

## ALLAMA IQBAL AND HIS CONCEPT OF SELF

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper is an attempt to explore Allama Iqbal and his concept of self. Based on the review of relevant literature, an effort has been made to conceptualize Iqbal and his concept of self. The paper is comprised of four sections. The first section titled introduction describes Allama Iqbal and his major perceptions. The second section deliberates on views held by Iqbal on Culture and Civilizational Invasion. The third section which is also the major focus of the paper, presents Iqbal's concept of self and the underlying transitions. The fourth section undertakes to reflect his dense sociological contributions which are second to none. In totality, the paper provides a deep insight into the persona of Allama Iqbal, his concept of self and the relevance of his rich sociological thought in the contemporary times.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Allama Iqbal, Khudi, Mard-i-Mumin, Self, Ummah*

### INTRODUCTION

Allama Iqbal (1877-1938) also christened as the Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (Iqbals fundamental teacher) of the 20th century, is today remembered as a poet-prophet among the literary circles across the world. His poetising quoting Iqbal was not the object of his poetry, instead his poetry carried a message to inspire the heart, elevate the mind and to guide, rather than to entertain and please the listeners. In him, we find a unique blend of a prophetic poet and a great thinker/philosopher where under, the mind of a philosopher and the heart of a poet worked in unison. As a true son of Islam, he was well grounded in various branches of conventional Islamic studies and was also well acquainted with the old as well as with the new and contemporary schools of thought. Being an outstanding thinker and the advocate of the Muslim Ummah, his immediate concerns were the Muslims, particularly the Muslims of sub-continent, but given his deeply rooted humanitarian concerns, his heart beat for every human being. He repeatedly sang of the dignity of man as man, and fought/stood for the self-respect and rights not only of the Muslim community but of every man and woman. Iqbal's era had been a witness to the all-round and totalizing changes across the globe. Capitalism was at its zenith and the colonial imperialism had wrought the havoc in the sub-continent. On one hand, heavy strides in the field of knowledge and scientific development represented the hallmarks of modern times (Iqbal's era), on the other hand, imperialism under the guise of territorial nationalism, capitalist democracy, communism, fascism etc. trampled the very spirit of freedom and dignity of the individual. The period also bears the witness to the declining, Muslim supremacy felled prey to mighty and turbulent forces of the world and having yielded to unforeseen problems created as a result of civilizational conflict between the East and West. In the wake of declining Ottoman Empire and the emergence of cold world war, he strongly awakened the Muslim Ummah of their responsibilities towards development and change and warned them of the consequence of such developments what Huntington said in the 21st century while raising the issues

of civilization clash. The horror of civilizational invasion has been the concern of Alama in almost in his every scholarly contribution. Iqbal was an erudite scholar who had a strong eye on the happenings around and knew exactly the preciousness of literature both of the East and the West. Having studied the world of men, both in the sub-continent and abroad, especially Europe, he kept a strong eye on the realities. His personality and intellect was to a large extent a response to the discourse he lived in. His abstruseness and sobriety was an outcome of the complex situations he faced and also the complex aspects, he wrote about. He believed in the philosophy of endless endeavour and tireless struggle and his personality was an epitome of courageous optimism and possessed the ability of looking through the dark strife and new beyond any doubt the meaning and significance of the conflict and the glory and grandeur of man's fight against the adverse circumstances and oppressive forces.

