

# IQBAL'S CRITICISM OF NIETZSCHE

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It is a common misbelief, engendered by the Western press and accepted uncritically by the Eastern scholars, that Iqbal was influenced, in certain very important respects, by Nietzsche to-wards the formulation of his concept of the Perfect Man. In this regard, however, we cannot afford to ignore Iqbal's own reaction to any such Western hypothesis in the following words : "I wrote on the Sufi doctrine of the Perfect Man more than twenty years ago, long before I had read or heard anything of Nietzsche."<sup>58</sup> Iqbal, then, refers to his article on Abd al-Karim al-Jili which was published in *Indian Antiquary*,<sup>59</sup> Bombay, September 1900, and later in 1908 formed part of his thesis on *Persian Metaphysics*.<sup>60</sup> He himself suggests<sup>61</sup> for the benefit of the Western scholars that they should reach his idea, not through Nietzsche, but through Samuel Alexander (1859-1939), his senior contemporary; though even this should be done with sufficient care, for there are certain very important differences so far as the two thinkers are concerned. Thus, pointing out one important difference Iqbal writes : "I believe there is a Divine tendency in the universe, but this tendency will eventually find its complete expression in a higher man, not in a God subject to Time, as Alexander implies in his discussion of the subject."<sup>62</sup> It is obvious from his own account that Iqbal was, in the first instance, influenced by such

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<sup>58</sup> Letter dated 24 January 1921, to Dr Nicholson. reproduced in S.A. Vahid. Ed., *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal* (Lahore : Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, (1964). p 93.

<sup>59</sup> Full title the article is: "The Doctrine of Absolute Unity as Expounded by Abdal Karim al-Jilani [sic I]", reproduced in *ibid* , pp. 4-27.

<sup>60</sup> *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* (Lahore : Bazm-i Iqbal, 1964), p. 134.

<sup>61</sup> In his letter to Nicholson, See. S.A. Vahid, Ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Sufi thinkers as al-Jīlī<sup>63</sup> and Ibn al-'Arabī<sup>64</sup> in the formulation of his doctrine of the Perfect Man, and had already drawn the outline of his idea before he happened to read Nietzsche. To those who would suggest that he might have read Nietzsche in his M.A. classes I will simply say that courses in the history of Philosophy in those days practically went up to Hegel, and post-Hegelian thinkers, including Nietzsche, were not taken seriously. Commenting on the concept of Superman as propounded by the German thinker Iqbal suggests: "It is probable that Nietzsche borrowed it from the literature of Islam or of the East and degraded it by his materialism."<sup>65</sup> In his Introduction to *Payām-i Mashriq*<sup>66</sup> (pub. 1923), Iqbal traces, in general, the impact of Persian literature on the German literary thought which was quite profound and enduring. This shows a direct influence of the Eastern thought on the West, especially Germany.

Iqbal regrets that his position has usually been confused with that of Nietzsche through some minor and cursory resemblances, and Dickinson is among those Europeans who have done some work to create this confusion. While commenting on *Asrār-i Khudī*, he gives the impression that Iqbal has "deified physical force in the poem".<sup>67</sup> To this Iqbal protests that he believed in the "power of spirit" rather than in "brute force" as Nietzsche did. He believes in "conflict," no doubt, because "reality is a collection of individualities tending to become a harmonious whole through conflict..."; but his interest in conflict was ethical and not political like Nietzsche.<sup>68</sup> To Iqbal, this conflict is "a necessity in the interests of the evolution of higher

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<sup>63</sup> Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (1465-1508), a mystic-philosopher, who wrote the book *Insān al-Kāmil* which inspired Iqbal in forming his theory of the Perfect Man.

<sup>64</sup> Muhyid Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (1165-1240), a renowned mystic-philosopher of the world of Islam who advocated the doctrine of *Tauhīd* and *Wandnt al-Wujūd*.

<sup>65</sup> "Note on Nietzsche" in Vahid, Ed., op. cit., p. 241. In his footnote Vahid states that this note was dictated by Iqbal to late Sayyid Ivazir Niyazi in the summer of 1937

<sup>66</sup> *Kulliyā .i Iqbal Fārsi*, pp. 7-13/177-83.

