Virginia Woolf's was a mystic way as her conscience was alive and her inward ear (as well as eye) was not dead and she 'had hearkened to the call of God, "Return"';¹ Her speech and 'action was the outer journey, her inner journey was above the sky'.¹ Her 'body travelled on its dusty way',¹ her 'spirit walked like Jesus on the sea'.¹ The mystical is intuitive. A mystic dreams of transformation of self, of consciousness - has an agony of collective consciousness - so had Virginia Woolf. She was a seer who delivered her message through the medium of art in order to make it intelligible. She yearned for the deliverance of modern man which led her to have her own ideal of perfect personality.

Virginia Woolf has consciousness of the beyond -- the beyond which is also within. Hers is an effort to go beyond time - having sense of unity with all things. Union of opposites is characteristic of mysticism. All marriage is mystical. In the opinion of Professor Sisir Kumar Ghosh, poetry is home - coming, so is mysticism which presents

₂ Ibid. p. 74.
₃ Ibid. p. 74.
₄ Ibid. p. 74.
states of consciousness. Mysticism is the state when body awakens in soul. Mysticism and literature deal with the mystery of man. Sisir Kumar Ghosh, himself a mystic, feels that "literature, being the sub-culture of mysticism, must be judged with mystical standards".

Virginia Woolf thought that there are only few essential hours of life. According to her life is a memory. Her life as a writer was based upon two persistent memories - the north Cornwall shore and her parents. All her writings are a record of the hidden moments on which her life turned. Her writings are a study of Virginia herself inseparable from her personality. It is difficult to see the shape of her life as its pattern is all-inclusive, assimilating everything. Being of a mystical bent of mind she had faith in indivisibility. Her life and her writings are inseparable. She is delineated in her writings more than any other writer. Hers was a circular personality therefore perfect and difficult to be understood. Hers was an invisible life. There was so much that she could not utter or do. Her birth, parentage, her sufferings and illnesses, her friendships etc. are well-known. Therefore an effort has been made here to probe deeper into the "caves", the inner recesses of her being, throwing light on those factors which have been quite controversial, i.e. her ideas about

5. This statement was noted down by the present researcher while Professor Sisir Kumar Ghosh was delivering his lecture on "Mysticism and Literature" in the Department of English, A.M.U., a few years back.
religion, her so-called "madness" and suicide. Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf's father, after having turned to agnosticism, took a career in literature. In *An Agnostic's Apology* he wrote that man is totally ignorant of the Infinite and Absolute therefore he should renounce for ever to get behind the veil and be satisfied with the systematic interrogation of experience. Nancy Bazin rightly feels that 'relentless in his pursuit he repressed his intuition'^6 His daughter's search for truth, on the other hand, led her towards just an opposite direction because she could never renounce to get behind the Veil as she was a mystic seer possessing a harmonious personality. She went deeper and deeper and "tunnelled the caves", i.e. in the mystery of Egyptology.

Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary that she was then writing a long picturesque essay upon the Christian religion. She believed proving that man is in need of God; but the God was described in the process of change. She also wrote a history of women and a history of her own family all very Elizabethan in style—God, Women, Family.

Here, some biographical information about her visible life is necessarily to be given in order to show the contrast. Sea memories of her early childhood haunt her novels. Hers was an extremely sad childhood due to disastrous shocks especially the death of her mother. Her

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father, after Stella's death became dependent on her and Venessa. He was crude and tyrannical to his family although lovable to his friends. This time was specially difficult for Virginia due to the improper behaviour of her half-brother George Duckworth. From this time she acquired a posture of defensive panic. She felt that her life had been destroyed before it had begun.

Her father's death led to another of her nervous breakdown. She attempted to commit suicide. But after his death the children got freedom. Bloomsbury Group was founded. Disasters still continued. Thoby died.

The love she felt for women was akin to that of a daughter for her mother. She married Leonard Woolf in 1912 due to the obvious advantages of marriage which she got in the form of care and protection. Virginia's passionate nature led her towards her writings through which she could synthesise her being. Her innermost self would have remained obscure had she not used her pen to its utmost vigour. We would never have known the real Virginia who was a seer, a mystic having unfathomable depths. Being a great lover of innocence she loved children. Due to the abhorring experience in her childhood she was disillusioned to the utmost of male lust.