### **IQBAL ON CULTURE AND CIVILIZATIONAL INVASION**

Iqbal's philosophy of culture reflects his in-depth understanding of the cultural matrix of the western world and society. Here, it deserves a mention that he was not a blind critique of scientific advancement of West and for that purpose, he was not critical of any other social order merely because of its being old and alien or indigenous and new. For him, Western culture being materialistic lacks morality and values and is, hence, devoid, of any spiritual matrix which is the prerequisite or "sine qua non" of an ideal social order. Aghast by the concept of Modern Man/Industrial Man/Technical Man, he sensitized the Muslim Ummah of the consequences of acculturation process cutting across the regions and ethnic boundaries. He rejected the so called political ideology enrooted into the imperialistic and so called democratic process which was highly hegemonic in nature. The culture according to him was a holistic process and he argued that individual is a byproduct of such process. He advocated the healthy cultural process is a key to the development of the Ummah that is why he rejected the western culture as the only ideal culture by emphasizing on the indigenous cultural progress. For him the cultural process was an acquired phenomenon which helps in the continuity and change of the society. Having comparatively and meticulously studied the existing social orders of East and West, he concluded that ultimate salvation of mankind lies in the synthesis of the two cultures and advocated the amalgamation of the endogenous and exogenous cultures and civilizations for the total development of the society as a whole. The below given couplet of his book "*Zarb-e-Kalim*", convey's the message:

*"Mashriq sa ho bezar, na magrib sa hazar kar fitrat ka ishara ha ki, har shab ko sahar kar"*.

(Do not show the East or look at the West with scorn, since nature yearns for change of night to morning).

Arguing that the Islamic culture framed by the teachings of Islam is scientifically valued and provides a complete and perfect frame of reference to the individual and society to maintain an equilibrium characterized by balanced social order. To him the Islamic culture was a process characterized by the collective justice and a social order based on the wisdom and healthy normative structure. He had cautioned that the western culture bereft of precious human standards as also devoid of any divinely and human values are grounded in the materialistic conception of development. In such a cultural process the individual is robbed of and alienated from the proper self. Allured by the worldly gains and leisure, Western man/modern man can go to any extent to realize his goals resulting in his commodification. As against the material cultural matrix of the Western culture, Islamic culture is grounded in the divine cultural matrix where under material culture is subordinated to non-material culture/world pregnant with moral and social standards. Iqbal invites our attention to "*Tawhid*" (unity of God). For him, "*Tawhid*", as a working idea, connotes equality, solidarity and total

emancipation of man. Therefore, the state, from the Islamic perspective, is essentially an effort to transform these ideal principles into time-space forces. According to him, republican form of government is consistent with the spirit of Islam. For him, establishment of “spiritual democracy is the ultimate objective of Islam. Arguing that in the Islamic cultural system prevalence is given to the “*Taqwai Illahi*” (fear of God) as he is the sole guarantor. He rightly warns that the Islamic Ummah is trapped in the vicissitudes and turbulence as man has distanced himself from the divine cultural matrix by inculcating the material values and by adopting the material culture. Warns that if the man is to save him and the human order, he need to distance himself from the cultural horrors of the west. For him, cultural invasion of the West has posed multifaceted threats to the Muslim Ummah because its influences are encompassing in nature and its main target is youth being the productive group and, hence, important asset of any society in whose hands lies the future of the nation. The so called modernisation and emancipation has been central to the cultural onslaught of Muslim Ummah. Cultural onslaught to Iqbal was the most heinous one than the military and economic colonialism as the anti Ummah forces drawn by nefarious designs were hell bent to rob the Ummah from the basic principles of their culture i.e., the self and morality. In the face of new capitalist world order, Iqbal had put in all his intellect to remain abreast but alas the cultural invasion has dismantled the roots of Muslim society. Thus the cultural onslaught has embarked through our institutions such as Dynasties, homes, schools, colleges and universities which has created the pathological situation for Muslim Ummah. To quote Syed Abulaila Maududi, Alama had performed the greatest ever job while giving a blow to the Western culture and their ideology of materialism arguing that his rejection of the West is recognized by one and all as there was no one to had such exposure of western philosophy, culture and civilization. In the context of civilizational invasion there have been attempts to separate deen (religion) from the polity as Iqbal had been a witness to the declining political systems of the Muslim states where religion was literally separated from the polity and the Islamic culture was engraved and warned the Muslims of the consequences of this western ploy. Religion serves the purpose of moral upliftment of man and, hence, religion and humanity compliments each other. Iqbal in his poem titled “Mecca and Geneva” included in his book “*Zarb-e kalim*”, states that in this age nations seem to be mixing freely with one another, although the principle of human unity remains hidden from the discerning eye. Elaborating his point, he reasoned that Western diplomacy is aimed at dividing humanity into nations, whereas the mission of Islam is to unify human beings into one fraternity. On this count, there is an utmost need for the Muslim Ummah to reassert themselves in the light of ultimate principles of Islam aimed at the spiritual democracy. For the sustained survival of humanity, it is prudent for a man to develop mutual tolerance and foster respect for his fellow men, irrespective of religious, ethnic, territorial and material concerns. Only then can we attain the purpose of selfhood as envisioned by Allama Iqbal.

