

IQBAL'S CONCEPTION OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

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Kierkegaard, the founder of modern existentialist philosophy; made an attempt at philosophical level to meet the challenge of materialism which threatened to erode the spiritual foundations of human existence. He was also critical of the institutionalization of religion. To him, institutionalized religion appeared as a feature of a highly institutionalized society which swallowed the individual man. In other words, his attempt was to save the individual man from the danger of losing his individual identity. In the preface of his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* Iqbal points to a similar danger- i.e. onslaught of materialism and an all-embracing bureaucratism. Modern society and civilization have reduced the individual to a nameless part of a huge machinery. Materialism is all-pervading. The modern society and state governed by institutions threaten the very existence of individuality.

Kierkegaard's aim was to liberate the individual from the group of institutionalized religion i.e. the Church. He revolted against the established religious authority and challenged the Christian faith. Blackhem says that in rejecting Christianity, Kierkegaard perceived the discontinuity between faith and reason and he made efforts to renew the meaning of Christianity by a compelling recognition of the permanent cleavages)between faith and reason, Christianity and culture and there are always, attempts to reconcile faith and reason to philosophize Christian beliefs.³⁵

Iqbal's task, at least in one of its aspects, was also similar i.e. to fight against Pantheistic Sufism. So far as the challenge of materialism was concerned, both Kierkegaard and Iqbal made attempts to stop it in order to save spirituality, which they considered as the fountain-head of human existence. The similarity of views of Kierkegaard and Iqbal naturally led them to an approach which was also similar. In other words, both had recourse to existential experience of the individual man. Iqbal points out that if man

³⁵ Blackhem, H. J. *Six Existential Thinkers*, Harper and Row, New York, 1959, p. 3.

wants to know God, he should first of all, recognize and realize his own existence.³⁶

At the very outset, it is necessary to say that Iqbal may not be considered an existentialist in the strict sense of the term. Although existentialism was initiated as a philosophy by Kierkegaard in the second half of the 19th century, it became a philosophical movement only between the two great World Wars in Europe. Its main representatives, besides Kierkegaard, are Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel and Sartre. But in most of the books on existentialism, certain other Western philosophers and writers too are referred to as having existentialist elements in their thought and works, such as: Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Unamuno, Nietzsche and to some extent, Bergson. All these philosophers and writers were concerned with the problems of the individual person and his life. Institutionalism is essentially anti-intellectualist in approach to the study of man and reality, which is not much different from the subjective approach of existentialism. Besides, literature has always been interested in the man of flesh and blood, who is born, suffers, chooses his own destiny through his actions, faces crises and ultimately dies. On the other hand, traditional philosophies considered man as an essence or universal concept. Aristotle defines man as 'a rational being' and regards reason as the essence of man. The Platonic-Aristotelian tradition dominated the Western philosophy throughout the history of the development of the Western thought. Rationalism and its later form, intellectualism, was strengthened by the advancement of sciences, whose arrogant claims ignored and rejected all the other approaches to the knowledge of reality as non-sensical, superstitious and unscientific. This arrogance of science reinforced the superiority and authority of reason. The most tyrannical form of the arrogance of rationalism found expression in the philosophy of Hegel, who regarded reason as the absolute reality and the whole phenomenal world as the unfolding of the absolute reason. Kierkegaard had to fight against Hegel and employed his own weapons to refute him.

Iqbal also fought against the claims of superiority of reason. According to him, reason is merely a 'light of the path' not the destination for the ideal

³⁶ See, for example, *Diwan-i-Iqbal Lahori* (Iqbal's Persian Collection), Intisharat-i-Pagah Tehran, Iran, 1361 (shamsi). p. 211.

man.³⁷ Whatever may be the differences between Iqbal and the existentialists, their motto was a Socratic one: Know thyself Knowledge of the self, Iqbal emphasized, was not possible through intellect which relied upon the data furnished by the senses. According to him, empirical or scientific method is capable of providing one with knowledge of the external world only. This knowledge is supposed to be objective Kierkegaard rejected and repudiated the notion of objectivity, particularly so far as self-knowledge was concerned. Iqbal, who had studied and was influenced by the Sufi tradition of Islam knew that the knowledge of the self and God could but be attained through reason and scientific method, Hence he had to go back to the religious experience as the source of authentic and valid knowledge of the realms lying beyond the physical world.

