sup>177</sup>

One of Iqbal's key works is titled *Islam and Ahmadism*, which is most relevant to the current research and the concept of *nubuwwa*.<sup>178</sup> Iqbal's response to the Ahmadias provides the single most important piece among his literary works in the *Kullīyat*, which provides substantial proof for his ideas on *nubuwwa*, and in particular the finality of prophethood through Muḥammad. It was this open letter to Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) about the question of Qadianis that has preserved most of Iqbal's theological ideas on *nubuwwa*. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

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<sup>175</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. *Stray Reflections*. Lahore: Sh. Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1961.

<sup>176</sup> Ahmed, Akbar. *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin*. London: Routledge, 1997.

<sup>177</sup> Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 57.

<sup>178</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. *Islam and Ahmadism*. Lahore: Academy, Islamic Research & Publications, 1974.

Iqbal's lectures, notes and letters, which have been preserved by the Iqbal Academy, will also be examined and analysed in Chapter Four to survey Iqbal's response to the Ahmadias as well as his general response to *nubuwwa* as outlined in the *Reconstruction and Islam and Ahmadism* and in some of his letters. The various other letters written in European languages of German and Urdu all provide direct historical primary evidence for Iqbal's thoughts and philosophies in this period and will be reviewed in Chapter Three. In particular his letters to Atiya Fyzee and the unpublished letters to Emma Wegenast, (his two friends of Iqbal whilst he stayed in Europe) will provide an insightful impression of his 'scholastic career in Europe' as well as insight into his personal life, character and thought.<sup>179</sup> Additionally, Chapter Four will also discuss the finding of the surveys of his many essays, lectures, speeches, correspondences and statements that have not been published to outline Iqbal's historical and political context but importantly his personal and ideological position on the notion of prophethood in Islam.

To conclude, as is evident by the limited scholarly interest on Nursi's and Iqbal's individual notions of prophethood, this research aims to fill this gap in prophethood and prophetology of Islam with the inclusion of two influential modern thinkers' ideas on the topic. Further, the comparison hopes to demonstrate how the influential scholars, thinkers and social revolutionaries addressed the '*aql-naql* issue, to what extent they diverted from *naql* or '*aql*, and how the positivist nature of philosophies influenced and shaped their ideas and thought of prophethood. Furthermore, it may be emphasised that while Nursi and Iqbal used logic and intellect in their writings, and although Nursi's works exceeded that of Iqbal, nevertheless Iqbal presented his ideas through his poetry. It was in these works where he directly discussed the philosophers and modern ideas facing him. The study will therefore critically analyse how the two scholars' methodology of applying '*aql* and *naql* differed, and also highlight how they differed to other contemporaries like Ridā and

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<sup>179</sup> See Begum, Atiya. *Sir Muhamamd Iqbal*. Ed Rauf Parekh: Oxford University Press, 2011.

‘Abduh on these matters and the extent to which they were similar. These will be further assessed in the forthcoming chapters that will critically analyse Nursi and Iqbal on their method of conceptualising prophethood, which is an integral part of Islamic theology and assess their success in effectively relaying this to the modern reader. Thus, the concept of prophethood of Nursi and Iqbal, in particular from the *‘aql* and *naql* angle, will be discussed in coming chapters.

## 2 AN OVERVIEW OF PROPHETHOOD AND PROPHETOLOGY IN ISLAM

To further the synthesis procured from the previous analysis of literature, this chapter aims to contextualise prophethood and prophetology within its historical and theological discourse, thereby providing the necessary contextual discourse to examine Nursi's and Iqbal's views on prophethood. The crucial task of understanding prophethood, as outlined by Islam's primary texts, will be undertaken. The concept of prophethood as defined by prominent scholars in Islam from multiple perspectives will be surveyed, as well as the development of prophethood as a response to the historical contexts and theological challenges that scholars from the early and later Islamic eras until the modern age<sup>1</sup> were faced with.<sup>2</sup> The intent is to conduct a purposive survey of Islamic history and theology, to outline the relevant aspects of prophethood that would provide a theoretical context for a critical review of Nursi's and Iqbal's discourse on prophetology.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the pronouncements of Islamic theologians in eschatological domains related to prophethood are unique among other theologies on prophethood. It is the detailed outline of the definitions, roles, characteristics and purposes of prophethood that has seen the development of this branch within divinity studies, which keeps tradition very much

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<sup>1</sup> Islamic history is often categorised into Early Islamic History or the 'Classical Period'. The classical period stretches from the early Caliphate period, which saw the expansion of Muslim world, and also the establishment of early Islamic scholarship; preservation and collection of *aHadith*, to the codification of legal schools of jurisprudence, until the development of schools of *kalām*, as well as the mystical and philosophical schools. Most of the classical period corresponds with the 'Golden Age' of Islam. The Later period often is also called the 'Golden Age of Islam' under Umayyad Rule, and is marked by other key events such as the 'Mongol Attacks', followed by the 'Sultanate Period', which takes us through till the 'Modern Period' and the 'Post-Modern Period'. The Later period or the 'Golden Age' of Islam correlates with the Western Middle Ages Era also referred to as the Medieval Period. See Humphreys, R. Stephen. *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009; Ansary, Mir Tamim. *Destiny Disrupted A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2009. This thesis at times also refers to the medieval period as a form of historical categorisation but maintains the distinction that this period has in the Islamic context.

<sup>2</sup> This chapter will explore the notion of prophethood from its earliest inception in 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia (also referred to as the classical period), through until and beyond the middle ages and until the modern era. The theological challenges refers to the external criticisms that Islam faced upon reaching lands beyond Arabian Peninsula, these included criticisms of other faith traditions like Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism and Buddhism. As Muslims made contact with other traditions they had to address the challenges that were put forward to them especially about prophethood.

<sup>3</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all the scholarly discussions on prophethood. My aim is to outline the major concepts relevant to the objective of my research.

connected with the practice. At the heart of it is the concept of *Sunnah* that makes prophethood pivotal in the everyday life of a Muslim. This is significant as much scholarly discourse across 1400 years debated the subtle aspects of these definitions, roles and purposes of prophethood. Their definitions and understandings would have a direct bearing on the practice and life of the masses that were to follow. Such was the historical context that Nursi and Iqbal inherited, and had therefore either to adhere to, or diverge from their predecessors. The chapter will lay down the theoretical foundations to assess the nuances of their own contentions regarding prophethood and the Prophet.

Matthew Long does not hold the dominant Judeo-Christian position that most of the prophets were sent to the Israelites.<sup>4</sup> He concedes that prophecy in the Western religious tradition is a universal experience, but its dimensions are not a minority position.<sup>5</sup> Not too far from this is the Islamic position that there is no ‘chosen race’, no sect of people that are particularly favoured by the divine, rather there is a universal manifestation of God’s mercy who sent prophets to guide humanity from the dawn of human life. Adam along with Eve, for instance, are believed to be the first humans and Adam also the first prophet of God.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, across the different human epochs, prophethood has been the universal institution that has played the critical role of relaying ‘*aql*’ universal values to humanity. Even though its expressions have been particular to community and time frames, nevertheless, no people or time has been devoid of such primary relays, which constitute the fundamentals of this institution.

The Qur’ānic text echoes the essence of the universality of the prophetic institution and concedes that it is the intersecting point of all human experiences. It holds that every human community has been supported by God, in order to find the truth, and establish all

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<sup>4</sup> Long. *Rasul and Nabi*. (2007). Retrieved 17.06.13 from <http://athenaeum.libs.uga.edu/handle/10724/9766?show=full>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Idris, Jaafar Sheikh. “Is Man the Vicegerent of God?” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1.1 (1990): 99-110.

bases of its moral values through the institution of *nubuwwa*.<sup>7</sup> From a more theological tangent, it can be argued that in the origins of all monotheistic religions and/or belief systems, there is an inevitable allusion to the notion of unification of all towards an ultimate Oneness or *tawhīd*.<sup>8</sup> With this backdrop, the institution of prophethood is necessarily directed by divine instruction and spaced out in complete congruence to that higher will, which continued to reorient such worldviews towards the primary intent of each of God's messengers and prophets. It is critical to note that this prophetic agency was not achieved through individual efforts or choice of these selected beings, but has rather been a divine deliberation. As a result, Islamic *ḥadīth* literature alludes to over 124,000 prophets that were chosen and charged with a prophetic role throughout human history – 25 have been explicitly mentioned in the Qur'ān and the rest are left to speculation.<sup>9</sup>

The universality of prophethood or its outreach *en masse* was one such charge of the office of prophethood, of which Islamic theology comparatively has a unique expression and conceptualisation. Two main currents emerge about this notion: firstly, that prophets as an institution are universal; and secondly, with the exception of Muḥammad, each of their functions is particular and localised to one designated tribe or nation. This is the Islamic orthodox premise and therefrom is the notion that *nubuwwa* is a divine gift, universal in essence.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the collective body or institute of all the prophetic chains belongs to all of humanity, a view that is in contradistinction to the otherwise arguably reductionist and simplified survey of this greater prophetic institution being a local post and therefore

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<sup>7</sup> Qur'ān, 35:24.

<sup>8</sup> See Unal, Ali and Gultekin, Harun. *The Prophet Promised in World Scriptures*. New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> The Qur'ān lists 28 names in total namely; Adām (Adam), Idrīs (Enoch), Nūḥ (Noah), Hud (Hud), Salih (Shaleh), Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Lūt (Lot), Isma'īl (Ishmael), Ishaq (Isaac), Ya'qūb (Jacob), Yūsuf (Joseph), Ayyūb (Job), Shu'ayb (Jethro), Mūsa (Moses), Harūn (Aaron), Dhu'l kifl (Ezekiel), Da'ūd (David), Sulaymān (Soloman), Ilyās (Elijah), Al-Yās'a (Elisha), Yūnus (Jonah), Zakariyyā (Zachariah), Yaḥyā (John), Īsa (Jesus) and Muḥammad peace be upon them all. However, the prophethood of three of them is debated by the *mutakallimūn*. Some contend they were Prophets, while others contend they were saints. However, the consensus of the scholars is that only 25 were Prophets. Hanbal, Ahmad bin. *Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal*. 1991, Hadith No. 21257.

<sup>10</sup> Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*. New York: Paragon House, 1994, pp. 164-165.

selective in orientation, and by implication privileging a certain community or nation only.<sup>11</sup> William Chittick and Sachiko Murata maintain that prophecy in the Muslim tradition is concurrently universal and particular.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter will further elaborate on all these contentions and propositions as well as the significance of the essential prophetic characteristics, which will be examined in the third section. Islamic theology pronounces five major principles of prophethood: *isma* (infallibility), *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *tablīgh* (conveying the message), *fatānah* (prophetic intelligence and knowledge) and *āmana* (trustworthiness).<sup>13</sup> Acquiring the title and duty of prophet requires that the person in question must necessarily have a complete and unblemished set of these five essential characteristics. The absence of even one trait is not only sufficient to question the authenticity and integrity of the individual claiming *nubuwwa*, but also forms the grounds for disqualifying the claimant as an imposter. The significance of these attributes in the scholastic discourse and their different views in the nuances will be outlined. This area is of particular relevance since it became contentious in the twentieth century with the re-assessment of prophetology by revivalist scholars.

Moreover, even though the role of *‘aql* in religion has not been denied in the history of Islam, nevertheless, its role has been subject to more debates in two main periods. Firstly, there was the philosophical influence of Hellenism that led to the rise of *falsafa* contentions with the *mutakallimūn*, during the ninth and tenth centuries. Secondly followed the influence of the post-French Enlightenment period in the Muslim world, which had its influence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of the modern period. In the fourth section, I will consider the notion of *wahy* vis-à-vis divine revelation and divine books in

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<sup>11</sup> Long, Matthew. *Rasul and Nabi*, 2007. Retrieved 17.06.13 from <http://atheneum.libs.uga.edu/handle/10724/9766?show=full>.

<sup>12</sup> Murata and Chittick. *The Vision of Islam*, pp. 164-165.

<sup>13</sup> See Tahawi, Ahmad ibn Muhammad and Yusuf, Hamza. *The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi al-Aqidah al-Tahawiyyah*. Berkeley: Zaytuna Institute, 2007; Unal, Ali and Gültekin, Harun. *The Prophet Promised in World Scriptures*, pp. 27-46.

comparison to other traditions. Lastly, the contentious issue of miracles, which was revisited in recent theological debacles of Sirhindī, Shāh Waliullāh and more recently ‘Abduh and Riḍā, as the key issues pertaining to prophethood will be assessed in Nursi’s and Iqbal’s works towards the end of this chapter.

There are five main sections in this chapter that will outline the scholarly discussions. The first section will outline prophetology in light of the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*, and discuss the etymology of prophethood by assessing the textual definitions of *rasūl*, *nabī* and *nubuwwa*. In the second section, the need, possibility and permissibility of prophethood will be examined and the development of the philosophical position will be analysed, in particular, the important scholarly arguments on whether prophethood was established for the benefit of humanity in light of universality.<sup>14</sup> This is followed by an examination of the distinct characteristics of prophethood as outlined in the Islamic tradition. The section on revelation and Divine scriptures outlines the significance and correlation of revelation not only to the notion of ‘Divine Speech’ itself, but also to prophethood. The last section discusses the critical aspect of miracles and surveys the belief in miracles as an evidence of prophethood in Islam.

## **2.1 Prophethood in the Qur’ān and ḥadīth**

The primary texts of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* provide the main elements of prophethood as outlined in Islam. In this section, the terms *rasūl*, *nabī* and *nubuwwa*, will be closely analysed to highlight the lexical understanding, as well as the role of prophets and messengers in Islam. The early scholarly discourse in the creedal texts and exegeses on the notion of prophethood will also be examined. Moreover, the number of times that a word appears in the Qur’ān is significant, because at times higher repetition has been interpreted

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<sup>14</sup> The idea that God established prophethood for the benefit and welfare of humankind to make prophethood applicable and relevant to every nation and community in the world is unique to Islamic theology and distinct from the Judeo-Christian view. In the Judaic and Christian traditions prophets are viewed as distinct entities, with definitive roles, in their particular localities.



as God giving greater prominence to certain concepts. It is also important to highlight that many crucial concepts may have only been mentioned once or a few times. Thus, although the numbering generally indicates the level of importance placed upon a term, it is often subject to the scholarly discretion to decipher its absolute significance to the tradition of Islam. Scholars often trace the numerical appearances of key words and concepts in the Qurʾān to ascertain their level of standing and prominence.<sup>15</sup> The outcome of the appearances of the two key terms that are significant for this research on *nubuwwa* (prophethood), ‘*rasūl*’ (messenger) and ‘*nabī*’ (prophet), will be conducted, in order to ascertain their significance in the assessment of prophethood. The distinctions between these terms bear upon varying scholarly deductions on *nubuwwa*, and were incidentally analysed by Iqbal in his discussions on *nubuwwa*.

*Rasūl* and *nabī* are used harmoniously in many verses of the Qurʾān. The nuances in their differences, while minor, do exist. Subsequently, every *rasūl* is also a *nabī*; however, every *nabī* is not necessarily a *rasūl*. Furthermore, it is also important to note the similarities and differences of the two terms.<sup>16</sup> Although, *rasūl* and *nabī* are translated into English as messenger or prophet, there is no specific English equivalent of these Arabic terms. Due to the complex morphology of Arabic language, verbs and words, they can indicate a multitude of meanings.<sup>17</sup> For the sake of consistency in intent and meaning, the original Arabic will be used.

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<sup>15</sup> For more on significance of numbers and numerology in Islam and other world traditions, see Schimmel, Annemarie. *The Mystery of Numbers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the lexicon meaning of *rasūl* and *nabī* see Manzur, Yamal al-Din Muhammad Ibn. *Lisan al-Arab*. al-Dar al-Misriyya: Lil-taʿlif wal-tarhim, 1975.

<sup>17</sup> Arabic words are generated from a tri-consonantal root that constitutes a “super-concept,” but does not have lexical status itself; words whose meanings share the root are derived via the addition of vowels, and can therefore result in multitude of meaning. See Caspari CP, Smith WR, and Goeje MJA. *Grammar of the Arabic language*. Oxford: OxfordUniversity Press, 1898.

The word *rasūl*, ‘messenger,’ appears 332 times in the Qur’ān and it is this noun form of *rasūl* that is our focus.<sup>18</sup> It appears for the first time at 2:87.<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that the first time that the tri-literal letters of *r-s-l* (which form basis of *rasūl*) appear as a noun form is in a discussion of sending messengers by God and their rejection by their people. Remarkably, in contrast to *rasūl*, the term *nabī* appears only 75 times in the Qur’ān.<sup>20</sup> It appears for the first time in its singular form in verse 2:246 where the elder of the Children of Israel are referred to as “they appealed to a *nabī*”.<sup>21</sup> It is thus this noun form of *nabī* that is our focus. It is interesting to note that the first time that the tri-literal letters of *n-b-a* (which form basis of *nabī*) appear as a noun form is in discussion of a ‘chosen prophet’ (*an-nabī al-mukhtar*) sent to the children of Israel and their disobedience of him. The significance of the word ‘chosen’ may also be highlighted here – that prophets are ‘chosen men of God’ as directed in this very first Qur’ānic verse depicting a *nabī*.

The lexical meaning of *rasūl* is “a messenger of God with a new revelation that alters God’s laws, which were sent to a previous *rasūl*”<sup>22</sup> In the Qur’ān, four messengers are specifically mentioned as a *rasūl* – Moses, David, Jesus and Muḥammad. Messengers who are *rasūls* make significant changes to the laws but not to the theology.<sup>23</sup> The lexical meaning of *nabī* is “an appointed prophet of God with a revelation that does not alter laws set by the previous *rasūl*”.<sup>24</sup> They call people back to belief in one God and invite people to follow previous set laws. For example, prophets sent after Moses confirm his laws.

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<sup>18</sup> See Kassis, Hanna E. *A Concordance of the Qur’ān*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

<sup>19</sup> Qur’ān, 2: 87 “And We did certainly give Moses the Torah and followed up after him with messengers. And We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear proofs and supported him with the Pure Spirit. But is it [not] that every time a messenger came to you, [O Children of Israel], with what your souls did not desire, you were arrogant? And a party [of messengers] you denied and another party you killed”.

<sup>20</sup> See Kassis *A concordance of the Qur’ān*, 1983.

<sup>21</sup> Qur’ān, 2:246.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Manzur. *Lisan al-Arab*, and Cameron, D. A. *An Arabic-English Dictionary*. Beirut: Lirbairie du Liban, 1979, p. 98.

<sup>23</sup> The Qur’ān mentions other prophets such as Ismail (Ishmael) as a *rasūl* as well. This will be discussed below. See Qur’ān, 42:13; 40:78. For more on the lexicon meaning of *rasūl* and *nabī* see Ibn Manzur. *Lisan al-Arab*, 1975.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Manzur. *Lisan al-Arab*, p. 801; Cameron, D. A. *An Arabic-English Dictionary*. 1979, p. 285.

*Nabī* has numerous literal meanings: *nabī* is similar to *naba*, which means *khāber* or news. *Nabau* and *an-nabwatu* mean to be high; therefore, *nabī* is derived from *naba* (news, information) or *nabwattu* (exaltedness or being elevated). Thus, the word *naba* is used to mean a ‘way’ or ‘path’ in this regard; *nabī* is the means to or medium between God and human beings. Thus, the two terms *rasūl* and *nabī*, as discussed in the Qur’ān and *aḥadīth*, are significant for *nubuwwa*, as they imply different roles; while a *nabī*, has the role of conveying the message only, a *rasūl* is empowered further with *wahy* (divine revelation) and is often the one who brings about a new law.

The scholars of the classical period looked to the foundational texts<sup>25</sup> to ascertain how the terms *rasūl* and *nabī* were used to discern the inferences for the essential belief of prophethood in Islam. There are some notable differences in the usage of the terms in the Qur’ānic verses. Firstly, in verse 19:51: “and mention Moses in the Book. He was one chosen, endowed with perfect sincerity in faith and practicing the Religion, and was a Messenger, a Prophet”. The terms appear side by side, thus the *rasūl* will also be assigned as a *nabī*, (*wa kana rasūl a nabī ya*). Here *nabī* is referring to or connected with the *rasūl*. Having the two terms in the one sentence side by side may indicate a similar function, yet the difference is still acknowledged with the inclusion of a connecting proposition (*atef wa*), which signals their distinctness in meaning. This similar positioning of the two terms in the Qur’ānic text is repeated in verse 19:54. While referring to Ishmael’s characteristic of truthfulness, the verse calls him a “messenger, a prophet” simultaneously.

The distinction between the two terms is also indicated in the prophetic traditions. In *Sunan Tirmidhi*, there is a similar narration quoting the prophet, “the *nubuwwa* and *risāla* has been stopped by me, and there is no *rasūl* and no *nabī* after me”.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, similar to the verses previously mentioned, the Prophet also referred to *rasūl* and *nabī*

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<sup>25</sup> This refers to Qur’ān and Ḥadīth.

<sup>26</sup> Tirmidhi, I. *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*. Beirut, Dar-al-fikr, Vol II, 1931, p. 51.

separately in his narrations. However, there is some seeming textual evidence that indicates there are no differences between *rasūl* and *nabī* according to their apparent meanings. This is realised in two instances. Firstly, in verse 22:52, where the verb indicating ‘sending’ or ‘revealing’ *arsalna* is used for both *rasūl* and *nabī* with no distinction made between the two. Additionally, in verses 4:164, 2:253<sup>27</sup> and 2:285 *rasūl and nabī* are used in the unaffected meaning. In verse 2:285 it is emphasised that there is to be no distinction among the messengers (*rasūl*), “We make no distinction between any of His Messengers (in believing in them)”.

The terminological definitions of *rasūl* and *nabī* are further assessed and discussed by the scholars of theology (*kalām*), who also tried to provide their definitions based on the traditions.<sup>28</sup> The most common scholarly deduction of *rasūl* was “as the one to whom God chooses to convey His message, and assigns him as His envoy”.<sup>29</sup> In this definition, the Sunni scholars concluded that all *rasūls* are obligated to convey the message.<sup>30</sup> However, a *nabī* may or may not be assigned to convey the message, but God also chooses him.<sup>31</sup> It is also mentioned in the *kalām* books that some of the *nabī* were not assigned to convey the message, but instead they were given personal revelation or inspiration; however, this is separate from ordinary inspiration.<sup>32</sup>

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209/1210) suggests that the rationalists and in particular the Mu‘tazilites do not accept a distinction between *rasūl* and *nabī*. The rationalists assert that prophets and messengers are equals and neither category is superior.<sup>33</sup> Others, like the Sunni schools of Ash‘arī and Māturīdī, use *nabī* and *rasūl* in a constant meaning; for them,

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<sup>27</sup> Qur’ān, 2:253.

<sup>28</sup> Golcuk, S and Toprak, S. *Kalam Tarih, Ekoller, Problemler*. Konya: Tekin Kitabevi, 2001, p. 318.

<sup>29</sup> This is the Sunni position, which constitutes of scholars such as Imam Abu Hanifa, Taftāzānī, al-Ghazālī, Ash‘arī, Māturīdī.

<sup>30</sup> Golcuk and Toprak. *Kalam Tarihi, Ekoller, Problemler*, p. 318.

<sup>31</sup> Qur’ān, 10:37.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad b. ‘Umar al-Rāzī. *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī 1989, Vol. 23, pp. 48-49.

they are synonymous. They define *rasūl* and *nabī* “as the one whom God revealed to and conveyed His message to”.<sup>34</sup> However, most relay the subtle differences between *nabī* and *rasūl* in the particular functions that were bestowed upon them. According to al-Taftāzānī (1322-1390), in his famous work *Sharh al-Maqasid* (Symbols of Purposes),<sup>35</sup> a *rasūl* is “the one to whom God revealed to, and assigned him as His messenger, and also gave him a book, and a new set of laws (*Sharī‘a*)”.<sup>36</sup> In Taftāzānī’s definition, a *rasūl* becomes the envoy with a revelation who brings a new *Sharī‘a* or he may simply remind his community of the previous existing *Sharī‘a*. In most instances, though, the canonical laws or the previously forgotten *Sharī‘a* will be bought back or revived.<sup>37</sup> According to classical scholars, most of the prophets after Moses were in this station, as no new laws were revealed but rather the *nabī* all called for the revivification of the Torah.<sup>38</sup> Alban Widgery applied these definitions in context of the Biblical text: Malachi was a prophet (*nabī*), but Moses was more than a prophet (*rasūl*). Thus, in Matthew 9:9 we have: “But wherefore went ye out? To see a prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet”.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand, the *nabī*, according to Taftāzānī, is one who informs people about the revelation, but does not possess independent law or *Sharī‘a*, rather he adheres to the earlier laws and further explicates them to their communities. A *nabī* may also receive distinct *wahy* (divine revelation) on a particular aspect: most of the *nabīs* of Bani Israel<sup>40</sup> are in this category. Al- Ghazālī does not detail the nuances of *rasūl* and *nabī*, however, he focuses

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqasid*, Taftazani, Masud ibn Umar. *Sharh al-Maqasid: Maqasid fi ilm al-kalam li Sad-al-Din Umar al-Taftazani*. Istanbul, Matb. al-Hajj Muhrim Efendi al-Bosnawi, 1887 and Taftazani and Elder. *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, p. 173.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Taftazani, Sa’d al-Din and Edgar Elder. *On the Creed of Najm Al-Din Al-Nasafi*, p. 173.

<sup>38</sup> See Al-Ghazali. *Some Religious and Moral Teachings of Al-Ghazzali*. Baroda: Lakshmi Vilas P. Press Co., 1921. Accessed from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/1845/104797> on 2013-06-10. See also Golcuk and Toprak. *Kalam Tarih, Ekoller, Problemler*, p. 319.

<sup>39</sup> Widgery, Alban G. *Living Religions and Modern Thought*. New York: Round Table Press, Inc, 1936, pp. 245-289.

<sup>40</sup> Banī Israel is the Qur’ānic title referring to the children of Jacob, whose other name was also Israel, thus children of Israel. It is important to note, as mentioned in the Qur’ānic verses, there is a clear recognition that many of the prophets and messengers came from the children of Jacob and many of the Qur’ānic prophets mentioned also refer to these prophets.

on the ‘spiritual and moral mastery’ of prophethood as ‘physicians of morality and spirit’.<sup>41</sup> He states that the “properties of actions have been discovered, like discoveries in medicine, but by the physicians of the heart, the saints and the prophets. If you will not listen to them you must suffer the consequence”.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, according to Shāh Waliullāh, the status and definition of a prophet is upon a person’s declaration that divine wisdom has decreed to send him to the people to make him a cause for their guidance, and God orders them to submit to him totally.<sup>43</sup> There is also a ‘confirmation among members of the *mala’ a’la* [that is, the heavenly host comprising elite angels and souls of departed prophets and other qualified people] with whom he is in constant contact about Divine pleasure with anyone who obeys him and vice versa, such an individual is a *nabī’*. The greatest in this group is one charged with an additional mission of making his community a model for humanity. Such a person is called a *rasūl*.<sup>44</sup>

After surveying the verses of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth*, it is imperative to examine the early scholars, who were instrumental in the formulation of the creedal texts of Islam, outlining the key beliefs, including prophethood and revelation, into creedal tables and lists based on the primary sources. It was in the classical period of Islam, post-Caliphate era 631 that early Muslim scholars elaborated on key concepts of beliefs, including prophethood, and codified the terms *nabuwwa*, *Khātam al-Nabiyyīn*, *risāla* and *rasūl* as important parts of the faith in Islam, thus making prophethood an important pillar of *īmān* (faith). These categories of classical texts include a survey of the creedal lists, one of which was *The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi*.<sup>45</sup> These texts formulated and coined the definitive Islamic belief in prophets, prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad in the early classical period (700-1400).

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<sup>41</sup> Ali, Syed Nawab tr. *Some Moral and Religious Teachings of al-Ghazzali*. Lahore: Ashraf Press, 2nd. ed. 1944, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Baljon. “Prophetology Of Shah Wali Allah,” pp. 69-79.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, see also Dadoo. ‘The Institution of Prophethood for Three Sunni Scholars Retrieved.’

<sup>45</sup> See Tahawi and Yusuf. *The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi*, 2007.

According to Hamza Yusuf, “religion is ultimately based on and begins with experience”.<sup>46</sup> Thus, what Prophet Muḥammad presented to the world, “a simple, terse, and intoxicating formula of monotheism, he acted not as a theologian but a prophet in the presence of the Divine, and in complete communion with the Divine”.<sup>47</sup> Yusuf maintains it was to this that others around him responded, as they had no interest in “abstruse debates about free will and fate quiddities”.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, as mentioned and argued in the previous chapter, prophethood, alongside other areas of *kalām* or theology became the key engagement of scholarly vocation. The historical and cultural developments of contact with the wider world, philosophies and ideas were culminated into these discourses to re-interpret religion in view of these later developments. It was this contact with other traditions that also encouraged early scholars to codify the Islamic faith edicts into creedal statements, like that of Imam Ṭaḥāwī (843-933) and Imam Nasafī (d. 1310).

Imam Ṭaḥāwī, in his renowned *The Creed of Tahawi*, outlines 31 (out of 130) aspects of faith alluding to the person of Prophet Muḥammad, belief in prophets, and the vocation of prophethood. Some of the key aspects listed are: the necessity to believe in Muḥammad’s finality; the necessity of the finality of revelation; the belief in the intercession of Muḥammad on the Day of Atonement; the necessity of belief in all other prophets; the necessity that prophets were all brothers of the same father but different mother; and the necessity of the miracles (gifted only to prophets as a sign from God).<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, according to Imam Nasafī, prophethood is a part of faith (*īmān*), and accordingly, it is necessary to believe in the sending of messengers and in the wisdom of sending the messengers. Just as they have been famously labelled as the ‘source of good news’ (*bushra*), they are also described as a ‘warner’ (*nadheer*), and a guide (*hadi*) to

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<sup>46</sup> Tahawi and Yusuf. *The Creed of Imam Al-Tahawi*, p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp. 48-81.

humanity, who explains the matters related to this world and the hereafter. Furthermore, Nasafi asserts, like Ṭahāwī: all prophets are aided with ‘evidentiary miracles’ (*mu’jiza*) that contradict customary ways; the first prophet is Adam and the last, final and most perfect one is Muḥammad; belief in numerous prophets sent to all people, all of whom were narrators of the divine ‘veracious and sincere’.<sup>50</sup>

To conclude, the primary texts of Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* were pivotal for assessing the understanding of prophethood in Islam. Evidently, the role of prophets from a Qur’ānic perspective is very important, as they are seen as the ‘official invite to belief’ from God and their acceptance or rejection is seen as the acceptance and rejection of God. The analysis of the terms *rasūl* and *nabī*, and their similarities as well as differences, are pivotal in understanding the role of prophets and messengers in Islam, as outlined by its main sources. Early scholarly discourse is also important in the creedal texts and exegeses on the notion of prophethood.

## **2.2 The need, possibility and permissibility of prophethood**

There are three main points of view in relation to the sending or not sending of prophets by God: the necessity (*wājib*), permissibility (*jaiz*) and possibility (*mumkin*) of sending prophets.<sup>51</sup> There are many traditions and verses that point to the essential need of *nubuwwa*. Traditions of Prophet Muḥammad created a demarcation in the theology on *nubuwwa* in Islam from previous traditions. The Prophet is ascribed to have stated that *nubuwwa* is “the best gift that God gave to human kind”,<sup>52</sup> and it was only through *nubuwwa* “that humanity could save itself from darkness and deviation”.<sup>53</sup> In another tradition, Prophet Muḥammad summarises the role of *nubuwwa*, “to provide guidance to

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<sup>50</sup> Tahawi and Yusuf. *The Creed of Imam Al-Tahawi*, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Aytaç, Ahmet. *Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur: (Said Nursi’nin Peygamberlik Anlayışı)*. Dissertation, Ankara University, 2011, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Bukhari. *Sahih Bukhari*, Vol. 7, Hadith No. 23, p. 186.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



humanity, as angels cannot guide humans because of their nature”,<sup>54</sup> therefore, the prophets due to their physical nature have the capacity to empathise with humanity and share all their feelings and similar passions, but channel them in the best way, so humanity has a guide in controlling their natural creational instincts (*fiṭrī*).

Furthermore, although human beings had reason to decipher the reality of life and existence of the Divine, many scholars still deemed human reason insufficient on its own. This is one of the key substantial differences between the two major Sunni theological schools of Māturīdī and Ash‘arī. Thus, some argued, “human reason has a key role in the discovery of reality”,<sup>55</sup> but most assumed “it is insufficient to find the ultimate reality about life and God without divine revelation (*wahy*)”.<sup>56</sup> Al- Ghazālī contends that “without prophetic guidance human civilization is impossible”; if humanity reaches elevated levels in civilisation, it is through prophetic guidance only.<sup>57</sup> Thus, humanity’s “absolute need and reliance on prophethood, and revelation” is necessary for the flourishing of civilisation.<sup>58</sup>

Additionally, it is through prophethood that the reality and the “good news of the end of life, judgement day and meeting with God is announced”.<sup>59</sup> Thus, without revelation and prophets, this key aspect of belief in the hereafter and concept of divinity would not have been understood. The other key benefit of sending prophets is their role in reasserting the same faith (*īmān*) to humanity and reminding them of their contractual promise with God.<sup>60</sup> Religion and faith are one according to Islamic theology, thus the variances are only in the ordinances and laws that were changed due to times and contexts. As such, the

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<sup>54</sup> Gülen, Fethullah. *The Messenger of God Muhammad: An Analysis of the Prophet’s Life*. Somerset: The Light, Inc, 2005, p. 119.

<sup>55</sup> Cerić and Al-Attas. *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, 1995.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Al-Ghazālī. *Al-Iqtisad fi al-F tiqad*: p. 39.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Golcuk and Toprak. *Kalam Tarih, Ekoller, Problemler*, p. 316.

theologians like Nursi argue radically in their contexts that the “institution of prophethood is one”, and prophetic duty involved the deliverance of guidance to humanity through the reiteration of the same message of ‘belief in one God’ and ‘preaching of righteousness’.<sup>61</sup> Prophets are thus here to remind humanity of their contractual promise made to God in the realm of spirits and all prophets, including the final one Muḥammad, came to remind humanity of this agreement.<sup>62</sup>

In short, the Ash‘arīte and Māturīdī scholars agree that, since the intellect cannot find or identify divine responsibilities of its own accord, nor can they determine right from wrong or the consequences of choosing evil, it is only through prophetic guidance that can humanity attain ‘sound belief and also learn about Oneness of Divinity’.<sup>63</sup> This creates the need to worship the one God, and behave morally in accordance with prophetic injunctions of good and bad ethics. They thus concluded that from its commencement, *nubuwwa* has had a great effect on the formation of moral values for humankind. The scholars deduced that prophethood had three main benefits for humankind: physical, spiritual and learning devotional practices. Conclusively, the Sunni scholars agreed that *nubuwwa* has a great benefit for humanity and human beings need and rely on the guidance provided from the institution of *nubuwwa*.

Another dialectic regarding *nubuwwa* was the issue of whether God is ‘obliged’ to send prophets to humanity. This issue was assessed through two different viewpoints: the first was if the sending of prophets by God is permissible or binding (*wājib*); the second was the possibility (*mumkin*) of God sending prophets.<sup>64</sup> While some scholars maintain that

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<sup>61</sup> Aytaç, Ahmet. “Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur”, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Frank, Richard M., and Dimitri Gutas. Classical Islamic Theology: The Ash‘arites: Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalam. Vol. 3. Variorum, 2008. and, Sharif, Miyad Muhammad, ed. *A history of Muslim Philosophy*. Vol. 2. O. Harrassowitz, 1966.

<sup>64</sup> This is related to deeds of God. There are some conducts for God that are possible and some that are impossible. For example we cannot imagine the non-existence of God, or theological principles that would contradict His essential qualities, so the sending of *nubuwwa* is not against His essential qualities.

sending prophets was *wājib* (mostly the Mutazalite and the Shiite schools although they differ in their reasoning),<sup>65</sup> this view is opposite to the majority, who posit that ‘his own subjects cannot bind God to definitive actions’.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the permissibility argument or *mumkin* was asserted instead.

The Mutazalite claim is that, from the viewpoint of *akhlāq* (moral ethics), “it is compulsory for God to send prophets”, because, God has to want the “ultimate benefit for His subjects”.<sup>67</sup> Thus, God’s sending is also deemed as *aslah*,<sup>68</sup> which is to correct the people for the betterment of the society and the people. Since God has to do what is better, therefore it is *wājib* upon him to send prophets.<sup>69</sup> It should be noted that in the verse 17:15 the Qur’ān declares that ‘We never punish until We have sent a Messenger (to give warning)’, thus highlighting the Divine intention and purpose in the ‘sending’ of prophets. In short, according to the *Mu’tazalites* it is *akhlāqī* (morally binding) for God to send prophets for the benefit of people (*iṣlāḥ*). Similarly, the Shiites also claim it is *wājib* or a bestowal (*lutf*) from God to send prophets to humanity. The Ahl al-Sunnah maintain that although nothing is ‘binding’ upon God, rather the sending of prophets is an emanation of God’s mercy (*rahma*) and *lutf*.<sup>70</sup>

As for the Muslims philosophers like Ibn Sīnā and al-Farābī, the institution of *nubuwwa* should be evaluated or discussed with understanding of general harmony of this universe –

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<sup>65</sup> See Martin, Richard C. “A Mutazalite Treatise on Prophethood and Miracles: Being Probably the Bab Ala L-nubuwwah from the Ziyadat Al-sharh by Abu Rashid Al-Nisaburi (died First Half of the Fifth Century AH).” PhD diss., New York University, 1975; Ess, Josef van. *Skepticism in Islamic Religious Thought*. Al-Abhat (1968), pp. 1-18.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> See Abd al-Jabbar ‘Abd al-Karim ‘Uthman (ed.), *Sharh al-Usul al-Khamsa (The Explication of the Five Principles)*. Cairo, Maktabat Wahba. 1965; Martin, Richard C., Mark R. Woodward, and Dwi S. Atmaja. *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mutazalite from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1997.

<sup>68</sup> *Nubuwwa* is for the benefit of people; it requires one person to represent the institution of *nubuwwa*. So, the prophet teaches people about the laws of God, see Ahmad Sirhindi. *Ithbāt an-Nubuwwa – The Proof of Prophethood*. Istanbul, Turkey: Hakikat Kitâbevi, 2001; Golcuk and Toprak. *Kalam Tarih, Ekoller, Problemler*, p. 324.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 331.

that is, the universe is created as a result of God's divine compassion.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the sending of prophets is *wājib* upon God, similar to natural laws.

Contrary to the other schools, the Sunni hold that the sending of prophets is related to God's will (*irāda*). God is not compelled to send prophets, as He does what He wishes; everyone will be called for accounting of their deeds, but no one can ask any questions of God. On this basis they refute all the schools, including the philosophers, Shiite and the Mutazalite.<sup>72</sup> They acknowledge that *nubuwwa* is permissible (*jaiz*) for God, but not *wājib*.<sup>73</sup> God is not obliged to reward the good or punish the bad; He wanted to create humanity, but He is not obliged to offer them liability or keep them responsible for religious duties. Setting the laws, revealing the rulings (*aḥkam*) and establishing the institution of *nubuwwa* is evidently not compulsory upon God.<sup>74</sup> They maintain that

If God did not send the prophets how would humanity get to know Him (God) and worship Him the way He deserves? How would they know which path leads to *jannah* (heaven)? How would they establish harmonious societies, civilizations, and justice systems?<sup>75</sup>

The Sunnis conclude that, since there is justice, civilisation and social harmony, this is a profound proof that God has sent prophets. Surah 21, Verse 107 reinforces this position “We sent thee not save as a mercy for the peoples”.<sup>76</sup> In summary, for the Sunnis, sending prophets is a direct mercy of God – a gift to humanity.

The second major discourse was the possibility of sending prophets; the scholars also have varying points with regards to this. According to al- Ghazālī sending prophets is quite

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<sup>71</sup> The universe works in harmony because it is a reflection of God; *nubuwwa* is not different from this harmony, thus they see the institution of *nubuwwa* within their understanding of their *sudur* (theory), which states that since the universe is created for God's mercy or favour, and therefore *nubuwwa* should also be seen the same way.

<sup>72</sup> Golcuk and Toprak. *Kalam Tarih, Ekoller, Problemler*, p. 332.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> The Qur'ān in many verses elaborates that revelation; guidance is a form of mercy from God. However, it also specifies prophets Muḥammad and Jesus as a ‘mercy’ for humanity, as in the quoted Qur'ān, 21:107.

possible (*mumkin*) according to the intellect; he further posits that there are no contradictions or impossibilities of sending prophets for the intellect.<sup>77</sup> Al- Ghazālī explains this topic in his *al-Iqtisad* (being in balance, following the Ahl al-Sunnah): sending a prophet and its possibility is related to the attribute of *kalām* (speech).<sup>78</sup> If God has the attribute of speech or *kalām*, this indicates the existence of the institution of *nubuwwa* and the existence of *wahy* (divine revelation).<sup>79</sup> Thus, it was argued that the very existence of the attribute of *kalām* is a clear fact that it is approved by *naql* tradition.<sup>80</sup> The attribute of speech (*kalām*) is not *muhdes* (something that happens later) and it exists with God.<sup>81</sup> Sending prophets and bestowing revelation to them is related to the will of God, and it is not a deferment of God’s speech, “for God it is beyond time, He speaks all the time”.<sup>82</sup> For this reason, the institution of *nubuwwa* is within the scope of *mumkin*.

Textual evidence used in support of these arguments is the Qur’ānic verses, which indicate that prophets and messengers were sent to humanity across time for every nation and tribe. Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, in his *Musnad*, has mentioned that “Allah sent 124,000 Prophets (*anbiyā*) and from among them 315 were the Messengers”.<sup>83</sup> The following verse reiterates this tradition:

Surely, We have sent you as Messenger with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings (of prosperity in return for faith and righteousness) and a warner (against the consequences of misguidance); and there has never been a community but a warner lived among them.<sup>84</sup>

In the following chapter, I explore how both Nursi and Iqbal, despite being from the Sunni tradition, approach the concept of prophethood differently due to their methodology.

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<sup>77</sup> Ghazzali, and Aladdin Mahmud Yaqub. *Al-Ghazali’s Moderation in Belief: Al-Iqtisad fi al-Itiqad*. Np, 2013, pp. 219-249.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.222.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> *Naql* refers to revelation or *wahy* and sayings or ḥadīth of the Prophet Muḥammad.

<sup>81</sup> The attribute of speech or *kalām* existed with God as *kalām-i nafsi* in eternity for this reason it is uncreated. God can speak without letters, words, noise and there is no contradiction and impossibility.

<sup>82</sup> Golcuk and Toprak. *Kalam Tarih, Ekoller, Problemler*, p. 332.

<sup>83</sup> Hanbal, Ahmad bin. “*Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal*,” 1991, Hadith No. 21257.

<sup>84</sup> Qur’ān, 35:24.

Although Iqbal is mostly silent on theological matters of prophethood, but for the notion of finality, Nursi affirms his predecessors on the mercy in sending prophets. Nursi states “Pre-Eternal Power, which does not leave ants without a prince, or bees without a queen, certainly does not leave mankind without prophet”.<sup>85</sup> Thus the *mutakallimūn*, and philosophers, logically outlined the need, possibility and permissibility of prophethood. The further implications of these will be assessed in the forthcoming chapters on Nursi and Iqbal. The other unique conceptualisation is that of the special characteristics and qualities given to prophethood in Islam.

### 2.3 Characteristics and qualities of prophethood

The specifications and unique qualities belonging to the institution of prophethood are quite significant in Islam and its religious discourse. The scholarly discussions in this area acknowledge common unique qualities. This is distinctive amid all the traditions, and even among the monotheistic traditions. This notion of ‘universality’ of prophets connotes the common values and beliefs of basic right and wrong for humanity across geographies, nations and tribes throughout human history. Additionally, this also asserts that the main message of these prophets was also universal and similar: belief in the absolute oneness of God often known as *tawḥīd*, the oneness of His revelation (*wahy*) and also the oneness of worship or *ibada* of the One Divine being. The following tradition of Prophet Muḥammad affirms this: “The prophets are brothers of different mothers, but their religion is one. Of all men I am the most deserving to be the brother of Jesus Son of Mary, for there was no prophet between me and him.”<sup>86</sup> This implies that all prophets taught the same main principles of faith, (*tawḥīd*, the hereafter, etc), but only their laws or *Sharī‘a* were

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<sup>85</sup> Nursi and Vahide. *The Letters*, p. 544.

<sup>86</sup> Ibn, Ḥanbal A. M, and al-Hindī AD. A. H.D. Muttaqī. *Al-musnad: Wa Bi Hāmishihi Muntakhab Kanz Al’ummāl Fī Sunan Al-’aqwāl Wa’l-’a’ māl, Li’l-Shaykh Al-’allāma ’alī Al-Muttaqī Al-Hindī*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1969, Vol. 17, Hadīth No. 1033.

different.<sup>87</sup> This is re-affirmed with the Qur'ānic verse 4:163, which highlights the commonality of revelation among all the prophets.

We have revealed to you (O Messenger), as We revealed to Noah and the Prophets after him; and We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Prophets who were raised in the tribes, and Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon; and We gave David the Psalms.

The prophets therefore taught the same essentials of belief. In the verse 42:13 it is stated that “God revealed the same principles of faith to Moses, Jesus”. Although the *din* or religion was essentially the same, the individual laws or *Sharī'a* were not.<sup>88</sup> The Qur'ān (16:36) affirms there was a messenger sent to every community, “to convey the primordial message: worship God alone, and keep away from false deities and powers of evil”.

It is as a result of the completion of prophethood with Muḥammad that Islamic theology developed the concept of *Sunnah* and gave it primacy only second to the Qur'ān. Thus, Muḥammad's role in finalising prophethood, as the ‘seal of prophets’ (*Khātam al-Nabiyyīn*),<sup>89</sup> became the subject of the discourse of the scholars of the medieval period, and an important aspect of the argumentation for his eminence as the ‘leader of the prophets’ as well as the ‘seal’. Thus, humankind was in a way given the ‘final prototype’ with the complete final message – the Qur'ān.

Claims that restrict the institution of *nubuwwa* as solely belonging to one particular group are often refuted by *kalām* scholars, like Taftāzānī, who based his argument on the notion of *wahbī* which posits that prophethood is a ‘divine gift sent to all humans’.<sup>90</sup> Even though individual communities received certain specific prophets, other prophets were sent more broadly. In Islam, only Muḥammad's prophetic mission is considered ‘universal’ as he was

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Here religion refers to essentials of faith.

<sup>89</sup> The term is used in Islamic theology to connote the finality of prophethood with Prophet Muḥammad as stated in the Qur'ān in 33:40.

<sup>90</sup> Taftazani and Elder. *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, p. 180. Golcuk and Toprak. *Kalam Tarih, Ekoller, Problemler*, p. 319.

the last of the prophets and messengers.<sup>91</sup> This is against the Judaic claim that the institution of *nubuwwa* belongs exclusively to the Israelites,<sup>92</sup> and hence, their rejection of prophets from other nations. Similarly, Christians also reserve prophethood only until the ministry of the Messiah – Jesus, although in some Christian readings the prophetic concept is more broadly defined to include all prophetic type people or leaders who appear continuously throughout human history.<sup>93</sup>

Another point of specification for prophethood is that of the language. In Islamic theology it is accepted that God did not assign a definite language to reveal his message, rather He revealed His message according to the language of the prophet's community and nation. There are some scholars who refer to the prophecies and true facts included in the Vedas, which they claim are similar to the Qur'ān in spirit and which were revealed in ancient Sanskrit language.<sup>94</sup> This is 'why prophets conveyed the message of God in the language of their tribes and nations' as this is a 'natural way', because, if God conveyed His message in different languages, there would be the possibility of confusion among the people.<sup>95</sup> It is widely known that names like Musa, Ibrahim, Isa etc. are not Arabic names and for the exact reason that they are 'ajamee or foreign and not 'arabee or Arabic – they reflect common Arabic grammar rules in a unique way. These names are all mentioned through out the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān thus affirms that 'every prophet was sent in the language of his or her nation'.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> See Sam Shamoun. *Jews, the Messiah, and the Prophet of Islam* quoted in, Musick, Erich and Mr Leitner. "Allah and God-Different." np, 2002.

<sup>93</sup> Marshall, D. "Muhammad in Contemporary Christian Theological Reflection", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, (2013): 24:2, 161-172.

<sup>94</sup> Unal and Gultekin. *The Promised Prophet*, pp.437-419.

<sup>95</sup> Gülen. *The Messenger of God Muhammad*, p. 119.

<sup>96</sup> Qur'ān, 14:04.



The final specification is that of *tafḍīl*, which means deeming one worthy over the other or excelling in one area over others.<sup>97</sup> According to the Ash‘arīte and Māturīdī scholars, there is no superiority, change or insufficiency in the institution of *nubuwwa*; *nubuwwa* is the same, for all the prophets.<sup>98</sup> However, there are some verses in the Qur’ān that suggest that some prophets excel over others in reference to personal perfections (*kamāliyat*), certain characteristics or specialities.<sup>99</sup> Fethullah Gülen notes “all prophets have some share in praiseworthy qualities, but each surpasses, on account of his mission, the others in one or more than one of those qualities”.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, the Qur’ān describes some prophets as *ulu’ azam* or ones who had greater or fulfilled great missions as evident in verse 46:35. There is, however, some differences in the degree of prophets, in particular the *ulu’ l a’zm* (The Greatest Ones). *Ulu’ l a’zm* prophets are specific only to Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad.<sup>101</sup> Among Muslim scholars, Prophet Muḥammad is pronounced as the best among them; this is based on general consensus (*ijmā’*). This is closely followed by *rasūls* who are greater than *nabīs*.

Accordingly, all prophets have some share in these praiseworthy qualities, but each surpasses, on account of his mission, the others in one or more of those qualities. Prophet Muḥammad has all of the qualities mentioned above, except for being the father of prophets. Gülen maintains that, because of the ‘universal nature of his mission’, he is

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<sup>97</sup> *Tafḍīl* – issue of excelling in a particular area among the prophets.

<sup>98</sup> Ghazzali. *Al-Ghazali’s Moderation in belief*, Golcuk and Toprak. *Kalam Tarih, Ekoller, Problemler*, p. 319.

<sup>99</sup> Qur’ān, 2:253.

<sup>100</sup> This is based on a hadith mentioned in Bukhari where the Prophet lists five things that were not given to any other prophet. Al-Bukhari. *Sahih Bukhari*, Book 1 Vol. 7, Hadith No. 331. Gülen. *The Messenger of God Muhammad*, p. 119.

<sup>101</sup> Special favours were bestowed on “each prophet and community according to the dictates of the time”. For example, Adam was favoured with knowledge of the names (the keys to all branches of knowledge), and being the first one was entitled as the pure one (*safi-ullah*). Noah was endowed with steadfastness and perseverance, and had the role of embarking humans upon the ship of a new civilisation. Abraham was honoured with God’s intimate friendship and being the father of numerous prophets earned him the epithet of friend of God (*khalilullah*). Moses was given the ability to administer, and was exalted by being addressed by God directly, popularly entitled as ‘the one whom God spoke to’ (*kalimullah*), because God spoke to him in a special way. Jesus was distinguished with patience, tolerance and compassion; he became the emblem of spirituality known as ‘spirit from God’ (*rūhullah*). Lastly as the most beloved of God, Muḥammad was *habibullah*. In this respect, these *ulu’ azam* prophets were *rasūls* as well as *nabis*.

further distinguished by the fact that he was sent to ‘all of humanity,’ as related in verses 21:107, 2:253 and by Sahih Bukhari.<sup>102</sup>

Islamic theology has coined unique institutions similar, but different, to other monotheistic or polytheistic traditions. It is most similar to the Judeo–Christian tradition in its beliefs, yet in Islam there is a clear outline and definition of the role and institution of prophethood as God’s envoys and special messengers to guide humanity back to God and moral conduct (such as the prophet Lot’s aversion of homosexuality). Therefore, in Islam the Prophet’s most essential role has been that of a guide (*hadi*) revealed to all nations and tribes.<sup>103</sup>

One of the central understandings of prophethood is related to the humanness of the prophets, that is that all the prophets were essentially human.<sup>104</sup> The prophets could not have a separate physical creation than other people’s lives; they walk, eat and drink just like all humans. Accordingly, the prophets do not transcend normal human boundaries while conveying the message. In other words, the institution of prophethood, revelation, does not make them a deity or ascribe divinity to them. This is an important understanding and is debated in prophetic studies in medieval scholastic discourse as a common, prevalent understanding. Even in Judeo–Christian understanding were instances of deification: Uzair also known as Azra or Ezra was often semi-deified after Babylonia, where this prophet was instrumental, and there were assertions that he was given the epithet of one like ‘son of God’.<sup>105</sup> The concept of ‘son of God’ or the divinity of Christ is a central belief in Christianity.<sup>106</sup> Thus, in spite of these realities, the early *mutakallimūn*

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<sup>102</sup> Gülen. *The Messenger of God Muhammad*, p. 120; Al-Bukhari. *Sahih Bukhari*, Book 1 Vol. 7, Hadith No. 331.

<sup>103</sup> Qur’ān 6:130-131.

<sup>104</sup> For the humanness of the prophets, look at Qur’ān: 2:151, 3:164, 23:33 and 11:37.

<sup>105</sup> In the Islamic tradition Uzair is not considered a prophet, the Qur’ān however makes reference to Uzair as being revered as the ‘son of God’ by the Israelites at verse 9:30. Ibn Kathir’s *Stories of the Prophets* also refer to Uzair. Kathir, Ibn and Sayed Gad. El-Mansoura tr. “*Stories of the Prophets.*” Egypt: Dar al-Manarah, 2000.

<sup>106</sup> Gerberding, R and Cruz, J. H. M. *Medieval Worlds*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004, p. 55. There are debates even amongst the Christian theologians about this part of scripture, nevertheless, this

fervently postulated elaborate discussions of the humanness of the prophets as a key demarcation from earlier readings of prophethood in their era. Many Qur’ānic passages to support this were noted, in particular verses 18: 110 and 41:6: “Say: ‘I am but a mortal like you’”.

The scholars concluded that prophethood is a trust given to the prophets. According to the Māturīdī scholars, prophethood is a reality (*haqīqat*) and it continues after the demise of the prophets as they are still called prophets after death.<sup>107</sup> According to the Ash‘arīte scholars, however, prophethood is a divine decree or verdict (*al-ḥukūm*)<sup>108</sup> as it is only present during the life of the prophets and they do not continue after their demise.<sup>109</sup> In short, there is no difference between humans and prophets, with the exception that prophets have the best character and access to divine revelation, which others do not. Due to this and the mission of conveying the message, they are given additional attributes. Due to God’s choosing them specifically, they have a different creation and among humanity they appear as the best of humankind.<sup>110</sup>

Prophethood requires certain added attributes, unique titles and particular designations among common people. These particularities are due to their role as envoys of the divine; therefore, they are reinforced with greater physical and spiritual support. There are five essential attributes, or *wājib šifāt*, that the prophets necessarily must have: *isma* – sinlessness; *šidq*– truthfulness; *āmana* – trustworthiness; *salama* – sound physique; *fatana* – intelligence; and *tablīgh* – conveying the message. The first essential *isma* was the subject of many dialectics among the scholars and will be discussed below. According to

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doctrine is largely accepted post the Romanisation of Christianity in the third century AD when the Roman emperor Constantine embraced Christianity and made it a state religion in 313.

<sup>107</sup> They assert that a prophet is a prophet all the time regardless if they are dead or alive, see Cerić and Al-Attas. *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, pp.195-197.

<sup>108</sup> *Hukūm* is also a law, legal verdict, divine decree.

<sup>109</sup> Cerić and Al-Attas. *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, pp.195-197.

<sup>110</sup> God’s choosing is predetermined, based on certain criteria. After determination, God protects prophets further from committing sins. Their nature is such that even if God does not protect them, they would not commit a sin, as their nature is from God. In using free will they prove themselves as excellent moral beings.

Gülen, *isma*, which also means protecting, saving or defending, appears in the Qur'ān in several derived forms.<sup>111</sup> For instance, in the Qur'ān when Prophet Noah asked his son to board the Ark, the latter replied: "I will betake myself to some mountain; it will save me from the water. Noah replied: Today there is not a saving one [active participle] from the command of God."<sup>112</sup> In this regard, infallibility "is an established fact based on reason and tradition".<sup>113</sup> All prophets were infallible, sinless and lived completely virtuous lives. Although God sent numerous prophets, the Qur'ān specifically mentions only 25 of them.

While most renowned scholars uphold that prophets are free from any sin, others posit that prophets have minor sins (*zāla*), for which they ask forgiveness and are subsequently forgiven.<sup>114</sup> Thus the first attribute that the prophets are required to have is *isma*. This is not mentioned in the Qur'ān; however, the Qur'ān mentions the general attributes. The Qur'ān even mentions some of the mistakes of the prophets<sup>115</sup>; nevertheless, the schools of *kalām* theology have discussed the issue of infallibility and have different views about this issue.

The Mutazalite and Shiite scholars hold that accepting the fallibility of the prophets would damage the institution of prophethood, from the viewpoint of the intellect or reason. They use logical arguments to prove the infallibility of prophets.<sup>116</sup> According to the Shiite understanding, prophets are perfect and this starts from birth and continues until death.<sup>117</sup> According to the Khariji sect,<sup>118</sup> the prophets can commit sin, so their nature is open.

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<sup>111</sup> Gülen. *Muhammad, Messenger of God*, p. 114.

<sup>112</sup> Qur'ān, 11:43.

<sup>113</sup> Gülen. *Muhammad, Messenger of God*, p. 114.

<sup>114</sup> See Hasan, Ahmad. "The Concept Of Infallibility In Islam." *Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (1972): 1-11, and Gülen. *Muhammad, Messenger of God*, p. 121.

<sup>115</sup> Qur'ān, 80: 1-42; 2:37.

<sup>116</sup> Al-Tabataba'i, Muhammad H and Nasr, Seyyed Hossien tr. *Shi'ite Islam*. Vol. 5. Albany: Suny Press, 1975, p. 144.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Hasan, Ahmad. "The Concept of Infallibility in Islam." *Islamic Studies* (1972): 1-11. The Kharijites were members of the earliest sect in Islam that left the followers of Ali (cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad). The Kharijite theology was a radical fundamentalism, with uncompromised observance of the Qur'ān in defiance of corrupt authorities.

However, Sunnis, through mainly the Māturīdī School, argue that the prophets are protected from committing minor or major sins and also from associating partners to God (*shirk*) and disbelief (*kufūr*); however, the prophets may commit light mistakes or *zāla*.<sup>119</sup> The Sunni scholars agree on two points: firstly, the prophets are innocent on *tablīgh*, i.e. they do not commit any sin while conveying the message, such as hiding some parts or acting different to how they convey; and secondly, the prophets never commit *kufūr*-heresy, even before prophethood. According to al-Baḳillani and Imam al-Juwanī (1028-1085), the prophets do not commit a major sin either mistakenly or unconsciously.<sup>120</sup> It is with regards to minor sins that the *kalām* scholars have a difference of opinion. However the great ‘*tafsīr* giant’, al-Rāzī (894-925/35) and al-Jurjānī (1004-1078) contend that the prophets may commit minor sins either mistakenly or unconsciously.<sup>121</sup>

There are two important points regarding the infallibility of prophets: infallibility before *nubuwwa* and infallibility after *nubuwwa*. Before *nubuwwa*, prophets either followed a previously ‘ordained *Sharī‘a*’, and thus did not commit a sin. Or, without knowledge of a coming prophet in future, they lived their life as trustworthy and ethical individuals, who represented morality and ethical values to their community. This is evident in Prophet Muḥammad’s life as well as the lives of other prophets;<sup>122</sup> thus, prophets, due to their knowledge of becoming a prophet and proximity to God even prior to revelation, never fell into sin or corruption as God protected them, even if they lived in a morally corrupt society.<sup>123</sup> However, in the *tafsīr* literature we do see interpretations, which allude to prophets committing sins, and Muslim theologians like al-Rāzī have devoted large sections of their work in disproving their claims from rational and textual sources. The “inclination

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<sup>119</sup> Hasan. “The Concept of Infallibility in Islam,” pp.1-11.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> For this reason Mecca’s pagans never blamed the Prophet Muḥammad with his previous life to be a *muskrik* (pagan worshiper) as they never used this as an argument.

<sup>123</sup> The prophet Muhammad intended to attend the wedding ceremony two times; in both of them God overwhelmed him with sleep and he could not attend the ceremonies, and people were calling him as *Al-Amin*, even before he declared his prophethood.

of Yusuf as to Zuleykha” is a famous example and a battlefield for these types of debates.

Ibn Hazm (994-1064) details the consensus of the scholars as follows:

God protected prophets from committing adultery, doing wrong, stealing, being harsh to other people, arrogance, harming people’s families and properties etc., even in their previous lives before prophethood because all these crimes can be used as an opposite argument when the prophets declared their prophethood.<sup>124</sup>

The notion of infallibility after *nubuwwa*, or the declaration of their prophethood, can be seen more clearly, as the prophets display unanimous obedience to all the commands of God in regard to their role as prophet. Furthermore, the prophet’s believed in divine revelation first, thus they never uttered disbelief, doubt or criticism about revelation.<sup>125</sup> Since every action, word or approval (*taqrīr*) of prophets are sources of law, if prophets were allowed to commit sins, those sins would become the law and code of conduct and hence a direct contradiction to what they were sent for. Therefore, since the prophets followed the revelation they received, they not only conveyed the message, but also practised its principles and laws. For this reason they did not commit forbidden acts. Committing a sin is not compatible with the institution of *nubuwwa*; they are opposed to each other – as prophets are envoys of God whom people should obey, if they commit a sin how can they be obeyed? Obedience to the Prophet is ‘commanded by God’ in the Qur’ān.<sup>126</sup> Likewise, there is the requirement to “follow those who ask of you no wage (for their service), and are themselves rightly guided”.<sup>127</sup> Also, from the viewpoint of logic, committing a sin cannot be accepted for the prophets, because people hate to follow sinners.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibn Hazm, Ali ibn Ahmad, and Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karim Shahrastani. *Al-Fasl fi al-milal wa-al-ahwa wa-al-nihal*, al-Qahirah: Muḥammad ‘Ali Subayḥ, 1964, Vol 2 p. 31.

<sup>125</sup> Qur’ān, 6:19, also see verses 6:19, 10: 104-106 and 36:21.

<sup>126</sup> Qur’ān, 36:21.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Adiseputra. *The Doctrine of the Impeccability of the Prophet*, p. 21.

Furthermore, there is Qur'ānic evidence of God warning prophets because they made a mistake in their *ijtihāds* (legal reasoning and ruling), including the first man and Prophet Adam whose forgetfulness<sup>129</sup> led humanity to 'fall from heaven',<sup>130</sup> Prophet Noah's seeking forgiveness for the disbelieving members of his family,<sup>131</sup> Prophet Jonah's mistake of leaving his community after their insistence on disbelief and disobedience,<sup>132</sup> Prophet Joseph's protection by God against the women of Egypt,<sup>133</sup> and Prophet Muḥammad's mistake for turning his back to a blind person.<sup>134</sup> In short, only the prophets are infallible.

The next attribute to prophethood is *ṣidq* or truthfulness also known as the essence of prophethood. A significant aspect of their prophethood is that they do not lie.<sup>135</sup> Truthfulness, loyalty and trustworthiness are desired qualities even for lay people; hence, they are imperatives for the institution of prophethood. All prophets are truthful with no element of deception in their character.<sup>136</sup> The Qur'ān attests to the truthfulness of Abraham,<sup>137</sup> Ishmael<sup>138</sup> and Enoch (Idris).<sup>139</sup> This is significant, for if there was any doubt about their honesty, people would easily doubt their claim to being a prophet of God and receiving divine revelation or doubt the revelation they were preaching. Furthermore, doubts about their soundness of character and honesty would be innately abhorrent to humanity; not something they would want to emulate. It was based on this criterion of *ṣidq* that Musaylima bin Habib (al-Yamama), and many others like him, was unanimously declared as a 'false prophet'. Due to their blatant lies, they were widely entitled as '*al-*

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<sup>129</sup> Qur'ān, 2:37.

<sup>130</sup> Qur'ān, 20:115.

<sup>131</sup> Qur'ān, 11: (45-46).

<sup>132</sup> Qur'ān, 21:87.

<sup>133</sup> Qur'ān, 12: (21-34).

<sup>134</sup> In *Sura Abasa*, the Prophet is warned for turning his back to a blind man who asked for advice. The warning came despite him being in a discussion with the tribal leaders of Mecca.

<sup>135</sup> Tahawi and Yusuf. *The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi*, 2007; Gülen. *Muhammad, Messenger of God*, p. 121.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Qur'ān, 19:41.

<sup>138</sup> Qur'ān, 19:54.

<sup>139</sup> Qur'ān, 19:56-57.

*kazzab* ' (the liar) in the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century, after the death of Prophet Muḥammad (d. 630).<sup>140</sup>

Importantly, Muslim scholars point out the truthfulness of Muḥammad even before the start of his prophetic mission. Many examples are cited as evidence for this, in particular the infamous dialogue between Abu Sufyan (d.652) (at the time a bitter enemy of Muḥammad and Islam) with Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (575-641) about Muḥammad's character in which Abu Sufyan confesses that 'no one has heard him utter a lie, and he is known as the truthful one,' which is why his epithet was 'al-Amin' (the most truthful).<sup>141</sup> He was nicknamed as al-Amin by the Quraysh even prior to the commencement of prophethood. Additionally, the non-believers in Mecca never accused the Prophet of being a liar.<sup>142</sup> In addition to being truthful, the third attribute that the prophets had was being trustworthy, and they possessed the high quality of *āmana* or trustworthiness. *Āmana* means being absolutely trustworthy, free from betrayal and treachery towards people. In fact, the essence of the Arabic word *mu'min* (believer) means one who safeguards the *āmana* or trust. The Qur'ān emphasises this quality in many of its verses: "I am for you a trustworthy Messenger, so serve you God, and obey you me. I ask of you no wage for this; my wage falls only upon the Lord of the Worlds."<sup>143</sup>

The prophets gained their people's confidence and trust. Being an essential part of *nubuwwa*, they thus fulfilled the mission of prophethood in the best way. This is depicted as follows: "He is not niggardly (in conveying to you Revelation and knowledge) of the Unseen (what lies beyond the reach of your sense-perception)".<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, the Qur'ān explains the notion that the trustworthiness of the prophets results from holding 'none but

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<sup>140</sup> Dale F. Eickelman, *Musaylima: An Approach to the Social Anthropology of Seventh Century Arabia*, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1967), pp. 17-52.

<sup>141</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, Dawood, Rosenthal. *The Muqaddimah*, p. 71.

<sup>142</sup> Qur'ān, 6:33.

<sup>143</sup> Qur'ān verses: 26:107-9, 125-27, 143-45, 162-64 and 178-80.

<sup>144</sup> Qur'ān, 81:24.



God in awe,<sup>145</sup> which was why they never lied. Thus, the prophets were the trustworthiest people. Nursi also describes the various duties that the prophet was entrusted with:

Thus, the wisdom of the All-Glorious One of Beauty, that He should entrust him with numerous duties, such as teacher to all His servants, herald of the sovereignty of His dominicality, announcer of those things pleasing to Himself, and expounder of the signs of creation in the palace of the world; that He should mark out his pre-eminence by conferring on him the decorations of miracles, and should make known through a decree like the Qur'an that that person is the truthful personal interpreter of the All-Glorious One.<sup>146</sup>

The attribute of *tablīgh* terminologically means to inform or explain. In Islamic theology, it is the prophetic function of conveying the message of God to people despite tough conditions. According to Unal, the messengers and prophets “never hide, change, or remain silent about any aspect of the revelation, they convey the message as it is, the way they received it from God, exactly as revealed to them”.<sup>147</sup> *Tablīgh* is so essential to prophets and prophethood in Islam that, as prophetic stories in the Qur'ān detail, despite the severe tortures some prophets underwent ‘they never added, omitted, or hid any part of revelation, even if it were against them’; thus, in this way, they fulfilled their mission.<sup>148</sup> Verse 5:67 is deemed by the *kalāmists* as the ‘command of God’ to Prophet Muḥammad to convey and ‘make known in the clearest way all that has been sent down to you from your Lord’, with the obvious warning that ‘if you do not, you have not conveyed His message and fulfilled the task of His Messenger-ship’. Thus, it befits the role of both the *rasūl* and the *nabī* to convey the message completely to the people.<sup>149</sup>

Another eschatological purpose of *tablīgh* is to ensure that people receive God’s message and thereby not complain in the hereafter of “not being informed about the aspects of faith

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<sup>145</sup> Qur'ān, 33:39.

<sup>146</sup> See “The Thirty First Word” in Nursi. *The Words*, p. 589.

<sup>147</sup> Unal and Gultekin. *The Promised Prophet*, p. 23.

<sup>148</sup> The Qur'ānic stories of Nuh, Salih and Shuhayb as mentioned in *Surah Anbiyā* describe the great ordeals that the prophets went through to convey their messages to their respective communities, despite the opposition and rebellion they faced from their nations (*qawms*).

<sup>149</sup> Qur'ān, 5:67.

as well as religious responsibilities”.<sup>150</sup> Further, they contend that since the ‘religion of Islam was explained by the Prophet in the most perfect manner, people cannot have an excuse’.<sup>151</sup> Many examples of these are evident in the Qur’ān, especially in the chapter “Prophets” (*anbiyā*), where Moses approaches Pharaoh to convey his message.<sup>152</sup>

Another specific characteristic of the prophets is *fatānah*, which means that every prophet had the highest degree of intelligence. Prophets have *fatānah* in order to comprehend the purpose of creation and humanity’s role, and understand divinity. *Fatānah* is like a ‘prophetic logic, it is beyond being a genius, it is having an extraordinary intellect, being very aware and smart’.<sup>153</sup> The prophets necessarily have the attribute of *fatānah* so they can easily convince their addressees. The Qur’ān often details the logical argumentation employed by prophets to their respective communities, such as the story of Abraham and his reference to the impossibility of the stars, moon and sun being ‘Lords’ because they set, presented to a people who were much consumed by such philosophies.<sup>154</sup> The attribute of *fatānah* is active all the time in prophets; they never weaken and they have very strong memory even with age. It is also a tool to defeat their enemies. *Fatānah* is different to literacy. Many scholars, such as Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (1116-1240), and Jalaludin Rūmī, claim that ‘prophets had special *fatānah*, in order to lead human kind to a greater Universal truth or God consciousness (as stated in the Qur’ān)’.<sup>155</sup> A European testament to the prophet’s intelligence and brilliance is George Bernard Shaw’s statement about Prophet Muḥammad that “if the Prophet was with us today he would fix the world’s problems over a cup of coffee or tea”.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, we see the notion of ‘prophecy’ in the

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<sup>150</sup> Unal and Gultekin. *The Promised Prophet*, p. 23.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Qur’ān, 20:51-52.

<sup>153</sup> Gülen. *Muhammad, Messenger of God*, p. 121.

<sup>154</sup> Qur’ān, 21:51, 58 and 67, also his story against Nimrod at 2:258.

<sup>155</sup> Akhtar, Shabbir. “An Islamic Model of Revelation.” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 2.1 (1991): 95-105.

<sup>156</sup> In another quote Shaw states that the Prophet was a

Judeo-Christian tradition, where the prophet is deemed as a ‘seer’ of the future with special vision and ability to foresee the events or forecast the future incidents, which was a sign for the people of their time.<sup>157</sup> Like its English counterpart, the Arabic *nabb-a* also means to ‘prophesise’; moreover the prophets’ prophesied on future events that are unseen and unknown, such as what is to come, who is next etc.

Beyond the traditionally five listed attributes discussed above, the attribute of *salama* or perfect physical and intellect ability, is an additional one that was discussed by some scholars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century like Nursi and Gülen. *Salama* ensures that all prophets remain free of any physical or mental impediment or defect. It would be detrimental to the prophetic vocation if there were any sort of deformities in their characters or even in their physical appearance. Sunni scholars maintain that since the prophets were to be ‘human role models’ (*uswai-ḥasanah*), they had to have attributes of perfection in their characters as well as their “physical appearance, so they could easily convey the message to their respective communities”.<sup>158</sup> Additionally, Prophets were often sent from the nobles of a people, Prophet Lut’s (Biblical Lot) supplication “My Lord, support me against the corrupting people”,<sup>159</sup> demonstrates that he was not from the people himself.

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wonderful man and in my opinion far from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the Saviour of Humanity. I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it the much needed peace and happiness: I have prophesied about the faith of Muḥammad that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today.

See, Shaw, Bernard, and Mohammad Abdul Aleem Siddiqui. *A Shavian and a Theologian: An Illuminating Conversation between George Bernard Shaw, the Sceptic, and His Eminence Mohammad Abdul Aleem Siddiqui Al-Qaderi, the Spiritualist*. Karachi, Pakistan: World Federation of Islamic Missions, 1967. Sir George Bernard Shaw in ‘The Genuine Islam,’ Vol. 1, No. 8, 1936, pp. 1-17.

