

Exploring Interfaith Reconciliation in Pakistan and Iran; A Comparative Study of “Malinda Panha” and “The Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam”

Avesta Farhad (Corresponding Author)

Research Associate at Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum (Qom Office)

Email: avestafarhad@gmail.com

Maryam Habib

Research Fellow at the Fatima Zahera Society for Women Development in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan (Qom Office), Iran

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Abstract

Within Pakistan, the discourse surrounding peaceful coexistence and religious harmony remains a seldom-explored terrain. In response, this project has been conceived to delve into the pursuit of interfaith harmony within traditionally conservative or orthodox societies, such as those in Pakistan and Iran. To accomplish this objective, the authors, under the guidance of their supervisor, conduct a comparative analysis of three key texts: the classical Buddhist work “Malinda Panha”, the renowned intellectual opus “The Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam” by Iqbal, and the philosophical contributions of the celebrated Iranian Shia cleric, Ali Shariati. This investigation endeavors to elucidate the intricate connections between Islam and Buddhism, particularly through the lens of distinct concepts, including but not limited to attention, wisdom, perception, volition, consciousness, transmigration, rebirth, the soul, the distinction between knowingly and unknowingly committing evil, dilemmas, inference, asceticism and similes.

Of noteworthy relevance is the text “Malinda Panha”, which chronicles the dialogues between Menander, the Indo-Greek king of Yavanas, and the Buddhist monk Nagasena. These exchanges occurred in the ancient locales of Sagala (the capital of Yavanas, currently known as Sialkot) and Kishtwar in Kashmir. This research underscores the profound influence of regional ideologies on Iqbal’s intellectual framework and how it resonates with his native environment. Simultaneously, the study probes the intellectual contributions of figures from Iran, notably the esteemed Shia cleric, Ali Shariati, who aligns with Iqbal’s approach in advocating for peaceful coexistence and interfaith harmony within socio-religiously diverse societies.

Introduction

Unfortunately, Pakistan is one of the few countries in the world which is suffering from enormous religious intolerance. Although this is an Islamic state, people belonging to certain sects and beliefs within Islam practice conservatism and extremism in the sense that, they do not consider followers of other sects and beliefs as having the right to live or a part of the Muslim community. Similarly, their ignorance does not allow them to bear the existence of Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Ahmadis within their surroundings. The history of relations between different religions and sects in Pakistan shows that the narrow-mindedness has damaged many families, most of whom belong to Shia, Deobandi and Ismaili sects within Islam whereas; many Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Ahmadis have also fallen victim to this rigidity.

Likewise, such extremism is also the biggest hurdle in conducting debates between religions, sects and faiths regarding seeking reconciliation. Therefore, this project aims to trace the historical, ideological, moral and sociopolitical ways of promoting 3Ps (peace, progress and prosperity) by conducting interfaith dialogues and ensuring religious reconciliations.

Literature Review

By following the addressed purpose, research work under this project comparatively examines Iqbal's philosophy with a classical Buddhist "Malinda Panha" (considers a holy book in Burmese Buddhism, sometimes count as part of Theravada Buddhism). As it has been proved that Iqbal had been inspired by numerous regional ideologies; such as Nazism and Pan-Germanism during his stay in Germany, similarly, his concept of reconstructing religious thoughts is an extraction¹ from the conversations between Menander (king of the Indo-Greek Kingdom of Yavanas) and Buddhist monk Nagasena held in the Sagala (capital of Yavanas, currently Sialkot) and Kishtwar (Kashmir) (Asim, 2020).

As the concepts of attention, wisdom, perception, volition, consciousness, transmigration and rebirth, soul, doing evil knowingly and unknowingly, dilemmas, inference, asceticism, and similes are the subjects of both; the regionally originated Buddhist book "Malinda Panha" and Iqbal's work², this study traces Iqbal as the inclusively accommodative personality who always seek reconciliation and harmony among different religions or religious societies but within the theoretical framework of Islam (as per the Quranic verse of 109:06³).