The similarities between the philosophies of Iqbal and Kierkegaard have been highlighted to show that to a certain extent the problems posed by Iqbal and his approach to the solution of these problems was existentialist in character. On the same lines, a parallel can be drawn between Iqbal and Heidegger, Iqbal and Sartre, Iqbal and Jaspers and Iqbal and Marcel. All the contemporary existentialists are not theists. The existentialists are divided into two groups— theists and atheists. But these two have certain notions in common. The interpretations and approaches of different existentialists may be different from one another in certain respects, but their points of emphasis are the same. All are concerned with the 'individual man.' All of them agree that all religion and philosophy are for man and should be concerned with evolving a proper theory of man. All of them reject the claim of intellectualism as the only source of knowledge. All of them are anti-essentialist i.e. they do not accept any given essence or ready-made definition of man. All of them regard freedom as the most authentic mode of human existence. The theist Iqbal in his *Reconstruction* asserts that Islam recognizes a very important fact of human psychology, i.e. the rise and fall of the power to act freely, and is anxious to retain the power to act freely. as a constant

³⁷ *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal* (Iqbal's Urdu Collection) Aligarh Book Depot, Aligarh (India), 1975. p. 376.

and undiminished factor in the life of the ego.³⁸ In a word, according to him, “Life is an endeavour for freedom.” Iqbal further says:

‘How long wilt thou abide under the wings of others? Learn to wing they flight freely in the garden breeze.’³⁹

Now the atheist Sartre’s position seems similar to that of the theist Iqbal. Sartre asserts in his famous book *Being and Nothingness* that “Human reality everywhere encounters resistances and obstacles which it has not created but these resistances and obstacles have meaning only in and through the free choice which human reality is”.⁴⁰ Again in his *Existentialism and Humanism* Sartre points out that one will never be able to explain one’s action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words according to him, there is no determinism. “Man is free, man is freedom.”⁴¹ All the theistic and atheistic existentialist thinkers grapple with dread, anxiety, concern and death which an individual man has to face in his life. All of them emphasize the historicity of human existence and consequently the relativism of all human values. For example, regarding historicity of man Heidegger says: “Man writes histories or makes history by his actions because his very being is historical”⁴² This theme has found its echo in Iqbal’s poetry also. For example, in a poem in *Bal-i Jibril* entitled “Zamana” (The Time) he says:

“From my goblet are trickling fresh events drop by drop; I count on my rosery days and nights bead by bead”⁴³

In his Persian Mathnawi: ‘Rumuz-i-Bekhudi’, he asserts:

So his memory maketh him aware

Of his own self, and keeps secure the bond Linking tomorrow with his yesterday;

³⁸ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, (Pakistan) 1944, p. 109.

³⁹ *Diwan-i-Iqbal Lahori*, op. cit., p. 248.

⁴⁰ Sartre, J.P., *Being and Nothingness*, Methuen, London, 1957, p. 489.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, *Existentialism and Humanism*, Methuen, London, 1948, p. 34.

⁴² Barrett, W., *Irrational Man*, Hainemann, London, 1961. p. 204.

⁴³ Iqbal, Kulliyat (Urdu), op. cit. p. 421.

Upon this golden thread his days are strung
Link jewels on a necklace,
one by one... A hundred knots are in its cord to loose

Ere it can reach the end of selfhood's thread. But when with energy it
falls upon

The world's great labours, stable then becomes
This new-won consciousness; it raises up
A thousand images, and casts them down;
So it createth its own history.⁴⁴

In the same Mathnawi emphasizing the importance of history in human
life Iqbal says:

'Yet, when the individual has snapped
The bond that joins his days, as
when a comb Sheddeth its teeth, so his perception is—
The record of the past illuminates

The conscience of the people; memory of past achievements makes it
self-aware; But if that memory fades, and is forgot,
The folk again is lost in nothingness.

Know, then, 'tis the connecting thread of days
That stitches up thy life's loose manuscript;
This selfsame thread sews us a shirt to wear,
Its needle the remembrance of old yarn. What thing is history,
O self-unaware? A fable? Or a legendary tale?