### **Iqbal’s Man and his Spiritual Future**

Iqbal’s conception of man is that of a dynamic man i.e., “*Mard-i-mumin*”—absolute/ideal man who is bestowed with the limitless potential. He is “biological by nature but metaphysical by origin, chemical in composition but spiritual in essence”. However, being the son of Islam and the poet of Quran, he propagated the Quranic concept of man by emphasizing the spiritual dimension of man over and above the biological and chemical dimensions. Though, microcosm in form, man is a macrocosm lapping the entire cosmos in his bosom. The philosophy of selfhood which Iqbal called as “*Khudi*” is rooted in his macrocosm-microcosm apposition. The relative picture of tri-axiality of man as conceived by Iqbal governs his relationship with his inward axis/inner-self, upward axis/universe and outward axis/God with man occupying a primary co-ordinate where from the other two secondary and tertiary co-ordinates of universe and God can be

traced. In philosophical lexicon, its analogue is provided by the trilogy of mind, body and spirit. For Iqbal, man is the plan of creation among all the species and he is the cause of creation where under, variety of things have been created for him and the world is the stage for his performance. His emphasis on the self is a reaction as he rightly states that it is, “deed rather than an idea”. His biological, physical and chemical composition represents his self contained centre, but he is not yet a complete individual and stands apart from his creator/God. The more he distances himself from God the more he loses his individuality. It is as a spiritual being i.e., while being nearer to his creator/God that man develops a complete individuality. As against other organic beings which are bound by their limited ways and means, “*Mard-i-mumin*” is guided by the divine laws. The divine corpuscle i.e., soul or consciousness that Iqbal calls “*Khudi*” represent the blue print of the universe in which is transcribed all the necessary information about every atom of the universe, whose transformation/decoding Allama calls as “*Tameeri Khudi*” or the discovery of self. The “*Mard-i-mumin*” is Iqbal’s ideal man who is placed in equipoise between determinism and free will. In conceptualizing “*Mard-i-mumin*”, Iqbal is critical of both the western and eastern man. Western man who is also called as modern man, technical man, industrial man, one sided man etc, is secular, selfish, and immoral duped in false pride. He prides in the supremacy of scientific and material achievements and chases happiness only through the multiplication of wealth and material comforts. But, drowned in his intellectual achievements, he is alienated from his inner self and has ceased to live soulfully. In his magnum opus *Reconstruction*, he furthers his disillusionment from both the Western and Eastern man. About Western man, he comments: “In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others. The ruthless egoism and the infinite hunger for gold gradually kills all higher striving in him and brings him nothing but life-weariness. On account of the Eastern man, he laments: “The condition of things in the East is no better. The technique of medieval mysticism by which religious life is in its higher manifestation developed itself both in the East and West has now practically failed far from reintegrating the forces of the average man’s inner life, and thus preparing him for participation in the march of history. It has taught him a false renunciation and made him perfectly contented with his ignorance and spiritual thralldom”. Allama’s philosophy of selfhood is a manifestation of delicate and precarious equilibrium between spiritual and material aspects of life or otherwise between the Mind and body. He seeks to fortify the self, instead of denying it. Iqbal believes that on the basis of the power of the desire of man and the purity of his endeavour, new worlds may not only be revealed to man but even created by him. For him, endeavour is life and lack of endeavour is death. The prime instinct of his philosophy of self or “*Falsafai Khudi*” is its emphasis on “action” and impetus it puts on the “dynamics of life”. For Iqbal, *Khudi* also translated as ego by him is not merely a mirage-an illusion of mind, but has real existence and connotes a process of self construction strictly based on Quranic prescriptions and the man who succeeds in this process of self construction is in true terms a “*Mard-i-mumini*”. He is Iqbal’s ideal man for whom following divine commandments is the food for his stomach. He is a spiritual being and raises himself over and above the so called narrow biological, chemical, physical and psychological horizons. His absoluteness is revealed by the fact that in the delicate equilibrium between the material and divine life, he is driven by his spiritual instincts and doesn’t get lost in his material and worldly urges. He prefers annihilation i.e., living in God, but without losing his individual identity i.e., self.