Another notable point is, this project deals with conservative societies like Pakistan and Iran where post-1979 Iranian academic circles also respect Iqbal's intellect even though its sociopolitical system has been converted from liberal secularism to Shia-Twelve fundamentalism. An Iranian famous revolutionary leader and sociologist Ali Shariati (1933-1977) has written: "Ma wa Iqbal" (We and Iqbal)⁴ and "Mohammad Iqbal: A Manifestation of Self-reconstruction and Reformation" where the first one is a

¹ Before embracing Islam, as forefathers of Iqbal were belonged to the community of Kashmir pundits (followed Kashmir Shaivism), later settled in Sialkot; this affiliation helped Iqbal to read and examine locally evolved religious ideas whether belong to Kashmir Shaivism or Buddhism (Asghar, 2021).

² Specifically presented in "the Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam" and generally interpreted in the "Israr-e-Khudi", "Ramuz-e-Bekhud", "Peyam-e-Mashriq" and "Zabur-e-Ajam.

³ In Surah Kafirun, there is written, "For you, there is your religion, and for us, there is our religion".

⁴ This book was translated into English entitled as "Iqbal: Manifestation of the Islamic Spirit" by Mahliqa Qarai and Laleh Bakhtiar.

compilation of his lectures on Iqbal during different occasions while second exhibits his ideological rhythm extracting from Iqbal.

This time when the Pak-Iran region is experiencing diverse religious or sectarian fundamentalisms and conservatisms at a prominent level, Allama Iqbal (famous as Iqbal Lahori in Iran) and Ali Shariati as the ideological figures in Pakistan and post-1979 Iran directly or indirectly follows interfaith harmony by getting inspirations from regionally originated historical holy Buddhist book “Malinda Panha”. Although, both figures encircle their concepts, ideas, and philosophies around Islam every sensible educated person can find the roots of their work by pointing out resemblances with the basic themes in conversations between Menander and Nagasena.

Ethical Consideration

There is no aim to hurt any religious, sectarian, or social community but to promote peace, progress and prosperity in every country, region and society suffering from intolerance and ignorance (as significantly practiced in Pakistan and Iran).

Historical Background

It is believed that “Malinda Panha” was initially written in the Sanskrit language between 100 BC and 200 BC. Later on, it was translated into the Chinese language as well. According to Thomas Rhys Davids, this is undoubtedly the masterpiece of classical Indian prose from the literary point of view, which had then been produced in any country (Davids, 1890).

On the other hand, “The Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam” is a compilation of lectures delivered by Allama Iqbal on different occasions in Aligarh, Hyderabad and Madras. The First edition of this book was published in 1930. However, the last chapter of this book “Is Religion possible” was added in this book in 1934 (Iqbal, 1930). On one side, the core themes of this book are correlated with the conceptual topics discussed in the “Malinda Panha”, similarly at another side, the theoretical and philosophical concepts of Ali Shariati in Iran are easily traced as an extracting work from Iqbal’s respective book (Asghar, 2021).

Similarly, the book “We and Iqbal” was also the compilation of Ali Shariati’s lectures delivered in Tehran during different times on Iqbal till his death in 1977. Not only this book but another work entitled “Mohammad Iqbal: A Manifestation of Self-reconstruction and Reformation” also indicates how much his philosophical roots follow Iqbal’s prescribed paradigm for interfaith harmony, socio-religious reconciliation and promoting 3Ps but within the framework of Islam (sometimes described as ‘Progressive Islam’ followed or designed by Iqbal and Shariati⁵) (Asghar, 2021).

Comparative Analysis

As the concepts of attention, wisdom, perception, volition, consciousness, transmigration and rebirth, soul, doing evil knowingly and unknowingly, dilemmas, inference, asceticism and similes have been

⁵ Although, he belonged to religious family but his approaches to conflict resolutions in Middle East -- through reconciliations between Islam, Islamic traditionalities, modern sociology, Marxism and libertarian theology -- portray his personality as progressive Muslim (Rose, 2017).

described in the book “Malinda Panha”, this study comparatively examines what are the perceptions of Iqbal and Ali Shariati on respective concepts; whether they adopt them as they are, or mold them as per their socio-religious ideologies.