Nay, 'tis the thing that maketh thee aware of thy true self, alert unto the
task,

A seasoned traveller; This is the source of the soul's a dour,
this the nerges that knit
The body of the whole Community... Preserve this history,
and so abide Unshaken, vital with departed breath.⁴⁵

There are certain other notions which are found in the writings of all the
existentialists such as those of choice, crisis and authenticity. In Iqbal's prose
writings and poetry all these concepts are dealt with. It may, therefore, be

⁴⁴ Arberry, A. J., *The Mysteries of the Selflessness* ('English translation of Iqbal's *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*), John Murray, London, 1953, pp. 60,61.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 60,61.

concluded that the themes and notions which Iqbal has dealt with are mainly existentialist in tone, temper and import. It may be noted here that none of these themes and notions is abstract. They arise out of the concrete reality of man's existence and his historic situation. Existentialist elements in Iqbal's philosophy are not accidental. There are two main sources of Iqbal's thought, namely, (i) the Islamic philosophical tradition--- which has always been concerned with the individual man, and (ii) literature in general which has always made man the central subject of its study. Both Islamic and literary traditions found their expression in Iqbal's thought and poetry in accordance with the needs of modern times. Iqbal lived and philosophized about the historical situation in which the existentialists lived and grappled with the problems of 'Human existence'. It is actually the spirit of the age or the historicity of human existence which induced Iqbal to think on similar lines with the existentialists.

The literary approach and the existentialist approach have some common characteristics. Objectivity, in scientific sense, has no place in the experience of a creative artist. Literature is the expression of the subjective experience of the writer or the artist. It does not mean that a writer is imprisoned in his subjectivity. He has to live in the society and is aware of all the social, political, economic, moral and religious trends and problems of his time. But he does not respond to these problems in a scientific way. His method of study is not analytical. He assimilates the external reality of his contemporary society and internalizes it. His response is, therefore, always subjective. Existential experience is also subjective in nature.

Existentialist philosophers do not ignore social and political problems. They take keen interest in their historical situations. Their response to the social reality is, like that of artists and literary writers, subjective to a large extent with minor differences.

Sartre says:

Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject and, on the other hand, that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity. It is the latter which is the deeper meaning of existentialism. When we say man chooses himself, we mean that everyone of us must

choose himself; but by that we also mean in choosing for himself he chooses for 'all men'.⁴⁶

In this way by 'choosing for all men', existentialist philosophers evince a keen interest in social and political problems. Iqbal too has discussed this theme elaborately in his *Mathnawi: Rumuz-i Bikhudi* (The Mysteries of Selflessness), the whole of which is an eloquent presentation of the intimacy of the relationship between the 'individual man' and the social life of the 'community' (Millat), in the midst of which he lives, moves, translates his values into action and expresses his authentic existence. Alone, man is weak and powerless and his aims are narrow. It is the active participation of the living membership of a vital Millar that confers on him a unique sense of power and makes him aware of higher collective purposes which deepens and widens the scope and significance of his very individual ego. Iqbal says:

Individual wins respect as being one of them,

And the society is organized

As by comprising many such as he. When in the congregation he is lost

Tis like a drop which, seeking to expand, Becomes 'an Ocean.

The joy of growth

Swells in his heart from the Community That watches end controls his every deed. The Individual,

Alone, is heedless of high purposes; His strength is apt to dissipate itself.⁴⁷

In his Urdu works too Iqbal describes an unbreakable bond between the individual and the community:

The individual is alive only due to its relationship with the Community, alone he is nothing,

⁴⁶ Sartre, J.P. *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 29.

⁴⁷ Arberry, A. J.. *op. cit.*, pp. 5,6.

The wave's existence is in the river, outside the river it is nothing'⁴⁸

and:

The destiny of the nations lies in the hands of the individuals, Every individual is the guiding star of community's destiny.⁴⁹

Literature has always been interested in the concrete existence of individual man who is reduced to a philosophical hypothesis or formula in traditional philosophy and social sciences like psychology and sociology. Man is not merely an economic or political being. He, therefore, cannot be understood fully by means of any of the social sciences. His inner life remains a mystery. Even psychology and psychoanalysis fail to understand individual human beings, because being sciences they try to generalize results of their studies of human beings and apply their laws to all the individuals. Literature, on the other hand, takes each and every individual as an independent entity, a world in himself or in Kant's words, "an end in himself". Iqbal is basically a poet. His approach is literary and, therefore, his philosophic responses are subjective. The religious tradition of Islam also helps him to adopt this approach. Iqbal analyses religious experience in mystical terms and for him it is an immediate, unanalysable whole, uncommunicable and constitutes a state of intimate association with a unique other self. However, the mystic's intimate association with the Eternal does not mean a complete break with serial time, or, say, common or normal levels of experience.⁵⁰ Iqbal makes a distinction between an ordinary mystic and prophet on the basis of the power of communication. An ordinary mystic lacks this power. After attaining the vision of Ultimate Reality, he is baffled and tongue-tied. He cannot express his experience in words. He does not come down to earth and his people to give even verbal expression to his experiences. The prophet, on the contrary, is distinguished from the mystic because of his return to earth and his people and his power of communication. The prophet can express his experiences in words and can convey the divine message and is capable of guiding his people to attain the

⁴⁸ Iqbal, *Kulliyat* (Urdu) Lahore, 1993, p. 217.