<sup>157</sup> Bremmer, Jan N. *Prophets, Seers, and Politics in Greece, Israel, and Early Modern Europe*. Numen 1993, p. 150-183. See also Khalidi, T. *Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam Across the Centuries*, Three Rivers Press, 2009.

<sup>158</sup> See Mahdi, Mahmud. *Al-Uswah al-Hasanah*, al-Qahirah: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 1983. For Qur’ānic evidence see 33:21.

<sup>159</sup> Qur’ān, 29:30.

Gülen contends that Prophets must be free from all bodily defects, for their appearance should not repel others.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, in explaining the Divine wisdom of Prophet Muḥammad living for 63 years, Said Nursi explains:

Believers are religiously obliged to love and respect God’s Messenger to the utmost degree, and follow his every command without feeling any dislike for any aspect of him. For this reason, God did not allow him to live to the troublesome and often humiliating period of old age, and sent him to the “highest abode” when he was 63 years old. This was the average life-span of the members of his community, thus making him the example in this respect also.<sup>161</sup>

Additionally, if the prophets had any deformities, like speech or blindness, people would have doubted their ability to receive the revelation then convey it soundly back to them; therefore, the prophets were free from all diseases that may harm their *nubuwwa*, such as insanity, forgetfulness, mistakes and memory lapses. Nevertheless, the prophetic attribute of *salama* is a contentious issue, as there are variances in the scholarly deductions on it. According to the Judeo-Christian theology, it is not problematic if a prophet appears to have a ‘speech impediment’ as in the case of Moses in the Bible.<sup>162</sup> However, Gülen asserts that prophets do not have any defects on their bodies, including even white hairs; they have perfect bodies, perfect health and do not have any mental, spiritual physical defects. Resultantly, he rejects Moses’ ability to stutter and provides an alternative explanation that “he was raised in the Pharaoh’s palace (so he felt the pressure) and that his brother Aaron was more eloquent than Moses in speech”.<sup>163</sup>

In summary, prophets were commissioned to provide human beings with a ‘model’ to emulate, and a standard to live according to. Consequently, Islamic theology dictated that every prophet has these six attributes. It therefore became necessary that they also possess

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<sup>160</sup> Gülen, *Muhammad, Messenger of God*, p. 143.

<sup>161</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, pp. 84–5.

<sup>162</sup> For more on concept of Isra’liyyats see Vagda, G. (1973), “Isrā’īliyyāt”. *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 4 (2nd ed.), Brill Academic Publishers, pp. 211–212. Also see, Wheeler, Brannon M. (2002). *Prophets in the Qur’an: An Introduction to the Qur’an and Muslim Exegesis*. London: Continuum

<sup>163</sup> Gülen, *Muhammad, Messenger of God*, p. 143.

other attributes of perfection, such as perfect *akhlāq* (morality of character), and physique, be foremost in love of God, be most near to God (*qurb*), revere God, be obedient to God, adhere to the tenants of faith most fervently, and be the living embodiments of God's religion, more than any other people.

## 2.4 Divine revelation, books and prophethood

*Wahy* is defined as God's guiding commands conveyed to the whole of the universe, as the 'Lord of the worlds' (*Rab al-'alamin*).<sup>164</sup> The notion of *wahy* (divine revelation) and divine books are an essential part of *nubuwwa*. Thus, *nubuwwa* and *wahy* are strongly connected. Without *wahy*, it is impossible to talk about *nubuwwa*, because *nubuwwa* is directly based on *wahy*. *Wahy* has been used linguistically in different places of the Qur'ān as: the laws of nature,<sup>165</sup> natural instincts,<sup>166</sup> inspiration,<sup>167</sup> signals or gestures to communicate,<sup>168</sup> divine inspiration to the angels,<sup>169</sup> and, finally, as divine revelation to prophets.<sup>170</sup>

There are different forms of revelation and the Qur'ān mentions three.<sup>171</sup> There are seven ways that it comes down<sup>172</sup> with two major categories: revelation without an intermediary (receiving revelation in a dream<sup>173</sup> or direct speech of God<sup>174</sup>); and revelation with an intermediary, which includes five ways: Gabriel coming in the form of a human being, the angel revealing the verses without being seen by the Prophet while he was awake,<sup>175</sup> revelation commencing with a sound of a ringing bell,<sup>176</sup> Gabriel appearing in his original

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<sup>164</sup> Qur'ān, 1:1.

<sup>165</sup> Qur'ān, 41:12.

<sup>166</sup> Qur'ān, 16:68-69.

<sup>167</sup> Qur'ān, 28:7.

<sup>168</sup> Qur'ān, 6:112.

<sup>169</sup> Qur'ān, 8:12.

<sup>170</sup> Qur'ān, 4:163-165.

<sup>171</sup> Qur'ān, 42:51.

<sup>172</sup> Bukhari, Imam and trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan. "Sahih al-Bukhari," (Beirut: Dar al-Arabia, 1985). Hadith No. 2.

<sup>173</sup> Bukhari, *Sahīh, Revelation*, 3.

<sup>174</sup> Qur'ān, 7:143.

<sup>175</sup> Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1/46.

<sup>176</sup> Bukhari, *Sahīh, Revelation*, 2.

form while bringing revelation to the Prophet and, lastly, Gabriel bringing the revelation when the Prophet was sleeping.<sup>177</sup>

Due to its primacy to prophethood, *wahy* was subject of medieval theological disputes of the *kalāmists*, philosophers and the rationalists. Their disputes varied, but were focused mainly on the actual nature of *wahy*. According to the philosophers, the prophet receives revelation by identifying himself with the ‘Active Intellect’.<sup>178</sup> The Sunni scholars postulate that the philosophers’ doctrine tends to make ‘prophets of men’ rather easily, since their talk of natural capacities of the human soul does not allow any limit where ‘ordinary humanity stops and prophecy begins’.<sup>179</sup>

The main difference between the *kalāmists* and philosophers was on the notion of naturalism versus non-naturalism – whether *wahy* was akin to prophetic nature, that is whether it was due to the individual capacity of the Prophet or a divine grace or favour (*lutf*).<sup>180</sup> Rahman maintains that the fundamental gap with orthodoxy (referring to Sunni scholars) and the philosophers is the issue of whether *wahy* is a product resulting from the nature of man or the nature of revelation, or whether it was a divine favour from God.<sup>181</sup> Thus, the philosophers focused mainly on the ‘Doctrine of the Intellect’ in their discussion of *nubuwwa*. While the *mutakallimūn* were not entirely anti-reason, nevertheless, they did not prefer to overemphasise the intellect as the philosophers conceptualised in their discussion of *nubuwwa*. Gülen contends, however, that receiving divine revelation requires a ‘special disposition’, as well as ‘intellectual and spiritual endowments’.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Davidson, Herbert A. “Alfarabi and Avicenna on the Active Intellect.” *Viator* 3, No.1 (1972) 109-178.

<sup>179</sup> Rahman, Fazlur, *Prophecy in Islam*. Rutledge, 2013, p. 109.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. p. 93.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Gülen, Fethullah. *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism: Emeralds of the Heart*. Vol. 1. Lanham: Tughra Books, 2007, p. 78.

Nursi explains *wahy* as a prophet's receipted revelation with the meaning, and the words.<sup>183</sup> Thus, revelation, which comes to the prophets, is an objective, binding phenomenon that takes place beyond the spheres of the human soul and physical sensations, and its certainty transcends the conviction, which comes from mere knowledge.<sup>184</sup> The angel Gabriel who brought the revelation of the Qur'ān taught the Prophet how to recite it. This was guidance in a particular field of one who was superior in general terms by one who was inferior.<sup>185</sup>

At the heart of the *wahy* and *nubuwwa*, lies the concept of *Khātām al-anbiyā* or the 'seal of prophets'. This Qur'ānic and *ḥadīth*-based epithet refers to the Prophet Muḥammad as the seal of prophets who brought closure to revelation.<sup>186</sup> God sealed the revelation process through Prophet Muḥammad, because humankind had reached a certain level of understanding of the universal values and the Qur'ān 'revealed these values forever for all human beings'.<sup>187</sup> Thus, when the Prophet died, the revelation stopped and the 'favours of God were completed'.<sup>188</sup> The theological significance of this concept is that no further revelation and prophecy could be claimed after Prophet Muḥammad. For Muslim philosophers and theologians, this again was an area of great intellectual enquiry with various understandings presented, especially on the bearing of finality of revelation for humanity. Iqbal outlines his definition of *wahy* in light of finality:

In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves a keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings (of future revelations); that in order to achieve full self-consciousness man must finally be thrown back on his own (intellectual) resources (for exercising and conquering nature outside himself). The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the

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<sup>183</sup> Nursi, Said. "Signs of Miraculousness." Trans. Sukran Vahide. Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2004. p. 181-190.

<sup>184</sup> Gülen, M. Fethullah. *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism: Emerald Hills of the Heart I*. New Jersey: The Light, 2006, p. 76.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.* Guidance in 'particular field' refers to role of Archangel Gabriel, who is the angel of revelation. Although he excels in this 'particular' duty, he is generally 'inferior' in 'general terms' to the general superiority of Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>186</sup> Qur'ān, 5:3.

<sup>187</sup> Gülen. *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, p. 77.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

constant appeal to reason and experience in the Qur'an and the emphasis it lays on Nature and History as sources of knowledge are all different aspects of the same idea of the finality.<sup>189</sup>

Thus, the finality of *nubuwwa* denotes a completion of revelation but not of *ilhām* (inspiration). The distinction between *wahy* and *ilhām* became more prominent in the era of Aḥmad Sirhindī and later by Shāh Waliullāh.<sup>190</sup> This issue rose in ascendancy in their era due to the influence of the Sufī Master Ibn‘Arabī and his famous doctrine of ‘all is Him’; this popularised notion was explained by Sirhindī, who stated, indeed, it was ‘all is from Him’. This was significant as it affected the understanding of divinity as well divine speech (*kalām*), which is an attribute of God but also related to *nubuwwa*. Sirhindī and Shāh Waliullāh agreed on the subservience of the mystical experience to that of the prophetic experience. Shāh Waliullāh was more discursive on the mystical experience and included in many of his works were accounts of his own mystical experiences with the Prophet and his descendants.<sup>191</sup> Thus, Sirhindī and later Shāh Waliullāh conceded that *wahy* and inspiration were to be distinguished.<sup>192</sup> According to Gülen, *ilhām*, may be distinguished from *wahy*.

Inspiration, this extremely important source which is based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah and which finds its true worth in conformability with them, keeps silent where it must do so out of respect for the Qur'an and the Sunnah, speaking only based upon them, and never attempts to transgress them or use them to confirm any possible errors.<sup>193</sup>

Gülen contends that although it is ‘not a source of objective knowledge’, *ilhām* has always ‘served as a source of recourse, like a spring of sweet, fresh water’.<sup>194</sup> Some distinguished scholars have regarded inspiration to be among the stipulations that are necessary to do

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<sup>189</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 101.

<sup>190</sup> See Baljon. “Prophetology Of Shah Wali Allah,” pp. 69-79; Balijon, J. M. S. *Religion and Thought of Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi: 1703-1762*. Vol. 48. Brill, (1986) nd.

<sup>191</sup> Hermansen, Marcia K. and Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī. “The conclusive argument from God.” *Islamic Philosophy Theology And Science* 25 (1996): pp. 245-265.

<sup>192</sup> Gülen. *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, p. 77.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.



*ijtihād*, that is, to deduce new laws based on the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* to meet the emerging requirements in every age, and have thus evaluated it as the deciding factor when there are conflicting views. Thus, inspiration is only acceptable and regarded as sound so long as it is in “conformity with the indisputable principles and foundations established by the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah*”, and as long as it can be viewed as an “origin of rules of a secondary degree”.<sup>195</sup> However, due to its subjective nature, it is not binding on others. On the other hand, revelation, which comes to the prophets, is an objective, binding phenomenon.<sup>196</sup>

In short, *wahy* is significantly relevant to *nubuwwa*, as the function and prophetic role would not be possible without guidance and prescriptions. Thus, according to Islam, humanity was never without guidance, as communities were always supported with divine books.<sup>197</sup> Although prophethood has been completed, Divine guidance has been extended in the Islamic tradition beyond prophets and books to individuals or centenary reviver scholars called ‘*mujaddid*’. These were prophesied to come at advent of a new epoch and era to reinterpret and explain the Qur’ān and Prophetic *Sunnah* in context of the new times.<sup>198</sup> Said Nursi discusses guidance in relation to the Qur’ān as a central theme of his *Risale-i Nur*, this will be further elaborated in Chapter 4.

## 2.5 Prophethood and miracles

It is important to note that the issue of miracles in relation to *nubuwwa* deserves detailed attention and requires lengthy discussion, which is beyond the scope of this chapter or this thesis; nevertheless, due to the implications it has on the contemporary understanding of *nubuwwa*, I will refer to miracles in the forthcoming chapters as well. In this section, the

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid

<sup>197</sup> Unal and Gultekin. *The Promised Prophet*, p. 13.

<sup>198</sup> God shall raise for this *umma* (community) at the head of every century a man who shall renew (or revive) for it its religion. Sunan Abu Dawood, 37:4278.

distinctive inclusion of miracles as part of Islamic prophetology will be assessed as the philosophers, traditionalists, *kalāmists* and historians of the Islamic world debated it. The discussions were centred on the primacy of miracles as part of the notion of *nubuwwa*. The definition of miracle according to the Qur’ān, in comparison to other religious texts will be made, followed by an assessment of the philosophical approach to miracles. Lastly, the Western discourse will be analysed, leading to the modern period where the discussions on Nursi and Iqbal will enter on the issue of the ‘rationalisation of miracles’ in the reform movement and their particular responses.

The etymological meaning of *mu’jiza* bears significance as to meaning and how it was perceived by the early *kalāmists*. As a word, *mu’jiza* comes from root word *a-j-z*, then *i’jaz*, which is an active noun coming (*ism-e fa’il*) from *mu’jiza*, meaning the core of miraculousness. Thus, *mu’jiza* is something that makes the others *ajiz* (weak), something that you ‘cannot resist or control’ or ‘something fantastic that you cannot prevent’, and it also means powerlessness, weakness.<sup>199</sup> As a term, it means ‘in the hands of the prophets’, to prove that the ‘*da’wah* (the claim of prophethood) of *nubuwwa*’, is right. *Mu’jiza*, which is the proof of prophethood, is God’s action. God creates something extraordinary or an event that is against the natural laws and cannot be imitated by someone else.<sup>200</sup> There are two requirements with *mu’jiza*: firstly, it needs to be extraordinary (breaks with ordinary natural laws); and secondly, it must happen in the hands of one who is a prophet,<sup>201</sup> and must occur in accordance with the claim or prayer of a prophet. However, there are set conditions for the occasion of a *mu’jiza* that affirms its authenticity of its occurrence as a response to a challenge or a request of proof of a prophet’s prophethood – known as *tahaddī* in Arabic.<sup>202</sup> Therefore, a miracle is an extraordinary event that ordinary humans

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<sup>199</sup> Al-Taftazani, Sa’d al-Din and Edgar Elder. *On the Creed of Najm Al-Din Al-Nasafi*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> See Ibn Kathir. *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad: Al-Sira Al-Nabawiyya*. Vol. 4, Beirut: np, 2000.

are incapable of doing, and that it is granted by God only to prophets. In other words, a miracle is the approval of the truthfulness of prophets by the Creator of the universe. The Qur'ān confirms the existence of miracles and further affirms that miracles only take place through the 'will and creation' of God.<sup>203</sup>

The miracles often reflect the social context of the society, and God strengthens the prophets through miraculous works.<sup>204</sup> Muslim scholars, such as Shāh Waliullāh, maintained that miracles were a significant aspect of prophethood and a sign from God to reiterate and maintain their follower's belief, trust and conviction in them.<sup>205</sup> Miracles are also an essential ability 'gifted only to a prophet with the permission of God'. Every prophet was given a special miracle, relevant to his time and context. Moses came at a time when magic and sorcery were prevalent, so his miracles superseded all other magicians in Egypt.<sup>206</sup> Likewise, Jesus was surrounded by medically ill and destitute people; therefore, he showed great healing miracles, such as curing the blind and lepers.<sup>207</sup>

The prophetic ability to perform miracles is not evidence for non-human or divine attributes within a prophet. In fact, as David Thomas outlines, in Islam, 'God is understood as the direct cause of all events', so much so that the issue of secondary causality has been debated by Muslim theologians.<sup>208</sup> Miracles in the Old Testament or *Tanakh* appear in many instances, some examples include Elijah's levitating a widow's son,<sup>209</sup> there is also multiplication of food or oil,<sup>210</sup> and lastly there is the miracle of restoring to life the

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<sup>203</sup> Qur'ān, 40:78.

<sup>204</sup> See Nursi, Said and Unal, Ali. *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*. Light Inc, 2007; Thomas, David. "Miracles in Islam." in Twelftree, Graham H. *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, (2011): 199 and Gülen, Fethullah. *The Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, New Jersey: The Light Inc., 2014, p. 150.

<sup>205</sup> Baljon, Johannes Marinus Simon. *Religion and Thought of Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi: 1703-1762*. Vol. 48. Brill Academic Pub, 1986.

<sup>206</sup> Qur'ān, 27:16-26 and Qur'ān, 34:12.

<sup>207</sup> Qur'ān 3:49; 19:17-22; 19:29-33.

<sup>208</sup> Thomas. *Miracles in Islam*. 2011, p. 199.

<sup>209</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. "1 Kings verses: 17:17-24", *The Hebrew Bible*. London: Cassell, 1999.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 4:1-7.

dead.<sup>211</sup> In the Christian scriptures there are categorical listings of three sorts of miracles performed by Jesus: exorcisms, healing of the ill and nature miracles. According to the *New Testament*, the greatest miracle is the resurrection of Jesus, which is central to Christian theology and faith.<sup>212</sup> The Qur’ān affirms all of these miracles except the resurrection of Jesus, and lists a few other miracles of Jesus not discussed in the Bible such as making a bird from clay and speaking from the cradle.<sup>213</sup> Contrary to Islamic definitions of miracles, the Judeo-Christian theological explanation of miracles does not associate it necessarily to a prophet or prophetic figure.<sup>214</sup>

In his attempt to reconcile the concept of miracles with the Aristotelianism that he accepted, Mūsā ibn Maymūn - Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) maintained that both the creation of the world and miracles are voluntary acts of God; because miracles are predetermined at the time of creation, they do not indicate a change in God’s will or wisdom.<sup>215</sup> Therefore, Maimonides asserts, the miracle “is a unique occurrence which establishes a reality or an order of its own. For example, the miracles of the patriarchs and Moses established the existence of a nation with a particular role to play in the order of the world”.<sup>216</sup>

In Christianity too, miracles have been subject to the rationalisation of the ‘Enlightenment’ period, which subjected the notion of miracles previously used to ‘convert the pagan’ to the scholarly attempts to ‘rationalise’ its possibility. Many twentieth century Christian scholars, like C. S. Lewis and William Craig, have argued that miracles are reasonable and plausible.<sup>217</sup> Among all the Christian denominations, the notion of miracles as upheld by the Catholic Church, as expounded by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), is most consistent or

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid, pp. 4:18–37.

<sup>212</sup> John 20:11–21:25; Barrett, C.K. *The Gospel According to John*, London: SPCK, 2nd Edition, 1978.

<sup>213</sup> Qur’ān, 3:49 and 19:29.

<sup>214</sup> Maimonides. *Guide to the Perplexed*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 2:25.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> See Beversluis, John. *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.

closer to the Islamic concept than other pronouncements. Aquinas postulated “properly speaking miracles are works done by God outside the order usually observed in things”.<sup>218</sup> However, in recent times, there has been a ‘moral argument against miracles’ exhumed by scholars like James Keller, who echoed their predecessors David Hume and Baruch Spinoza.<sup>219</sup> Further, the Orientalists’ view influenced the Muslim world and scholars in terms of miracles, who reinterpreted miracles in light of this new trend.

In the post-Enlightenment period, an increase in philosophical and theological rationalisation of religious beliefs encouraged even modernist Muslim scholars to under emphasise (or not emphasise) the miracles attributed to the prophets and rationalise these instances mentioned in the Qur’ān. Rashid Riḍā and Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Islamic revivalist movement, were key figures in the modern period from Egypt who attempted to prove rational explanations for instances of miracles mentioned in the Qur’ān.<sup>220</sup> Theirs is a somewhat unique position amongst the majority of Muslim scholarship and theology of prophetic miracles.

The Western scholarly discourse on miracles in Islamic tradition also took a different path. The Western scholars or experts on Islam in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (also known as the Orientalists) question the very traditions – the *ḥadīth* on which the *kalāmists* base their contentions.<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, the notion of miracles was problematic for these scholars, many claiming they were mere clairvoyance on the part of the prophets and it could not be proven either rationally or scientifically. Therefore, the actual historicity of

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<sup>218</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009, p. 101.

<sup>219</sup> Keller, James. “A Moral Argument against Miracles.” *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 12, no 1. Jan (1995): 54–78.

<sup>220</sup> For example in the chapter “Elephant” (*Fil*), there is an outright rejection of the incident of the ‘birds flock threw stones that stopped the army of Abraha’, which is the accepted position that is deemed ‘miraculous’, instead the explanation of a widespread epidemic that destroyed the army, is found in their commentaries of this Qur’ānic chapter.

<sup>221</sup> See Williams, Rebecca Ruth. *An Analysis of the Supernatural Archetype of the Prophet Muhammad as Found in the Sira/ta’rikh and Tafsir Works of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir*. Montreal: McGill University, 2007; Keller, James. “A Moral Argument against Miracles.” *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 12, no 1. Jan (1995): 54–78; Thomas. *Miracles in Islam*. 2011, p. 199; Terzic, Faruk. “The Problematic of Prophethood and Miracles: Muṣṭafa Ṣabri’s Response.” *Islamic Studies* (2009): 5-33.

them was questioned, despite the fact there were numerous reports with singular and multiple *isnads* (*ḥadīth* narration with proven authenticity) that were a witness to the events reported. The post-Orientalist discourse (post Goldziher) took on a new outlook – their collective discourse can be summed as ‘sympathetic’ yet unconditional in their non-acceptance of *ḥadīth* as well as miracles. Much of the Orientalist discourse was centred on questioning and critiquing the personalities who reported these narrations or the *ḥadīth* scholars, like az-Zuhrī (d. 741).<sup>222</sup> However, the post-Orientalist discourse is focused on miracles, and hence can be classified as neo-Orientalist. These included examining the ‘supernatural archetypal’ depictions of Muḥammad by early exegetes.<sup>223</sup>

While Iqbal is mostly silent on the aspect of miracles, Nursi on the other hand uses ‘logic’ in addition to the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* in order to argue for the essentiality of miracles as part of *nubuwwa*.<sup>224</sup> Said Nursi’s position on miracles is unique as he explains not only the need, he also discusses, as a matter of fact, that these incidents took place and explains the various instances of wisdom underlying these miracles attributed to the prophets. In the “Twentieth Word”, Nursi details selective key prophetic miracles outlined in the Qur’ān including ‘Abraham’s escapade whilst being in the pit of fire’<sup>225</sup> and Solomon’s flight through the air covering many kilometres distance in short periods.<sup>226</sup> Here Nursi’s theological and ontological explanations are rather unique; his sophisticated explanation does not negate the possibility of the occurrence of these ‘miraculous events’, rather it strengthens his re-occurring argumentation in the *Risale-i Nur* that ‘causes or nature is not the law giver’ and causes ‘do not have creative power’ but are rather governed by the

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<sup>222</sup> Kamali, M. Hashim. *A Textbook of Ḥadīth Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification and Criticism of Ḥadīth*. Markfield, Leicestershire: Islamic Foundation, 2005; Duri, A.A. “Al-Zuhrī: A Study on the Beginnings of History Writing in Islam”. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London (1957); Hallaq, W.B. “The Authenticity of Prophetic Hadith: A Pseudo-Problem”. *Studia Islamica*, (1999).

<sup>223</sup> See Williams. *An Analysis of the Supernatural Archetype of the Prophet*, 2007.

<sup>224</sup> See “The Twentieth Word” in Nursi. *The Words* and “The Nineteenth Letter” in Nursi. *The Letters*, 2004.

<sup>225</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 273.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, p. 269.

Creator and the governor of causes ‘whose kingdom has the hand hold of every molecular, atomic and celestial and cosmic object in the universe and creation’.<sup>227</sup> Such is the explanation that Nursi puts forward while discussing the verse “O fire be cool and calm’, where Abraham was thrown in the fire pit and evidently walked out of the incident. Nursi explains that:

God almighty suspends his own laws of nature temporarily as a sign and mark for a people of that time by the request of one of his own sent envoys or prophets and grants permission as a final chance for those that may need further proof for strengthening of faith. If however after an evident sign and miracle is shown to a people and they still remain obstinate than according to the Qur’an God’s punishment is manifested.<sup>228</sup>

Nursi does not delve into historical accounts of the miracles or geological proofs, but selectively deducts stories and shows that “miracles are all an aim and goal for humanity to achieve it in material life”.<sup>229</sup> For example, Solomon’s traversing of space became a reality thousands of years later with the invention of the transportation modes of trains and aeroplanes.<sup>230</sup> This unique view of miracles sheds a whole new light and opens a wide door for scientific interest or study on prophetic miracles and other Qur’ānic stances to see if they have been scientifically realised in our time.

Shāh Waliullāh and Sabrī do not reject the view that ‘a prophet should have miracles at his disposal for legitimation’. However, he deems it not a ‘condition per se’. Shāh Waliullāh acknowledges that people may have faith because of rational argumentation (*burhān*) or prophetic behaviour (*ṣamt*), which distinguishes him from other people.<sup>231</sup> This view is not distant from the majority position. Moreover, Nursi’s “Nineteenth Letter” wherein he discusses numerous miracles of Prophet Muḥammad goes against other contemporary Muslim revivalists. Not only does he not shy away but also goes out of his way to prove

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, p. 263.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Baljon. “Prophetology Of Shah Wali Allah,” pp. 69-79.

these miracles and argues for them as having the status of ‘*tawātur* by meaning’ according to *ḥadīth* terminology. This will be discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The Islamic notion of prophethood was distinctly conceptualised in comparison to other traditions. Islamic prophetology laid emphasis beyond the eschatological associations of prophecy, and dealt with detailed definitions of key terms such as *rasūl* and *nabī*, which signified the role and duty of prophets and messengers as God’s chosen representatives, who were bestowed upon every human tribe as a favour from ‘His mercy’. This became the dominant view in the Islamic discourse on the nature purpose and role of prophecy, as discussed. Further, the key attributes and characteristics of prophets *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *āmana* (trustworthiness), *isma* (infallibility), *fatana* (prophetic intellect), *tablīg* (conveying the message) and *salama* (perfection of physical and mental capacity) were outlined, which shaped the particularity of Islam on this branch of its theology. The characteristics further became a demarcation from previous notions of prophethood in particular with the attribute of *isma* or sinlessness. Even amid the slight contentions among scholars, this was accepted by the majority position, even by revivalist scholars like ‘Abduh and Riḍā. Islamic prophetology, as outlined, has been subject to sustained critique with the introduction of rationalist thought as well as the philosophers. The discussions were often wedged between the traditionalists’ and rationalists’ camps on the nuances in the degrees of prophethood as an ‘institution’, the notion of *wahy* and particularly the topic of miracles. Regardless of the dominance of the theologians, or the popularly accepted ‘Sunni’ position, which was championed by al-Ash‘arī and al-Māturīdī, the inclusion and great impact of rational thought and philosophy even upon the orthodox views of prophetology was undeniable. Arguably, since its introduction right until the modern period, rational argumentation has been included in all schools of discourse in *kalām* and in particular on prophetology. The



evidence of this impact on the modern scholars will be outlined in the coming chapters, which will also address how Nursi and Iqbal grappled and responded with reason or ‘*aql*’ in their argument for prophetology in Islam.

### 3 NURSI'S AND IQBAL'S METHODOLOGY IN CONTEXT OF THEIR GLOBAL AND LOCAL HISTORIES

Ideas and thoughts are formed due to particular realities in history, cultural thought, belief, and socio-economic and political contexts of the writers. Nursi and Iqbal are not exceptions to this formula. Although a number of key works have addressed the life and context of both Iqbal<sup>1</sup> and increasingly of Nursi,<sup>2</sup> there are insufficient critical studies on them. Moreover, a comparative study of their lives and global and local historical contexts has never been assessed to date.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter besides their historical setting, a comparative analysis of their responses of how the 'prophetic understanding' is reflected upon significant contemporary issues of modernism, rationalism, Pan-Islamism and nationalism will also be assessed. Their different approaches will be illustrated to demonstrate two exclusive responses to modernity from the Muslim world.

As argued in the earlier chapters of this thesis, the second main period of the ascendancy of 'aql (rational thinking) was in motion during the life and times of Nursi and Iqbal. This chapter illustrates the two scholars' global and local contexts and trends in religious practice as well as intellectual thought comparatively, to see how their lives were an embodiment of the Muslim psyche and a response to the rise and dominance of modernity.

A critical examination of the socio-political and cultural contexts of Nursi and Iqbal will

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<sup>1</sup> For the major works on Iqbal's life and times, see, Schimmel, Annemarie. *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*. Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1989. Mir, Mustansir. *Iqbal: Makers of Islamic Civilization*. IB Tauris, 2006. Iqbal, Muhammad and Vahid, Syed Abdul. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*. Lahore: S. Muhammad Ashraf, 1992. Majeed, Javed. *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics, and Postcolonialism*. Routledge India, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> For the key works on Said Nursi's life and, see Mardin. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*. 1989. Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 2012. Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim M., ed. *Islam At The Crossroads: On The Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. Suny Press, 2003. Reed, Fred A. *Anatolia Junction*. Books On Nursi Studies, 2012. Vahide, Sükran. "Toward an intellectual biography of Said Nursi." *Islam at the crossroads: on the life and thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003). Markham, Ian S., and Suendam Birinci Pirim. *An introduction to Said Nursi: Life, thought and writings*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011.

<sup>3</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, apart from the two articles by Jalal Jalalizade and Oliver Leaman, which briefly discuss the two scholars, an in depth study of their life, thought and works has not been undertaken as yet. See Jalalizade, Jalal. "A Comparison of the Thought of Bediuzzaman and Muhammad Iqbal." In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)*. 1995 and Leaman, Oliver, "Nursi's Place in the Ihya' Tradition." *The Muslim World* 89, no. 3-4 (1999): 314-324.

explain how their thought and method of response were shaped by it. Resultantly, it will demonstrate how the dominance of rationalism and positivism in the scholarly discourse of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries provoked a similar response from the Muslim world.

The first part of the chapter sketches their background, by outlining their global contexts within a declining Ottoman Empire in the case of Nursi and the dominance of the British Colonial rule in India for Iqbal. Their early life, education, and personal history will also be critically examined. The second part considers their response to emerging trends in their shared global historical context, particularly in relation to their ‘prophetic understanding’ in relation to the issues involved. This is significant to their prophetologies because it demonstrates their understanding of the ‘prophetic example’ and recommendation on each of these issues.

In the final section, their choice of genre and method of response resulting from their historical context will be assessed. The use of ‘*aql*’ prevailing either in the theological exposition in Nursi’s case or philosophical defence in Iqbal’s case will be examined. Their writings are further contextualised in the classification of the revivalist or *tajdīdī* genre as well as the modernist discourse. Lastly, their use of metaphysical and spiritual discourse in verse and poetry as an alternative tool and medium to reach the masses will also be assessed. A critical examination of the elected genre is essential to contextualise both their rational and mystical discussion in the later chapters.

This chapter argues that there are three types of revival or *tajdīd* that usually occur: firstly, theoretical revival, which is usually an intellectually constructed renewal project based on ‘*aql*’; secondly, practical revival, which involves the intellect as well as the practical ‘action centred’ revival based on the ‘*aql*’ and the heart; thirdly, spiritual revival, which is a combination of ‘*aql*’, heart, and spirit (*rūh*) in light of the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*. This is brought about through a long spiritual journey in the intellectual realm – it is manifested as

positive thinking as well as positive action in all aspects of life, with enduring difficulty and suffering. It is argued that since Nursi did not write only about revival or *tajdīd* but he also demonstrated it in his character and life especially in the “New Said period”; his revivalist project is therefore based categorically in this third revival at the level of the spirit. By comparison, Iqbal would fit more in the second level of practical revival, which is based on the *‘aql* and the heart.

### 3.1 Global context

The life and times of Said Nursi and Muhammad Iqbal were marked by an era of rapid technological and political change. The foremost global trends were the prevalence of positivist sciences, and an obvious shift away from theology to more atheistic philosophies. Darwinian theories also governed the polemics of the time. The intellectual fervour was led by competing economic theories that dictated the global platform, consisting of either Marxist economic theory or the capitalist theory. Both were driven by socioeconomic and political life. There was a huge shift also in the global political structure, marked by the demise of nearly all the Islamic Sultanates and the rise and dominance of the European colonies.<sup>4</sup> This shift of power out of the fallen and falling Islamic Empires as well as their total subjugation to the Western powers were typical almost everywhere, including the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. This shift was further represented by a break away from monarchies and gave rise to the emergence of many Republican nation-states. In this climate, reason was taking precedence once again over the ‘heart’<sup>5</sup> and dominating human intellectual enquiry.<sup>6</sup> The awareness of these trends was very clear in Nursi’s and Iqbal’s

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<sup>4</sup> The 18th, 19th and 20th centuries saw the gradual fall of the three Turkic Empires, the Safavid Empire in Persia that fell in 1736, the Mughal Empire in India that fell in 1857 and the lastly the longest and largest among them the Ottoman Empire that fell in 1922.

<sup>5</sup> Within the context of the Islamic theology and mysticism, rational argumentation stands alongside with metaphysical and spiritual expressions that are often referred to as the ‘heart’, see Gülen. *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, 2006. The heart is also seen as the centre of the spirit as well as the interface with the body and is therefore within the confines of this definition that is referred to here as well.

<sup>6</sup> See, Kasaba, Resat. *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy: The Nineteenth Century*. SUNY Press, 1988.

writings – as they either referred to them subtly or directly addressed their criticisms in their writings.

In the Ottoman state, to which Nursi belonged, the influence of such socio-economic, political and intellectual global trends was also gradually felt. Although somewhat late, these global trends were nevertheless still adopted.<sup>7</sup> Correspondingly, the efforts of the British Raj in India – the geographical home of Iqbal – saw a rise in educational institutions as well as social and political reforms that were also introducing an emerging trend of Westernisation. The Ottoman state was more affected by the rational and philosophical theories of the West than her Indian counterpart. Perhaps this was due to geographical proximity to Europe, meaning a greater and easier infiltration of European thought and political influence on the ‘Islamic State’ was possible. This contrasts to India where the British Colonial rule had ousted the Mughal Muslim government from the nation prior to the birth of Iqbal.<sup>8</sup> Although governed by British rule, the influence of European thought and culture in India was somewhat resisted and thus, had a slower effect, which will be assessed later on in the chapter.<sup>9</sup> This is important to the key prism which the thesis is considering in relation to their prophetologies – namely that of rational thought. Hence, the variance and degrees in the adoption of not just Western cultural influence but rational thought in India and the Ottoman Empire is important.

Since both Nursi and Iqbal belonged the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>st</sup> centuries, the swift change in their global context was a significant commonality that not only affected but also shaped

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<sup>7</sup> See, Ihsanoglu, Ekmeleddin. “Ottoman Educational Institutions During the Reform Period.” *Manchester: Foundation for Science Technology and Civilization*. Retrieved January 9 (2004): 2010. Makdisi, Ussama. “After 1860: debating religion, reform, and nationalism in the Ottoman Empire.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 04 (2002): 601-617.

<sup>8</sup> See Dirks, Nicholas B. *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Ghulam Hussain (1727-1806) was a descendant of the high ranking Mughal families that later worked for British Companies in India. His historical account of Mughal Rule up until the years of the British rule called *Seir Mutaqherin (Review of Modern Times)* reveals the discontent and distrust of the Indians towards the ‘British’ “invaders”, Nickolas Dirks extends this discussion in his text, Dirks, Nicholas B. *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*, Harvard University Press, 2009. pp. 219-230.

the potentialities of their responses. As mentioned afore, the rapid changes in politics, economics, and global power in the world from the East to the West, as well as the introduction of new philosophies, ideologies and technologies affected the global and proximate worlds of Nursi and Iqbal. Both Nursi and Iqbal were directly affected by these changes as these were introduced in their own local communities. It is outside the scope of this thesis to explore all the changes in their individual contexts, and therefore only the key ones will be highlighted.

Colonisation brought along with it opportunities and challenges. One positive gain was the access to greater education; this is evident in both Nursi and Iqbal's personal life that will be explored later in greater detail. The psychological impact of colonisation upon the Muslim world had various responses from different scholars around the world. Many Muslims were alarmed by this sudden shift in power and the disintegration of the 'Muslim *ummah*' politically, economically and socially. Therefore the scholarly response that followed was almost always based on innovative ways of adjusting to the new politics of the day. The theological works were also somewhat a justification and motivational basis for the political action and responsibility that Muslims had to take. Nursi and Iqbal however, responded differently to this situation. Although both realised the impact of the rapid changes listed above, Iqbal sought to respond by seeking a better solution for Muslims through the higher apparatus in society, through his political connections in British India.<sup>10</sup> By comparison, Nursi was largely disenfranchised from the social and political arena and he therefore sought a total disassociation from politics and even social engagements.<sup>11</sup> His objective was also renewal, yet an internal one – renewal of faith or

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<sup>10</sup> Annemarie Schimmel outlines closely the social and political connections of Iqbal during the era of the British Raj. In 1922 he was conferred the knighthood by the British Crown. See Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, pp. 45-60.

<sup>11</sup> Particularly in his 'New Said' period, biographers of Nursi have observed his somewhat chosen and somewhat coerced into being totally a political. See, Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim M., ed. *Islam at the crossroads*, 2003, p. 13.

*īmān*. To meet this key aim he envisaged reaching out to educate potential hearts and minds towards his cause.

Nursi's context was socio-politically less unfavourable than Iqbal's, as Nursi was still living in a Muslim majority empire and later a Muslim majority Republican state. Iqbal on the other hand was born during the British colonisation of India and experienced the economic, social and political demise of the Muslim minority in the Sub-Continent. The geographical and political context of these prolific scholars had a significant psychological impact upon their experience, and perception, hence their main ideas as communicated in their major works. This will be briefly explored in other sections of the chapter related to their education and experience and contact with the West and their choice of response and methodologies.

### **3.2 Peripheries and the centre**

Another corresponding reality of the two thinkers was their social standing in the societies that they resided. Both Nursi and Iqbal were culturally, linguistically and in Iqbal's case also religiously dissimilar to their wider societies. Despite being at the periphery of their communities, they maintained an influential role and relationship with the 'centre'. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi maintains that 'arising from the periphery' Nursi sought social change and reform not only in Eastern Anatolia his native homeland, but also across all of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>12</sup> Abu-Rabi describes Nursi 'as a major scholar (*'ālim*) who hailed from the rough mountains of Kurdistan', a region in Eastern Anatolia that was peripheral in relation to a 'declining multiglot and multi-ethnic Empire'.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Abu-Rabi argues this in brief and refers to Mardin's discussion of Martin van Bruinessen argument about the 'Kurdish and other Middle Eastern tribes have for millennia lived in the peripheries and had other various dealings with developed States'. See Van Bruinessen, Martin. *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. London: np, 2nd Edition, 1992, pp. 205-264, as quoted in Abu-Rabi, *Islam at the Crossroads*, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

Nursi's initial disadvantage – being from the periphery and not the centre of the Ottoman Empire – was soon transformed into a significant gain and benefit. Not having direct access to the centre of the social and political activity of the Empire, which seemed as an obvious disadvantage, as the centre of the then still thriving Empire was located to the West of Anatolia, in Istanbul– meant a lack of direct access to the modern socio-political, scientific and economic opportunities.<sup>14</sup> However, Nursi's location in the East of Anatolia and hence the periphery of the Ottoman Empire meant that he had access to the traditional *madrasā* system where he acquired all the traditional sciences as well mystical teachings by way of contact with the Sufi *tekkes* that were most prevalent there. Both of these were stronger in the Eastern provinces where Nursi was from. In a short time Nursi became very popular and well regarded in the Eastern provinces, hailed as the 'Bediuzzaman' a title meaning 'Wonder of his age', that was given to him as a result of his brilliant mind and intellectual capacity to resolve all theological, logical as well social and political dilemmas of Eastern Anatolia.<sup>15</sup> This young talent was soon spotted by the direct representatives of the Sultan in the Eastern provinces – who sponsored Nursi's further education and training especially as it was coming to a threat by other competing scholars that felt threatened by this rising '*alim*'.<sup>16</sup> In fact it was in the house of Tahir Pasha that he was bequeathed contact with the leading and most up to date chronicles and journals as well as the philosophical and intellectual and scientific developments in the Western world.<sup>17</sup> These were made directly available to the young scholar from the periphery. This access and support went beyond educational bursary, as a result of his close associations with the

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<sup>14</sup> Nursi was a scholar and not interested in the economical and political gains personally. However, he had assessed early on the unequal access and opportunity to the privileges of the Western Anatolians and sought these similar access and opportunities particularly (access to proper schooling and education) for his own native region. His educational proposals will be discussed later on this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, pp. 3-33.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. According to Vahide, Nursi never took anything from anyone while at *madrasā* as he self-financed his own education. It was only in the later part of his educational career that Tahir Pasha provided him with protection and access to wider resources in his own house. This was not a monetary bursary but for return of Nursi's assistance in resolving local issues due to his brilliant problem solving mind, a bequest of protection and access to grand library.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



'Amirs' of the Sultan; Nursi even had opportunities to have a direct audience with the Sultan Abdul Hamid II himself.<sup>18</sup> It was indeed his links with the Ottoman aristocracy coupled with his recognition as a brilliant scholar of his time that enabled this access. Nursi's brilliance as a scholar was soon established as he took residence in Istanbul. Due to his ability to resolve the complex questions of the most renowned scholars of the Empire, he was quickly recognised and revered amongst the *ulamā*' of the centre of the Empire as well. Occasions such as these that determined Nursi's future success as a one of the most renowned scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>st</sup> centuries in not only in Turkey but also all over the Muslim world. Thus, even though Nursi belonged to the periphery he influenced and reformed and had a significant impact upon the heart of the 'centre' as well.

As Van Bruinessen argues, 'Kurdish and other Middle Eastern tribes have for millennia, lived in the periphery of, and had various dealings, with well developed states'.<sup>19</sup> This situation may also be extended to other parts of Asia including India during the reign of the British Raj that prevailed in the geographical home of Iqbal. Iqbal's case was somewhat similar to that of Nursi's life. He was from Sialkot a region from the Punjab province of India and due to being a Muslim minority in a Hindu majority nation, he felt the social and political marginalisation of the Muslims in India, particularly after the ascension of the British Raj post the Muslim Mughal rule.<sup>20</sup> Although Iqbal inherited the mystical and literary arts from what were the remnants of the ousted Mughal Empire, making his cultural, linguistic and philosophical roots strong earlier on in his life, which was one of the few advantages of being from a humble Muslim family at that time. Nevertheless, the social, political, economic centre of the Empire were seated initially in Calcutta (Kolkata)

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp. 33-63.

<sup>19</sup> Bruinessen. *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 212.

<sup>20</sup> This is well illustrated in many of his poetical verses and his speeches and political essays. See Iqbal's two Presidential Addresses delivered in the All-India Muslim League at Allahabad and Lahore pp. 161-219 and his Speeches in the Punjab Legislative Council pp. 310-343 in Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, 1992.

and then transferred to Delhi in 1911,<sup>21</sup> for the greater part of Iqbal's life though the centre was distant in the Eastern region of the Sub-Continent in Calcutta. This made economic and socio-political opportunities rare for the more densely Muslim-populated regions of the North Western Provinces to which Iqbal's family belonged. Like Nursi, this meant that Iqbal too received the traditional Islamic teachings, the study of the Qur'ān and in particular the transfer of the Persian and Urdu mystical poetry and literature of the late Mughal Empire. Soon though this lost the advantages that it would have had in the Mughal days, as Persian was dropped for English as the common curriculum language in the education system.<sup>22</sup> The establishment of the Government College in Lahore as well as the prestigious Punjab University in 1882, opened access to not only English language and education but also occasions to further Persian and Arabic, these facilitated more opportunities for the emerging young talent.<sup>23</sup> Due to Iqbal's particular talent and the expansion and stabilisation of the British rule in the central and Northern Provinces, his admission to the Scotch Mission College subsequently opened many doors of access to the intellectual and philosophical thought of Europe and the West as well as the Islamic Studies taught in the Orientalist department.<sup>24</sup> It was Iqbal's education that introduced him to not only leading scholars and academics of the British Empire in India, but also recognition and appreciation of his talent and skills by the political rulers of India as well.<sup>25</sup>

Though the British entered India via the East, the West was becoming a growing political and economic interest for the Empire and this meant recognising and dealing with the Muslim presence and working with that segmented part of the society as well. Due to growing British interest in the Western provinces where Muslims were in the majority,

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<sup>21</sup> Judd, Denis. *The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 91.

<sup>22</sup> See Spear, Percival. "IV. Bentinck and Education I. Macaulay's Minute." *Cambridge Historical Journal* 6, no. 01 (1938): 78-101.

<sup>23</sup> Ellis, Catriona. "Education for All: Reassessing the Historiography of Education in Colonial India." *History Compass* 7, no. 2 (2009): 363-375.

<sup>24</sup> Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, pp. 35-40.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

greater opportunities for individuals like Iqbal became possible. Iqbal like others sought after these new opportunities to further their educational, economic and political avenues beyond the borders of India – to the noteworthy institutions in England. Although Iqbal was less successful in the economic and political department, he was soon recognised for his exceptional abilities and gifted talents by the British Empire on 1922 as he received knighthood by King George V.<sup>26</sup> With such conferred prestige Iqbal became more influential in the All India Muslim league – to whom he delivered two key Presidential Addresses in 1930 and 1932 consecutively.<sup>27</sup> In this way Iqbal sustained an influential role with the centre of his socio-political rulers, despite his humble origins from the peripheries of the British India.

Iqbal was religiously, politically and ideologically different to the ‘centre’ of his society. By comparison, Nursi was only ethnically and linguistically different.<sup>28</sup> These differences in their peripheral settings had a great impact on their particular responses. These will be examined later on in this chapter.

### **3.3 Secular and Islamic education**

Another important aspect of the personal histories of Nursi and Iqbal that further crystallised their response to modernity, rationalism and their global context is the nature of their education. The educational instruction of Nursi and Iqbal bear great similarities and significant differences. These become important later on in this chapter as their style and method of response is explored, as well as in the forthcoming chapters that consider their theological, philosophical and mystical ideas on prophethood.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 161-219.

<sup>28</sup> Nursi spoke his native tongue of Kurdish as well as Arabic in his early life. It was only in his later life that he acquired the Turkish language (language of the Ottoman Empire) and decided to write his major exegesis in that language. Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 28.

Nursi was born, raised and educated in Eastern Anatolia in the villages of Nurs in Bitlis Province, and Van, and belonged to a Kurdish family in the diverse region.<sup>29</sup> He received instruction in the traditional Islamic sciences and quickly proved to master them at an early age. He had an independent nature and found himself being challenged and questioned by the leading scholars of his era.<sup>30</sup> Nursi was therefore well educated; in fact, he was known to be a ‘child prodigy’ and went on to become a great scholar (‘Bediuzzaman’ or ‘wonder of his age’) while still relatively young. He received a *madrasā* education in Eastern Anatolia and travelled extensively in this region in his earlier years. He soon gained popularity for his brilliant ability to challenge esteemed scholars and for his brilliant mind and photographic memory.<sup>31</sup> Nursi did not go to the secular schools or *maktabs* however; due to his superb capacity and talent he was sponsored by the regional ‘Pasha’ (the Sultan’s vizier in the Eastern regions) and given a bursary to stay and receive access to the modern philosophies, sciences and politics.<sup>32</sup>

Iqbal received his basic Islamic education from his family. He was admitted to the local mosque for the study of the Qur’ān. His Arabic teacher Syed Mir Hassan encouraged his admission to the Scotch Mission College, where he was prepared for university and completed his matriculation in 1883.<sup>33</sup> Unlike Nursi, Iqbal did not have a traditional Islamic or *madrasā* education. But subsequent to his admission into the Scotch Mission College, his academic education exposed him to Western thought and philosophy, English language and literature as well as Arabic language and studies. In 1895 and 1897 Iqbal completed the Intermediate level equivalent of a Bachelor of Arts from Scotch Mission College (later called Murray College in 1909) and two years later the full degree from the

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<sup>29</sup> Although Nursi was from Kurdish villages, there were also many other tribes in the region of Eastern Anatolia. There were Armenians and Turks as well.

<sup>30</sup> See, Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, pp. 3-31. See also, Markham, Ian S. and Suendam Birinci Pirim. *An Introduction to Said Nursi: Life, Thought and Writings*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2011, pp. 3-20.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Mir. *Iqbal*, p. 2.

Government College Lahore.<sup>34</sup> As Nursi surpassed the local scholars of Eastern Anatolia, Iqbal was soon recognised as the growing star of Punjab. His philosophy teacher and mentor Sir Thomas Arnold encouraged his philosophical, and linguistic interests. Arnold also encouraged Iqbal to pursue his studies in the West. From 1905-1908 Iqbal travelled to Europe and from England he acquired Bachelor of Arts (from Trinity College, Cambridge University) and was admitted to the Bar Lincoln's Inn. From Munich, Germany he acquired his Doctor of Philosophy in 1908.

The outstanding difference in Nursi and Iqbal's early education is related to the content and nature of their instruction in the form of traditional religious sciences and modern Western education. Clearly, Nursi's prime education was nurtured in the *madrāsā* system in Eastern Anatolia at the periphery of the Ottoman Empire, whilst, Iqbal's prime education was in Western Sciences and Philosophy in region of British India. The significance of this difference is reflected in their later choice of methodology, where they elected to communicate their views on prophethood and the Prophet Muḥammad. Nursi chose the revivalist methods and suffused his work in traditional *kalām* or Islamic theology, whereas Iqbal chose the modern philosophical and even psychological discourses to convey his thought. Even though Nursi and Iqbal also had access to both Western and Islamic sciences later on, this did not affect their established orientation in the respective early educations that they each received.

Moreover, even though Iqbal was geographically located more to the East of Europe than Nursi, nevertheless, being a great colony of the British Empire, India provided him with access early on to modern Western thought and then later through his three years of study and travel in Europe – a direct exposure and intimate discourse with Europe and European modern thought and philosophies. Iqbal's theoretical engagement with the Western

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

philosophies is directly visible in his essays and poems. Iqbal received no formal Islamic education; in fact it was through exposure to classical sources in Orientalist departments of India and Europe that paved the way for contact with the great Orientalist departments there.<sup>35</sup> His correspondence with the Indian Muslim scholars on key issues related to *fiqh* or jurisprudence and *īmān* faith, illustrates that he considered himself in his own words a ‘student’ of Islam.<sup>36</sup>

Nursi on the other hand was very confident in the Islamic sciences and law. On one occasion in Istanbul he boldly wrote on his guesthouse room’s door ‘all questions answered, no questions asked’,<sup>37</sup> and thereby became the renowned scholar of not only Eastern Anatolia, but with growing fame, popularity and respect in Istanbul – the heart of the Ottoman empire as well.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, despite being geographically more proximate to Europe, in the periphery of the Ottoman Empire (Eastern Anatolia) this background equipped Nursi with all the traditional Islamic sciences and grounded him in Islamic *kalām* and thought. Nursi’s sponsored education of the Western sciences and philosophy at Tahir Pasha’s residence equipped him with the up to date knowledge in human thought. Notwithstanding his newly found fascination with the other positivist sciences, Nursi continued to build his renewal works based on Islamic theology but also incorporated scientific and rational arguments throughout his works as well.

The importance and significance of Western sciences and philosophical thought eventually became realised by both Nursi and Iqbal, who sought to re-evaluate Islamic thought and philosophy in light of it. Nevertheless, both were also critical of the loss of a spiritual

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<sup>35</sup> See Fyzee-Rahamin, Atiya Begum. *Iqbal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Schimmel. *Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> Iqbal admits at the beginning of a number of essays that he is a ‘critical student’ of Islam. See Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 30. In Iqbal’s correspondence with leading Muslim scholars of India, the capacity and at times limitation of Iqbal in Islamic theology, and jurisprudence is obvious. See in particular his correspondence with Sulayman Nadvi in Iqbal, Muhammad. *Letters of Iqbal*. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1978.

<sup>37</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 39.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 38-42.

dimension to religious practice and a meaning for life – a loss that they both observed also in the West. To counter balance this over-emphasis on rational and positivist sciences, Nursi and Iqbal both reconnected with the earliest training that they had both received as children – Islamic *taṣawwuf* or Sufi mysticism.

In addition to *madrasā* education, Nursi belonged to the Shafi school of Law (*fiqh*) and generally was part of the Ash‘arīte School of *kalām*,<sup>39</sup> also in his native province the Qadiri and Naqshbandi Sufi orders were dominant,<sup>40</sup> although Nursi himself did not follow one particular Sufi order.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, his filial piety and loyalty to ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (1077–1166) and Aḥmad Sirhindī (1564-1624) (both leading figures from the Qadiri and the Naqshbandi traditions) is notable. Thus, the environment that formed the basic characteristics and later personality of Nursi – namely the Eastern Anatolian *tekkes* and *zāwiyas*, all houses of remembrance *dhikr* – was one steeped in the key practices of the mystical tradition of Islam. In this way Nursi had a profound understanding and appreciation for the inner aspects of faith and practice. This re-surfaced in his later life, especially in the ‘New Said’ period,<sup>42</sup> whereby due to forced exile, the wisdom and

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<sup>39</sup> Despite the general assumption that most Shafi scholars would follow in the traditional lines of adhering to Ash‘arī School of theology, this is not the case with Nursi. I argue in this thesis that his writings reflect that he was closer to the Māturīdī School in some respects, especially in relation to the notion of *qadar* or Divine Will and Determining. See “The Twenty Sixth Word,” in Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 479-493. In fact, this is very atypical of a Nursian approach as argued in this thesis – that is why he has meticulously infused various branches of Islamic law and theology of the Orthodox Islam (also known as *ahl al sunnah wal jama’*) and re-expressed and written it in his own exegetical works which are not characteristically assembled to any one particular school of theology or law.

<sup>40</sup> See Bruinessen. *Agha, Shaikh and State*, pp. 205-264.

<sup>41</sup> Nursi’s family and close kinsmen followed the Naqshbandi Sufi order, but as was characteristic of his style, individuality and uniqueness, Nursi was not a ‘follower’ and since an early age a great spiritual connection to *Shaykh* of the Qadiri *ṭarīqa* – ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī – to whom he himself later recounted ‘I would send him thousands of *fatīhas* (a Qur’ānic prayer) as a child’. See Vahide and Abu-Rabi‘. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 4-8.

<sup>42</sup> The New Said is a classification of the period, stage of Said Nursi’s life where the scholar himself proclaimed a ‘New Said’. It is marked by the scholars changed circumstances from being very active in social and political affairs, to almost being totally isolation through forced exile and apolitical. It is also in this period that Nursi begins to write his main exegetical works the *Risale-i Nur*. Many biographers of Nursi including Necemettin Sahiner, Serif Mardin and Sukran Vahide have all discussed thoroughly the various differences between the ‘Old Said’ and New Said, not only in terms of personal behaviour but also worldview outlook and socio-political context and Nursi’s response. See Şahiner, Necmeddin. *Bilinmeyen Taraflarıyla Bediüzzaman Said Nursi: Kronolojik Hayatı*. İstanbul: Nesil, 2010; Mardin. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, 1989.

teachings of the mystical tradition in many ways led to the formation of the ‘new Nursi’ a stark change and transition from a socially and politically active scholar and civil leader to an isolated scholar, in a long retreat like exile, immersed in deep reflection, meditation and prayer. It was in this state that Nursi’s key exegetical works the *Risale-i Nur* were written.

Similar to Nursi, Iqbal was also born to a household that was at the centre of communal gatherings hosting *dhikr* sessions as well as mystical poetical recitations and teachings of earlier Muslim mystics and poets. Iqbal’s father Nur Muhammad, a pious Muslim sought and encouraged the regular study sessions of Sufi classical texts in Urdu and Persian, with which he himself was well acquainted.<sup>43</sup> Besides the Qur’ānic instruction he had at his local mosque, Iqbal started lessons with Syed Mir Hasan (1844 – 1929), who taught him Islamic tradition and literature. As with Nursi, the metaphysical and mystical teachings of Islam were inculcated deeply in Iqbal from a young age. Thus, despite having more instruction in rational and philosophical thought in his later years at the Scotch Mission College, Government School Lahore and Punjab University as well as his higher tertiary education in Europe, Iqbal reverted back to his mystical ‘roots’.<sup>44</sup> Ironically this consciousness and realisation occurred to him in Europe. In a paradoxical quote he is recorded to have said that ‘I became a Muslim in Europe’.<sup>45</sup>

Corresponding to Nursi, Iqbal too has been affiliated with both the Qadiri as well as the Naqshbandi Sufi Orders. Tahir Qadiri has recently shed light into Iqbal’s personal statement in a letter outlining that he had given allegiance or *baya* to the Qadiri Order.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, due to his personal and devotional appraisal of Aḥmad Sirhindī many assumed

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<sup>43</sup> Mir. *Iqbal*, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Schimmel. *Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> Tahir Qadiri a renowned and respected Pakistani Muslim scholar has announced in a televised statement the conclusion of his research about Iqbal’s connection with the Sufi orders existing in his time. According to him, evidence is found in the actual letters of Iqbal, wherein he clearly states that he is not against Sufism per but distinguishes between the ‘Persianised attitude’ that he says has affected India as well as distinct to other ‘truthful’ paths. Qadiri asserts that this is stated in his letter to Suleyman Nadavi. See Iqbal, Muhammad. *Letters of Iqbal*. Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1978, p. 650.



an affiliation with the Naqshbandi Order as well. However, like Nursi, Iqbal too remained connected yet independent of both orders. Iqbal's preference to communicate his ideas of reform were conducted through the medium of Urdu and Persian poetry, wherein he communicated his creative and intellectual thought within the metres and styles of classical poets and Sufi saints.<sup>47</sup>

However, despite this Nursi and Iqbal did not promote the ideas of following a Sufi order or *ṭarīqat*. This was useful in a neo-Wahhabi and Salafi world that was intolerant and abhorred any notion of Sufism and dogmatically promoted literalistic readings of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. Although very far in thought, style and behaviour from the Salafi movement, nevertheless due to the climate of his times Nursi more than Iqbal solely focused on the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*.<sup>48</sup> Another reason for this particular emphasis on the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* in his writings was due to the anti-Sufi attitudes amongst his co-religionists and due to the repressive policy of the secularist Turkish government.

Moreover, their respective responses towards the Sufi orders may be further contextualised by Sirhindī's example.<sup>49</sup> Just as Sirhindī was critical of the existing Sufi practices of his time, Iqbal in particular displayed a disapproval of the mystical orders and blamed them for the 'apathetical status quo' of the Muslim people, whom he envisions to call back to action and change.<sup>50</sup> This attitude is not entirely consistent with Nursi's approach.

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<sup>47</sup> Mir. *Iqbal*, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Unlike the Wahabis and the Modernists scholars who were anti-Sufi, Nursi in fact fused Sufi teachings, concepts and methods in his exegetical works the *Risale-i Nur*. What distinguishes him from the Sufi Orders is his persistence on the 'unnecessariness' of shaikh and decipile models and orders as such is prescription of the essentialness and sufficiency of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. Nursi states that sufism is like 'fruit' and that the Muslims were in need of 'bread' the essentials of Islam in the modern age. In this statement he has maintained the dignity and reverence for the mystical side of Islam unlike his contemporaries who very quickly were ready to farewell this integral branch of the Islamic tradition.

<sup>49</sup> Imam Rabbani, Aḥmad Faruq Sirhindī (d. 1624): Accepted by many as "The Reviver of the Second Millennium," especially in Islamic spirituality. Born in Sarhind (India) and well-versed in Islamic sciences, he removed many corrupt elements from Sufism. He also taught Shah Alamgir or Awrangzeb (d. 1707), who had a committee of scholars prepare the most comprehensive compendium of Hanafi Law. See Unal, Ali. *Gleams of Truth: Risale-i Nur Collection*. Izmir: Tughra Books, 2009, p. 64.

<sup>50</sup> Iqbal's duality of thought in regard to the mystical tradition of Islam will be further assessed in Chapter 5 of this thesis. See Iqbal. *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, pp. 76-116.

Although like Iqbal, Nursi did not promote any particular Sufi order, or prescribe membership to one, he was nevertheless not as strongly critical of the *ṭarīqas* in his works as Iqbal. In this regard both Nursi and Iqbal followed the Prophetic prescriptions mainly and made the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* as their true '*Shaykh*' (spiritual guide).<sup>51</sup>

Lastly, it could be argued that the mystical tradition of Islam had a great impact since early childhood on the formation of both Nursi and Iqbal's thought and character. As illustrated afore, this had a significant role in formulating their thought. Against the popular anti-Sufi trend in the Muslim world then prevalent, in many ways their works have contributed to the actual preservation of the mystical and literary tradition of Islam. In this way they have made a significant contribution in the conservation of the spiritual dimension or inner dimensions of the *Sunnah* that the Wahhabi and Salafi were destroying with their over-emphasis on the outer dimensions of the *Sharī'ah* and *Sunnah*.<sup>52</sup> Nursi particularly has also defended an important aspect of prophetic studies in *kalām* that is the prophetic way, tradition or otherwise known as the *Sunnah*.

### 3.4 Personal life

The personal circumstances that surrounded Nursi and Iqbal as well as their private life also demonstrates the opportunities, and obstacles that stood in the way of their revivalist and modernist objectives. Their personal lives show the significance of their belief in their own philosophies that they represented and the contextual reality that this gave to their writings.

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<sup>51</sup> Nursi more so than Iqbal, as Iqbal was somewhat influenced by Orientalist literature and has some reservations about the Hadīth literature, which would affect his understanding of the totality of the *Sunnah*.

<sup>52</sup> Esposito, John L. *The Future of Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 74-77. It should be noted however, that Salafism and Wahabism were not influential or widespread outside Arabia and the Middle East, particularly less so in Turkey and the Sub-Continent. Nevertheless, both Nursi and Iqbal knew their ideas and thoughts. Thus their writings in the long term had a counter-affect to the Salafism that frowned upon mysticism and spiritual dimension, this was not an immediate effect.

Nursi was the fourth child of a pious Kurdish family. His father's family had immigrated from Cizre to Bitlis; he was born in the village of Nurs near Bitlis. The biographers of Nursi have noted the humble dwellings that formulated the household of Nursi's family; his father was a villager with a small-holding of land and his mother was a pious traditional woman. As Martin Van Branen demonstrates the tribal bonds of 'Agha' and 'Shaykh' marked Kurdish communities.<sup>53</sup> The Sufi *tekkes* (also known as *az-zāwiya*) and orders such as the Naqshbandi and Qadiri were also dominant in Nursi's homeland. The Eastern part of Anatolia was much more traditional and retained a more rural type of community in the isolated villages near the mountain ranges, which was in sharp contrast to the urban life and westernised part of Western Anatolia. Nursi's childhood and early youth were set in this context; he travelled extensively with his elder brother and had a very independent nature. He soon outshone all the students in the visiting *madrasās*; his independent nature reflective of his prodigious mind and intellect which challenged the local scholars. Very quickly Nursi completed all the education that Eastern Anatolia could provide for him. He became a young scholar, the 'Bediuzzaman' or 'wonder of the time' at a young age after which he also started to teach.

Nursi was also concerned about the local tribal relations and peace; he served his region not only through teaching and passing on of knowledge, but also in social issues. There were many instances of tribal disputes in which Nursi was instrumental in keeping peace in his region. He wished to eradicate the growing divide between the East and West of Anatolia through the resolution of the Educational reforms (discussed later in this chapter) that he thought would resolve these gaps in their upbringing, and hence outlook and development. Nursi was also in charge of government backed militia group that defended the frontier borders in the East during the Russian attack in the region. It was also while on that front that he started writing his Qur'ānic commentary the '*Sign of Miraculousness*'.

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<sup>53</sup> Bruinessen. *Agha, Shaikh and State*, pp. 205-264.

Nursi's early life was spent in books, *madrasās*, teaching, researching and on the battlefield. In the latter period of his life, he was to experience a lonely voyage away from his hometown in complete isolation and exile in the Western part of Anatolia. As a result of these circumstantial realities, Nursi never married and did not have a family of his own. It was however, in Western Anatolia in the 'New Said' period whereby he wrote his most famous treatise the *Risale-i Nur* and set up a civil movement, the 'Nur' Movement that was centred on his books that replaced the '*Agha* and *Shaykh*' model in his Eastern Kurdistan. Due to the restrictions of the practice of Sufi orders, the Nur Movement provided a new alternative for the people of Anatolia to retain their culture, tradition and religious beliefs in a rapidly Westernised environment that opposed and intended to abandon the 'out-dated traditions' existing in not only in that region, but all over Turkey.

Iqbal had a similar humble and traditional upbringing in the Punjab region of Sialkot in British India. Iqbal was also born in the same year as Nursi in 1877 to Kashmiri immigrant parents Nur Muhammad and Imam Bibi, both of whom were pious Muslims. Iqbal had Brahmin roots; his great grandparents were known to have converted to Islam from Brahmanism. He refers to his origins in a number of instances in his poetry.<sup>54</sup> Iqbal's early childhood and youth were spent in a deeply rooted traditional Sufi mystical Islam. His father was the host of many Sufi gatherings and many literary classics were read in his household. It was also in the more rural neighbourhoods of Sialkot where Iqbal frequented the local mosque for an education and familiarity with the Qur'ān. Unlike Nursi though, Iqbal did not receive an '*ijaza*' type of religious *madrasā* education however he was admitted to government colleges and even missionary ones that were popular in his time. The early years of his life greatly shaped and formed the most essential values that he

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<sup>54</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad, and K C. Kanda. *Allama Iqbal, Selected Poetry: Text, Translation and Transliteration*. Elgin: New Dawn Press, 2006, Farrar, Adam M. *Conceptions of Religion: Exploring the Converging and Diverging Religious Philosophies of Muhammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche*. The College of William and Mary, 2010, p. 12.

would later turn back to, in particular mystical poetry and ‘higher Sufism’ as he referred to his own ideal Sufi of Islam. After his return from Europe, despite his great academic excellence achieved in a short time, Iqbal was generally dissatisfied like Nursi with the trends in the West, particularly, the Western emphasis on empirical science and a great departure from spiritual and religious sciences. Iqbal’s return to his traditional roots is notable in his final years where he frequented the tomb of the great Sufi scholar and mystic ‘Ali Hujwārī (d. 1077) in Lahore as well as his great dedication to the literary tradition of Persian and Urdu poetry to which he has contributed to significantly through his numerous poetical volumes or *divans*.<sup>55</sup>

Despite being distant from Calcutta, the capital of the then British India, Iqbal had greater opportunities for travel abroad, travelling to England, Germany and Spain in his adult years to obtain further tertiary educational opportunities abroad. Iqbal was always a critical and reflective thinker, thus his adventures abroad brought him much intellectual satisfaction, but also made him struggle and critique some modern philosophical concepts and cultural propositions such as nationalism, communism and capitalism, which will be explored later on. Upon his return from abroad he had a respected standing amongst his peers and community as not only a great scholar and lawyer but importantly as a philosopher, thinker and poet in his native homeland of North West India.

Contrary to Nursi’s life and circumstances, Iqbal became gradually involved in the social and political life of the Muslim Indians. He was on a number of representative boards and committees in order to voice and create change for his people. Resultantly, he became directly involved in social, political change and contributed to policy making. He became highly influential in governmental affairs and the future of an independent India first and

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<sup>55</sup> Quraeshi, Samina, Ali S. Asani, Carl W. Ernst, and Kamil K. Mumtaz. *Sacred Spaces: A Journey with the Sufis of the Indus*. Cambridge, Mass: Peabody Museum Press, 2010, p. 145. Schimmel notes that Iqbal also visited Sirhindī’s tomb in 1934, see Schimmel. *Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 56.

later he also affirmed the idea of the two-nation state and a separate homeland for Muslim Indians.<sup>56</sup> Iqbal also had access to various mediums including print media in addition to these influential boards to communicate his ideas and works, and he utilised all of them. He was able to successfully publish his academic and literary works and even have them translated. His contributions to magazines, and newspapers and radio interviews were all modern mediums to communicate his message to the masses. Thus, on the one hand unlike Nursi who was facing an iron wall from the upper class and government, almost making him ‘disabled’ in his efforts to communicate to the wider society and world, Iqbal on the other hand had the privilege of access to mass audiences and his popularity increased very quickly as his ideas were welcomed.

In terms of his family life, Iqbal unlike Nursi was married in his younger years; his biographers have recorded his marriages to three Muslim Indian women, two of whom he had children with.<sup>57</sup> He also had the greater responsibility to provide for his family and children. Iqbal often had to take on legal matters to make a living and support his family, and this diverted his attention away from his more academic and as well as civic pursuits. Iqbal has also been criticised for his ‘other female acquaintances’ uncommon in his time, in particular, his correspondence and friendship with Atiya Begum, which provides insight on what was constructed later as the ‘controversial’ aspects of his life.<sup>58</sup>

Lastly, arguably Iqbal had a change in vision and perspective upon his return from Europe. Although being under the influence of Existentialist philosophy, Iqbal engaged more in rational philosophy before his departure for Europe. However, afterwards, Iqbal made a turn back to his ‘roots’, by furthering his spiritual and mystical pursuits by expressing them through his Persian and Urdu poetry. Therefore although he did not abandon rational

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<sup>56</sup> Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, pp. 56,198.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 247.

thought and philosophy, he sought the mystical avenues to communicate his main message and thought.

### **3.5 Response to specific issues**

In this section the thought of these two scholars is considered comparatively in relation to five areas and issues that dominated their time, including the following: educational reform; Islamic modernism; Pan-Islamism; nationalism; and the formation of the secular nation states of Turkey and Pakistan. The contrast of their thought as well as the similarity will be highlighted despite their geographical and political differences. Their commonalities illustrate some of the similar trends that almost all Muslim scholars, reformers and modernists were considering in the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

#### **3.5.1 Educational reform**

The importance and significance of having access and training in both the Islamic tradition as well as the Western philosophical thought, despite the order and greater instruction in one or the other, meant that both Nursi and Iqbal soon realised the key problem and also the solution to their local contexts being education. Education therefore became the key instrument through which not only did each man contribute significantly by way of teaching and instruction, but also made it their key facet in their reform methodologies and the renewal of Islam in their respective societies.<sup>59</sup>

Both Nursi and Iqbal were notably dissatisfied with the existing education system and their access to it. Nursi saw the absence of positivist sciences and philosophy in the *madrasā*

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<sup>59</sup> Both Nursi and Iqbal were directly involved in teaching. Nursi taught the Islamic sciences as an esteemed scholar in Eastern Anatolia in the Old Said period. Later on it was mainly through his letters and authoring of his exegetical works (*Risale-i Nur*) that he continued the passing down of education. Likewise, Iqbal also was involved directly in teaching Islamic tradition particularly Islamic history and philosophy as well as the Arabic language. He did this in his role as Professor of Oriental Studies, philosophy and Arabic at Lahore University and at the Government College. His teaching role declined towards the later part of his life, as he took on more legal work and was occupied with writing and affected by physical illness, nevertheless even in the later stages he continued to teach through his letters and particularly his public forums and lectures.

system, and Iqbal saw a lack of Islamic sciences being taught in the *maktabs* or state based schools. Hence they both sought reform in the educational system of their society. Moreover, they thought that the remedy for the existing problem in their educational curriculums would be to bridge the widening gap between positivist and Islamic sciences. While Iqbal realised the lack of Islamic content whether history or literature, Nursi saw a total disregard for the latest developments in science and philosophy in the *ulamā'* of the *madrasās*.

Nursi and Iqbal were both active in trying to reach their goals for educational reform. Nursi sought to establish an institute that would alleviate the growing divide between the existing *madrasās* in the East and the dominant Western based *maktabs* that were prevalent in the Western part of Anatolia. The proposed institution would teach both the Islamic sciences taught in the *madrasās* as well as the most up to date sciences and curriculums taught in the *maktabs* under the one roof. He called this project the '*Madrasāt-ul Zahra*',<sup>60</sup> which would be like a sister institute to the famous 'Al-Azhar' (one of the most renowned and first Islamic university) in Egypt, which bears the masculine name of Nursi's envisaged feminine noun 'al-Zahra'. Intriguingly his selected choice of the feminine version *Zahra* of the masculine *Azhar*, is not without purpose as Nursi's careful use of language and lingual tools throughout his work portray deeper motives and objectives to pursue his educational and social reform. In this case he wanted to ensure that multiple such institutions will be elected hence the choice of the feminine version.<sup>61</sup> He even had a proposed site in mind, which was to be located near the Eastern Provinces of Anatolia that served as a cross road between many cultures and civilisations. Thus, by having it in the East, at the periphery of

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<sup>60</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 46.