Attention

As the term “attention” is used in “Malinda Panha” within the context of “reasoning”, where monk Nagasena advises King Menander, “Then, O king, the living principle within cannot make use of whichever sense it pleases as you suggested. It is, O king, because of the eye and forms that sight and those other conditions arise, namely; contact, feeling, perception, intention, one-pointedness, vitality and attention. Each arises simultaneously with its cause and herein ‘The one who knows cannot be found’ (Pesala, 1979, p. 50). Interpreters explain this statement as follows reasoning while investigating within or around yourself.

Similarly, in chapter 10, monk Nagasena advises King Menander to ensure attention during meditation because it promotes the spiritual welfare of monks, so you should learn it as you learn the art of war, property maintenance and trading, cattle business and households care (Pesala, 1979, p. 104). Similarly, another piece of advice of the monk to the king is presented in chapter 18 which defines, “no one can avail concentration without attention” (Pesala, 1979, p. 171).

At the same time, Iqbal also quotes the concept of “Attention” in “the Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam” as;

- He quotes Greeks ancient scholars including Socrates who gave attention to the human world; argues that the subject for the study of man is only a man but not the insects, plants or stars. Apparently, to give attention by human on human seems to be out of Islamic jurisdiction, especially when Quran says that ‘there is no bee but a recipient of divine inspiration. However, the concept of attention shows clarity in the next part of this verse when Quran also advises the readers ‘to observe the perpetual change of the winds, alternation of day and night, the clouds, the starry heavens and the planets swimming through infinite space. Iqbal says that not only Socrates but Plato and Ibn-e-Rushd also follow the concept of “attention” for the well-being of humans. If Imam Ghazali opposed this concept, it was only based on some private experiences (Iqbal, 1930, p. 03).
- He also refers to Quranic verses 44:38-39 (Surah Dukhan) where there is written, “And we do not create the heavens and earth, and that between them for play. We did not create them but for concentration (or attention), however many of them are not attentive” (Iqbal, 1930, p. 08).
- By following his progressive attitude, he also describes Quranic verses of 1:35, 3:190-191, 4:95, 16: 12, 24:44, 20:31, 29:20, 33:72, 75: 36-40 for defending his viewpoint regarding “attention” (Iqbal, 1930, pp. 08-21).
- Moreover, Syed Akbar Ali Shah interprets Iqbal’s concept of attention as, “Both life and death do not deserve attention but only yourself, your ego and your self-consciousness. Similarly, Professor R.A. Nicholson explains this concept in the book “secrets of self” as ‘everyone can know secrets of the self by giving attention to itself’ (Sabir, 2021).

On the other hand, Ali Shariati follows the concept of “attention” in terms of tracing out the reasoning of deterioration, backwardness and stagnation in society, and argues that “an enlightened being would be able to transmit his understanding to the society outside the narrow and limited group of his generation” (Tariq, 2022).

Wisdom

During the conversation, monk Nagasena teaches King Menander about wisdom as ‘Reasoning is not same as wisdom. Animals have reasoning but do not have wisdom. Taking hold is the mark of reasoning, cutting off is the mark of wisdom. O king, hold your mind with reasoning and cut off the defilements with wisdom’ (Pesala, 1979, pp. 37-38). He also advised the king ‘to be purified by wisdom’ (Pesala, 1979, p. 40). He also defines wisdom as “O king, when wisdom springs up in the mind it dispels the darkness of ignorance, causes the radiance of vision to arise, makes the light of knowledge shine forth and makes the noble truths plain” (Pesala, 1979, p. 42).

On the other hand, Iqbal defines the term “wisdom” as the divine blessing, and argues that the creative world is only based upon reality and wisdom (Iqbal, 1930, p. 57 & 102). He further says that modern society with its bitter class struggles can adopt modern economic life by renewing faith with wisdom (Iqbal, 1930, p. 195).

In the same direction, Ali Shariati advises his readers to acquire wisdom for knowing themselves as, “Adam acquired the wisdom and consciousness, opened his eyes, found himself naked, and then he entered into the state of knowing himself” (Tariq, 2022, p. 342).