<sup>67</sup> Iqbal's "Letter to Nicholson," Vahid, Ed. op., cit., p. 94.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

forms of life, and of personal immortality".<sup>69</sup> Nietzsche did not believe in personal immortality and he remarked: "Do you wish to be a perpetual burden on the shoulders of time?" Iqbal criticised this view on the ground that he misconceived the notion of "time".<sup>70</sup> Thus, Iqbal, under the inspiration of the Qur'an, justifies "a righteous war" on the moral basis that conflict or war, if righteous and lawful, shall help the evolution of higher forms of life.<sup>71</sup> Nietzsche's interest in conflict was political, i.e. it was for the political dominance of a certain limited group or band; that is why his philosophy led to Fascism in its various kinds.

According to Nietzsche, the "I" or self is a fiction. He was actually following the premises of Kant's First Critique. They both took an intellectual point of view which had nowhere else to lead to. Iqbal, however, contends that there is another point of view of "inner experience" from which the "I" is an indubitable fact, a fact which even F.H. Bradley was forced to admit despite his cold logic. Remarking on this aspect Iqbal says in his "Note on Nietzsche" : ". . . in its essence 'Asrar-i-Khudi' and Nietzsche are diametrically opposed to each other. 'Asrar-i-Khudi' wholly depends on the factum of khudī in which Nietzsche does not believe",<sup>72</sup> Again, he adds: "When I say 'Be as hard as the diamond,' I do not mean as Nietzsche does callousness or pitilessness. What I mean is the integration of the elements of the ego so that it may be able to obstruct the forces of destruction in its means towards personal immortality."<sup>73</sup> What is really paradoxical is that Nietzsche, while denying the factum of khudī or self, should be devoting his whole time and energies to developing a doctrine of the "Superman".

As said before, Nietzsche's doctrine of the Superman is, perhaps, borrowed from the East and degraded by materialism. Iqbal compares his

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

idea to the Overman of Emerson.<sup>74</sup> In Islamic mysticism they prefer to use the phrase *Insān-i Kāmil* which is a right amalgamation of the Divine (*lāhūt*) and the human (*nāsū't*).<sup>75</sup> Nietzsche was, however, devoid of this concept as his approach was purely materialistic. He failed to understand "the term spirit except in the sense of life in the metaphysical manifestations".<sup>76</sup> Life, according to Nietzsche, passes through three metamorphoses, namely, "camel" which is a symbol of load-bearing strength, "lion," a symbol for strength to kill without pity, and "a child" who is "beyond good and evil" and is a law unto himself.<sup>77</sup> This series of metamorphoses goes on repeating after a specified time, for the time movement to him is circular. It lays the foundation for his view of Immortality which is called the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence. Iqbal remarks on his hypothesis thus: "It is only a mere rigid kind of mechanism, based not on ascertained fact but only on a working hypothesis of science. Nor does Nietzsche seriously grapple with the question of time. He takes it objectively and regards it merely as an infinite series of events returning to itself over and over again."<sup>78</sup> This view of time and 'creation, as propounded by Nietzsche, cannot account for originality and creativity. His view is, in fact, a cloaked form of "a Fatalism worse than the one summed up in the word 'Qismat'. Such a doctrine, far from keying up the human organ-ism for the fight of life, tends to destroy its action-tendencies

and relaxes the tension of the ego."<sup>79</sup> According to Iqbal, Nietzsche was endowed with a true and keener insight and a heart afire, but "he broke from God, and was snapped too from himself. He desired to see, with his external

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

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

<sup>76</sup> under the inspiration of al-Jilī to whom *Insān-i Kāmil* "is the point where *Abudiyyat* (Man-ness) and *al-Wahidiyyat* (God-ness) beco E e one and result in the birth of god-man".

19. Vahid, Ed., op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> The Reconstruction of Religeous Thought in Islam, p. 115

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

eyes, the intermingling of power with: love;... What he was seeking was the station of Omnipotence, which station transcends reason and philosophy".<sup>80</sup> He failed to reach his goal because of his materialistic traditions. As Iqbal remarks, a really "imperative" vision of the Divine came to him which gave him a kind of prophetic mentality. "Yet Nietzsche was a failure; and his failure was mainly due to his intellectual progenitors such as Schopenhauer, Darwin, and Lange whose influence completely blinded him to the real significance of his vision."<sup>81</sup> Thus, "instead of looking for a spiritual rule . . . Nietzsche was driven to seek the realization of his vision in such schemes as aristocratic radicalism."<sup>82</sup> Iqbal regrets that a great genius failed "whose vision was solely deter-mined by his internal forces, and remained unproductive for want of external guidance in his spiritual life."<sup>83</sup> Had he got to the real depth and immensity of his vision, including its spiritual significance, he would have known the Omnipotence he was groping for so zealously. Like Karl Marx, Nietzsche was also prophetic; both failed because of their materialistic interpretation of the historical processes. Again, Nietzsche's Superman was a biological product, rather than the product of moral and spiritual forces. He