<sup>61</sup> Some of Nursi's students and followers like Fethullah Gülen have discussed the linguistic extensions of Nursi's choice of 'al-Zahra' as a title for his educational institute. Gülen suggests that the feminine noun *Zahra* indicates the female ability to reproduce, thus concluding that multiple such institutions should be build in not only in the Easter region, Arab world but also across the globe. Information obtained through personal communication with main supervisor.



the empire, he thought it would also eradicate the socio-economic and political problems of the Eastern provinces that arose from time to time, due to an existing socio-economic and political gap in comparison to the West of Anatolia.<sup>62</sup> Nursi was probably hopeful that his envisaged al-Zahra would be a model institute where both religious and positivist sciences were taught side by side. In this way he hoped that bigotry existing at the time and the rise of 'faithlessness' would also be eradicated – if other institutions also followed a similar curriculum. Nursi had made great advancements with this project. During the 'Old Said' period when the Ottomans were still the Sovereign rulers in Anatolia, he travelled twice to the centre of the Empire and had a direct office with the Sultan Hamid II that secured funding for his educational project. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of war with Russia, the project was soon abandoned.<sup>63</sup> The unstable future of the Ottoman Empire soon forced Nursi into an exile that consumed the rest of his life, in isolation and away from his social contacts. Nursi had to resort only to pen and paper for his educational reform. He later said that the *Risale-i Nur* also fulfilled that role of bringing together various disciplines and sciences of the Islamic faith along side facts from positivist sciences in order to 're-instil' faith in his people.<sup>64</sup>

Like Nursi, Iqbal was actively seeking ways to propose a new curriculum in the educational institutions in order to incorporate greater subjects on Islamic history and tradition. Iqbal's biographers have highlighted the various relationships and contacts with leading institutions in India such as the Aligarh Islamic University and other scholars.<sup>65</sup> Iqbal corresponded with them particularly on his return from Europe to express his ideal curriculum that would incorporate Islamic belief and tradition as well as Islamic legal

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<sup>62</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, pp. 101-110.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>65</sup> See Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing; Mir. Iqbal*, 2006.

philosophy, jurisprudence, philosophy and literature.<sup>66</sup> He also recommended research as an integral part of such a degree. In other correspondences particularly his letters to the Afghan Ministry of Education, he was asked for his advice about the schooling and educational model in Afghanistan. Iqbal warned them of 'blindly accepting' all the Western curriculums without a critical view.<sup>67</sup> He suggested incorporating the latest subjects in all the positivist sciences but alongside the important subjects of Islamic studies and tradition.<sup>68</sup>

Nursi and Iqbal felt that if Muslims in the modern era had access to a well-rounded education that did not deprive them of their own faith, ethics and identity, this could potentially resolve all the other socio-political, economic and national problems. Interestingly, both scholars deduced this very same conclusion about a balanced educational reform, despite their stark differences in their own personal and educational backgrounds as discussed earlier. That is why despite being a strong proponent of Islamic tradition, Nursi recognised the lack of the development and scientific knowledge in the Islamic institutions of his hometown, as well as seeing the dangers of having a totally secular education that was aloof to any ethical and moral teachings of Islam. His perception was very accurate, and was soon realised as the events of the ousting of the Ottomans and the formation of Secular Turkey unfolded as a direct result of the secularising education in Turkey.

Similarly, despite being educated in mostly Westernised schools of British India and then in England and Germany, Iqbal was aware of the dangers of 'blind imitation' and 'total acceptance' of all Western educational content. He saw great value in his own earlier

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<sup>66</sup> See Iqbal and Vahid. 'Some Thoughts on Islamic Studies', pp. 103-109, and 'A Plea for Deeper Study of the Muslim Scientists', pp. 147-159 and pp. 234-237, in Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*. 1992.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pp. 359-362.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

training in the Islamic tradition and literature and sought to encourage this in order to give ‘Muslims’ what he argued they had lost. Identity or his concept of ‘*khudhi*’ that dominates his poetical as well as his prose works – was Iqbal’s core philosophy and teaching.<sup>69</sup> He felt that if Muslims were well educated in their own tradition, ethics and history then they would secure a strong sense of ‘selfhood’ and identity that could be rooted in ‘Islam’ yet also independent and free to learn from what the latest sciences and western thought had to offer.

### 3.5.2 Islamic modernism

The educational reform sought after by Nursi and Iqbal was also an integral part of the Islamic Modernism prevalent at that time. Islamic Modernism emerged in the eighteenth century after the Muslim political decline and the power shift to the Western Colonial rule. In this climate many Muslim scholars blamed and recognised the lack of access to up to date scientific developments, philosophy and technology for the decline of the Muslim empires. As a result they called for a ‘re-interpretation’ or *tajdīd* of Islam in light of the ‘modern developments’.<sup>70</sup> The key proponents of the Modernist euphoria were Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897) and his followers Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905) and Rashid Riḍā (1838-1897). Indian Modernism as argued by scholars started with Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898).<sup>71</sup> Together these scholars took on the task of ‘reform’ by attempting to affirm the consistency between reason (*‘aql*) and tradition (*naql*). Although this subject was not alien to Islamic theology and was debated, they called for a renewed emphasis on the permissibility and consistency of these two principles.

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<sup>69</sup> Majeed. *Muhammad Iqbal*, pp. 31-63.

<sup>70</sup> See Kurzman, Charles. *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; Cornell, Vincent J. *Voices of Islam*. Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers, 2007, p. 14 and Rafiabadi, H N. *Challenges to Religions and Islam: A Study of Muslim Movements, Personalities, Issues and Trends*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007, p. 914.

<sup>71</sup> There are notable differences between Syed Ahmad Khan and al Afghani, the former was for colonial presence in India although he was also critical of the British presence, whilst the later was against colonial rule and promoted Islamic socio-politic unity. See Masud, Muhammed Khalid. “Iqbal’s Approach to Islamic Theology of Modernity.” *Al-Hikmat* Volume 27 (2007), pp. 1-36.

Nursi and Iqbal's discourse was in some ways similar to the modernist discourse, particularly in the recognition of education and access to the contemporary developments in the positivist sciences and thought. However, their methodology had important differences to the modernist scholars, particularly Nursi's works that are better characterised with the revivalist or '*Ihya*' tradition of Islam than with the modernist discourse. Iqbal can be easily identified and categorised with the modernist discourse more so than Nursi. Iqbal generally accepted the proposal of *ijtihad* or independent reasoning and re-evaluation of the Islamic tradition and law. Many scholars of Iqbal have traditionally categorised him in the modernist camp,<sup>72</sup> although there are others who have also emphasised his more 'traditionalist' and the 'political Islamist' aspects of his work.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, as Iqbal Singh Sevea argues, Muhammad Iqbal was not an absolute modernist, as he was also critical of Western philosophies and in particular their political ideologies.<sup>74</sup> Iqbal's position regarding nationalism evolved, he became critical of the Western notion of the nation-state based on racial and ethnic grounds. For Iqbal, the hope of a separate homeland for the Muslims in India came later and he argued these were centred on spiritual nationalism and not racially based one.<sup>75</sup>

Despite Iqbal's close affinity with the grandchild of Syed Ahmad Khan, Sir Ross Masood (1889 – 1937), he definitely favoured the modernism of al-Afghani more than his Indian counterpart.<sup>76</sup> The various references to al-Afghani in his prose works as well as his poetical verses referring indirectly or directly to the early modernist depicts his great admiration and reverence for the personality of al-Afghani. Iqbal agreed with al-Afghani's critique of Western colonial domination of the Muslim world and his view of Islamic

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<sup>72</sup> Masud, Muhammed Khalid. "Iqbal's Approach to Islamic Theology of Modernity." *Al-Hikmat* Volume 27 (2007), pp. 1-36.

<sup>73</sup> Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, p. vii.

<sup>74</sup> See, Sevea, Iqbal Singh. *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Sevea. *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, p. 132.

<sup>76</sup> Masud, Muhammed Khalid. "Iqbal's Approach to Islamic Theology of Modernity", pp. 1-10.

socio-political unity. Moreover, it seems that there was some theological disagreement of Iqbal with some of Syed Ahmad Khan's thought and work, as this is acknowledged in the message he wrote at Khan's funeral.<sup>77</sup>

Thus while Iqbal was more comfortable with the radical proposal of a break away from existing traditional institutions, Nursi was less willing. Perhaps due to his own traditional upbringing, early education and not to mention his native homeland of Eastern Anatolia, where after tribal allegiance religion and tradition were the core features of one's identity.<sup>78</sup> Nursi also did not accept the radical proposals that destroyed the Sufi lodges, and he did not call for a rapid interpretation or *ijtihād* in social and legal issues; in many ways he was against this mode of thought, yet he still sought to achieve educational and social reform through adherence to what he perceived and believed to be the rich Islamic tradition.<sup>79</sup> However, like Iqbal, Nursi too was aware of the ideas of al-Afghani, who at that time was promoting unity and searching for a political centre for Islam.<sup>80</sup>

### 3.5.3 Pan-Islamism

One of al-Afghani's key strategies against the Colonial powers was Pan-Islamism, a term he used to call Muslims back to the true political and social unity of the Muslim nations into one single polity.<sup>81</sup> Both Iqbal and Nursi saw a potential ideal in Pan-Islamism in the context of their times for the Muslim world. Nursi first promoted and was pro the Ottoman state through its wider Pan-Islamic policies. In his defence speech in the court-martial of

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<sup>77</sup> Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 23.

<sup>78</sup> Bruinessen. *Agha, Shaikh and State*, pp. 205-252.

<sup>79</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 44.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

<sup>81</sup> Despite his lack of sophistication in considering the constitutional republic as alternatives, his idea of Pan-Islamism worked well with the declining Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans felt that they could conceivably use the 'Pan-Islamism' as a political and religious philosophy to gain support and popularity with Muslim nations beyond their own borders. While the efforts of Abdul Hamid II to achieve this showed promising results (even as far as India) nevertheless, after the collapse of the Ottomans this policy was also left unfulfilled. Pan-Islamism policy of Abdul Hamid II was soon forfeited as the power shifted to Mehmed V and then to the Young Turks who promoted a Pan-Turkism and Pan-Turanism, with the establishment of the Turkish Republic a 'Turkification' process led to a complete nationalist policy that lost favour with the Pan-Islamic aspirations of Abdul Hamid II. See Özcan, Azmi. "Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924," Leiden: *Brill Online*, (1997): 23-63.

1909, Nursi declared: ‘my predecessors in this matter of Islamic unity are Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī the late Mufti of Egypt Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Ali Suavi Efendi and Hoja Tahsin Efendi, Namik Kemal Bey, and Sultan Selim’.<sup>82</sup> He was also a supporter of the constitutional reforms that were introduced initially in 1877–1878 and then again in the Young Turk constitutional period (1908–1918).<sup>83</sup> Nursi did not hold his criticisms back of the Sultan for having too much absolutist power over the people.<sup>84</sup> However, he also hoped that the Ottoman Empire could be the saviour and defender that Islam was in need of. It was for this reason that he perceived some merit in al-Afghani’s notion of Pan-Islamism. Nursi was not a Pan-Turk-ist or Pan-Ottomanist and wished to unite the *umma* together in this social and ‘political unity’ of Pan-Islamism. This vision ended with the ‘Old Said’; in the ‘New Said’ period, Nursi was ‘*aql* distant from all forms of political ideologies including Pan-Islamism, although his hope for a united Muslim community never ceased. During the years of the ‘Old Said’, Nursi had initially thought that he could ‘save’ the empire from collapse but soon realised that this was not the correct method. In the ‘New Said’ period he refrained from the socio-political arena and did not get involved in the politics of the time.

In the final last phases of the ‘Third Said’ Nursi gradually started to get involved more in social and political issues. He indirectly supported the more ‘liberal’ Democratic Party against the repressive Republican People’s Party which was less tolerant towards religious practice as well as ethnic minorities.<sup>85</sup> One of Nursi’s reform proposals for the educational system was to include and retain the *madrasā* (religious school education) the *tekke* (Sufi mystical training) and *Qishla* (military camp like discipline)<sup>86</sup>; his vision was to combine these three key ingredients for a well grounded education. In fact in the First Said or the

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<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 22.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 305.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.56.

‘Old Said’ period, Nursi sought the realisation of this vision, through an educational institution that he hoped to securely build in the Eastern provinces of Turkey.

Like Nursi, Iqbal too saw this possibility and potential of Pan-Islamism as a uniting force for the *umma*. Iqbal’s view of Pan-Islamism was strongly present in his Urdu poetry in particular, his recital of the epic verses *Jawab-i-Shikwa (Complaint and Answer)*, which was recited in the Badshahi Mosque at Lahore in November 1912 to raise funds in aid of the Turks, wounded in the war against the Balkans.<sup>87</sup> The lines about the attack on the ‘centre’ of the Islamic lands or upon their ‘Turkish brethren’ moved so many Indian Muslim hearts (in attendance in his crowded audience) that many were emotionally compelled to send large amounts of donations from their own personal jewels and money to assist their ‘brothers in need’.<sup>88</sup>

Make the covenant of fealty now with some local one  
Make the *Ummah* of the Holy Prophet a local one!  
You are the support of the boat of God in the world  
The present age is night, you are a glimmering star.  
This tumult of Bulgaria’s invasion, which is afoot  
Is the message of awakening for the negligent?  
You think this is the plan for hurting your sentiments  
This is a test of your sacrifice and your self-respect  
Why are you afraid of the hooves of the enemies’ horses?<sup>89</sup>

The Pan-Islamic ideology had its greatest success in India, where it soon evolved into the Khilāfat Movement in support of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>90</sup> Iqbal supported the Pan-Islamism in Turkey; this led him to follow closely the developments in Turkey. Unlike the some other Indian *ulamā’*, Iqbal did not support the Khilāfat Movement. He was hopeful that the nationalist movement there would continue the Pan-Islamic ideals yet in a politically reformed republican structure. Iqbal was disappointed to learn that the project of

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<sup>87</sup> Qureshi, M. Naeem. *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924*. Vol. 66. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 58. “Now the onslaught of the Bulgars sounds the trumpet of alarm” he was commemorating the invasion of Turkey by Bulgaria in the late autumn of 1912, an attack which threatened at one time to penetrate as far as Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire and the last home of the Caliphate.

<sup>89</sup> Arberry, Arthur. J. *Complaint and Answer*. Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1992.

<sup>90</sup> See Qureshi. *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics*, 1999.

modernism had somewhat ‘failed’ in the new Turkish state, due to rapid, radical social and political reforms made by Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938).<sup>91</sup> Although Iqbal was very open to *ijtihad* like many other Muslims of his time, he was disappointed in the ‘blind and absolute’ imitation and acceptance of Western values.

### 3.5.4 Nationalism

Nationalism on racial lines was the opposite of Pan-Islamism that perceived an organic unity amongst all the Muslim nations. Yet, due to the failure of the Pan-Islamic movement generally seen together with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and hence Islamic Caliphate, nationalism became a driving factor in many Muslim countries. Nursi and Iqbal also had to respond and reconsider their works in light of this new dawned reality.

Even though Nursi was supporting the constitutional government and sought the freedoms encouraged by Namik Kemal and the Young Turks since the 1860s, nevertheless,<sup>92</sup> like Iqbal after the radical social and legal reforms that changed the dress, language and public expression of religion (like the veil and the *adhān*) Nursi also retracted from the nationalist movement completely.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, after the formation of the Turkish Republic Nursi’s hopes for Islam – namely that it might be saved by the Empire, were extinguished. Yet he

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<sup>91</sup> Although in the *Reconstruction* we find Iqbal optimistic about the developments in Turkey under ‘Ghazi Mustafa Kemal’ see Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 68. Yet his disappointment with the Turkish example is evident in the *Javid Nama* he writes, “Mustafa Kemal, who sang of a great renewal, said the old image must be cleansed and polished; yet the vitality of the Ka’bah cannot be made new if a new Lat and Manat from Europe enter its shrine. No, the Turks have no new melody in their lute, what they call new is only the old tune of Europe; no fresh breath has entered into their breast, no design of a new world is in their mind. Turkey perforce goes along with the existing world, melted like wax in the flame of the world we know”. Iqbal, Muhammed and Arthur J. Arberry tr. *Javid Nama: Book of Eternity*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1966, p. 301.

<sup>92</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> Even though Nursi was a support of the Young Turks and wanted Constitutional freedoms that they sought, in a statement about the events in Salonika Nursi clarifies his on going support for these ideals but distances himself with opposition as their policies changed. He states “I did not part from it; it was some of its members that parted. I am still in agreement with people like Niyazi Bey and Enver Bey, but some of them parted from us. They strayed from the path and headed for the swamp.” Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 37.



never opposed the newly established Turkish Republic.<sup>94</sup> In fact this outward change in his socio-political settings affected an inner change and pushed a new outlook for Nursi. He chose to be apolitical from then onwards, and also averted any engagements in society as well as politics.

Hasan Horkuc posits that despite Nursi's clear aversion from politics and society, his critics accused him of promoting Kurdish nationalism in a post-Ottoman Era.<sup>95</sup> Abu-Rabi states: 'even when the Ottoman Empire was abolished, Nursi refused to overplay his Kurdish card. He saw himself, first and foremost, as a Muslim scholar'.<sup>96</sup> Nursi thought that nationalism of any kind was a tribalist secular political movement, which would break the Islamic bonds between Muslims. Therefore, in contrast to other Muslims of his time, Nursi in both the Old and New Said periods always idealised Islamic unity rather than the Western notion of nation-state nationalism that dominated the era. Nursi states 'we are truly intensely in need of this unity for the happiness of this world and the next, for we have no nationality other than Islam'.<sup>97</sup>

Nursi tried to address the 'nationalism' problem indirectly through his exegetical writings the *Risale-i Nur* that became his main revivalist project. He therefore focused totally on faith issues and spiritual issues, and defined nationalism into positive and negative.<sup>98</sup> He like Iqbal identified the dangers of European nationalism.

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<sup>94</sup> Nursi sought social and political reform and was very active in the first 40 years of life, he dreamt of change in Eastern Anatolia. Nevertheless he accepted the Republic and did not encourage any revolts.

<sup>95</sup> Horkuc, Hasan. *Said Nursi's Ideal for Human Society: Moral and Social Reform in the Risale-i Nur*, Durham, University of Durham, 2004, p. 280.

<sup>96</sup> Ibrahim, M. Abu-Rabi. "How to Read Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur", p. 62.

<sup>97</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 339. See also Huseyin Celik, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and the Ideal of Islamic Unity", in *Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi the Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Istanbul: Sozler, 1995, p. 254; as quoted in Horkuc, Hasan. *Said Nursi's Ideal for Human Society*, p. 280.

<sup>98</sup> According to Nursi, there are two types of nationalism, the negative nationalism is inauspicious and harmful, it is nourished by devouring others, persists through hostility to others, and is aware of what it is doing. It is the cause of enmity and disturbance. According to Nursi, there is no place for 'negative nationalism' that is, considering a particular race to be superior, or giving priority to race over religion. Positive nationalism is defined by Nursi as 'an inner need for social life and is the cause of mutual assistance

Furthermore. Nursi defined the characteristics that demonstrated nationhood: language, religion and country, and excluded race from it. Even if one of these key characteristics is lacking, it is still within the bonds of an ‘organic nationalism’. Although Nursi uses the Turkish words nation (*millet*) and nationhood (*milliyet*) he has used them in accordance with the Arabic meaning that was initially used to refer to membership to a religion.<sup>99</sup> Thus, due to being in the periphery of their societies and hence a minority in their own wider communities, Nursi and Iqbal felt that the nationalist movements in Turkey and India would further contribute to the marginalisation of their respective communities. It was for this reason that Iqbal in particular sought a separate homeland for the North Western Frontier provinces. Iqbal wrote extensively and defended the idea of a two-nation state. However, he staunchly defended his position against nationalistic lines, but rather based on religious lines.<sup>100</sup>

Iqbal like Nursi was encouraged by the ideal notions of Islamic unity as propounded by al-Afghani and ‘Abduh as Pan-Islamism. Iqbal strongly opposed nationalism as being inherently un-Islamic in its essence by disputing the territorial foundations of Western formulations of nation and nationhood. He also rejected any conflation between the concepts of nation and state.<sup>101</sup> Sevea maintains that he fought for this belief even until his last efforts prior to his death (his public discord with Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879–1957) on the issue as an example of his efforts to secure a correct understanding of the concept).<sup>102</sup> However, Iqbal’s definition of nationalism differed to Nursi’s vaguely, as he

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and solidarity; it ensures a beneficial strength, and is a means for further strengthening of Islamic brotherhood’. In this respect loving one’s fellow ‘root members’ is a positive and necessary nationalism so as to ensure internal strength of brotherhood. Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 380-81.

<sup>99</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 276.

<sup>100</sup> See Iqbal’s Presidential Addresses delivered in the All-India Muslim League at Lahore, pp. 195-219 in Iqbal and Vahid.. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, 1992.

<sup>101</sup> Sevea. *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, p. 132.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

agreed that when race encouraged notions of nationalism this was ‘dangerous’.<sup>103</sup> Like Nursi he also identified the various branches of nationalism,<sup>104</sup> but asserted that religion is the one that ties strongest of all – and hence a nationalism build on religion would be more ‘rational’.<sup>105</sup> It was within the confines of these definitions that Iqbal justified his proposal of a two state entity in his Presidential addresses. It was also this point that distinguished his basic definition of nationalism from that of Nursi, for according to Nursi’s definition of nationalism India could easily form part of a nationhood as the elements of country and language would tie them even though they may be religiously diverse. Perhaps it was also due to Iqbal’s belief in his core philosophy of *khudhi* that he wanted the ‘self mobilising’ and realising and identifying aspect – that he thought the Muslims of India were justifiably entitled to a separate homeland. In Iqbal’s proposal of a separate state based around faith, he was hopeful that eventually Muslim nations would attain their own autonomy that would later on mobilise into one consolidated Islamic commonwealth.

### **3.5.5 Formation of secular nation states of Turkey and Pakistan**

The socio-political views of Nursi and Iqbal are discussed here to assess the extent of their adoption of the prophetic example through the appropriation and adoption of the *Sunnah* and the *Shari‘a* to the arising modern socio-political institutions of their time, thus demonstrating their individual understanding of prophetology in this arena. Iqbal’s vibrant thought and dynamism makes it hard to easily place him in one particular discourse. A thorough analysis of his political, religious and philosophical essays, as well as his thought reflected in his poetry reveals the passion and hope for positive change in India and the

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<sup>103</sup> Vahid, Syed Abdul and Muhammad Iqbal ‘Presidential Address, delivered at the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim Conference at Allahabad 29 December 1930’, pp. 161-194, and ‘Presidential Address, delivered at the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim Conference at Lahore 21 March 1932’, pp. 195-219, in *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*. 1964.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

East.<sup>106</sup> Despite his wish for educational reform that included both the Islamic sciences and ethics as well as Western thought and sciences, he did not support the ‘blind imitation’ and acceptance of all the Western ideals and norms without a thorough critique. In an address to Aligarh university students Iqbal presented the ‘otherness’ of his thought in the poem ‘*mere payam aur hai*’ or ‘my message was something else’.<sup>107</sup> Iqbal saw merit in the Western institutions, but was critical of their notion of the ‘nation-state’, and he therefore did not agree with his fellow Muslims who promoted and accepted these socio-political formations.<sup>108</sup> Sevea maintains that Iqbal was in a fierce argument with his co-religionist and Islamic scholar Madani, for his views on accepting the nation state idea as consistent with Islam. Iqbal felt that ‘nationalism’ was not an Islamic concept and hence he disputed territorial foundations of the Western formulation of nation and nationhood.<sup>109</sup>

He also embraced positive aspects of Western thought and education but was critical of their ‘policies’ in the East.<sup>110</sup> Despite being knighted by King George V of Britain, and maintaining ‘cordial’ relations with the British Empire, Iqbal and other intellectuals of India still sought freedom from the Empire.<sup>111</sup> Iqbal belonged to a minority Muslim community and felt the ‘imbalance’ in distribution of income as well as political representation and power between the Muslims and wider Hindu citizens. In hope of a better ‘deal’ for the Muslims, Iqbal supported and ‘coined’ the notion of the two state solution post British rule.<sup>112</sup> Iqbal did not live long enough to see the independence of India and the formation of Pakistan, as he was deceased in 1938. Iqbal had a great standing before the political apparatus of his community and hence was able to influence as well as

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, p. 89.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 159.

<sup>110</sup> Hussain, Riaz. “Iqbal’s Relations with the British Imperial Power,” *Iqbal Review*, Vol: 19 No: 3, Oct. (1978): 55-58.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

communicate his ideas to a greater populace, who embraced his proposals. He therefore sought change politically, and was very much opposed to Nursi in this regard.

Nursi could not conceive of socio-political change as envisaged by Iqbal. His vision was to reach out to single hearts, souls and hence had a more civil rather than political effect. Moreover, Nursi's position regarding socio-political change transformed in the New Said period. In the Old Said Period Nursi was pro-Ottoman, critical of the despotic and autocratic rule of the Sultan Abdul Hamid II. He was Pan-Islamic and sought an organic unity of the Muslim people. After the ousting of the Sultanate and establishment of the Secular Republic of Turkey in 1923, Nursi's fame as a 'great scholar' and ability to direct social and political affairs was recognised by Mustafa Kemal who offered him the role of a "general preacher"<sup>113</sup> in the Eastern Provinces with a salary of 300 liras, in order to keep him 'contained' and controlled.<sup>114</sup> Feeling perhaps threatened by Nursi's outstanding mind and abilities Mustafa Kemal may have feared uprising from the established scholar, and therefore invited him to take the religious affairs post in the Republic. After a confrontation and a decline of this office Nursi was subjected to the overwhelming years of exile and imprisonment, his books were outlawed and anyone associated with him also suffered the same fate as him.

Nursi soon learnt the ultra secularist agenda of the Nationalist movement led by Mustafa Kemal. He was disillusioned with the new parliamentarians – the freedoms that he sought through the young Ottomans were mostly relinquished with the power dominance of the Young Turks. Their radical secularism brought about severe changes to religious and social affairs and was not what Nursi had envisaged, and disappointed with these developments, he declined Mustafa Kemal's offer.<sup>115</sup> It was as a result of this that he

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<sup>113</sup> A deputyship in the assembly, and a post equivalent to that he had held in the Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-Islamiye.

<sup>114</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 171.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

suffered years of exile and imprisonment that followed. The Republic wanted to keep Nursi's influence to a minimum and hence all his works were outlawed and he was sent to isolated communities in the Western part of Anatolia. In these compelling circumstances Nursi's outlook and vision changed as he sought to bring about the preservation and conservation of Islam in his *Risale-i Nur* (a compendium of the key essentials of faith practice and belief) that was to serve as the remaining 'madrasā' of the defeated Ottoman Empire that would educate the hundreds and thousands of 'young Turks' in a different consciousness than that projected by the government of his Republic.

In short, it may be said that despite them both living at the peripheries of their society Nursi and Iqbal had a dichotomous relationship with the centre of their Empire transformed into a nation state. Nursi's life is a significant illustration of the power play between the *ulamā'* or scholarly class as well as the military and ruling class, both in the Ottoman Empire and its continuance in the early years of the Republic. As a result of this in the Old Said Period, Nursi retained a respected standing and was hailed as a 'brilliant scholar' from Eastern Anatolia. He had on occasions influence over the scholars of Istanbul and was even able to advise the Sultan on two occasions. Even post the establishment of the Turkish Republic Nursi's abilities were recognised by Mustafa Kemal who offered him an honourable post, however Nursi's disillusionment with the direction and policies of the new secular regime made him at odds with the newly positioned government officials, who subjected him to a life of imprisonment, exile and torture until his demise. Despite these negative developments, Nursi was driven to a religious life centred on worship, contemplation and supplication. In long hour vigils he contemplated on the essentials of Islam and sought a solution for the *umma* of his time. It was as a result of all of this and particularly his changed circumstances after the establishment of the Republic that he decided to dedicate his whole life to writing and teaching through his

books. He focused on educating individuals, small communities and lost all interest in socio-political affairs – toward which all his involvements were halted. The impact and result of this deliberate choice was a civic movement centred on the books of Nursi,<sup>116</sup> enabling a successful future for a religious movement that was not involved in politics but in civic affairs.

In contrast, Iqbal's relationship with the social and political elite of his community was retained during the British Raj in India and through the last phases of the independent movement that led to the ousting of the British Empire from India. However, despite his being conferred a knighthood by the British in 1922, his travels to England and Germany, as well as his relationship with the leading Indian thinkers/politicians like Nehru, and his particular standing with the Muslim League, Iqbal too had a dichotomous relation with the State – throughout its evolution in his own lifetime. While having and sustaining good relations with the political apparatus, Iqbal retained his individuality and thus his ability to critique them. While Nursi became increasingly apolitical in his latter life, Iqbal on the other hand became increasingly more involved in politics, he held various administrative and leadership posts on various political movements and groups like Kashmir, Punjab legislative, and the Muslim league. It was due to the opportunities and strong associations with the leading elite of his society that Iqbal acquired an audience to convey his messages philosophically. It was not just the intellectual and educated class that corresponded with him or attended his lectures and public speeches, but also the common Muslims. At various public gatherings organised by various groups, Iqbal had opportunity to convey his philosophy of *khudhi* selfhood and discussed his views of a separate homeland for the Muslims to secure their economical and political rights. As a result of this though he expired in 1938, Iqbal's works were reprinted and published and gradually became the

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<sup>116</sup> Yavuz, M. Hakan. "Print-Based Islamic Discourse: The Nur Movement", *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 15-178.

basis of a political and social ideal for the newly incepted Pakistan in 1947. To the young nation he became one of its founding fathers and has hence ever since retained reverence and respect from the political apparatus of his society. This secured a great outreach and spread of his poetry and philosophy.

### **3.6 Concepts, methods and argumentation in Nursi and Iqbal's works**

The situational and contextual circumstances in the lives of Nursi and Iqbal signify the important global as well as local events in their lifetimes. These have not only shaped the course of their lives and their thought on key issues pertaining to their life and particular contexts but importantly in their response as Muslim scholars or scholars from the Muslim world on these global issues. Of particular significance is the formation and articulation of their choice of methodologies through which they articulated their views, theologies and philosophies. In this section the key concepts, particular methods, style of writing as well as argumentation in Nursi and Iqbal's works will be critically discussed. The objective, purpose and style of their writing as rooted in either the new *kalām* revivalist *Ihyā* tradition or the Western philosophical thought and Islamic mystical literary tradition will also be examined. These will create the necessary conceptual framework and platform to dissect and critically analyse their prophetologies in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

#### **3.6.1 Nursi's objective and purpose of writing in milieu of his contemporaries**

Nursi first sought reform by intending to write a comprehensive *tafsīr* (exegesis) that would address the logical challenges and dilemmas of the modern times.<sup>117</sup> In his treatise called *Muḥakemat* or *The Reasonings*, Nursi demonstrates his brilliant knowledge of *falsafa* or philosophy and reasoning '*aql*. Nevertheless, as argued by Serdar Dogan, Nursi is soon disheartened with this way and seeks a way of the heart. As Dogan demonstrates, Nursi, in essence was dissatisfied with the categorical separations of religious sciences that

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<sup>117</sup> See Dogan. *The Influence of Modern Science on Bediuzaman Said Nursi's Thought*, 2012.



existed during his times and he expressed a strong desire to unite them into one single treatise. In his struggle, Nursi did not abandon any of the earlier paths; that of the theological schools, the way of the philosophers, nor the way of the *taṣawwuf*. However, what he offered in his final writings – the *Risale-i Nur* – was the creation of a new exegetical work that sought instruction from ‘Qur’ānic methods’, which became Nursi’s main methodology in the *Risale-i Nur*. This new method combined the various traditional sciences of Islam (revelation, *ḥadīth*, *taṣawwuf*) with scientific rational facts of the universe as well as his own reflections. In doing so it can be contended that he created a new approach to *kalām* through the *Risale-i Nur*.<sup>118</sup> Thus, unlike his contemporaries in various parts of the Muslim world who also sought a new way of ‘reviving’ Islam, Nursi sought a new path that arguably was un-attempted before. Resultantly, even though he clearly belonged to the ‘*Ihyā* tradition’ of reviving Islam,<sup>119</sup> Nursi had in fact diverged and created a ‘new path’.<sup>120</sup> In doing so, he suffered imprisonment, persecution, exile and loneliness for the rest of his life – to meet the end of his new founded vision.

Nursi’s *tajdīdī* style necessitates comparison with other *mujaddids*. There are certain principles of *tajdīdī* style and methodology that are common to the writings of Imam Ghazālī, Ahmad Sirhindī and Said Nursi. In all three cases, because these scholars in their earlier lives were renowned for their scholarly knowledge amongst their contemporary *ulamā*’, they thus had social standing and even political standing with the rulers of their respective societies. The second trend in these revivalist works is their shift in their genres particularly in their latter lives to a more ‘watered down’ style with simpler language that addressed the issues and needs of their particular contexts<sup>121</sup>. This is particularly true for

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, pp. 4 & 53.

<sup>119</sup> See, Leaman, Oliver. “Nursi’s Place in the Ihya Tradition.” *The Muslim World*. 89 (1999): 314-324.

<sup>120</sup> Dogan. *The Influence of Modern Science on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s Thought*, p. 10.

<sup>121</sup> That of the rule of the Seljuk viziers in Khorassan of Ghazālī, the Mughal emperors reign in India of Sirhindī, and Ottoman rule during Nursi’s time. Interestingly all three also dealt with an ethnically and culturally diverse society, their rulers being all Turks in this instance made them at odds somewhat with their elites of their times.

Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Sirhindī's *Maktūbāt*, and Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* respectively. It is therefore in the interest of the revivalist *tajdīdī* style to reinterpret the essentials of Islam according to the particular context of their individual times and revive people's faith once again. In a similar fashion Nursi too revisited the essentials of Islam including *nubuwwa* to meet the desperate need to 'hold to faith' for the believers in a characteristically rationalist age that was 'killing God' and religion, with no room for prophethood.

Whilst some of Nursi's contemporaries like 'Abduh and Riḍā were fervently writing theological treatises addressing the 'aql issue in relation to *nubuwwa*, despite having an acute awareness of the intellectual trend in Islamic scholarship, Nursi's purposive style and manner in which he wrote his treatise on prophethood differentiated him from his contemporaries due to his unique and new founded exegetical methodology. It was within this intellectual climate that Nursi's 'blended' and multidisciplinary approach to prophetology was fermented amidst his contemporaries; an exclusive exposition in itself. Nursi's prophetology in light of the theoretical and scholastics of the *kalāmīc* tradition will better shape the understanding of his prophetology.

### **3.6.2 Concepts, methods and argumentation in the *Risale-i Nur***

Before approaching Nursi's prophetology, it is important to understand the particular terms and concepts that the scholar employs as well as the methods and argumentations in his revivalist exegeses the *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi's *tajdīd* or revivalist style necessitated the inclusion of almost all branches of Islamic tradition including 'aql and *naql*, as well as mystical, literary and spiritual expressions.

As part of his argumentation and method in presenting his theological exegesis in general, as well as his hermeneutics of *nubuwwa* in particular, Nursi uses specific terminologies,

concepts consistently and continuously throughout the *Risale-i Nur* in order to augment his explanation of the Oneness of God (most central theme in his exegesis) and the interconnectedness of this creed of Oneness to all other branches of faith, including and not exclusive of prophethood. Nursi achieves this result through exercise of certain language tools and idioms that he uses repetitively that differentiates his treatise from other treatises. One key concept that dominates the Nursian outlook and maybe considered a summary of his theological endeavours was the notion *ma'na-i ismī* (meaning by name), and *ma'na-i ḥarfī* (meaning by letter). In a self-proclaimed manifesto, Nursi states that there are four words that form the basis of his entire learning: *ma'na-i ismī* or 'meaning by name', *ma'na-i ḥarfī* or 'meaning by letter', *niyah* or intention, and *naẓar* or perspective.<sup>122</sup> These four terms have great linguistic indications as well in Nursi's case a 'new theological paradigm' to perceive the universe, religion and the human being. Meaning by name (*ma'na-i ismī*) is that which is indicative of an entity within itself, and meaning by letter (*ma'na-i ḥarfī*) is that which is indicative of an entity other than itself.<sup>123</sup> To the latter Nursi gives great precedence, for it is the latter that perceives everything in existence and the universe as merely a letter indicating a more comprehensive meaning which is greater than itself. In Nursi's epistemology *ma'na-i ḥarfī* is thus a signifier of the Greatest Being – that is God and His absolute Oneness (*tawḥīd*).<sup>124</sup> In this complex web of his *kalāmīc* deliberations, Nursi skilfully weaves this *ma'na-i ḥarfī* and applies it universally to all aspects of belief and as a tool to perceive the entire existence as a mere indicative signifier that points to God. It is this tool that all his theological, philosophical, mystical and literary discussions are centred upon and is used as a medium to epistemologically convey the

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<sup>122</sup> “Know, O friend, that during the 40 years of my life and my 30 years of study, I have learned four words or phrases and four sentences [each of which is a general ruling]. The phrases are: being, like a letter, a sign of the whole or pointing to others rather than to itself; like a word, pointing to or representing itself; intention; and viewpoint”. Nursi, Said. *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuri: Seedbed of the Light*. Somerset: The Light, 2007, p. 67; Vahide, Sükran. “Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi.” *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, p. 11.

<sup>123</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 146-148.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p. 147.

message that all entities and in fact all of creation are larger than themselves in meaning and they signify a greater Entity. Hence, the real meaning is not on the apparent perceived level, but rather through this tool sheds light and provides ‘insight’ in order to actually perceive the creation. It may be used as a pointer to the ‘Greatest Meaning’ and ‘Existent One’ – God being the central theme of his theology is consequently discussed in all dialogues by the tool of *ma‘na-i ismī*. Prophethood is also perceived in this nous and will be discussed later in detail. Therefore the significance of this statement is underlined by the conveyance of the exegete’s own identification with a core outlook and term that he not only employs in his deliberations on *nubuwwa* but widely across the spectrum of 12 volumes of his works. This has an enormous bearing on how he represents his exegetical works, as for Nursi these terms formulate the basic outlook and are like a window through which he sees himself and then discusses with his audience on various aspects of Islamic theology including *nubuwwa*.

Similarly, intention (*niyah*), as well as perspective (*nazar*), are ‘*aql* important and employed consistently throughout his works. Once again these terms both portray Nursi’s philosophical outlooks as well as his epistemological outlook on how to read the ‘book of the universe’ (*kitāb al-kā’ināt*) – another term used consistently in the *Risale-i Nur*. The book of the universe is used repetitively to highlight Nursi’s suggestion of the former being the ‘manifest book’ or the actual manifestation of the ‘book of revelation’ or the Qur’ān. The book of the universe is one leg of the trio-lingual concepts used by Nursi as an epistemological and linguistic tool that is required to be ‘read’. The other two are the Qur’ān and the human being.

The concept of selfhood (*ana*) is also of paramount significance to Nursi’s theology. The *ana* is a miniature universe, the universe being the macro cosmos and the selfhood or human being the micro cosmos. It is also another signifier of the Creator in the *ḥarfī*

paradigm.<sup>125</sup> In this sense Nursi is akin to Ibn ‘Arabī’s<sup>126</sup> exertion of ‘knowing the self is knowing God’.<sup>127</sup> However, to bring about a balance to those who exceeded and sought Divinity with the self itself – he takes it one step further and suggests the *ana* is a mere indicative tool, a measuring tool that is needed to comprehend Infinity (*Baqā’*).<sup>128</sup> The *ana* is thus central to Nursi’s *kalāmīc* discourse in particular when discussing the Names and Attributes of God – which in Nursi’s theology is the principal focus of his *ḥarfī* paradigm as well as his method of explaining the diversity and multiplicity in creation. It is within these terminological usages that Nursi builds his revivalist theology of *nubuwwa*, which will be discussed in length in the chapters Four and Five.

Just as Iqbal discusses his concept of selfhood – *khudhi* (which will be elaborated later on), Nursi uses the concept of ‘*ana*’ or the I-ness as a key ontological concept to relay his theological underpinnings. Beyond its function as a ‘measuring instrument’ to the Eternal Attributes and Names, Nursi also presents the *ana* in relation to prophethood. He posits in the “Thirtieth Word” that the *ana* has two faces, one representing philosophy and the other prophethood.<sup>129</sup> Thus, in the Nursian prophetology the ‘selfhood’ or *ana* is purified through the guidance and balance provided by the prophetic examples, hence making it ascend from the ‘lowest of the low’ to being the ‘best pattern of creation’.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, in the Nursian paradigm the *ana* extends the traditional role of ‘*amanah*’ or trust that if placed appropriately with prophetically revealed injunctions, would be a bright shining face-reaching its true purpose and hence perfection. If on the other hand the *ana* submerges

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<sup>125</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 552-3.

<sup>126</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī a towering mystic figure in Islam also had many treatises such as *Futuhat al-Makkiya* that he warned others who were not of his circle not to read further. In particular Ibn ‘Arabī’s conceptualisation of ‘*waḥdat al-wujūd*’ was interpreted by some to be pantheistic and became a point of contention in mystical and scholarly discussions.

<sup>127</sup> For Ibn ‘Arabī’s discussion refer to Chittick, William C. *Heir to the Prophets*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2005, p. 14. The notion of perfect human self or *insān-i kāmīl*, of Nursi and Iqbal in line with Ibn ‘Arabī’s formulation is discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

<sup>128</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 552-3.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 553.

itself to philosophy deprived of ‘prophetic guidance’ then the *ana* loses balance and imagines its imaginary sovereignty or rule to be real and becomes manifest as tyrannical rulers like Pharaoh and Nimrod, and in emotions displays anger and lust in the philosophies of atheism, materialism, naturalism.<sup>131</sup> Thus, the *ana*, in its lowest form is represented by the great tyrants in history and in its most perfected form it is represented by the prophetic role embodied in all the prophets, which manifests the ‘bright face’ of the *ana*.<sup>132</sup>

Thus, through the use of these terms Nursi is reviving or reinventing not only conceptual theologies but also reinventing a new language for theology in order to continue *kalāmīc* relevance in the age of reason – the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, these terms signify a carefully revised theology that considers epistemological discourse thus taking *kalāmīc* deliberations beyond the often-confined borders of ontology and teleology. In fact, this careful revision and use of language and linguistic tools to create a theology based not only on mere philosophical reasoning but also on intuitive experience, mystical and *taṣawwuf* (Sufi) outlook as well inner spiritual ecstasy and delight is deliberately constructed in order to adapt to a changing world that questioned modernity itself. He thus aimed to provide a solution to all these various needs and aspects of a human being and to address them all adequately in a new language.

Other language tools that Nursi employs in his writings that differentiates him from his contemporaries as well as his predecessors are the allegories and metaphors that are applied through out his works. His main aim is to appeal to various faculties of the reader including the intellect, while not oblivious of the heart, emotions, spirit and imagination. The parables often paint a vivid picture of the discussed complex theology that Nursi is addressing. This is evidently a remarkable sign of *tajdīdī* scholars who engage in

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p. 555.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

scholastics not only with the scholarly class, but importantly their objective is to have a far-reaching audience. Hence, in doing so they intuitively aim to reduce the complexity of their discussion through various mediums such as allegories, metaphors as well as literary quotes and poetry. There are numerous examples of Nursi's use of rhetorical and allegorical tools to de-mystify and make available otherwise multifarious beliefs and principles for ordinary Muslims.

Another aspect of Nursi's thought that reflects his difference with other scholars is his use of the method of *temsil* (illustration of concepts or leading by example) in order to ensure that his intended audience understood what he meant. Adopting the method of *temsil* from the Qur'ān, he states that it is possible to deal with any matter, with this method. *Temsil* is applied both linguistically as a language tool through *misal* or analogies and metaphors as well as in actual reality as a 'lived example'.<sup>133</sup> In fact, he believed that the people of *temsil* (those who represent) perform the role of a '*durbun*' (which is to relay a far concept as very close, like binoculars). The *durbun* makes a far away object appear close – just as *temsil* enables uncertain matters or matters that are far from the mind's reach closer to the mind and easier to grasp.<sup>134</sup> In addition to being a textual medium that Nursi's applies in his writings to illustrate his theology, *temsil* or 'living by example' became a core principle in Nursi's own life. Nursi adopted this 'prophetic method' of 'living by example' in all principles related to faith and practice himself and to all of his students as well.<sup>135</sup> Nursi also related *temsil* to prophethood; in many parts of the *Risale-i Nur* he says that the matters of faith can only be influenced and effective through *temsil*, and hence since the

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<sup>133</sup> This is a reoccurring method in Nursi's work, for examples of linguistic application refer to Nursi, *Words*, p. 3-19. Nursi's reference to his own self to demonstrate a point through *temsil* is exemplified in Nursi. *The Words*, p. 166.

<sup>134</sup> This is discussed and elaborated by Aytaç, *Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur*, p. 35-38

<sup>135</sup> Nursi's treatise on frugality not only elaborates on the Prophetic *Sunnah* of '*iqtisad*' and living modestly, but with anecdotes of his own life demonstrates his own '*temsil*' of this concept.

prophets are the highest in terms of *temsil* or God has sent them to humanity so that they demonstrate these principles and aspects of faith effectively.<sup>136</sup>

With the support of all Prophets and Messengers, saints and truthful, truth-seeking scholars and purified ones, he attested to Divine Unity with all his strength and opened the way to the Divine Throne. What fancy or doubt can divert belief in God, which he demonstrated, and close this way to Divine Unity, which he proved?<sup>137</sup>

In many passages of the *Risale-i Nur* he provides lengthy discussions of his own life, thought, reflection as well the inclusion of his court trials as examples of how to ‘exemplify’ the ‘realities’ and ‘truths’ of Islam and make clear abstract concepts in the modern age.<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, the ultimate *temsil* he concludes is that of the prophets who represented exactly as God instructed them to through revelation.<sup>139</sup>

Although it is possible to justify criticism of his work by classifying it as un-academic according to Western standards due to his tendency to lean towards common style of language (like scholars of the classical period), a critical examination of his reasoning power as well as his appeal to the intellect in the *Risale-i Nur* do not suggest such simplistic and ordinary argumentation. Nursi’s style is clearly in line with the *tajdīd* tradition as posited by Leaman and Algar.<sup>140</sup> In fact, his ability to engage with and continue the discussion on *nubuwwa* and *kalām* since the scholastics of the middle and late centuries suggests his aptitude for syllogism, rational thinking, reason and logic. Nursi’s use of reason and logic are apparent in most of his treatises; in fact one may distinguish his theological deliberations as distinct to his predecessors based on his ability to use reason and logic, very much in line with the Ghazalian approach and method. It was important to

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<sup>136</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 78-79.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p. 320.

<sup>138</sup> Nursi, Said. *The Rays*, Sozler Publications, Istanbul, 2006, p. 511.

<sup>139</sup> As an example of another aspect of faith that prophets demonstrate or ‘*temsil*’, Nursi explains in the *Tenth Word* in his pressing Treatise on the hereafter. He states that all 124,000 Prophets, the elect of humanity, have reported that the Hereafter exists and that all beings will be taken there, just as the Creator has promised. He asserts therefore that the mi’raj ascension of the Prophet Muhammad and the testimony of all prophets as well as saints illustrate how prophets are first and foremost ‘displayers’ *temsil* of this essential of faith. Nursi. *The Words*, p. 129.

<sup>140</sup> Leaman, Oliver. “Nursi’s Place in the Ihya Tradition.” (1999).



do so in his context as discussed above, due to the rise in rational and critical thinking that necessitated a theological discourse that was also on the same par. Reason and logic may be regarded as the core and basis of Nursi's argumentation in the *Risale-i Nur*, which his premises are all based upon. However, an important distinction from al-Ghazālī and other scholars is Nursi's ability to also engage the imaginative faculties, as well as appeal to the heart, spirit and emotion. Language is used as a powerful tool to convince the mind through address of the intellect, as well as the heart through poetry, allegory and emotive language. Seemingly, this point of criticism may in fact be deemed as a point of appraisal of his linguistic style that has the readers captivated, addressed and moved by his message. To this end Nursi was successful as through his set of works he also developed a textual community or the Nurcus<sup>141</sup> that formed the bases of a social religious movement in the modern secular state of Turkey.

Furthermore, although critical of the Muslim philosophical tradition, Nursi was well engaged with this tradition too, for he addresses and presents new premises to their syllogisms. Nursi also engages with Ash'arī and Māturīdī and moves the theological paradigm forward; one may even deduce that he is establishing a new theological framework – arguably unprecedented in the modern world.

### **3.6.3 Nursi's style of writing in the milieu of his world**

It may be argued that it was the bold, assertive expression of Nursi's language that distinguishes him from his predecessors and contemporaries. Thus, it was his linguistic aptitude that echoed into the heart and souls of the Anatolian shepherd and admiral alike in the era of Modern Turkish Republic. Nursi's style however evolved over the years, reflecting his own self –evolution from the Old Said to the New Said and later the Third Said, from a very sophisticated intellectual treatise to a more mellowed down language

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<sup>141</sup> See, Mardin. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, 1989.

used in later years of his writings particularly in the *Risale-i Nur*. Although his arguments on *nubuwwa* are unchanged, nevertheless his style affords a wider appeal to the ordinary layman or woman – en masse. This also fits in with his wider aim of defending and promoting belief and prophethood to all people.

The earlier writings of Nursi, such as *Ishārāt al-i'jāz (Signs of Miraculousness)*, *Muhâkemat (The Reasonings)*, and *Al-Mathnawi al-Nuri (The Epitomes of Light)*, were more structured and organised, in comparison to the later ones. The change in nature and style is reflective of the change in his personal circumstance. The tough conditions of the exile, and the extreme pressure of ceaseless surveillance and lonely solitude forced Nursi to contemplate deeper on various aspects of his earlier education, as he reflected on the universe and his own self. The outcome of these conditions resulted in an ardent passion and commitment in him to serve Islam – by ‘reviving faith’ through his contemplative writings. Thus, due to the limitations of resources (access to libraries), primary texts of Islam, and even a lack of access to the volumes of *ḥadīth* and Qur’ān Nursi had to rely mainly on his photographic memory, to which he had committed many books in his earlier life.<sup>142</sup> Due to all this, and to the reality that many of the existing libraries as well as religious scholars were no longer available as a result of being killed in war and persecution in the early Republic,<sup>143</sup> he thus wrote the *Risale-i Nur* in a more synthesised fashion in order to ensure the successful transfer of the Islamic tradition unto the new era in a compact way. Moreover, the removal of the *madrasā* and *tekkes* Sufi lodges further pushed Nursi to incorporate both the religious sciences of *kalām* and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) with the spiritual sciences of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) and literature (*adabiyat*). The result was the success of the *Risale-i Nur* – even with a ‘mellowing down’ of the sophistication in language argumentation and style, it nevertheless remained a highly synthesised treatise

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<sup>142</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, pp. 10, 13, 25, 39, 42, 206.

<sup>143</sup> See Berkes, Niyazi. *The development of secularism in Turkey*. Routledge, 2013.

that appealed which affected the hearts, minds and souls of the people of Anatolia (as it brought together various fields of the Islamic tradition into one single commentary). The effect of his influence is seen through various studies of the social movements that emerged with the leadership of his students. This style made his writings available to a larger audience and not just to scholars or those studying religious sciences. This gave Nursi an advantage over his contemporaries like ‘Abduh, Riḍā and Sabrī.

Moreover, there is a notable shift in Nursi’s style and written expression from the highly intellectual and sophisticated treatises that he wrote in his earlier career (prior to his exile) in impressive titles of *The Reasonings*, *The Dialogues*, *The Epitomes of Light* and *The Signs of Miraculousness* to the more mellowed down and less sophisticated writings of the *Risale-i Nur*.<sup>144</sup> However, it was this latter work that gave Nursi a widely accepted following and influence. Thus, he gained popularity as a great scholar of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the *Risale-i Nur*.

The treatise written in his later life and when in exile, had a more universal appeal, making it accessible to the ordinary post Ottoman Turkish citizen. This is not a unique shift, as similar changes have been common in other revivalists including the highly influential thinker and theologian al-Ghazālī who also resorted to more simple means of communicating his thought. In fact, arguably this is indeed the method of the Qur’ān itself – that is use of eloquent yet simple sentences and messages to convey the message. Nursi who calls himself the ‘student’ of the Qur’ān employs many of its methods including language and style of expression.<sup>145</sup> Although initially some may have deemed Nursi’s

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<sup>144</sup> Nursi, Said. *The Reasonings: A Key to Understanding the Qur’an’s Eloquence*. Tughra Books, 2008; Nursi, Said. *Münazarat (The Dialogues)*. *Risale-i Nur Külliyyatı*, 1945, 321-332; Nursi, Said. *Epitomes of Light [Mathnawi al-Nuriya]: The Essentials of The Risale-i Nur*, Izmir, Kaynak, 1999 and Nursi, Said. ‘*Signs of Miraculousness*.’ Trans. Sukran Vahide. Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 2004.

<sup>145</sup> For an example of Nursi’s application of this see Said. *Signs of Miraculousness*. 2004.

main exegetical work to be less academic,<sup>146</sup> due to the ultra secularist regime in Turkey which adopted an antagonist position against any religious expression, in this mood there were huge barriers and limitations placed on academic freedom and expression, especially if it did not suit the anti-religious sentiments of the early Republic.<sup>147</sup> As a result of this widespread attitude within Turkey and globally, Nursi's works were outlawed almost until the middle of 1980s. Thus his works were studied and considered seriously in academia, much later than most other scholars of the same period and were dismissed easily under the pretext of being written in a sermon-like style. Nevertheless, in light of Nursi's overall aim of defending faith and the Qur'ān, Nursi quickly realised the need to make his works accessible to all people and not just to an intellectual elite. His aim here again was in relation to 'saving people's faith and belief',<sup>148</sup> thus, in this sense Nursi gained popularity first as a 'spiritual leader' and reviver by the common Turkish people, and then at least three decades after his death, the academic world and international world which followed suit.

One explanation is provided by Aytac, who contextualises Nursi's shift in style in his historical and social context. Aytac, in discussing the shift refers to the 1839 reforms of the Ottomans, which proved to deflect people away from Islam, places Nursi in different epochs of the times and justifies his approaches accordingly.<sup>149</sup> Evidently, the affect of a largely Western lifestyle, that pushed many away from religion, encouraged Nursi to find a way to engage with religion more fervently and he consequently addressed the common people in his treatises, particularly the later ones written during the post Old Said period. Perhaps one of the downfalls of this appeal to the wider society was his being largely

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<sup>146</sup> The socio-political barriers were the main reason for the prevention of the serious study of Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* and other works; the continuing political dis favour meant a lack of academic interest until much later.

<sup>147</sup> Bozdoğan, Sibel. *Modernism and nation building: Turkish architectural culture in the early republic*. University of Washington Press, 2001. Kuru, Ahmet T. "Passive and assertive secularism: Historical conditions, ideological struggles, and state policies toward religion." *World Politics* 59, no. 04 (2007): 568-594.

<sup>148</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. v-xxii.

<sup>149</sup> Aytac, Ahmet, *Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur*, Dissertation, Ankara University, 1996, p. 19.

ignored by academics – despite being successful in terms of reaching the masses and influencing society.

Evidently, Nursi wanted to open a new era – by combining various aspects of knowledge. Although, as previously stated Nursi traditionally follows the Ash‘arī school of *kalām*, he nevertheless offers a synthesised approach to the Islamic tradition and also the schools of *kalām*. He leans towards Māturīdī in some aspects, but resembles Ash‘arī in others. He therefore uniquely blended the two most prominent schools of thought and arguably other schools as well. He took ownership of the ‘*aql*-based approach, yet he wrote in a style that was comprehensible to the ordinary reader and academic alike. A lot of his contemporaries from within Turkey like Muṣṭafā Sabrī and Mehmet Akif Erksay were all leaving the country, but Nursi stayed on, so that he may combat the existing social and religious problems in Turkey. He wanted to influence everyone in a way that was distanced from bigotry (*ta’sub*), and was ‘*aql* distinct from fanaticism. Thus, he used a very common or general method, which enabled him to reach minds and hearts of individuals from every tier of society. We can deduce that he chose this method purposely, in line with the way of *irshād* and *tablīgh* of guiding people to faith.

The effect of having logical reasoning alongside traditions (*ḥadīth*) and use of emotive language, analogy and imagination on his readers was that most of their sensory faculties were addressed in any given topic with competent rhetorical style of repetition and questioning – enabling the reader to be deeply convinced of the ‘truth’ in his argument. This was particularly true of Nursi’s reference to ‘Fruits of belief’ in that he tried to link faith to human ‘need’ emotions, spirit, and psychology. Perhaps Nursi’s own faith assisted him to bear the torments of separation from his own people family, in exile and torture and humiliation – making his works not only an intellectual and spiritual synthesis but also an

experientially reflected masterpiece. His survival itself implies a strong will, positive behaviour and thought emanating from a heart/person that deeply harbours hope.

Nursi also addresses himself in his treatise – this tool is effective in drawing the reader into an inward journey of his spiritual evolution. Such an authentication gives Nursi a particular authority – a hybrid of spiritual and intellectual personhood with profound and consistent humility with such self-addresses.

#### **3.6.4 Iqbal's objective and purpose of writings in milieu of his contemporaries**

Iqbal was also cognisant of the need to re-interpret Islam with the rational and philosophical argumentation that was prevalent at his time. Unlike Nursi's clear *tajdīd* revivalist tendency, Iqbal's purpose and objective of his writing was more inclined towards the modernist discourse similar to the works of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī. Nevertheless, Iqbal's style of writing and argumentation is also very distinct compared to the other modernists. Although he agreed with the modernist thinking of re-evaluating Islam in the modern times, he preferred to locate his discourse by using and relying on Western philosophical thought and argumentation.

Unlike the modernists who were directly engaging in the discourse of the Islamic tradition, Iqbal did not directly engage with the Islamic tradition. Rather in this way, he situated the Islamic discourse within the framework of Western philosophical language. It was this difference in style that differentiated him from the traditionalists and the modernists alike. Arguably, Iqbal's works do not echo the revivalist discourse of al-Ghazālī, Sirhindī and Nursi either, as he does not see himself an authority in the Islamic tradition as such. Iqbal admits in many instances that he is not a theologian, or a 'teacher' of the Islamic tradition. In this statement he depicts his honesty and great respect for the tradition to which he belonged. In '*Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal*' in an analogy once again he identifies

himself as the ‘critical student’.<sup>150</sup> In the introduction to the *Reconstruction*, he again admits his particular capacity in relation to the Islamic sciences. He states, “most of my life has been spent in the study of European philosophy and that view point has become my second nature”.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, Iqbal’s philosophical approach to Islam is noted in his statement where he claims “consciously and unconsciously, I study the realities and truths of Islam from the same point of view”.<sup>152</sup>

Nevertheless, Iqbal is also further distinguished from the modernists in that as a Muslim scholar of philosophy, Islamic history, and literature, he has inspired a third category of discourse in the hope of bridging the Western discourse with the Islamic tradition. In this third category, he is neither conversant directly in the Western tradition nor in that of Islam. Although, this can be a point of critique and considered as weak point of his writing,<sup>153</sup> it has also encouraged the congruity of human thought across these two traditions and enriched the discourses in both. Iqbal’s unprecedented style has encouraged other Muslim scholars like Fazlur Rahman, Abdul Hameed Siddiqui and Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi to have greater scholarly intercourse with Western philosophical thought.<sup>154</sup>

Iqbal’s main aim in his poetical writings, as well as his prose works like the *Reconstruction* and his various letters, essays and speeches, was the subject of the ‘survival of Islam’ and the Muslim *umma* amidst the intellectual, cultural and political dominion of the Western world. Iqbal, like his predecessor Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī whom he looked to admiringly, sought a different ideal for what he perceived to be the only solution for the shameful ‘enslavement’ of Muslims everywhere. For Iqbal the solution was social action and social

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<sup>150</sup> Iqbal and Vahid, “Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal”, pp. 29-31.

<sup>151</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, 2013.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> See Asif Iqbal Khan, “The Problem of Method in Iqbal’s Thought”, *Iqbaliyat*, Apr, 1994, 35, 1.

<sup>154</sup> See Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Vol. 15. University of Chicago Press, 1984, Siddiqui, Abdul Hameed. *The Life of Mohammad*. Adam Publishers, 1995 and A’la Mawdudi, Sayyid Abul. *Towards Understanding Islam*. Kube Publishing Ltd, 2013. This assertion is mine based on the comparative study of the cited texts.

change, and in many ways, political equity and unanimity with other powers of the world. He therefore sought to dedicate his key writings on this aspect in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought Islam* in the modern world.<sup>155</sup> To this effect his prophetology was uncovered by social and political developments in India. He therefore developed his prophetology in his prose and literary works to inspire not only the Indian Muslims, but also to a wider South Asian audience since he wrote in Persian and Urdu. The objective was therefore to evoke passion and instil socio-political change by inspiring the masses with prophetic examples, stories, images and parables that he used in his great literary works.<sup>156</sup> Iqbal's main pejorative was against the Aḥmadīya, who theologically challenged the orthodox position on the notion of finality of prophethood. To this he put a fierce defence.<sup>157</sup>

### 3.6.5 Concepts, methods and argumentation in Iqbal's works

Iqbal's modernist objective and aim of reviving Islam effected the conceptual framework, methods and key themes of his writing. He was disheartened by the demise of the Muslims everywhere especially in India. In contrast to the Western powers in the British Raj, the Indians in general and the Indian Muslims particularly were subjugated economically, politically and culturally. This became not only a common theme and motif in his work 'the plight of the Muslims' but also affected his key objective of reviving Islam. Iqbal felt that Muslims could overcome their 'perceivable decline' by 're-embracing' values and ethics that they themselves had introduced to the West.<sup>158</sup>

One of the key reasons for this decline that Iqbal felt strongly about was 'bad culture' and 'superstitious beliefs' that had led the Muslims to almost a 'dogmatic cult' of 'Mulla

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<sup>155</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, 2013.

<sup>156</sup> Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, 2000; Iqbal, Muhammad. *Kulliyat-e Ash-aar-e Farsi Maolana Iqbal-e Lahore*. Tehran: Intishar-e Sanai, 1980.

<sup>157</sup> Iqbal. Muhammad. *Islam and Ahmadism*. Lahore: Academy, Islamic Research & Publications, 1974.

<sup>158</sup> Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 17.



mongery' and the worshipping of shrines.<sup>159</sup> The key to counteracting this social behavioural problem, Iqbal felt, was to address the root of the problem, namely the misinterpretation and celebration of certain mystical beliefs of Islam which he believed had led to their decline. Iqbal was highly critical of the '*waḥdat al-wujūd*' or 'unity of existence' concept and related Sufi concepts.<sup>160</sup> This belief that 'God and His creation are one' had led the Muslims into a state loss of 'self' and apathy.<sup>161</sup> Iqbal's diagnosis for the further demise was their 'other worldliness' notions found in the concept of '*fana*' or 'annihilation' of the self. In a global climate of Protestant-ist spirit of work ethics and revolution Iqbal sought the 'Islamic version' of the same ideal in the Islam's historical past.<sup>162</sup> His emphasis on the notion of *khudhi* or 'selfhood' became a consecutive common theme throughout his prose and poetry. *Khudhi* was also a conceptual rebuttal of the *taṣawwuf* concept of *fanā*' that Iqbal was passionately against. He wanted not to dissolve the self as was encouraged by the popular Sufi concept of *fanā*' – an attitude he felt had contributed to the decline of the Muslim spirit and social standing. Rather, he wanted to recreate and strengthen the Muslim morale and identity by constantly drawing parallels to the historical classical period of Islam since its inception in 610 CE, to the era of the Prophet's caliphs and beyond. In this period like other Modernists of his time, he too saw an ideal in the 'general spirit' of the early Muslims that those of his own century could also adopt. This is referred to in many of his essays on Islamic history, culture and ethics as well as politics, and is also a theme in his poetry, where he refers to key members of the

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> The unity of Being doctrine formulated by the school of Ibn al-Arabi postulates that God and His creation are one. Since all that is created preexisted in God's knowledge and will return to it, making mystical union with God possible.

<sup>161</sup> Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 51.

<sup>162</sup> For the protestant work ethics see Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: and other writings*. Penguin, 2002. For more on Iqbal's ideal of action and hard work for the Muslim world see Javid Iqbal, 'Religious Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal' *Iqballiyat*, <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/apr02/01-RELIGIOUS%20PHILOSOPHY%20OF%20MUHAMMAD%20IQBAL.htm> accessed, 18.02.15.

‘Muḥammadan community’ in order to rejuvenate a similar spirit of ‘action’ and ‘deed’.<sup>163</sup> In fact, the notion of action and emphasis on deed is obvious in Iqbal’s thought. In the opening paragraphs of the *Reconstruction*, Iqbal’s definition of Islam as a religion of deed and not just ‘creed’ further reiterates his position regarding the need for the activity and activeness of Muslims in social and political life. Iqbal believed that only through correct thought and action could society change, and he strived in trying to achieve both, although his activities in the social and political realm became increasingly dominant in the latter part of his life.

Iqbal’s concept of *khudhi* has some parallels with that of Nursi’s definition of the *ana* or the ‘enigmatic self’.<sup>164</sup> Due to the popular discourse on the human being, notions of selfhood were increasingly popular in Western philosophical discourse that also included psychology and social sciences in that time. The philosophical movement beyond the ontological questions of existence of the universe and God towards epistemology and axiology are another reason for the popularity of the discourse during that period. Due to this importance both Nursi and Iqbal included explanations of the ‘self’ in their discourse. Javed Majeed highlights Iqbal’s illustration of *khudhi* in his poetical aesthetics as well as his prose works.<sup>165</sup> Majeed underlines the link between his poetical concept of *khudhi* to the ‘ascetic formation of a political ideal in the postcolonial context.’<sup>166</sup> Iqbal’s concept of *khudhi* has been perceived to be his re-assertion of the Muslim social and political interest in his separatist political philosophy of two state nation solution for the Hindus and Muslims of India. This is supported by Khamenei’s description of Iqbal’s *khudhi* as ‘the

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<sup>163</sup> Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, pp. 1, 74.

<sup>164</sup> For details on Nursi’s exposition on ‘The ego and the movement of the atoms’, see Nursi. *The Words*, Sozler Publications, Istanbul, 2006, pp. 511-576. For details on Iqbal’s concept of *khudhi* see, Muhammad, Iqbal *asrari Khudi. The mysteries of selflessness: a philosophical poem*. J. Murray, 1953.

<sup>165</sup> Majeed, Javed. *Autobiography, travel and postnational identity: Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, and Majeed, Javed. *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics, and Postcolonialism*. Routledge India, 2009.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, pp xxiv-xxv.

central theme of his poems'.<sup>167</sup> Majeed also maintains that the 'mainstay of Iqbal's poetry is the philosophical explication and aesthetic dramatization of selfhood'.<sup>168</sup>

Iqbal's had a dichotomous position in regards to West and its norms and ideals. Although some consider him to be traditionalist (in fact in Pakistan today – the scholars of Iqbal even his students are divided into traditionalists, perennialists, and modernists) this highlights the complexity of his thought and his appeal to various minds.<sup>169</sup> However, he has also been represented as a traditionalist, with 'traditional' roots. Iqbal represents this in his love and passion for upholding the 'dignity' of Islam and Muslim world, yet, he thought that the West had surpassed the world of Islam in thought and civilisation – even though he was critical too of the West. Nevertheless, this explains why he choose to explain his prophethood through means of Western philosophical thought.

Iqbal's main theological position echoes Sunni orthodoxy and the influences of Mawlana Rūmī, Ibn Khaldūn and Aḥmad Sirhindī. Besides his main theosophical expressions that were depicted in literary works previously mentioned (such as the Prophet as the Mercy of all the worlds, the embodiment of mercy, the saviour, the embodiment of seen beauty with God being the unseen, his pre-Adamic creation, his perfect human self-hood *insān-i kāmīl*), Iqbal's theosophical ideas outside of his poetry are mainly on the finality of prophethood and smaller inferences to prophetic miracles and prophetic intelligence.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Khamenei, Ali, Ali Shariati, Mahliqa Qarai, and Laleh Bakhtiar, *Iqbal: Manifestation of the Islamic Spirit, Two Contemporary Muslim Views*, Albuquerque: NM, 1991.

<sup>168</sup> Majeed, Javed. *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics, and Postcolonialism*, (2009), p. 19.

<sup>169</sup> According to Iqbal's own son Javaid Iqbal, 'the spirit of Islam is inclusive and limitless. Basit Bilal Koushal's view is that Iqbal integrated tradition and modernity'. Dr Amjad Waheed's discourse presents the idea that 'Iqbal not only assimilates tradition and modernity but also opens up the possibility of a new civilizational paradigm'. Iqbal's thought has assumed greater importance in view of the challenges being faced by Muslim thinkers in contemporary times. From 'In Discourse on Iqbal's 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' <http://umt.edu.pk/News/Dr-Amjad-Waheed-presents-views-in-discourse-on-Iqbals-Reconstruction-of-Religious-Thought-in-Islam.aspx>, accessed, 15.02.15.

<sup>170</sup> Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, pp. 54-62.

Even though Iqbal's works have been criticised for not being 'strictly philosophical' in style and content<sup>171</sup>, prominent scholars focusing on Iqbal's works like Basit Bilal Koushal and Amjad Waheed have suggested that Iqbal has been one of the earlier scholars pushing the philosophical theory of knowledge and existence, beyond theology, ontology, teleology and has introduced a new means: namely that of the epistemological approach – the study or critique of knowledge itself.<sup>172</sup> Iqbal in particular amidst Muslim scholars quite early on contributed not only to the Islamic field but to philosophy – by focusing heavily on the epistemological of the approaches to religion, existence, concept of Divinity itself, as well as prophethood. In his newly established approach Iqbal attempts to create a framework to discuss matters related to existence, God and prophets.

The main stance of Iqbal in relation to *nubuwwa* was unlike that of Nursi. Nursi's discussion of *nubuwwa* had established arguments based on ontological grounds. Therefore, the issue of the existence of God and then the revelatory process in nature, the human beings mirroring God, as well as the creative activity of God, these scholars argued for the necessity of *nubuwwa* based on these grounds.<sup>173</sup> However, Iqbal had a different standpoint, due to the prevalent trend of a paradigm shift from 'tradition' to 'modernity'. There was a similar necessary representation in philosophy between a shift from ontology to epistemology.

This shift is represented by Rene Descartes (1596-1650) celebrated as the 'father of modern philosophy' and his Cartesian philosophy of methodological doubt, *cogito ergo sum* or 'I think therefore I am'.<sup>174</sup> From Descartes to Kant represents the development of

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<sup>171</sup> See Harre, R. "Iqbal: A Reformer of Islamic Philosophy." *The Hibber Journal*, July, London (1958). Javid Iqbal is also of the view that Iqbal was not a philosopher in the literal sense but a 'religious poet'. See Iqbal, 'Religious Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal.'

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Colin Turner posits Nursi's exposition; see his explanation of revelation and nature as revelatory act Turner, C. *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light*, 2013.

<sup>174</sup> Descartes, René, *A Discourse on Method: Meditations on the First Philosophy Principles of Philosophy*, London: Everyman, 1994, p. 29.

epistemology, making the question of God's being no longer pertinent. In the post-Cartesian world epistemology became the prevalent question of philosophy. Therefore, epistemology, which dealt with the question of what is knowledge, became more relevant in the modern age than ontological questions of what is God, what is existence and what is the origin of the universe. Iqbal too understood this shift and wished to situate his prophetology and discussion of *nubuwwa* through epistemological analysis of how prophetic knowledge or consciousness is different to the mystical consciousness. (This will be further elaborated in Chapter Four).

Based on this modern philosophical move away from ontology, Iqbal purposely avoided lengthy discussions of ontology, teleology and theology in his works and focused more on epistemology, and as some recent scholars have assessed axiology as well. Whilst Nursi was aware of the modern stance he unlike Iqbal purposely situated his discourse in the religious framework corresponding to ontology and teleology, with references and parallels to epistemology. In this respect, Nursi comes from the traditional and religious stance and Iqbal is inclined more towards the modern position, but he hoped to bridge the traditional aspects with modern thought. Thus, while Nursi was primarily addressing Muslim thought in the *Risale-i Nur*, Iqbal's primary audience had to have known the Western development and modern thought and therefore he was indirectly addressing the Muslim world but directly engaged with the modern philosophical thought. Iqbal assumed that this modern shift necessitated the requisite to establish the need for religion in modern times. This is the primary position of Iqbal in the *Reconstruction*.

Iqbal has established the epistemological issue on four grounds: firstly in history; secondly in philosophy; thirdly in the physical sciences; and fourthly in psychology. Nursi is also doing the same thing, but he is also trying to adjust religion in the modern scenario and he

is doing it ontologically and traditionally. Iqbal by comparison is tackling this issue in more depth.