Perception

Monk Nagasena describes the term “perception” as “he would still be in ignorance about the things he had not yet learned but regarding what had been accomplished by wisdom – that is the perception of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and soullessness – he would not be ignorant” (Pesala, 1979, p. 44). He also says that ‘O king, whatever is happening with yourself or around you is just because of your perception, intention, feelings and contact’, ‘there is self-consciousness, there is perception’ (Pesala, 1979, pp. 50-51).

Similarly, Iqbal argues that Quran tells Muslims about perception as the intellectual revolt (Iqbal, 1930, p. 03). He says that the dilemma is, Muslim students recite Quran in the light of Greek teachings while, Plato does not recognize perception as real knowledge (Iqbal, 1930, p. 03). He also says that knowledge is self-perception which is elaborated by understanding. By quoting Quranic verse 32:7-9, he explains that sense-perception must be supplemented by the perception of what the Quran describes as “something which sees and its reports, if properly interpreted, are never false” (Iqbal, 1930, p. 14).

At the same time, Ali Shariati discusses that, not perceiving yourself or to unfamiliar with indifferences with one’s self is the biggest social and spiritual illness. Sociology and psychology reports that a person forgets his own self when he gradually inclines toward materialistic life. While, development in socio-economic life is actually associated with perceptions a person perceives by his own wisdom, attention and feelings (Shariati, 1977).

Volition

Monk Nagasena also teaches Menander that volitional determination of three kinds performs miracles; one is the volition of an alive monk, the second is when you visit any shrine with a belief of observing a miracle, and the third is an act of a wise person who has confidence for his conduct and purity (Pesala, 1979, p. 153).

Similarly, Iqbal quoted Bergson for defining volition as ‘reality is unpredictable and creative. It is a product of vital impetus of volitional nature’. In other words, Iqbal says that the vitalism of Bergson ends in an insurmountable dualism of will and thought. As Bergson argues that the presence of any person is a product of his past, Iqbal says that consciousness and volition help a person to look at the future. A person can form his future by his volitional determination (Iqbal, 1930, p. 50).

On the other hand, Ali Shariati says that “a man has an independent volition. This is his most extraordinary and inexplicable power; volition in the sense that humanity has entered into that chain of causation upon which the world of nature, history, and society are completely dependent as a primary and independent cause, and continues to intervene in and act upon this deterministic series” (Campbell & Shariati, 2016).

Consciousness

Nagasena teaches about consciousness as, ‘ignorance establishes formations or causes certain events; then respective formations or events develop links with consciousness; and by consciousness, the mind constructs six senses’ (Pesala, 1979, p. 48). He also says that eyes-consciousness and mind-consciousness are interlinked with each other (Pesala, 1979, pp. 50-51).

On the other hand, Iqbal also discusses that the basic purpose of Quranic teachings is to awaken the higher consciousness in man regarding strengthening his relations with God and the universe (Iqbal, 1930, p. 07). Reality is actually an empirical fact that invades our consciousness (Iqbal, 1930, p. 14). Ordinary rational consciousness and prophetic or mystic consciousness; both are linked to the same reality as per their level of exploration and observations (Iqbal, 1930, p. 16).

Likewise, Ali Shariati considers that existing social conflicts or class differences can be undermined by delivering a sense of conscious awareness regarding social responsibilities. People can be conscious of their well-being by exploring their inner artistic, literal and linguistic abilities (Tariq, 2022, p. 338).

Transmigration and Rebirth

As Menander asks Nagasena that, “Can there be any rebirth where there is no transmigration?” Nagasena replies, ‘yes, it can. As a man can give light from one oil-lamp to another but nothing moves from one lamp to another, or as a pupil learn a verse by heart from his teacher but it does not mean that verse transmigrated from teacher to pupil’ (Pesala, 1979, p. 59). However, people do not desire rebirth for righteousness but glory (Pesala, 1979, p. 83). They must learn that “good deeds lead rebirth either in heaven or fortunate human births while, evil deeds lead to rebirth in states of misery or unfortunate human births” (Pesala, 1979, p. 113).