## Iqbal and his Rich Sociological Thought

Iqbal's undulating concerns and love for individuality and humanity ultimately landed him in an arena full of social discourse. Man which has been the subject as well as object of Iqbal's writings (*kalami Iqbal*), also comprises the subject matter of the discipline of Sociology and hence, represents a connecting link between the two. Though Iqbal's sociological thought is not the mouthpiece of any of the sociologist be it the Continental, sub-continental or Western, his sociological contributions are second to none. Fundamentally, Iqbal's social thought was based on the idea of reconstruction of the religious thought. The goal of his interpretation of the tradition was to arouse and awaken the national consciousness and political mobilization of Muslims. During 1905-08 in Aligarh, while advocating the revolutionary movement/ideas of students, he called for the political activities of the Muslim intellectuals arguing that the poet must be "all seeing eye of the people". Thus, he invited the role of intellectual leadership. Iqbal's social philosophy was based on the idea of the active and sustained fight against the social evil. His main idea of social concept was that the social order as advocated by Islam is based on the principle of Tawhid/unity of God, the essence of which is equality, freedom and fraternity/solidarity. He pleaded for just distribution of material wealth and social rights in the society and was sympathetic enough to all the economic aspects of socialism and shared an utopian idea that Islam and socialism can supplement each other. For him, the idea of solidarity was the integration of Muslims and the idea of freedom meant the condemnation of western imperialism and capitalistic exploitation in conclusion his social philosophy was deeply rooted in the concept of humanism. Allama has talked at length about contemporary social issues and challenges such as social order, social justice, culture, gender, youth, women empowerment, moral degradation, Imperialism, materialism, collective consciousness, social change and development, religion, education, sectarianism, parochialisation etc. In his perspective, the individual is central to the social system and man is a byproduct of the social institutions. His recognition of relative importance of individual and society finds a special mention in his book "*Asrar-i-Khudi*". Iqbal argued that the social justice is a key to the continuity and change of society. The social progress is not possible without the ideal social order. The supremacy of justice lies in uniting different and even heterogeneous systems and subsystems into one body characterized by unity and harmony. By virtue of social justice each member of the society gets a due representation which leads to the collective consciousness and cohesion which in turn helps in building a social order. For him, the ideal society was the only response to the problems of human society. He aspired a society wherein the creative power of man is central to the social order and emphasized on the community interests over individual ones, and protested against social inequality and suppression. Having compared the ideal society with the human body, we find an analogue of August Comte in him. Emphasizing the close cooperation between its members, he argues that a lone man is weak and powerless, his energies are scattered and his aims are narrow. He further adds that membership in the universe confers in him a sense of power and makes him conscious of great collective purposes in the contemporary materialistic world. Given his meticulous analysis of the world cultures, he advocated the cultural synthesis especially those of East and West and warned the Muslim Ummah about blind adoption of the western culture. For him the salvation of mankind lay in the cultural synthesis. He argued that modernism in exchange of the material benefits has alienated us from our true self grounded in morality and high values and has brought with it, strange consequences of jealousy, abject submission, impatience and lust for worldly gains. Emphasizing the importance of moral principles of ideal society he highlighted the role of religion as a key to the development of ideal social order but equally stressed a need for the social and political character and asked for the revival of the Islamic traditions with ideas of western democracy. Iqbal was the revolutionary and was totally dissatisfied with the