Virginia woolf had been a victim of hostile criticism and ridicule. She was a victim of destiny and society. Overstressed by agonies and miseries she again attempted to commit suicide in 1913. Whenever she found that her
writings were getting recognition, her condition improved.
In 1941, by her own free will, in totally sane condition, she mingled with the Infinite, with her origin, water, which is the source of creation upon the earth!

Virginia Woolf's suicide and the so-called "madness" is to be discussed rather in detail as it is somehow related to the main subject of this thesis. Phyllis Rose is of opinion that the recurrent "image of water, of sea, suggests a unity with the life either beyond or beneath individual consciousness -- the world without a self, in which individuality is dissolved in the eternal rhythms of collective life. The ocean suggests escape into the impersonal, a comforting and protective element-the kind of escape she was obsessed with throughout the thirties. Her earliest memories were of her mother and the water outside her window. In her beginnings was her end."¹

The circle ended where it had begun.

Maurice Bucaille, a French author has quoted a verse from The Holy Quran while describing the origins of life:
-- Sura 21, Verse 30:

Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together, then we clove them asunder and we got every living thing out of water. Will they then not believe?²

8. Maurice Bucalille: The Bible, the Quran and Science Crescent Publishing Company, Delhi, 1985, p. 186.

37
Interpreting this verse, Bucaille says that every living thing originated in water which is the major component of all living cells without which life is not possible. Rumi says:

*These waves cast themselves back into ocean

... for verily to him do we return.*

The spirit casting away the body that it wears attains its form and glory, the still point of revolving wheel. Even after death life continues. Thus man defeats death after he has died. Virginia Woolf's was not an ordinary death. Phyllis Rose writes:

"On April 18, Leonard went to the Newhaven mortuary to identify her body. On April 21 she was cremated in Brighton. Leonard thought that the Cavatina from Beethoven's B-Flat Quartet, Opus 130, should be placed at one's cremation, but when the time came to make arrangements for the funeral, he could not bring himself to discuss Beethoven's cavatina. When the doors of the crematorium opened and the coffin slid forward, Leonard heard, to his surprise, the music of the Blessed Spirits from Gluck's Orphee". He buried her ashes under a tree in the garden.

The music of the Blessed Spirits from Gluck's Orphee heard by Leonard is indicative of something very essential concerning Virginia Woolf's personality and her being i.e. her concept of chastity resulting out of the puritan

background of her family. Her very name Virginia is suggestive of this essential trait and virtue in her. This trait has been given excessive importance in Christianity which would have been one of the root causes of Virginia Woolf's extreme sense of guilt resulting in nervous breakdowns and then suicide. This trait must have been in her blood since her very early childhood when she was assaulted by her half-brother. The unutterable feelings of shame naturally must have made her tongue-tied and extremely suffocated. Consequently a sense of self-condemnation remained with her throughout her life. She has, time and again, asked questions as to why men also are not expected to be chaste. Her conception of chastity is surprisingly Islamic in spirit (if we believe in Islam being the most ancient as well as the most modern religion with its faith in submission to the will of the Absolute Being).

*The Holy Quran* says:

C. 157 Chastity is a Virtue for men and women,

24:1.26 Whether joined in marriage, or single or widowed.

*The punishment for offences in such matters should be public.*

And--

*The women and the men*

*Guilty of adultery or fornication*

*Flog each of them*

*With a hundred stripes.*

Virginia Woolf yearned for equality among human beings. Phyllis Rose writes:

Elsewhere Virginia might blame George's (her half-brother) advances for warping her sexuality, but in the context of her memoirs the affair is presented as the final and most grotesque example of the cleavage between appearances and reality which so distressed her about the world of fashion.¹¹

There seems to be a deep relationship between the childhood experiences concerning the sexual assaults and the very act of suicide attempted by her. The issue is the mind's dominion over itself. Clarissa, in Mrs. Dalloway can intuitively understand, (while Septimus kills himself):

A thing there was that mattered; a thing wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, led drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance.¹³

Phyllis Rose writes:

She can imagine how a man like William Bradshaw, obscurely evil, "Capable of some indescribable outrage-forcing your soul" (203) could drive a young man to protect, himself through death. Here the word 'forcing' has connotations of rape, and Septimus' death scene in which he

¹² Virginia Woolf: Mrs. Dalloway, (Published by Granata Publishing Ltd.in Panther Books, 1976.), p. 163.
jumps out of the window to avoid the relentless bearing down on him of the doctors, suggests a melodrama in which the virginial girl leaps off a cliff rather than submit to a sexual assault.¹⁴

The very idea of chastity being in her blood Virginia Woolf, in a way, like that "virginal girl" had committed a mental suicide at the time while she was assaulted for the first time by George Duckworth at a very early age. Her life, she says, was ruined before it had started.

It is quite appropriate here to refer to Roger Poole's illuminating book entitled The Unknown Virginia Woolf introducing which David Smail, Area Psychologist, Nottinghamshire, writes:

Among those Psychologists concerned with understanding people rather than classifying or labelling them, there has in recent years been much dissatisfaction with the research methodologies developed and advocated by the scientific orthodoxy: pursuit of 'objectivity' has not delivered the goods. Even so the development of alternative approaches has been disappointing. The Unknown Virginia Woolf is the first published application of the theoretical position of Dr. Poole's earlier book, and a fulfilment of its promise. In expounding a psychological account, of the meaning of Virginia woolf's 'madness' and presenting it with a sensitivity and scholarship which puts official psychology

¹⁵. Ibid., p. 142.
and psychiatry to shame, this book indicates, among much else, a fruitful as well as a hopeful direction for psychological research.\textsuperscript{16}

This book by Roger Poole, in his own words, had a "riotous"\textsuperscript{17} and "exciting"\textsuperscript{18} reception. He quotes Nigel Nicolson's decision concerning Virginia Woolf's suicide which he had found to be identical to that of his own:

"Was this insanity? No, it was a combination of fantasy and fear. She would have recovered, as she had before. She was not mad when she died. It was not an insane or impulsive act, but premeditated. She died courageously on her own terms."\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{(The Letters of V.W.ed. by Nicolson Vol.VI, p. XVII)}

Poole comments that in 1978, that view was irreceivable. He feels that the objectivity of the official psychiatry should be scrutinised. He says that Virginia's was an enforced silence. She had to submit to the judgement of the doctors. She writes of herself as having been 'mad' and she implies that madness had been beneficial to her work. Roger Poole infers that her specialists would have referred to her as 'mad' and for them madness was equivalent to moral insanity. Poole, very sarcastically writes:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16} David Smail's: "Preface" in \textit{The unknown Virginia Woolf} by Roger Poole. (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), p. 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. ix
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p.ix
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Roger Poole: \textit{The Unknown Virginia Woolf}, p. x.
\end{itemize}
"The judgement passed upon Virginia Woolf in 1913-15, that she was mad was one which she had no alternative but to accept and to learn to live with ... When she refers to her own 'madness' she is using the terminology of the doctors, somebody else' diagnostic phrase".  

Roger Poole further says:

'Madness' in both cases is used as an equivalent term for 'hearing voices' and 'hearing voices' is the ultimate small change for what is obviously an enormously inward and subjective problem. 'Whose voices?' No one stopped to ask. So the 'outer phrase is used for inner reality, The dominant language is used in order that Virginia, faced with the inexpressible, the terrifying and the unanalysed can quietly defect.

Probing deeper into this very crucial matter he says:

"I would like to suggest that it is not so much a question of what the word itself means, as a question of intentionality with which the word is uttered ... If the word 'mad' is used in a disabling, disconforming way then the word itself is a false and distorting label. If however the word is used in an empathetic, even loving manner, then it may pass muster temporarily as a word we use for want of a better one ... Two different intentional attitudes are in evidence, one harsh, punitive, revengeful, full of suspicion

20. Roger Poole: The Unknown Virginia Woolf, p. xi.
21. Ibid., pp. x-xi.
and hostility, the other compassionate, loving and tactful. 32

Roger Poole refers to the work of Mr. Stephen Trobley whose study of Virginia Woolf points out the sheer incomprehension that she would have met with when she suffered her nervous collapse of 1913-14. Poole is of opinion that Virginia Woolf's Diary is not a real diary as it does not contain "change and developing moods". The 'soul' was to be banished from it. In the introduction to his book Poole writes:

Was Virginia Woolf 'insane'? Was Virginia Woolf mad?