Moreover, the epistemological development of Kant in his definition of knowledge, as the 'Synthetic a priori judgment' is valid only within 'phenomena' not with 'noumena'.<sup>175</sup> According to Kant, knowledge is relevant only with this physical world not with noumena or the 'Ultimate Reality'; thus, we cannot acquire the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality.<sup>176</sup> The modern era embraced Kant's definition of knowledge, and as a critical student of the modern philosophy Iqbal also utilised Kant's definition to apply his epistemological questions related to the Islamic tradition. As a result of this, Iqbal felt it was necessary due to the shift from Descartes to Kant to explain prophethood and the necessity of prophethood within the parameters of epistemology.

Iqbal assumed the predominance of the epistemological argument and in many respects thought it was more advanced than the traditional theological arguments of ontology and teleology and therefore concentrated his efforts in most of his discourse towards this end. On the contrary Nursi did not choose epistemology as a basis of his argumentation in his works; however, he did not ignore it either. In a synthetic way that was characteristic of his work, Nursi arguably discussed epistemology and ontology simultaneously. In this way he acknowledged the validity and continued the traditional arguments of prophethood from Islamic *kalām*, however, he did so using rational argumentation and epistemological analysis.

Iqbal was thus speaking to an educated elite who were philosophically inclined particularly in his major prose works the *Reconstruction of Islam* and not to the common Muslim Indian, who had a very basic education. He raises the question in the last lecture of the

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<sup>175</sup> Kant, Immanuel, and J. M. D. Meiklejohn. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Raleigh, N.C: Alex Catalogue, 1990, p.13.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

*Reconstruction* – Is Religion possible?<sup>177</sup> This is a direct shift from Kant’s question is metaphysics possible? Iqbal’s scenario therefore needs to be contextualised within this modern shift in philosophical outlook.

### 3.6.6 Iqbal’s style of writing in the milieu of his world

Iqbal’s discourse may be appropriately situated amongst the Muslim Modernist discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are certain genres, themes, concepts and methods as discussed above that mark the uniqueness of his prose and poetical writings. However, due to the multifaceted complexity of his work, Iqbal has been recognised in various capacities and ideologies; as a ‘poet’, a ‘philosopher’, a ‘politician’, a ‘nationalist’, a ‘revolutionary’, a ‘patriot’, a ‘colonial agent’, a ‘British subject’, a ‘German enthusiast’, a ‘Persian admirer’, a ‘pan-Islamist’, a ‘modernist’, a ‘traditionalist’ and much more. Many scholars including Iqbal Singh, Annemarie Schimmel, and recently Javed Majeed have recognised this complex and multiple identities that the scholar has been affiliated with over the years. They have acknowledged the vivacity of his thought and rigorous passionate evolution of his ideas as valid reasons for his complexity and depth.<sup>178</sup> Iqbal himself has admitted that his ideas have had an evolutionary aspect to them.<sup>179</sup>

This evolutionary aspect of Iqbal’s thought is also evidenced further in his own works. A critical examination of Iqbal’s works display an evolution of his concepts and thought. In fact, his earlier works such as *The Metaphysics of Persia*, his doctoral thesis, may be comparable to the *Reconstruction*.<sup>180</sup> Further evidence of this process of change may be seen in the drastic shifts in his own thought on key issues such as unity of being or *wahdat*

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<sup>177</sup> Iqbal, “Is Religion Possible?” *Reconstruction*, p. 77.

<sup>178</sup> Majeed, Javed. *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics, and Postcolonialism*, (2009), p. xxiv. See also Singh, Iqbal. *The Ardent Pilgrim: An Introduction to the Life and Work of Mohammed Iqbal*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>179</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 23.

<sup>180</sup> Compare and contrast for example Iqbal’s thought of pantheism as expressed in the Iqbal. *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, 1908 with Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, 2011.

*al-wujūd*, which persuaded many of Iqbal's close associates during his student days in Europe that he was a pantheist in his outlook and philosophy.<sup>181</sup> The deconstruction and *Reconstruction* of this concept in his own thought marks a contrast to his earlier works. Here Iqbal continues to display the same astuteness of his scholarly endeavours as he did in the *Metaphysics of Persia*, but a maturation of ideas, thoughts and concepts are more aligned with his revivalist objectives that he hoped for the Muslims in the Modern era.

Moreover, before his study in Europe, Iqbal was more inclined towards the West in general and in particular Western rational thought and philosophy. He pursued an academic career initially and delved deeper in this field. Iqbal's writings are webbed within the Western framework of thought, nevertheless, Iqbal has not been freed from being associated with Islamism or being an Islamist. As part of his main objective – to protect the rights of the minority Muslim Indians in a time of great socio-political and economic and legal change – he sought reform in these areas. Part of the reason for this is that he wrote predominantly in areas of social and political reform. In fact a lot of his prose works in English including his doctoral thesis, *Iqtisad* economics, and his *Reconstruction*, as well as his popular speeches and presidential address depict an approach to the elite and educated of his community. He also addressed the masses through his poetry. Despite his staunch criticism of ethnic based nationalism later on, Iqbal's ideas of nationalism gradually evolved from being an Indian nationalist to critical or even anti racial nationalism. He composed one of the finest lyrics for an anthem which is still sung in official occasions in India, yet upon his return study trip in Europe, he had a 'new awaking', being fully aware of the limitations of ethnically based nationalism. Now he sought a new path in a 'spiritual nationalism' which in his vision united Indian Muslims with their fellow co-religionists around the world.<sup>182</sup> In this

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<sup>181</sup> Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 38.

<sup>182</sup> Vahid, Syed Abdul and Muhammad Iqbal. 'Presidential Address, delivered at the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim Conference at Allahabad 29 December 1930', pp. 161-194, and 'Presidential Address,



sense he sought a different homeland in order to protect the rights of the Indian Muslims post-British colonisation of India and the annexation of the Mughal Emperor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that saw reversal of the Muslim power play in the socio-political scene of India.

It was Iqbal's return from his first visit to Europe that marked a change in his intellectual and academic pursuits. He became more critical of some aspects of European thought and culture; this was reflected in his various essays, and speeches as well as letters. Iqbal was perturbed by the economic theories dominating the intellectual and cultural movement of capitalism and communism, both of which he was critical of. He also was staunchly against race-based nationalism as was discussed in the first part of this chapter. Thus, there is a particular delineation between Iqbal's work prior and post his European expeditions, one inclined towards the West and one more critical. Yet in the second phase of Iqbal's life, he continued to engage directly with Western philosophical discourse; while favouring some theorists like Whitehead, Goethe, and even Nietzsche, he was also critical of others and often highlighted the 'gaps' in their philosophies.

Iqbal wanted to marry the East with the West and bridge what he perceived to be a widening gap between faith and scientific and rational knowledge.<sup>183</sup> Nursi was very much pro this stance as well, yet he was not as open to the Western tradition and philosophical enquiry as Iqbal was, and thus depended more on *kalāmic* style rooted in the revivalist *tajdīdī* genre. Nursi perhaps perceived beyond even his own immediate context and imagined an audience in the greater future. In this way he tried not only to revive but also ensure the survival of the essentials of Islamic faith, during a time where it was under great attack.

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delivered at the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim Conference at Lahore 21 March 1932", pp. 195-219, in Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, 1992.

<sup>183</sup> Through out his essays and speeches in the *Reconstruction* as well as his poetry, Iqbal complains about the 'materialistic atheism' that dominates Western thought as well as blind and superstitious practice of faith that he associates with the East. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, pp. 70/80.

Another aspect of change in Iqbal's latter work was his recognition of a 'fundamental gap' in Western thought: that of the metaphysical and mystical aspects of faith and religion. He recognised the East (although lacking in many respects) offered something of greater value. Therefore his call for the Easterner to return back to his 'self' as propounded by the notion of *khudhi* discussed above, was also communicating his message of return to the 'original Islam'. Although seemingly motivated by the modernist's sentiments of 'Najd' and 'Egypt', nevertheless, Iqbal's calling was for a return to 'golden era' of Islam, which had a modern spirit and untainted by the later *ajami* or foreign influences of the Greeks and Persian (Magian).

Iqbal communicated his matured and developed thought through the medium of poetry and literature. Poetry became a powerful tool to communicate his sophisticated philosophies to a larger audience than the elite intellectual few who were educated enough to grasp and comprehend his philosophical sentiments for a true revival of Islam. Iqbal's speeches to the All Muslim League provided him with access to hundreds and thousands of Muslims in one large gathering. He utilised this opportunity to reach those large audiences and crowds, and in doing so always incorporated provocative and emotive language not only in his speech but also through insertion of the lyrical verses that supported his philosophical and political thought.

Unlike Nursi in Iqbal's works there was no abrupt change in style or expression or mode of writing. Iqbal divided his works into prose and poetry and used both mediums to communicate his thought and ideas to the educated elite class, as well as the common Muslims who were the majority of his addressees. Iqbal may be further distinguished from Nursi's style of synthesised work, whereby he incorporated intuitive, mystical, philosophical and theological arguments into his major piece of writing, whilst Iqbal separated his into prose and poetry. Although this division enabled Iqbal to access different

audiences and appreciation from both the higher class and the lower, it has also a limiting aspect of disengaging quickly the less keen ones from being able to access his philosophical thought. Even though many of Iqbal's poetical pieces have been renditions of his own prose work and thought such as the *Javid Nama* (Book of Eternity), nevertheless, in other poetical volumes such as his treatise of *Self and Selflessness* the poet himself disassociated his personal rational thoughts from his 'poetical expressions'. Indeed this conscious divide may have contributed to a larger misappropriation of his works or a misunderstanding of Iqbal, as often either one of the genres would be consulted and hence the greater appreciation for prose and poetry missed in this way.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The methodologies of Nursi and Iqbal have significant differences in objectives, style and genre. However, their common local and historical similarities are evident in their similar responses to issues such as nationalism, the formation of a secular nation state, Westernisation and pan Islamism. On the one hand, Nursi is writing in the *tajdīdī* revivalist tradition and his works have made a great contribution in this genre. Whilst on the other hand, Iqbal's works are comparable to the modernist discourse and an extension of it, yet form a new category of their own. Although Nursi was well grounded in the Islamic tradition and Iqbal is admittedly a 'student' in the tradition, nevertheless, his contributions are meaningful to the bridging of the Western epistemological approach and Islamic tradition.

Iqbal's overall aim was to reform the Islamic/Muslim world through reviving certain aspects of Islamic theology (*kalām*) through the use of modern Western philosophical thought. However, Iqbal felt the need to explain Islam through the means of rational and Western thinking and therefore resorted to psychology, biology, and Western philosophy to do so – in his own words, just as Nursi was trying to revive Islam by preserving the

traditions of the past and ensure its continuation. Nursi was also aware of Western philosophical thought; however, he did not make it the primary method in his works, but rather used a combined method of ontological, teleological *kalām* based approaches to explain prophethood.

Despite other differences both Nursi and Iqbal have realised the significance of reason and '*aql*' and have incorporated this in their works profusely in order to reinterpret Islam in the modern times. They were also conversant and critical of Western discourse and did not accept all Western norms imitatively. Both also realised and included the rich mystical and literary tradition of Islam in their works as well, a contribution that distinguishes them from the Modernist discourse of 'total abandonment' and disregard for the mystical and literary tradition of Islam.

In their own personal histories, Nursi and Iqbal sought different results and objectives. Nursi sought revival in faith, which meant he in his own life became totally apolitical to meet the result of this objective, and aimed to reach multitudes of individuals gradually which he hoped would exponentially grow. His key methodology was reviving the Islamic faith and essentials through the use and reinterpretation of the language of the Islamic tradition and incorporated mystical aspects as well as theological rational argument alongside each other. Iqbal proceeded and hoped to seek revival through *fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence. He had planned but did not succeed to continue this project. As a result of the change in the social and political world of Islam that he sought, Iqbal became increasingly political and socially active in British India through to the edge of the independent movement's success. He did not live to see the independence of India from the British nor did he see his own vision of the two state solution and the formation of Pakistan, however during his lifetime, he had access to masses of Indian Muslims not only through his published works, and his office of professorship in Lahore, but also through his

civic participation in various boards especially through the All Indian Muslim League through which he communicated his message to the masses. The medium of language that Iqbal used became the key difference in methodology to Nursi. He situated his discourse in the Western modern philosophical medium, and in doing so he departed from the typical method of the modernists Muslims who fused Islamic theology with Western rational thought.

#### 4 RATIONAL THOUGHT AND PROPHETHOOD IN NURSI'S AND IQBAL'S PROPHETOLOGY

As has been argued in this research, the second ascendancy of rational thought in the Muslim intelligentsia necessitated a response from Muslim scholars in the modern period.<sup>1</sup> In order to answer theologically amidst such a rational climate, two types of Muslim responses emerged, one within the bounds of an emerging new school of 'Muslim modernism' or the 'modernist' thinkers, in the, 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the second group whose response was in the form of a reformed revivalist method that sought to 'revive' the essentials of the faith within a new historical context as had been done in previous centuries. Our corresponding scholars Nursi and Iqbal, both from the same historical period, were in fact part of these two responses in their newly formulated prophetologies. Iqbal's was more or less in the modernist camp,<sup>2</sup> with which he himself identified, while Nursi's was within the revivalist tradition with which he held sympathies.<sup>3</sup> The intricacies of their careful 'reconstruction' or 'revival' of prophethood will be critically analysed in order to assess how and why they responded to each key area of prophethood. These include the need, possibility and essentialness of prophethood, the

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<sup>1</sup> In this climate, *taqlid* (blind faith or a cultural adoption of faith through imitation) was no longer possible. In a direct estimated response to this both Nursi and Iqbal realised the significance of reason or '*aql*' and incorporated this in their works profusely in order to reinterpret Islam in modern times. Thus, on the one hand, all other scholars adopted more or less a pure rationalistic, '*aql*' based approach in order to 'sustain' a theory of Islam compatible with modernity. Nursi, on the other hand, revived his works (in line with the *tajdid* tradition) wary of the fundamental role of '*aql*', while also addressing a critical gap in the modernist theory that was the fusion of Islamic theology into a combined methodology of '*aql*', that differed in style, language, and argumentation, as his objective was to have a far reaching audience and a wider appeal.

<sup>2</sup> Iqbal was never deemed a theologian. Although he engaged in theology, he was more inclined to the philosophical tradition within both the Muslim world as well as the Western philosophical tradition. He envisaged to 'reconstruct' his response to prophethood in a similar fashion with a direct engagement with the Western epistemological discourse and situated his Islamic understanding through these dialectics. Although Iqbal's theological views were largely accepted to be well established amidst orthodox Islamic *kalām*, nevertheless, his methodology of using frameworks for his discussion may well be positioned in the philosophical and Western framework as well as the Eastern Sufi mystical tradition, like Kant and Rumi.

<sup>3</sup> Nursi was aware of the philosophical and rational climate in the late Ottoman era and early Republican times. He resorted to rational arguments in order to explain the theological problems within his own tradition using a combined method that was not restricted to ontology, teleology and theology. The discussion of the listed areas of prophethood will be analysed concurrently in order to see the stark differences in approach as well as the similarities in some cases of their response, which is reflective of both their aim of making a case for Islam in the modern world.

understanding of miracles, divine revelation, *ḥadīth* and *Sunnah*, and the finality of prophethood respectively.

In light of the Nursian concept formation, argumentation and ontological paradigm, his theological theory of *nubuwwa* will be assessed according to his use of philosophical reasoning, logic, emotive language and other literary tools appealing to the heart and spirit; as well as how he elaborates prophethood through the prism of *mani ism* and *mani harf*, and its imminent connection it to *ana* or selfhood, and lastly an assessment of how he positions his works historically, contextually, and theologically within the orthodox Ash‘arī and Māturīdī discourses, as well as systems of theosophical and philosophical thought. Similarly, Iqbal’s contribution to the Muslim philosophical tradition will be appraised to ascertain the distinguishing features he shared with his predecessors and with his contemporaries in particular that formulated his prophetology. Furthermore, in light of the Iqbalian concept formation, argumentation and epistemological paradigm, his philosophical theory of *nubuwwa* will be assessed according to his use of reason, logic, emotive language and other literary tools appealing to the mind and heart.

Additionally, Nursi’s vision for a new *kalām* style and Iqbal’s continuation of Muslim philosophy, which incorporated *nubuwwa*, is discussed, followed by a critical evaluation of their key theological and philosophical expositions regarding *nubuwwa* that forms the basis of their prophetology. In doing so it will cover seven aspects of *nubuwwa* that they surveyed including; the essentialness and the need for prophethood, the prophetic miracles as a necessary proof of prophethood, the evaluation of *ḥadīth* and *Sunnah* in lieu of their contemporaries, their elaboration on the concept of *wilāyāt al-kubra* or the greater sainthood as a continuation of prophethood, their classification of divine revelation *wahy*, their interchangeable use of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad, and lastly, their reconciliation of the humanity in contrast to the exalted attributes of Prophet Muḥammad.

This chapter argues that Nursi reinterpreted and renewed the concept of *nubuwwa* in response to materialistic philosophy by utilising *‘aql* and *manṭiq* without neglecting spirituality or heart more than *naql*. Nursi does not differentiate between Sunni and Shia when he discusses *nubuwwa*.<sup>4</sup> It also argues that Iqbal has correspondingly reinterpreted and renewed the concept of *nubuwwa* and the Prophet in response to materialist philosophy, by composing his work in the Muslim philosophical tradition with reference to the recent developments in Western philosophical inquiry in order to establish the epistemological basis for prophethood. Iqbal’s views on prophethood have been a subject of further scholarly elaboration as well as critique; he has also faced criticisms particularly due to his stance against the Aḥmadiyya Movement in the Sub-Continent.

As a preliminary step, the theological, philosophical and modernist approaches will be briefly discussed in order to better situate Nursi’s and Iqbal’s take on these matters. Although on the outset, many presumably qualify Nursi and Iqbal as orthodox Sunni theologians,<sup>5</sup> not many have recognised the complexity of their multi-layered works that in many ways directly deal and in some ways indirectly deal with the issues raised by the theologians, philosophers, modernists and even Orientalists.<sup>6</sup> Hence, it is only fitting to

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<sup>4</sup> Arguably Abduh, Riḍā and Iqbal had a very elitist approach in their dialectics, Nursi’s methodology reached the masses, which necessitated a set of works that ‘presented’ the various branches of Islamic thought, inherited from theology, philosophy, mysticism, coupled with sophisticated argumentation, use of syllogisms, metaphors, analogies, in order to make it comprehensible to the ‘ordinary man’ obliging a summarised understanding of complex philosophies that typically were only afforded to a niche elite scholarly audience. This was due mostly to the context being made available to scholar and villager alike. The key methodological difference between Iqbal and Nursi was due to the variance in their adopted theoretical frameworks that they chose to situate their discourse within. Iqbal went beyond the modernists by placing his discourse within the Western modern philosophical framework. In doing so, he departed from the typical method of the modernist Muslims who fused Islamic theology with Western rational thought.

<sup>5</sup> See Dadoo. “The Institution of Prophethood for three Sunni Scholars,” 2000; Schimmel. *Gabriel’s Wing*, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> At the onset Nursi’s and Iqbal’s discourse may be differentiated from other scholastic discourses on the topic of *nubuwwa*, that provided many illustrious works from various fields, such as biographical and historical outlines of the Prophet’s life with the perspectives of Ibn Ishaq (d. 768) and Ibn Hisham (d. 833) and al Tabari’s (d. 923) epistles to theological discussions like those of Taftāzānī’s (d. 1390) ‘Creed of Islam’ and Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 1328) *Nubuwwa*; the mystical and devotional epistles such as those of Jalaludin Rumi’s (d. 1273) *Mathnawi* and Ibn ‘Arabī’s (d. 1240) various works to more philosophical approaches like those of Ibn Sina (d. 1037) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198). While Nursi in many ways develops and continues the discourse of the above scholars, Iqbal is more particularly focused on Muslim philosophy and mystical literary epistles of Rūmī. See Guillaume, Alfred, ed. *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishāq’s Sīrat*



critically discuss Nursi's and Iqbal's approach amidst this rich tradition to which they supposedly belonged and in many ways contributed, in order to ascertain their alignment or misalignment with the theologians, their variances and convergences with the philosophers, and their similarities and remarkable differences to their own newly inherited tradition of the modernist scholars.<sup>7</sup> Whilst assessing Nursi and Iqbal against the above three areas of Islamic scholarship and their historical period generally, a particular discussion of the key arguments of this research will also be addressed. This will consider issues such as whether Nursi's and Iqbal's methods of argumentation sufficiently address the issue of 'aql, and how they differ or compare to their contemporary modernists in maintaining the balance between 'aql and naql. Is Nursi reviving or developing the Ash'arī and Māturīdī schools on the issue of need for prophets? Is Iqbal merely imitating Ibn Khaldūn or does he extend the Muslim philosophical tradition? Finally, their address of the Orientalist discourse will also be assessed.

#### 4.1 Need, possibility and essentialness of prophethood

As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, the theologians and the philosophers were heavily engaged with the arguments of need, possibility and permissibility of prophethood that had dominated the scholastics of the Middle Ages. Together, the Ash'arīte and Māturīdī scholars agreed that, since the intellect cannot find or identify divine responsibilities, nor determine right from wrong, only through prophetic guidance could humanity attain 'sound

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*Rasūl Allāh*. Oxford University Press, 2006. Hisham, Ibn. "The Life of Muhammad." *A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasiil Allah* (1958). Al-Tabari, Abu Ja'far. "Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk." *Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif* (1963). Taftazani and Elder. *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*. Rumi, Jalaluddin. *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi*. Edited by Reynold A. Nicholson. 1948. Rūmī, Jalāluddīn. "The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi, Edited from the oldest manuscripts available with critical notes, translation, and commentary by Reynold A." 1977.

<sup>7</sup> In the centuries closer to Nursi and Iqbal the writings of Ahmad Sirhindī (d. 1624) and Shāh Waliullāh (d. 1762) provided glimpses of a new theosophical approach to *nubuwwa*. Even in Nursi's contemporaries we see either theological exegeses on *nubuwwa*, like those of Muḥammad Abduh (d. 1905) and Rashid Riḍā (d. 1935), separate to the poetical expressions like that of Muhammad Iqbal. Nursi, however, offers a blend of these various approaches to *nubuwwa* in his esoteric *Epistles of Light*, the *Risale-i Nur*, he provides a culmination of all the above stated categories in order to discuss prophetology and the Prophet. Iqbal's works on the other hand are comparable to the Modernist discourse and arguably are an extension of it, with a new category of its own. Iqbal's contributions are meaningful to the bridging of Western epistemological approaches and the Islamic tradition.

belief and also learn about Oneness of Divinity'.<sup>8</sup> This subsequently creates the need to worship the one God, and behave morally in accordance to prophetic injunctions of good and bad ethics. They concluded that *nubuwwa* has had a great effect on the formation of moral values for humankind. They deduced that prophethood had three main benefits for humankind: physical, spiritual and devotional practices.

Iqbal is largely silent on many key *kalāmīc* areas related to prophethood. Due to his context and education as a philosopher poet, he does not regard himself to be a theologian,<sup>9</sup> and at times assumes a critical stance towards the 'medievalist theories' that he views as outdated.<sup>10</sup> Avoiding such 'medieval' dialectics intentionally, Iqbal was inadvertently drawn to dealing with prophethood as an unrelenting phenomenon and belief in Islamic faith, which coloured his poetical verses in various poems. Iqbal's contribution to this field of Islamic tradition is minimal if compared to Nursi; nevertheless, some of his key expositions that are conveyed indirectly in his 'wisdom verses' do provide an insight into the poet philosopher's orthodoxy that satisfied and still satisfies the millions of South Asian and Muslim followers who are more familiar with his verse than his prose. It is instructive to relate his corresponding beliefs to the same orthodoxy to which he showed some aversion, as communicated in some of his poetical verses and signify their importance in the Muslim thought and mind in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One particular area of his prose work that looks towards the need and possibility of prophethood in general but predominantly Prophet Muḥammad, is the condition of the Muslim world and particularly Muslims in India for principles and examples in governance. Within this context he sees the Prophet as the ideal guide and needed role

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<sup>8</sup> Frank, Richard M., and Dimitri Gutas. *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ash'arites: Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalam*. Vol. 3. Variorum, 2008; Sharif, Miyad Muhammad, ed. *A History of Muslim Philosophy*. Vol. 2. O. Harrassowitz, 1966.

<sup>9</sup> For Iqbal's self-proclaimed statement regarding this see Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. xi.

<sup>10</sup> See, Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, 1992.

model as a leader and statesman that has demonstrated to humanity the principles of governance and justice. In his essay on political thought in Islam he enumerates the need to consider the Prophet's example and the example of the democratic republic of Islamic governance as practiced by the four rightly guided caliphs as the correct model of governance for Muslims of his day. He compares the customs of pre-Islamic Arabia in contrast to the Islamic ideals established by the Prophet. In appraisal of the latter he states:

Though these primitive social groups (referring to Arabian tribes in the pre-Islamic era) recognised, to a certain extent, their kinship with one another, yet it was mainly the authority of Muhammad and the cosmopolitan character of his teaching which shattered the aristocratic ideals of individual tribes, and welded the dwellers of tents into one common ever expanding nationality.<sup>11</sup>

However, it is mainly in many of his lyrical verses where Iqbal acknowledges the need, possibility and necessity of prophethood, both with reference to other prophets that are mentioned in the Qur'ān particularly (but not restricted to) Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, and importantly and predominantly Prophet Muḥammad.

From Prophethood is in the world our foundation,  
From Prophethood has our religion its ritual,  
From prophethood are hundreds-thousands of us one,  
Part from part cannot be separated.  
From Prophethood we all got the same melody,  
The same breath, the same aim.<sup>12</sup>

Iqbal's appreciation for the significance of prophethood in the physical, spiritual and devotional guidance, and solidarity of Muslims across all geographies and time, but particularly the Muslims of India, for whom he sought a separate homeland is highlighted in these verses emphasising prophethood as the 'key' in order to achieve this aim.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, many direct references to Prophet Muḥammad's prophethood once again illustrate his correlation with the view of Orthodoxy with regards to the need of humanity

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> See "Rumuz" in Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i Iqbal*, p. 176.

<sup>13</sup> Iqbal in his two famous presidential address of the Anjuman in 1930 and 1932 respectively depicts his initial and fermented idea of separate Muslim homeland, which was finally recognised and actually realised by the British Raj 8 years after his death. See Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*.

for guidance through revelation and prophethood. In quoting the Indo-Muslim poet Ghalib he reiterated in the *Javid Nama* or *Book of Eternity*, “Creation, destiny and guidance is the beginning –”Mercy for the worlds” is the end.<sup>14</sup> Verses such as these clearly depicting Iqbal’s acceptance for the need of prophets and prophethood as a ‘mercy’ affirms and aligns the modernist thinker with the group of Islamic thinkers and theologians who as discussed in Chapter Two emphasised the ‘sending’ of prophets as *luṭf* or ‘grace’, *raḥma* or mercy and *sunnatullah* or Divine behaviour.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, a critical review of his major treatise *Risale-i Nur* demonstrates that Nursi directly engages with prophethood from the position of an Islamic theologian with specific training and instruction (refer to Chapter Three) that situated him well to speak with authority on this issue. Nevertheless, Nursi is unconventional, as he does not follow one particular school of theology of the main two Sunni schools of Ash‘arī and Māturīdī. Although himself a follower of the Shafī school of jurisprudence, Nursi is not a traditionally an Ash‘arīte in all theological aspects.<sup>16</sup> This highlights that Nursi’s ‘revivalist works’ sought and hence created a new school of *kalām* in Islamic thought. Whether or not this was his personal prerogative or objective is outside of this discussion; textual instances showing Nursi’s position do not provide an exact alignment with orthodox Ash‘arītes or Māturīdītes, which further crystallises his position. Nevertheless, although his works present a unique compendium of Islamic belief in *nubuwwa* and *kalām* in general, he still affords due consideration and adherence to the established Sunni position. Therefore his treatise demonstrates how he furthered the issue by commenting only where necessary and only discussed matters summarily in order to reiterate the established position. His true

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<sup>14</sup> Iqbal. *Javid Nama*, p. 301, stanza: 2301.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Two for an elaboration.

<sup>16</sup> Horkuc, Hasan. *Said Nursi’s Ideal for Human Society: Moral and Social Reform in the Risale-i Nur*, Durham: University of Durham, 2004, p. 417.

creativity may be assessed in how he presented these concepts and principles that were already established.

Both Nursi and Iqbal's works may also be comparable to the philosophers, who also logically outlined the need, possibility and permissibility of prophethood. Whilst some were at one extreme end of the pendulum, like Abu Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 935)<sup>17</sup> who observed that prophecy, prophethood and revelation were superfluous, as the human intellect – a 'gift of God', was capable of finding the Divine, hence there was not a real need for prophets, which he deemed as pointless.<sup>18</sup> Others like al-Kindī (d. 873), al-Farābī (d. 950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) however refuted Razi's position by arguing that prophecy is a 'valid instrument' for the guidance of humanity and for the establishment of religious life.<sup>19</sup> In particular, Ibn Sīnā,<sup>20</sup> who although criticised by some theologians like al-Ghazālī,<sup>21</sup> was nevertheless a devout Muslim. Fauzen Saleh maintains that, Ibn Sīnā saw prophets characteristically as philosophers, with peculiarity of being "inspired philosophers".<sup>22</sup> Moreover, unlike the theologians who saw *nubuwwa* as *lutf* 'Divine bestowal' or favour, the philosophers and in particular al-Farābī, ascribed prophecy to an 'exceptional perfection of imaginative faculty', hence not necessarily a signification of Divine blessing.<sup>23</sup> Although, in this instance both al-Farābī and Ibn Sīnā seem to derogate the

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<sup>17</sup> Majid Fakhry, *A Short Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), p. 32.

<sup>18</sup> Saleh, Fauzen. "Is Prophethood Superfluous? Conflicting Outlook on the Necessity of Prophethood between Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and Some Muslim Philosophers." In *International Bediuzzaman Symposium Papers (English)*. 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Fakhry, *A Short Introduction to Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism*, p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> After memorising the Qur'ān at the age of 10, Ibn Sina sought to reconcile rational philosophy with Islamic theology in his later life. His theological treatise included treatises on Islamic prophets as well as evidences and proof of prophecies of the Qur'ān. Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> See, Al-Ghazzali, Imam. *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Adam Publishers, 2007. Note however, that Ghazālī's emphatic criticism of Ibn Sina's philosophy, has been recently contested, see, Janssens, Jules. "Al-Ghazzali's Tahafut: Is it really a rejection of Ibn Sina's Philosophy?" *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, no. 1 (2001): 1-17.

<sup>22</sup> Saleh, Fauzen. "Is Prophethood Superfluous? Conflicting Outlook on the Necessity of Prophethood between Badiuzzaman Said Nursi and Some Muslim Philosophers." 2013, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

sacredness of the prophetic office held by the Messengers,<sup>24</sup> nevertheless, unlike al-Rāzī, other philosophers like al-Kindī, al-Farābī and Ibn Sīnā, all maintain the authority of divine revelation, with variance to Muslim theologians only in their reasoning.<sup>25</sup>

Although Iqbal identified and ascribed to the Muslim *falsafa* philosophers more readily than Nursi, his views were more limited to the concept of finality of prophethood and not on the issue of need, possibility and necessity of prophethood. Nursi's views are more extensive in this area and require a closer examination. Interestingly, although Nursi employs many of the methodologies and argumentation of the Muslim philosophers (see below), nevertheless, he at times was dismissive of them arbitrarily. Unlike al-Ghazālī who was much less 'tolerant' of them,<sup>26</sup> he had room within his theosophy where he could see convergences between orthodoxy and philosophy. Although like the philosophers and Māturīdī, Nursi too afforded human reason the significant role of discovering the 'Ultimate Reality', yet what stood as the biggest challenge that the philosophers posed to Nursi's thinking was their ascribing autonomy to human reason in a *kasbi* (acquisition) sense reaching the Ultimate Reality – although as stated above this was accepted in the absolutist sense by al-Rāzī mostly. The other philosophers afforded great respect for divine revelation, nevertheless, they still did not perceive *nubuwwa* as a bestowal in the sense that Nursi like other orthodox scholars did.

Due to personal limitations of being in exile Nursi did not have the time and conditions to write elaborately like his contemporaries 'Abduh and Riḍā, who wrote separate treatise of volumes on *nubuwwa*. Classical scholar's discussions defended *nubuwwa* against other traditions, and adopted philosophy and reason viewing *nubuwwa* through that lens of possibility. However, Nursi's addition in this area lies in his ability to link *nubuwwa* and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> See Nasr, Seyyed H. Ghazzali, *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Leesburg, VA: Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences, 2000.

the notion of need, essentialness, and possibility of prophets to other aspects of belief. He is mainly demarcated due to his methodology that used Ghazalian reasoning alongside mystical and theosophical language.

More so, on the issue of benefit, need, possibility and essentialness of prophets, Nursi's texts provides a vivid understanding of the Sunni position on *nubuwwa*, with analogies, metaphors and facts drawn from natural phenomena – it is the inclusion of the latter that positions him well in the revivalist *tajdīd* tradition of Islam, like his predecessors al-Ghazālī and Sirhindī, and unlike his contemporaries ‘Abduh and Riḍā from whom he was differentiated due to his adherence to orthodoxy as well as his overall method, based on the *tajdīd* tradition. Moreover, his discussion is not written in the uniform fashion of his medieval counterparts and thus, he may be demarcated on various points; including the overall style of his *kalāmīc* presentation of *nubuwwa*, and through the use of ‘*aql* in order to respond materialist philosophy. His method and argumentation was based on ‘*aql* with due regard for *naql* (tradition) as well, and as the style of his discussion of the topic. Nursi clearly uses core *kalāmīc* concepts related to *nubuwwa* but echoes the teachings of modern sciences by clothing his words with examples of all established sciences of learning. Nursi's addition to the *tajdīd* style maybe assessed through the various examples discussed in light of his new theological theory, his ontological and teleological argumentation, and his ability to maintain reason without discarding tradition, and through the various powerful tools of language to evoke emotional response and spiritual pleasure in explicating the need for prophets.

Nursi's discussions of this key aspect of *kalām* are not found in one particular section of the *Risale-i Nur* as a book, chapter or heading, rather as is characteristic of his style, written in various different parts in a culminated fashion appearing alongside other main theological discussions, such on concept of divinity and oneness. This style aids his aim of

incorporating *nubuwwa* as a key area of *kalāmīc* studies and develops an important intellectual response to materialist philosophy prevalent in his time, and in this way distinguished him from his medieval counterparts.<sup>27</sup>

Just as the Qur’ān discusses the universe and living entities, Nursi too follows this method in his treatise. In doing so he not only supports his main argument for the ‘Oneness of God’, but also for the correlation of the notion of ‘Oneness’ to prophethood.<sup>28</sup> In this respect, he is similar to the classical scholars, as he brings proofs from the universe in his defence of *nubuwwa* using the cosmological argument of *kalām*. Nevertheless, his cosmological argument is rendered in light of the modern sciences and knowledge of his time. He does this in order to impress upon his audience the ‘proofs’ or ‘*dala’il*’ of prophethood. An evidence of this is his explanation of the need for a leader or a guide amongst all entities, with the example of ‘the ant’ from the animal and insect world.<sup>29</sup> This is not peculiar to Nursi’s overall aim of conveying the message of Islam (also a Qur’ānic method) to Turkish citizens, as well as the Global Muslim community in line with his *tajdīdī* objective. He therefore affirms his predecessors on the mercy in sending prophets, by establishing a connection between living things and animals.<sup>30</sup>

In the *Letters*, he utilises logical arguments and teleological reasoning to state the ‘essentiality’ of prophethood for mankind supporting this by the analogy of the ant.<sup>31</sup> He states “Pre-Eternal Power, which does not leave ants without a prince, or bees without a queen, certainly does not leave mankind without prophet”.<sup>32</sup> Nursi’s example from the naturalist perspective is not only adhering to the principles of logic but also is an example of the inferential outlook that Nursi has of all entities in the universe in his *ḥarfī*

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<sup>27</sup> Nursi and Vahide. *The Words*, pp. 61, 62, 120; Nursi and Unal. *Mathnawi al-Nuriye*, p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 247.

<sup>29</sup> Nursi, Said. *Gleams of Truth: A Selection of Criteria for Belief, Thought, and Life*. New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2010, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 701; Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 469.

<sup>31</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, 2004, p. 544.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



paradigm.<sup>33</sup> He is thus applying the *ḥarfī* outlook ontologically and teleologically in order to deduce reasonable proofs from the natural world, in this case a bee and an ant, to prove the ‘need’ for leaders hitherto prophets. Thus, the significance is not these two entities on their own or in other words perceiving them through lens of *ismī ma‘na*, meaning by name, but rather in Nursian analogical argumentation for *nubuwwa*, it is an inference, if viewed from the *nazar* – perspective of the qualitative meaning given to it with *niyah* – intention of decoding a universal law about the need for leadership in the natural phenomenon, which sheds light on the subject of *nubuwwa* by way of *ḥarfī* inference.

Through this seemingly simple analogy, Nursi demonstrates the ‘essential need’ for prophethood and prophets, and also the key function of the need of being a ‘guide’ or leader. When we look at the universe we see that whether living or non-living every community (society) has a leader, or a head. This is valid for humans who are the highest of all creation. As the *maddi* (material) and *manavi* (spiritual) leaders of humans are prophets.<sup>34</sup> Nursi’s approach here is important as it gives the prophets the mission of a leader. This is because prophets are also the leaders of the societies that they are sent to.<sup>35</sup> Thus, although this topic has been discussed philosophically by Nursi, it has not been in great detail. Nursi’s methodological approach and aim is away from the purpose of addressing an academic audience. Rather it may be said that his writings are best aimed to convince a wider audience, in line with his *tajdīd* objective.

Nursi’s appeal to reason is further evidenced in the *Isharat al I’jaz* (the Signs of Miraculousness) and in the *Rays* in which the question of the reason for the various outlooks of the prophets and their different ways is equated with the ‘change of seasons’ to

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<sup>33</sup> The *ḥarfī* paradigm is explained in Chapter 3 under section 3.7.3.

<sup>34</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 544.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

the differences in prophetic laws and prescriptions.<sup>36</sup> Nursi thus demonstratively ‘simplifies’ complex theological issues; his aim is not to enter into ‘systematic logic’, but to employ what he calls the ‘Qur’ānic method’ of simple ‘analogies’ that address the rational mind and are easily grasped due to the nature of the example. Nursi adopts this approach throughout the *Risale-i Nur* in order to put forward his theological understanding of the nature of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad.

As is typical of his methodology and argumentation, Nursi never loses an opportunity to link all areas of *kalām* and further to link every notion to the unity, existence and oneness of God, even in his discussion of *nubuwwa*.<sup>37</sup> He approaches the creation of humanity and prophethood through arguments of *tawḥīd*. He posits “for humans to be able to grasp real *tawḥīd* (Oneness), and have belief in God’s Oneness and Unity and for them to be away from false beliefs and *bida* (innovations), can only happen through the help of prophets”.<sup>38</sup> In other words, only humans can ask and understand the Creator of the universe, and only prophets can teach humanity regarding the Creator fully. Here, Nursi is clearly addressing the ‘*aql*. His discussion of *naql*, and emphasis of the sending of prophets as a ‘mercy’ of God, is demonstrated. According to the exegete, since the start of human life, prophets have been calling their people and telling them to believe in God in order for humans to thank God properly, and to praise him. This is can only be achieved by prophets establishing the firm belief in the Oneness of God. His ontological reasoning is also apparent, as he stated ‘it may be said that with the coming of the prophets the way to reject the Existence of God is closed, as prophets explain every phenomenon in detail’.<sup>39</sup> *Naql* is

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<sup>36</sup> Said Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, Sozler Publications, Istanbul, 2006, pp. 31-32.

<sup>37</sup> Uniting all *kalam* parts to *tawhid* (unity) maybe a consequential result of the historical context and time of Nursi – which was due to lack of time, resources and being in harsh conditions of exile – that created the resulting need to explain all the Islamic creedal truths succinctly. It could also be due to Nursi’s method and consistency displayed in the *Risale-i Nur*, that everything is linked to belief in Oneness of God, which was Nursi’s main theological objective. Thus, to these two purposes, Nursi deliberately connected the need and essentialness of prophets to the purpose of existence, creation and existence of One God.

<sup>38</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 574.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*.

then brought in to reinstate the Qur'ānic position and reaffirms the position of orthodoxy with the statement that, there is no nation to which God Almighty has not sent a Messenger.<sup>40</sup> These are further supported by verses 17:15, 4:41, 10:47, and 16:36, of the Qur'ān, which openly declare that God Almighty has sent a Messenger to each nation. This is affirmed by the Qur'ānic verse 4:55. These verses highlight that without the guidance of prophets, humans on their own accord will not recognise the bounties of God, thus, by sending them prophets as guides God closes the door of unappreciativeness.<sup>41</sup> However, if no prophet was sent God will not condemn them due to His mercy. Nursi clearly defends this unique stance amidst other scholars. He states, 'God holds His servants responsible for His Commands only after sending a Messenger', highlighting the need for prophethood as afforded by 'God's Infinite Mercy'.<sup>42</sup> According to Imam Shafī (767-820) and the Ash'arītes School of Ahlu's-Sunna wa'l-Jama'a,<sup>43</sup> based on the Qur'ānic verse, "*We would never punish until We have sent a Messenger,*"<sup>44</sup> people can be held responsible only if they are aware of belief and Divine commands. Although God sent a Messenger to every nation, nevertheless, in every age, there have been, numerous people who have left the world without being called to God's message. It is this category of people that will not be punished. Nursi has thus approached this topic in a similar outlook as the previous medieval theologians, although he ideologically agrees with the other scholars. However, his method differs due to his over emphasis on the mercy of God.<sup>45</sup> By putting the merciful attributes of God at the front, he confers more about heaven, than hell, and marks distinguishably from his predecessors.

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<sup>40</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 377.

<sup>41</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 574.

<sup>42</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 377.

<sup>43</sup> This refers to the classical notion that was used in *kalām* by the Sunni Orthodoxy. This should not be confused with the modern rendition of the title that is often associated with the Wahabi and Salafi movements, who also identify themselves with the same name.

<sup>44</sup> Qur'ān, 17:15.

<sup>45</sup> See Yavuz, M. Hakan. "The Sufi Conception of Jihad: The Case of Said Nursi." In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)*. 2002. On his views about the death of innocent non-muslims who were killed during Second World War.

In a series of rhetorical questions, Nursi in the “Tenth Word” establishes a strong correlation between the notion of Divinity and Divine Oneness, which is central to Islamic theology (*kalām*) and prophethood *nubuwwa* as well as the impossibility of not having prophets.<sup>46</sup> This he proves goes against all notions of contingency and attributes of unity, oneness and divinity which all require necessarily the existence of prophethood. Nursi through use of command of language using rhetorical questions, appeals to reason, heart and mind and links prophethood to *tawḥīd* oneness and vice versa. The excessive questioning is again attempting to ‘silence’ the reader and leave no room for further doubt regarding this issue.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, he links the essentialness of *nubuwwa* in relation to God’s purpose and the overall purpose of creation as well as the duty of prophets. In his interwoven ontological and teleological argument, Nursi builds the *nubuwwa* archetype. He posits “God Almighty created this tree of creation so that He may be known and worshipped”,<sup>48</sup> and moreover, since God has infinite beauty and perfection, God through means of prophets makes Himself known.<sup>49</sup> His *ḥarfī* prototype appears again, discussing all creational entities as

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<sup>46</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 78.

<sup>47</sup> “Could an absolute, perfect beauty not will to reveal itself through one who will demonstrate and display it? Could the Owner of the universe not resolve, by means of a messenger, our bewilderment over why there is constant change in the universe, and answer the questions in everyone’s mind: What is our origin? Where are we headed? What is our purpose here? Who is it? Who has sent us here? What do life and death ask of us? Who is our guide in this life and to eternity? Could the All-Majestic Maker, Who makes Himself known to conscious beings through His fair creation and loved through His precious gifts, not send a messenger to convey to them what His Will demands from them in exchange? Could He create us with a disposition to suffer from multiplicity (this world and its charms) alongside an ability to engage in universal worship, without simultaneously wanting us to turn away from multiplicity toward Unity by means of a teacher and guide?” Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Qur’ān, 51:56; Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 219.

<sup>49</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 78. He further elaborates: “Or could the One of infinite essential Beauty not will to behold, and have others behold, in numerous mirrors, His Beauty’s aspects and His Grace’s dimensions? Could a perfectly beautiful artistry not will to make itself known through one who will draw our attention to it? Could the universal dominion of an all-embracing Lordship not will to make known its being One and the Eternally Besought to all levels of multiplicity and particularity through an envoy ennobled by his authority? Could He not do so by means of a beloved Messenger, who both makes himself loved by Him through his worship, and holds up a mirror to Him, making Him known and beloved by His creatures, and demonstrating the beauty of His Names? Could the Owner of treasuries filled with extraordinary miracles and priceless goods not will to show His hidden perfections to an appreciative humanity via a master “jeweller,” an eloquent describer? Could the One Who has adorned the universe with His artefacts that display His Names’ perfections and so made the universe resemble a palace decorated with every variety of subtle, miraculous artistry not

signifiers of a 'Greater Reality'. He posits that: 'He created the universe like a palace'; to introduce this palace is thus the duty of the prophets. Moreover, he maintains that everything that exists tells us about God. In order to understand this however prophets are needed.<sup>50</sup>

Those who will know and worship Him are the conscious beings. So, there must be one, or some, who will communicate with God to make Him known to conscious beings. Otherwise the creation of this meaningful universe would be useless.<sup>51</sup>

Nursi posits that they were the prophets who received revelation from God and made Him known to people. Therefore, the prophets were the brightest among the 'fruits of the tree of creation'. The term 'tree of creation' or the 'tree of the universe' is used not only by Nursi throughout the *Risale-i Nur*,<sup>52</sup> but has also been used in Islamic literature by theologians and mystics like Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (1165-1240). It serves as metaphor for life, creation and human life, being the final finest product of the 'tree' i.e. the fruit, to which all of creation points to or assists.<sup>53</sup> The human being is renowned in this epistemology as the most conscious and ripest fruit of this 'tree'. Moreover, the universe is like a book; in order to teach this book to humanity, prophets are needed. God gave numerous blessings to humans. In order that they should understand these blessings and learn how to thank Him, He sent prophets.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the 'Book of the Universe' therefore needs to be taught by the prophets as 'in every line of it a verse of the Qur’ān is inscribed with a fine pen',<sup>55</sup> being most meaningful and corroborating one another. Moreover, due to the variances in the people's intellectual capacity, human intellect on its own cannot 'decipher' the

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appoint a teacher and guide who will make those perfections known and teach people how to live in such a palace?"

<sup>50</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 61.

<sup>51</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 219.

<sup>52</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 337-338.

<sup>53</sup> The Tree of Being is described by Andalusian mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240) also gives off the Light of Muhammad, from which all other light derives, see Muḥyī’ d-Din Ibn’ Arabi and ed. Riyad al-’Abdu’llah. *Shajaratal-Kawn (Tree of Being)*, Beirut: Markazal-’Arabili’l-Kitab, 1984. As quoted in Cole, Juan RI. "The World as text: cosmologies of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i." *Studia islamica* (1994): 145-163, p. 151.

<sup>54</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 61.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 171.

ontological meaning indicative behind the events in the history of the creation of the universe. Hence, a revelation sent to a prophet by God, can only resolve this gap in human nature. Since purpose is so fundamental to the human intellectual and spiritual quest, prophets therefore highlighted the wisdom and various purposes behind the creation of the universe. In this respect Nursi echoes the Māturīdī position and school that also highlights the need of prophets due to the insufficiency of the human mind to attain universal truths, purpose-ness and worship and morality.<sup>56</sup>

In the above excerpt from the ‘Thirteenth Word’, Nursi uses the ‘natural sciences’ perhaps accepting some validity to the claim that the human intellect through effective reflection may reach the Divine, which is the position of the Māturīdī School as well as the philosophers. However, although he seems to have explained this truth in similar fashion to the Māturīdī and philosophers, he is also highlighting that a prophet is still required to do the task of interpreting the meaning of the book of the universe. Therefore, these explanations of Nursi, taking into account ‘*aql*, *manṭiqi* and *naqli* without the neglect of the *qalbi* or heart, demonstrate, that from the perspective of the *kalāmīc* arguments in religious terms, it is *mumkin* (possible) for God to send prophets. From the perspective of ‘*aql* and *manṭiq* (reason and logic) it is a must.

It is through the means of ontology, teleology, and his unique *ḥarfī* paradigm that Nursi enables the ‘*aql* to understand prophethood through the theological argument of need.<sup>57</sup> In fact, Nursi perceived the role of prophets key to decipher the various inferences that all entities signify in the *ḥarfī* prototype. He states in the *Words* “a book that is not

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<sup>56</sup> However, much vaster and more perfect and meaningful than the book in the example mentioned above is this compendium of the universe and mighty embodied Qur’ān of the world, which is infinitely full of meaning and in every word of which are numerous instances of wisdom, to that degree – in accordance with the extensive measure and far-seeing vision of the natural science that you study and the sciences of reading and writing that you have practised at school – it makes known the Inscraper and Author of the book of the universe together with His infinite perfections. Proclaiming ‘God is Most Great!’, it makes Him known. Uttering words like ‘Glory be to God!’, it describes Him. Uttering praises like ‘All praise be to God!’, it makes Him loved. Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 122.

understood, will remain a meaningless paper”.<sup>58</sup> This highlights the necessity of understanding ‘the book’. Although, it is not as *fard* (compulsory), nevertheless, according to logic, if a book is left as a meaningless, it is illogical. Thus, logic sees the sending of prophets as necessary.

Nursi’s arguments are on a par with the Qur’ān, demonstrating his ability to echo the same arguments of the Qur’ān yet in an infused language of the heart and mind addressing the modern intellect, thus showing his regard for tradition, yet without compromising the rationale, reason and the intellect. In chapter 2:151 of the Qur’ān, God states that “we send you prophets to teach right and wrong”, emphasising the key role of the prophets in their guidance and leading of humanity to good and righteousness. The Qur’ān sees prophets as bearer of good news and warners in verses 48:08, 2:119 and 5:19 amongst others, and also to provide humanity with guidance 2:213. Nursi also uses logical reasoning. He states that only when you accept the existence of God as compulsory, can you then see the existence of prophets as possible, because it is a logical fallacy to not believe in God, yet still believe that He sends messengers.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, Nursi’s discussion of the duties and functions related to why prophets were sent also necessitate the great need and essentialness of prophethood for humanity, which he bases on the *manṭiqi* or logical reasoning. As stated before, the first reason why prophets were sent is that they made God Almighty known to people with all His signs in the universe.<sup>60</sup> However, God also sent them to guide people to the truth, and so they could be purified of falsehood and sin. He further elaborates that ‘we were not created only to

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Abraham’s story in the Qur’ān, 6:74-82, illustrates his study of the book of the universe, whereby the Qur’ān discusses his engagement in a demonstrative dialogue with his people and his use of reason to show the limits in the creation of the stars, the moon and the sun, stating that ‘he loves not those that set’ he claims that his Lord is greater and permanent than all of creation. This is an example which prophet Abraham uses the signs and creation in the universe to highlight the finiteness point of their creation and highlights the Everlasting nature of the One God.

eat, drink, and reproduce; these are natural facts of our life, and natural needs, our main purpose is to recognize and serve God'.<sup>61</sup> For this reason, all prophets were sent to show us how to serve Him, and those enlightened by the messengers found the way to the Divine Presence and attained the highest rank of humanity.<sup>62</sup> Nursi also argues in parallel with tradition and the Qur'ān, that the prophets had many key roles in relation to humanity; they were always seen as the revealers of Divine Commandments, teachers, guides and role models in conveying the principles of justice. In order to perform worship *ibadah*, the need for prophets to teach us how to do it is therefore, crucial. '*aql and mantiq, reasoning and logic necessitate this; hence it is essential that they be sent.*

#### **4.1.1 *Wājib al-wujūd* – Ontological argument for need**

Nursi demonstrates the strength of his revivalist theology, through the effective use of the *wājib al-wujūd* (necessarily existent) argument and a term that he uses consistently through his works, as an ontological argument for need. By elucidating the possibility of prophethood, he attempts to steer away from all theological debates, but emphasises on the necessity of prophethood, establishing a strong bond between *wājib al-wujūd* and prophethood. He considers the possibility of prophethood through the relationship between Divinity (*Ulūhīyat*) and prophethood. He maintains that the attribute of Divinity means 'God is the one who deserves to be worshipped and obeyed'.<sup>63</sup> According to this definition, it is *wājib al-wujūd* or Necessary Existence, to have the institution of prophethood in order to teach and show people how to worship the Divine. Appealing to '*aql*, Nursi ties this with supporting arguments beyond *wājib al-wujūd*, the proofs of *tawhīd* (unity), the purpose of creation, God's perfection and beauty, prophets and humans as reflecting the attributes of God as mirrors.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the notion of *wājib al-wujūd* is discussed

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<sup>61</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 87, 97, 98.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 219.

<sup>63</sup> Nursi. *The Rays*, p. 115; Nursi. *Ayat al-Kubra*, p. 92.

<sup>64</sup> Nursi. *The Rays*, p. 115



predominately in relation to *nubuwwa* in the *Risale-i Nur*, where he questions whether it is possible if someone with an absolute beauty, a perfect will, to be known – or anyone with a special quality, to show or emanate that quality and explain what that quality is.<sup>65</sup>

The exegete then moves the discussion to the Names and Attributes of God, a central characteristic of his exegesis, which makes him once again divergent from other theologians as well, and concludes that in order to impress upon humans, God uses His *kamāl* (perfection) and *jamāl* (beauty). Humans have those qualities latent within them, however, those capacities are realised with manifest on prophets only in the highest levels.<sup>66</sup> The Qur’ān also alludes to this with many verses.<sup>67</sup> Thus, if prophets were not sent, we would not know these Names and Attributes, and hence our understanding of the Creator would be deficient. Therefore, in order to teach human beings the absolute qualities of perfection and beauty (*kamāl wa jamāl*), there was the necessity of the sending of prophets to humanity.

#### 4.1.2 Universe and prophethood

Through the *ḥarfī* paradigm, Nursi also makes a relation between the universe and prophethood,<sup>68</sup> by claiming that prophets are needed in order to explain the meaning and wisdom behind the law, beautiful order, delicate precision of measures of the objects and events within it; ‘an infinite desire for beauty and art has been created in humanity in order for them to understand the art and to find the Creator of the artwork’.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, prophets are needed from this perspective, as well, as to comprehend the universe’s various aims, goals and the way it is created in accordance with those aims and goals. Since God created

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<sup>65</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, pp. 212, 220.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Qur’ān: 17:110, 20:8, 59:24.

<sup>68</sup> The *ḥarfī* paradigm is used as a conceptual tool by Nursi. This is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. For the relationship between the universe and prophethood see Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 212.

<sup>69</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 78.

everything beautiful,<sup>70</sup> establishing the true purpose and meaning and opening the door of wisdom behind the events in the universe and creation is a duty beholden upon the prophets to teach and guide humanity. They are the ones who draw our gazes upon these events and then explain the truths behind them. This indeed is another reason why Nursi assumes a need for prophets and a proof for their prophethood. According to him, prophets are sent to tell people that everything in the universe (that has an existence in the universe) is actually there to show the existence of God (in its own language *lisān-i fitrī*).<sup>71</sup> This is what a prophet's role is. "The sun cannot exist without emitting light, and Divinity cannot be thought not to reveal Itself by sending prophets".<sup>72</sup>

Nursi approaches this topic from the axiological angle of the human existence, by demonstrating that the co-relationship between the creation, wisdom and existence of the human being with that of the prophets. Similarly, due to the style and method of argumentation and the reasons and outcomes, he establishes a connection with the prophets and prophethood, and the results of humanity. As an elaboration of the above is Nursi's intent to outline and explain the purposes for the creation. This according to Nursi is one of the hardest aspects to ascertain, hence questions arise such as: Where do all beings and creation come from? Where will they all go? Moreover, due to the various changes that constantly take place in the universe, a further question arises: What is the reason for all these changes in the universe? Hence, due to the difficulty for the human mind to comprehend the totality of the natural or the physical phenomenon and the universe, and since the universe was created by God, and His names and attributes are manifest therein,<sup>73</sup> all the physical phenomena takes place and is created with His Divine will only.

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<sup>70</sup> Qur'ān 32:7.

<sup>71</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 78.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> See Chapter 3 section 3.3 for an explanation of how names and attributes manifested in the universe in Nursian conceptualisation.

Consequently, explaining the why and how all this occurs necessitates the existence of prophets.

According to Nursi “prophets are mirrors to Divine Names. Prophets will attract people’s gazes upon themselves as they have the Divine manifestations *tajallī* on themselves. By drawing their attention, they are actually teaching others to believe, to obey, to thank and to praise to their Creator in the best manner”<sup>74</sup>. Moreover, he argues that it is necessity for Divinity to send prophets who could be the best mirror for Him. Using analogous reasoning and through his own constructed *ḥarfī* paradigm, Nursi explains the concept of being a mirror to God, “with the things that are given to human beings i.e. knowledge, power, limited senses, we can relate to the knowledge of God with the limited power given to us, with limited vision – like this they are a mirror to general way of their creator. I make this house hence I am the owner of it, just like this house, this big universe also must have a creator, whom knows it very well and runs it very well.”<sup>75</sup>

Nursi’s approach to this topic is more *taṣawwufī* (mystical, Sufi), as the notion of humans and prophets being mirrors to God is also supported by the mystics’ *mutaṣawwuf*.<sup>76</sup> However, the theologians like Sirhindī and philosophers like al-Farābī criticise this and do not accept it and this is closely related to *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence) and *shuhūd* (unity by witnessing) matters. Nursi is closer to *waḥdat al-shuhūd* than *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Nursi’s character of an *irshād* and *tablīgh* person may be formed as a result of this. Nevertheless, in order to impress upon his chosen audience he used this and it is obvious that he is under influence of *taṣawwuf* as well.

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<sup>74</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 61, 576; Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 212 and Nursi. *The Rays*, p. 230.

<sup>75</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 61, 576.

<sup>76</sup> See, Jalalu’d-din, Rumi. *Mathnawī of Jalalu’d-din Rumi*, Volume 6 (English Translation). Gibb Memorial Trust, 2013. Nettler, Ronald L. *Sufi Metaphysics and Qur’anic Prophets: Ibn ‘arabi’s Thought and Method in the Fusus Al-Hikam*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003. Ibn, al-‘Arabi, and Khan Khvajah. *Wisdom of the Prophets (in the Light of Tasawwuf): A Synoptical Translation into English of Muhiyuddin Ibn-I-Ali Ul Arabi’s Famous Standard Book of Tasawwuf Fusus-Ul-Hikam (bezels of Wisdom) : Th Analytical Notes on Each Fas, and a Life of the Shayk by Khaja Khan :oreword by L. Massignon*. Madras: Printed at the Hogarth Press, 1928.

### 4.1.3 Perfection and appreciation

Nursi also approaches the necessity of prophethood from the perspective of perfection (*iḥsan*) and appreciation (*shukūr*). He elaborates this in his unique style in the words,

Is it possible that with this beautiful artistic work, the One who is introducing Himself to the creation with consciousness/intellect and with valuable bounties, He makes creation lovable? He makes us love Him with beautiful bounties called *sani zul jalal* (Great Artist), in return He expects something from conscious beings, He will tell His wishes through a medium – that will be the prophets.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, in return of His Divine beauty and perfection (*iḥsan ilāhī*), God expects us to recognise, be cognisant and thankful for the bounties He has gifted, and this can only be possible through the prophets.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, Nursi continues this discussion by suggesting that it is an integral part of human nature (*fiṭrah*) to know please and thank God for all the goodness and bounties received from Him. He states that the ‘One who gave us endless bounties for us to be able to make Him pleased, the things he wants us to know he has told us through the prophets’.<sup>79</sup> Hence, God told the prophets who are the chosen selectively from the rest of humanity his wishes and his commands. And the teachings they got from God through *wahy* (revelation) they firstly put into practise in their own lives, and then secondly they explain and inform (*tablīgh*) others.<sup>80</sup> Nursi thus draws our attention to perfection (*iḥsan*) and thankfulness (*shukūr*), and the necessity of prophets, by concluding that prophets were taught everything, and therefore it is they who teach us how to be thankful. Since only prophets can show what God is pleased with and what bounties he has given us it become imperative to have prophets. We can clearly see in this argument that he is arguing from the moral and ethical (*akhlāqī*) perspective. We see this similar type of approach in

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<sup>77</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 62.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 542, 577, Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 212, 220 and Nursi. *The Rays*, p. 130.

<sup>80</sup> Qur’ān, 55: 29-30: “Anything in the earth and heavens – they ask from God and He is always – doing something – then which of the favours of your lord do you then deny”.

different theologians like al-Ghazālī and Sirhindī; Nursi is therefore parallel with other theologians in his discussion of *ihsan ilāhī* and prophets.

#### **4.1.4 Argument for need – Through social justice and order in society**

Through use of analogies, and the teleological reasoning within the Nursian *ḥarfī* paradigm, the key area of the role of prophets in creating real justice and order in society is discussed. This supports Nursi's greater formulated argument of need, possibility and essentialness of prophethood, as the heart of his prophetology. In the Nursian worldview, the mystery of obedience (*iti'at*) to the Creator entails that every entity in the universe obeys the physical laws set by God. In his book the *Muḥakemat (The Reasonings)*, Nursi posits that prophets are needed in order to establish an ethical code of conduct (*akhlāq*) in society.<sup>81</sup> According to him, it is impossible to establish human rights by trying to insinuate the norms of every single evil. This is because the world has never experienced this before and there is no historical record of it. Hence, civilisation did not only bring goodness, it also brought along evils with it. Therefore, there is a great need for prophets who can speak to the conscience and communicate the effective divine laws to human beings.<sup>82</sup>

Observance of human behaviour, aptitudes, and capabilities demonstrate that humans are created in such a way that they are dependent upon and need to live in communal way and have a social life.<sup>83</sup> Thus, there is a great necessity for the principles which are introduced and applied by the prophets to successfully implement legal activities and ensure the social justice among the individuals of the community are prevalent. Otherwise, peace, justice, order, reliance, law and order, and assurance, social solidarity, brotherhood, fraternity, love

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<sup>81</sup> Nursi. *The Reasonings*, p. 127.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Bandura, Albert. "Self-efficacy Mechanism in Human Agency." *American psychologist* 37, no. 2 (1982) 122-147.

and respect between humans will not be possible to achieve.<sup>84</sup> Nursi argues that this in turn has increased the myriad of social problems experienced in the modern world today. Peace and happiness are lost in family life, and the gap between the social classes has increased. This is why God has sent Divine edicts, which impart the lessons of happiness for this life as well as the next, and He has taught us what is better for our nature, as well as our own duties as a servant.<sup>85</sup>

Not every individual can observe the rights of others and control their carnal desires and use their senses in the right way. This is because the intellect works under the principle formed by the information, which has been gained through the five senses. It is always possible for these five senses to make a mistake, as their capability to perceive things is limited. Accordingly, there is a need for an intellect, which is not bound to time and has a wide surrounding.<sup>86</sup> That is why Nursi elaborates that

Humans can't find the justice through their own intellects, hence the establishment of justice between humans can happen with the laws that God informs humans about. In order to apply these laws and put them into actions, there is a need for prophets who are of a higher class than the rest of the humanity to do so.<sup>87</sup>

It may be said that theologians see the sending of the prophets as wisdom and a good bestowal. Further, in accordance with this, on the one hand they have seen prophets as a means to teach the key to attain happiness in both worlds, and to show the way for the 'aql, and to help humans to mature through them. On the other hand, Iqbal's subtle and silent

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<sup>84</sup> Nursi, *The Signs of Miraculousness*, p 84; Nursi, *The Reasonings*, p. 126.

<sup>85</sup> Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, p. 32. Human being is created in a higher way than animals, that is why they have a variety of wants/desires and tendencies, and that is why they have a lot of needs and for every individual. It is impossible to meet those needs alone, and consequently everyone needs the help of the others, and by helping each other they meet their needs. Because the mind and the carnal feelings (*shahwi hisler*) are not limited, and because we have our own will power (*irāda*), (the reason for us to improve ourselves, that is why they are not limited,) if you leave these alone with no rules, there will be oppression *zulm*, abuses, (if no rules are applied). To prevent oppression (*zulm*) and tyranny (*tajawuz*) you need justice in society.

<sup>86</sup> Peter Critchley, noting the philosophical reasonings for the limitations of sensory deductions based on positivist sciences only, suggests that a 'deeper intellect' or 'active intellect' that the ancient philosophers described was required for a more universal understanding of noumena or the 'actual reality'. Critchley, Peter. *Philosophising through the Eye of the Mind: Philosophy as Ethos and Praxis*, 2010, p. 245, 268. [e-book] Available through: Academia website<<http://mmu.academia.edu/PeterCritchley/Books>

<sup>87</sup> Nursi, *The Reasonings*, p. 126.

approval through his poetical verses affirm this and poignantly Nursi's claims for the great the need and essentiality of the prophets also rests on the notion that they establish the good and the beautiful *akhlāq* manners, utilise, and order the good and provision of the needs. Moreover, by focusing on the nature of the Divine Acts called *sunnatullah*,<sup>88</sup> which operate in nature and their connection with the prophets, in this way the need for the prophets are highlighted.<sup>89</sup> In short, amidst the theological, philosophical and modernist approaches discussed in relation to Iqbal's and Nursi's theology of the need, possibility and essentialness of prophethood, evidently, Iqbal affirms orthodoxy through his verses, as expressed through his prose and poetry. His prophetology admits the human need for guides and prophets, although this is not stated in a 'traditional theological way'. Nevertheless, it is clear with his acceptance of the divinely guided law or *Sharī'a* as discussed in his essay on *Islam as Moral and Political Ideal*,<sup>90</sup> it is in fact synonymous with the need for prophets with a book of Divine instruction. Iqbal has thus expressed this in his 'wisdom poetry' as well where he suggests many instances in his lyrical verses whereby the poet himself seeks assistance and aid from Prophet Muḥammad, as well as other verses acknowledging the significance of his guidance for the answers of the modern world and for Muslims of India, whilst making a case for religion in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Similarly, Nursi although was within the parameters of orthodox Sunni theology, yet his ability to adopt a complex and multi-layered theosophy, that in many ways directly deals and in some ways indirectly deals with the issues raised by the theologians, philosophers, modernists and even Orientalists to some degree and has thus built a sophisticated web of theological deliberations on the need of *nubuwwa*. Moreover, the method, argumentation, and ideas applied address 'aql coherently; yet differ

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<sup>88</sup> A term that is often used by Nursi in his works, it refers to the Divine 'actions' and behaviors as manifested in the universe, usually referring to the physical or natural laws that in Nursian worldview is Divinely administered hence 'Divine Acts'.

<sup>89</sup> Omer Ozsoy. *Sunnatullah Kavrami Hakkında Detaylı Bilgi İçin bkz, Kur'an'da Sunnetullah Kavramı*, Ankara 1994.

<sup>90</sup> Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 29-55.

from the modernist approach due to the balancing of *'aql* with *naql* and heart. Accordingly, Nursi may be positioned amidst the revivalist traditions on the issue of need, possibility and permissibility of *nubuwwa*.

## 4.2 Miracles

Another key aspect of *nubuwwa* that became topical in the twentieth century and one that Nursi more than Iqbal is the topic of miracles. There were different points of view on this issue, those who stood for the validity and existence of miracles,<sup>91</sup> those who were against miracles and denied its necessity in theology<sup>92</sup> and lastly, those that justified miracles through rationalisation of the miraculous events and occurrences mentioned in scripture.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, Nursi carefully developed his argument for the validity of miracles utilising *'aql* and *manṭiq* more than *naql* due to the post-Enlightenment influence dominant in his era. As discussed in Chapter Two, miracles or *mu'jiza* are an accepted theological aspect linked to the 'proof', and evidence of prophethood. In the earlier centuries the miracles were argued in the "evidences of prophethood" theological works (*dalā'il al-nubuwwa*),<sup>94</sup> wherein the Qur'ānic miracle stories were seen as an 'accepted' part of prophetic theology.<sup>95</sup> However, post the 'first ascendancy of *'aql*', in the medieval times, the question of causality and causation in nature, raised doubts in some Muslim philosophers like Ibn Rushd, as to the necessity and validity of miracles.<sup>96</sup> Although unlike al-Rāzī (854-925) (an earlier Muslim philosopher) Ibn Rushd did not deem prophethood or miracles simply as 'superfluous', nevertheless his explanation of miracles envisioned a class-based

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<sup>91</sup> Majority of the *mutakallimun* like Mustafa Sabri and Said Nursi.

<sup>92</sup> Mainly developments outside of Islamic theology like in Protestantism.

<sup>93</sup> Modernists thinkers like Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida.

<sup>94</sup> For the earliest work on this topic see, Nu'aym, Abu. *Kitāb Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*. Haydarabad 1320 (1902): 1351-1357. Recent works include: Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. *Al-Wahy al-Muḥammadī : thubūt al-nubūwah (The Muhammadan Revelation)*. Alexandria, Va: Al Saadawi Publications, 1996; Şiddīqī, Abdul Ḥamīd. *Prophethood in Islam*. Lahore: Islamic Publ, 1968.

<sup>95</sup> Sājaqlizādah, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, et al. *Risālah fī al-ghayb. Risālah fī al-tafsīr wa-mā Muḥammad illā rasūl*. 1600.

<sup>96</sup> See Rushd, Ibn. *Tahafut al-Tahafut: The incoherence of the incoherence* (trans: S. Van den Burgh). London: Luzac (1954).



distinction in the Qur'ānic audience. Thus, he assumed miracles may be necessary to 'persuade the ordinary reader' of the Qur'ān, versus the greater reality of these narratives as 'moral stories' for the 'advanced reader' of the Qur'ān, which demonstrates the philosophers' intellectual dilemma in 'rationalising' this concept.<sup>97</sup> Al-Ghazālī's extensive critique of natural determinism and argument for the logical possibility of miracles created yet another plausible position on the issue of *mu'jiza* in the Qur'ān.<sup>98</sup> Other discussions also resulting from the various contexts and settings such as those of Aḥmad Sirhindī's and Shāh Waliullāh's<sup>99</sup> in the subcontinent – arguing for the notion and necessity of a distinction which needed to be drawn between *mu'jiza* (distinguished as Divine acts of God) bestowed upon the prophets as opposed to '*kiramah*' or wonder workings afforded to saintly or Godly people or the close friends (*wali*) of God, the later being a favour (*lutf*) of God.<sup>100</sup> Nursi clearly defends this position with the statement that, 'without the permission and help of God Almighty, prophets can not work miracles nor can saints work wonders'.<sup>101</sup> Nursi views miracles as evidences for prophethood, which is separate to the wonder-working that is usually a favour (*lutf*) of God for some of His beloved servants. Both miracles and wonders depend on the permission of God. Besides, 'if God does not enable them to work miracles or wonders, a prophet cannot work a miracle nor can a beloved, saintly servant of God work wonders'.<sup>102</sup>

However, in the post-Enlightenment period, an increase in philosophical and theological rationalisation of religious beliefs encouraged a new wave of modernist Muslim scholars to

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<sup>97</sup> Yazicioglu, Isra. *Understanding the Qur'anic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age*. Vol. 3. Penn State Press, 2013, p. 103.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Shāh Waliullāh and Muṣṭafā Sabrī (1869-1956) do not reject the view that 'a prophet should have miracles at his disposal for legitimation'. However, he deems it not a 'condition per se'. Shāh Waliullāh acknowledges that people may have faith because of rational argumentation (*burhān*) or prophetic behaviour (*ṣamt*), which distinguish him from other people.<sup>99</sup> This view is not distant from the majority position. See Baljon. "Prophetology Of Shah Wali Allah," pp. 69-79.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 91.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

under emphasise (or not emphasise) the miracles attributed to the prophets and rationalise these instances mentioned in the Qur’ān. Prior to the advent of the modernist discourse, miracles as an aspect of *nubuwwa* were contested and scrutinised by the Orientalists, who questioned and placed doubt on the validity of prophetic miracles. While the Orientalists like Gustav Weil (1808-1889), Aloys Sprenger (1813-1893), William Muir (1819-1905), Reinhart Dozy (1820-1883) and Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) were generally focused upon disproving the *ḥadīth* literature and their authenticity more than miracles,<sup>103</sup> nonetheless, the Orientalist critique of miracles sustained the historic criticisms of the Prophet and his miracles since the Middle Ages by scholars like Thomas Aquinas.<sup>104</sup> Since the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Orientalists were mostly Christian, it is important to contextualise their position amidst the general Christian theological view of miracles that were still considered to be ‘essential proof of a prophet’s claim of authenticity’. It was for this reason that many of the early Western biographers of Prophet Muḥammad like Muir and Montgomery Watt were quick to dismiss his miracles. One particular example shows the continued disaffections of the ‘old Western arguments’ against the Prophet of Islam in Muir, where he states,

The prophets of old were upheld (as we may suppose) by the prevailing consciousness of divine inspiration, and strengthened by the palpable demonstrations of miraculous power; while with the Arabian, his recollection of former doubts, and confessed inability to work any miracle, may at times have cast across him a shadow of uncertainty.<sup>105</sup>

Nevertheless, the ideas of evolution and of natural causality associated with the science of the 19th century also played a part through the naturalistic explanations of the biblical

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<sup>103</sup> See Buaben, Jabal Muhammad. *The Life of Muhammad (S.A.W) in British Scholarship: A Critique of Three Key Modern Biographies of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W)*. 1995.