Iqbal describes the concept of rebirth in the Quranic context by referring to 35:1 and 29:20 where it is written;

- He (God) adds to his creation what he wills (35:1)
- Say, go through the earth and see how God hath brought forth all creation thereafter will he give it another birth (29:20)

In interpretation, Iqbal argues that this universe is not blocked or finished, the immobile and incapable product of change. Deep in its inner being lies, perhaps, the dream of the new birth (Iqbal, 1930, pp. 08-09).

On the other hand, Ali Shariati does not recognize Iqbal's ideological connections with the emotional teachings of Sufism, Buddhism, Lao Tzu, or Christianity but as a constructor of linkage between religion and rationality. He argues that the meaning of new birth or transmigration can be the transferring of knowhow and awareness about miseries and other problems to the next generation, and it would help in understanding the solutions of described dilemmas with attention, wisdom, consciousness and righteousness (Tariq, 2022, p. 336) (Shariati., 1977).

Soul

When monks Anantakaya, Devamantiya and Mankura visit Nagasena, Anantakaya asks Nagasena, "when, your reverence, I say, Nagasena, what is that Nagasena"? "What do you think that Nagasena is"? Nagasena replies, "The soul, the inner breath, which comes and goes" (Pesala, 1979, p. 36).

Interpreters argue that Nagasena wants to say that a person in the existing state of body or at existing status is just because of the power of his soul. As the soul becomes strengthened by righteousness, virtues and wisdom, it enables the soul to come again and again in somewhat similar or distinct shapes. 'Body is mortal but the soul is immortal' (Asghar, 2021).

In a similar direction, Iqbal highlights Quranic verse 17:85 where there is written that "And they ask thee of the soul, the soul awards by the Lord's Amar (Command) but little among you are aware of this". Iqbal argues that a body is God's creation while a soul is God's command. If a person utilizes God's creation under God's command, he will conquer not only his inner and external world but his present and future (Iqbal, 1930, pp. 111-112). In fact, the linkage between purposes of creation and command assists the soul to compete, face and defeat terrible situations (if any) not only in the present but after the transformation from this life to another.

In the same direction, Ali Shariati says that a person can be internally weak if he only focuses on materialistic authority and powerful social status but never think to strengthen his soul. He would be disintegrated soon like a mountain of sand if he only looks at his external survival but his soul is not connected with moral, rational, righteous and wise values (Tariq, 2022, p. 340).

Evil Deeds or Doing Evil

About evil deeds knowingly, Nagasena says that a person prepares poison or drink, it would suffer from pain, so if someone thought to perform evil deeds and he performs, he would be suffered from hell' (Pesala, 1979, p. 52). He also argues that 'all the pains we receive in life are because of the negative powers of evil deeds' (Pesala, 1979, p. 77).

He also advised Menander that “on doing evil, O king, a man becomes filled with remorse, and his mind cannot escape from the thought of it, he is depressed and obtains no peace, miserable and despairing he wastes away. Just, O king, as a drop of water falling onto dry river-bed gains, not in volume but is swallowed up on the very spot where it fell. This is why unwholesomeness is so mean and minute” (Pesala, 1979, p. 151).

Similar to this, Iqbal says that God’s judgment for the nation on evil deeds is more relentless than God’s judgment for individuals. Although, God is forgiving and compassionate but nations only destroy for their evil deeds and transgression. By quoting Quranic verse 11:116, he argues that when a nation perishes, its good members also face destruction because they fail to stop evil deeds in society (Iqbal, 1930, p. 172).

At the same time, Ali Shariati follows this concept as, “when a person does not recognize the spirit of his soul, he becomes an evil being, perform evil deeds”. This is similar to a giant (in Persian, called ‘Jinn’), when a person becomes insane, ancient Iranian people thought, a giant has captured his soul, so he will now perform as per the directions of a giant; he has lost his intellect now. Ali Shariati argues that, performing evil deeds is a sickness that only arose when you do not know the spirit of the soul (Shariati, 1977).