Leonard Woolf in the course of his autobiography constantly speaks of his wife in terms of her 'insanity' and Quentin Bell in Virginia Woolf—a Biography, repeatedly uses the word 'mad'. 23

Roger Poole further writes:

The present work is result of a sense of unease in face of all this undefined assertion. When I read Professor Bell's biography I was puzzled by the failure to offer any evidence for the alleged 'madness' of his subject, and I was offended by the looseness and crudity of the word 'mad' as applied to one of the subtlest writers of this century. Professor Bell's acknowledged source was Leonard Woolf and I therefore read through the five volumes of his Autobiography looking for evidence of what he constantly

22. Ibid., p. xi, xii
calls 'insanity'. Again I could not find any though Leonard Woolf is more worried by the terms he uses than is Professor Bell.24

Extremely puzzled and worried by the 'alleged' madness of Virginia Woolf, Roger Poole further writes:

True, there were here and there, both in Quentin Bell and in Leonard Woolf, some passing descriptions of what Virginia did during the course of what were obviously very distressed periods.25

Then, almost in fury and disgust, overwhelmed by an extreme sense of justice and humaneness, Poole says:

There was never any enquiry into why she did what she did. There was never any enquiry into what she might have meant by what she said. There was never any enquiry into whether there might not be reasonable explanation for the states from which she suffered. There was, in fact, no attention paid to what she herself thought, felt or meant. She was seen from the outside, as someone suffering from madness.26

Roger Poole, overwhelmed by utmost sincerity continues:

The present work is the result, then of the puzzlement and unease I felt in the face of this failure to regard Virginia Woolf as a subjectivity. She was the author of some of the most remarkable analyses of inter-subjectivity in the language. Why had no one done her the compliment of

examining her own subjectivity in a way which attempted to come up to her own very high standards?

According to Poole the literary critics chose to create an abyss between the "life" and the "work" leaving all biographical matters to Quentin Bell etc. He says that he had to reread the novels if Virginia Woolf herself had offered us the key to what she suffered from in her bouts of her so-called "insanity". He read the novels not as art but as records of her life. This was what Virginia Woolf expected from her critics having faith in the indivisibility of art and life, of self, of time. She wanted herself to be seen as a whole.

Poole says that while reading the novels anew he found that Virginia had herself documented the reasons for her own mental distress and exorcised certain key persons from her life by writing about them. Referring to the essays contained in Moments of Being, he says that he found the confirmation in Virginia's own hand for the theory he had himself derived from reading the novels, the theory about the influence in madness of 1913 and 1915 of George Duckworth. Poole's concern is to show that the words "insane" and "mad" must be withdrawn since Virginia's behaviour throughout her life is explicable in terms of cause and effect. He feels that the words used for her are crude, offensive and inappropriate. He says:

27. Ibid. p. 2.
But to these words about a writer who analysed her own problems with such percepience and created works of art which stand amongst the most brilliant of our century, seems indefensible. 28

Poole's book is an innovation in literary research approaching the writer as subject and remaining independent of any school of psycho-analytical theory. According to him Virginia Woolf's works treat of the lived experience. He feels that each person has a right to his own opinion "provided he does not claim that his is the only right one". 29 Poole feels that the pressures of living in the household of Leslie and Julia Stephen must have been enormous. In his opinion full understanding of her two 'madnesses' is necessary to study Virginia's relation to each of her symbolic parents. He points out towards the unfathomable trust and admiration of Virginia for the healing talents of her mother who was immensely beautiful having presence and style, was sympathetic, understanding, intuitive -- the traits which her intellectual father did not have. Poole's sincere approach is admirable and inspiring. Virginia needed such a critic very badly as the persons of such a stature as she was need vehement supporters. Immense courage and self-confidence is required on the part of the protector in order to get rid of the so-called 'objectivity' and 'sense of proportion'. Besides

29. Roger Poole: *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*, p. 5.
Poole, N.C. Thakur is also such a supporter who saves himself from 'objectivity' - the 'very normal trait' in order to save Virginia from the labels of 'insanity'. Using a harmonious approach he states the reasons as to why Virginia Woolf made a frequent use of symbols. He feels that long drawn-out illnesses, like highly emotional stresses, have a great sensitising effect on the mind. She considered her illness to be partly mystical, that she saw her books in their ideal state. Thakur quotes a passage from her *Diary*:

> Once or twice I have felt that odd whirr of winds in the head, which comes when I am ill so often... If I could stay in bed another fortnight I believe I should see the whole of *The Waves*. (p. 153).  