<sup>104</sup> James Waltz. “Muhammad and Islam in St. Thomas Aquinas”, *Muslim World* Vol. 66, (1976) No. 2, pp. 81-95.

<sup>105</sup> Pailin D.A. *Attitudes to other Religions – Comparative Religion in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Britain*, Manchester, 1984, p. 89 as cited in Buaben, Jabal M. *The Life of Muhammad (s.a.w.) in British Scholarship – A Critique of Three Key Modern Biographies of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) University of Birmingham*, 1995, p. 13.

miracles. In particular the rationalist criticisms of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries produced empiricists like David Hume (1711-1776) who argued that, given the general experience of the uniformity of nature, miracles were highly improbable and that the evidence in their favour was far from convincing.<sup>106</sup>

In this rationalist climate of faith and tradition, the Muslim modernists too either classified miracles as ‘moral stories’ of the past, or provided rational explanations for every miracle of the Qur’ān. Nursi and Iqbal also discussed miracles. Nursi in particular differed with the modernists as he did not deny their theological subsistence as an essential proof of prophethood, nor did he over rationalise the miracles, yet in light of the Orientalist as well as the rationalist critiques he creatively engaged with the topic of miracles by reinforcing the issue of causality in Ghazalian terms and providing a new alternative theory to them in Islam which will be discussed in the following analysis.

Rashid Ridā and Muḥammad ‘Abduh were key figures in the modern period from Egypt who attempted to provide rational explanations for instances of miracles mentioned in the Qur’ān.<sup>107</sup> From the sub-continent a more daring argument was also put forward by its own modernist thinker Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898)<sup>108</sup> who claimed that miracles are not in conformity with the laws of nature and concluded saying, “We declare openly that there is no proof of the occurrence of anything supernatural, which, as it is asserted, is the miracle.”<sup>109</sup> Theirs is a somewhat exclusive position among the majority of Muslim

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<sup>106</sup> See the Hume’s chapter on ‘Miracles’ in the book, Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Raleigh, N.C: Alex Catalogue, 1990.

<sup>107</sup> See Muhammad, ‘Abduh, *Ta’liqat al-Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abduh ‘ala Sharh al-Dawwani li L-Aqa’id al-Adudiyah*, Cairo: Al-Matba’ah al-Khayriyyah, 152-153; Rashid Ridā, *al-Manar* (May 3, 1935), 793, quoted by Haykal in the “Preface to the Second Edition” of his, *The Life Muhammad*, tr. Al-Faruqi, lxxv, and Rasid Rida, *al-Wahy al-Muhammadi*, Beirut: Mu’assasat ‘Izz al-Din, 1935, 105-116, also quoted in Terzić, Faruk. “The Problematic of Prophethood and Miracles: Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī’s Response.” *Islamic Studies*. 48.1 (2009): 5-33.

<sup>108</sup> See, Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), pp. 307-32.

<sup>109</sup> See Aziz Ahmad, *Muslim Self-Statement in India and Pakistan 1857-1968*. (Weisbaden: Otto Haarasowitz, 1970), p. 30, as quoted in Masud, Muhammed Khalid. “Iqbal’s approach to Islamic theology of modernity.” *Al Hikmat*, vol: 27 (2007) p. 13.

scholarship and theology of prophetic miracles. The post-Orientalist discourse is focused on miracles, and hence can be classified as neo-Orientalist. These included examining the ‘supernatural archetypal’ depictions of Prophet Muḥammad by early exegetes.<sup>110</sup>

Iqbal is mostly silent on the aspect of miracles. He does not attempt to explain them using rational arguments nor does he refute them out right like his predecessor Sayyid Ahmad Khan.<sup>111</sup> Although there have been recent claims of Iqbal’s modernist inclination especially towards Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s theology of *jadīd ‘ilm al-kalām*, (literally new theology)<sup>112</sup>, nevertheless these lack serious analysis and scrutiny of Iqbal’s thought on miracles. Not only does Iqbal frequently refer to prophetic stories in his poetry, he also refers to many miracles within those contexts. One famous example is his epic poem *Javid Nama* that is obviously a depiction of the ascension (*mi‘rāj*) of Prophet Muḥammad,<sup>113</sup> which, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. In his other statements and prose work we find Iqbal mostly silent, and apart from his other main statement that suggests the establishment of a nation or *millet* as arguably one of Prophet Muḥammad’s main miracles,<sup>114</sup> this is rather a depiction of the poet-philosopher’s obsession with the political theory of Islam and his various attempts to closely study its early development in order to draw parallels or re-create a new home land for his people – the Muslims of India. Iqbal’s main direct statement in relation to miracles is listed in the 89<sup>th</sup> note of his *Stray Reflections*, where we find that for him, it was not important to ask the question whether

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<sup>110</sup> See Williams, Rebecca Ruth. *An Analysis of the Supernatural Archetype of the Prophet Muhammad as Found in the Sira/ta’rikh and Tafsir Works of Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir*. McGill University, 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Muhammed Khalid. Masud “Iqbal’s approach to Islamic theology of modernity.” *Al Hikmat*, vol: 27 (2007) pp. 1-36.

<sup>112</sup> Muhammad Khalid Masud argues that Muhammad Iqbal continues more or less the modernist project of Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s attempt to create a ‘new theology’ for Islam in his *Reconstruction*. Although a he makes a good outline of the theologies of both, on certain theological issues such as prophethood and miracles there is not a direct link established between Khan’s prophetology and classification of miracles with that of Iqbals. Muhammed Khalid. Masud “Iqbal’s approach to Islamic theology of modernity.” *Al Hikmat*, vol: 27 (2007), pp. 1-36.

<sup>113</sup> See, Iqbal. *Javid Nama*, p. 301.

<sup>114</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad and A. J. Arberry. *The Mysteries of Selflessness*. Kuwait: Dar al-Islamiyya, 1990, p. 7; Schimmel. *Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 163.

miracles did or did not occur. This he claims is a question of evidence, which he asserts may be interpreted in various ways.<sup>115</sup>

The real question is whether belief in miracles is useful to a community. I say it is; since such a belief intensifies the sense of the supernatural, which holds together primitive societies as well as those societies (e.g. Islam) whose nationality is ideal and not territorial. Looked at from the standpoint of social evolution, then, belief in miracles appears to be almost a necessity.<sup>116</sup>

Unlike Ahmad Khan for Iqbal miracles are an important part of the ‘religious experience’ of the individual as well as the community. But due to Iqbal’s lack of discussion of this contentious subject, further deductions will be difficult to extract regarding his exact views and the relation and importance of miracles in relation to his understanding of prophethood.

In Nursi’s prophetology miracles formulate a key area of attention and assessment. He uses ‘*aql*, *manṭiq* in addition to *naql* texts of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* in order to argue for the essentiality of miracles as part of *nubuwwa*. Nursi’s position regarding miracles, although in line with orthodoxy is still distinctive, as he defends the institution of *nubuwwa* with the miracles as an established condition of being a prophet in Islam. In doing so, Nursi analyses miracles with compelling logical and *kalāmīc* arguments in order to persuade the ‘modern mind’ and to repel any doubts. He explains not only the need, but also discusses the circumstances in which these incidents took place and the various instances of wisdom underlying the miracles attributed to prophets. More importantly Nursi’s successful methodology in combining reason (‘*aql*) as well as appeal to the spirit and heart, as well as his extensive classification of the miracles of Prophet Muḥammad, enable a compelling argument for the defence of miracles in the twentieth century. In doing so Nursi adds five new dimensions to the prophetic miracles in *kalām*: firstly, reaffirming through use of logic and natural events that miracles do not negate the *al-irāda juziyya* (individual will) by

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<sup>115</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. *Stray Reflections*. ed. Javed Iqbal, Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1961, p.107.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

compelling belief to the onlookers; secondly, he highlights the non-Divine aspect of the prophetic miracles, claiming that they are only given as a favour (*lutf*) from God and only occur with his permission, hence he protects the integrity of *tawhīd* Divine Oneness; thirdly, he outlines miracles as the bases for the scientific and civilisational progress of humanity, leaving no room for doubt in their historicity;<sup>117</sup> fourthly, Nursi outlines the prophetic miracles as a reaffirmation of faith and revivification of faith for the community (*umma*); and lastly, he astutely establishes the accuracy of the testimonies of the learned scholars of every century in a firm chain of narration as a proof and certitude of the occurrence of the prophetic miracles as a strong proof of prophethood. In doing so he creates a new domain in *ḥadīth* literature in regards to *aḥad* narrations, *mutawātir* in meaning *ḥadīth*, creating an unprecedented treatise combining the both miracles and proof and authenticity of *ḥadīth* traditions and their chains.<sup>118</sup>

Nursi's theological outlook on miracles is projected in the "Thirty-First Word", where he discusses miracles as a proof to the claim of prophethood by a prophet as well as to convince deniers, but not to compel belief. He suggests that if miracles did compel belief that this would be against the All Wise's Wisdom in or the Divine purpose for creating humanity with free will and sending of religion. This he asserts that 'free choice be not negated or cancelled', which would otherwise 'violate Divine purpose'.<sup>119</sup> Although Nursi is not in any form diverting from the orthodox position against this definitional understanding of the term, he is elaborating the definition of miracles to include the independence of the agency of free will in humanity. Therefore he extends the understanding of miracles. Although mentioned in earlier texts, his exposition on miracles of the prophets is innovative in that he sees miracles as 'the confirmation by the Creator of the cosmos of his declaration of prophethood; they have the effect of the words, 'You have

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<sup>117</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 259–276.

<sup>118</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 155.

<sup>119</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 606–607.

spoken truly!<sup>120</sup> In doing so, he upholds the position of ‘orthodoxy’, contrary to his contemporaries, by showing miracles as part of everyday life; at the heart of the miracles discussion is the question of causality, which he resolves totally.

Additionally, in the Nursian paradigm and theology, much is inherited from his predecessors on the issue of miracles. Of particular continued emphasis in Nursi’s works is the common position amongst the *kalāmists*, that miracles were indeed evidence or a support for the veracity of a prophet. Nursi is defiant against contemporary scholars, who did not emphasise this point, and he demonstrates his acceptance of this position of orthodoxy. It seems though his method of appealing to the intellectual rationalists of the late Ottoman and early Turkish Republican era, necessitated a convincing of the intellect and reason over scriptural and or textual proof. Thus, as a result of this element, in the first instance and due in part also to the inherited Orientalist thought in the second instance, Nursi carefully developed his argument for the validity of miracles utilising ‘*aql* and *manṭiq* more than *naql* to argue his position.<sup>121</sup> By espousing the Ghazzalian theory of causation he further clothes his arguments for miracles. Moreover, by asserting that natural causes are depended upon a ‘contingent’ entity the contingency argument is also a re-occurring argument throughout his theological works.

Indeed, Nursi’s position on miracles assumes three more distinctive categories: firstly, miracles as proofs and evidence for *nubuwwa* such as the miracle of the moon split,<sup>122</sup> secondly, prophetic miracles as proof/evidence shown to believers in order to create ‘certainty’ in believers, for which Nursi gives the example of the ‘moaning pole’

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<sup>120</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 119.

<sup>121</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 102.

<sup>122</sup> In his discussion of the miracle of the moon split, whereby he utilises systematic logic, historical enquiry and geographical facts to highlight the impossibility of the witnessing of this miracle in most parts of the world, and at the same time reiterates his initial definition that indeed prophets are given miracles in order to convince or reiterate faith in the existing believers or to the particular community they were sent to, although Nursi in other parts argues for the universality of prophet Muhammad’s message, here he is simply pointing to the nature and context of this miracle. Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 220.

incident;<sup>123</sup> and lastly, prophetic miracles are shown as a Divine bestowal arising from a particular ‘need’ of the prophet or his community, which include the many examples of plenty in food, and abundance of water.<sup>124</sup> Nursi summarises the numerous miracles amounting in the hundreds in the following entreaty and supplication.

Upon him—our master Muhammad—to whom the All-Compassionate and All-Merciful One sent the Wise Criterion of Truth (the Qur’an) from the Mighty Throne, be peace and blessings equalling the number of his community’s good deeds. Upon him whose Messenger-ship was foretold by the Torah, Gospels, and Psalms; whose Prophet-hood was predicted by wondrous events prior to his Prophethood, and by the voices of jinn, saints of humanity, and soothsayers; and at whose gesture the moon split, may there be peace and blessings equalling the number of his community’s breaths. Upon him at whose beckoning trees came; by whose prayer rain fell; whom the cloud shaded from the heat; who made one dish of food satisfy hundreds of people; from whose fingers water flowed like the Spring of *Kawthar*; to whom God caused the lizard, the gazelle, the wolf, the camel, the mountain, the rock, the pole, and the clod of earth to speak; the one who made the Ascension (*Mi’raj*) and whose eye did not waver, may there be peace and blessings equalling the number of letters (of the Qur’an) formed in the words represented, with the All-Compassionate’s permission, in the mirrors of the air-waves when all reciters of the Qur’an, from the beginning of Revelation until the end of time, recite its words. Forgive us and have mercy upon us, O God, for the sake of each of those blessings. Amen.<sup>125</sup>

Indubitably, his classification of the last two classes as miracles is related directly to the inner dimension of faith (*īmān*) and need, which fit well with the ‘revivification of faith’ project of Nursi, but they also provide a valuable explanation of how and why certain narrations and *ḥadīths* have been recounted more about some miracles of the Prophet Muḥammad and not others. A prominent example stipulated in the *Letters* is the incident of the ‘moaning pole’ as opposed to other miracles, such as; plenty in food, water pouring out

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<sup>123</sup> Nursi’s inclusion of the ‘moaning pole’ refers to the famous incident whereby the Prophet’s mosque had a wooden pole near a designated area where the Prophet while addressing the early Muslim community leaned on it for support. Upon a further construction of the mosque, the Prophet’s sermon pulpit was located away from the bare wooden pole. This incident was reported by separate narrations, whereby the many companions present reported a loud moaning sound coming from the direction of the pole, who was crying due to the physical separation from the Prophet’s side. The Prophet then went up to the pole and placed his hand upon it to calm it down and comfort it. Nursi then states that if a wooden dead pole was brought to life by the veracity and presence of the Prophet Muḥammad, what of the human beings who are not affected by his veracious character. Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 163.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 219.



of his fingers, or animals and inanimate objects communicating with him.<sup>126</sup> In this respect only, it seems that Nursi is switching to an emphasis of *naql* in light of *'aql* and *manṭiq*, in order to appeal to the inner faith dimension of the reader, hence, differentiating him from others.

On the topic of the 'Miracles of Prophet Muḥammad' (*Mu'jizat al-Aḥmadiya*), Nursi's approach is reflective of his aim of depicting the finality of prophethood and the oneness of prophethood, moreover; there are two key points in relation to his treatise. Firstly, amidst many books, articles and treatises written on *nubuwwa* and Prophet Muḥammad in the last two centuries, arguably, this treatise stands out. Due to the fact that no other theological and even biographical treatise affords so much emphasis on Prophet Muḥammad's other miracles in addition to the Qur'ānic ones, making his treatise arguably the only theological treatise emphasising other miracles of the Prophet Muḥammad in recent times.<sup>127</sup> Secondly, as his main proposition on this topic is to illustrate that the prophets' miracles were a combination of the miracles of all other prophets. For example these include the raising of the dead and healing miracles of Isa (Jesus),<sup>128</sup> and striking of water with his staff by Musa (Moses) as well as his miracle of the white hand,<sup>129</sup> the subjugation of the wind to Suleyman (Solomon), wherein he covered the distance of two months with two strides by travelling through the air<sup>130</sup> and all other prophetic miracles, which are all found in the traditions that outline Prophet Muḥammad's own miracles, suggesting that he indeed performed those very same miracles. It is the exegete's suggestion that as a result of all these various types of miracles cited and referenced in his *Mu'cizat-i Ahmediyye*, the miracles of Prophet Muḥammad are in fact an 'encapsulation', a 'summary' and a

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<sup>126</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the 300 plus miracle narrations, see Nursi. "The Miracles of Prophet Muhammad" in *The Letters*, pp. 118-263.

<sup>127</sup> The Qur'ān refers to some key miracles of Prophet Muḥammad such as the *isra'* or night journey, as well as the incident of the moon split.

<sup>128</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 268.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

‘perfected version’ of the collective miracles of all the other prophets.<sup>131</sup> This is another sub-point signifying how the exegete is pressing on aspect of the finality of his prophethood as has been argued in this thesis thus far.

Another aspect of his argumentation that sets him apart from his contemporaries and predecessors is his creation of a ‘new language’ for theology in Islam, and thus, its revivification of various singular aspects of *kalām*. In the miracles of Prophet Muḥammad, mentioned above, he has used evidence that would otherwise be covered in biographical accounts of the Prophet’s life (*Siyar* or *Sīrah*), hitherto, Nursi has crossed borders of this discipline and meshed prophetic biographical history (*Sīrah*) with science of *ḥadīth*, science of Qur’ān, philosophy and logic all in a culminated fashion to discuss miracles in his works.

Furthermore, the Qur’ānic miracle stories and narratives have been questioned due to the advent of the ‘second ascendancy of *‘aql*’. Positively, the modernist thinkers like ‘Abduh, Riḍā and even Ahmad Khan of India, preferred the seemingly apologetic approach by ‘rationalising of miracles’ and accepting Qur’ānic narrations about prophets and their miracles as mere ‘moral narratives’.<sup>132</sup> Yazicioglu and Saritoprak maintain that Nursi was defiant against this emergent trend and adamantly argued and discussed in favour of miracles. So, in actuality Nursi is in line with his *ḥarfī* paradigm – having inferentially discussed the event in the natural phenomena as ‘miracles of Divine Power’.<sup>133</sup> Nursi’s redefinition maintains the Ghazzalian position and the contingency argument, yet is

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<sup>131</sup> In many places in the *Risale-i Nur* Nursi, points to the comprehensiveness of the prophet’s message, see ‘The Nineteenth Word’ in Nursi. *The Words*, p. 111. For the universalness of the Qur’ān see Nursi. *The Words*, p. 253. Many statements are made about the Qur’ān being the summary of all previous scriptures, Nursi. *The Words*, p. 253. Similarly, also similar inferences are made in the *Nineteenth Word*, ascribing comprehensiveness to the miracles of the prophet see Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 248, 275, 473.

<sup>132</sup> Terzic, Faruk. “The Problematic of Prophethood and Miracles: Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī’s Response.” *Islamic Studies* (2009): 5-33.

<sup>133</sup> Yazicioglu, Isra. *Understanding the Qur’anic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age*. Vol. 3. Penn State Press, 2013, p. 103; Saritoprak, Zeki. “Revisiting Nursi’s Writings on the Significance of Prophetic Stories in the Qur’an.” In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers (English)*. 2013.

furthered by open declaration of miracles as ‘extraordinary’ events and occurrences in daily life.<sup>134</sup>

Thus, he differs from his contemporaries due to his non-apologetic acceptance of the position of orthodoxy, by dedicating a whole treatise to miracles; he is sending a clear message that they are an important aspect of *nubuwwa*. Although here Nursi demonstrates a strong adherence to *naql* tradition, his argumentation is based on reason and logic, thus in this sense he has given more prominence to ‘*aql* over *naql*, as his explanations and arguments suggest. However, at any given opportunity, he assumes the defensive position of tradition *naql* as well. Additionally, he differs from al-Ghazālī due to his inclusion of prophetic narrations in his theological works and in arguing that miracles are an important aspect of establishing prophethood. He is however on various points aligned with others, such as his ‘interpretation of Qur’ānic miracles stories’ and their moral and spiritual relevance to our times,<sup>135</sup> as explained in his example of the stories of Jonah and Job in *The Flashes*.<sup>136</sup>

Nursi’s discussion of prophetic miracles provides a different approach to a much-contested area of theology in general and even Islamic theology. By re-affirming the key belief of prophetic miracles in Islam and by drawing meaningful allegories, his approach may be distinguished by his defiance of the ‘actuality’ of the events in the prophetic stories including miracles. Indeed by never refuting the actual existence of prophetic stories, he is re-asserting his repetitive claim that human history is marked by ‘prophetic history’.<sup>137</sup> In Nursi’s prophetology, the world’s historical events may be seen through this lens of ‘prophetic history’ or ‘philosophy’ with the aspect that prophetic line represents ‘divine

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<sup>134</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 99.

<sup>135</sup> See Kartika, B. “Strengthening one’s faith through the stories of the prophets in Qur’an: the approach of Imam Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in his Rasail al Nur.” In *International Bediuzzaman Symposium Papers (English)*. 2013.

<sup>136</sup> Said, Nursi. *The Flashes*. Tr. Şükran Vahide. Istanbul: Sözlür (2004), pp. 18-29.

<sup>137</sup> Nursi, Said. *Al-Mathnawi Al-Nuri: Seedbed of the Light*, Tughra Books, 2007. p. 230.

law', guidance and favouring from God, and philosophy represents the rational mind that dominates the 'ana' or sense of I-ness in humanity.<sup>138</sup> Through his repetitive axiom of selfhood – ana, Nursi illustrates the 'superiority' of prophethood<sup>139</sup> over philosophy.<sup>140</sup>

There have always been two lines of thought and action in human history, of which the human selfhood's two aspects or faces are the origin. One face is represented by prophethood, and the other by purely human thoughts or philosophers.<sup>141</sup>

Nursi's extension of the Ghazalian position extends to the discussion of the prophetic miracles as an aid to human civilisation. In the "Twentieth Word" he discusses many prophets namely, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Enoch, David, Solomon, Moses and Jesus and points to his argument for miracles as an aid to civilisational development. Nursi directly engages in the use of rational argumentation and scientific facts, in his reason to 'display' the realities behind prophetic miracles. His main idea about miracles is that they are each 'an indicate a wonder of human art and craft', that has not yet been 'realised', so a miracle directs humanity to an as yet undiscovered art and craft and that is the reason for its 'miraculousness', but each miracle is either the start of a new industry of craft like 'melting iron' bestowed to Dawud (David) who invented military equipment, the clock to Yusuf (Joseph) and the ship to Nuh (Noah). The miracle becomes the seed of an un-realised objective, i.e. the idea or the story of the miracle, encourages humanity to discover

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<sup>138</sup> Said Nursi, *The Flashes*, Sozler Publications, Istanbul, 2004, p. 174.

<sup>139</sup> Nursi posits that "Know that among mankind prophethood is the summary and foundation of human good and perfections; True Religion is the index of prosperity and happiness; belief is sheer, transcendent good. Since apparent in this world are a shining beauty, an extensive and exalted good, an evident truth, and superior perfection, self-evidently truth and reality lie in prophethood and in the hands of prophets. While evil, misguidance, and loss are with those who oppose them." Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ali Unal further elaborates Nursi's explanation of the two aspects or faces of the human selfhood stating that the face represented by prophethood is the origin of pure worship and servitude to God, for our selfhood knows that it is His servant. This is how prophets, pure and righteous ones, and saints who follow the prophets' line, perceive selfhood's nature. As a result, they resign sovereignty to the All-Majestic Sovereign and Master of creation and believe that He has no partner or like in His Sovereignty, Lordship, and Divinity. He does not need an assistant or a deputy. Nursi therefore affords beauty to the 'radiant, luminous, beautiful face of Selfhood', which according to him has always been like a living seed full of meaning. This face is to be distinguished by the other which represents philosophy which conceives the past as an eternal extinction or a vast graveyard instead of a 'a source of light and a bright, shining ladder with many rungs from which all spirits traversing it may leap into the future and eternal happiness. It is also a radiant abode, and a garden for spirits that have left this world, cast off their heavy loads, and been set free'. See, Ali Unal, *Prophethood Risale-i Nur*, 2013.

<sup>141</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 558.

the actualisation of it through science, he gives the example of Isa (Biblical Jesus) miracle of healing and claims that he was ‘ Master’ of medicine.<sup>142</sup>

This idea of miracles as a significant agency in developing and aiding human civilisation has been mentioned previously in other works such as the Indian Muslim scholar Shibli Nu'mani (1857-1914) who also points to miracles as means for future technological development.<sup>143</sup> However, Nursi's exposition of it in the “Twentieth Word” includes scientific facts, and other literary tools to confirm the same premise that miracles are also departures from normal course of nature and not just ‘mere technological hints’.<sup>144</sup> Here Nursi's theological and ontological explanations are unique; his sophisticated explanation does not negate the possibility of the occurrence of these ‘miraculous events’, rather it strengthens his re-occurring argument in the *Risale-i Nur* that ‘causes or nature are not the real Law Giver’ and that causes ‘do not have creative power’ but are rather governed by the Creator and the governor of causes ‘whose kingdom has the hand hold of every molecular, atomic and celestial and cosmic object in the universe and creation’.<sup>145</sup> Such is the explanation that Nursi puts forward while discussing the verse ‘O fire be cool and calm’, where Abraham was thrown in the fire pit and evidently walked out of the incident. Nursi explains God's suspension of His own laws of nature temporarily is as a sign for the people of the time who may need as a final chance, a further proof and strengthening of faith, hence, he concludes as the Qur'an that if obstinacy remains after its occurrence, it is only then that God's punishment is manifested.<sup>146</sup> Hence, Nursi does not delve into historical accounts of miracles or provide geological proofs for their occurrences, but selectively deducts stories and shows that ‘miracles are all an aim and goal for humanity to

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<sup>142</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 259-279. Nursi's discussion maybe instructive to other theologies as the modern trend towards non-consideration of prophetic stories was the new norm in theological studies.

<sup>143</sup> Shibli Nu'mani, *Ilm-i-Kalam-i Jadid*, tr. M. Taki Fakhr Dai Kilani, Tehran, 1329, pp. 61-63; cited in Yazicioglu, Isra. “Redefining the Miraculous: al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd and Said Nursi on Qur'anic Miracle Stories.” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13, no. 2 (2011): p.108.

<sup>144</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 267.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

achieve it in material life'.<sup>147</sup> For example, Solomon's traversing of space became a reality thousands of years later with the invention of the transportation modes of trains and aeroplanes.<sup>148</sup> This unique view of miracles sheds a whole new light and opens a wide door for scientific interest or study on prophetic miracles and other Qur'ānic stances to see if they have been scientifically realised in our time. Thus, Nursi posits emphatically that humanity was 'led' by prophets through their miracles, which were each an aim, a goal, to achieve by science and technology, the situation of miracles as irrational scriptural narratives that are often associated with superstitious ideas, is thus very much reversed that in his *harfî* paradigm, these 'miraculous events' have in fact been reasons and an impetus for the advancement in science and teaching in every era.<sup>149</sup>

Nursi dedicates many parts of the *Risale-i Nur* to the miraculousness of the Qur'ān.<sup>150</sup> In fact, his first discussion of the prophethood beginning with the explanation of verses 23-24 of Sura Baqara in the Qur'ān.

And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed, step by step, to Our servant, then produce a Sura like thereunto; and call your witnesses [ and helpers if there are any] besides Allah, if what you say is true. But if you cannot, and of surety you cannot, then fear the Fire whose fuel is men and stones, which is prepared for those who reject faith<sup>151</sup>

This was a central theme in Nursi's thought and worldview and therefore other theological and ontological explanations are all centred upon the defence of the Qur'ān's inimitability, impeccability and miraculousness.<sup>152</sup> Nursi's insistence on the Qur'ān as the most

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<sup>147</sup> Dadoo, Y. "The Institution of Prophethood for Three Sunni Scholars," p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 270.

<sup>150</sup> For Nursi, the miracle of miracles given to the Prophet Muḥammad is the Qur'ān, for Nursi the Qur'ān mentions other prophetic miracles and stories all of which 'corroborate' with the and point to the Qur'ān. Nursi's views the Qur'ān as the final revelation, complete form, Nursi focuses on the literary aspects and eloquence of the Qur'ān being its main aspect of miraculousness among thousands (many). The Qur'ān encourages humanity towards its main purpose worship recognition and true God therefore its the Qur'ān style of oration, rhetoric that Nursi views as unique inimitable and miraculous in opening humanity once again to belief.

<sup>151</sup> Nursi. *The Signs of Miraculousness*, Sozler Publications, 2004, Istanbul, p. 181.

<sup>152</sup> See "The Twenty-fifth Word" in Nursi. *The Words*; Nursi. *The Signs of Miraculousness*.

formidable proof of miracle of Prophet Muḥammad is a separate discussion but should be noted that Nursi's insistence on '*balagah*' imitability of the Qur'ānic exposition in his major earlier treatise called *Isharatal I'jaz* – point to his assertion that just as other miracles signify a greater material and physical reality for human civilisation, in this age he claims the resurgence of 'eloquence' (*balāghah*) is once again required and to this effect – Nursi proposes that hidden within the 'mastery of these verses' are signposts for all sorts of scientific, literary, meaning and purposeful clues for humanity.<sup>153</sup>

In short, Nursi's exposition of miracles and miracle stories in the Qur'ān, provide a distinctive position amidst his contemporaries as well as predecessors. He is not apologetic, and at the same time he is arguing for the validity of *naql*, using insistently '*aql*' throughout his passages. In doing so he maintains the balance between the theological validity of miracles as evidence for *nubuwwa*, as well as the moral and spiritual guidance provided by miracle stories. In this way, he thus revived the theology of *nubuwwa* by his new five aspects of miracles and the three different categories outlined above.

### 4.3 Divine revelation (*wahy*)

In order to critically examine Nursi's and Iqbal's views of the *ḥadīth* traditions and the *Sunnah*, a thorough understanding of their thought on *wahy* (revelation) is also necessary.<sup>154</sup> The concept of *wahy* in relation to *nubuwwa* was detailed in Chapter Two. In this section, the continuation, elaboration and clarification of this concept by both Nursi and Iqbal will be examined against both the *kalāmists*, orientalist and the Muslim philosophers. Iqbal does not engage in theological dialectics nor does he enumerate the *kalāmīc* position in the manner of his counterpart Nursi. His philosophical contributions to the understanding of revelatory process will be assessed alongside Nursi's theological enumerations.

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<sup>153</sup> See Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*.

<sup>154</sup> Qur'ān, 42:51.

Around the time of Iqbal Orientalist scholars were also addressing this question of *wahy* revelation. Some had started to accept the Prophet Muḥammad as a ‘hero’<sup>155</sup> and even the Qur’ān as Divine inspiration, though not totally infallible.<sup>156</sup> Watts, Schimmel and other Orientalists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had no direct problem with the historicity of the events and even revelation to the Prophet, they did not question Muhammad’s honesty in particular with regards to revelation. Nevertheless, most of them concluded that he was either mistaken in his belief that he heard God’s voice, call or that the Qur’ān was most likely a reflection of the inner sub-conscious of the Prophet and not an external agency of Gabriel or Divine source.<sup>157</sup> This was diametrically opposite to the Muslim theologians who attested that indeed both the meaning and the words of the Qur’ān were directly revealed to the Prophet, and hence did not emerge from within him. Thus, Iqbal was engaging within these debacles as he chose to prove the possibility of Divine bestowal *wahbī* of revelation to the Prophet via the internal mode as well. In this way he defended the notion that *wahy* or the Qur’ān is indeed not other than the word of God. He carefully constructed his defence in philosophical epistemology, and in doing so he discussed the physiological and psychological possibility of this experience in its acquisition of knowledge and the bestowal of this intuition to the prophet. Iqbal felt that he needed to defend prophethood and in particular *wahy* in this manner in the modern age in order to address not only the Orientalists but also to create a new dialogue for communication of Islamic truths in his times, using the language of the modern philosophy. He engaged directly also with the Islamic philosophers (even though he was critical of them) – for being classical in spirit – claiming the Qur’ān itself was anti-classical and modern. Another

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<sup>155</sup> See for example Thomas, Caryle. *Heroes and Hero Worship*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1866.

<sup>156</sup> See William Montgomery, Watt. *Islamic Revelation in the Modern World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969; Schimmel, Annemarie. *And Muhammad is his messenger: the veneration of the Prophet in Islamic piety*. UNC Press Books, 1985.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.



reason that he also gives is the early engagement of Muslims with empirical or scientific methodology and facts.

The concept of *wahy* and the notion of finality are thus key areas in Iqbal's prophethood; the two concepts are also intricately linked as stated in Chapter Two.<sup>158</sup> It is fair to assert that Iqbal's discussion of the concept of *wahy* does not fit into the traditional Islamic modes of *kalām*, as in the case of Nursi's, as the former restructures his argument within the Islamic philosophical tradition and modern sciences of his time. He devotes the first two chapters of his *Reconstruction* to conceptualise *wahy* within the *falsafa* tradition and psychology.<sup>159</sup> He is therefore more 'rational' and adheres more to 'aql' in his discussion of *wahy* more than Nursi. Iqbal's style of discussion and writing and his method of conveyance, as well as his overall objective of 're-reading' the Qur'ān in light of modern Western knowledge, involve employing psychology and biology to theological and mystical concepts in Islam as well.

Nevertheless, Iqbal has been a strong proponent of *wahy* as Rashid and others have argued – the majority of his prose work as well as his poetry are not just fit with philosophy but are a direct attempt at a modern interpretation or *tafsīr* of the Qur'ānic verses in light of the new areas of knowledge particularly, biology, physics, sociology and psychology.<sup>160</sup> Rashid argues that Iqbal's has a great reverence for the Qur'ān and makes the case that he applies new interpretations to the Qur'ānic verses.<sup>161</sup> This view or reading and relation of Iqbal to the *wahy* and revelation can be easily read, due to the primacy of the Qur'ān in his

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<sup>158</sup> Finality will be discussed separately; this is deliberate, as the issue of finality crosses over other broader historical and socio-political developments in India that require a separate study.

<sup>159</sup> Iqbal's theory of knowledge, which is intricately linked to his reading of *wahy*, is covered in the first chapter 'Knowledge and Religious Experience' as well as the second chapter 'The Philosophical Test of the Revelation of Religious Experience'. See. Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, 2011.

<sup>160</sup> K. A. Rashid, "Has Iqbal's Thought Been Distorted?" *Iqbal Review*, Oct, 1975, Vol 16, Issue 3. Retrieved 17.10.14 from <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/oct75/5.htm>; Halepota, A J, and A J. Halepota. "Shah Waliyullah and Iqbal, the Philosophers of Modern Age." *Islamic Studies*. 13.4 (1974): 225-233, p.226.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, Rashid.

own private life (since a very young age) and his reference to it primarily in his *Reconstruction* and other writings as well as his poetry. His whole teaching is directed towards arousing the Muslims towards a self-consciousness based on revelation. Iqbal thus views the Qur'ān as a unique book. Subsequently, it may be deduced that indirectly Iqbal highlights the need for prophethood due to the emphasis he places on revelation, but more importantly the reception of revelation by the prophet is a key focus of Iqbal's exposition of *wahy*.

Nursi's approach to the notion of *wahy* is not consistent in style and emphasis with that of the medieval theologians. He approaches *wahy* in discussions of *tawhīd* as a necessarily outcome of God's attribute of speech (*kalām*). Likewise unlike his precursors in the scholastics of *kalām*, he focuses on the 'wisdom' behind the revelatory process, in order to address those who refuse its necessity.<sup>162</sup> He bases his conceptual framework of *wahy* upon four titles and attributes of the Divine, namely *Rab* (Lord), *Khaliq* (Creator), *Kamal* (Perfection), and *Kalām* (Speech), as a requirement of Divinity. Moreover, he utilises '*aql*' in order to create his 'defence' of *wahy*.<sup>163</sup> According to him, the One who makes everyone speak, and the One who knows all speeches will indeed reveal Himself with 'His own speech' this is the Necessity of God being *Rab*. If God tries to introduce Himself through the works He has done, why wouldn't he introduce himself through His *Kalām*, revelation? Just as He answers human beings' natural needs and prayers with action (act) so too He will answer them through His *Kalām*. The most obvious sign for the Existence of a person is their speech – speaking requires knowledge. It is not possible for God to not speak, as

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<sup>162</sup> As an example of Nursi's indirect object of defence, is Watt's definition of *wahy* as a 'mental process' is notable, see Watt, William Montgomery. *Islamic Revelation in the Modern world*. Oxford University Press, 1969.

<sup>163</sup> According to Aytac, Nursi's style is defensive (*mudafah*) as his main objective is to influence a very broad audience, and address their doubts. See, Aytac, Ahmet. *Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur*" (*Said Nursi'nin Peygamberlik Anlayışı*), Thesis On Nursi Studies, Ankara University (2011), p. 38. Perhaps that is why he did not consider other classical aspects of *wahy* that his co-*kalamists* were engaged in (such as issue of the created-ness of the Qur'ān) partly because these were already covered, but more so due the 'arising need' of a 'defensive' against the 'onslaught of Orientalist criticisms'. Aytac. *Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur*, p. 38.

He possesses infinite knowledge.<sup>164</sup> According to Nursi “ the only way for God to speak (communicate with us) is through *wahy*”.<sup>165</sup> In this way *wahy* is inextricably linked to *nubuwwa*, as it is not only another proof for it but also as means of support for the prophet, without which the prophet cannot be a ‘prophet’.

The inimitability of the Qur’ān is another key area in relation to *wahy* and the Qur’ān for Nursi. This is also not surprising, although this area of *i’jaz* has been previously discussed by those Nursi refers to as ‘his masters in the field’. Nevertheless, he also takes ownership of ‘proving’ this aspect of the Qur’ān in order to ‘combat atheistic criticisms’ against the Qur’ān, by focusing solely on the ‘universalism’ of its language, appeal to all classes of humanity through use of metaphorical passages.<sup>166</sup> Since the Qur’ān, in its earliest formations was advanced as a ‘supreme miracle’ and hence as the strongest proof for the basis of Muḥammad’s claim to prophethood, therefore in Nursi’s theology, by emphasising the Qur’ān he is also ‘defending’ it once again an important ‘proof’ of *nubuwwa*.

Moreover, there was also a need to combat and defend the Qur’ān against Orientalist doubts raised as to its authenticity. The Orientalists’ critique of the Prophet Muḥammad’s prophethood extended to their staunch critique of the Qur’ān as well. Due to the centrality of the Qur’ān to the Prophet Muḥammad’s claim as an ‘authentic Prophet of God’, it was seen as the most important subject of the Oriental scholarly discourse. Despite the developments of the Western approach to the Prophet from a total rejection and ‘fake prophet’, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries emerged a new turn in Western scholarship on Islam, almost a shift in orientation.<sup>167</sup> In the new Orientalist style of ‘fascination’ with the

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<sup>164</sup> Nursi. *The Rays*, p. 47.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 387-475.

<sup>167</sup> See Alfred Guillaume. *Islam*. Penguin Books, 1990, Goldzhiher, Ignaz, *Introduction to Islamic theology and law*, trans. by Andras and Ruth Hamori/With An Introduction And Additional Notes by Bernard Lewis, Princeton University Press, 1981, Guillaume, Alfred, ‘*The Koran Interpreted: Review*’, *Muslim World*, 48 (1957), p. 248.

‘Orient other’, a more serious attempt in the study of the Qur’ān and a more ‘systematic critique’ of it was attempted.

Whilst an increasing number of Orientalist scholars like Ignác Goldziher were attempting to produce ‘objective scholarly’ assessments of the Qur’ān, M. Pickthall and Arthur J. Arberry noted the insulting and derogatory remarks in the translations of the Qur’ān in European languages and many others noting the mastery of its literary composition and its inimitability.<sup>168</sup> The Orientalist scholars were keen on denigrating the Qur’ān by commenting on the ‘simplicity’ of language, repetition and use of analogies.<sup>169</sup> Nevertheless, many others still questioned many aspects of revelation, including and not limited to the questioning of the historical origin of the Qur’ānic text, and the charge that the Prophet Muḥammad authored the Qur’ān.<sup>170</sup> They also questioned the authenticity of the Qur’ān by focusing on certain verses,<sup>171</sup> whilst others dismissed the verses of the Qur’ānic due to their being the produce of ‘epileptic fits’.<sup>172</sup> Many Orientalist scholars studied the ancient languages to prove not only the Biblical influence on the Qur’ān, but also to critique the Qur’ān from a literary angle like Theodor Noldeke’s critique of the grammatical shifts in tense and abrupt change of topics.<sup>173</sup>

It was in this climate that Nursi’s arguments in the “Twenty Fifth Word”<sup>174</sup> and the *Signs of Miraculousness*<sup>175</sup> in conjunction with his other treatises on Prophethood of Prophet

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<sup>168</sup> See Arthur J. Arberry. *The Koran Interpreted*. Oxford University Press, 1964, and M. Pickthall. *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur’an*. George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1930.

<sup>169</sup> Nöldeke, Theodor, ‘*The Quran: An Introduction*’ in *The Origins of the Koran: Classic Essays on Islam’s Holy Book*, ed. by Ibn Warraq, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998.

<sup>170</sup> See for example, Mingana, Alphonse, ‘Syriac Influences on the Style of the Kur’an’, *Bulletin of the John Ryland’s Library Manchester*, 2 (1927), pp. 77–98.

<sup>171</sup> For instance, Reinhart Dozy and Gustav Weil (1808-1889) was skeptical of the authenticity of those verses in the Qur’ān that speak of the Prophet as a mortal being and those about the event of the *isra*’ (the night journey – a miraculous event).

<sup>172</sup> Reinhart Dozy (1820-1883) in his work, which also involves the claim that the revelations were epileptic crises, “generated negative reactions from all circles of society for insulting religious values” See, Hatiboglu, “*Osmanli Aydinlarınca Dozy’nin Tarih-i Islamiyyet’ ine Yoneltilen Tenkitler: Criticism Directed to Dozy’s History of Islam by the Ottoman Intellectuals*”, p. 202.

<sup>173</sup> Nöldeke, *The Quran*, ed. by Ibn Warraq, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998.

<sup>174</sup> See, Nursi. *The Words*.

Muḥammad and ‘his miracles’ (already discussed) further developed his indirect refutation of the Orientalists’ critique. Nursi addressed almost all the claims of the Orientalists including the impossibility of the Prophet Muḥammad’s authorship of the Qur’ān, and the soundness of its historical transmission. However, Nursi’s emphasis on the inimitability of the Qur’ān was in direct response to the Orientalist critique of it. He focused on the miraculousness and its inimitability with great command of the Arabic syntax and grammar. In the *Signs of Miraculousness* Nursi proves through reference to grammatical and literary tools the inimitability of the Qur’ān. Nursi realised that in order to refute all other arguments the inimitability of the Qur’ān needed first to be established. Subsequently other claims such as the authorship of the Qur’ān will also have been answered. Indirectly, through his focus on *I’jaz* and *balāghah*, Nursi sought to dispel any ‘doubts’ by demonstrating the ‘miraculousness’ of the verse, *nazm*, word order, reason for repetition, scientific content, easily memorised, relevant to all people across all times, many predictions that came true, the connection of meaning and phonetics in sound of words, the book being intact for fourteen hundred years, and universal appeal.<sup>176</sup>

For Iqbal, the inimitability of the Qur’ān is also a focal theme in his life and works. Although he does not directly discuss it like Nursi, he indirectly discusses the topic by situating his discussion within the parameters of rational thought only and does not approach the issue with regard to the elaborate Islamic theological position as Nursi. In a passage quoted by one of the scholars who had met Iqbal – Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979), Iqbal’s personal adherence to and preoccupation with the Qur’ān is highlighted.

Whatever Iqbal has thought he has thought through the brains of the Qur’an and whatever he has seen he has seen through the eyes of the Qur’an. Truth and Qur’an were for him, one and the same, and in this one thing he was so absorbed that among

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<sup>175</sup> See, Nursi. *Sign of Miraculousness*.

<sup>176</sup>, Nursi. *Isharat al I’jaz*, (Signs of Miraculousness of Qur’ān), Sozler Publications, Istanbul, 2007 p. 181, see also Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 387-474.

the theologians of his century I have never seen any person who may have lived such life of *fanafi'l Qur'an* (annihilation in the Qur'an) as this M.A., Ph.D. Bar-at-Law.<sup>177</sup>

Schimmel also elucidates Iqbal in context of this '*fanafi'l Qur'an*' (annihilation in the Qur'an). Nevertheless, as is established, even though Iqbal undoubtedly has a deep connection and reverence to this final revelation of the Divine, his depiction of this imitability is not really in a discourse from within the tradition of Islam but rather he constructs his exposition consistently in his prose work and situates it in not only the philosophical tradition but also western philosophical thought as well as the sciences.<sup>178</sup>

Conceptually speaking Nursi perceives the revelatory process of God as manifested in all creational aspects of the 'book of the universe' as the non-verbal form, as well as to other classes like angels, animals etc. Since God has the attribute of Speech – *Kalām* –He will 'speak'. Moreover, to decipher the 'creational speech' of the universe, 'verbal speech' is necessary to 'read' and to make sense of both books. Thus, prophets in general and Prophet Muḥammad in particular are needed to fulfil this task.<sup>179</sup> Turner states, 'even though God's speech is essentially 'transcendent' His words manifest in the temporal, corporeal world in a manner amenable to human understanding'.<sup>180</sup> For God to speak in accordance with men's intellects and understandings is known as 'Divine condescension to the minds of men'. It is a requirement of God's dominicality that He endows all conscious creatures with speech, has understanding of their speech, and then participates in it with His own speech.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 222.

<sup>178</sup> Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, p. 222.

<sup>179</sup> See, Turner, Colin. "*The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light*." Gerlach Press, Berlin, 2013.

<sup>180</sup> Turner, Colin. "*The Qur'an Revealed*." 2013, p. 179.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. See also, Nursi. *The Words*, p. 200.

Finally, Nursi categorises *wahy* into two kinds: implicit and explicit.<sup>182</sup> Explicit revelation is when the Messenger merely interprets and announces, and has no share in its content. The Qur’ān and the Sacred Traditions (*ḥadīth qudsī*), specifically the Prophetic sayings whose meaning and content belong to God exclusively, but whose wording belongs to the Prophet, are included here. In the case of implicit revelation, its essence and origin is based on Divine Revelation and inspiration. The Prophet is allowed to explain and describe them. When he does so, he relies either on direct revelation and inspiration, or on his own insight. When giving his own interpretation, he either relies on the perceptive power bestowed upon him due to his Prophetic mission or speaks as a person conforming to his time’s common usages, customs, and kinds of comprehension. Therefore, not all details of every Prophetic tradition are necessarily derived from pure revelation, nor are the sublime signs of his Messengership to be sought in all of his human thoughts and transactions. Since some truths are revealed to him in a brief and abstract form, and he describes them through his insight, and in accordance with normal understanding, the metaphors, allegories, or allusions he uses may need explanation or interpretation.<sup>183</sup> This highlights the reason behind Nursi’s emphasis on analogies as his distinctive method in explaining the traditions and the *Sunnah*.

Similarly, at the heart of Iqbal’s discussion is the process of revelation and knowledge and the meticulous difference of the ‘prophetic intelligence’ comparable to the human intelligence or as he uses the term synonymously ‘mystical intelligence’.<sup>184</sup> Despite the great influence of Ibn Khaldūn, Rūmī, and Sirhindī on Iqbal’s thought, most of his philosophical views on prophethood were also influenced by al-Ghazālī’s works.<sup>185</sup> Iqbal discusses ‘*ilm-e wahbī* (given or ‘gifted’ knowledge by God) and ‘*ilm-e kasbī* (acquired

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<sup>182</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, pp. 122–123.

<sup>183</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, pp. 122–123.

<sup>184</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, pp. 124–125.

<sup>185</sup> Iqbal’s discussion in this section will be contextualised in light of al-Ghazzālī’s.

knowledge through self endeavors) but is more focused on *'ilm-e wahbī* (sainthood) aspects of prophethood as will be outlined below.

Iqbal is consistent with orthodoxy as expressed by his Indian predecessors Sirhindī and Shāh Waliullāh, in asserting that mystical experience is subservient to that of prophetic experience.<sup>186</sup> He is thus critical to an extent of the mystical tradition and the mystic.<sup>187</sup> He posits that prophetic intelligence is more than that of the mystics and higher and distinct to ordinary human intellect/reason;<sup>188</sup> therefore, only through this prophetic guidance and access to revelation can humans in general and Muslims in particular regain unity and ascendancy in the world.

So long as knowledge has no portion of love it is a mere picture-gallery of thoughts. This peep-show is the Samiri's knowledge without the Holy Ghost is more spell-binding. Without revelation no wise men ever found the way, he died buffeted by his own imaginings; without revelation life is a mortal sickness, reason is banishment, religion constraint.<sup>189</sup>

Iqbal further contends with the view of orthodoxy that inspiration or the mystical experience is not a source of “objective knowledge”. The view is expressed well by the modern Sunni scholar Gülen who defines the difference between the two.<sup>190</sup> Accordingly inspiration is only acceptable and regarded as sound so long as it is in “conformity with the indisputable principles and foundations established by the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah*”, and as long as it can be viewed as an “origin of rules of a secondary degree”.<sup>191</sup> However, due to its subjective nature, it is not binding on others. However, by contrast revelation, which

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<sup>186</sup> See Baljon. “Prophetology Of Shah Wali Allah,” pp. 69-79.

<sup>187</sup> Iqbal blames the apathy in Indian Muslim resulting from bigoted “*mullas*”, and a wrong interpretation of the mystical tradition of Islam. He blames Persian thought and Magianism for these influences that in his view has ‘distorted’ the pristine message of the Qur’ān which calls all believers to action. Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. v. In which he stipulates that “Qur’an is a book which emphasizes deed rather than idea”. Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. v.

<sup>188</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>189</sup> Iqbal. *Javid Nama*, p. 26.

<sup>190</sup> Gülen. *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, p. 77.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.



comes to the prophets, is an objective, binding phenomenon. He asserts this view in a letter:

The primary source of the law in Islam is the Qur'an.  
The Qur'an, however, is not a legal code.<sup>192</sup>

Siddiqi affirms that the case of the prophetic revelation is different to that of the mystics, as the prophets' intuitive experience is 'fully capable of scrutiny' and can 'admirably stand the test of the intellect and exercises a dynamic influence on the life and thought of the people who uphold it.'<sup>193</sup> Iqbal expresses this in the following way:

The mystic does not wish to return from the repose of 'unitary experience'; and even when he does return, as he must, his return does not mean much for mankind at large. The prophet's return is creative. He returns to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals. For the mystic the repose of 'unitary experience' is something final; for the prophet it is the awakening, within him, of world-shaking psychological forces, calculated to completely transform the human world.<sup>194</sup>

Nursi clearly pronounces the position of orthodoxy in relation to *wahy* and summarises and resolves the philosophical dilemma of the 'revelatory process' by stating that,

The revelation, which comes to the prophets, is an objective, binding phenomenon that takes place beyond the spheres of the human soul and physical sensations, and its certainty transcends the conviction, which comes from mere knowledge. Moreover, the angel who brought the revelation of the Qur'an taught the Prophet how to recite it. This was guidance in a particular field of one who was superior in general terms by one who was inferior.<sup>195</sup>

Here he claims it to be beyond the sphere of the human soul and sensation, which is also somewhat expressed by Iqbal, though in greater vagueness to his contemporary, as he

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<sup>192</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 131.

<sup>193</sup> Siddiqi, Abdul Hameed. *Prophethood in Islam*. Islamic Publications, 1968, p. 39.

<sup>194</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, pp. 124-125. The desire to see his religious experience transformed into a living world-force is supreme in the prophet. Thus his return amounts to a kind of pragmatic test of the value of his religious experience. In its creative act the prophet's will judges both itself and the world of concrete fact in which it endeavours to objectify itself. In penetrating the impervious material before him the prophet discovers himself for himself, and unveils himself to the eye of history. Another way of judging the value of a prophet's religious experience, therefore, would be to examine the type of manhood that he has created, and the cultural world that has sprung out of the spirit of his message.

<sup>195</sup> Quoted in Gülen. *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, p. 76.

seems by comparison to be quite engulfed with the ‘organic’ association of the two and exerts too much effort in reconciling the process through biology and psychology.<sup>196</sup> Perhaps Iqbal was trying to show some validity to philosophical claims that certain natural faculties such as the intellect and spiritual disposition enabled the ‘endowment’ of Divine revelation. Yet Iqbal is not totally in favour of the philosophers; he disagrees with Ibn Rushd’s notion of the immortality of the “Active Intellect” and its role in revelatory process;<sup>197</sup> but he does so by outlining Ghazzali’s choice for mystical experience<sup>198</sup>

As was established in Chapter Two, the dialectics in the Middle Ages about *wahy* and the nature of *wahy* gave way to extended discourse between the theologians and the philosophers. At the heart of their contentions was the ‘nature of revelation’. Although generally accepted in Orthodox tradition that the true nature of revelation is hard to establish and hence apart from the Prophet largely unknown, the philosophers mostly have tried to provide explanations of the physiologically of how this would have taken place. The naturalist tendency of giving prominence to the particular nature and attributes of the Prophet was indicated mostly by the philosophers, who argued and emphasised what they deemed to be the integral part of revelatory process. This was largely refuted by the orthodoxy that naturalism had a lesser role or none that *wahy* was external to the Prophet’s soul and intellect and was therefore *wahbī* bestowed and gifted to the Prophet.<sup>199</sup> In light of these deliberations Nursi expressed his addition to the notion of *wahy* by suggesting that “revelation, which comes to the prophets, is an objective, binding phenomenon that takes place beyond the spheres of the human soul and physical sensations, and its certainty transcends the conviction, which comes from mere knowledge”.<sup>200</sup> This statement while

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<sup>196</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 5.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> This refers to Prophet Muḥammad directly, however, their argumentation also applied to other prophets as well.

<sup>200</sup> Gülen. *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, p. 76.

representing the view of the majority orthodoxy also addresses the philosopher's contentions and argues against it. Extending slightly to this definition is the admittance of Gülen, who accepts the particularity of the prophetic nature being distinct. However, he argues that receiving divine revelation requires a 'special disposition', as well as 'intellectual and spiritual endowments'.<sup>201</sup>

While Iqbal affirms the objectivity of revelation and its necessity for human beings in terms of guidance and development, he also considers closely the epistemological connection of the revelatory process with that nature of the Prophet. Moreover, he is in agreement with the binding nature of revelation, and assumes the Qur'ān to have a unique status for humanity. While Iqbal agrees with al-Ghazālī that revelation is ultimately beyond the physical senses nevertheless, in his discussions of intuition and knowledge and the process of idea and thought, he tries to explain the phenomenon of thought process and the prophetic consciousness using physical sciences, claiming its empirical validity that corresponds to the 'aql valid experience of the inner mystical type or the prophetic type. Although he rejects Ibn Rushd's notion of the eternity of the Active Intellect,<sup>202</sup> Iqbal tries establishing the close connection between thought and intuition. In doing so he considered the physical senses and its connection with both functions.

In another light, Iqbal's reconstruction of the notion of *wahy* was also a direct response to his contemporary Orientalists or Western scholarship. Implicitly Iqbal was addressing the issue raised on whether or not the revelatory process was 'external' to the Prophet as he claimed, or whether it was internal and a part of his 'subconscious activity'.<sup>203</sup> This is in many ways a reverse of what al-Ghazālī has done.<sup>204</sup> While on the one hand al-Ghazālī foresaw the confines of analytical thought especially in its relevancy to religious life and

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>202</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 4.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

experience and stepped away from philosophical dialectics and appropriated some of their understandings in mainstream theological and mystical expressions,<sup>205</sup> Iqbal on the other hand, while completely agreeing with al-Ghazālī and by dedicating the majority of the discussion in his lecture on the ‘Knowledge and thought in Islam’, argued for al-Ghazālī’s position of the mystical experience extensively. Yet he felt (some argue incorrectly) that al-Ghazālī, by focusing in this way on the inner experience, was somehow totally divorcing himself from analytical or empirical realities, to which he tried to address by showing the connection and ‘organic relation’ between thought and intuition and by showing the cognitive aspect in intuitive experience. Thus, making relevant the philosophers’ particular language, it seems as though Iqbal has conversely and purposefully elected to go back to the epistemology of the Islamic philosophers and in particular that of Ibn Sina’s psychological treatise of the revelatory process of prophecy, even though he sides more with al-Ghazālī on certain aspects of the prophecy. Iqbal asserts right at the start of the chapter on knowledge and reason that Ibn Rushd is wrong in assuming the eternity of the Active Intellect. Perhaps Iqbal’s views were influenced by Muslim philosophers like Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Khaldūn, as well as by theologians like al-Ghazālī on the issue of revelation, and sources of intuition and knowledge.

Iqbal’s prophetology may also be read through this lens: that he was not only trying to reconstruct Islamic thought within the Western epistemology, but he was also dissatisfied by the Greek advances (ontology) as well as Theologians (rationalists) and even was critical of the empiricists (lengthy discussions of their limitations) in his initial two chapters in the *Reconstruction*.<sup>206</sup> He defended the epistemology of the sources of

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<sup>205</sup> Some contemporary scholars have claimed that Al-Ghazālī has largely appropriated the idea of prophecy as explained by Ibn Sina but has expressed more or less his content within the confines of Islamic theological epistemology. See for example, Brockopp, Jonathan E., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*. Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 158-179.

<sup>206</sup> To understand Iqbal’s critique of the medieval Muslim philosophers and even the theologians Chapter Two of the *Reconstruction* is necessary to see his reasoning as justifiable for not applying their etymology in his own discussions unlike Al-Ghazālī. See, Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, pp. 28-61.

knowledge of Islam on four grounds: the historical, philosophical, scientific and psychological.<sup>207</sup> In doing so he has created a sophisticated contribution and defence for the addition of two more sources of knowledge by establishing upon a rational and empirical basis the validity of the religious experience as a source of knowledge, or *kasbi*, acquisition of knowledge, through religious experience. Iqbal uses this concurrently with the mystical experience. Revelation as argued by his disciples is *wahbī* or given. Without these two sources of knowledge, human beings will be very limited with empirical and rational knowledge alone. In this way he concurs with al-Ghazālī in professing that indeed prophecy or prophethood is essential for the civilisational development of humanity. In the Iqbalian appropriation of this intuition and revelation are most necessary for the continuing advancement of humanity.<sup>208</sup>

Intuition and revelation are almost similar, in that both are intuitive – but intuitive is *kasbi* – and therefore we can acquire intuition through our practices.<sup>209</sup> Here Iqbal is discussing the correlation of intuition and thought:

The Ultimate Reality reveals its symbols both in the external world and in man's inner self and may, therefore, be called the immanent Infinite. Reflective observation of nature is an indirect, rational mode of reaching that Reality; intuition is a direct, non-rational mode of reaching it. The latter mode, whose validity is attested by the world's revealed and mystic literature, is no less natural and genuine and no less effective in yielding objective, concrete, and real knowledge. The two types of knowledge must, however, supplement each other to make a complete vision of Reality possible.<sup>210</sup>

But Iqbal establishes that revelation is a different source of knowledge even from intuition.

He has taken two key positions in the *Reconstruction*: firstly, he established the possibility

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Iqbal is compared to al-Ghazālī here instead of Nursi, as the modernist has rendered many of his philosophical and theological discussions in his *Reconstruction*, which necessitated its analysis here.

<sup>209</sup> Dr Burhan Faruqqi (who was Iqbal's student) in his works has used the terms – the acquired knowledge and the revealed knowledge and he has worked a lot on the categories of acquired knowledge and revealed knowledge. See Faruqi, Burhan Ahmad, *Quran Aur Musalmanon Ke Zinda Masail*, Adam Publishers, 2014, and Faruqi, Burhan Ahmad. *The Mujaddid's Conception of Tawhid: Study of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindis, Doctrine of Unity*. Adam Publishers, 2006.

<sup>210</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, pp. 13-16; Mir, Mustansir. *Iqbal: Makers of Islamic Civilization*. IB Tauris, 2006, p. 86.

of intuition on rational grounds; and secondly, he differentiates between intuitive knowledge and revealed knowledge.

Nevertheless, there have been criticisms of Iqbal's explanation of intuition and revelation in his lectures, due to Iqbal's great dependence upon the physical sciences, and rational thinking mostly to describe the possibility of religious experience and intuition. Due to these factors, it is argued that he has blurred the lines between the variance of mystical experience with that of the prophetic experience.<sup>211</sup> It is further contended that he affords little distinction between the prophetic experience of revelation and mystical intuition – and here perhaps his critics have at least some validity to their claims.<sup>212</sup> It is however contested by others and in particular his students Burhan Farouqi and Abdul Hamid Siddiqi who claim that in fact the subtle difference between the intuitive experience and the prophetic experience in Iqbal's thought is missed – they enunciate his view by asserting that indeed Iqbal's description of the mystical consciousness refers to the *kasbi* – or acquisition of knowledge by reaching a certain state or being or consciousness – whilst the prophetic consciousness is *wahbī* (given) even though there may be some similarities in their experiences.<sup>213</sup>

So Iqbal established in this way the necessity of prophethood through the necessity of revelation (intuition), as a source of knowledge. Revelation is a major source of knowledge, and what is affirmed by his students like Farouqi, Siddiqi, Khalifa Abdul Hakim (all his disciples).<sup>214</sup> Thus, the fourth source of knowledge is revelation – they have

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<sup>211</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, pp. 13-16. Iqbal is of the view that revelation and prophethood are instinctive. Critics said that he has therefore equalised the prophet and all the animals and creatures on the same ground. They also acquired things through instincts and the prophet is also acquiring something on instincts. They couldn't understand the delicate difference between simple instinct and given instinct or bestowed intuition (Iqbal discussed bestowed intuition). That is revelation and this is a fourth source of knowledge, these are the ones chosen by God – whom God revealed all things to – this is a different source of knowledge.

<sup>212</sup> al-Haqq, Jalal. "Epistemology of Prophethood in Islam." *Al-Tawhid* 4: 1986-87, p. 1.

<sup>213</sup> See Faruqi, Burhan Ahmad. *The Mujaddid's Conception of Tawhid: Study of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindis, Doctrine of Unity*. Adam Publishers, 2006.

<sup>214</sup> See *Iqbal Review*, <http://khalifaabdulhakim.com/books.html>, Retrieved August 7, 2015.

categorised revelation particularly. Farouqi is of the view that there are some certain forms of knowledge that cannot be acquired without revelation.<sup>215</sup> There is a possibility that these are four different sources, and we can acquire the same knowledge with these sources, we can acquire some knowledge from empirically data – with rational data, with intuition or with revelation, but the Ultimate result may be seen. Iqbal is of the view that revelation requires/acquires different kinds of knowledge that are not possible to acquire through intuition or through rational and empirical data alone, and if we ignore revelation, we will miss a certain kind of knowledge and guidance (*hidāyat*) – transmitting this guidance is the task of the revelation.<sup>216</sup> We can acquire certain kinds of knowledge on the ground of rationalism, empiricism, or intuition, we can understand the universe on rational and empirical grounds, we can understand nature/*fiṭrat* but we cannot be ‘civilised’ without revelation. Similar to al-Ghazālī Iqbal argues that we need prophecy for the advancement of real civilisation. Iqbal resorts to similar arguments to al-Ghazālī on this – but he uses more philosophical terms to explain similar phenomena. We cannot be guided without revelation: this is the stance of Iqbal. Revelation is the only source of guidance, the only source of cultivation, and revelation is the only source of civilisation. If we ignore revelation in modern times, we will minimise the scope of knowledge, we will be limited to only two or three sources. The West also ignores intuitive knowledge, but even in the postmodern developments the West is empirical.

Thus, Iqbal categorised reason in this way. On the ground level we can acquire a very foundational understanding on the basis of our empirical tools – our five senses. We can also acquire a further degree of knowledge on rational grounds through the exercise of reason, and we can acquire further knowledge on the ground of intuition. But the

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, pp. 13-16.

finest/finals level of knowledge is revelation.<sup>217</sup> Iqbal epistemologically established the necessity of prophethood through his categories of the sources of knowledge. In doing so he established four categories, and it is purely Iqbal's contribution that he differentiated intuition from revelation, and also established the scope of intuition in rational terms, establishing reason on the basis of intuition. In this verse Iqbal establishes clearly the superiority of the prophetic wisdom/revelation to reason.

He is the meaning of Gabriel and the Quran  
He is the watchman of the wisdom of God  
His wisdom is higher than reason.<sup>218</sup>

#### **4.4 *Ḥadīth* traditions of the Prophet**

In Islam, any theological studies of *nubuwwa*, necessitate an assessment of the key area of study, the *ḥadīth* (traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad) which also covers the practices of the Prophet or the *Sunnah*, or the record of the messengers every act, word, and confirmation, as well as the second source of Islamic legislation and life.<sup>219</sup> In this section it will be argued that although both Nursi and Iqbal discuss *Sunnah* in their writings, the former is more authoritative on the topic than the later. Thus, whilst Iqbal's position will be carefully assessed in light of new research, Nursi's formulations regarding *Sunnah* and *hadith* will be considered critically as important contributions to this area of Islamic sciences.

Iqbal's prophetology does not contribute to this field of Islamic theology directly as he quotes them directly or refers to them tacitly. In his works Iqbal uses the traditions consistently and directly.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, in the *Reconstruction*, and especially in correspondence with the scholars, such as Maulana Sulaiman Nadvi, Iqbal attempts to

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i Iqbal*, p. 293.

<sup>219</sup> Gülen. *The Messenger of God Muhammad*, p. 278.

<sup>220</sup> Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 56.



grapple with this part of Islamic studies,<sup>221</sup> and an evolution of ideas on the topic appear as a gradual formulation throughout his intellectual career.<sup>222</sup> It is therefore difficult to ascertain with exactitude his views on the matter, even though there is no doubt of his ‘deep reverence’ for the prophet’s person<sup>223</sup> (which will be analysed in detail in chapter 5) his acceptance of his finality, and even of the Prophet as a “living” guide to humanity.<sup>224</sup> Likewise his consistent use of the traditions favourably to support and make a case for the issue of finality, *ijtihād*, and the ascension and the necessity of prophet as guides provide evidence of his attitude. Nevertheless, there is copious evidence of influences from the Orientalist Goldziher,<sup>225</sup> and his self-expressed doubts about the “absolute” relevance of *ḥadīth* as a source of law mentioned in the *Reconstruction*,<sup>226</sup> as well as his correspondence

<sup>221</sup> See, Tawnsawi, Tahir. “Iqbal Aur Syed Sulaiman Nadvi.” *Iqbal Review Urdu*, 88-89; Ahangar, Muhammad Altaf Hussain. “Iqbal and Hadith: A Legal Perspective.” *Iqbal Review*, XXXVII 3 (1996): 89-110.

<sup>222</sup> In light of Iqbal’s personal history, it becomes evidently clear that he was not well versed in the traditional Islamic theological sciences, this deficiency is reflected in his correspondence with the scholars of his time, and his own self proclamation of being a student of Islam and the Qur’ān. Thus, his ideas evolved over time as he himself once claimed, especially on hadith, as his awareness of certain new studies (orientalist western critiques) as well as traditional knowledge Iqbal sought to establish a middle course between the two. Ahangar. “Iqbal and Hadith,” pp. 89-110.

<sup>223</sup> Schimmel, Annemarie. “The Place of the Prophet of Islam in Iqbal’s Thought.” *Islamic Studies* 1, no. 4 (1962), p. 111.

<sup>224</sup> See Iqbal’s letter to Khan Niaz-ud-din Khan dated 14 January 1922; See Syed Akhtar-as-Salam, *Mutalaat Aur Makateeb Allama Iqbal*, 287 (Urdu) as mentioned in Ahangar. “Iqbal and Hadith,” pp. 89-110.

<sup>225</sup> Iqbal refers to and discusses the Orientalist quite extensively in the *Reconstruction*, where he states: “These [traditions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w)] have been the subject of great discussion both in ancient and modern times. Among their modern critics Professor Goldzieher has subjected them to a searching examination in the light of modern cannons of historical criticism, and arrives at the conclusion that they are, on the whole, untrustworthy.” Iqbal. *Reconstruction*, p. 135. In another quote which does not disapprove of the whole collection of traditions but nevertheless presents some “theoretical doubts” he states:

Another European writer, after examining the Muslim methods of determining the genuineness of a tradition and pointing out the theoretical possibilities of error, arrives at the following conclusion: It must be said in conclusion that the preceding considerations represented only theoretical possibilities and that the question how far these possibilities have been actualities is largely a matter of how far the actual circumstances offered inducements for making use of the possibilities. Doubtless the latter, relatively speaking, were few, and affected only a small proportion of the entire *Sunnah*. It may, therefore, be said that for the most part the collections of *Sunnah* considered by the Muslims as canonical are genuine records of the rise and early growth of Islam.

Unfortunately, Iqbal’s continuing statements on the same topic do not negate or totally endorse the orientalist that he quotes, it seems that he is more inclined to N.P. Aghnides’s views rather than that of Goldziher, illustrating the point that there is a great possibility of doubt in at least some of the traditions by Iqbal. Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 136.

<sup>226</sup> This position is argued by Muhammad Ahangar, nevertheless, it needs to be balanced with Iqbal’s positive statements and reference to the *ḥadīth* traditions in most of his works and especially in his essays about ‘Political Thought in Islam’, where he searches for example in the prophetic *Sunnah* as a guide to establishing of the Indian Muslim community. See, Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 56-75.

with contemporary scholars like Nadvi,<sup>227</sup> make Iqbal's 'total acceptance', of the *ḥadīth* as the second most important source of law questionable.<sup>228</sup>

The scholarly findings of Muhammad Ahangar regarding Iqbal's position on *ḥadīth* illustrate the instances of doubt in Iqbal's thought regarding the usage of certain *ḥadīth*.<sup>229</sup> Nonetheless Iqbal's thought in this area was not stationary, and evolved as he corresponded with Muslim scholars. He therefore had no set beliefs and there is evidence of the influence of Orientalist discourses on the *ḥadīth* in particular of Goldziher (may have possibly affected Iqbal's views) however, it is difficult to assert conclusively his exact position. Whilst the contemporary author Muhammad Ahangar's research bears great insight into the topic, the reality of Iqbal's perceivable 'lack of authority' puts a question mark on his "instructiveness" in this field, demonstrating the limitation of the poet-philosopher, an evidence of which is the lack of influence upon the Pakistani legal jurists view and their unanimous acceptance of the *ḥadīth* traditions as part of the country's legal institutions and diction – a position contrary to Iqbal's critical stance.<sup>230</sup>

Nursi on the other hand enumerates extensively on this topic engaging within the *kalāmīc* discourse. According to Nursi, the Prophetic *Sunnah* is an irreplaceable aspect resulting from belief of prophethood in Islam, and is thus a practical manifestation of God's intended purpose for humanity, and hence a perfect moral guide.<sup>231</sup> It therefore defines yet another key area of focus for his prophetology. Moreover, in an era marked by the rise of the Orientalist critique of the *ḥadīth* literature,<sup>232</sup> as well as internal doubts arising from the

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<sup>227</sup> Ahangar. "Iqbal and Hadith," p. 91.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, pp. 89-110.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. Ahangar states that "In brief, the strength of judicial pronouncements in Pakistan is, on the whole, in favour of the recognition of the Hadith as a second valid source; of law and is in no mood of compromising on this stand", p. 13.

<sup>231</sup> See, Said Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi an-Nuri*. New Jersey: Light Inc. 2004, p. 118. Nursi. *The Flashes*, p. 78.

<sup>232</sup> See Goldziher, Ignác. *Mohammed and Islam*. Yale University Press, 1917. Goldziher, Ignaz, and S. M. Stern. "2. Scriptures, Early Islam." *Bibliographie Internationale de L'histoire Des Religions* 82 (1971): 101.

Modernist scholars including Iqbal,<sup>233</sup> Nursi's approach clearly delineates him from the former two camps of thought as well as from Iqbal's approach, as he strongly advocates for *naql*, particularly the traditions and the *Sunnah*, with the *'aql*, making a case for the validity, relevance, and significance of *Sunnah*. This is an approach lacking in Iqbal who is still today scrutinised about whether or not he accepted the traditions. It is due to this significance as well as its relevance to *nubuwwa*, that greater focus of *Sunnah* according to Nursi will be taken into consideration.

Nursi states seven functions of the *Sunnah*: a spiritual compass; a source of guidance of God and the worship of Him; an exemplary model for humanity to establish balance between the three main 'powers gifted to humanity' (the power of lust, power of anger and reasoning power); an antidote of spiritual problems; and a source of 'true' happiness in this life and the hereafter.<sup>234</sup> Subsequently, he is careful to 'preserve' the practices at a time of 'innovation', even if it were a small matter, which he claims 'signifies a powerful belief and fear of God'.<sup>235</sup>

In a less assertive way than Nursi, Iqbal's approach to traditions was not as staunch a defence like that of his counterpart, and despite his seeming doubts about the validity of all traditions, nevertheless, he considers Islam as a society and state as being indebted to the personality of the Prophet. Khurshid Ahmad summarises Iqbal's position regarding the *Sunnah* very clearly:

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<sup>233</sup> See, Juynboll, Gautier HA. *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt*, GHA Juynboll, Brill Archive, 1969, p. 21.