existing social order. Being anti-capitalist and anti-feudalist, he strongly admired the Russian revolution and the working class struggle of colonial period; appreciated equality, democracy and freedom in Russia but was disturbed to see the applicability of these ideas. For him, man is the main engine of social progress, therefore, the ideal order of society is not possible without him. He disliked and discouraged the bourgeoisie order and claimed the character of human activity can alone ensure social development and discouraged the society characterised by the race, cast and colour. He advocated the Ummah for establishing such a social order where all people will be equal and the spirituality may be the central to society. Elaborating this he expresses as “The hearts are throbbing with a yearning for revolution Perhaps the days of the old world war are numbered”. Allama was ardent critique of sectarianism and parochialisation which resulted in down fall of Muslim states and caused the disintegration of Muslim society. Being aware about the dangers of sectarianism, he warned Ummah against them in a number of verses as

*“Do not use your tongue for sectarianism there are terrible dangers hidden in it”.*

Addressing the moon in his poem ‘Hilali Id’, he says:

*“Muslims are bound in shackles of sectarianism Just see your freedom and their bondage”.*

Orthodoxy and narrow conservatism was another social problem which posed serious handicaps to developmental process. Often he satirises the Mulla who is an embodiment of the orthodoxy, conservatism and narrow mindedness. The most difficult stage in the life and development of nations is the cultural lag i.e., the fear of the new order and sticking to the customary and old ways of behaviour. Among the other social issues highlighted by Iqbal were gender equality, liberalism, modernism, western education, capitalism and feudalism. He saw gender equality as one of the important ingredient for social stability. He pushed for and advocated the equity of status of women alongside men. Extending further, he states that, “Women is a covering for the nakedness of man. Her love is a garment for the beauty of heart”. For Iqbal, a philosophy of life which creates an atmosphere of hatred and suspicion between male and female was not only destructive for the progress of society but was disastrous for the very sentence of mankind on earth. So he sharply reacted against the women of eastern societies who are imitating the freedom and emancipation of western societies. To him, there should be a feeling of love and mutual co-operation between male and female for a smooth working of the society. In his view, the equality of status between male and female does not also mean equality of job and responsibility. Like two wheels of the social life, they should move on their track in the same direction for the attainment of a common goal in life, i.e., for the prosperity of society and continuity of mankind. So there should be perfect harmony and mutual understanding between the two sexes in every sphere of social life. Iqbal considered the liberalism as a fashion imported from the west and even held it more dangerous than orthodoxy and conservatism. Though he always stood for liberty, but in his magnum opus “Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam”, he terms liberty of thought as an action of Satan and warns that liberalism of thought is dangerous for those who have no originality. He highlighted and exposed the social effects of western education bereft of social values and morals on Muslim Ummah. Being highly anti capitalist and anti-feudalist in spirit, he strongly discouraged the exploitation of down trodden and believed that modernism and blind imitation of west have robbed us of the moral values which were our distinctive features as Muslims.

## Tail Piece

Allama Iqbal (RA) was the ambassador of humanity whose poetry touched contours of social evils and like all poet-prophets of the world; he used his poetry for the moral upliftment of the society. Iqbal's poetry will always remain interesting, appreciated alike by the scholar and the man in the street, for it is poetry based on an understanding of, and sympathy with, man as man in the East and the West. Iqbal was a poet whose rapture was reasoned and was not the result of mere sentiment and riotous fancy. He appreciated the best in both the East and the West and was not averse to condemning what he considered reprehensible in both. His egalitarianism and magnanimity is reflected from the fact that while his philosophy of effort, endeavor and action represents an assimilation from the West as distinguished from the asceticism, resignation and submission of the East, he held the East in high esteem for its rich spiritual and moral values. As a poet of the Quran, he always propagated the message of Islamic teachings aimed at humanity and the collective good. Being a Muslim, his heart always beats for the Muslim Ummah especially the Muslims of Sub-continent being the worst sufferer's. He was the man of vision who was quite ahead of his age and times and possessed the higher intuition of looking through the contours of time and space. Today, when the entropy in worldly social order is touching the sky, the need for his moral prescriptions and advocacies is being highly felt. His whole thought carries a great relevance in the contemporary world. His message is universal, i.e. the message of love for humanity.

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