Thakur refers to Virginia Woolf's words in her *Diary* about the fertilising effect of illnesses which are the most fruitful artistically. Such ideas spring up expressing themselves in symbols. Thakur quotes Yeats' words who used to practise meditation:

> "... the soul moves among symbols and unfolds in symbols when trance or madness or deep meditation has withdrawn".  

Thakur feels that her illness, besides supplying ideas, showed her the mystical quality of words - what lay beyond

31. Ibid., p. 9.

48
their surface meaning. He uses the word illness instead of 'madnesses which is suggestive of his circular vision.

Referring to Peter and Sally of *Mrs. Dalloway* he says that being ordinary creatures of human failings they are ignored as of no consequence, but the visionary, as they refuse to follow the proportion of the herd are pronounced mad, secured behind bars. If they still persist in their visions they are crucified or forced to commit suicide (which is also a kind of crucification in such cases). According to Thakur Septimus Warren Smith of *Mrs. Dalloway* as well as Virginia Woolf herself symbolise those who have been martyred due to their visions. Septimus, a promising young man, was anxious to improve his condition. He was among those who volunteered for war and served with great distinction. He is aware of the sins of society, women burnt alive and men trapped in mines during war. Such were the sights, Thakur feels, that would turn a sensitive mind mad. Septimus could read Dante as his brain was perfect in spite of stresses.

Thakur feels that Virginia Woolf seems to share Plato's viewpoint: 'there is madness that is Divine gift' (*Phaedrus: the Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 1, p. 449). The profound and universal truths uttered by Septimus have extreme utility and relevance. Referring to the excitement of Virginia Woolf, especially at the time of writing her novels, Thakur has quoted the following words from Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*:
I must very nearly verge on insanity, I think I got so deep in this book, I don't know what I am doing. Finding myself walking along the strand, talking aloud. 32

That excitement is characteristic of a genius, a genuine creative writer. Thaker further quotes her:

I wrote the words O death! fifteen minutes ago:

... with some moments of such intensity and intoxication that I seemed to stumble after my own voice (as when I was mad.) I was almost afraid, remembering the voices that used to fly ahead. (Diary, p.169). 33

Thakur's is a harmonious and uniform approach because he is well-acquainted with the Oriental Sufis as well as with The Upanishads hence his probing deeper into the innermost self of the personalities created by Virginia Woolf and her own personality. He feels that Septimus, talking loud and hearing voices, uttered such truths as Virginia pondered throughout her life to elaborate in her novels. "There is God," "There is no death," "Universal Love and Time" are purely Sufi ideas—the various aspects of the personality of the Perfect Man. Thakur feels that Septimus' flinging himself down on the area railing of Mrs. Filmers is not suggestive of his being a coward as opined by Dr. Holmes.

According to Thakur Septimus' suicide is a symbolic act of defiance. He commits suicide to show that Bradshaw had

33. Ibid., p. 63.
no power over him to order rest in bed... without friends, messages and books. In the footnotes Thakur refers to De Quency's words in his article on Suicide' that under certain circumstances self - homicide is not suicide, that in the case of a young man, who, looking upon imposition as an indignity to which he was determined not to submit, killed himself and died peacefully. Septimus had preserved his own soul ... a thing that mattered. It was very similar to the "virginal girl leaping off a cliff rather than to submit to a sexual assault". 34

Rose's is a vehement defence of Virginia Woolf's suicide. Keeping in view the religious concept of chastity, self-respect and honour Virginia's was actually a martyrdom.