<sup>234</sup> Nursi, *The Flashes*, "The Eleventh Flash", p. 65

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. See also, Khan, D. "Significance of the Practices of the Prophet (Sunna) for Modern People: A Study of the Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi." In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers (English)*. 2013.

Iqbal considers the following of the path shown by the Prophet (s.a.w) as 'Islam' and deviation from it as 'Kufr'. The life of Muslim community depends upon the adherence to the path shown by the Prophet (s.a.w).<sup>236</sup>

Iqbal asserts that 'the limits prescribed by the Prophet (s.a.w) though apparently hard, are mandatory and we should, instead of complaining, strive hard for the conformation to these limits.'<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, that 'the present decadence and degeneration of Muslims is the result of deviation by Muslims from the Prophet's conduct',<sup>238</sup> and therefore 'the Prophet's guidance can prove a strong instrument for the organisation of Muslim community in India.'<sup>239</sup> Iqbal considers the 'propagation of Islam and the diversification of information regarding its achievements as the greatest service to the great Prophet (s.a.w)',<sup>240</sup>

The love for the Prophet (s.a.w) is a sine qua non for the Muslims. One can reach to great heights if there is a faith in the Prophet (s.a.w). In the Prophet's guidance, there is a message for life. The Prophet's personality stands for truth and his sayings differentiate between truth and falsehood. All progress and success is possible in this world if we follow the guidelines set by the Prophet (s.a.w).<sup>241</sup>

The above excerpts shed light on the important place of the *Sunnah* and even in a limited way to the *ḥadīth* in Iqbal's thought. Iqbal clearly sees the survival of Islam as a tradition tied to the adherence of the Prophet both in action and words. Although there seems to be some doubt in his thought on the latter, that may have possibly have been influenced by Orientalists (as established already). Iqbal generally has great reverence for not only the person of the Prophet but also his *Sunnah* and *ḥadīth*.

Nursi's approach may be further distinguished by his awareness of the relevance of the theology for the social life of humans, is reflected in his application of the *Sunnah* as

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<sup>236</sup> Khurshid Ahmad, "Iqbal Ka Tasavur-i-Shariat", *Iqbal Review*, (Urdu) Vol. I. No.2 July, (1960): pp. 59-80 Quoted in Ahangar. "Iqbal and Hadith," p. 90.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, p. 74

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>240</sup> See Iqbal's Letter to Pir Ghulam Miran Shah dated 29 March in Iqbal, Muhammad. *Makateeb-e Iqbal*. 1938; Abu Muhammad Muslah. *Quran-Aur-Iqbal*. Lahore: (Urdu)18, p. 89.

<sup>241</sup> Ahangar. "Iqbal and Hadith," p. 69.

‘sacred’ whilst, showing a complete acceptance of a the ‘secular’ state,<sup>242</sup> Nursi has argued for freedom of conscience for the pluralism of various thoughts and freedoms to practice; and in this way he validates being a ‘Muslim’ and also a citizen in a secular setting at the same time. In this ‘sociologically grounded’ way,<sup>243</sup> he has defended the twelve methods of distinguishing the *Sunnah*<sup>244</sup> and also kept unity of religion during his own life that was marked by changed secularism at its core by declaring through his ‘*ḥarfī* paradigm’ the ‘sacredness’ in all aspects of life through his classification of the *Sunnah*.<sup>245</sup>

Nursi’s discussion of the *Sunnat al-sagīrah* or the minor *Sunnah* and *Sunnat al-kubra* or the great *Sunnah*, Nursi uses the ‘*kullī*’ or the comprehensive outlook as opposed to ‘*juzī*’ or particular outlook. Another expression of Nursi’s is *ḥarfī* (inferential paradigm) towards *nubuwwa* and Prophet Muḥammad’s *Sunnah*, perceiving it as a proof of *nubuwwa*. It is likewise another ‘proof’ for the veracity of Prophet Muḥammad’s prophethood due impart to his exemplary life and way.<sup>246</sup> Nursi uses his ‘*kullī*’ outlook to envisage the Prophet as the ‘sun infusing light to the universe’.<sup>247</sup> Just as the Qur’ān corroborates and interprets the ‘book of the universe’ Prophet Muḥammad also corroborates with both the ‘book of universe’ and the Qur’ān, and is the interpreter of them both.<sup>248</sup> Nursi has transformed the general outlook towards *Sunnah* as an ‘apparent meaning of traditions’ pushing the *Zāhirīs*

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<sup>242</sup> Nursi was generally for constitutional reform and the freedoms offered by a republican system that steered away from a potentially despotic monarchical rule. Therefore in this sense only he initially encouraged the constitutional reforms of the Young Turks, however, after discovering the ultra-secularist and nationalist with little tolerance for freedoms of religion and practice Nursi was critical of these aspects of the New Turkish Republic, but all the while he did not oppose the new regime socially or politically. See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of this aspect.

<sup>243</sup> See, Alatas, Syed Farid. “An Agenda for Nursi Studies: Towards the Construction of a Social Theology.” *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38, no. 4 (2010): 523-531 and Horkuç, Hasan. “Said Nursi’s Ideal for Human Society: Moral and Social Reform in the Risale-i Nur.” *Thesis On Nursi Studies* (2011). Miharja, Nurhidayahti Mohammad. “Said Nursi, Prophetic Traditions, and Sociologically-informed Theology.” In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers (English)*. 2013.

<sup>244</sup> Nursi, Said. *The Reasonings: A Key to Understanding the Qur’an’s Eloquence*. Tughra Books, 2008. P 53-54. See, Abdullah Ismail. “The Sunnah as a practical manifestation of the Qur’an: An Analytical Study of Said Nursi’s concept of Sunnah” *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers (English)*. 2013, p. 1.

<sup>245</sup> Nursi. *The Flashes*, p. 64.

<sup>246</sup> Nursi. *The Rays*, pp. 144–150.

<sup>247</sup> Nursi. *Al-Mathnawi an-Nuri*, p. 118.

<sup>248</sup> Nursi. *Al-Mathnawi an-Nuri*, p. 447; Redha, Ameer. “Preface to the al-Mathnawi al-Arabi al-Nuri.” in Abu-Rabi. *Islam at the Crossroads*, p. 337 and Abdullah, Ismail. “The Sunnah as a Practical Manifestation of the Qur’an: An Analytical Study of Said Nursi’s Concept of Sunnah.” *Nursi Studies*, 2013, p. 14.

(externalists) borders and balancing with his *ḥarfī* paradigm. Nursi further promotes a broad concept of *Sunnah* as ‘*Sunnatullah*’ or Gods established laws of the universe also known as *Sharī‘āt al-Takwīnīya* (creational laws of nature) thus Prophet Muḥammad ‘unlocked the key talisman’ by interpreting the meaning of the ‘book of the universe’, and by bringing the Qur’ān (revelation) and by ‘living’ the Qur’ān, in fact his interpretations of the Qur’ān are considered ‘*ḥadīth*’ as he was indeed the ‘walking Qur’ān’,<sup>249</sup> and in doing so, his *Sunnah* also created a *tafsīr* (interpretation) of the universe.<sup>250</sup>

Nursi’s use of ‘*aql*, with examples such as a ‘compass’ to describe the guidance and direction provided by prophets in all aspects of life and act like ‘electric switches along the innumerable hazardous, dark ways’ is notable of how he logically defends *naql* with ‘*aql*.’<sup>251</sup> His approach also differs to his predecessors as he does not consider the *Sunnah* as one single entity but rather he judiciously considers it through various ‘categories’, by involving both the ‘external or outward forms’ as well as the form of ‘meaning’. Additionally, he further elaborated the categories of *fard* (compulsory), *nāfila* (optional), *sawāb* (meritorious) and *adāb* (etiquette and manners).<sup>252</sup> These categories emphasised the ‘need’ for *Sunnah*, (another argument also for the necessity of Prophet Muḥammad’s prophethood) especially to perform the obligations of servanthood, according to Nursi.

This newly added dimension implies a hierarchical degree of *Sunnah*, with some of its degrees being imperative, while others consisting supererogatory acts of worship and practices, and lastly, the final category comprising the Prophet’s practices that are regarded

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<sup>249</sup> Nursi, similar to previous scholars, explains that the actions and traitions of the Prophet Muḥammad have varying degrees; some are so significant that they are considered ‘*fard*’ ‘*wājib*’ or compulsory actions, while other actions, particularly his personal taste in food and clothing that are not directly related to religion and worship are in the category of ‘*sawāb*’, or *adāb* – that is meritorious or etiquette if observed. Said Nursi, *The Flashes* “The Eleventh Flash”, p. 225.

<sup>250</sup> The *Sunnah* as a *tafsīr* of the universe is coined in Ismail. “The Sunnah as a practical manifestation of the Qur’an,” p. 8.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>252</sup> Nursi. *The Flashes*, p. 69.

as good manners or good, commendable conduct.<sup>253</sup> This is significant in particular in the context of the times where rapid technological, scientific and change in peoples beliefs resulting from Darwinist and Marxist theories, albeit these had their affects in later Ottoman era and early Turkish Republic, an era marked with innovations was consequently crucial to understand the nature of the *Sunnah* and its significance. Needless to say that these categories would also make life easier for the modern Muslims living under ‘secular regimes’ that were ‘bent on replacing the ‘*sha’ir*’ or the outward symbols of Islam, like the call to prayer, Friday prayers, and the religious festive days Eid – which according to Nursi are the most important ‘public symbols and marks of Islam’ since the whole community is involved in their performance they are included in social rights and duties.<sup>254</sup> The emphasis on the external forms in an attempt to ‘separate’ religion from the state by focusing first on matters related to the core and essence of personal and communal practice of Islam worship instead.

Iqbal’s engagement with this aspect of the tradition is less sophisticated and creative than that of Nursi, especially as he is not particularly engaged with *Sunnah* aspects, nonetheless, he also produces his own classification of *ḥadīth* into legal and non-legal traditions; he states in the *Reconstruction* that “we must distinguish traditions of a purely legal import from those which are of a non-legal character”,<sup>255</sup> illustrating his engagement and definitely a critical yet great level of openness to the traditions. Moreover, B.A. Dar says, “like Shāh Waliullāh, Iqbal divides the *ḥadīth* into two kinds i.e. explanatory and non-explanatory. Explanatory are those from which some legal rule can be deduced and non-explanatory *ḥadīth* are common *ḥadīth*.”<sup>256</sup> These illustrate Iqbal’s efforts in trying to reconcile the accusation of the Orientalists about the validity of the traditions as well as the

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 136.

<sup>256</sup> Dar, B.A. “Fikhr-i-Iqbal aur Mas`la-i-Ijtihad”, *Iqbal Studies*, Vol. II No. 2, (1953): 29-48, p. 43.

acceptance of the *Sahīh* traditions by the orthodoxy, within his own thought as projected in his lectures.

On the issue of the *Sunnah*, while Iqbal's discussions are non-existent, Nursi's idiosyncratic aspect in this sense is that while other scholars are focused on the other worldly benefits of the *Sunnah*, Nursi talks about *Sunnah* in a way that transforms all natural and 'mundane' activities including worldly ones such as eating, drinking and sleeping, into activities for the hereafter. In this sense Nursi equates the following of the *Sunnah* to worship, through adherence to the *Sharī'a*. Moreover, through his *ḥarfi* paradigm (other indicative) his views and explanations of the *Sunnah* depict his characteristic approach to the Prophetic actions, as the conduct or as a means of 'reconnecting' human beings with the Divine, thereby giving 'meaning' and adding 'sacredness' to all their actions, hence making every 'profane' aspect of life sacred – contrary to the Emile Durkheim's (d. 1917) proposed dichotomy of the two.<sup>257</sup> Hence, at a time of great social, ethical and legal innovations, Nursi defended his religious tradition and its essence through his understanding and projection of *Sunnah* and that of *ḥadīth*.<sup>258</sup> He endorses Sirhindī's position and concludes that "one who takes the *Sunnah* as the basis of one's path is on the way to the station of being a beloved of God under the guardianship of God's Beloved, peace and blessings be upon him".<sup>259</sup>

As to the question of the authenticity *ḥadīth*, Nursi assumes a position of total certainty; in fact he carefully builds his work to remove any doubts as to their validity and authenticity that had been raised by the Orientalist propositions in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century by Ignaz Goldzier and William Muir. Goldzier, Muir and Schacht critiqued the validity, accuracy,

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<sup>257</sup> See, Durkheim, Emile and Robert A. Nisbet. *The Elementary Forms Of The Religious Life*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1976, quoted in Sayilgan, Salih. "Challenging the Dichotomy between Sacred and Profane: Nursi's Emphasis on the Sunna." *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers* (2013).

<sup>258</sup> Nursi. *The Flashes*, p. 64.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid*.



authenticity as well as the chronological dating of *ḥadīth*, suggesting it belonged to later generations of early Islam.<sup>260</sup> Nursi approach this issue from a ‘grounded tradition’<sup>261</sup> within Islam, in his *Mu’jizatal Aḥmadīya* or *Miracles of Prophet Muhammad* and the “Fourth” and “Eleventh Flashes” respectively; he demonstrates a strong ‘approval, acceptance of the validity of the *ḥadīth* literature’.<sup>262</sup> By not addressing the issue from the position of ‘doubt’, Nursi does not revert to refutation or even mention Goldziher and Muir; rather through relaying more than 300 plus miracles of the Prophet, he tries to provide details of the *isnād* (narrating line in the chain of narrators). In doing so he indirectly addresses the Orientalists in order to settle the mind of the questioner, with regard to authenticity. It may be said that Nursi has extended the scholarship in the *ḥadīth* studies as well,<sup>263</sup> by using not only ‘*Saḥīḥ*’ or authentically classified traditions that were ‘*ḥasān*’ (these traditions had the correct *isnād* with different narrators on the same topic) but also ‘*daif*’ or ‘weaker’ narrations that had singular chain of narration called the *aḥad* narrations. He emphasised the *matn* or textual meaning in order to indicate that they are based on ‘realities’ and ‘truths’ and that is why they were recorded initially. He appeals to reason and logic by claiming the soundness of the narrations that were carefully selected by leading Muslim traditionists who were ‘so familiar’ with the Prophetic sayings and ‘their exalted style’ that that they could ‘instantly spot and reject one false tradition among a hundred reports’.<sup>264</sup> Subsequently, he goes a step ahead of his co-traditionists and states that even if a tradition is being regarded as fabricated,<sup>265</sup> it does not always mean that its

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<sup>260</sup> See, Juynboll, Gautier HA. *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt*, GHA, Brill Archive, 1969.

<sup>261</sup> Markham. *Engaging with Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 2009; Markham and Birinci-Pirim. *An Introduction to Said Nursi*, 2011.

<sup>262</sup> Nursi. *Al-Mathnawi an-Nuri*, p. 118.

<sup>263</sup> Ayaç. “Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur,” p. 82.

<sup>264</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 123.

<sup>265</sup> Nursi claims that even though traditionists were like an expert jeweller who recognised a pure diamond, and could not confuse other words with those of the Prophet, he posits that such meticulous authorities as Ibn Qayyim Ibnu’l-Jawziya were so excessive in their criticism that they unfortunately considered several authentic Traditions to be false. This is revelatory, as the leading Salafi scholars today quote from Ibn

meaning is wrong; rather, it means that the wording does not belong to the Prophet.<sup>266</sup>

Nursi's choice of emphasis on *ḥadīth* traditions was to defend the traditions and traditionists against the Orientalists, however in defending them he utilised logic, historicity, and conscience more than appeal to spirit. Additionally, Nursi argues that the relation of the Prophetic traditions through chains of transmitters show the consensus of the truthful and reliable narrators, meticulous traditionalists, as well as the unanimity of the discerning authorities mentioned. Also, it shows that each scholar in the chain puts his seal on its authenticity.<sup>267</sup>

Nursi's position is clearly delineated from Iqbal as he maintains that *izafī Sunnahs* or relative *Sunnah* 'inspire us to the truths'.<sup>268</sup> In a clear statement of Nursi's ontological view of *ḥadīth* is the following: "*ḥadīth is the source of life and a very important truth*" [*madani hayat, mulhim-e haqīqat*].<sup>269</sup> By giving greater importance to 'meaning' rather than 'form', Nursi is resolving the neo-Orientalist 'inserted' dilemmas with regards to certain *ḥadīths*. Nursi's words are encouraging people to search for the 'deeper meanings' of such narrations, and has therefore, discouraged any 'sabotage' of this *naqli* tradition by introducing new and innovative ways of classification and derivation of meaning in line with his '*tajdīdī*' tradition.

Furthermore, unlike his contemporaries, including 'Abduh, Riḍā and Iqbal who were more 'ready' to discount a *ḥadīth* mentioned in *Saḥīḥ* collections like *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Nursi demonstrates his awareness of both the 'Orientalist' camp like Goldziher and Muir as well as the Modernist camp of 'Abduh and Riḍā, by engaging directly in narrations that were put to the 'scrutiny' by all three camps, including the *aḥad* traditions. He was thus unlike

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Jawziya in their claim and rejection of many *ḥadīth* such as 'greater *jihād*', which has great socio political ramifications on the actions, and behaviours of salafī understanding and behaviour. Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 124.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, p. 172.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, p. 473.

Riḍā, who displayed ‘doubt’ towards their ‘complete and absolute usage.’<sup>270</sup> Correspondingly in the *Al-Manār*<sup>271</sup> the emphasis on the ‘*amalī Sunnah*’ or actions rather than the ‘*qawlī Sunnah*’ or words of the Prophet, could have arguably encouraged the literalist interpretation of religion by the Salafī Muslims today. In contrast, Nursi emphasises the *matn* (the text) and the *ma‘na* or meaning in some instances even more so than the ‘*shakl*’ or form of the *Sunnah*.<sup>272</sup>

As regards to *mutawātir ma‘na* or consensus in meaning, Nursi explanation of this concept is dissimilar in *ḥadīth* literature and methodology. He utilises the methodology and terminology of *ḥadīth* more broadly to incorporate Prophetic traditions related by numerous reliable authorities as indisputable, hence this form of relation (*tawātur*) has two kinds: obvious *tawātur* and *tawātur* with respect to meaning.<sup>273</sup> A Prophetic tradition related by reliable authorities through numerous chains of transmission, at the beginning of which there is a companion of the Prophet, is an obvious *tawātur*. The second kind is *tawātur* with respect to meaning. This second one also has two kinds: those agreed upon by silence and those unanimously related by different people but with different words. In the first case, a tradition related in the presence of others that is met with silence, or without engendering any dispute, enjoys an implied acceptance. If those remaining silent are interested in the narration and are known to be very sensitive to errors and lies, their silence

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<sup>270</sup> The ‘radical’ views of author Sidqī who questioned the total discipline of the *ḥadīth* tradition much like Goldzier/Muir appeared in the *al-Manar*. Riḍā’s explanation was put simply the idea that it was another ‘*ijtihād*’ in other words making the process of *ijtihād* a means for the myriad of views on matters key to religion. In fact Riḍā had made the controversial declaration to be a *mujadid* himself, a claim that no actual *mujadid* makes in the Islamic tradition. See, Juynboll, Gautier HA. *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt*. GHA Juynboll: Brill Archive, 1969.

<sup>271</sup> The *al-Manar* (The Lighthouse) Periodicals were an Arabic Journal that Rashid Riḍā under the tutelage of his teacher Muḥammad Abduh published Qur’ānic commentary and Islamic theology from 1898 until the former’s death in 1935. Although there were many controversial editions that diverted away from mainstream *ahl al-Sunnah* theology, nevertheless the influence of this periodical was arguably far reaching, particularly in the Arab world that laid the strong foundations of Salafism in the Arab and Muslim world – that was later on also influential for political Islam as well.

<sup>272</sup> Ayaṭ. “Prophethood in the Risale-i Nur,” p. 100.

<sup>273</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 123.

implies acceptance with far more certainty.<sup>274</sup> The second kind of *tawātur* with respect to meaning occurs when an incident is related unanimously by different people but with different words, as this also implies its actual occurrence.<sup>275</sup> The great majority of the Prophet's miracles were not transmitted with as great an emphasis as the *Sharī'a*'s basic rules.<sup>276</sup> There are many similar examples, most of which are narrated by traditionalists. Taken together, they represent a miracle having the certainty of *mutawātir* in meaning, even if we were to regard each one as individual in nature and, accordingly, questionably reported.<sup>277</sup> In this fashion Nursi defends these *ḥadīths* as *mutawātir* on the basis of logic, which according to classical categorisation may not be otherwise considered '*mutawātir*'. Nursi argues that due to the various testimonies and witnesses narrating a particular *ḥadīth*, logic necessitates that it cannot then be denied or rejected, it must therefore necessarily be '*mutawātir* in meaning'.<sup>278</sup>

Iqbal's stance regarding the validity and authenticity of the *ḥadīth* juxtaposes that of Nursi's.<sup>279</sup> While the latter's view is established strongly above, the former lacks conviction and as argued earlier has been influenced by Orientalist thought – even though he is critical of most of their claims. In a letter to Mawlana Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, Iqbal writes, “About the authenticity of the hadith, whatever apprehension I have in my heart, it does not mean that the hadith are useless completely,”<sup>280</sup> indicating his clear apprehension in completely relying in the total soundness of the *ḥadīth* collections. Ahangar argues that Iqbal does not refute the views of the Orientalists, and again in a dichotomous way to Nursi he criticises the use of weak traditions, in his lyrical verses in the *Rumuz* he writes:

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Most of the Prophet's miracles and his Prophethood's proofs fall into either category. Although a few are related through only one chain of transmitters, they can be regarded as certain as if related through *tawātur*, since confirmed authorities have accepted them. Among such authorities were those who memorised more than 100,000 Traditions, and who were extremely God-conscious.

<sup>276</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 124.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, p. 174.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Refer to footnote 789 for my elaboration of this discussion.

<sup>280</sup> Iqbal. *Iqbal Nama*, p. 152; Ahangar. “Iqbal and Hadith,” p. 91.

The preacher is storyteller and tale-collector. His meaning is low, and his words are high. He talks of Khatib and Daylami and is interested in traditions “weak” and “irregular” and “uninterrupted”.<sup>281</sup>

Thus, against the critiques of the Orientalists and the modernists, while Iqbal sought a middle ground between the two but remained affected by the Orientalist discourse, Nursi’s revised explanations of *Sunnah* and *ḥadīth* elucidates not only his defence of *naql*, but also his ability to address the issues related to the authenticity, *isnād*, *aḥad* narrations and even weak *aḥadīth*. In this way, he has carefully ‘revived’ faith in this aspect of the second most important text or corpus of the Islamic tradition making it an integral part of his prophetology.

#### 4.5 Finality of prophethood

The concept of *Khātām al-anbiyā* or the finality of prophethood was not a dominant theme in Nursi’s writings and thought, as this was not an issue in the late Ottoman era and the early Republican Turkey, due to no claims to prophecy as had emerged in Persian and India. Nursi’s emphasis on addressing the rationalistic claims and denial of prophethood is notable only due to its greater prominence than finality in the region. Nevertheless, there are many references in his works to the title of the Prophet as the ‘Seal of all prophets’. For Iqbal the concept of finality is one of the key themes that predominates through his works, not only in the finality of prophethood, but also by virtue of the finality of prophethood, the finality of revelation as well. That is why in any essay or subject matter and even the lyrical verses of poetry, we see Iqbal engaging with the Qur’ān intricately woven in his thought and works. Importantly, in his situating Qur’ānic arguments within a western framework, he wanted to prove the imitability of the Qur’ān in this way. The concept of *Khātām al-anbiyā* or the ‘seal or finality of prophets’ is Qur’ānic- and *ḥadīth*-based epithet

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<sup>281</sup> *Rumuz-i-bekhudī*, Lahore: 1918, p. 142.

that refers to the Prophet Muḥammad as the prophet who brought closure to revelation.<sup>282</sup> God sealed the revelation process through Prophet Muḥammad, because humankind had reached a certain level of understanding of the universal values and the Qur’ān ‘revealed these values forever for all human beings’.<sup>283</sup> Thus, when the Prophet died, revelation stopped and the ‘favours of God were completed’.<sup>284</sup> The theological significance of this concept is that no further revelation and prophecy could be claimed after Prophet Muḥammad. For Muslim philosophers and theologians, this again was an area of great intellectual enquiry with various understandings presented, especially on the bearing of the finality of revelation for humanity, of which Iqbal enters the discussion with geo-political as well as cultural and psychological implications of the ‘cultural ramification of finality’.

The understanding of the finality of prophethood became more prominent in the modern era with Mirza Ghulām Aḥmad’s (1835-1908)<sup>285</sup> claim to be the ‘awaited *mahdi* of Islam’, the ‘Christian Messiah’ and the ‘final *avatar* (incarnation) of the Hindus’.<sup>286</sup> This created detailed discussions of finality of prophethood, with Iqbal being its forerunner in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>287</sup> Iqbal outlines his definition of *wahy* in light of finality.<sup>288</sup> Iqbal’s position was that the Qadianis form a ‘heretical’ group in Islam, due to their rejection of the notion of

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<sup>282</sup> Qur’ān, 5:3.

<sup>283</sup> Gülen. *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, p. 77.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Mirza Ghulām Aḥmad was from the Punjab region of Qadian in India (hence also referred to as Qadiani movement) is the spiritual leader who self-proclaimed to be a reviver, a *mahdi*, a messiah and a prophet. He is the founder of the Aḥmadiyya movement that split into two branches after his death. The ‘Aḥmadiyya Muslim Community’ believed in the literal reality of Ahmad’s claims to prophethood, but the ‘Lahore Aḥmadiyya Movement’, accepted the claims as allegorical only. Orthodox Muslims reject their faith and beliefs as falling outside the fold of Islam. See Mark, Juergensmeyer, and S A. Ali, *Religious Movements with Islamic Origins*, 2006, and Manuel, David J. *Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam*. Portland, TREN, 1989.

<sup>286</sup> See Walteb, Howard Arnold. “The Ahmadiyya Movement To-Day.” *The Muslim World* 6, no. 1 (1916): 66-78.

<sup>287</sup> See Iqbal, Muhammad. *Islam and Ahmadism*. Academy, Islamic Research & Publications, 1974.

<sup>288</sup> In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves a keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings (of future revelations); that in order to achieve full self-consciousness man must finally be thrown back on his own (intellectual) resources (for exercising and conquering nature outside himself). The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Qur’ān and the emphasis it lays on Nature and History as sources of knowledge are all different aspects of the same idea of the finality. Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 101.

finality of prophethood, which he has argued in at the heart of the understanding of the central aspect of prophecy in Islam.<sup>289</sup>

This is a key theological discussion of Iqbal, whereby he engages with this concept at length, primarily due to the mere fact that it was within his geo-political context creating a need for clarification and elucidation of this point. In relation to finality Iqbal states.

The intellectual value of the idea is that it tends to create an independent critical attitude towards mystic experience by generating the belief that all personal authority, claiming a supernatural origin, has come to an end in the history of man. This kind of belief is a psychological force, which inhibits the growth of such authority.<sup>290</sup>

The notion of *tawhīd* or unity of God as the only foundation is poignant for Muslim unity, yet this is not enough; thus the idea of the finality of prophethood serves as an important and in fact essential supplement. According to Vahid, Iqbal enunciates this as follows:

Islam is essentially a religious community with perfectly defined boundaries that includes belief in the unity of God, belief in all the prophets and belief in the finality of Muhammad's prophethood. The last mentioned belief is really the factor which actually draws the line of demarcation between Muslims and non-Muslims and enables one to decide whether a certain individual or group is part of the community or not. For example, the Brahmos believe in God, they also regard Muhammad (on whom be peace) as one of the prophets of God, yet they cannot be regarded as part and parcel of Islam, because they, like the Qadianis, believe in the theory of perpetual revelation through prophets and do not believe in the finality of prophethood in Muhammad. No Islamic sect, as far as I know, has ever ventured to cross this line of demarcation. The Bahais in Iran have openly rejected the principle of Finality, but at the same time frankly admitted that they are a new community and not Muslims in the

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<sup>289</sup> In many of his statements, speeches and letters, Iqbal spoke directly on this issue of Qadianis in correlation to the finality of prophethood. Beyond the religious implications, Iqbal, constructed his argument in socio-historical and cultural realities in context of the British India prior to separation. He argued that this would further divide and marginalise the Muslim community of India and that it was a social justice and equity issue that the group be either labeled heretic, or that they be enlisted as a separate community. He was for the latter position so to avoid social and political discord. The various statements, essays and correspondence to make a case and reassert finality are outlined in this book. He deemed the group as such in time and extended this heresy to the founder of the Aḥmadiyya movement's leader himself Ghulām Aḥmad, on the mere basis that he (Ghulām Aḥmad) or his followers implied heresy and non-belief to the rest of the Muslim world for not accepting his right to prophecy. Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 56.

<sup>290</sup> Iqbal connects the 'necessity' of the 'finality' to the wisdom in the social and psychological opportunities for the Muslim community. He further elaborates: The function of the idea (finality) is to open up fresh vistas of knowledge in the domain of man's inner experience. Just as the first half of the formula (there is no god but Allah) of Islam has created and fostered the spirit of critical observation of man's outer experience by divesting the forces of nature of that divine character with which earlier cultures have clothed them. A Muslim as perfectly natural experience must, now regard mystic experience however unusual and abnormal. Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 127.

technical sense of the word. Accordingly to our belief Islam as a religion was revealed by God, but the existence of Islam as a society or nation depends entirely on the personality of the Holy Prophet.<sup>291</sup>

Siddiqi argues that notion of Iqbal's exposition of finality of prophethood rests within a sociological exposition of the concept, extending from the mere fact that religion in Islam is primordially considered as one, and prophethood is only distinguished with varying *Sharī'a's* laws (as discussed in Chapter Two), the 'abolition of prophethood' or rather the 'completion and perfection of revelation' due to the finality of Prophet Muḥammad's prophethood implies the very 'birth of inductive reasoning'.<sup>292</sup> Siddiqi states:

The Sharia law proclaimed and enforced by the Prophet of Islam (SAW) is comprehensive in content and universal in application. It is valid for people of all times and climes. It sets "the seal of completion and perfection" on the moral and social code of life, leaving no room for any further addition or alteration in it. Being complete and perfect in all respects, spiritual and temporal, it put to an end the history of revelation once and for all.<sup>293</sup>

Resulting from the birth of the inductive intellect, Siddiqi posits three consequences of the doctrine of finality in Iqbal's works: firstly, that of the integration of the faith with the intellect which established the middle position between the ancient and the modern world.<sup>294</sup> Referring to Iqbal's elucidation of this point:

In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned (to which he relentlessly sticks), he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the (empirical) spirit of his revelation is concerned (as anticipated by gradually passing the early logistics of Islam from the deductive to the inductive attitude in their efforts at interpretation, he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 108.

<sup>292</sup> Siddiqī, Abdul H. *Prophethood in Islam*. Lahore: Islamic Publ, 1968, p. 77-83. See also Reason, I. "Logic of the Doctrine of Finality of Prophethood." *The Qur'anic Horizons* 5, no. 1: 80.

<sup>293</sup> The abolition of prophethood is, thus, a logical consequence of the completion of the eternal law of Islam. Another 'aql logical consequence of it is "the birth of inductive intellect", in its wake, for solving any difficulty, which may arise in acting upon the law, side by side acquiring power and control over the stupendous forces of nature. Ibid, Siddiqī, p. 81.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 101.



Thus, he conceded that as an apostle of moderation and middle-way-ness, he stands for the integration of faith with intellect, of revelation with reason, of religion with science, which is obviously the first corollary inherent in the very concept of the doctrine of finality. Secondly, Siddiqi maintains that due to the completion and ‘finality’ of revelation the obligated duty of *tablīgh* or continuation of the ‘prophetic message’ to humanity was the duty of the *umma*. Lastly, he maintains that of the continuation of *ijtihād* or juristic reasoning to continue, which demonstrates the comprehensiveness of *Sharī‘a* law.<sup>296</sup>

Iqbal noticed a shift from discursive to inductive reasoning in their legal thinking, and in this way encouraged the conducting of *ijtihād*. “With the expansion of conquest and the consequent widening of the outlook of Islam”, he writes, “these early logists had to take a wider view of things, and to study local conditions of life and habits of new peoples that came within the fold of Islam. A careful *study* of the various schools of legal opinion, in the light of contemporary social and political history, reveals that they gradually passed from the deductive to inductive attitude in their efforts at interpretation.”<sup>297</sup>

Moreover, the doctrine of finality implies as we have said earlier, integration of faith with intellect, not “complete displacement of emotion by reason.”<sup>298</sup> The function of the doctrine “is to open up fresh vistas of knowledge in the domain of man’s inner experience”<sup>299</sup> on the one hand, and “to create an independent critical attitude towards mystic experience”<sup>300</sup> on the other to determine the genuineness of the experience. Mystic experience, though “unusual and abnormal”, is yet “a perfectly natural experience” with Iqbal, “open to critical scrutiny like other aspects of human experience.”<sup>301</sup> The intellectual test of such an experience is its “critical interpretation, without any presuppositions of

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<sup>296</sup> Siddiqi. *Prophethood in Islam*, pp. 82-85.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

human experience, generally with a view to discover whether our interpretation leads us ultimately to a reality of the same character as is revealed by religious experience.”<sup>302</sup>

From a cultural angle Iqbal also considers finality:

The cultures of Asia and, in fact, of the whole ancient world, failed because they approached reality exclusively from within and moved from within outward. This procedure gave them theory (vision) without power, and on mere theory no durable civilization can be based.<sup>303</sup>

He reiterates his view at another place: “Vision without power does bring moral elevation, but cannot give a lasting culture.”<sup>304</sup>

The only alternative left, he continues, is that “both must combine for the spiritual expansion of humanity” on the one hand, and the realisation of “spiritual democracy,” on the ultimate aim of Islam, on the other. This is the cultural significance of the doctrine of finality in Islam. It ushered in inductive intellect, giving a “new direction” to life, that of conquering nature outside itself, beside the traditional direction of self-conquest. Awakening the latent empirical spirit in man to acquire more and more physical power is one side of the doctrine, the other and far more important than the first one, is placing the power thus acquired under the overall control of religion and morality.<sup>305</sup>

In short, Iqbal developed a comprehensive theoretical argument for the finality of Islam and reiterated this position of orthodoxy by infusing arguments from history of religion, cultural and sociological implications, as well as the psychological implications upon the Muslim community and the continuing of the phenomenon in their thought. In this way and also by outlining in the contemporary socio-political reasons for the very existence of

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p. 142; Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

Qadianis and their doctrines as an ‘insinuating ‘ ploy to further divide the already politically, economically estranged Muslims of India.

#### **4.6 Conclusion: Similarities and differences in their theological approaches, themes and significance of their position**

The theoretical framework of the theologically based *tajdīd* tradition and the Western epistemological discourse that Nursi and Iqbal employed demonstrate the influence of their intellectual, social and historical contexts upon their individual prophetologies. Nursi constructed his thought and attempted to revive this area of *kalām* by applying rational argumentation. There is even evidence of Nursi’s attempts at providing sociological, historical and cultural reasons for his prophetology, yet he chose the language of *kalāmists* at most and even tried to simplify that as his aim was revival of Islam within the Muslims his was a bottom up approach, whereas Iqbal on the other hand envisioned problems within the religious thought of the his own tradition and tried hard to reconstruct and re-visit the currents of thought in the area of prophecy by situating it in contemporary epistemological mode and hence targeted the more scholarly and elite of the community and took a top down approach. Although correspondingly both fall into the category of orthodoxy and are tied loosely on those grounds, their overall views, veneration and passion for their respective tradition is obvious yet it is their approach and methodology that largely differs, one rooted in tradition (Nursi) who sought revival from inside out, and the other rooted also in his tradition but more versed in modernity and western modes of thought and reflected that in his prophetologies.

With regards to the use of ‘*aql* and reason, both were quite aware of the need for and yet deficiency of reason, and one counter balanced ‘*aql* with use of tradition or *naql* (namely Nursi, as seen even in his defence of *ḥadīth* traditions, whilst the other also aware of the deficiencies of ‘*aql* yet conversely was more discursive in it and admittedly so more than

the former). Ironically both also had a great aptitude for *qalb* or the heart and the spiritual and mystical dimension of faith and prophethood. This will be the key subject of their prophetological comparison in the following chapter.

## 5 SPIRITUAL AND METAPHYSICAL DIMENSIONS OF PROPHETHOOD AND PROPHET MUḤAMMAD IN THE THOUGHT OF NURSI AND IQBAL

As established in the previous chapters, the criticism or obstacles for Muslim theologians and philosophers of the modern era originated ‘within’. The internal reproaches were no longer Orientalist accusations that were deemed as ‘external criticism of *nubuwwa*’. In the post Enlightenment era’s scholarship that also dominated the Muslim world, there were generally two waves of censures launched against prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad. One was the reform movement that sought to abolish the prophetic *Sunnah* and also pursued the displacement of the *Sharī‘a* by questioning its rational validity.<sup>1</sup> It was at the height of this reason-based dominance that Nursi and Iqbal constructed their prophetologies in light of ‘*aql* (as discussed in Chapter Four). The second aspect under scrutiny was the attack on the metaphysical and mystical dimensions of prophethood and the Prophet Muḥammad. In this regard, there were theoretical criticisms at the Sufi or mystical depictions of the Prophet, and hence a push to bring about the ‘ordinary’ or focus upon the human aspects of Prophet Muḥammad. As a result of this trend there were question marks placed next to the notion of the prophet as the ‘perfect human’ or ‘*insān-i kāmīl*’, as well as the sainthood or *wilāyāh* aspect of his prophethood. Subsequently, the issue of ascension or *mi‘rāj*<sup>2</sup> became topical as it crossed over all three suspected metaphysical aspects of prophethood. The practical manifestations of this new trend of internal critique against the spiritual dimensions of *nubuwwa* were socially manifested in

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<sup>1</sup> Besides the modernists, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad ‘Abduh, and Rashid Rida, a host of prominent thinkers of a new reform movement were on the rise; Muhammad Shahrur (b.1938), Ahmed Subhy Mansour (b.1949), Edip Yuksel (b.1957), Gamal al-Banna (1920-2013), Ahmed Al-Gubbanchi (b.1958), Mahmoud Mohammed Taha (1945-1985) and Farag Foda (1946-1992). Many of these reform thinkers For detailed discussion of this see section 4.4

<sup>2</sup> The ascension story is detailed in the *Sahih Muslim*. It outlines the Prophet’s night journey from Mecca to the Mosque of Aqsa, in Jerusalem, where after leading in prayer a congregation with all the prophets, the Prophet Muhammad continues on an ascension to the heavens. His observance of all the dimensions of the creation and universe is also detailed as well as his unique presence to a station of ‘two bows length’ proximity to God. The ḥadīth also reports his encounters with other Prophets: Jesus, Joseph, Enoch, Moses and Ibrahim and his observance of paradise and hell. He is reported to have received certain revelation as well as the five daily prayers on his return. For further details refer to Siddiqui, Abdul Hamid. *Sahih Muslim*, “Chapter No: 1, Faith (Kitab Al Iman)”, Peace Vision, 1976, ḥadīth no: 314.

the political oppression of the Sufi houses or *zāwiyas* and *tekkes*. Moreover, in the global trend towards rational sciences and philosophy, there was little room left in the wider Western discourse for metaphysics. Aware of these trends, Nursi and Iqbal considered the mystical and metaphysical side of prophethood and the Prophet Muḥammad as a major component of their prophetologies.

This chapter will consider the responses of Nursi and Iqbal to the mystical and metaphysical dimension of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad in light of the theoretical context prevalent at the time. It will also consider their choice of genre as well as their methods and arguments in defending the spiritual aspects as a second aspect of *nubuwwa*. The aim of this chapter is to highlight that although both Nursi and Iqbal valued reason, in their most inner private worlds and in their more mystical works, the experience of the spirit was never undermined. Both saw the limitations of *'aql* and therefore relied on *kashf* or spiritual unveiling of the literature and poetry to communicate their thoughts. The place of the mystical tradition and metaphysics in their works are also explored. This chapter will study Nursi's and Iqbal's mystical and literary writings on prophethood, suggesting the ingenious way Muslim modernist scholars wove the mystical and spiritual tradition along with rational thought. This chapter also highlights the significance of the meta-rational aspects to their prophetology, to illustrate how both scholars used literary and spiritual notions to communicate their messages to their respective audiences, and made sophisticated truths 'available' to the common people. It will also assess their unique contributions to the Islamic literary tradition, in light of their poetry and mystical thought.

## 5.1 The methodology of Nursi and Iqbal in light of their objective

While the West offered ‘enlightenment’ and development in sciences and thought, the East offered spirit and mysticism.<sup>3</sup> (The ‘mystical dimensions’ of Nursi and Iqbal’s thought is the second major focus of this thesis). Despite their great usage of *‘aql*, either directly or theoretically, both Nursi and Iqbal also gave due importance to metaphysics. They had profound respect and personal connection to the ‘realities’ of the metaphysical dimension of prophethood. In fact, through the theme of the ‘prophet’ and Prophet Muḥammad, a central re-occurring motif in their own mystical expositions which is interwoven in their works (like Nursi’s exegesis) or separated in different genres (like Iqbal’s poetry) they found a meta-rational way to argue for *nubuwwa*. Arguably, it was the inclusion of the ‘mystical’ and metaphysical that had a ‘greater’ effect on their respective audiences, more than their ‘prose’ works. The common Muslim Indian and Anatolian, who may not have understood the complexity of their argumentation and logical explanations, found recourse in their literary and poetical aspects of *nubuwwa*.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, even though the common aspect among all the modernists was their utmost devotion and ‘reverence’ and love for the Prophet Muḥammad, both Iqbal and Nursi too portrayed this love, yet surprisingly, in greater degrees than their modernist cohorts. This positioned them distinctly amidst their largely modernist contemporaries, who were mostly ‘anti-Suffi’. In the modern era, the trend of breaking away from the traditional associations such as *ṭarīqats* and *tekkes*, dominated most of the civic and revivalist movements of the Islamic world.

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<sup>3</sup> There are many works that discuss the Western paradigm in contrast to the wisdom of the East. Nursi discusses in his definition of ‘two Europes’, that generally the West is associated with philosophy and the East with religion and spirituality. See Said Nursi, (trans. Unal, Ali). *Gleams of Truth (Risale-i Nur Collection)*, Tughra Books, 2009, p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> Nursi in his later life lived in Western Anatolia during the Turkish Republic years, and therefore addressed a diverse group of ‘Anatolians’ that consisted mainly of Turks, but sometimes Arabs and Kurds as well.

They were often motivated emotionally and practically as ‘civic social movements’, as a result of their mystical illustrations and allusions to the Prophet Muḥammad. Thus, when it came to the notion of the love of the Prophet Muḥammad, both Nursi and Iqbal did not resist in expressing their deep reverence, sentiments and adoration for the central figure of their tradition throughout their works. Arguably they were totally immersed in mysticism, particularly when it came to the person of the Prophet, who had captivated their finer senses and emotions. On this aspect of *nubuwwa* their reason regressed and the reigning dominance of the ‘*qalb*’ or spiritual heart was at the fore.

Nursi and Iqbal were however also critical of the ‘dormant’ or ‘superstitious’ ideas and the ‘blind faith’ that mostly subjugated a growing number of the Muslim populace that misinterpreted and exaggerated some of the Sufi concepts and outlook.<sup>5</sup> These individuals became far removed and distant to the development in positivist sciences and technology. This vein of thought is more prominent in Iqbal’s work, who was tackling this reality more in his Indian context where it prevailed beyond Nursi’s context. Nevertheless, despite their reservations about the necessity of Sufism in modern times, both never denied the great literary and mystical richness of the metaphysical traditions of Islam. Therefore, the strength and unique contribution of both scholars lie in their ‘*aql* engagement of the heart or *qalb*. By considering the mystical undertones of *nubuwwa* in their writings, they were able to broaden their appeal to a wider readership.

In contrast to their contemporaries, both Nursi and Iqbal married the ‘*aql* and *qalb* through a combination of mysticism and philosophy, without overlooking tradition or *naql* to address prophethood.<sup>6</sup> This is chiefly prevalent in Nursi’s work, though both were undoubtedly more mystically inclined than their modern counterparts, like Jamāl al-Dīn al-

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<sup>5</sup> See the preface of: Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, 2011; Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 221-237; Nursi. *Mathnawi al-Nuriya*, pp. 169-197 and Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, 2011; Iqbal, *Kulliyat*, pp. 155-215.



Afghānī (1838-1897), Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), Rashid Riḍā (1865-1935), Abu A’la Maududī (1903-1979) and Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966). Accordingly, although they apprehended the need to utilise ‘*aql*’ in their prophetologies, they were also astutely aware of the limits of ‘*aql*’ unlike the modernists ‘Abduh and Riḍā. Common mystics and spiritual guides mentioned in their works include figures such as Jalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī, (1207-1273), Aḥmad Faruq Sirhindī (1564-1624), Fakhr-al-Din al-Iraqī (1213-1289), ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (1077-1166) and al-Ghazālī (1058-1111).

Moreover, both Nursi and Iqbal have an obvious pronouncement of the mystical dimension in their writings. While Iqbal discussed it separately in his poetic verses written in Persian and Urdu, Nursi infused mystical and literary inferences throughout his exegetical work. In this way they both addressed what they considered to be a ‘gap’ or a void in Western thought. Despite this obvious inclination towards mysticism Nursi and Iqbal were not particular advocates of organised *taṣṣawuf* or Sufism. Nonetheless, in many ways they have not only preserved the great literary and mystical traditions of Islam, but have also revived and contributed to it themselves.<sup>7</sup> Nursi’s position is unique as he defends the right of the Sufi *ṭarīqas* within society as a way of reaching ‘God’ and practicing the *Sunnah*, yet he cautions people about abandoning the *Sharī‘a* and *Sunnah*, which is the true Sufi path anyway. Despite his nine warnings, Nursi has a favourable view of *ṭarīqa*.<sup>8</sup>

As sainthood and Sufism prove the truth of Messengership and the Sharia, they also express Islam’s perfections, are among the sources of its light, means for humanity’s spiritual progress, and sources of enlightenment due to their connection with Islam.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Vahide notes that despite living amidst a people drawn to *ṭarīqas*, Nursi ‘never joined a *ṭarīqat* or followed the Sufi path’—he was later to state that it is ‘not the time for *ṭarīqa*’, as he believed faith was necessary and not Sufism. Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam In Modern Turkey*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, pp. 426-440.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 427.

### 5.1.1 Humanness and exaltedness of the Prophet

It is true that Prophet Muḥammad has been the centre of theological, philosophical and literary thoughts of many theologians, philosophers and literary figures.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Nursi argues that he was the inspiration behind the many great intellectual and spiritual poles that sprung forth after him,<sup>11</sup> or that indeed he was the instigator or one who encouraged great thinkers across various disciplines.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, a textual examination of the *Risale-i Nur* demonstrates Nursi's particular exposition on Prophet Muḥammad that culminates the techniques, styles and expressions of the various disciplines and their depiction of the Prophet in one central place in his new theosophical and theological 'treatise of light'. A textual example demonstrating this is the literary quote of Hassan bin Thabit (554-674): "I could not praise Muhammad with my words; rather, my words were made praiseworthy by Muhammad",<sup>13</sup> with which he begins his treatise on prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad. Arguably, Nursi's distinct approach that stands out from other scholars of the last two centuries is primarily due to his unique expression; that is, the way he culminates various linguistic, philosophical, as well as theological arguments to discuss the subject matter of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad. In doing so he speaks to the complete human intellectual and sensory dimensions and is therefore effective in convincing his readers of his arguments.

Unlike his Abduh and Riḍā contemporaries, who wrote profusely using 'aql predominantly in order to expound their *kalām al nubuwwa* (theology of prophethood), Nursi in an unconventional way and unlike most authors on the life and Messengership of Prophet

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<sup>10</sup> See, Ishaq, Ibn. "Sirat Rasul Allah." compiled by A. Guillaume as "The Life of Muhammad", Oxford, London (1955). Hisham, Ibn. "The Life of Muhammad." *A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasiil Allah* (1958). Ibn Arabi, M. "The wisdom of the prophets." *Fusus al-Hikam* (1975). Nettler, Ronald L. *Sufi metaphysics and Qur'ānic prophets: Ibn 'Arabī's thought and method in the Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Islamic Texts Society, 2003. Al-Ghazālī, Abu Hamid. "Al-mustasfa min ilm al-usul." Cairo: *al-Maktabah al-Tijariah* (1997). Sirhindī, Aḥmad, and Hakikat Kitapevi. *Proof of Prophethood*. No. 9, Istanbul, Hakikat Kitapevi, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 250.

<sup>12</sup> Each discipline has had its unique position on the historical character, religious role and the spiritual essence.

<sup>13</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 243.

Muḥammad, did not solely focus on the human aspects of his mission. He also included the *mutaṣawwuf* discussions like his self proclaimed spiritual masters – Aḥmad Sirhindī<sup>14</sup> and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī.<sup>15</sup> As discussed in the previous chapters, it was due to this careful revision and projection of his *nubuwwa* that arguably the spiritual dimensions relating to the personhood and prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad were actually preserved and maintained. Unlike ‘Abduh and Riḍā he referred to the ‘spiritual aspects of the Prophet’ in his work. Similarly, unlike other Sufi writers, who projected their ‘theosophies’ of the Prophet in their literary works, Nursi bridged both camps by ‘compounding’ the ‘*aql*’ as well as the mystical appraisals and projections of the Prophet. His aim was to instil conviction in the mind, by providing rational argumentations side by side to the theosophical and mystical passages about the Prophet Muḥammad, evoking love for his personhood and ‘obedience’ *ita’at* to his *Sunnah*.<sup>16</sup>

For Nursi Prophet Muḥammad’s prophethood is the third most prominent evidence for the proof and existence of God, alongside the Qur’ān and the ‘book of the universe’.<sup>17</sup> His *kalām* is therefore also based primarily on the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad which he placed great emphasis upon through out his writings and in all discussions wherein he correlates and links Prophet Muḥammad, thus, adding the ‘third element of his proof’ or ‘evidence’ of the ‘Unity and Oneness of God’. Although Nursi dedicated the “Nineteenth Word”, the “Nineteenth Letter” predominantly on his two main treatises on Prophet Muḥammad, he also discusses the *Sunnah* and questions related to his *Sharī’a* as well. However, as a result of Nursi’s belief that Prophet Muḥammad is the ‘third most important proof for the existence of God’, he brings all his *kalāmīc* discussions and adds the important aspect of its link to Prophet Muḥammad to verify it further. Thus, important

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<sup>14</sup> Refer to Chapter Three footnote 506 for a brief description of his life and works.

<sup>15</sup> Nursi affords great reverence to certain scholars and mystics of Islam, in particular Ahmad Sirhindi and ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, amongst others like al-Ghazālī. Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 247-257.

<sup>16</sup> Unal. *Gleams of Truth*, p. 73.

<sup>17</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 136.

factors relating to prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad may be found throughout the *Risale-i Nur* even in discussions such as the “Resurrection Treatise”, where Nursi refers to the importance of Prophet Muḥammad as the ‘reason for the existence of this world’ (due to his prophethood) and the creation of the eternal world resulting from his sainthood and servanthood.<sup>18</sup>

Another unique aspect of Nursi’s *kalām* on Prophet Muḥammad is his introduction of the concept of *shakhs al-ma’ nawī* or the ‘collective personality’ of the Prophet, which he uses to describe the universal aspect of his prophethood as an addition to his human aspect, which is emphasised by his *Sunnah*.<sup>19</sup> The intricate dichotomy of the Muḥammadan Essence vis a vis Muḥammad the man has led to somewhat confused nuances in Islamic theology in recent times.<sup>20</sup> Nursi’s explanation of the two will be thus contrasted with other positions in order to shed light in this area. Nursi delineates the servanthood aspects from the messenger-hood aspects of the Prophet. In light of this, his explanations of the Prophet’s ascension shows the pinnacle of his culminated approach to address the complicated aspect of the prophetic miracles. Furthermore, within the discussion of why Prophet Muḥammad was elected for the ascension, Nursi provides evidences from the previous scriptures, from history, from *irhāṣāt* incidents that reportedly took place miraculously prior to his birth and prophethood, as well as his own miracles, his sublime character, and lastly that he manifested all the Names of God, to verify his position suitable for the ascension. In addition, Nursi’s emphasis on the Prophet Muḥammad’s truthfulness will also be discussed, as well as his role as ‘teacher of mankind’ and ‘guide of their spirits’, his balanced approach to all aspects of life and living and finally his compassion to his community and to all of creation.

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<sup>18</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 120.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 473.

<sup>20</sup> See, Turner, Colin. *The Qur’an: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi’s Epistles of Light*, Gerlach Press, 2013.

### 5.1.2 Prophet Muḥammad’s unique role in the legacy of prophethood

Nursi’s prophetology positions Prophet Muḥammad as the most prominent evidence and important vehicle and culmination of all other prophetic qualities, miracles and characteristics in the ‘final’ messenger to mankind. In the *Mathnawi al-Nuriya (Epitomes of Light)*, Nursi emphasises the importance of Prophet Muḥammad as the manifestation of God Himself through His Messengers. In doing so he not only argues that belief in God and other pillars necessitate belief in Prophet Muḥammad,<sup>21</sup> but he also reiterates the principle that ‘beauty and perfection like to adore themselves or through other adoring eyes’. Similarly, Nursi depicts Prophet Muḥammad as the most beautiful art work and mirror of Gods Names and attributes and thus, his most principle manifestation.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Nursi’s appraisal of the laudable qualities of the Prophet Muḥammad as the ‘proof of God’s existence and unity’ as well as the ‘summary’ of his truth and essence is further reiterated in the *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi states the Prophet as the ‘truthful witness’ and the ‘articulate, verified proof’.<sup>23</sup>

He is the master of all prophets, messengers, saints, who holds the meaning of the confirmation of God’s existence and unity. He is the consensus of all prophets, Messengers, leader of all its God conscious scholars, who possess lofty and laudable virtues and perfect admirable morals, and is the centre upon which Divine revelation is focused. He is the traveller to the unseen realm and the teacher, and guide of humanity and jinn.<sup>24</sup>

To Nursi, the ‘Muḥammadan Truth’, is the proclamation of *nubuwwa* and Islam alike, wherein lies the Messengership of Prophet Muḥammad which he argues contains the testimony of the ‘greatest consensus’ and the ‘most comprehensive agreement’ of all the prophets in Islam and bears the spirit of the Divinely revealed religions and their confirmation based on the revelation.<sup>25</sup> Nursi asserts that the Prophet’s words were

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<sup>21</sup> Nursi. *Mathnawi Al Nuriya*, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp. 19, 416.

<sup>24</sup> Nursi. *Mathnawi Al Nuriye*, p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 368.

affirmed by his miracles and all the divinely revealed religions. In another appraisal, Nursi considers the prophet as the embodiment of truth, the servant and Messenger of God, and the perfect manifestation of the light of Divine Unity.<sup>26</sup> In this understanding Nursi does not accept any blemish on the character or lineage of Prophet Muḥammad. He states that he is a member of an illustrious genealogy, beginning with Abraham and culminating in Prophet Muḥammad, and he emphasises that he must not have been indifferent to the true religion's light, or overcome by unbelief's darkness.<sup>27</sup> Nursi brings supporting evidence from traditions that relate that the ancestors of Prophet Muḥammad followed remnants of Abraham's religion, which survived in some individuals despite the pervasive veils of heedlessness and spiritual darkness.

Nursi deems the Prophet in a greater light not too distant in view theologically to Abu'l Hasan al-Ash'arī, Imam Māturīdī and al-Ghazālī, theosophically to Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī and Aḥmad Sirhindī and philosophically to Ibn 'Arabī and to an extent Ibn Sina. From the mystical perspective he echoes 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (1077-1166) more as well as Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (1414-1492) in their reverence and devotional love of the Prophet.<sup>28</sup> Nursi's theological consideration of the dimension of 'prophethood' along with the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad are the other significant proofs in establishing the truths of the existence and proof of the Maker.<sup>29</sup> In the "Eleventh Word", Nursi describes the role of the Prophet as the 'aide de camp' of the 'King' in his analogy about the Divine purpose for creating humanity.<sup>30</sup> As Nursi develops the analogous story, likening prophetic duties to being God's 'special envoy', His Messenger, the conveyor of His message to creation and humanity are all illustrated showing the symbiotic relationship between the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 377.

<sup>28</sup> Abu-Rabi. *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-I Nur*, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> See Nursi. *The Reasonings*, pp. 119-121.

<sup>30</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 133-141.

duties and functions of the Prophet with the existence and Oneness of God.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Nursi is tying it once again to his overall main theme of the proof for the existence of God. Therefore he uses these two dimensions in order to do so. In doing this he establishes and shows a clear link between the institution of prophethood, and the existence of God, revelation, and Prophet Muḥammad –all demonstrating the interconnectedness of the Islamic Essentials of faith.<sup>32</sup>

In the *Reasonings (Muḥakemat)*, Nursi is directly appealing to human reason ‘*aql*, and other faculties.<sup>33</sup> He is well aware of his contextual doubts and concerns of his fellow brethren in belief, who at the time were inflicted and dealt with many philosophical and psychological challenges to their faith and belief.<sup>34</sup> That is why Nursi begins this section by preparing his readers for what is to come. He first begins with a short reminder that “it is not necessary to refer to the proofs of the existence and unity of the Maker in order to prove the truth of Prophet Muhammad pbuh”.<sup>35</sup> Nursi then categorically moves to the ‘Establishment’ in order to establish this truth; he states initially that the Prophet is the proof of the ‘Maker’ and states that his aim is to analyse him for himself.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, understanding his contemporary challenges, Nursi then moves on to addressing his reader’s doubts by ‘appealing to their conscience *wijdan*, by the title of ‘lover of truth’. He thereby absolves the obvious doubts such as the community of the Prophet by suggesting that ‘do not expect and look at all its members’,<sup>37</sup> ‘polish the mirror of your heart’. He requests his readers to ‘weight without pretexts, biases and prejudices and to sway towards objectivity’.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Nursi. *Mathnawi Al Nuriye*, p. 69.

<sup>33</sup> Nursi. *The Reasonings*, pp. 11-78.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pp. vii – xii, and pp. 1-5.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Beyond Nursi's appeal to his audience for 'objectivity', he then moves on to the theosophical explanations of Prophet Muḥammad and his unique position amongst other prophets is highlighted resultantly. Nursi emphasises theosophically on Prophet Muḥammad as the 'key purpose' for the existence of the 'tree of creation' and meaning amidst all other prophets.<sup>39</sup> He posits that since a things' result or fruit is considered first, the latest in existence is the first in meaning, consideration and intention.<sup>40</sup> Therefore he states that Prophet Muḥammad is the most perfect fruit of the tree of creation, the means for valuing all other fruits, and the cause for realising all purposes for the universe's creation. His nature is the first in creation, thus he is also the initial 'seed of creation'.<sup>41</sup> This theosophical position bears other indications for creation, such as the assertion that there is an intended purpose in creation and creatures – being that of the 'Muḥammadan light' existing prior to creation, as well as this purpose being the main aim and ultimate goal of creation and hence its final material fruit as well. This necessarily rejects Darwinist evolution theories that claim purposelessness in the initial creation of creatures who later gain a purpose as they get transformed to another form.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned in previous chapters although theosophical underpinning of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad gained ascendancy with the authorship of Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī and Aḥmad Sirhindī and Shāh Waliullāh, nevertheless, Nursi's unique addition to this field is in this particular expression of the Prophet as the 'seed' as well as the 'fruit of the tree of creation'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Nursi. *Mathnawi Al Nuriye*, pp. 169–170.

<sup>40</sup> This idea was also expressed by other scholars based on the tradition that the Prophet was the first light of creation, or that his light was created first. The Prophet Muḥammad states, "I am the first Prophet to be created and the last one to be sent." He also stated "I was a Prophet when Adam was between the water and the mud – before he came into existence." See Ibn, al-'Arabī, Aisha A. Bewley, and Laleh Bakhtiar. Ibn Al-'Arabī on the "Mysteries of Bearing Witness to the Oneness of God and Messengership of Muhammad": From the *Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyya (Meccan Revelations)*. S.I.: Great Books of the Islamic World, Inc, 2010, p. 143.

<sup>41</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 600.

<sup>42</sup> Unal. *General Principles in the Risale-I Nur Collection for a True Understanding of Islam*, p. 199.

<sup>43</sup> Nursi. *The Reasonings*, pp. 124-125.



Nursi's provides evidence for the special and unique role of the Prophet, with the position that whatever he asserted was confirmed by all of the prophets based on their miracles, and by all saints based on their good or marvellous works.<sup>44</sup> Each prophet is associated with an individual type of miracle; for example Jesus with a healer, Moses and his miraculous staff and the truth of Joseph's dreams as well as his correct interpretation of them. Prophet Muḥammad's miracles though, consist of all other types of miracles, as he also healed and his dreams came true.<sup>45</sup> Nursi questions the impossibility of objecting to such a strong affirmation whose statements were corroborated by the illustrious shining "suns", namely the prophets of the past, and the starts or saints of humanity in the future. Despite their differing temperaments they agree with all of his affirmations and say in unison: "You declare and speak the truth."<sup>46</sup> Nursi's emphatic reiteration of the truthfulness and veracity of the prophet is also deployed to prove the objections regarding the Prophet's legitimacy.

Nursi's assertion that Prophet Muḥammad holds a particular and special role amongst all the prophets is affirmed by his statement that,

Just as the Prophet's mission of Messengership caused the creation of this world for trial and worship, so the prayer he makes as a requirement and dimension of his servanthood would cause the construction of the other world for reward and punishment.<sup>47</sup>

Nursi again appeals to reason to support this point as well, with an example from the natural world. Nursi states that if the prayer of the lowliest creatures is answered in the most unexpected fashion. Thus an All Merciful One, who responds to the faintest cry of help of His most obscure creatures and responds to all petitions – would he not respond to the universal petition of the 'Pride of Existence' who stand with all the prophets behind

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<sup>44</sup> Nursi. *Al-Mathnawi an-Nuri*, p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> For a greater discussion and elaboration of his miracles see "The Nineteenth Letter" in Nursi. *The Letters*, pp. 117-237.

<sup>46</sup> Nursi. *Al-Mathnawi an-Nuri*, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 86; Nursi. *Al-Mathnawi an-Nuri*, p. 28.

him?<sup>48</sup> In this manner Nursi impresses upon his audience to accept the importance of the Prophet Muḥammad’s servanthood as the key for the creation of the after life.<sup>49</sup>

In another place, Nursi once again highlights the great effect of prayer, especially when it is universal in nature. It may even be argued that prayer is one reason for the universe’s creation. As the Creator knew before creating the Prophet that he would desire eternal happiness for humanity and all creation, and to be favoured with the Divine Names’ manifestations, we may say that God answered his future prayers by creating the universe.<sup>50</sup>

Nursi’s theological and theosophical positioning of Prophet Muḥammad in world history and amidst other prophets is unique in various respects; his approach to this topic may be summed up with his methodological choice of the concept of *shakhṣ al-ma’ nawī* or ‘collective personality’. Nursi’s utilises this term to refer to the universal aspects of the prophet’s nature as well as his mission. A summary of his understanding is found in the “Nineteenth Word”.<sup>51</sup>

In order to justify his inferences, Nursi draws upon history, reason, spiritual rapture to explain that indeed Prophet Muḥammad’s collective personality and the universal aspects of his mission distinguished him from preceding prophets and Messengers, even though he was most closest to Moses according to some. (This is by virtue of the universality of his mission – which took Moses until the time of David and Solomon to fulfil and which he

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<sup>48</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 86.

<sup>49</sup> “Just as the Prophet’s being the Messenger was the reason for establishing this realm of trial—*But for you, I would not have created the worlds* (Qur’ān, 25:77) is an indication of this—his worship was the cause for establishing the abode of happiness”. Nursi. *The Words*, p. 88.

<sup>50</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 319.

<sup>51</sup> Nursi states “as Prophet Muhammad’s person is universal in nature, as well as his mission, the earth is his mosque, Mecca his place of worship as the leader in prayer, and Medina his pulpit. He leads all believers during history, who stand behind him in rows and follow his words on the principles of happiness in both worlds. The chief of all prophets, he removes the lies and slurs levelled against them by their own people, and affirms them and the essentials of their religions, which Islam encompasses. The master of all saints and scholars, he guides and educates them via the light of his Messengership. He is the “pivot” around which turns a circle formed of the prophets, the good, the truthful, and the righteous, who agree on his Message”. Nursi. *Al-Mathnawi an-Nuri*, p. 20.

achieved in 23 years). Nursi argues that proof of the Prophet's ability and excellence lay in changing the crude and rude Arabs of the 7<sup>th</sup> century into the 'leaders of humanity', who had such customs and superstition to bury their own daughters, but later were humbled and moved to tears by stepping on an ant.<sup>52</sup> Nursi claims to change one bad habit such as smoking takes years of educational campaigning amongst other things, but he effected such changes with his book the Qur'ān and due to the truthfulness of his character and his representation of nobility that with one command, many habits were changed over night.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, it is by virtue of the exaltedness of his refined character, the veracity of his message proved by the evidentiary miracles, and the completion and perfection of the final revelation that the Qur'ān that made him the world's most influential person in human history according to Michael Hart, who justifies his choice due to his astute role as statesman and religious prophet and leader.<sup>54</sup> It is thus due to such rationalists arguments that Nursi supports his theosophical premises that the Prophet together with the universe and the Qur'ān, is one of the key universal 'books' which makes the Creator and Lord of the universe known to conscious beings. Moreover, even though all the other prophets were sent to a particular people for a limited time, Prophet Muḥammad was sent to the whole of humankind and jinn,<sup>55</sup> and whilst all the Books and messages of all the previous prophets, which were particular to a specific people for a limited time, were corrupted during history, the Book—the Qur'ān—which Prophet Muḥammad brought from God and his *Sunnah*, the two unique sources of his Message, have been preserved, intact. Moreover the Qur'ān contains, together with all the truths in the previous Scriptures, the eternal principles of true

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<sup>52</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 249.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 250.

<sup>54</sup> See Hart, Michael H. *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*. Secaucus, N.J: Carol Pub. Group, 1992. This judgement is also supported by others like Alfonse Lamartine who said of Muḥammad: "If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad?" see Lamartine, Alphonse. *Histoire De La Turquie*. Paris: Lecou, 1855.

<sup>55</sup> Qur'ān, 21:107.

thinking, sound belief and morality, and a happy individual and social life.<sup>56</sup> Nursi thus affirms his initial premise that Prophet Muḥammad is as a result of these evidences the leader of all the prophets and the affirmer of their miracles, books and message of oneness of God (*tawḥīd*).<sup>57</sup>

Lastly, one of Nursi's key arguments is his emphasis upon his nature that was perfectly balanced, his obedience to Divine order as well as his biography,<sup>58</sup> which he claims clearly demonstrate that he was always balanced and straightforward in all his actions and states. He continuously avoided going to all sorts of extremes.<sup>59</sup> Nursi affirms his point through three examples; balance in intellect which he said acted always with wisdom which he claims is the point of balance, he was neither a sophist nor prone to stupidity. In terms of his faculty of anger, he was completely removed from cowardice and rage, which are the extreme points of this power, and lastly with the power of passion, he was purified of frigidity and dissipation, which are the extremes of this power; he always followed chastity. In short, in all aspects of his *Sunnah*, his natural states and everyday practices, including his speech, eating, and drinking, and in all the ordinances of Shari'a, he always chose the balanced way and avoided all kinds of extremes and wastefulness, which entail wrongdoing and cause "darkness."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>See "The Twenty Fifth Word," in Nursi. *The Words*, p. 388.

<sup>57</sup> "Look at that most illustrious person from the viewpoint of his mission: He is the proof and lamp of the truth, the Sun of guidance, and the means of happiness. Look at him from the viewpoint of his person: He is the epitome of the All-Merciful's love of His creatures, the embodiment of the Lord's mercy upon them, the honour of humanity, and the most radiant and illustrious fruit of the Tree of Creation. Now look at him and see how the light of Islam has reached the east and the west with the speed of lightning, how one-fourth of humanity has accepted the gift of his guidance wholeheartedly." Nursi. *The Words*, p. 125.

<sup>58</sup> Qur'ān, 11:112.

<sup>59</sup> Nursi. *The Gleams*, p. 78.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

### 5.1.3 The significance of the dichotomy between the Muḥammadan<sup>61</sup> essence vs. Muḥammad the man (his human aspects)

It may be espoused that the *Risale-i Nur* is a commentary of the 99 names and attributes of God, or the 1001 names and attributes listed in the *Al-Jawshan al-Kabīr*, which shows the significance of God in his worldview theology and the significance of the Prophet for Nursi –prophets were the best ‘mirrors’ of these names and attributes, and Prophet Muḥammad the perfect mirror of all of them.<sup>62</sup> Evidently, the themes of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad are key and quite central in Nursi’s writings and thought, and therefore deserve an in depth analysis.<sup>63</sup> Thus, within his theological theory and framework, prophethood is central in exploring not only the truths of the Qur’ān (Nursi’s main objective) but also to providing a better understanding of God’s attributes, without which the inclusion of prophethood would be deficient in comprehending the totality of His names and attributes.

At the heart of Nursi’s prophetology is the issue of the exalted role and function of prophethood and the Prophet Muḥammad as opposed to the human aspects of his life in history. However, Nursi still upholds the importance of the human aspects of the Prophet as he was sent as a ‘role model’ and ‘guide’ to human beings, as follows:

For God Almighty sent him in the form of a human being so that he might be a guide and leader to human beings in their social affairs, and in the acts and deeds by means of which they attain happiness in both worlds; and so that he might disclose to human beings the wonders of Divine art and His dispositive power that underlie all occurrences and are in appearance customary, but in reality are miracles of Divine power...<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> This term should not be misunderstood to bear the same meaning as used by the Orientalists or European writers. Moreover, Nursi use of the term does not correlate to the Christian understanding in Christology as used in the history. In the Islamic tradition this term has been referred to or understood to indicate the spiritual truths of the Prophet’s *Sunnah*, which would be consistent with Nursi’s use and expression as well.

<sup>62</sup> Turner. *The Qur’an*, p. 33.

<sup>63</sup> In the *Words*, Nursi states the three key factors of creation: the universe (physical creation), the prescribed book (revelation/Qur’ān) and the human being (prophets as most perfect humans ‘*Insan e kamil*’) see Nursi. *The Words*, p. 247.

<sup>64</sup> “For, in accordance with the purpose of the examinations and trials that man is to undergo, the way must be shown to him without depriving him of his free will: the door of the intelligence must remain open, and its

Khalil maintains that ‘although some qualities and aspects of the ‘Most Noble Messenger’, have been described in books of history and biography, most of those qualities relate to his humanity’.<sup>65</sup> The spiritual personality and the sacred nature of the Prophet are not covered adequately. Thus, Nursi is more interested in the universal aspect of prophethood and the Prophet Muḥammad. It is this ‘universal manifestation’ of his prophethood in ‘meaning’ and ‘essence’ that emanates from his Messengership. Nursi’s emphasis on the universal aspects of the Prophet Muḥammad is reflective of his awareness of the globalisation and the formation of a global culture and global consciousness. Arguably, Nursi was enlightened in his approach and consequently his focus on presenting ‘muslim’ in lowercase lend to his understanding the universality of ‘islam’ and prophethood in comparison to other scholars.<sup>66</sup> It is through this lens that Nursi puts forth his prophethology.

In order not to proceed in error, one should raise his head beyond the ordinary qualities of the Prophet (PBUH) that pertain to his participation in the human state, and behold instead his true nature and luminous stature that pertain to the rank of messenger-ship. Otherwise, one will either show him irreverence, or instil doubts in oneself.<sup>67</sup>

By emphasising the ‘luminous stature’ of the Prophet Nursi was again addressing another emerging criticism – an over emphasis on the historical personality of the Prophet (there was a similar trend in Christian studies as well, where the ‘Historical Jesus’ became the hot

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freedom must not be snatched from its hand. But if miracles had occurred in so apparent a way, intelligence would have had no choice...”, Nursi, *Letters*, p. 122.

<sup>65</sup> Khalil. *God’s Messenger (pbuh) in the Risale-i Nur*, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> In the “Ninth Letter”, Nursi admits that Islam and *īmān* or (belief and conviction) are both vital as one is not acceptable without the other, nevertheless, he differentiates them as follows: “Islam, or being a muslim, means siding with, submitting to, and obeying the truth. *īmān*, or being a believer (*mu’min*), means confirming and confessing the truth of Islam” he then elucidates that there are those who ‘strongly advocate Qur’ān’s commandments, thus may be called a muslim in the literalist meaning of the word, and believers who reject or do not accept the Qur’ānic injunctions but are still believers *mu’mins*. In this subtle differentiation, Nursi has in fact addressed some key social and legal issues of the Muslim societies. See Said Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 53.