Dilemmas

Nagasena discusses the concept of “dilemma” as ‘tear apart tangles of wrong views existing in people, solve their difficulties, mess and puzzles (which are their dilemmas), and give insights for better future to the sons of Buddha, so they will refute their opponents or adversaries’ (Pesala, 1979, p. 75).

On the other hand, Iqbal defines the concept of “Dilemma” by explaining the term “Ijtihad”, and argues that the immobility of Islam during the last 500 years has generated intellectual dilemma, and it can only be resolved by the movement in the structure of Islam; called Ijtihad (Iqbal, 1930, p. 176). However, unlike the concept of Ijtihad given by Ibn-e-Taimiya or any other intellectual, the idea of Ijtihad prevailing and working within the Turkish socio-political and religious sphere is much more clear under Islamic laws and modern sociological concepts. He says, if the renaissance of Islam is a fact, we will one day follow Turks regarding re-evaluating our intellectual inheritance by neglecting extra-healthy conservative criticism. And, this practice would serve as the rapid movement of liberalism within the Islamic world (Iqbal, 1930, pp. 180-181).

Similarly, Ali Shariati also idealizes the concept of “Ijtihad” for resolving socio-political, cultural, economic and other intellectual dilemmas for independent reasons; called Ijtihad (Tariq, 2022, p. 337). According to him, Ijtihad is the religious reformist movement that will polish the massive growth of energy in the society, and enlighten the present as well as coming generation(s) (Tariq, 2022, p. 339). However, lack of Ijtihad causes intensification of dilemmas and absence of developments as per the time needs (Tariq, 2022, p. 343).

Inference

The concept of “inference” in “Malinda Panha” is presented in the context of “guess”, “conjecture” and “supposition”. Nagasena tells Menander that, ‘we can only guess about the powers of perfectly enlightened Buddhas having all knowledge (including ten powers, four modes of fearlessness and

eighteen characteristics of a Buddha)'. Their righteousness makes them so clear and agile that we can never suppose how their miracles can be, or how they can display twin miracles at a time (Pesala, 1979, p. 79).

On the other hand, Iqbal presents the concept of "inference" within the context of understanding reality. He argues that facts give the supposition or inference that the 'ultimate nature of reality is spiritual, and it is based on ego'. In other words, he says that attention, wisdom, will and wish within ego provide supposition to a man for developments in a future life (Iqbal, 1930, p. 58).

On the contrary, Ali Shariati refers poetry of Hafiz Sherazi, and describes the concept of "inference" as 'inference is based upon a person's own taste'. As every person perceives the poetry of Hafiz Sherazi according to own taste, understanding and perception, the multi-dimensional and multi-symbolic nature of teachings provides inference to each reader or follower with a new outlook. Therefore, the series of interpretations is continued. The same is the case with religions. According to him, "as religions were brought for various types of peoples and generations, it was/is necessary that they contained symbolic languages". It will provide a concrete way for future developments (PIIF-Islamabad & Shariati, 1970).

Asceticism

As "Asceticism" generally means to adopt a lifestyle with an absence of sensual pleasures and to follow spiritual or religious teachings, Nagasena describes the similar trait of a monk following asceticism, such as;

- A monk deserves praise if he performs righteousness and follows rightness.
- Such austerity is useless and worthless if you receive gold and silver as an advantage of being a monk.
- What will be the benefit of hardship if bliss can be received comfortlessly? (Pesala, 1979, p. 129)

Iqbal traces asceticism within Sufism, and argues that dry-as-dust asceticism during pre-Islamic times was generating socio-political, cultural and religious dilemmas whereas; Sufism relates free thoughts with rationalism, and helps a person to polish not only his 'zahir' (appearance) but 'batin' (reality) (Iqbal, 1930, p. 178).