⁴⁹ *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, pp. 190 and 657.

⁵⁰ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 18-22.

highest End. Iqbal regards a poet's mission similar to that of a prophet. Poetry is a part of prophetic mission:

‘It is said that poetry is a part of Prophethood;

Lo! convey the message of the heavenly voice to the congregation of Millah’.

The religious experiences, which Iqbal underwent in his creative process found verbal expression in his poetry. The results of the poetic experience were formulated in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Hence, Iqbal's philosophy is inseparably connected with his mystical and poetic experiences which are ultimately existential in nature and logic. This is how Iqbal comes closer to the existentialist approach.

Iqbal, like the existentialists, the pragmatists and the Marxists, advocates the unity of thought and action. According to him the Ego or man possesses the germ of vicegerency of God on earth. “The highest power is united in him with the highest knowledge. In his life, thought and action, instinct and reason become one”.⁵¹ This unity of thought and action is attainable through ego-activity. Through the realization of ego's potentialities (specially creativity and freedom) and translating them into action, the individual comes nearer to God. Iqbal conceives that with the perfection of the ego man comes nearer to God by assimilating Divine attributes. “Not that he is finally absorbed in God, but on the other hand, he absorbs God into himself”.⁵² The religious experience finds expression in the assertion like “I am the truth” (ana al-Haq), “I am time” and “I am the speaking Qur'an”. In the same way, Kierkegaard's dictum “Subjectivity is truth” finds deeper meaning in these phases. In Iqbal's concept of ego existential subjectivity is transformed into creative activity. Iqbal attributes Divinity to Ego,⁵³ and

⁵¹ Nicholson, R. A., *The Secrets of the Self*, London, 1920,, (Introduction), pp. XXVII, XXVIII.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. XIX.

⁵³ cf. “Existentialist Elements in Iqbal's Philosophy” by Dr. S. Waheed Akhtar, (*Indo-Iranica*, Vol. 31, 1978, Iran Society, Calcutta, pp. 28-41).

holds that “of -all the creations of God he (man) alone is capable of consciously participating in the creative life of his Maker”.⁵⁴

We have already discussed how Iqbal met the challenge of materialism by reawakening a deeper sense of individuality (egohood). His criticism of the Western culture is similar to that of Nietzsche and Spengler. The lack of spiritual values and one-sided development on materialist lines, have led, according to him, to the decline of the West. Sartre and Jaspers are also critical of Western culture and regard it responsible for the alienation of man at various levels. Their solution of the problem is social and political, while Iqbal suggests an solution which is essentially spiritual. The society and polity can be transformed by the individuals who develop their’ egohood under the guidance of Divine light. He, unlike Sartre, does not believe in absolute freedom nor he regards freedom as condemnation. Freedom is a blessing, but it cannot be bestowed upon man from outside. Man has to win his freedom through struggle and effort to perfect his egohood. According to Tradition ‘the true Faith is between predestination and free-will’. In the same way the Ego attains to freedom by the removal of all obstructions in its way. It is partly free, partly determined, and reaches fuller freedom by approaching the Individual who is most free-God.⁵⁵ But it is to be noted here that the highest stage which a man can attain is not union with God but perfection of egohood as a separate entity. At this stage, man’s will becomes identical with the divine will and he participates in the act of creation. It is in this sense that a man creates himself, his values and his surroundings. Man’s creativity also depends upon the stage of the development of the ego. Iqbal’s’ philosophy of egohood is not far from existentialist concept of individuality and authenticity. Highly developed ego is the only state of authentic existence. This authenticity can be acquired by means of Divine light. A true believer submits to the divine will with the knowledge and faith in the authenticity of religious commandments. In this respect Iqbal’s approach to freedom is different from the atheist Sartre’s. God does not delimit or curtail human freedom. God guarantees human freedom. Man conquers finitude and death through his struggle in time. Finitude is not a misfortune. Islam does not teach “complete liberation from finitude as the highest state of human bliss.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 72.