<sup>67</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 127-128.

topic of the 1960 and 1970s).<sup>68</sup> Although, as mentioned, Nursi recognises the human domain and reality of the Prophet, he nevertheless purposefully concentrates on the universality and exaltedness that formulate his prophethood. In many places Nursi refers to the Prophet as ‘the pride of humanity’,<sup>69</sup> ‘pride of creation’,<sup>70</sup> ‘seal of all prophets’,<sup>71</sup> ‘chief of all the prophets’, ‘lord of all the saints’, ‘glory of the cosmos’,<sup>72</sup> and similar. Emphasis is placed on the universal aspects of the Prophet, due to Nursi’s overall *mubuwwa* philosophy that seeks to consider the essential nature and inner meanings of all theological concepts. In doing so, he extends the understanding and meaning of prophethood and the Prophet to higher and exalted stations, as aims and targets of perfection for humanity to achieve.

Nursi’s *harfî* method of extracting meaning is in line with the *taṣawwuf* or the mystical tradition, which he is also reviving and upholding. He argues that ‘faith is required to see the ‘Muḥammadan reality’. Nursi attributes ‘universal/collective personality’ (*shakṣ al-ma‘nawî*) to Prophet Muḥammad. In one aspect he upholds ‘ferently’ the person of the Prophet, yet his is a radical shift that infers ‘greater meaning’ to be read in what ‘he’ represents as an archetype model of perfection. Nursi uses ‘*aql*’ to describe *naql*; in an analogy of the sun he outlines the ‘necessity’ of Prophet Muḥammad’s prophethood to the universe, therefore arguing for the possibility of and the logical occurrence of Muḥammad’s light pre-existing creation.

A critic of this notion is Danny Clarke – who assumes as ‘superlative’ language in scripture found in both Biblical passages of the Bible as well as Nursi’s exegetical works. Despite this and other such criticisms, Nursi has pushed this mystical depiction of the

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<sup>68</sup> See Kähler, Martin. *The so-called historical Jesus and the historic, Biblical Christ*. Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1964. Robinson, James McConkey. *A New quest of the historical Jesus*. Scholars Press, 1979.

<sup>69</sup> Nursi, Said, *The Reasonings*, p. 127.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, pp. 55-56.

<sup>71</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 243.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Prophet extending the literary excerpts of Prophet Muḥammad by Ibn ‘Arabī and Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī. Nursi like others in the ‘*tajdīdī*’ tradition such as al- al-Ghazālī, and Aḥmad Sirhindī, has also resorted to the esoteric allusions of the Prophet that in this paradigm is part and parcel of the belief and prophetology.

## 5.2 The depiction by Nursi and Iqbal of Prophet Muḥammad as *insān-i kāmil*

While there have been a significant number of studies of Iqbal’s notion of ‘Perfect Man’ or *insān-i kāmil*, these are mostly limited to comparative studies with Ibn ‘Arabī,<sup>73</sup> Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī,<sup>74</sup> and even Nietzsche.<sup>75</sup> These lack a thorough study of the term in relation to the Prophet Muḥammad. Iqbal’s other co-concept ‘*mard-e mu‘min*’ as well as ‘*insān-i kāmil*’ have been discussed largely in relation to his concept of the ‘Self’ or ‘ego’ or ‘*khudhi*’.<sup>76</sup> These terms are connected to Iqbal’s other philosophical understandings such as the evolutionary process of creation, the cosmological and philosophical understandings of human nature in relation to the Divine, free will.<sup>77</sup> Of direct concern to the core subject matter of prophetology is Iqbal’s outlook and his necessary link of his ‘Perfect Man’ in light of Prophet Muḥammad. In fact William Chittick’s definition of *insān-i kāmil* in Ibn ‘Arabī’s works is almost exactly synonymous to both Iqbal and Nursi:

Muhammad in his own person achieved all the human perfection possessed by all previous prophets, while the revelation he received the Qur’an gathers together all prophetic knowledge in a single synthetic whole, while at the same time clearly differentiating these sciences from each other.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See Arnel, Iskandar. *The Concept of the Perfect Man in the Thought of Ibn ‘Arabi and Muhammad Iqbal: a Comparative Study*. 1999. Zwanzig, Rebekah. “An analysis of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s *al-Insan al-Kamil*, the Perfect Individual, with a brief comparison to the thought of Sir Muhammad Iqbal.” (2008).

<sup>74</sup> Erkan Turkmen, “Perfect Man in the Eyes of Rumi and Muhammad Iqbal”, *Iqbal Studies*, Oct, 1999, Vol 40, 3.

<sup>75</sup> See Kashyap, Subhash. “Sir Muhammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche.” *Islamic Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1955): 175-81. See also Schimmel. *Gabriel’s Wing*, 1987.

<sup>76</sup> This concept is discussed by other scholars as well, It is used concurrently with *insane kamil* see Erkan Turkmen, “Perfect Man in the Eyes of Rumi and Muhammad Iqbal”, *Iqbal Studies*, Oct, 1999, Vol 40, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> These are not the key concern of this thesis, thus interested readers may refer to the footnotes for further reading on these.

<sup>78</sup> Chittick, William C. “Perfect Man according to Ibn Al-‘Arabi.” *Encyclopedic Survey of Islamic Culture* 13 (1997): p. 86.



By considering Iqbal's collection of essays in the *Reconstruction* and his poetry, we see that in fact, alongside all his other philosophical thought in relation to '*khudhi*' or selfhood or 'ego', Iqbal's thought of 'Perfect Man' and the 'Perfected Self' is definitely referring to Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>79</sup> For Iqbal Prophet Muḥammad represents all the aims and goals that the Divine seeks from His creation. 'He is the tablet and he is the pen'. Iqbal maintains himself that his idea of the 'Perfect Man' is Islamic and not Nietzschean,<sup>80</sup> yet as Schimmel maintains Nietzsche's 'Superman', may still have acted as a 'foment in the formation of Iqbal's ideals'.<sup>81</sup> Schimmel also notes the possibility of the Vedantic and Hindu influences of '*atman*' or spirit upon Iqbal's ego-concept.<sup>82</sup>

Moreover in imitation of Manṣūr Ḥallāj's *Kitāb Ṭawāsīn*<sup>83</sup> Iqbal constructs his prophetology in the *Javid Nama*. His discussions on the meaning of '*abduhu*' ("His Slave") is no doubt inspired by the '*Tasin of al-Faḥm*' in the quoted work of Hallāj whereby he praises the high qualities of the Prophet, alluding to his ascension where Prophet Muḥammad is the Being whose light was conceived before things existed.<sup>84</sup>

Thus in the spirit of the 'love intoxicated' Hallāj, whom Iqbal refers to in his early and later works including the *Javid Nama*, his adoption of the '*tasins*' to purport his own prophetology of 'Buddha, Jesus and Muḥammad', may also be influenced by the mystics very own *Tasin al-Sirāj*, whereby the Prophet is venerated as the 'first light'. In fact previous mystics and poets of Islam, including Hallāj, may very easily consider Iqbal's works an extension of the '*haqīqat Muḥammadi*' or the 'reality of Muḥammad' as espoused. Despite the critical mention of Ibn 'Arabī in the latter works of Iqbal, his theosophical concepts about the Prophet, such as '*haqīqat-e Muḥammadi*' as well as the

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<sup>79</sup> Abdul, Khaliq. 'Iqbal Concept of the Perfect Man', *Iqbal Studies*, 1984, Vol. 25, 1.

<sup>80</sup> For an elaboration of this see Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, 1989.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 334.

<sup>83</sup> See Schimmel. *Gabriel's Wing*, for a broader discussion of the metaphysical and mystical influences both East and West upon Iqbal's thought and works.

<sup>84</sup> Iqbal. *Javid Nama*, p. 301, stanza: 2301.

‘*Muḥammadan nur*’ or the ‘Muḥammadan Light’ are also repeated in Iqbal’s works dedicated to Prophet Muḥammad.

Similarly, Nursi coerces mystic thoughts on Prophet Muḥammad as an intricate part of his prophetology alongside the theological expositions, as he never engages in one discourse predominantly. The themes of ‘*ḥaqīqat-e Muḥammadi*’ and ‘*Muḥammadan nur*’ are intertwined in the passages of his *Risale-i Nur*. He suggests in a similar way to Hallāj that ‘he was the seed as well as the fruit’, in the treatise of ascension of his “Thirty First Word”. He describes the reality of Muḥammad’s ascension and displays his greatest expansion on the notion of the ‘Perfect Man’ or ‘*insān-i kāmil*’. For Nursi, the ‘Perfect Man’ is synonymous to Prophet Muḥammad being the prototype of perfection amidst all humans, believers, saints, and prophets. In Iqbal’s connection of ‘*insān-i kāmil*’ to ‘*mu’min*’ in his poetry affirm his essential beliefs about Prophet Muḥammad and God. His relating ‘*insān-i kāmil*’ to the perfected Self or his ego concept of ‘*khudhi*’, arguably makes Iqbal synonymous to the mystical tradition of Sufism. In Sufism ‘Divine love permeates and embraces the Self’. This is not to be confused with the notion of ‘Oneness of Being’ or *wahdat al-wujūd*, which he spoke so vehemently against. Thus Iqbal’s depiction of the Prophet as the ‘Perfect Self’ has continuity with his mystical predecessors. It is due to the ‘beauty in self and good deed’ or prophetic action, as Schimmel puts it, that Iqbal envisages rediscovery of the Muslim community or *umma* being a greater theme and goal of Iqbal’s ‘reform theosophy’ through his works.

Nursi’s contribution on the other hand is mainly in his new *kalāmic* outlook and language, which elaborates on the Ghazalian grounds, (*Ihyā* tradition) the Prophet depicted as the ‘Perfect mirror’ to the ‘Perfect Being’. Nursi’s explanation of the ‘reality’, ‘truth’ and ‘wisdom of the ascension’ is a great commentary on the ‘prophetic *mi’rāj*’ as discussed in the next section, but also a great compendium of the ‘perfected qualities’ and attributes

specific to Prophet Muḥammad, hence he was the ‘Seal’ elected for a ‘Divine Favour’ or *lutf*. Nursi explains the *mi‘rāj* to be an evidence of the perfect saintly attributes of the Prophet of Islam and his return being the first stage of Messengership.<sup>85</sup> In the “Thirty First Word”, Nursi enumerates the various aspects of his ‘perfection’ or *kamiliyat* as shown through the event of the *al-isra’ wa’l mi‘rāj*.<sup>86</sup> Nursi reiterates the theme of the Prophet Muḥammad as the ‘seed’ as well as the final ‘seal’ and fruit of the universe. But also as the ‘seal’ and ‘most elect’ of the prophets, his sainthood was also the ‘greatest sainthood’.<sup>87</sup> Nursi argues that the title ‘Aḥmad’, name of the Prophet, reflects his ‘saintly side, which is epitomised by the event of the *mi‘rāj*, a Divine Bestowal to the ‘chosen servant’, or ‘His Servant’ or *abduhu*’.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, he argues that the ascension shows the universality of the prophet’s sainthood, as the experience although individual and particular, opened up the doors for future saints in his example to reach their own *mi‘rāj* and attain the ‘Divine Presence’ through the gift of the five daily prayers. Nursi demonstrates the superiority of the prophet’s sainthood in his ascent and his return being the first degree of Messengership due to finality. By showing the *risāla* even in the Prophet’s *wilāyā* Nursi is emphasising his unique role as the seal of prophets. It should be noted that like other scholars Nursi describes prophethood as having a distinct characteristic and nature to sainthood as revelation - *wahy* comes to them directly. In this way, Nursi has articulated his prophetology creatively and deliberately to show that God’s names were all manifested completely on Prophet Muḥammad as a reflection of his ‘personal perfections’ (that encompasses all human perfections). His journey through the spheres depicted his unveiling of the creation’s ‘enigmatic meaning’.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 580.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 591.

<sup>87</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 579.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 578.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

Thus, through the event of the *al-isra' wa'l mi'rāj*, Nursi demonstrates the '*insān-i kāmīl*' or the 'Perfect Human' aspect in his prophetology. The significance of this finding to Islamic theology is evident, due to the resolution of this notion of depicting and affirming the 'universal' and 'saintly' aspects of the Prophet (ignored largely by other modernists, except for Iqbal) thereby combining both branches of prophetologies discussed previously, namely the summary and re-expression of the *kalāmīc* theology (Islamic sciences) as well as the esoteric and exoteric inner and mystical aspects of prophethood and the Prophet. In doing so Nursi has in fact developed the '*tajdīdī*' revivalist tradition of *Ihyā* that had initially started this 'ground breaking' synthesis of the two branches.<sup>90</sup> Nursi has in many ways sought a 'completion of this project', as evidenced in the creative formation of the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad in his *Risale-i Nur*.<sup>91</sup> He incorporates the human perfections and explores the 'historical Muḥammad' as well as the direct aspects of his prophecy in *kalām* such as the 'seal of prophets'. Arising from a 'well grounded' theosophical explanation, he elaborates the 'Perfect Selfhood' and personal attributes of the Prophet Muḥammad by directly linking him as not only the '*insān-i kāmīl*' but also the 'light' (*Muḥammadan nur*) and the 'truth' (*haqīqat-e Muḥammādī*) that emanates from him being the 'perfect mirror' and manifestation to the 'fullest degree' of the Divine Titles and Names.<sup>92</sup> Thus, Nursi is reiterating and re-establishing the significant place of Prophet Muḥammad in the *kalīma* as only second to the God-head Allah.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Many scholars like Imam Abu Zayd al-Dabusi (d. 1039) have discussed that behind the various legal schools or *madhaahib* of the four *madhabs* there is a light directly connecting them to God or a light from the Qur'ān. Fethullah Gülen says the *Sunnah* of the Prophet is too big for any one *madhab* to capture it. Similarly, like the *madhabs* – the different orientations of Islam like Sufism, *fiqh* – they all represent a particular aspect of the Prophet. Nursi came at a time where the connection between the community-*umma* and all of these traditions were being cut; he therefore combined all these different aspects of the Prophet in *Risale-i Nur*. See Abū, Zayd-D. A. A. U, Amīr K. A. U. Itqānī, Muḥammad-H. Arsābandī, and 'Abd-J. 'Aṭā. *Taqwīm Uṣūl Al-Fiqh Wa-Taḥdīd Adillat Al-Shar'*. Dimashq: Dār al-Nu'mān lil-'Ulūm, 2005, and Abu Raīḥon Berunī. *The Treasury of Oriental Manuscripts*, Taskent, Nomidagi Sharqshunoslik Institute, 1990.

<sup>91</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 245-256.

<sup>92</sup> Nursi. *Al-Mathnawi an-Nuri*, p. 28.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. The *kalīma* refers to the creedal statement in the Islamic tradition. It is the assertion and belief in the utterance and meaning of 'There is no god but God and Prophet Muḥammad is the Messenger of God'.

### 5.3 *Mi'rāj*: Ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad

The Prophet's ascension or *mi'rāj* was a major part of the *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* (Proofs of prophethood) in the Middle Ages and later on very prominent in the literary and artistic depictions of the *mi'rājnama* or 'ascension treatises'.<sup>94</sup> These reinforced not only the 'supreme miracle' of the Prophet Muḥammad but also highlighted his unprecedented prophetic experience of having an audience with God, making his prophethood special and unique. The *mi'rāj* in this way became a subject of fascination and also ridicule in the Middle Ages. The rationalisation of miracles in general and particularly the event of the *mi'rāj* were challenged in the centuries of Nursi and Iqbal. Despite their particular way of addressing the concerns of their time, both scholars included the *mi'rāj* as a dominant theme of their prophetologies, particularly, in relation to non-rational mystical aspects of it.<sup>95</sup>

Both Nursi and Iqbal give prominence to the *mi'rāj*. Nursi, on the one hand, focuses on the theological aspects connected with the personal aspects of the Prophet's prophethood and sainthood. Iqbal, on the other hand, addresses the historical, cultural and social ramifications of the event on the Muslim mind and thought. He has elaborated in his *Javid Nama*, in imitation of not only Dante, but other medieval scholars of the *mi'rājnama*, in

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<sup>94</sup> *Mi'rājnama* refers to the title of the books and treatise centered on the theme and story of the Prophet Muḥammad night journey and ascension. After their first appearances in the centuries immediately after the Prophet's death, Ibn Abbas' account of the event has been one of the earliest sources. Later sources differed in their content due to their artistic and literary depictions. These became popular during the Timurid dynasty. Scholars also started to write their own *mi'rājnama* not only an account of the prophetic ascent but intertwined their own mystical and spiritual experiences as well. See, Gruber, Christiane J. "The Timurid Book of Ascension: A Study of Text and Image in a Pan-Asian Context." (2008), and Christiane Jacqueline Gruber. "The Prophet Muhammad's ascension (*mi'raj*) in Islamic art and literature, ca. 1300—1600" (January 1, 2005). *Dissertations available from ProQuest*. Paper AAI3179741. These were made popular in the Turkic Sultanates of the 13th-15th centuries with earlier and later versions as well. See, Gruber, Christiane J. "The Timurid Book of Ascension: A Study of Text and Image in a Pan-Asian Context." (2008).

<sup>95</sup> An example of the continuation of the 'ridicule' of the Prophet Muhammad's *mi'raj* is Richard Dawkins' statement in a televised interview on Al Jazeera, in attempt to ridicule a British Muslim journalist for believing in the *mi'raj*. <http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2012/12/god-best-answer-why-there-something-rather-nothing> Accessed 11.03.15.

hope of using the symbolisms of this epic prophetic story to communicate his vision of greater possibilities for the Muslim community.

Nursi's engagement with *mi'rāj* is primarily to address the theological doubts of this significant Prophetic event. He emphasises the reason, purpose and wisdom of the ascension bringing to culmination not only *kalām*, but also *taṣawwuf*, and mystical literature in order to show the conjunction of the 'prophetic' as well as the 'sainthood' aspects of Prophet Muḥammad's *nubuwwa*. Iqbal's engagement with *mi'rāj* aims to detail the sociological outcome of the event in Muslim world history and in doing so through the *Javid Nama* and other poems re-ignites a new creative force or direction for the *umma*. He predominantly relies on the mystical and literary genres of the *mi'rājnama* and its European counterparts like the *Divine Comedy*, in order to infuse his philosophical outlook of '*khudhi*' or selfhood to motivate the Muslim Indians and others to go beyond the Pleiades as their Prophet did.

Nursi's views about the necessity, reality, wisdom and fruits of the *mi'rāj* are covered in the "Thirty First Word"; they pertain to his profound outlook of the Prophet as '*insān-i kāmil*', and have been discussed in the above section. However, his discussions of the ascension are also found in other parts of the *Risale-i Nur*. Nursi vividly describes the *mi'rāj* as the Prophet's 'supreme miracle' due to his spiritual journeying in the metaphysical and spiritual realm.

Pre-eternal power, which does not leave ants without a prince or bees without a queen, certainly does not leave mankind without prophets. As the Splitting of the Moon was a miracle of Muhammad (UWBP) for men in the Manifest World, so his Ascension was a supreme miracle before the angels and spirit beings in the World of the Inner Dimensions of Things. Through this clear wonder, the sainthood of his prophethood was proved, and like lightning or the moon, that shining Being scattered light through those inner worlds.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 530.

Nursi elaborates the sainthood (*wilāyā*) aspect of the Prophet’s messengership (*risāla*) in the “Thirty-First Word” as well as how the ascension is directly related to the Prophet’s mission, thus confirming that the ascension marks the Prophet’s sainthood and has opened this door of ‘ascent’ to other potentials.<sup>97</sup> He elucidates the significance and truth of the ascension by addressing four key questions that consider four key aspects of the event: Why was the Ascension necessary? What was the reality of the Ascension? What was the wisdom and purpose of the Ascension? And what are the fruits and benefits of the Ascension?<sup>98</sup> As Imaduddin Khalil and Shumaila Majeed have discussed, Nursi’s address of these four key aspects of the ascension reflected his meticulous method of looking at a subject through various angles and lenses to reiterate a point and to bring to light the certitude in meaning of what he is trying to convey.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, his style addresses ‘realities’ and ‘wisdoms’ as well as ‘fruits’ and ‘spiritual benefits’ of the ascension. In his explanation of the necessary-ness of the ascension, Nursi shows that the ascension is a depiction of the ‘universality’ and ‘supremacy’ of the Prophet’s sainthood in comparison to other saints in the using the ‘sun analogy’.<sup>100</sup>

In this analogous story Nursi has achieved two results: firstly, to show the difference between the ‘degrees of sainthood’ as depicted in the first man and the ‘degrees of prophethood’ as depicted by the second man; secondly, through the notion of Divine proximity or ‘*aqrabiya*’ and ‘*qurbiya*’ he has affirmed the ‘role of prophethood’ in relation

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<sup>97</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 577.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, pp. 579-603.

<sup>99</sup> See Imaduddin Khalil. “God’s Messenger (pbuh) in The Risale-I Nur,” in *Third International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi the Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, (Istanbul: Sozler, 1995), and Majeed, Shumaila, and Amjad Waheed. “The Miracle of Prophet Muhammad’s (Peace be upon him) Ascension: A Comparative study of the views of Said Nursi and Allama Iqbal.” In *International Bediuzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)*. 2013.

<sup>100</sup> “A man holds up the mirror he is holding to the sun. According to its capacity, the mirror receives light. If he directs the luminous mirror towards his dark house or his tiny, private garden, which is covered by a roof, he cannot benefit in relation to the sun’s value, but only in accordance with the capacity of the mirror. A second man, however, puts down the mirror, faces the sun directly, and sees its majesty and understands its grandeur. Then he climbs a very high mountain, sees the brilliance of the sun’s broad dominion and converses with it in person and without veil. Then he returns and makes large window in his house and in the roof over his garden, and opens up ways to the sun in the sky, and speaks and converses with the constant light of the actual sun”. Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 579-580.

to the Divine as being superior to that of the spiritual perfection and journeying of the saint. Thus, he has successfully substantiated that ‘sainthood proceeds through shadow’, ‘while in messengership there is no shadow, it looks directly to the oneness of the All-Glorious One’.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, just as the ascension was a manifestation of his sainthood, the Prophet’s return to humanity marks the *risala* or messengership.

As for the Ascension, since it was the greatest wonder of Muhammad’s sainthood and also its highest degree, it was transformed into the degree of messengership. The inner face of the Ascension was sainthood; it went from creation to Creator. While its apparent face was messengership, it came from Creator to creation.<sup>102</sup>

In this way Nursi explains the ‘reality of the ascension’ as ‘consisting of the journeying of the person of Muḥammad through the degrees of perfection, by showing that special servant all the works, spheres and levels of Almighty Allah’s dominicality’.<sup>103</sup> This is like a sort of conferment of the highest perfections bestowed upon the best of creation ‘humanity’ and the ‘chosen amongst humanity the prophets’ and the ‘seal of all prophets’. Nursi argues that God’s various names and titles were manifested completely upon the Prophet Muḥammad, to show the Lordships’ works to his ‘special servant’ or ‘*abduhu*’.<sup>104</sup> The elaboration of the word ‘*abduhu*’ here is important because the verse that mentions the *isra*’ or night journey at Qur’ān 17:1 also uses this same adjective to refer to the Prophet.<sup>105</sup>

In relation to the purpose and wisdom of the ascension, Nursi explains the incomprehensibility of the ascension by the human intellect due to it being so exalted; he

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<sup>101</sup> Sainthood is spiritual journeying in the levels close to God; it needs a certain amount of time and many degrees must be traversed. While messengership, whose light is greatest, looks to the mystery of uncovering Divine immediacy, for which the passing instant is sufficient. Ibid, pp. 580-581.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 588.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, pp. 582, 584, 593.

<sup>105</sup> The exact verse reads, “Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing”.



suggests though that certain indications enable it to be known.<sup>106</sup> One such indication of the ascension is when the Prophet transpired from the realm of ‘multiplicity’ to the realm of ‘unity’. Due to the ‘light of unity’ or ‘*nūr al-wahdat*’, he witnessed the realm of the ‘manifestation of Oneness’ or ‘*tajallī aḥad*’.<sup>107</sup> Nursi’s describes the purpose and wisdom of the ascension in relation to the Creator and purpose of existence in the following two passages.

The Creator of the universe chose an eminent individual to represent all creatures, and took him by means of an Ascension that was like a link from the furthest levels of multiplicity to the source of unity.<sup>108</sup>

Thus, the wisdom of the All-Glorious One of Beauty, Who opens the palace of the world as though it was an exhibition in order to see and display His own transcendent beauty and perfections, requires that He should inform someone of the meaning of the palace’s signs so that they do not remain vain and without benefit for conscious beings on the earth.<sup>109</sup>

Nursi confirms the wisdoms of the ascension by enumeration various ‘fruits’ or gifts resulting from the return of the Prophet in his vocation of messengership (*risāla*). The five fruits include firstly, that the Prophet had ‘vision of the ‘truths’ from which the pillars of belief originate seeing the angels, paradise, hereafter, as well as the ‘Majestic Being’, and that the elevated status of humanity is shown as the ‘fairest composition’ and ‘creation’s best pattern’. Secondly, he argues that the ascension brought Islam’s essentials like the five daily prayers to humanity and jinn as well as other gifts. Through the ascension humans learnt what pleased God, and also satisfied human curiosity of the ultimate destination. Thirdly, that the Prophet saw the ‘hidden treasury’, the ‘eternal happiness – paradise’ with absolute certainty. Fourthly, the Prophet was specially honored with the vision of God’s beautiful ‘countenance’ and others could also be honored.<sup>110</sup> Fifthly, that each person has

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<sup>106</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 590-591.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 591.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 593.

<sup>110</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 582.

potential to also ascent and be a ‘valued fruit’ or ‘darling beloved’ of the Creator, if they also adhere to the blueprint left by Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>111</sup>

Nursi states in the “Thirty-First Word” that God “would make Muḥammad’s blessed body accompany his spirit in ascending to the lote-tree of the furthest limit, the “trunk” of the Garden of Abode”.<sup>112</sup> Moreover his stance regarding the real physical occurrence of the ascension is also reiterated in the “Nineteenth Letter”, wherein he recalls the ‘miracle’ of the Prophet’s own explanation of his journey to Jerusalem to his opponents, who challenged his one night journey.<sup>113</sup> He briefly relates the incident as recorded in the Muslim, Tirmidhi, Bukhārī and Ibn Hanbāl.<sup>114</sup> This shows Nursi emphasis of the incident as well as his confirmation of the mainstream view that the event of the *al-isra’ wa’l mi’rāj* was a real and physical event.

The extent and reality of this ‘physical journey’ through the vast sphere of contingency in a small fraction of time is furthered by Nursi’s explanation of the Prophet’s ‘traversing the entire sphere of contingency like lightning’.<sup>115</sup> Gülen alludes that Nursi is one the first scholars to have said that the Prophet on his journey of ascension reached a point between

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 586.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, pp. 588-589.

<sup>113</sup> Nursi elaborates in the “Nineteenth Letter” that “When God’s Messenger informed the Quraysh of this event, they refused to believe him, saying: “If you actually traveled to the Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem, as you claim, describe its doors and walls.” God’s Messenger would later say: “I was annoyed by their question and denial in a way that had never happened to me before. Suddenly, God lifted the veil between me and Bayt al-Maqdis (Masjid al-Aqsa) and showed it to me. I looked at it and described it as it stood before my eyes.” Thus the Quraysh realized that God’s Messenger was giving the correct and complete description”, p. 201.

<sup>114</sup> Muslim, 1:156-57; Tirmidhi, No. 3133; Bukhari, 5:66; Ibn Hanbal, 3:378.

<sup>115</sup> Nursi elaborates in the “Thirty-First Word”, p. 590 that “since time is like an aspect or a “ribbon” of motion, a rule that is in force in motion is also in force in time. While we would see the same amount of things during an hour as the one mounted on the hour-hand, which moves in the smallest circle at the slowest speed, God’s Messenger, like the one mounted on the hand showing fractions of the hour to the tenth power, gets on the mount of Divine assistance and, in the same space of time, traverses the entire Sphere of Contingency like lightning. Seeing the wonders in the inner and external dimensions of contingent existence and rising as far as the Divine realm’s limits, he is honored with Divine conversation and vision of His Beauty, receives the decree, and returns to his duty. It was possible for him to do that, and he did it”.

‘*imkan*’ or contingency and ‘*wujūd*’ or ‘the world of real existence’.<sup>116</sup> The earlier being the world where creation exists and the later the world where God’s presence or *zat* is.<sup>117</sup>

Like Nursi, Iqbal too held in significance the theme of the *al-isra*’ (the night journey) and *al-mi’rāj* (the ascension) as important aspect of his prophetology. In the *Reconstruction of Islam*, Iqbal highlights the key role of Prophet Muḥammad as essentially ‘serving and guiding’ the early Muslim community.<sup>118</sup> He learns from the miracle of ascension or *mi’rāj* of Prophet Muḥammad that “Heaven” is within the reach of mankind. According to him, return of the Prophet from highest heavens discloses the psychological difference between the prophetic and the mystic types of consciousness. In lecture five of the *Reconstruction*, Iqbal quoting Abdul Quddus Gangohi, discusses the psychological meaning of *mi’rāj* in the cultural history of Islam.

Muhammad of Arabia ascended the highest Heaven and returned. I swear by God that if I had reached that point, I should never have returned.<sup>119</sup>

The *mi’rāj* was indeed a dominant theme in Iqbal’s thought. He considered the ascension of the Prophet not merely on its own accord, but for the psychological, cultural and historical implications the concept had upon the Muslim thought, culture and history respectively. In other speeches and letters, Iqbal refers to the positive ‘psychological culture’ of Muslims and Islam by upholding this tradition. These interesting aspects of his view of the ascension are illustrated well in his address to the Fifth Indian Oriental Conference, held at Lahore in November, 1928.

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<sup>116</sup> Gülen, M. Fethullah. “*The Essentials of the Islamic Faith*”. (tr.Ali Ünal), Light Inc, 2014, pp. 164-165.

<sup>117</sup> Nursi himself places a disclaimer towards the end of this discussion stating that that “God has nothing to do with corporeality and is absolutely uncontained by time and space. So, all these examples and comparisons are aimed to make a very subtle matter understandable by human mind”. Nursi. *The Words*, p. 590.

<sup>118</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 54.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Abd al-Quddus, Gangaohi and ed. Shaikh Rukn, al-Di’n. *Lata’if-i Quddusai*. LaÇâfah 79 quoted in Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p 54. Fethullah Gülen says this is the difference between the saint and a prophet. A prophet would always think of his community even if he is in the heaven. See Chapter 7, “Two Forgotten Principles of Da’wah: Istighna and Ithar and the Hizmet Movement”, in Yücel, Salih, and İsmail Albayrak. *The Art of Coexistence: Pioneering Role of Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement*. New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2014.

Professor Bevan has given us valuable historical discussion of the story of the *mi'raj*. To my mind, however, what is, culturally speaking, more important is the intense appeal that the story has always made to the average Muslim, and the manner in which Muslim thought and imagination have worked on it. It must be something more than a mere religious dogma, for it appealed to the great mind of Dante, and, through Muhyiuddin ibn-ul-Arabi, furnished a model for the sublimest part of the Divine Comedy, which symbolizes the culture of mediaeval Europe.<sup>120</sup>

Iqbal's interest in the concept was also in relation to space and time and the physiological understanding of that possibility within the confines of his own philosophical enquiry.<sup>121</sup>

Iqbal refers to the idea of the *mi'rāj* and thereby suggests that the ascension of the Prophet to the Divine Sphere was not an impossibility.<sup>122</sup> Despite his physiological enquiry on the *mi'rāj*, Iqbal's discussion on the physical occurrence of the *mi'rāj* is inconsistent and at times does not strictly conform to the consensus of the traditional scholarly belief. One interpretation of the *mi'rāj* according to Iqbal is a change or revolution in consciousness, the 'prophetic consciousness' being totally different to the common consciousness.<sup>123</sup> In this way he reduces the understanding of the physical journey to a psychological one. According to S.M Abdullah, in Iqbal's own rendition of the *mi'rāj* in the *Javid Nama*, he does not follow the 'actual pattern of the journey' of the *isra'* and the *mi'rāj* in his poem, out of respect for the Prophet, 'whose special privilege it was to have ascended the Heavens with prophetic dignity and sublimity, as 'no other human being according to

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<sup>120</sup> Iqbal continues, "The historian may rest satisfied with the conclusion that the Muslim belief in the Prophet's Ascension finds no justification in the Quran; yet the psychologist who aims at a deeper view of Islamic culture cannot ignore the fact that the outlook given by the Quran to its followers does demand the story as a formative element in the world-picture of Islam. The truth is that it is absolutely necessary to answer all such questions, and mutually to adjust their answers into a systematic whole of thought and emotion. Without this it is impossible to discover the ruling concepts of a given culture, and to appreciate the spirit that permeates it. However, a comprehensive view of the culture of Islam, as an expression of the spiritual life of its followers, is easy of achievement". Muhammad Iqbal, "A Plea for a Deeper Study of Muslim Scientists," *Islamic Culture*, no.2 (1929): 210-229.

<sup>121</sup> See the 'Notes on *Javid Nama*' in Iqbal and Vahid. *Thoughts, Speeches and Writings of Iqbal*, p.78.

<sup>122</sup> Iqbal states that "the ascension of Mustafa has revealed to me that the heavens are within man's reach," see Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 54.

<sup>123</sup> Abdullah, Dr. S.M. "The Nature of Dante's Influence on Iqbal", *Iqbal Review*, Vol. XXIV, N.1, April 1983, pp. 25-31.

Muslims can have that honour'.<sup>124</sup> Despite S. Abdullah's assertion, Iqbal pursued his own 'ascension' or an imagined one in the *Javid Nama*.

This is consistent with Iqbal's interpretation of the ascension that signifies a higher state of 'ordinary human consciousness' and not specifically a physical one. We can deduce conclusively that for Iqbal 'lay men' other than the Prophet can also attain some sort of 'super-consciousness' as exemplified in his own *Javid Nama*. However, he also concedes that the ascension of the Prophet's is a unique experience and without counterpart, due to his particular 'prophetic consciousness' that distinguishes him from others.<sup>125</sup>

Moreover, Iqbal engages creatively in the *Javid Nama* with the notion of *mi'rāj* in Islam, by addressing the space and time possibility for man's soul to ascend. Nevertheless, due to the disparity in Iqbal's thought regarding the physical possibility of the *mi'rāj*, scholars have 'aql deduced his acceptance of bodily ascension as well as the rejection of the physical journey.<sup>126</sup> Nazier interprets Iqbal's understanding of *mi'rāj* to be a spiritual one, and suggests that Iqbal like Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī denies the physical occurrence of the *mi'rāj*. Rather he sees this as a 'symbolic' concept relating perhaps to the spiritual reality of Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>127</sup> Nazier's authority on this point is questionable as there is no evidence to suggest that Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī ever denied the bodily ascension. Thus, if he is mistaken regarding Rumi's position on *mi'rāj* he is also mistaken about Iqbal's position.

It seems though unlike Nursi, Iqbal's ideas of the *mi'rāj* were inconsistent as discussed already. It is likely that he was under greater influence of rational thought, as even though he considered and explored the possibility of the bodily *mi'rāj*. Iqbal's understanding of

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Qaiser, Nazir. *Rumi's Impact on Iqbal's Religious Thought*. Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1986.

<sup>127</sup> He argues that reality is spaceless, for Iqbal the "*mi'raj* is a spiritual transformation both far and high, proceed from the consciousness, whereas the flight – means transformation of this consciousness, brought forth by the urge and zeal, liberating us from far and high". Ibid, p. 79.

the *mi'rāj* does not seem to be as broad and he does not give it as much theological significance as Nursi does.

Iqbal believes in the ascension *mi'rāj*, and contemplates it as a proof of the fact that man can conquer the whole of the universe. In the *Bāl-ī Jibrīl* (Gabriel's Wing) he says, 'I have learnt this lesson from the ascension of Muḥammad, that heaven itself is within the range of man'.<sup>128</sup> It is therefore the accessibility of the entire cosmos to man which constitutes the greatest lesson of the prophetic ascension.<sup>129</sup> Iqbal states this in the poem *Mi'raj* (ascension) in *Zarb-e-Kaleem*:

A mote endowed with strong desire for flight  
Can reach the Sun and Moon with effort slight.

If chest of partridge fire and zeal emit,  
My friends, in fight with hawk it can acquit.

Ascension means to gauge a Muslim's heart,  
The Pleiades are the target of his dart.<sup>130</sup>

With an objective to use this great event with significance for 'Muslim history and culture', Iqbal conveys this sense of exploration and drive in the poem *Shab-e-Meeraj* (*The Night Of The Celestial Ascension*) in his book *Bang-e-Dra*:

This call of the evening star is coming from the sky  
This is the night before which the dawn prostrates

"For courage, the *Arsh-i-Barin* is only a pace away"  
The *mi'raj*'s night is saying this to the Muslim<sup>131</sup>

The theme of ascension or *mi'rāj* in Iqbal's works is beyond the discussion of the bodily or spiritual possibility of the prophetic event. Iqbal's literary masterpiece the *Javid Nama*, is

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<sup>128</sup> Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, p. 364.

<sup>129</sup> See, Majeed, Shumaila and Amjad, Waheed. "The Miracle of Prophet Muhammad's (Peace be upon him) Ascension: A Comparative study of the views of Said Nursi and Allama Iqbal." In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers* (2013), p. 7.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, also see Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, p. 529.

<sup>131</sup> Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, p. 278.

not only a literary exposition of his major philosophical outlook and thought,<sup>132</sup> but also a *mi'rājnama*,<sup>133</sup> similar in style to other comparable examples of the poet-philosopher's own mystical and spiritual experience as reflected in the verses. Jilānī assumes that the *Javid Nama* positions the poem as a mystical or spiritual journey or experience as expressed in verse including the intellectual and philosophical thought of the poet.<sup>134</sup> Jilānī notes that the poet's other works particularly his presidential address and *Reconstruction* depict his efforts to recreate Muslim thought and socio-political change, but the *Javid Nama* being the essential transformation that he proposes for a spiritual change.<sup>135</sup>

Like his predecessors who also emulated the *mi'rāj* story in their *mi'rājnamas*, Iqbal too 'tries to follow and emulate the example of his 'Master' – the Prophet, when in the celebrated *Javid Nama* he has unfolded the fascinating story of his poetic journey through the heavens, guided by his mentor 'Pir-i-Rumi'.<sup>136</sup> The *Zinda Rud* or the living stream is the poet's pseudonym as the spiritual traveller in this heavenly excursion is, also a metaphor for 'prophetic activity in Islamic mystical thought'.<sup>137</sup>

Iqbal practically discusses his own philosophical outlooks, influences in his life and times, which are indicated by the names and inferences given throughout this piece. Towards the end is a plea for the youth of the future through the 'advice' to his son 'Javid', which has the literal meaning of "eternal".

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<sup>132</sup> Annemarie Schimmel argues that the *Javid Nama* is not a personal manifesto or reflection of the poet's own mystical experience or 'ascension' as previous works of the same genre but rather his poetic 'masterpiece' that communicates his main thoughts and philosophy. Schimmel. "Muhammad Iqbal 1873-1938. The Ascension of the Poet." *Die Welt des Islams* (1954): 145-157.

<sup>133</sup> See footnote 1082 above.

<sup>134</sup> Zaman, S.M. "Iqbal's Javid Nama." *Iqbal Review*, Vol. XXV, No.1, April 1984, pp. 59-92.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

<sup>136</sup> Zaman, S.M. "Iqbal and The Fundamentals of Islam." *Iqbal Review* 36, no.3 (1995): 105-113.

<sup>137</sup> Majeed, Javed. *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetics, and Postcolonialism*, New Delhi, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009, p. 46.

### 5.3.1 The *Ayat al-Kubra* and the *Javid Nama* in the literary tradition of *mi'rājnama*

Nursi's *Ayat al-Kubra* or the 'Supreme Sign', and Iqbal's *Javid Nama*, are not just mere imitations or impersonations of the ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad. They are better contextualised in contrast to the great literary genre of *mi'rājnama*. In this section the *Javid Nama* and the *Ayat al-Kubra* will be considered in light of the *mi'rājnamas* to assess the extent of the influence of the *mi'rājnama* upon Nursi and Iqbal. The similarities and differences between the unique rendition of Nursi and Iqbal's *mi'rājnama* in the *Ayat al-Kubra* and the *Javid Nama* will also be examined.

In the *Javid Nama* the influences of other *mi'rājnamas* such as Ibn al-Nafīs (d.1288), Abdul Karim al-Jili (1365-1424) and Dante, are evident in this rhythmic poetic masterpiece of Iqbal's literary works.<sup>138</sup> After the first translation of the *Javid Nama* into Italian by Alessandro Bausani, many scholars noted the great influence of Dante's *Divine Comedy*<sup>139</sup> on Iqbal's *Javid Nama*.

It is necessary to consider briefly the appearing of *mi'rājnamas* in Islamic scholastic history. The historical accounts of *mi'rājnamas* that became available to Iqbal, would have also prepared him for the task of communicating the knowledge of his time and expressing it in a creative poetic and narrative way. Christiane Gruber's text in the English language presents a historical account of how the ascension story became a dominant theme of

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<sup>138</sup> S.M Abdullāh discusses the undoubted claim of Dante's influence on Iqbal particularly in relation to the composition of the *Javid Nama*. He details at length the similarities but highlights the important differences between the two literary works. Abdullāh argues that Dante himself was influenced by the '*mirajnamas*' that he inherited from the Muslim scholars and from the actual theme of *al-isra' wa'l mi'rāj* or the night journey and ascension in Islamic belief of Prophet Muḥammad. He assumes that Iqbal had just as much access to those classical works as he did to Dante. Nevertheless, the historical date of the publication of Iqbal's *Javid Nama* depicts that he wrote this 'masterpiece' after a thorough study of the *Divine Comedy* – and perhaps Miguel Asín's research about the connection of the *Divine Comedy* and its Islamic origins. Evidently, Iqbal seems to have 'responded' in a similar style purposively like his predecessor Dante, nevertheless, his response reflected his own intellectual and historical context, as he never departed from the scientific and rational realities even though he wrote in this 'imaginary ascent of the heavens'. Abdullāh. "The Nature of Dante's Influence on Iqbal", pp. 25-31.

<sup>139</sup> Dante's *Divine Comedy* became a masterpiece in Italian literature. Alessandro Bausani rendered in Italian the famous *Javid Nama*, the 'ascension to heaven' perhaps Iqbal's most interesting; 'most ambitious and most complex' poem which often is called to be his masterpiece. Rahman, Fazlur. "Iqbal and Mysticism." *Iqbal as a Thinker (Eight Essays)* (1944): 198. p. 226.



Islamic literary art in the 1300 till the 1600 in Arabic, Persian and Turkic languages.<sup>140</sup> These narratives, *na't* and poems about the *mi'rāj*, were dedicated in the honour of the Prophet Muḥammad. They reinforced the significance of this event as well as his prophethood during the period of religious fluctuation in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Besides the contribution of this key work on *mi'rājnamas* to Islamic art and literature, of greater relevance is Gruber's extensive theological and historical analysis of the development of the *mi'rājnama* out of the biographical accounts of the Prophet, post the consolidation of *ḥadīth* period in Islamic history.<sup>141</sup>

Indeed what makes Iqbal's *Javid Nama* one of his masterpieces is the fact that he was able to combine rational proofs, science, and philosophy with his own theological outlook and present it in the narrative and literary style of *mi'rājnamas*. As it has been established he was certainly not the first; Dante was another example who resembles closely the thematic style of Iqbal's *Javid Nama*. Other theological novels even predating the *Divine Comedy* and the Timurid *mi'rājnamas* were the theological novels of Al-Baghawi (d. 1122)<sup>142</sup> and Ibn al-Nafis<sup>143</sup> In my assessment Iqbal has been inspired by Ibn Nafis's (1213-1288) book and Al-Baghawi.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Christiane Jacqueline Gruber, "The Prophet Muhammad's ascension (mi'raj) in Islamic art and literature, ca. 1300—1600" (January 1, 2005).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Al-Baghawi (d. 1122 or 1117) was originally from the town of Bagh (also called Baghshur) near Herat. Having trained in Ḥadīth, *tafsīr*, and hagiographical stories under his famed mentor al-Tha'labi (d. 1035). See, Gruber, Christiane J. "The Timurid Book of Ascension: A Study of Text and Image in a Pan-Asian Context." (2008), and Gruber, Christiane Jacqueline. *The Prophet Muhammad's Ascension (Mi'raj) in Islamic Art and Literature, Ca. 1300-1600*, Thesis (Ph.D. in History of Art) University of Pennsylvania, 2005.

<sup>143</sup> Ala-al-din abu Al-Hassan Ali ibn Abi-Hazm al-Qarshi al-Dimashqi, known as Ibn al-Nafis, was an Arab physician who is mostly famous for being the first to describe the pulmonary circulation of the blood. He was born in 1213 in Damascus.

<sup>144</sup> Al-Baghawi chose "fictional" narrative as his primary device for religious exposition. He realised that points of dogma could be best expounded through the joint efforts of proselytism and entertainment, while tales that inspire admiration or provoke fear afford a powerful introduction to the religious sciences. 'aql, he understood that narratives can reveal the nature of God, reassert moral behaviour, and solve ethical problems simply by drawing attention to the Day of Judgment and its consequences. Similarly. Iqbal has chosen this genre to communicate his understanding of phenomenon and theology to the people. See Gruber, Christiane Jacqueline. *The Prophet Muhammad's Ascension (Mi'raj) in Islamic Art and Literature, Ca. 1300-1600*, Thesis (Ph.D. in History of Art) University of Pennsylvania, 2005.

Ibn Nafis's theological novel *Al-Risalah al-Kamiliyyah fil Siera al-Nabawiyyah* (The Treatise of Kamil on the Prophet's Biography or Theologus Autodidactus, henceforth *Al-Risalah al-Kamiliyyah*) bears a greater resemblance to Iqbal's adaptation of its methodology in the *Javid Nama*.<sup>145</sup> Perhaps Ibn al-Nafis presents us with an even greater proximity to Iqbal's aim and method in the *Javid Nama*. One of the main purposes behind *Al-Risalah al-Kamiliyyah* was to explain Islamic religious teachings in terms of science and philosophy through the use of a fictional narrative; hence this was an attempt at reconciling reason with revelation and blurring the line between the two. Ibn Nafis's response to Ibn Tufayl is arguably the first science fiction novel as well,<sup>146</sup> as he incorporates his knowledge of the natural world and biology in his theological novel.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, Iqbal incorporates physics, philosophy, economics sociology and psychology in the *Javid Nama*. An example includes the section of 'Zarvan – the spirit of Time and Space'; Iqbal presents his philosophical enquiry of the relation of soul and how it traverses space and time as it leaves the body.<sup>148</sup>

Although the protagonist in the *Javid Nama* is 'Zinda Rud' or the 'Living Stream' is not a castaway like the protagonist 'Kamil' or 'Perfect' in Ibn Nafis's *Al-Risalah al-Kamiliyyah*, nonetheless, the use of the narrative genre to convey philosophical and theological truths is sustained in Iqbal's *Javid Nama*, as Ibn al-Nafis in Kamil's story. Ibn Nafis's work considers the biography and prophethood 'risāla' of Prophet Muḥammad, whilst Iqbal emphasises his 'wilāyā', through the adaptation of the prophetic ascension. Moreover, just as Ibn al-Nafis upholds Ghazālī's position with regards to revelation and

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<sup>145</sup> See, Meyerhof, Max, and Joseph Schacht, eds. *The Theologus autodidactus of Ibn al-Nafis*. Clarendon Press, 1968.

<sup>146</sup> Ibn al-Nafis was a Syrian Sunni Muslim, who followed the Shafi legal school of Law. He disagrees with Ibn Tufayl's philosophical novel *Hayy Ibn Yaqdhan* particularly on the issue of revelation and guidance and prophecy.

<sup>147</sup> See, Goodman, Lenn Evan. *Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Tale*. University of Chicago Press, 2009. Mahdi, Muhsin. "Remarks on the "Theologus Autodidactus" of Ibn Al-Nafis." *Studia Islamica* (1970): 197-209.

<sup>148</sup> Iqbal. *Javid Nama*, p. 36, stanza: 395-340.

prophethood and human beings dependence upon both, through an emphasis of similar methods, he refutes Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqdhan*. Iqbal also depicts the significance and 'sublimity' of Prophet Muḥammad in the *Javid Nama* juxtaposing Dante's depiction of the prophet in the contra in the latter's *Divine Comedy*.

The *Javid Nama* is a break from Iqbal's previous Persian poems;<sup>149</sup> as it is written in narrative style, it is a *mi'rājnama* (as established earlier). As Arthur J. Arberry notes in his introduction to his translation of the *Javid Nama*, the poem is indeed a description of a spiritual journey made by the poet from earth through the 'spheres' of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn – beyond the spheres to the Presence of God.<sup>150</sup> Arberry also notes that the 'prophets' *mi'rāj* naturally formed a theme of meditation and as part of the '*imitatio prophetarum*' or '*imitatio muhammadi*' of emulation for many pious Muslims and mystics through out the centuries. Iqbal therefore had many models, precedents of this emulation of the ascension and chose this to express his doctrine of Muslim regeneration and self-realisation or *khudhi*.<sup>151</sup>

The *Javid Nama* encompasses Iqbal's own intellectual and philosophical enquiry. It is a fine expression of the poet's inward intellectual and spiritual journeying towards God in imitation of the prophet's own *mi'rāj* through the spheres. For Iqbal too in each sphere or space or station/planet a significant personality emerges – the dialogues reflecting his intellectual quest. In this emulation of the prophetic ascension Iqbal seeks a revival and re-ignition of the Muslim *umma*.

The symbolic journey includes '*Pir-e Rum*' or the 'Sage of Rome' (Rūmī) as his guide. Iqbal has purposely aligned himself with the mystical 13<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī as a proponent of 'love', suggesting that Iqbal envisaged his own 'ascension' as

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

ignited by the Sage. On his way the different planets and stations and the different people are in fact all depicting Iqbal's intellectual academic awareness of these various theories as well as the philosophies and personalities all symbolise key themes in the *Javid Nama* that pre-dominates Iqbal's thought. The pattern of his ascent through different spheres depicts Iqbal's engagement with various Eastern and Western philosophies in his own life. Iqbal is outlining his final conclusions about his intellectual and spiritual findings; he is also trying to provide a critique of European thought and its 'insufficiency' by going through 'Tasin of Christ', he presents the gloomy reality of Europe caught into the web of its own greed of interest giving and taking and capitalism and 'Christ misunderstood'.<sup>152</sup> By incorporating various personalities from the ancient and modern East and West he commends some streams of thought such as Hallaj's mysticism that cost him his life as praiseworthy, also of Rūmī and Mirza Asadullah Baig Khan Ghalib (1797-1869) and other heroes of love.<sup>153</sup> He also favours al-Afghani and Said Halim Pasa for their pan-Islamic outlook and particularly praised al-Afghani's anti-nationalism.<sup>154</sup> He is relentlessly critical of the Eastern 'imitation of the West', suggesting they are worse than Westerners.<sup>155</sup> Iqbal is basically suggesting that amidst all these views and influences of East and West, the selfhood or *khudhi* must be retained – in this example the Prophet Muḥammad himself becomes the ultimate 'vicegerent' or caretaker of earth that should be emulated, the 'Chosen One' as he describes him, or the one who sought to witness the 'Essence' and was not satisfied with 'attributes of God only'. In this prolonged journey and dialogue of ascent through various ancient and modern theories, Iqbal finally reaches 'beyond the spheres' into the 'presence of God' in similar fashion as the Prophet did.<sup>156</sup> Conclusively, it may be added that a key theme in this magnum opus is the message that only through love represented by 'Rumi'

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<sup>152</sup> Iqbal. *Javid Nama*, p. 49, stanza: 395-340.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, pp. 19-111.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

the 'Zinda Rud' can enter the presence of the Divine, even though the journey may be long tumultuous as depicted through dialogues and encounters with various thoughts and philosophies. It is possible and quiet tempting to read the Jungian philosophy of subconscious archetypes in Iqbal's *Javid Nama* in but it suffices to say that Iqbal has also engaged very well this theory in his *Javid Nama*. Therefore, restricting the influence only to Dante is not possible because of the evidence of the Ibn al-Nafīs, al-Jili and various *mi'rājnamas* that were also apparent in his work.

Similarly, Nursi's other key work inspired by the *mi'rāj* is the *Ayat al-Kubra* or 'The Supreme Sign' in the *Rays Collection* which bears a great resemblance to and is maybe comparable with Iqbal's *Javid Nama*. It is called the 'Observation of the Traveller questioning the Universe concerning His Maker'.<sup>157</sup> The whole treatise is like a reflective commentary of the verse 17:44 of the Qur'ān, 'the seven heavens and the earth, and all that is in them extol and glorify Him'. In a way similar narrative yet distinct from Iqbal's work, Nursi's narrative of the 'Supreme Sign' is also an emulation of the Prophetic ascension. Although he alludes to the event of *mi'rāj* only a few times in this treatise, Nursi takes the traveller through an imaginative mental journey through a dialogue with the cosmos, testimony of heavens, atmosphere earth, seas and rivers, mountains, trees and plants, animal and bird realms. Then he proceeds to the realm of humanity, the prophets, exacting scholars, spiritual guides, through to the testimony of the angels, spirit beings and the upright testimony of Prophet Muḥammad, his age and the Qur'ān, right through to the Divine Presence-station of direct address.

It is said Nursi's 'Supreme Sign' addresses in at least three ways the curiosity of the post modernists.<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, it may be said that his 'narrative style' that like the *Javid*

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<sup>157</sup> Nursi and Vahide. *The Rays*, pp.131-160.

<sup>158</sup> Scott, David. "Muhammad's Message for Postmodern Seekers and Skeptics." In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey*, 2013, pp. 1-5.

*Nama* may be well situated among ‘*mi’rājnamas*’ or contain the creative elements and personal experiences found in the theological novel of Ibn al-Nafīs’s *Al-Risalah al-Kamiliyyah*. The similarities and differences of the respective works of Nursi and Iqbal are highlighted below.

The structure and style of Iqbal’s *Javid Nama* differs to Nursi’s *Ayat al-Kubra*, with the former being the ‘magnum opus’ of the poet’s most ‘profound’ poetry written in Persian (original) while the latter being a ‘narrative style’, and also a ‘masterpiece’ in its own right of the theologian’s inner most spiritual experience ‘penned’ in a theological narrative dialogue of the traveller or voyager across the cosmos and creation. Both works are written in emulation of the epic ‘prophet journey’ through the spheres unto the presence of God’, known as the *mi’rāj*. They may be classified amidst other similar narrations in Islamic literary tradition known as ‘*mi’rājnamas*’.<sup>159</sup> Iqbal’s poetical verses would fit this genre more naturally, however, Ibn Nafīs’s theological novel maybe more comparable to Nursi’s narrative of the ‘traveller questioning the universe’. Although Iqbal’s *Javid Nama* contains his main philosophical outlook and is said to be the ‘poetical version of his *Reconstruction*’,<sup>160</sup> Nursi’s ‘Supreme Sign’ bears greater similarities due to its heavy ‘theological content’. Just as Ibn al-Nafīs wanted to show the human capacity’s ability and limitation in finding God, and also highlights the need for revelation, similarly Nursi’s main theological concern is establishing the ‘Necessary Existence’ or ‘Oneness’ of the Creator, through an exploration of questions and possibilities hypothetically raised by a person who maybe atheistically inclined.

Moreover, while Iqbal thematically moves from the modern plights and suffering of the ‘humiliating’ state of the *umma*, to dialogues with historical personalities of the past like

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<sup>159</sup> Gruber. *The Prophet Muhammad’s Ascension (Mi’raj)*, 2005.

<sup>160</sup> There is a well-argued position that there is an internal consistency in *Reconstruction* and a parallel between *Reconstruction* and *Javid Nama*. See Ahsen, M. Shabbir. “Iqbal’s Conception of God (review)” *Philosophy East and West*, 62, no. 4 (2012): 602-604.

Hallāj, Rūmī, Ghalib, to al-Afghani, prophets, he is in a way trying to synthesise their works and building his main climax of ‘love’ knowing ‘true Self’ which in Iqbal’s scenario takes him to the ‘Divine Presence’. For Nursi, the theme or discipline of his discussion is predominantly ‘theology’ (*kalām*) and the struggles with the present age with causality, naturalism, existentialism and atheism. Through a question and answer dialogue with various parts of ‘creation’ he also alludes to scientific and rational possibilities making it less ‘fictional’, in order to prove that only through an intellectual and spiritual examination of ‘reality and truth’ the ‘Necessary Existent’ One may be found in an unshakeable ‘affirmation’ of His Existence and Unity by the ‘testimony’ and ‘witnessing’ of various aspects of the cosmos, earth, creatures, creation, prophets, scholars, revelation God hierarchy.

Interestingly the ‘Supreme Sign’ was written in Kastamono in 1938, which was two years after the publication of Iqbal’s *Javid Nama*. There is however no evidence to date of any contact or access of one scholar to the other. This suggests that both scholars foresaw an urging inclination or need to respond creatively to the philosophical theological outlooks ‘inspired by the Prophets epic journey’, and also by the abundant literature of *mi‘rājnamas*, the *mi‘rāj* ascension theme was so akin to both of their thoughts that one of their most celebrated works was written in an emulation of him.

#### **5.4 Other spiritual aspects of prophethood in Nursi’s work**

Nursi has created an innovative variation on the *tajdīdī* style or extended the *Ihyā* tradition by incorporating the mystical traditions of Islam with his main *kalāmic* exegesis. Although Nursi was not a disciple or follower of any Sufi circles in his time, Nursi had great regard for all key branches of main stream *taṣawwuf silsilas* such as Qadiriya and the Naqhsbandiya. In an age of extreme influences upon almost all the Muslim scholars of his

era, Nursi's efforts towards the 'preservation' and great contribution to this key branch of Islamic sciences will now be assessed and critically analysed.

Many Muslim mystics have expressed an ecstatic state of being, either explicitly in their life (as recorded in history) or embedded in their written works, such as Maṣṣūṣ Ḥallāj and Ibn 'Arabī.<sup>161</sup> Nursi though did not publically display an ecstatic state nor does he demonstrate any obvious elements of having the 'state of ecstasy' in his writings. Despite his obvious 'sobriety' in his life and works, Nursi was able to retain and capture the essential elements of 'ecstasies' and 'spiritual mystical experiences' from his predecessors, and has injected these throughout his work thereby preserving and retaining the mystical literary tradition in textual form even as it was largely suppressed in its outer manifestations of *zawiyas* and *tekkyas* in the Muslim world at that time.

In *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi has efficaciously addressed the faculty of the heart, the mind, the senses, emotions and the conscience in a way which is not contrary to the principles of 'aqīdah or belief and the *Sharī'a* or the Divine ordinances. This is unlike Hallāj, and Ibn 'Arabī, whose works are sometimes contrary to the principles of *Sharī'a* or the literal meaning of the sacred texts of Islam, written whilst in an ecstatic state. In his works Nursi was able to inject the 'spiritual pleasure' and 'joy' by including his own way of 'ecstatic spiritual experience' that never exceeded the boundaries of the *Sharī'a* or compromised any major principles of 'aqīdah.

There are many notable pieces from Nursi's works that illustrate this. The "Treatise of the Ascension"<sup>162</sup> and the *Ayat al-Kubra*<sup>163</sup> or the "Supreme Sign", which has been recognised and admired for its deeply spiritual and ecstatic content and a rendition of the prophetic

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<sup>161</sup> In order to avoid the apparent excesses in the ecstatic expressions of some mystics like Hallāj and Ibn 'Arabī, many scholars in the past either submerged totally in ecstatic expression, or totally avoided it.

<sup>162</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, pp. 551-575.

<sup>163</sup> Nursi. *The Rays*, pp. 123-199.



ascension to the author's own experiential ascension.<sup>164</sup> Nursi's discussion and explanation of the Names and Attributes of God, which superficially resembles al-Ghazālī's, is also another example of his personal spiritual visions and experiences embedded in his theological treatises and ontological explanations. In this way he differs from al-Ghazālī, for al-Ghazālī's discussion of the Names and Attributes are limited to their definitions and expositions of other scholars,<sup>165</sup> Nursi's rendition however, has extended upon al-Ghazālī, due to his incorporation of his own personal reflections, feelings and spiritual insights.<sup>166</sup>

In this way Nursi has carried the essentials of the Islamic faith, belief and practice through rational argumentation, analogies and even scientific facts alongside the deeper, mystical and spiritual experiences that are presented alongside these essentials, giving his works credibility not just for the excellence in logical style and argumentation but also for its metaphysical and spiritual content. Through the characteristic style of presenting a balanced metaphysical aspect in his works, Nursi has particularly exemplified this in relation to prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad, through his notion of '*wilāyāt al-kubra*' or the 'greater sainthood' and his deliberate insertion and discussion of various titles and names for the Prophet. Both are an extended example of this aspect of Nursi's work, which will be detailed below.

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<sup>164</sup> Scott, David. "Muhammad's Message for Postmodern Seekers and Skeptics." In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers*, 2013, pp. 1-20.

<sup>165</sup> Although Nursi is clearly aligning himself with the *tajdidī* revivalist tradition of Al-Ghazālī and Sirhindī, obviously due to differences in their historical and social contexts, the content and degree and depth of their discussion on various points vary. With regards to the Names and Attributes in particular, there was a greater need in 20th century to enhance and include the personal experiential dimension within the text as Nursi did more so than in al-Ghazālī's time, where the standard of belief and practice was a variant to Nursi's time. Al-Ghazālī obviously saw no need in elaborating on them, however, Nursi's deliberate inclusion is a reflection of his accurate assessment of the context of his own global and local worlds. For al-Ghazālī's discussion of the Names and Attributes see al-Ghazzali, Abu Hamid. *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, trans. and ed. David Burrell and Nazih Daher, Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 1995.

<sup>166</sup> The *Thirtieth Flash*, bears a good illustration of this, in Nursi's discussion of the 6 Greatest names of God, see Nursi. *The Flashes*, p. 395.

#### 5.4.1 Spiritual dimension of prophethood – ‘The greater sainthood’ (*wilāyāt al-kubra*)

An inner aspect of prophethood brought to a new definition in the *Risale-i Nur* is a thorough redefinition of the term *wilāyā* or sainthood. As discussed thus far in this thesis, *nubuwwa* in Islamic theology is believed to have reached completion with Prophet Muḥammad; sainthood on the other hand is a large door that was opened with the *mi‘rāj* and still available to humanity if so willed.<sup>167</sup> While the connection of sainthood to prophethood had brought along with it controversies that may have ‘blurred’ the lines between the two,<sup>168</sup> their distinctive roles and capacities as already discussed are based on the notable difference of their ‘standing’ before God. While the former (prophets and messengers) are elected convoys of the Divine decree to humanity, the saints also have their share of the delegated role of ‘guidance’ to humanity, in the restricted zone of the ‘Muḥammadan way’.<sup>169</sup> However, there are many layers and dimensions on the path of *wilāyāt*. While most scholars have defined and coined particular levels of sainthood, Nursi by tying his definition to *nubuwwa*, has created not only a new definition of sainthood in the modern age, but also a new paradigm and philosophy for the mystical path in Islam. The development of the history leading up and until the coining of the term by Nursi will be briefly examined, before a discussion of Nursi’s ‘redefinition of the term’ and the ramifications it had in his particular context.

During the era of the Aḥmad Sirhindī (renowned as the *Mujadid* of the second millennium) there was much religious division and strife resulting from political and social irregularities stemming from un-called for beliefs – in particular the notion of ‘*waḥdat al-wujūd*’ or

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<sup>167</sup> Sean Foley discusses the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya Sufi brotherhood as a modern example of Sufi order ‘outliving modernity’ and having powerful influence. See Foley, Sean. “The Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya, Islamic Sainthood, and Religion in Modern Times.” *Journal of World History*. 19.4 (2008): 521-545.

<sup>168</sup> In different epochs of post the Caliphates of the ‘rightly guided’ the Muslim world has witnessed the confusion of the role of the *Shaykhs* or *pirs* in the Sufi tradition at times claiming too much authority indirectly or through definition – in Mughal era it reached its peak in India – that necessitated a revision of *taṣawwuf* concepts by Aḥmad Sirhindī who relegated back the

<sup>169</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 29-31.

unity of Existence that was dominant.<sup>170</sup> Sirhindī's core reform and revivification of faith was in part with the intention to 'protect and preserve' the main tenant of *nubuwwa* or prophethood in Islam against such notions that enabled the door to be open for other 'uncertainties and vagueness' of faith.<sup>171</sup> In fact, due to the reign of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar I (1542-1605) and the unorthodox ideas of ' *Din Ilhahi*' or Divine Religion that were formulated due to the 'influences of the misguided mystics' and other religious adherents, Sirhindī was 'compelled' to establish certainty in the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad and to defend *nubuwwa* in general.<sup>172</sup> He discussed *waḥdat al-shuhūd* or unity of witnessing as an alternative to *waḥdat al-wujūd* unity of being – and concluded that belief in Prophet Muḥammad as final prophet was essential to faith.<sup>173</sup>

Others introduced beliefs were the superiority of sainthood – *wilāyāh* to prophethood – *risāla*. To this end Sirhindī outlined how prophethood is superior due to proximity to the Divine. Moreover, due to some particular ideas arising from Persia claiming that 'one thousand years was sufficient for the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad and the need for other prophets to come about afterwards',<sup>174</sup> Sirhindī struggled against these notions in his writings in order to prove the 'superiority' of Prophet Muḥammad's prophethood and its sufficiency for human kind, in a unflinching attempt to maintain that there will be 'no other prophet after Muḥammad'.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Siddique, A.F.M. Abu Bakar. "*Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (Rh.) & His Reforms.*" Mujaddidia Complex, Dhaka, 2011. See also, Yohanan Friedmann. "Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi and Bediuzzaman Nursi, Some Comparative Consideration,s" in Abu-Rabi. *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur*, pp. 275-286.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>172</sup> Siddique. "*Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (Rh.) & his Reforms,*" p. 112.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>174</sup> This was articulated by only some Persian Muslim philosophers, even though a minority interpretation it had far reaching influences in both Central and South Asia. This Is not be confused with Bahaims that emerged later in Persia in the 19th century. Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

Just like Sirhindī, Nursi (renowned by many scholars as well as his followers as the *mujaddid* of the twenty-first century)<sup>176</sup> also struggled against onslaughts and attacks on the *Sharī‘a* as well as Islamic beliefs in a time of rapid technological, intellectual and even theological innovation.<sup>177</sup> Nursi dived deeply within the tradition of Islam and wrote his exegetical treatise the *Risale-i Nur*, from ‘within the tradition of Islam’, and in this way preserved the language and intellectual thought of faith of Islam. Also like Sirhindī, his avid defence of *nubuwwa* was against the ‘innovations to replace *Sharī‘a* or Islamic laws’ that was occurring at the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. He therefore defended the *Sharī‘a* which was a core aspect of faith containing the Muḥammadan truths.<sup>178</sup> He also focused greatly on the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad as yet another ‘essentials of faith’.<sup>179</sup>

In terms of *wilāyāh* (sainthood) and *nubuwwa* (prophethood) Nursi also discusses similar themes to Sirhindī – one whom he calls his ‘companion, a tender-hearted friend, and teacher’<sup>180</sup> and as ‘one of his teachers’, perhaps he also realised his role as ‘*mujaddid*’ or renovator of faith like Sirhindī and therefore adopted similar strategies in order to uphold the Orthodox position.<sup>181</sup>

Sainthood is not like prophethood in virtues. Consequently he distinguished between the two concepts profoundly in the *Letters (Mektubat)*.<sup>182</sup> Conversely, he upholds that the ‘greater sainthood’ is the carrying out and a continuation of the prophetic duty.<sup>183</sup> This concept of *wilyat al kubra* is very unique to Nursi – although discussions similar to this are

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<sup>176</sup> See Algar. “The Centennial Renewer, pp. 291-311; Saritoprak, Zeki. “An Islamic Approach to Peace and Nonviolence: A Turkish Experience.” *The Muslim World* 95, no. 3 (2005): 413-427; Turner, Colin. “Renewal in Islam and Bediuzzaman.” In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)*. 1992. Saritoprak, Zeki. “The Mahdi Question According to Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.” In *International Bediüzzaman Symposium Papers in Turkey (English)*. 1995.

<sup>177</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 34.

<sup>178</sup> Siddique. “*Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (Rh.) & his Reforms*,” 2011.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> Nursi. *Gleams of Truth*, p. 333.

<sup>181</sup> See, Mardin. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, pp. 54-56.

<sup>182</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 71.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

to be found in Sirhindī, al-Ghazālī and other Islamic scholastics – and Nursi’s addition is not yet unaccounted for. Being ‘timely’ in his context where people were fervently holding onto the saints and saintly people for the preservation of their faith. His coining of this term is thus arguably unprecedented as expressed in this way. Nursi’s aim as he saw it was to continue to serve *īmān* and Qur’ān<sup>184</sup> which was in itself a ‘prophetic act’ and a ‘prophetic duty’. Thus, this service of faith and the Qur’ān – that he titled *khidmāh* or service – was indeed the means of attaining a greater level of sainthood or a *wilyatul kubra* that no longer necessitated the joining of a Sufi brotherhood or *ṭarīqa*.<sup>185</sup> Incidentally, this idea of Nursi’s conveniently coincides with the abolishing of the Sufi *tekkes* – at the beginning of the Turkish Republic that enacted harsh laws on religious institutions and scholars at that time hence making the practice of Sufism almost impossible.<sup>186</sup> Perhaps due to the same reason Nursi proposed that ‘the present age is not the age of *ṭarīqa*’.<sup>187</sup> Nursi states that human kind needs its basic essentials in order to survive: while bread and water are the basic essentials needed for physical survival, similarly the ‘essentials and basics of *iman*’ are necessary for the ‘sustenance of the spirit’– which if properly understood and practiced will be sufficient<sup>188</sup> to traverse the grave, judgment day and eternal life.<sup>188</sup> In this reasoning Nursi equates Sufism to ‘fruit’ and ‘sweets’, which are both ‘delights for the spirit’ but not a necessity for basic survival. Additionally, he maintained that ‘today human kind is being deprived of their very basic need and bare minimum that is bread and water’ due to ‘faith and religion being under attack’, therefore he proposed that

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<sup>184</sup> See, Vahide. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 34; Turner, and Horkuc. *Makers of Islamic Civilization-Said Nursi*, p. 19.

<sup>185</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 71.

<sup>186</sup> For historical conditions leading to an anti-Sufi climate in the last two centuries, see Sirriyeh, Elizabeth. *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World*. Routledge, 2014.

<sup>187</sup> Quoted in Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p 18. See also, Ansari, Mahsheed. “*The Concept of ‘Shari’a in The Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (d. 1960).*” Sydney University, Thesis On Nursi Studies 2009, p. 29.

<sup>188</sup> Vahide and Abu-Rabi. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, p. 5.

the conditions are ‘not ripe for such spiritual delights’ or ‘fruits’ – making Sufism unnecessary in the modern age.<sup>189</sup>

However, Nursi was a devout ascetic himself, who took as his leaders, teachers and spiritual guides some of the most renowned and celebrated Sufis, including the leader of the two spiritual orders – ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī and Aḥmad Sirhindī, both of whom were leaders of the Qadiri and Naqshbandi orders respectively.<sup>190</sup> Nursi’s practice and his conviction of faith were very strong yet his prescription was always one that could be applicable to all people. Similar to Abu Hanifa’s (699-767) practice of ‘*taqwā* for self and *fatwā* for others’ vernacular,<sup>191</sup> Nursi did not preach Sufism, but himself adhered to the prayers, and vigils (*awrād* and *dhikrs*) of the Prophet, *ṣaḥābas*, all the scholars and saints that preceded him. This is evidenced by his students who stated that he read the *Majmū‘at al-Aḥzāb* (a compendium of all saintly orders *dua* prayers)<sup>192</sup> and completed the three volumes in three weeks.<sup>193</sup>

Incidentally Nursi’s recommendation to refrain from Sufism or *taṣawwuf* also came within a historical context whereby the Salafī and Wahabi thought was gaining some footing especially in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world, particularly after the collapse of the holy lands of Islam Makkah and Madinah to the British and the Saud family.<sup>194</sup> In the Salafī and Wahabi movements Sufism was in contrast seen as a ‘malignant cancer’ that had brought about a lot of innovations within the pristine teachings of Islam and had therefore diverted

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Sirhindī was considered not only as a reformer but also one of the great *Shaykhs* of the Naqshbandi. He is not to be mistaken as the founder of the order who was Bahaudin Naqshbandi.

<sup>191</sup> When Abu Hanifa was questioned as to why he ordered the washing of a dish to be three times in Islamic law, when he washed it seven times, he replied with this famous statement. <http://en.osmannuritopbas.com/taqwa-piety-and-god-consciousness.html> Accessed 05.03.15.

<sup>192</sup> This book was compiled by Ahmad Ziyauddin Gumushanawi (1813-1893) who was an Naqshi Shaykh. The book extends over three volumes.

<sup>193</sup> Abu-Rabi. *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, p. 6.