On the other hand, Ali Shariati defines asceticism as a reaction to worldliness, and argues that;

- All societies chose either asceticism or worldliness in the past.
- As every action has an opposite reaction; when Chinese civilization was materialistic and followed worldliness, the ascetic religion under Lao Tzu was introduced there, which molded the society towards Sufism, theosophy and monasticism. Later on, Confucianism diverted Chinese society from ascetic religion to materialism and worldliness.
- Similarly, Vedic influence molded Indian society towards Sufism and asceticism. Some of the pundits still neglect worldliness there.
- However, Islam does not enslave any person but makes him a friend of God. And, this friendship needs such a religion that should have the ability to protect him whether he follows asceticism or worldliness. Islam provides equilibrium between both sides through Ijtihad (PIIF-Islamabad & Shariati, 1970).

Similes

During examining the text of “Malinda Panha”, it is noted that not only Nagasena but other monks also used similes for advising their followers. However, Nagasena says that ‘similes are like a wind, it exists all the time but is difficult to explain’ (Pesala, 1979, p. 141). He also argues that similes are only used for the effectiveness of lessons delivered to the followers (Pesala, 1979, p. 170).

On the other hand, Iqbal considers similes as the product of intellect, rejects the Sunni-Hanafi principle of reasoning by similes, analogy and Ijma regarding the understanding of oldest legalities; argues that similes should be based upon morality and intellect as per modern needs (Iqbal, 1930, p. 180).

In somewhat similar directions, Ali Shariati discusses Hajj as a metaphor or simile where different practices during offering pilgrimage provide distinct resemblances as religious symbolism and mystical interpretation. Hajj exemplifies circling crowd teaches to be state-centric and nation-centric, pilgrim dresses explain simplicity, and pelting stones indicate to kick off evil deeds. Similarly, he argues that apparent practices of religion should be observed as similes for deeply moving into real life (Chowdhury, 2021).

Conclusion

Both Allama Muhammad Iqbal and Ali Shariati are counted as the ideological founders of Pakistan and post-1979 Iran respectively. However, not only Ali Shariati but numerous other Iranian intellectuals have been inspired by Iqbal’s work. Thus, this inclination urges the renaming of numerous libraries as “Kutab Khana Iqbal” in Iran. Therefore, this study adds Iqbal as the following intellectual personality in the Pak-Iran geographical region (Lone, 2016) (Khan, 2004). However, as a majority of the population considers both personalities as the major contributors in the formation of Islamic republics within their territorial spheres, the resemblance within their major work with “Malinda Panha” assists the researchers to find the founding stones of both countries on the bases of interfaith harmony. On one side, If Iqbal contemplates, scrutinizes and mulls over the Buddhist teachings presented in the regionally originated book “Malinda Panha”, Ali Shariati follows similar academic lines to Iqbal for looking at respective concepts. However, the difference is; both portray their selves as “inclusive⁶” or “inclusively accommodative⁷” personalities – because of ground realities at the geographical piece of land currently consisting of Pakistan and Iran – along with exhibiting their Islamic centrism (Asghar, 2021).

Hence, this study traces the solution of countering religious extremism, dogmatism, conservatism and militarism within Pakistan and Iran in an approach followed by firstly Allama Muhammad Iqbal and then

⁶ Inclusivism generally defines as particular form of religious pluralism where all beliefs have equal weightage within the specific context of believer (Banerjea, 1998, p. xxi).

⁷ The term Inclusive Accomodativism can be decoded as seeking similar traits between socio-political and/or cultural segments, market economies and religious/sectarian factions by avoiding differences (even major or minor) just to avail 3Ps⁷ (peace, progress and prosperity), structural functionalism and cosmopolitanism (Zaheer & Asim, 2022).

Ali Shariati. Although the consideration of the prophecy of Buddha is controversial among Muslims⁸, the concepts given in “Malinda Panha” urged both intellectuals to utilize and interpret them as per the religious contexts of the society but to ensure interfaith harmony and to avail peace, progress and prosperity.

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⁸ Gohar Shahi sect within Islam assumes Buddha as the prophet of his time. His followers have also projected this assumption on ALRA TV several times. On the other hand, due to following concepts given in Malinda Panha, numerous scholars think that ‘Iqbal adds Buddha in between the list of prophets’ (Asghar, 2021).

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