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<sup>80</sup> A.J. Arberry, Javid Name (London : Allen & Unwain, 1966), p. 112. The relevant verses are (Jāvīā Nāmāh/Kallijāt, p. 153/741)

از خدا بپريد و هم از خود  
گست  
خواست تا بيند بچشم  
ظايرى  
آنچه او جويد مقام  
كبرياست  
اين مقام از عقل و حكمت  
ماوراست!

<sup>81</sup> Reconstruction, p. 195.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid-

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

failed to understand the spiritual heights of which man is capable of reaching. Had he realised the significance of moral and spiritual forces in the fashioning of perfect manhood, he would not have lost his way. It was his materialistic background and his atheistic stance which seduced him away from the right path which his vision had shown him. This explains why Iqbal described him thus: "His heart is a believer's, but his brain an infidel's."<sup>84</sup>

Iqbal feels that Nietzsche "was fully conscious of his great spiritual need. 'I confront alone', he says, 'an immense problem : it is as if I am lost in a forest, a primeval one. I need help. I need disciples; I need a master. It would be so sweet to obey,'<sup>85</sup> He is looking for a man who can see higher than, him-self, but he is finding none to his regret. This amply shows his dissatisfaction with his own predecessors and traditions of the West. As Iqbal says: "His eyes desired no other vision but man; fearlessly he shouted, 'Where is man?' and else he had despaired of earth's creatures and like Moses he was seeking the vision. Would that he had lived in Ahmad's time, so that he might have attained eternal joy."<sup>86</sup> So, like Jalāluddīn Rumī,<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche

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<sup>84</sup> Payām-i Mashriq/Kulliyāt, p. 2031371

قلب او مومن دماغش کافر  
است

<sup>85</sup> Reconstruction, p. 195.

<sup>86</sup> Arberry, Tr., op. cit., p. 113. The Persian verses (as in. Jāvid Nāmāh/Kulliyāt, p. 153/741) are

was also looking for "man"; but Rūmī was privileged to have a mystic proclivity, which the German sage lacked. As a result, says Iqbal in the final analysis, he failed to comprehend his own vision: he could not go beyond the stage of "negation," "being a stranger to the station of 'His servant'"<sup>88</sup>—that is, he did not know what a servant of God is, else he would have grasped the real significance of his experience. In short, he could not comprehend the

چشم او جز  
 رویت اَدَم  
 نخواست  
 نگرہ بیے باکانہ  
 زد، اَدَم کجا  
 ست  
 ورنہ او از  
 خاکیاں بیزار  
 بود  
 مثل موسیٰ  
 طالب دیدار  
 بود!  
 کاش بودے در  
 زمان احمدے  
 تا رسیدے بر  
 سرورے  
 سرمدے

<sup>87</sup> Iqbal quotes Rūmī's verses in the beginning of *Asrār-i Khudī*, see *Asrār-o Rumūz/Kulliyāt*, p. 4.

<sup>88</sup> As-berry, *Tr.*, op. cit., p. 113. *Jāvīd Namāh/Kulliyāt*, p. 153/741 : u.. 31.

depth and spiritual immensity of his own being, a fact which caused his failing. Iqbal calls him a Hallāj who was a stranger to his own people; "he saved his life from the mullahs, and the physicians slew him".<sup>89</sup> What is worthy of note here is that Iqbal has placed him on the outskirts of Heavens ("Beyond the Spheres": An Sū 'i Aflāk in the Jāvid Nāmāh, i.e. he lies in between the two worlds.