⁵⁵ Nicholson, R.A., *op. cit.*, p. XXI.

⁵⁶ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 117.

According to the Qur'an as mentioned before, "Man is the trustee of a free personality which he accepts at his peril".⁵⁷ In this respect freedom is man's own choice. He is neither condemned to be free, as Sartre holds, nor does he receive freedom as a gift from the transcendence as Jaspers believes. Iqbal agrees with Jaspers that God speaks through freedom. He does not regard slave's prayer as genuine because of the fact that a slave cannot communicate with God. Iqbal agrees with Heidegger and Sartre that freedom in the sense of free creative activity is the mode of human existence:

'The world of Moon and Pleiades has no worth before thee; Theirs is the world of necessity, thine of freedom.'⁵⁸

According to Iqbal, man being a partner in the creative activity of his Maker (Allah) should not subscribe to the oft-repeated notion of Taqdir, that is Fate. He emphatically say that 'man himself is his fate and the maker of his destiny'.

'Lovers of Truth! Be like a shining sword and be the fate of thine own world.'⁵⁹

All the things which are there in the world are tools for man. It is only the human person who gives them meaning and purpose.' In a word, the whole world is the inheritance of the mumin.⁶⁰ Iqbal, like existentialists, holds that every individual has to discover the meaning of life through his own freedom and experience. In his Bang-i-Dara Iqbal says:

'Create thy own world if thou be amongst the living;

Life is the secret essence of the Adam, the hidden truth of creation... Life is reduced to a rivulent with little water in the bondage; In freedom, life is a boundless ocean.'⁶¹

DEATH AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 95.

⁵⁸ Kulliyat-i-Iqbal, op. cit., p. 534.

⁵⁹ Diwan-i-Iqbal Lahori, p. 411.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 359.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 259.

Iqbal has a very peculiar conception of human existence. In his philosophy, death is not the end of human life. The existentialists interpret death as “Not” or “Nothingness”. According to the Heidegger and others this realization inspires dread and anguish. Iqbal’s Perfect Man (Mard-i-Mumin) is not awed by death. The inevitability of death strengthens his faith in Allah and he tries to attain immortality through seeking His pleasure. In Bang-i-Dara in a short poem Humayun and in another long poem entitled In memory of the late mother Iqbal says:

‘Ignorants consider death the end of life,

While the eve of life is the beginning of an eternal life...⁶² Death is nothing but revival of the lust for life,

It is a dream that conveys the message of awakening.

Alas! you, the ignorant person, are unfamiliar with the mystery of death;

The transitory character of an image implies permanence.⁶³

In Bal-i-Jibril he further asserts.⁶⁴

‘I learnt this wisdom from Abu al-Hasan [‘Ali (A)]’

that the soul remains unaffected by the death of body.’

According to Iqbal the aspect of action is very important in human existence. It may be called the essence of his life. He points out that it is in action that the free ego seeks immortality. The martyrs who sacrifice their lives for the sake of higher ends attain immortality. In Iqbal’s view Martyrdom of husayn Ibn ‘Ali is. the. highest instance of the individual freely choosing his own destiny and thus attaining immortality. In this context, regarding Imam Husayn (referred to him by name “Shabbir”), he says in Bal-i Jibril:⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., p. 251.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 231-33.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 379.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 365.

‘The station of Shabbir is an eternal reality while the positions of the Kufis and Shamis are ever-shifting.’

Immortality, in the eyes of Iqbal, is an ideal which may or may not be attained by every one. Its achievement solely depends upon one’s personal efforts or constant striving. As the Holy Qur’an declares:

Blessed is He in Whose hand is the Sovereignty, and He is able to do all things.

Who hath created life and death
that He may try you, which of you
is best in conduct (or in point of deed);
and He is Mighty and Forgiving.⁶⁶

According to Iqbal, life offers to the ego a great scope for personal efforts to achieve the ideal of immortality, and death is perhaps the best test whereby the synthetic activity of the ego is brought to trial. In this regard Iqbal says in his Payam-i-Mashriq:⁶⁷

I tell thee a piece of secret wisdom,
If thou would’st learn from me the
lesson of life:

Thou diest if thou hast not the soul in the body, If thou hast the soul in the body thou diest not.

An ego perfected through a life of creativity and action overcomes finitude. Martyrdom is eternal life, for in it the individual ego becomes one with the creative activity of Allah and conquers time:

It is here that he becomes the Perfect Man; his eye becomes the eye of God, his word

⁶⁶ Al-Qur’an, 67:1-2.