<sup>194</sup> See, Sirriyeh. *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, pp. 86-102.

the course of Islam away from its pure original roots.<sup>195</sup> Although Nursi was aware of the Wahabi movement, he seldom commented on them or wrote against them. In the *Rays*, he has indirectly referred to their influence on the ‘expert committee’, whom attacked Nursi for his *ḥadīth* interpretations of the end of days in the “Fifth Ray”, due to their being ‘weak’, to which he replied in a ‘thank you letter’ as an indication of their having a ‘wahabi vein’.<sup>196</sup> He spoke from a position within the Islamic tradition and tried to revive the faith of his peers and people. However, he was aware of such thinking and in hope of creating greater unity amongst Muslim thought he chose to forgo or overlook a part of Islam upon which he himself stood so firmly upon; that of the spiritual metaphysical side of *taṣawwuf*. He claimed that *taṣawwuf* was not a necessity in this age – and focused his efforts on the fundamental tenants of Islam.

Nursi though, did not wish to abolish a most sacred branch of Islamic sciences – that is science of the metaphysical realm and Sufism. His effort to this effect was to keep hope in a mystical realm by promoting the idea of the sacred service of faith and the Qur’ān. He desired that his works would be disseminated to a wider audience, and thereby preserve the faith of his people. He thus titled this sacred duty as a ‘greater sainthood’ or *wilāyāt al-kubra* and thus united all the targets and aims of what the people sought from spiritual discipline of the Sufi schools and brotherhoods. So in characteristic and piety it was exactly that – but it had a greater appeal as it was of the *kubra* greater *wilāyāh* sainthood – thus a motivation for people to continue the works of service, which he deemed that it was prophetic act and duty.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid, p. 94. Ironically both founders of the modernist Islam Abduh and Riḍā – arguably promoted or are associated with the ‘Salafi movement’ (this has been debated by scholars, however, today they are associated or are considered to have contributed to ‘modernist’ Islam if not Salafism) as well as of the Wahabi movement – Muḥammad ibn Wahab were not proponents of Sufism and also rejected the legal schools, creedal schools as well as the theological and philosophical schools. It was due to the influence of this ‘new trend’ that the Muslim world experienced radicalism and literalist expressions of Islam surpassing that of the Kharajites, see Esposito, John L, and Emad E. Shahin. *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 34-36.

<sup>196</sup> Nursi. *The Rays*, pp. 510 & 515; Vahide, Sukran. “*The Author of the Risale-i Nur: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.*” Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 1920, p. 321.

Whilst Nursi clarifies the misunderstandings and misgivings attributed to the *ṭarīqas* and Sufi orders, in particular in the “Twenty-Ninth Letter”, where he delineates the notion of *wahdat al-wujūd* or unity of being as being ‘exclusive claims’ that ought to be counted as ‘*shathiyāt*’ or ‘ecstatic utterances’ from the ‘excessive materialist’ influences of monism, naturalism and pantheism.<sup>197</sup> In these discussions as well as others he also explains the ‘greater’ or ‘major’ sainthood to be in the way of the Prophet’s companions, and that due to their proximity to the Prophet and hence prophethood and *risāla*, they had a more direct means and access to the spiritual refinement, that did not necessitate long years of discipline and following of the Sufi schools.<sup>198</sup>

The Companions enjoyed the rank of major sainthood, which is attained through a direct inheritance of the Prophetic mission and, without having to follow a religious order, by full observance of the Sharia, penetrating to the truth and ultimately gaining nearness to God.<sup>199</sup>

Nursi’s aim here is a twofold one to explain the superior spiritual rank of the Prophet’s companions to the rest of the Muslim community, and to highlight some of the dangers of the Sufi schools beliefs and practices. Although he has also defended and through his positive opinion dispelled much criticism of the ‘ecstatic Sufis’ saying that their states should be ‘excused’<sup>200</sup> nevertheless, Nursi has implicitly also emphasised his personal preference of the ‘Prophetic way’ that is the way of the companions and those that attain the ‘major’ ‘sainthood’ or spiritual development as a result of their proximity to prophethood or *risāla*. In a number of instances in the *Letters* and in the *Flashes*, Nursi

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<sup>197</sup> Nursi notes, if they break their egotism and do not pursue any spiritual position, they cannot be condemned for such assertions, and their excessive claims are to be counted as ecstatic utterances (*shathiyat*). But if they seek a spiritual position to satisfy their self-conceit and so turn from thanking God to self-pride, ultimately they will lapse into vanity and deviation because they will begin to consider themselves ‘*aql*’ to the greater saints. Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 430.

<sup>198</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 89.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.* p. 90. Such sainthood, though much greater and more valuable than the minor one, is rarely favored with wonder-working. Therefore it is safer, for wonder-working can lead saints to attribute wonders to themselves and thus bring about spiritual desolation. Without having to follow a religious order’s discipline for many years, the Companions attained the rank of major sainthood through the grace and elixir of the Prophet’s presence.

<sup>200</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 352.



explains the ‘greater sainthood’ as being the ‘way of the *ṣahābah*’ or the companions of the prophet Muḥammad. He states, “The most beautiful, straightest, and brightest way of sainthood is following the *Sunnah* and obeying the *Sharī‘a* as closely as possible”.<sup>201</sup>

In *taṣawwuf*, the level of *wilāyāt* or sainthood is based on the level of spiritual advancement. In the Qadiri order they are typically categorised as ‘general saint-ship’ (*wilāyāt al-āma*), ‘special saint-ship’ (*wilāyāt al-khāssa*) within which there are a further six more classifications, *Akhyār* (the good), *Abdāl* (the substitute), then from among the *Abdāl*, there are the *Abrār* (the pious), *Awtād* (the pillars) from among the *Abdāl*, then the *Nuqāba* (the leaders) finally the *qutb* or *ghawth*, also known as (*wilāyāt-i Muḥammadī*). According to *Shaykh* Bataā’ihi *wilāyāt al-ṣughra* (small *wilāyāt*) is what all *awliyā* have, but *wilāyāt al-kubra* (the great *wilāyāt*) is given exclusively to the ‘*Ghous al-Azam*’ only or ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī’.<sup>202</sup>

According to Ken Lizzio, in the Naqshbandi Sufi order, the definitions slightly differ to the Qadiriya, making the *wilāyāt al-ṣughra* or lesser sainthood at the station of ‘unity of being’, which is marked by the temporal loss of interest in worldly matters.<sup>203</sup> Sirhindī elaborates that whilst *wilāyāt al-ṣughra* is an ‘unstable condition’ marked by uncontrollable fits of ecstasy, in contrast the state of *wilāyāt al-kubra* is one of calm and quiet union with God’s unity of essence (*baqā*).<sup>204</sup> Moreover, Buehler notes that *wilāyāt al-kubra* “is the station *maqām* of the ‘expanded breast’ (*shar-i sadr*),<sup>205</sup> and according to

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<sup>201</sup> “Such adherence transforms one’s ordinary deeds, actions, and natural movements into a form of worship. It reminds people of the Sunna and the *Sharī‘a*, and causes them thereby to think of the Prophet, which in turn calls God Almighty to mind. This remembrance gives a kind of peace and contentment. Thus one’s whole life can be counted as spent in continuous worship. In addition to being the broadest highway, it is the way of the Companions and their righteous followers, who truly represented the succession to the Prophetic mission (the greatest sainthood)”. Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 433.

<sup>202</sup> Irshad Soofi Accessed 21.07.14 <http://www.sufi.co.za/article%20spiritual%20administration.htm>

<sup>203</sup> Lizzio, Ken. “*Ritual and charisma in Naqshbandi Sufi mysticism*.” Anpere. net, 1 37 (2007). Accessed 21.07.14 <http://www.anpere.net/2007/3.pdf>

<sup>204</sup> See Sirhindī, Ahmad. *Maktubat-i Imam-i Rabbani*. Np, 1889.

<sup>205</sup> Buehler, Arthur F. “Ahmad Sirhindī: A 21st-century update.” *Der Islam* 86, no. 1 (2011): 122-141.

Fusfeld, the benefits of the contemplations of this level leads to a total elimination of bad habits and desires.<sup>206</sup>

Nursi confers two dimensions of spiritual elation that of prophethood and sainthood. Within these confines he argues that prophethood has ended<sup>207</sup> but sainthood has not.<sup>208</sup> In doing so his lengthy discourse and emphasis on the spiritual side of prophethood is distinctive. In contrast to both the Qadiri and Naqshbandi, Nursi's discussions of sainthood or *wilāyā* (plural *awliyā*) and prophethood or *nubuwwa*, are evidently in favour of reviving the *wilyat e kubra* or 'greater sainthood' notion and formulating an extensive definition of the term.<sup>209</sup> There are numerous instances in the *Risale-i Nur* where the concept emerges; the exegete mostly equates the concept in specific relation to an ongoing continuation of carrying forward the prophetic duties of serving faith *īmān* and Islam. In this understanding of the term '*wilāyāt al-kubra*', there is a correlation between attaining the 'highest rank of sainthood', to a devotional type of 'social activism' geared at serving faith, which is diametrically opposite to the limited use of the term within both the Qadiri and Naqshbandi *silsilas*. Even though being raised amidst the 'valleys' of the 'Khalidiya Naqshi' order as well as the Qadiri order, Nursi as others reserved criticism of their educational and philanthropic philosophies that promoted a devotional *silsila* centred around training of the soul/ego with little or no relevance to the development of others.

Nursi's push for the 'we' centric model as opposed to the 'I' centric one reflected this aspect as well. It is certainly within the confines of these outlooks that Nursi's *musbet hareket* or 'positive action' model was also assembled as a *manavi jihād* or spiritual

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<sup>206</sup> Fusfeld, Warren Edward. "*The Shaping of Sufi Leadership in Delhi: The Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya, 1750 to 1920.*" (1981).

<sup>207</sup> In many instances Nursi recounts the finality of prophethood through the reiteration of the epithet 'Seal of the Prophets'. See Unal. *Gleams of Truth*, pp. 333 & 109 as an example.

<sup>208</sup> Nursi hints the continuation of sainthood in various ways, through his reference and description of Muslim saints like Jilānī, Sirhindī, Naqshbandi, Ibn 'Arabī and others. Note that the continuation and affirmation of Muslim saints and their vocation of sainthood is not an outright promotion of Sufism but a tacit approval of it. See Unal. *Gleams of Truth*, pp. 333/ 28 as an example.

<sup>209</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 71.

struggle of the ‘pen’ (representing philosophy and knowledge) in response to the extreme secularist anti-religion trends in the newly established Republic. This shouldering of the ‘prophetic duties’ was thus so significant in these circumstances that if conducted with utmost devotion and sincerity it would merit the ‘*wilāyāt al-kubra*’ – the highest levels of sainthood in the *taṣawwufi* model. The theological relevance of this particular aspect exists in Nursi’s answer of the question of the choice of the succession to the Prophet’s caliphate and the successive ranks of the four rightly guided caliphs in the letters– which also addresses the question of Ali’s personal qualities with those of Abu Bakr, Omar and Uthman. In his explanation of the various qualities of the four caliphs and the superiority of ‘caliphate’ over ‘*imamat/wilyata*’, Nursi states that the one bearing the role of caliphate – which ‘represents the office of the Prophet’ and what he describes as the carrying out of ‘prophetic duties’ is therefore a greater station *maqām*, than that of *wilāyāt*.<sup>210</sup> Nursi’s justification for the former’s greatness is that those charged with ‘prophetic duties’ warrant God’s immediacy and closeness as the carriers of the prophetic responsibility, whereas in the case of the later or the saints it is through their individual striving and merit that they seek and if successful attain proximity to God.<sup>211</sup> Thus, Nursi asserts that God’s being close to us –in the case of the caliphs and those carrying out the ‘prophetic duty’ are at a more elevated station and honourable role as bestowed on one’s carrying out the ‘sacred duty’. In this way Nursi admits that this may not be due to personal spiritual excellence of the individuals but rather the importance of the share in their prophetic duty.

Nursi actually refers to Sirhindī as the first one who expounded on this understanding, but as discussed he has indeed added his own flavour.<sup>212</sup> Thus, Nursi has revived the Islamic branch of *taṣawwuf* back through this concept of greatness and superiority of the carriers of the prophetic duties. In other words according to Nursi in this day and age the service of

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<sup>210</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 72.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

faith (*īmān*) and Qur'ān (revelation) is indeed a most sacred duty that extends the prophetic duties even nearly two millenniums onwards, and arguably through this model, he has not discharged the relevance and contribution of a rich tradition of Islam as his contemporaries were quick to do so, but has maintained their efforts with an intelligent re-structuring echoing indeed the spirit of the first community of believers.

#### 5.4.2 Literary titles for Prophet Muḥammad in the *Risale-i Nur*

Although in Nursi's revivalist model, there was not an open promotion of the traditional Sufi *ṭarīqas*, nevertheless his revision of the spiritual science of *taṣawwuf* was imbedded throughout his exegetical works in particular in the literary theosophanies dedicated to the Prophet Muḥammad. Therefore, Nursi's position does not resemble the outright dismissal of the Sufi orders by his contemporaries who sought revival in this way and cut off access to a rich literary and theosophical tradition, but rather as that of the 'conservator' of his own tradition and its various aspects in this light has enabled the survival of the mystical, literary and theosophical works of Islam's *taṣawwuf* in a historical context that was ready to part with it.

Nursi's renewal or *tajdīd* even in the insertion of the names and attributes of the Prophet Muḥammad in his theological compositions is reflective of his singular style that has brought renewal *tajdīd* in the literature on prophethood. Moreover, this is another example of Nursi's style of including his own spiritual reverence and state 'within the boundaries of *Sharī'a*' in his works (as discussed above). It is likely that Nursi was inspired by *Majmū'at al-Aḥzāb*— a collection of the prayers of all prophets including Prophet Muḥammad from the Qur'ān, as well as all major scholars and saints of Islam.<sup>213</sup> Thus as part of his project of incorporating and synthesising the mystical and experiential aspects of Islam into his

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<sup>213</sup> *Majmū'at al-Aḥzāb* has now been reduced to 750 pages and rendered as *Al-qulūb Al-Dāri'ah*. See Gülen, Fethullah, and Aḥmad M. Kumushkhānawī. *Al-Qulūb Al-Dāri'ah*. Clifton: Tughra Books, 2011; Abu-Rabi'. *Spiritual Dimensions of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, p. 6.

work Nursi, successfully rendered most of the 500 + titles and epithets included in *Salawatul Mustafa* ‘Praises of Muḥammad in his major work the *Risale-i Nur*.

The different prophetic titles enable and create ‘spiritual joy’ and ‘reverence’ for the central figure of Islam. The use of various titles is like using different ingredients to describe the different aspects of the universal character of the Prophet. Through the means of illustrating his works with the inclusion of these epithets of the Prophet, I argue that he successfully appealed to the spiritual needs of his readers who were attracted through the various highlights of his characteristics and names in a particular given sentence about a particular subject of his character, for example when he writes about sainthood, he uses the title ‘Lord of all saints’, when he writes about the *Sharī‘a* he says ‘Owner of the *Sharī‘a*’.

In line with this literary conserving and revivalist project, Nursi’s approach bears yet another distinctive method – that of listing many honorific titles that have been used in this literature embedded within his exegetical works – in any given opportunity to disclose or to discuss Prophet Muḥammad. In fact there is a record mention and reference to Prophet Muḥammad in at least 119 occasions in the *Risale-i Nur*, whereby Nursi mentions different ways and different attributes to address the Prophet. Some examples include, ‘The Best of Creation’, ‘Beauty of Creation’, ‘Seal of the Prophets’,<sup>214</sup> ‘the Supreme Sign of the Book of the Universe’,<sup>215</sup> ‘Pride of Humanity’,<sup>216</sup> Muḥammad the Trustworthy,<sup>217</sup> God’s Noble Messenger,<sup>218</sup> Leader of all the Believers,<sup>219</sup> Preacher to all Mankind,<sup>220</sup> the Clear Proof,<sup>221</sup> the Chief of all the Prophets,<sup>222</sup> Lord of all the Saints,<sup>223</sup> Muḥammad al-Hashimi,<sup>224</sup> Owner

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<sup>214</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 243.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Nursi. *The Reasonings*, p. 127.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, p. 131.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, pp. 135, 137.

<sup>219</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 243.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

of the Shari'a,<sup>225</sup> the Luminous Tree whose Living Roots are all the Prophets, and the Fresh Fruits are all the Saints,<sup>226</sup> the Supreme *Muezzin*,<sup>227</sup> and the Sublime Character.<sup>228</sup>

These titles and attributes are rather descriptions of the Prophet and his qualities and are respectful indicators on the 'extra-ordinariness of the Prophet'. Thus, they consider not the Prophet as an ordinary man, so much so that God Himself makes an oath on his life, as a *rasūl* – messenger and a *nabī* prophet. In this way Nursi is suggesting that to consider as 'ordinary' to such an 'extraordinary being' is indeed a misreading and 'disrespect' to the personhood of Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>229</sup>

The positioning of these titles at the sentences or endings of paragraphs and at the end of certain treatises is to highlight, summarise and reiterate the particular beliefs and aspects of belief related to Prophet Muḥammad's prophetic mission as well as the qualities and attributes as the 'Final messenger of God'. It is aligned to his consistent methodology of being concise yet repetitive in these reassertions. It maybe also that Nursi in the spirit of the *tajdīd* style of reform sought to incorporate certain characteristically unique methods of the Qur'ān itself one of which is the ending of many verses of the Qur'ān with the names, titles and attributes of God in many ways summarising the key message and bringing the discussion in 'essence' to the Oneness or *tawḥīd* of God. Similarly Nursi adopts this style in his treatise not only in his discussions of the names and attributes of the Divine, but also of the 'subject' of the Divine and His 'perfect mirror' Prophet Muḥammad who in the Nursian worldview predominates all the Divine names and attributes reflected most perfectly and in the most balanced way on him. So, it is only fitting for Nursi within this

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 774.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, and Nursi. *The Reasonings*, p. 140.

<sup>226</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 243.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, p. 774.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid. Nursi. *The Reasonings*, p. 129.

<sup>229</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, pp. 125–126.

already developed framework to reiterate these honorific titles back to the Prophet of Islam. In the “Nineteenth Word”, there is a good illustration of this point.

Now, consider how, eradicating in no time at all their evil, savage customs and habits to which they were fanatically attached, he decked out the various wild, unyielding peoples of that broad peninsula with all the finest virtues, and made them teachers of all the world and masters to the civilized nations. See, it was not an outward domination, he conquered and subjugated their minds, spirits, hearts, and souls. He became the beloved of hearts, the teacher of minds, the trainer of souls, the ruler of spirits.<sup>230</sup>

The above excerpt from the ‘Seventh Droplet’ from the “Nineteenth Word”, is a good illustration of Nursi uses these epithets of the Prophet – as emphasised in bold towards the end of his paragraph, in direct correlation with the his particular discussion, in this case the ‘un-civilised nature’ and customs of pre-Islamic Arabia, and he then links this mostly to the titles highlighted; *‘the beloved of hearts, the teacher of minds, the trainer of souls, the ruler of spirits’*. These titles give clues as to how the Prophet Muḥammad would have ‘reformed’ his people. The four titles effectively start with the heart, him being the ‘beloved of their hearts’, then addresses their minds, then souls and finally spirits. Hence, whatever the topic of the passage is, he uses a particular name or names in direct association to the content of the passage.

In other parts of his *Risale-i Nur* he would from time to time bring these titles in order to reiterate the greater meanings they each signify in this case with regards to the ‘reforming his people’. It is thus in this compounded way that he styled his writing in order to ‘simplify’ what at times may be ‘complex’ theological edicts for the ordinary believer. Thus, the use of simplification is also in line with his adoption of the Qur’ānic pluralism or *tajdīdī* objective, having a wider appeal beyond the elite or educated class and thereby, making available the ‘reality of the prophet’ to everyone in society.

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<sup>230</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 243.

The Qur'ān also addresses other prophets with their individual names but refers to and addresses Prophet Muḥammad specifically with many attributes and not directly with his name. Moreover, there are specific parts in books of *ḥadīth* about how Prophet Muḥammad should be mentioned or addressed. Many of their recommendations do not refer to the 'ordinariness' of the Prophet Muḥammad. Despite a great cautious effort to instil this 'ethics' of *naql*, Nursi acknowledges his own limitations in praising the prophet by quoting Hasan ibn Thabit's statement '*I could not praise Muhammad with my words; rather, my words were made praiseworthy by Muhammad*'.<sup>231</sup>

Like Nursi, Iqbal also used various titles and epithets to refer to the Prophet Muḥammad in his writing but particularly in his poetry. From his Persian verses to the Urdu ones, there is not a poem that refers to the prophet, but Iqbal uses a variety of ways of addressing the central figure of Islam. From the common one in his works 'Al-Muṣṭafā' 'The Chosen One' a traditional common epithet and name for the Prophet.<sup>232</sup> Iqbal also highlights certain qualities of the Prophet, such as his leadership qualities, his statesmanship in his essays about political Islam. He refers to his Arabian roots and in more intimate renderings of the Prophetic qualities and personhood in his poetry, we find an appeal the prophet as the intercessor or '*shafi*'.<sup>233</sup>

Iqbal was careful about over glorifying the Prophet; nevertheless, he refers to the Prophet as the 'tablet' and the 'pen' showing the deep spiritual reflections of the poets own state in this verse. In many other poems he complained of his inability to visit the prophet. However, Iqbal's titles are predominantly found to be in poems not like Nursi's and he also does not exceed Nursi in recounting the various titles and attributes of the Prophet. Whilst

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<sup>231</sup> Nursi. *The Words*, p. 243.

<sup>232</sup> Iqbal. *Bang-e-Dara*, p. 102

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*.



Nursi's has created a new style Iqbal has retained the traditional poetical inferences found in earlier literary works.

### 5.5 Other spiritual aspects of prophethood in Iqbal

Iqbal refers often to the Sufi tradition in varying contexts and in different capacities. At times he is critical of the 'Sufis'. This attitude is found explicitly in his works and needs to be necessarily distinguished and contextualised by the certain behavioural patterns and social views of his times. To Iqbal, the Sufi or mystics of India are guilty of the 'total neglect' of the worldly life which he claims is a misunderstanding of the *taṣawwuf* concept of '*fana*' in Islam (the wrong understanding being influenced by Hindu Gurus).<sup>234</sup> In this fashion he often criticises and blames this type of Sufism in his poetry and prose. In adherence with this position, Iqbal is at times critical of Ibn 'Arabī's exposition of '*waḥdat al-wujūd*' concept of unity of being. In this way he rejects the 'pantheistic' possibility of 'Arabī's thought – for denying the 'actual reality of this world'.<sup>235</sup> Iqbal is also critical of some of the Persian mystical poets like Hafiz Shirazi, whom he views as 'wonderful art' without 'valour' or call for action and therefore deficient.<sup>236</sup> Thus he viewed the 'Persian garden', an analogy he used in his works to refer to the Persian influence – as romanticised and too 'Rosy' and thus unreal for the Indian climate.<sup>237</sup> Again this view may easily be contextualised in his socio-political and economic times, where the 'Protestantism' attitude was prevalent seeking productivity, capital through hard work and labour. Iqbal was certainly influenced by these 'active motors' in Europe and he hoped to create and bring a similar consciousness in the people of India/Asia.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Iqbal. *The Reconstruction*, p. 51.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Iqbal. *Payam-i-Mashriq*, p. 99.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> See Javid Iqbal. 'Religious Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal.' *Iqballiyat*, <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/apr02/IQBAL.htm> accessed, 18.02.15.

Iqbal favours and praises other Sufi scholars and poets who echo the ‘real Islamic spirit’. Rūmī in particular dominates his poetical aspirations. In the *Javid Nama*, he clearly sees Rūmī as his spiritual guide (*murshid*).<sup>239</sup> In many writings and speeches and poems he also refers to the ‘boldness’ of Aḥmad Sirhindī with great admiration – similar to Nursi in this respect, Sirhindī being part of the revivalist Sunni Naqshbandi order. In some letters he seems to have even admitted being a follower of the *Qadiriya silsila*,<sup>240</sup> again similar to Nursi who saw Jilānī as his ‘spiritual doctor’ and ‘guide’.<sup>241</sup>

Perhaps like Nursi, Iqbal too saw problems with the Sufi ways (*silsilas*), not that they were against the mystical, deep understanding of Islam, but perhaps, due to their social/political climate of doubt and reason as well as political changes in the world of Islam. In order to have clarity and not to lose the essentials of the Islamic tradition to modernity and puritanical Islam, both sought to promote the foundational teachings of the Qur’ān and *Sunnah* (Prophet Muḥammad) more directly, in order to simplify and preserve the essential spirit of Islam, in an anti-theist world.

Yet Iqbal like Nursi preserved the actual *taṣawwuf* tradition, through his own poetical verses, written in similar meter to predecessors like Rūmī, for Iqbal like Nursi saw the deficiency in reason alone. Thus, in many ways Iqbal’s poetry balances his prose work that is centred upon philosophical and rational explanations of history of religion/Islam as well as commentaries on Muslim Islamic Political sociological thought.

Iqbal’s prophetology consisted of two currents: the mystical veneration of the Prophet and the investigation of his life with an aim to depict to Muslims that, just like the community of the past, the *umma* can once again live in complete harmony with the way of life, the

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<sup>239</sup> Iqbal. *Javid Nama*, p. 4, stanza: 220.

<sup>240</sup> See Philippon, Alix. “A Sublime, Yet Disputed, Object of Political Ideology? Sufism in Pakistan at the Crossroads.” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 52, no. 2 (2014): 271-292. See also, Tahir Qadiri *Video Lecture: Teachings of Sufis in the light of Quran & Hadith*”, Episode 45, accessed 10.02.15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnLMSKq6haw>.

<sup>241</sup> Unal. *Gleams of Truth*, p. 333.

behaviour and the ideal that Prophet Muḥammad had put before the faithful. This became a reoccurring theme, or *basso ostinato*, through his works in different epochs of his life<sup>242</sup> and Iqbal blended these two currents of the depiction of the Prophet. The devotional attachment and love for the Prophet is very similar in style and expression to that of his spiritual guide or ‘*murshid*’: Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, whom Iqbal sought permission from in a dream to write to the wider Muslim community by writing in Persian.

The dust of Madina and Najaf is collyrium for my eyes.<sup>243</sup>

Iqbal’s objective was to echo through a literary lens the *insān-i kāmīl* or ‘perfected human self’ that the Prophet was. Later in his life, he also defended the institution of prophethood and wrote extensively on the ‘finality of prophethood’ in his letters, addresses and speeches, against the then newly established Aḥmadīya Movement. In many places he spoke of the Muslim nation as the *Tasvir-i-Dard* (Portrait of Pain) and as *Nala-i-Yatim* (Sighing of an Orphan). He brought forth *Fariyad Ba-Hazur Sarwar-i-Kainaat* (Complaint to the Prophet).<sup>244</sup>

The role and function of prophethood depicted through Prophet Muḥammad exists in almost all of Iqbal’s poetry from the *Asrar* to the *Armaghan*. Iqbal’s mystical depictions of the Prophet were aroused upon the study of law and jurisprudence as well as a visit to Afghanistan, where he was inspired to write the finest Persian poem upon seeing the *Khirqah-i Sharīf* (cloak of the Prophet) at Qandahar.

I saw it in the light of “I have two cloaks”,  
His religion and his ritual are the effect of the All,

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<sup>242</sup> Schimmel. “The Place of the Prophet of Islam in Iqbal’s Thought,” pp. 111-130.

<sup>243</sup> Iqbal. “Bal-i Jabril,” 1936 in Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i Iqbal*, pp. 293-462, stanza: 61.

<sup>244</sup> This is a reference to *Abr-i-Guharbar*, (Pearl-laden Cloud), subtitled as *Fariyad-i-Ummat* (Complaint by the Muslim People) and *Na’at-i-Ashiqana Ba-hazur Sarwar-i-Kainaat* (Devoted Eulogy to the Holy Prophet). It was recited at the annual session of Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam, Lahore, in 1903. See the Afterword by Javid Iqbal in Iqbal, Muhammad. *Stray reflections*. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1992.

In his forehead is write the destination of everything.<sup>245</sup>

Iqbal demonstrates a ‘perfect trust’ in the character and essence of the prophet.

In him is our trust on the Day of Judgement, and in this world too he is our protector.

Schimmel claims that role of *as-shafi* or the Prophet as the intercessor was not pronounced as much by Iqbal. This is questionable and Schimmel’s German background as well her context is very much in the neo-Orientalist discourse, thus her critiques or appraisals of Iqbal need to be understood from this perspective. Nevertheless, Schimmel admits Iqbal’s total and absolute confidence in the Prophet as a guide for every human affair, including his own illness. In fact Iqbal composed a long poem, *Pas Cheh Bayed Kard ai Aqwam-e-Sharq (What are we to do, O Nations of the East?)*, in which, after describing the miserable situation of the Muslims, he asks the Prophet to help him in his illness – just as seven centuries ago the Egyptian al-Busri (d. 1296) composed his famous *Qasīdat al-Burdah* in honour of Muḥammad and was cured.

Interior medicine for me is only that I recite blessing (*durud*) on your ancestor (Muhammad).<sup>246</sup>

Furthermore, according to Schimmel, Iqbal assumes the Prophet to be the ‘visible’ tide of God’s activity as in the poetical lines:

God is my Hidden One, Thou art my Open One! With God I talk in veils, with Thee openly!<sup>247</sup>

Iqbal therefore turns to the Prophet in his poetry not only for praise but also for help. The extent and greatness of the Prophet in Iqbal’s thought is exemplified in another verse, where Iqbal refers to the Prophet as the ‘Preserved Tablet’ and ‘the Pen’. These are both

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<sup>245</sup> Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, pp. 131.

<sup>246</sup> Iqbal. *Payam-e Mashriq*, at 221 in Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, p. 115.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, at 221, see also Sahota, G. S. “Uncanny affinities: a translation of Iqbal’s preface to *Payam-e Mashriq*.” *Postcolonial Studies* 15, no. 4 (2012): 437-452.

mystical depictions of theology: the ‘Preserved Tablet’ of God’s determining (*qadar*), and the pen symbolises divine knowledge and will manifesting through His power.

“Thou art the Preserved Tablet, and Thou art the Pen.”

Iqbal saw the answer for Muslim unity through the personality and figure of Prophet Muḥammad. In 1929 he expressed happiness at the birthday celebration of the Prophet (*Mawlid*) in South India.

In order to bind together the Islamic nations of India the most holy personality of the honoured Prophet can constitute as our greatest most efficient power.<sup>248</sup>

In the poem *Jawab-i Shikwah*, Iqbal questions the state of the Muslim *umma* (community); in his complaint (*Shikwah*) and the answer (*Jawab*) to it, Iqbal laments their state. This is, however, the answer to the complaint and it is in this answer that references are made to prophetic examples and remedies, including Musa, Ibrahim, Yusuf or (biblical Moses, Abraham and Joseph) and of course Prophet Muḥammad. Instances of their lives are depicted, with the narration of stories like Abraham’s fire turned into a garden and Yunus’s (Arabic rendition of Jonah) escape from the whale, as examples to Muslims through true unity (*tawḥīd*) to go above and beyond their problems. Iqbal stresses that ‘your God is one, your Prophet is one’ and in this sense he is appealing not only to the Messianic leadership of the prophets as ‘saviours’ of Muslims and believers, but he is also providing vivid examples of their famous ‘struggles’ and depicting them as champions and transformers of tribulations through their utmost trust and belief in *tawḥīd*. Here Iqbal resembles Nursi, although unconscious of his contemporary. Nursi also appeals to Muslim consciousness

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<sup>248</sup> Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, at 93 as quoted in Schimmel, “The Place Of The Prophet Of Islam In Iqbal’s Thought.” p. 114.

and calls for unity by declaring ‘your God is one, your Prophet your religion is one, your *qibla* is one...’<sup>249</sup>

Lastly, Iqbal uses the metaphor of *watan*, *mulk* for the Muslim community (*umma*) and in doing so he relies on the prophetic image and derives inspiration from his life in his reconstruction of these terms, an effort that eventually led to the separation of the India and Pakistan. Iqbal was highly critical of nationalism and in this sense he may be comparable to Nursi.

On prophethood is in the world our foundation  
From prophethood has our religion its ritual  
From prophethood are hundred-thousand of us one  
Part from part cannot be separated  
From prophethood we all got the same melody  
The same breath, the same aim<sup>250</sup>

Iqbal, like Nursi, never had a chance to physically perform the pilgrimage or visit the Prophet’s tomb in Medina. In his later poems this became a dominant theme that expressed his fervent longing for the resting place of the Prophet. This theme remained in his poetry until his final days, when he still expressed his ardent wish to visit the Prophet’s tomb. Moreover, in *Armaghani Hijaz*, a whole chapter is dedicated to the Prophet – ‘in the presence of the Prophet’.

Iqbal expressed and felt that loyalty and faithfulness to Muḥammad was the answer (*Jawab*). In the poem *Jawab-i Shikwa* in 1913, prior to his writing of *Armaghan Hijaz*, Iqbal outlines seven aspects of the Prophet and details his sublime characteristics as: ‘Muṣṭafā, The Chosen One’; the source of everything good and useful in human life; the king of both poverty and sovereignty – belonging to his manifestation; he is the model for

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<sup>249</sup> Nursi. *The Letters*, p. 308.

<sup>250</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad. *Secrets of Collective Life: Being a Descriptive and Comprehensive Translation of Allama Iqbal’s Rumuz-I-Bekhudi*. Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1977, p. 116.

every Muslim; the visible and witness of God's beauty and power; His way only way to choose; Muslims this century are strangers to his beauty.

In *Asrar-e Khudhi* (the Secrets of the Self), the 'self' is strengthened by love only and Iqbal depicts and seeks this love in the person of the Prophet.

There is a beloved hidden within thine heart...  
By love of him the heart is made strong  
In the Muslim heart is the home of Muhammad  
All our glory is from the name of Muhammad.<sup>251</sup>

Iqbal may be easily placed among the array of mystical and literary traditions of longing and love for the Prophet as espoused in metres like Rūmī, Bedil and Hafiz Shirazi. Iqbal is considered to be one of the final poets in Persian literature to write in this metre. In *Bal-e Jibreel* (Gabriel's Wing), the Prophet becomes the epitome and 'perfect manifestation of Love'.<sup>252</sup> This theme of perfection echoes the common theme of *insān-i kāmil* – perfected human selfhood that manifests most exclusively in the Prophet Muḥammad among all the other perfected souls of the other prophets – is a central theme in both Iqbal's and Nursi's works.

In *Javid Nama*, Iqbal is taught the secrets of prophethood by the mystic 'Hallaj'. This affirms that Iqbal's respect and one of his key sources of inspiration has been the mystical and Sufi teachings (such as Rūmī and Hallāj) more than philosophical dialectics. Thus, various passages in the *Javid Nama*, honour the Prophet and express his mystical personality. Moreover, Iqbal echoes the mystical tradition and his Sufi predecessors in the *Rumuz* – considered to be the 'treasure house' of his prophetology, where Muḥammad is depicted as the 'lamp in the darkness of being'. Lastly, the relationship of the Prophet being a 'slave' of God and also 'the mercy sent to all the worlds' (*Raḥmat al-‘ālamīn*)

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<sup>251</sup> Iqbal, Muhammad and Reynold A. Nicholson. *The Secrets of the Self: Asrār-i-khudī : a Philosophical Poem*. Whitefish, Mont, Kessinger Publishing's Rare Reprints, p. 11.

<sup>252</sup> Iqbal. "Bal-e Jibreel" in Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, p. 151.

demonstrates *Shaykh* Ghalib's influence upon Iqbal. Ghalib was an Urdu poet and is referred to by Iqbal directly in *Javid Nama*, where Iqbal maintains the finality of Mercy and thereby of prophethood.

Where even a tumult of the world arises,  
There is also a Mercy for the worlds.<sup>253</sup>

Thus, according to Iqbal, the mercy of the entire world is a single manifestation of Muḥammadan reality and mercy.

## 5.6 Conclusion

The prophetologies of Nursi and Iqbal were 'reconstructed' with the continuing notions that had developed in the classical period, with a 'new methodology' of adopting scientific and rational sciences prominently in their works. The uniqueness of their response and methodology was also due to their realisation of an existing gap in Western thought: that of the limitations of reason and materialism. Nursi and Iqbal pursued an explanation of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad with due reverence to the tradition of Islam (adopted from the classical scholars), as well as due regard to modern developments in science and philosophy. Unlike their contemporaries, they included the mystical and the metaphysical dimension in their works. In this way they added to or renewed the understanding of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad in Islam.

Nursi has designed a successful way of preserving the mystical dimension of Islam and hence demonstrated *tajdīd* renewal in *taṣawwuf* or Islamic mysticism as well as *kalām*, by addressing the heart, the mind, emotions and conscience in a way, which is not contrary to '*aqīdah* or principles of faith and *Sharī'a* or Divine Ordinances unlike other mystics of the past. He has also developed and renewed the literature about the Prophet, by effectively using different prophetic titles in the right places. Nursi's emphasis upon the

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<sup>253</sup> Iqbal. *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, pp. 130-137.



‘*Muhammadan Truth*’ and ‘*Muhammadan Light*’ is purposive in that he reiterates the ‘higher meaning’ or significance of the ontological meaning of the Prophet beyond his human qualities. Thus, he has added a new dimension of sainthood to Prophethood through his notion of *wilāyāt al-kubra* or the ‘greater sainthood’, in Nursi’s rendition the carrying forward of the ‘prophetic duty’.

Iqbal’s prophetology resembles Nursi’s in its inclusion of the literary and mystical dimensions of Islam, although Iqbal also uses an appeal to the heart, the mind and emotions throughout his poetical verses. In this respect he is more conversant than Nursi with the somewhat controversial aspects of Islamic Sufism such as Maṣnūḥ Ḥallāj whom he quotes in specifically. Like Ibn al-Nafīs, Iqbal has considered fictional narrations with rational and philosophical outlooks in order to illustrate his views of the *mi’raj* and other aspects of prophethood particularly in his *Javid Nama*. Lastly, Iqbal’s personal and devotional poetry for the Prophet Muḥammad, depicts not only his human excellence but the ‘greater in meaning’ aspects of his being, but also illustrates that Iqbal may not easily be camped amidst the modernist or traditionalist discourses prevalent at that time, and that although his works cannot be considered as *tajdīd* in *kalām* or *taṣawwuf*, they have arguably created a unique compendium of modern Muslim and Western philosophical thought

In short, at a time when the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad was questioned, his *Sharī‘a* challenged and his spiritual legacy of *zawiyas* and *tekkes* closed, Nursi and Iqbal considered closely the metaphysical and spiritual aspects of Prophet Muḥammad to counteract this increasing trend. Nursi and Iqbal have retained the Prophet’s unique role in the legacy of prophethood, and both have upheld the ‘Muḥammadan Essence’ even in an era where his human aspects were so emphasised that the deeper meaning and mystical ontologies of the literary tradition were largely ignored and rejected. In this way the

Prophet Muḥammad was seen as the epitome of human perfection. The works of both Nursi and Iqbal illustrated him as the ‘perfect man’, and the ‘human ideal’. The Prophet’s perfections and legacy were further evident in their discussions of the significance, wisdom and meaning of the ascension in their works. The historical assessment of the *mi‘rāj*namas that were inspired by the *mi‘rāj* paved the way for the further contextualisation of their own personal mystical and literary depictions of the *mi‘rāj* in the *Ayat al-Kubra* and the *Javid Nama* respectively. In the final section the other particular spiritual aspects unique to Nursi and Iqbal were critically assessed, particularly the concept of *wilāyāt al-kubra* or greater sainthood in Nursi’s prophetology that cast a new definition of sainthood and prophethood as well as his literary titles for prophet Muḥammad in the *Risale-i Nur*. Iqbal too has advanced the literary tradition of devotional poems and particular epithets and titles for the Prophet. His personal and devotional love for the Prophet is ardently expressed in the rhythmic verses of his poetry, yet Iqbal is not reserved in his criticisms of the failures of ‘suffix oriented culture’ predominated in the sub-continent. He therefore distinguishes his attacks from what he perceives to be ‘misrepresentation’ of ‘higher Sufism’.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Reason or *'aql* was a prominent intellectual theme of the post-Enlightenment era. How did the Muslim scholastic tradition respond to this? This thesis has explored and compared the works of two acclaimed Islamic scholars – Said Nursi and Muhammad Iqbal. It has examined the critical context of their responses to establish the ‘proofs’ of ‘prophethood’ and Prophet Muḥammad, within the context of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was contrasted to the purely intellectual responses of the Muslim modernist discourse and those critics forwarded by the post-Enlightenment era’s discourse on the subject of ‘prophethood’ or *nubuwwa*.

This comparison has closed the gap in the literature on responses to modernity in postcolonial India/Pakistan and post Ottoman Turkey. Research had not been carried out previously in the area of Muslim theological thought on *nubuwwa* in that era. This thesis has assessed that Muslim responses to modernity were not monolithic. Local realities including geographical, sociological and political contexts all shaped the myriad of responses to modernity. Thus, Nursi and Iqbal provided a good comparison for this research that ascertained the way their individual responses brought about distinct outcomes – one being more Islamist while the other a more civic-based faith movement.

It is contended that the notion of prophethood was less dominant in the non-Islamic theologies. However, for the Islamic theologian, the significance of *nubuwwa* in Islamic *kalām* had a requisite focus due to the centrality of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad to Islamic theology and practice. As examined in Chapter Two of the thesis, the exceptional qualities afforded to a prophet in Islam like infallibility, fortified a prevailing role for him amongst the early community. He was the sole authority in explaining Divinity, a guide in all aspects of life related to belief, and the key legislator whose statements were piously held on to. These were a source of guidance in matters related to

worship, spiritual life, as well as the legal and socio-political governance of the community. In this way the role and function of Prophet Muḥammad and prophethood was indispensable to Muslim thought, belief and practice since its inception. Through to the Middle Ages, the notion of *nubuwwa* was constructed in response to the polemics of other monotheistic and polytheistic traditions. Hence, the Middle Ages proved to be significant for the codification and elucidation of *nubuwwa* in Islamic thought.

In the modern era, the notion of prophethood was investigated in a different light. Not only were there more direct arguments and criticisms from ‘within the tradition’ but they also required an understanding of the wider global scientific and philosophical theories prevailing at that time. The two significant responses originating from the distinct Muslim geographies of Nursi and Iqbal were constructed in the modern age. Their prophetologies were ‘reconstructed’ with the continuing notions that had developed in the Middle Ages, with a ‘new methodology’ of adopting scientific and rational sciences prominently in their works. The uniqueness of their responses and methodology was also due to their realisation of an existing gap in Western thought, specifically that of the limitations of reason and materialism. Nursi and Iqbal pursued an explanation of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad with due reverence to the tradition of Islam, as well as due regard to modern developments in science and philosophy. They included the mystical and the metaphysical dimension in their works alongside the rational aspects, adding a new dimension to prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad in Islam in the modern era.

The main focus of this research and its methodology has been a consideration of the role of reason and tradition, or the ‘*aql* and *naql*’ dilemma that had re-surfaced in the post-Enlightenment period. By paralleling and contrasting these two unique responses to modernity and modernism, it has constructed a comparative study in light of this key

question of reason and tradition to see how these scholars grappled with this issue and to draw conclusions from the nuances in their similarities and the differences of thought.

The research methodology included a textual analysis of key texts of Nursi and Iqbal and a hermeneutical study of *nubuwwa*. I have surveyed the construction of the conceptual development of prophethood in classical Islamic theology, through to its reconstruction in the modern era, and situated Nursi and Iqbal among this discourse. I have conducted a textual analysis of Iqbal's *Kullīyat, Reconstruction*, speeches and letters, as well as Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*, by consulting English, Turkish, Arabic, Persian and Urdu primary and secondary sources. I have critically assessed these texts in the wider context of their global and personal histories. I have considered the ontological, teleological and philosophical descriptions of prophethood and the Prophet in the works of Nursi and Iqbal. By applying the method of textual analysis, I have analysed their convergences or divergences from the theological, philosophical and modernist traditions. Lastly, I conducted a hermeneutic comparison of their ideas of prophethood, assessing the similarities and differences in their project of defining *nubuwwa* and the Prophet Muḥammad in contemporary times. Hermeneutic interpretations of their key texts were examined in light of theological and literary studies. I then deduced new definitions of *nubuwwa*, as augmented by Nursi and Iqbal.

### **6.1 The evolution of the 'proofs' of prophethood**

Islamic theology or *kalām* has developed more or less in response to scholarly polemics since the time of its inception in 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, through the modern era. During all these historical and world evolutions of empires, religious wars, politics and knowledge, Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*) developed sophisticated responses to address the concerns within and outside the borders of the Islamic world on the topic of *nubuwwa*. Many proofs of prophethood or *dala'il al-nubuwwa* were constructed in the Middle Ages against

staunch attacks particularly by European accounts of Prophet Muḥammad's life.<sup>1</sup> They aspired to uphold the Islamic belief that Prophet Muḥammad is a true envoy sent by God to guide humanity. The Muslim *kalāmists* further elaborated that the Prophet was affirmed by a revealed book (the Qur'ān) and bestowed with many miracles (*mu'jiza*). They also enumerated his personal qualities and characteristics recorded in the famous *Shāmā'il* of Tirmidhi<sup>2</sup> and argued for the relevance of the Prophet's 'divinely bestowed law' or *Sharī'a*.<sup>3</sup> This sufficed until the infusion of Greek philosophy and thought that demanded a philosophical validity of these claims. In response, al-Kindi, al-Farābī and Ibn-Sina attended to this emerging philosophical challenge and sought a position for the Prophet Muḥammad as the 'great statesman', the 'philosopher-prophet' or the 'prophet-king', who brought about a 'just law' and communicated with the 'Active Intellect', and hence left a necessary guide for humanity at large.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these internal developments in the polemics of the *mutakallimūn* and the Muslim philosophers (*falasuf*), the centuries preceding the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> saw a gradual shift in the deliberations of the European writers. Increasingly, attitudes in Europe were shifting towards a more accepting and positive image of the Prophet as a 'sage', a 'legislator', and a 'great man'.<sup>5</sup> Even though this was a great improvement from the religious polemics that had coloured European discourse on Islam and its Prophet in the earlier eras, nonetheless, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries' presentation of the Prophet Muḥammad as predominantly a 'political' and 'military leader' shadowed his role as an 'envoy of God' and a 'model for

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<sup>1</sup> See, Tolan, John V. "II European accounts of Muhammad's life." *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad* (2010): 226.

<sup>2</sup> See, Ibn 'Isa Tirmidhi, Muḥammad, Muḥammad Zakariyya and Ahmed E. Bemat. *Shamail-e-Tirmizi*. International Islamic University, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> See, Al-Asbahani, Ahmad. *Kitab Dala'il al-Nubuwwah*. Beirut: Alam al-Kutub, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> See, Aminrazavi, Mehdi and Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*. Routledge, 2013; Leaman, Oliver. *Islamic Philosophy*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013 and Azadpur, Mohammad. *Reason Unbound: On Spiritual Practice in Islamic Peripatetic Philosophy*. Albany: Suny Press, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> See, Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract' and Other Later Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 145; Napoleon. *Campagnes d'Egypte et de Syrie*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1998, p. 275 and Tolan, John V. "II European accounts of Muhammad's life." *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad*, 2010, pp. 243-245

Muslims'.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the critiques and popular discourse that dominated European and other non-Muslim writers were indeed a critique from 'within the tradition'. The discourse of the post-Enlightenment era now engaged directly with the key texts and traditions of Islam, through questioning the scripture, the process of revelation, the validity of the legal sources of *ḥadīth*, and the *ḥadīth* narrator's credibility. Moreover, the sustained criticisms of the Prophet's personal life including his marriages, and lastly, the questioning of miracles on a rational basis, were all key theological issues posed by these scholars that had raised a new challenge to the contemporary *mutakallimūn*.<sup>7</sup> These coupled with a wider global intellectual shift towards rationalism and the dominance of the positivist sciences, together with increasing criticisms and forward objection of 'traditional authority' of the *madrasās* and scholars in the Muslim world,<sup>8</sup> called for a popular push for *ijtihād* or reinterpretation of Islamic law by some camps in the Muslim socio-political arena. All of these rapid developments in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries necessitated a 'new response' once again to 'prove' prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad. In this context the Muslim responses varied from apologetics, modernism, Islamism, traditionalism rationalism and mysticism. Two different yet distinctive responses emerged from Eastern Anatolia and the Sub-Continent. They had some parallels with the new responses, but largely stood as two separate responses on their own. Indeed it was the intellectual climate and the significance of their times that dictated the predominance of *nubuwwa* as a key

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<sup>6</sup> Tolan. "II European accounts of Muhammad's life," p. 226.

<sup>7</sup> See Hourani, Albert. *Islam in European Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Goldziher, Ignaz. "The Hadith as a Means of Edification and Entertainment." *Muslim Studies* 2. Muir, William. *Mahomet and Islam: A Sketch of the Prophet's Life from Original Sources and a Brief Outline of His Religion*. Religious Tract Society, 1887. Tisdall, William St Clair. *The sources of Islam*. Amarko Book Agency, 1973. Muir, William. *The Mohammedan Controversy*. Read Books, 2006. Watt, William Montgomery. *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*. Vol. 409. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.

<sup>8</sup> There was a lack of scholarship and authority in the Muslim world, as people started to doubt 'traditional scholars' or 'mullas' who were deemed as bigots. This was due to their non-exposure to positivist sciences. However, the secular institutions or '*maktabs*' had no religious sciences being taught. This created a rift and a loss of authority in the Islamic scholars of the day. Iqbal and Nursi were both aware of the dangers of this trend, and thus, both wrote to rectify it.

subject of their theologies. They both responded to this, similarly in some ways like the nature of the issues and topics of *nubuwwa*, but in many instances also very distinctly.

## 6.2 Nursi and Iqbal's defence of key aspects of prophethood

Nursi used rational and positivist sciences as well as traditional *kalāmīc* arguments in order to construct his defence of prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad in the modern era. As rooted in the *tajdīdī kalām* tradition, his response to the prevailing climate was to address all seven aspects of *nubuwwa* that were predominant in his times.<sup>9</sup> He sought to defend these by carrying forward some of the traditional 'proofs of prophethood' known as *dala'il al-nubuwwa*. In doing so, emphasised on the need for prophets, miracles and the Qur'ān, as the key proofs of prophecy, as well as the luminosity and the perfection of the character of the Prophet. He wanted to eradicate doubts about the Prophet being 'the source' and 'addressee' of revelation.<sup>10</sup> His extensive use of the Islamic tradition highlights not only his grounded-ness in it, but also his awareness of the common knowledge of the ordinary person in Anatolia – as one being rooted more in tradition rather than the modern sciences. Hoping to not disengage the majority of the Anatolians, Nursi therefore focused on bridging the gap between the secular elite and the ordinary person.

Nursi's defence of *nubuwwa* also reflects the changed conditions of his time. The medieval scholars had presented their proofs '*dala'il al-nubuwwa*, in response to the external attacks directed against the personhood of Prophet Muḥammad and his claim of prophecy that were deemed as 'false'. Nursi however, found the greater challenge of defending the 'proofs' against the subtle attacks from 'within the tradition'. In the post-Enlightenment era, there was no outright rejection of, or attribution of 'lies' to, or falsity ascribed to Prophet Muḥammad's claim of prophecy. However, elusive suggestions raised about

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<sup>9</sup> This was discussed at length in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

<sup>10</sup> This issue was elaborated in the '*aql* and *naql*' section, under the discussion of *wahy*.



aspects related to *nubuwwa* were questioned and if left unattended, could have potentially broken the key understanding of prophecy in Islam.

Nursi's adoption of tradition, and the sciences was with the objective to 'prove' *nubuwwa*.<sup>11</sup> Through the combination of tradition, sciences and mysticism he presented prophethood from a new angle. Moreover, his distinctive contribution lies in his creative ability to respond to these significant 'internal challenges' posed by the conditions and theories of his time. The response was his methodology that sought to 'preserve' a dying tradition (in an era of rapid change) as well as to address and renew faith in these proofs of *nubuwwa*. He coloured his arguments with logic and reason (*manṭiq wa 'aql*),<sup>12</sup> scientific facts<sup>13</sup> literary expositions and his brilliant use of linguistic tools. These enabled a unique blend of ideas, packaged to address the mind, heart and the emotions. He utilised rational argumentations from natural science to prove the logical need for *nubuwwa*.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, Nursi used science and modern knowledge within particular boundaries, to strengthen prophethood and not to cast aspersions on to it. In this way his commitment to his tradition also stands out. By culminating his exegetical works with his deep devotional dedications to the 'luminous nature of the Prophet', he engages the 'traditionally oriented Anatolian' through this appeal of the heart, soul, as well as secularly educated elite through the mind. His defence of the 'weak traditions' or *da'if ḥadīth*, and the arguments in validation of the Prophet's personal life in the *Risale-i Nur*, is a good illustration of this.

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<sup>11</sup> His method was elaborated in the '*aql* and *naql*' section.

<sup>12</sup> Nursi had written two books on logic or *manṭiq* in Arabic. One of them is called *Ta'liqat 'ala Burhan al-Galanbawifil-Mantiq* [facsimile edition] reprinted in Istanbul, 1993, as quoted in Abu-Rabi. *Islam at the Crossroads*, 2003. The other *Kizil I'jaz* (Red I'jaz) but unfortunately it was lost after he became prisoner of War. See, Source Gülen, Fethullah. *Fasildan Fasila*. Izmir: Nil Yayinlari, 1995, p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> Wherever possible, Nursi adopted examples from the natural world, for example his use of science in explaining the miracles of all the prophets in the *Twentieth Word*.

<sup>14</sup> Nursi's emphasis on the 'need for prophets' initially was to address the 'atheistic trends' that questioned not only God but also the need for prophets, suggesting that humanity had no longer any need for guidance. In response to this, Nursi emphasised the need for all living creatures to have a guide. In addition to using traditional 'proofs', his link of this argument to the natural world and animals established the validity of his argument, in an age of rational and scientific authority. In a similar way, his address of divine revelation or *wahy*, miracles, *ḥadīth* and *ijtihād* as well as the 'luminous character' and qualities of the Prophet Muḥammad dominate his works.

Iqbal's response was not as expansive as Nursi's as his focus was particularly to outline the revelatory process as a valid proof of Muḥammad's prophethood. Additionally, his great push for *ijtihād* in contrast to Nursi resembled other modernists of the same period. Approximating Nursi however, he engaged considerably in defending the 'perfect personality' or *insān-i kāmil* of the Prophet Muḥammad, against attacks on his marriages and personal life. His response to the defence of the *ḥadīth* and miracles was also much weaker than Nursi's, as his position was not clear. Iqbal however launched a great defensive of the 'finality' of prophethood, which was somewhat questioned in Persia and the Sub-Continent, by creating a sophisticated response for the historical and 'cultural psychology' of finality for the Muslim civilisation. He structured his response straightforwardly and passionately, by responded from within the new Western epistemology. He based his arguments on rational and scientific facts and infused various theological concepts in order to validate them. For miracles and *ḥadīth* though, he was more open to Western scholarly criticisms than Nursi, being influenced by the Orientalist and the post Enlightenment era's discourse. He was also criticised for being too 'apologetic' in these two areas.

### **6.3 The 'aql and naql deliberation of *nubuwwa* in Nursi's and Iqbal's work**

The 'aql and naql debate was at the heart of the scholarly contentions on *nubuwwa* in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>15</sup> Scholars preceding and contemporary to Nursi and Iqbal all dealt with this popular 'theological enquiry'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Reason and revelation ('aql and naql) debate permeates Muslim scholarship from the classical period till now. The initial influence of rationalism on Muslim thought was with the introduction of Greek philosophy in the 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. This period saw a predominance of development in theological and Muslim philosophical enquiry that greatly affected Muslim thought, inevitably influencing the Muslim civilisation of its day. The second ascendancy of 'aql in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries occurred with the rise of modernist philosophy and consequent responses from the Muslim world, predominating in Muslim modernist thinkers' and reformers' works. Rational argumentation was applied in response to "modern' philosophies and theories by Muslim scholars as part of their response to modernism.

<sup>16</sup> There have been many debates about situating Iqbal within the traditionalists or modernists. Although on balance he leans more towards the modernist camp, it is fair to add that he is not an absolute modernist. In

An examination of the extent of the use of *'aql* more than *naql* in the writings of Nursi and Iqbal, depict that both were indeed non-traditional in their own respective genres. One rooted well in the revivalist *kalām* tradition and the other in the Western philosophical discourse. Nursi's lack of reference to traditions and scripture is an obvious break from previous *kalāmists*, with his strong arguments not entirely based on scripture alone, but intertwined with metaphors, logic, analogies, and scientific facts consistently. Iqbal was more *'aql* centred; in fact so much so that he wished to change the 'epistemology' of his tradition beyond what he perceived to be 'medieval' *falsafa* as well as *kalām* and hoped to position it within the Western epistemological and rational discourse. Moreover, he did not directly engage in traditional *kalām* topics such as evidences for prophethood; rather he established his discourse in the philosophical questions and answers with reference to tradition (mostly the Qur'ān). He centred his arguments with evidence from psychology, history, philosophy and physics.

The concept *wahy* serves as a good example to illustrate how both scholars used *'aql* to verify and establish the 'truths' or validity of the Qur'ān. In this sense, 'scripture' was very important for both and at the centre of their writing. It was also a direct 'evidence' of the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad. Iqbal focused more on the process of knowledge or the acquisition of revelation being part of the natural disposition of the Prophet. In doing so, he has engaged directly with the theoretical philosophy of the Muslim philosophers including Ibn Sina, Ibn Khaldūn, al- Ghazālī, as well as addressed related Western discourse. Iqbal has therefore tried to maintain the validity of the process of revelation by exploring its compatibility of the 'physical sciences'. Hence, he has maintained the compatibility 'rationally' of the revelatory process with modern understanding and sciences.

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fact Iqbal was not an absolutist in any sense due to the evolving nature of his thought. This depicts that he exceeded very quickly beyond tradition, and even modernism itself.

Nursi addresses the traditional *kalāmic* discussions for the validity of *wahy* and the Qur’ān (used interchangeably) by giving various ways as evidences of the ‘truth’ to the verses of the Qur’ān. Due to his knowledge of Arabic grammar and syntax, he shapes his arguments in order to validate ‘Qur’ānic truths’ or the science of *i’jaz* (miraculous-ness inimitability of the verses). He acknowledges that the exact nature of the process of revelation is not known except by the ‘experience’ of the Prophet. Emphasising its metaphysical reality, he centres his argument more on the validating the truths of its content in order to establish its relevance or compatibility with science and modernity.

Nursi and Iqbal have accepted the importance of ‘*aql* enlightened with Divine Revelation’, and relied heavily on it in their argumentation for *nubuwwa*. Evidently though, Iqbal leans more towards ‘*aql* than Nursi, the notable difference being Iqbal’s doubts in relation to the use of *ḥadīth* narrations. Nursi argues for the ‘validity’ and authenticity of *ḥadīth* traditions (miracles are also another key example) through his use of ‘*aql* in the light of tradition or *naql* and faith or *iman*’. His logical explanations and interpretations of the ‘metaphorical traditions’ echo his revivalist objective that has given prevalence to ‘*naql*’ and scripture by arguing with ‘*aql* to defend it. Nevertheless, both saw the limitations of ‘*aql*’ as well and therefore relied on literature and poetry to communicate their thoughts.

#### **6.4 Mysticism and metaphysics in Nursi and Iqbal**

Despite their engagement with ‘*aql*, either directly or theoretically, both Nursi and Iqbal also gave due importance to metaphysics. They had a profound respect and personal connection to the ‘realities’ of the metaphysical dimension of prophethood. In fact, through the theme of the ‘prophet’ and Prophet Muḥammad (a central re-occurring motif in their own mystical expositions), at times admittedly interwoven in their works (like Nursi’s exegesis) or separated in different genres (like Iqbal’s poetry) they found a non-rational way to argue for *nubuwwa*. Arguably, it was the inclusion of the ‘mystical’ and

metaphysical that had a ‘greater’ effect on their respective audiences, more so than their ‘prose’ works. The common Muslim Indian and Anatolian, who may not have understood the complexity of their argumentation and logical explanations, found recourse in their literary and poetical articulations of *nubuwwa*. They were often moved emotionally and practically as a ‘civic social movement’, as a result of their mystical illustrations and allusions to the Prophet Muḥammad. Thus, when it came to the notion of the love of the Prophet Muḥammad, both Nursi and Iqbal did not resist in expressing their deep reverence, sentiments and adoration for the central figure of their tradition throughout their works. Arguably Nursi and Iqbal were totally immersed in it, particularly when it came to the person of the Prophet, who had captivated their finer senses and emotions. On this aspect of *nubuwwa* their reason regressed and the reigning dominance of the ‘*qalb*’ or spiritual heart was at the fore. This positions these two scholars distinctly amidst their generally modernist contemporaries, who were mostly ‘anti-Sufi’. In the modern era, the trend of breaking away from traditional associations such as *ṭarīqats* or *tekkes*, dominated most of the civic and revivalist movements of Islam. Nursi and Iqbal were also critical of the ‘dormant’, ‘superstitious’ and ‘blind faith’ that mostly subjugated a number of these circles. These institutions were far removed and distant from the development in positivist sciences and technology. This vein of thought is more prominent in Iqbal’s work, who was tackling this reality more in his Indian context in which it prevailed more than in Nursi’s one. Nevertheless, despite their reservations about the possibility or necessity of Sufism or *taṣawwuf* in modern times, neither ever denied the great literary and mystical richness of the metaphysical traditions of Islam. Common mystics and spiritual guides mentioned and referred to in their works are not restricted to Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, Aḥmad Sirhindī, Fakhr-al-Din al-Iraqī, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī and al-Ghazālī.

Nursi and Iqbal employed *'aql*, establishing that their prophetologies were reflected not only by the traditional principles that were rooted in their thought, but also within the theological or *tajdīdī* tradition or steeped in the Western epistemological language an obvious engagement with modern day theoretical, human and practical sciences. With regards to the use of *'aql* and reason, while both were quite aware of the need for reason, and both also highlighted its potential deficiencies, one counterbalanced *'aql* with the use of tradition *naql*. Ironically both also had a great aptitude for *qalb* or the heart and the spiritual and mystical dimension of faith and prophethood and this forms the key subject of their prophetological comparison in Chapter Five of the thesis.

## **6.5 Criticisms of Nursi and Iqbal**

This research additionally reveals the limitations and criticisms of Nursi and Iqbal. Despite their efforts and successful political and social implications of their works, they still faced some criticism in their address of *nubuwwa*. Some have criticised Nursi for his adoption of a new method to outline prophethood. Although there were no critical attempts to consider his works seriously, the ultra secularists failed to see his apolitical aspirations and endeavoured to keep him distant from social and political life, through an imposed exile for the greater part of his life. Nursi faced suspicions, due to his popularity and reputation in most parts of Anatolia. He was often under scrutiny from the authorities of the Republic who feared an uprising inspired by him and his followers. Nursi also faced some resistance from Sufi leaders or *shaykhs*, who felt threatened by his knowledge and popularity. Some traditionally oriented people were also critical of him as they had reservations about his adoption of a new methodology that utilised science and rational principles of *kalām* together. One scholar, Neda Armaner, a professor at the School of Divinity at the University of Ankara, went so far as labelling Nursi as ‘mentally deranged’ and as a ‘deviant of Islam’, because she believed that he claimed the scientific definitions of

electricity, meteorological phenomena, and physics all contradicted Islam and were therefore an expression of atheism. Another criticism is the unconventional style of Nursi's exegesis, although arguably Nursi's style is consistent with the *tajdīdī* scholars like al-Ghazālī and al-Sirhindī. Furthermore, since Nursi did not adopt a traditional style of *kalām*, nor did he engage directly with theoretical philosophy of his time, his works were not considered seriously in academic circles until recently.

Moreover, due to his adoption of an unprecedented style (positive philosophy of 'not labelling') Nursi avoided a direct address of the various segments that criticised or misrepresented *nubuwwa*, including the ultra-secularists, the ultra-nationalists, the ultra-Sufis as well as the atheists. In this respect he was unlike his contemporary modernist scholars, who tackled the polemics that were raised premise by premise. Nursi developed a new methodology to address the separate parts of their contentions, by responding to the core subject matter in a generic way, without referring to direct names or philosophies making his position trickier to follow and grasp. In a similar unprecedented way, in some instances, he targets mystical theosophists once again making it difficult to be comprehended correctly by ordinary readers.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, there have been critical readings of Iqbal's major prose work of the *Reconstruction* for lacking theological content and relevancy, as well as for not being sufficiently philosophical. Although most Iqbalian scholars largely accept the former, the latter is debatable. Regardless of the more organised and academically structure of his works, nevertheless, due to the fluidity of his thought, he has often been erroneously or justly associated with different currents of thought such as modernism, traditionalism, and even pantheism. Most agree though that he was an Orthodox Muslim philosopher. Moreover, although it can be certainly considered a strength, the duality present in Iqbal's

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<sup>17</sup> Although, it may be argued that Nursi's methodology on this issue is similar to al-Ghazālī, nevertheless, his extension of this 'norm' as discussed above is in line with his revivalist objectives.

work (or his division of genres into the rational and mystical) presented in his prose works as separate to the mystical poetry, has created an imbalance in his address of both the *'aql* and the *qalb* or heart.

Through this critical study of two contemporary Muslim scholars, Said Nursi and Muhammad Iqbal, whose continuing influence in South Asia and Turkey is only growing, I hope that this study will contribute to the subject of *nubuwwa* in the field of Islamic theology, Islamic studies and, Islamic philosophy. The study highlights that Islamic responses to modernity and the post-enlightenment era were not monolithic. The comparative nature of this study provides insight into how particular histories and contexts effected Muslim scholarly responses in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both Nursi and Iqbal's reconstructed prophetologies are an important contribution to academia, due to their unprecedented method of utilising *'aql* and *mantiq* in a philosophical way to respond to the contemporary theoretical arguments against religion including *nubuwwa*. Though Iqbal seemingly engaged more theoretically with philosophy than Nursi, nonetheless, the strength and unique contribution of both scholars lie in their *'aql* engagement of the heart or *qalb*. By considering the mystical undertones of *nubuwwa* in their writings, they were able to broaden their appeal to a wider readership. In contrast to their contemporaries, both Nursi and Iqbal married the *'aql* and *qalb* through a combination of mysticism, philosophy, without overlooking tradition or *naql* to address prophethood. This is chiefly prevalent in Nursi's work, though both were more undoubtedly more mystically inclined than their modern counterparts like Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad 'Abduh, Rashid Riḍā, Abu A'la Maududi and Sayyid Quṭb. Accordingly, although they apprehended the need to utilise *'aql* in their prophetologies, they were also astutely aware of the limits of *'aql* unlike the modernists 'Abduh and Riḍā.



## 6.6 The impact and significance of their ideas of prophethood in *kalām* and revivalist discourse

The key difference in Nursi and Iqbal's work is not just the balance in the use of reason and tradition, but how the use of *'aql*-reason and *naql*-tradition affected their concept formation of prophecy, prophethood and their understanding of Prophet Muḥammad and his *Sunnah*. In addition to the extensive comparison of their historiographies, this research has also considered the historical context of their thoughts as well as their response and thought in regards to prophethood and Prophet Muḥammad. The conclusion will now focus on the implications and impact of these ideas of prophethood upon their immediate and later audiences.

At a theological level the significance of Nursi's contribution has brought about a new dynamism in *nubuwwa* studies and understanding of Prophet Muḥammad. He has created a particular methodology of combining various branches of Islamic tradition such as Sufism, theological schools, the legal schools, rhetoric, literature, logic, philosophy and history in order to rationally demonstrate the classical discussions on the need for prophets, and their perennial role in human history since the first prophet and human, Adam. Nursi's addition to Islamic theology is by way of this new methodology that details the same argument of the classical *kalāmists* with re-emphasis from various disciplines to convince the reader. Nursi's main objective was the preservation of 'faith' to meet this goal he sustained this *tajdīdī* style consistently. This was effective in the context of his time – as all aspects of faith including the validity, and need for prophets were questioned in particular by the emerging atheistic philosophies prevalent at the time. For the average Muslim affected by such philosophies his writings became a means of support and evidence to continue their belief in prophets and Prophet Muḥammad.

Key issues in *nubuwwa* that were under philosophical and rational scrutiny included the *ḥadīth* traditions of the Prophet, as well as the miracles of all prophets, including Prophet Muḥammad’s own. Nursi using his new methodology defended these two areas, the effect of which was significant. Nursi maintained the validity of the *ḥadīth* traditions and arguably created a new categorisation of the traditions. In the “Nineteenth-Letter” Nursi merged both areas as he defended by relaying the ‘sound narrations’ about the many miracles performed by Prophet Muḥammad – he was actually emphasising the point about the authenticity of these traditions and re-asserting faith in them by using them and defending them boldly. Likewise with the miracles, besides his scientific and rational explanation for prophetic miracles in the “Twentieth-Word”, in the “Nineteenth-Letter” Nursi reiterates the validity of the other miracles performed by Prophet Muḥammad.

The defence of these aspects of prophethood in Nursi’s *kalāmic* exegesis is significant as they paved the way for his defence of the *Sunnah* and ‘customs and habits of the Prophet’. The discussions of the *Sunnah* are also supported by the literary and symbolic discussions of Prophet Muḥammad. The *Muḥammad nur* and light concepts also assisted with ready acceptance of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Nursi’s defence and re-emphasis of the *Sunnah* at a volatile time – where much of it was brought to scrutiny criticism and questioning – was bold and almost dismissive. He argued for the necessity and dire need for the Muslim *umma* to continue the ‘standard of the Prophet’ as the blue print for personal and social life. However, his categorisation of the *Sunnah* into the four broad categories enabled the easier application of the local customary traditions such as changes and variations in clothing and taste. Nursi did not discuss *maghāzī an-nabāwīya* or the Prophet’s war stories, but emphasised his life and qualities – the ultimate meaning in mystical sense as well as the perfect human exemplary code of his life – his mercy compassion and family life. These explanations of prophethood meant his

followers could sustain their faith in the Prophet and also keep up with modern standards and demands of clothing social norms.

Nursi's astute understanding and broader conceptualisation of *Sharī'a*, *Sunnah* and prophecy enabled his students and followers to focus on 'faith essentials' or aspects of their faith that were questioned. Nursi provided new answers on how Islam was perfectly compatible with proposed socio-political reforms that were in effect from Islam itself. Thus, through these universal discussions of prophethood and connected topics Nursi was able to provide a new formula for personal and social life that enabled average Muslims to keep their faith, despite the radical changes in outer society and governance. Through use of reason (*'aql*) Nursi was able to address doubts with regards to prophecy, *ḥadīth*, and miracles. While he was able to dispel these doubts with the *'aql* address of the meaning and spiritual aspects of prophecy – he was further able to emphasise the 'greatness' and 'nobility' of Prophet Muḥammad that assisted with his arguments for the validity of *ḥadīth*, *Sunnah*, *Sharī'a* and the Prophet's finality. Nursi's methodology of avoiding politics influenced his students who also strove to achieve change in the 'hearts, minds and spirits' of the people of Anatolia.

Iqbal was diametrically opposite in relation to this formula. For Iqbal reason (*'aql*) and the spiritual aspects of the Prophet Muḥammad were used to evoke a sense of 'socio-political' change. Iqbal's methodology differed slightly in approach to Nursi as despite the fact that he used *'aql* and emphasised the universal aspects of the Prophet's character he was perturbed by the colonial presence and the Muslim world's demise. Iqbal may have perceived some errors in Muslim understanding and thought and wished to re-read and reconstruct Islam with the linguistic tools of Western philosophy which he argued had stemmed from Islam anyway.

Iqbal's impact may be assessed in his choice of language and genre. He wrote in English and Persian languages that most of the Indian Muslims could not access perhaps because he was addressing the elite educated classes whom he thought could affect the thought of the common people through social and political change and autonomy. His use of both Western and Muslim philosophy in his explanations of prophethood also allude to this.

Iqbal's response in his context distinguished him from other modernists who focused purely on rational aspects of prophethood. Iqbal like Nursi included the mystical aspects of Islam in his work, as evident in his devotional poems written about the Prophet of Islam. This fermented his prophetology and enabled his sophisticated ideas to reach the heart of the ordinary Muslims as well. Volumes of his poetry were also published in Urdu which met this aim. Nevertheless, like other modernists Iqbal was critical of the Sufi practice of Islam in India. He philosophically deconstructed the 'laxed Muslim Indian attitude' to Ibn 'Arabī's *wahdat al-wujūd* concept – an idea that he claimed had stalled the development of Muslim India in terms of spiritual and social progress.

Iqbal was also more in direct contact not only with Western philosophy through his immersion in Western culture itself, as he had spent considerable amount of time abroad whilst completing his doctorate. This enabled him to see the inconsistencies in the Colonial rulers of India, although he did not reject the 'good' that came with developments in Western thought. Iqbal's explanations of prophethood, particularly finality of prophethood, as well as his veneration of the Prophet Muḥammad, all bear a stamp of 'revolution' and change'. He is now celebrated as one of the 'founding fathers' of the State of Pakistan. Arguably it was his innovative way of understanding prophecy that contributed to his reputation.

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