Dorothy Brewster, in company with Thakur, is of opinion that the brutal world wars - their disasters, were responsible for her suicide. The entries of her Diary throw light on the stress she had to undergo. War, she felt, had begun in cold blood. Her Diary says that Leonard had petrol in the garage for suicide should Hitler win. She expresses her fear of being bombed. But she would read Dante in spite of all hardships while lying in the dark with gas mask. There are references in January and February entries in the diary to a battle against depression. She continued to make plans for new books and went for meeting at which her husband spoke. She felt that during those days humanity lived without a future. Dorothy Brewster writes:

The strains to which Mrs. Woolf was subjected, whatever interpretation has been placed upon them, proved too great. When, on March 28, 1941, she disappeared, she opened the closed door and sought death in the river near her home leaving her hat and walking stick on bank.\(^{35}\)

In her beginnings was her end. The spirit casting away the body it wears attained its form and glory. Even after death life continues. Thus Virginia defeated death after she died. She was a blessed spirit. She got martyrdom in the way of truth. Hers was the mystic way as she prized her self-respect very highly. Her inner journey was above the sky. Possessed by Divine illumination she is somehow related with the great Oriental Sufis. In order to preserve her self-respect and honour (like the maiden who jumped from the cliff of the mountain for preserving her self-respect, her chastity and honour), she blended herself with her origins - waters of the Ouse!

In her beginnings was her end.

The Holy Quran says:

\[
\begin{align*}
105 \\
O \text{ ye who believe!} \\
\text{Guard your own souls:} \\
\text{If ye follow (right) guidance,} \\
\text{No hurt come to you} \\
\text{From those who stray}
\end{align*}
\]

The goal of you all is to Allah:
That will show you the truth, of all
That you do.

*(The Holy Quran - Translation & Commentary
by Abdullah Yusuf Ali)*

Virginia Woolf, like the "Virginal girl" "guarded" her own "soul" and self-respect. Hers was actually a martyrdom (not a suicide) for the sake of truth, peace and justice. She was capable to see the truth, to "see into the life of things". Life is attainment of perfect self and death, correspondingly, a failure in this regard ("death of the soul"). Virginia Woolf tried to curb all evil.

The idea of suicide is related with Sufism, which, unlike the systems of religious theology, leaves room for personal God and personal religion. Both Virginia Woolf and Coleridge yearned for personal religion. Nicholson is of opinion that a "sufi, who enjoys communion with God can take the creed of his own heart and see in its words a partial and inadequate reflection of what his inner light has revealed to him." 36 He writes in the footnotes of his translation of Rumi:

"Death whether physical (ْیَدِتِّیْرِی) or mystical (ْیَکِخَتِّیْرِی) is like mirror in which everyone sees the image of himself: if his nature be good and action righteous he will be in love with death; otherwise he will loathe it.

and flee in terror from the reflection of his own wickedness”.37

There are innumerable acts of cowardice and insanity (moral insanity), i.e. untruth, hypocrisy, oppression, tyranny, injustice, torture, despotism, egocentricity, cannibalism not merely suicide. Innocent souls, who are truthful, should not be suffocated to death as they love life and appreciate beauty which is pervaded everywhere. Life should not be made miserable for them. The "virginal girl" should not be compelled to make an end of her life.

Inspite of death the self of Virginia remained alive. The desire for an "easeful death" is most normal especially for those who are capable to see that man has ruined God's beautiful world and men are mere "orts, scraps and fragments."38 and the "wall of civilization is in ruins."39 Man, the world over has committed a spiritual suicide while Virginia's soul, along with many other such souls, is still alive.

Iqbal says:

Death is a station in life if the Self be alive
Since Love seeks affirmation through death.

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Life is attainment of perfect self and death a failure in this regard. Blake has expressed a similar idea in his infant poem "The Fly":

If thought is life  
And Strength and Breath 
And the want 
Of thought is death; 
Then am I 
A Happy fly 
If I live 
Or If I die. 40

Virginia kept her self inviolable. Hers was a mystic death. 
Hers was a "mystic way".

40. In order to show similarities between Blake and Iqbal, this poem by Blake has been quoted by Professor Asloob Ahmad Ansari in his essay "An Existential Approach to Iqbal" in Iqbal Essays and Studies. Ghalib Academy, 1978, p. 134.