⁶⁷ Diwan-i-Iqbal Lahori, pp. 199-200.

the word of God and his life the life of God—participates in the general life of Nature and ‘sees into the life of things’.⁶⁸

Iqbal is of the view that it is only the pure time that brings to the ego its freedom, creativity and immortality. Man that has attained a relatively perfect egohood, possesses a privileged position in the heart of Divine creative energy and is capable of consciously participating in the creative life of Allah—the Supreme Creator:

Endowed with the power to imagine a better world, and to mould ‘what is’ into ‘what ought to be’ the ego in him aspires, into the interests of an increasingly unique and comprehensive individuality, to exploit all the various environments on which he may be called upon to operate during the course of an endless career.⁶⁹

In short, to Iqbal, death is not inflicted upon man but he chooses his own modes of death. Each man’s death is determined by his deeds. The martyrs who sacrifice their lives for the sake of higher ends, attain immortality. According to Jaspers, through death a human person transcends his own existence and becomes one with the Absolute Transcendence-- God. According to Iqbal, human ego is everything. He argues that every aspect of his existence represents a kind of totality of being:

‘I am life, I am death, I am resurrection.’⁷⁰ Again, Iqbal maintains:

‘Life and death are not worth our attention; Ego alone is the object of ego’.⁷¹

FREEDOM AND HUMAN EXISTENCE

Another most important aspect of human existence is freedom. Freedom is the summum bonum of Iqbal’s religious and ethical philosophy. According to him, an individual is alienated from his own self, nature, society

⁶⁸ Iqbal, Muhammad., *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia; Bazm-i-Iqbal*, Lahore, p. 119.

⁶⁹ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 72.

⁷⁰ Ansari, A.A, (ed.) *Iqbal: Essays and Studies*, Ghalib Academy, New Delhi, 1978, p. 144.

⁷¹ *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*, p. 530.

and God in the state of slavery and he adds that this is also true of a nation. He goes to the extent of saying that a slave's prayer is futile. Only a free man can establish a direct relationship with God.

Iqbal interprets prayer as "an expression of man's inner yearning for a response in the awful silence of the universe"⁷² The universe responds to the yearning of a free man. This yearning is the yearning for freedom and immortality.

Iqbal's view regarding the various stages of the development of man can be compared with Kierkegaard's theory of the three stages of life. Iqbal in his *Secrets of the Self* has mentioned three stages: (a) Subordination or obedience to moral law; (b) self-control, which is the highest form of self-consciousness or Ego-hood; and (c) Divine Vicegerency⁷³ (Niyabat). The first two stages, combined together, represent the ethical stage in Kierkegaard's religious stage. But in Iqbal's philosophy Vicegerency of God is far higher than the religious stage. It is at this stage that man establishes his own individuality and can even address God boldly in the following manner:

'It is I who turn stone into a mirror,

And it is I who turn poison into an antidote.

Thou didst create the deserts, mountains and forests, I produced the orchards, gardens and groves.⁷⁴

It does not mean that Iqbal disregards God or shows disrespect to Him. It is the voice of freedom which echoes in these verses. This free creativity of man becomes part of Divine creativity-- a continuous process. Iqbal maintains in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* that "Man, in whom egohood has reached its relative perfection, occupies a genuine place in the heart of Divine creative energy..."⁷⁵ Man being the crown of the

⁷² Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 72.

⁷³ Nicholson, R.A., *The Secret of the Self* (Introduction), p. XXVIII.

⁷⁴ *Diwan-i-Iqbal* Labor., p. 242,- (English translation: cf. S.A. Wahid's *Iqbal: His Art and Thought*, John Murray, London, 1959, p. 106).

⁷⁵ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 72.

creation is along capable of consciously participating in the creative life of his Master or Maker (Allah).

In the light of the preceding discussion it can rightly be said that none of the Muslim thinkers had elaborated the conception of human existence in such detail as Iqbal did in his Urdu, Persian and English works. There are various common characteristics of existential philosophy and Iqbalian thought. 'Human existence' is the centre point on which both the systems more. Iqbal has been and is being interpreted even today from different points of view. In the opinion of the present researcher, all these approaches are inadequate and one-sided. Existentialist approach to Iqbal alone can help one to understand Iqbal in his totality, and can bring out his relevance to contemporary thought in a broader perspective. In reality, human existence is the *raison d'être* for his philosophy.