Iqbal and Nietzsche differ in yet another respect which is seldom noticed, viz. in their choice and interpretation of symbols. Both make use of the symbol of "eagle," though interpreting it differently. To Nietzsche "eagle" was a symbol of "pride," calling him "the proudest animal under the sun"<sup>90</sup> while for Iqbal "eagle" (shāhīn) symbolises "lofty ideals,"<sup>91</sup> "relentless

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<sup>89</sup> Arberry, Tr., op. cit., p. 112. See Jāvid Nāmāh / Namāh/Kulliyāt, p. 152/740:

بود حلاجی  
 بشهر خود  
 عریب  
 جاں زملا  
 بردو کشت او  
 را طیب!

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Common, Tr. (F. Nietzsche), Thus Spake Zarathustra

(New York : Modern Library), p. 19

<sup>91</sup> Bāl-i Jibrīl/Kulliyāt, p. 120/412:

نہیں تیرا نشیمن قصر سلطانی  
 کے گنبد پر  
 تو شاہیں ہے! بسیرا کر پہاڑوں  
 کی چٹانوں میں!

[A palatial dome is by no means your abode,

Being an eagle make your dwelling among the rocks.]



struggle"<sup>92</sup> for the good, restlessness till the object is achieved, contentment and "dervish-like qualities".<sup>93</sup> In the "Zarathustra's Prologue," "eagle" is intertwined with another animal "serpent" : "And behold ! An eagle swept through the air in wide circles, and on it hung a serpent, not like a prey, but like a friend: for it kept itself coiled round the eagle's neck".<sup>94</sup> Zarathustra ejaculates ; "They are mine animals," and proclaims : "Let mine animals lead me !" <sup>95</sup> He describes the serpent as "the wisest animal under the sun" and adds that the eagle and the serpent "have come out to reconnoitre".<sup>96</sup> He rather wishes to have been as wise as the serpent, which he regrets that he cannot be. He, however, combines in him the "pride" of the eagle and the "wisdom" of the serpent; his "pride" helps him in his "folly" and

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 61/353:

پرندوں کی دنیا کا  
 درویش ہوں میں  
 کہ شاہیں بناتا نہیں  
 اَشیَانہ !

[O eagle ! be in perpetual flight for

You have heavens to everfly before you.]

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 165/457 :

پرندوں کی دنیا کا  
 درویش ہوں میں  
 کہ شاہیں بناتا  
 نہیں اَشیَانہ!

[I am a dervish of the kingdom of birds,

As an eagle makes no dwelling place for him.]

<sup>94</sup> Thomas Common/Nietzsche, op, cit., p. 19.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

compensates for his lack of wisdom.<sup>97</sup> Now, taking these symbols in their common meaning, the wisdom of serpent lies in its maliciousness, cowardice, hatred, and harmfulness; while eagle stands for cruelty, sadism, swiftness, arrogance and pride. Iqbal, on the other hand, gives no place to serpent; in him serpent is replaced by "lion"<sup>98</sup> which is the symbol of courage, nobility, strength, and pride in straightforwardness rather than in hypocrisy. As said above, he has placed a specific interpretation on his symbol of "eagle". Consequently, how unlike Nietzsche's is the picture which emerges from Iqbal's interpretation and use of symbols: a fact which differentiates his idea

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>98</sup> Bā1-i Jibril/Kulliyāt, p. 57/349 and 128/420 respectively ;

اَءَينِ جوا  
نمرداں حق  
گوءى و  
بيباكى  
الله كے شيروں  
كو اَتى  
نہیں روباہی !

[Law unto the fearless is truthfulness and frankness,  
for the "lions of God. know no cunning and guile".]

خودى شير مولا، جہاں اس  
کا صيدا!  
زمین اس کی صيدا! اَسماں  
اس کا صيدا!

[Khudī being the "lion of God." the World is its prey,  
it hunts for the heavens and the earth, and nothing less.]

of the Perfect Man fundamentally from the concept of Superman of his German counterpart.

To sum up, then, despite his appreciation of Nietzsche for his keen vision and burning heart, Iqbal subjects his philosophical system, especially his idea of the Superman, to criticism on the following scores:

- (1) His materialistic interpretation of historical forces;
- (2) His misconceived notion of time which, according to him, is circular;
- (3) His denial of self or khudī as a fact;
- (4) His denial of immortality and the Hereafter ;
- (5) His mechanistic view of evolution which he conceived as an Eternal Recurrence;

(6) His failure to comprehend the true significance of his own vision; and he epitomises Nietzsche's total failings in the lack of proper spiritual guidance and ascribes this to his intellectual progenitors like Kant and his Western traditions.