

IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF CREATIVE EVOLUTION AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Ayesha Leghari

Allama Muhammad Iqbal is one of the most outstanding poet-philosophers of the Indian sub-continent belonging to the modern period. His intellectual genius has reigned supreme in the arena of Islamic philosophy during the twentieth century and is likely to direct and influence the Islamic Intellectual tradition in the twenty first century as well. His sublime poetry and philosophy inspired millions of Muslims to wake up to the reality of the times and forge a destiny for themselves. Iqbal was deeply concerned about the pervasive lethargy that had settled over the minds and souls of Muslims, under the colonial rule. His message motivated millions of Muslims to struggle for emancipation from colonial rulers and age old, stagnant norms of thinking and acting.

The integrity of the world of Islam and the universality of the message of Islam was under threat due to the fearful attitude of Muslims towards all knowledge and philosophies that did not originate in their own traditions and conventions. Ignorance bred fear and fear bred oppression at all levels. Speaking specifically, Iqbal was frustrated by the lack of movement in the intellectual and spiritual life of Muslims. If he were alive today, Iqbal would be filled with dismay over the same lack of movement in the intellectual and spiritual spheres of present day Muslims. Although he was able to influence millions of Muslims to rise up against colonial oppressors, the depth of his message and its manifold implications have yet to be realised by the Muslims.

His burning ambition was to rekindle the fire of the unique human personality to put it on the path of creative evolution, renovation and renewal.

'The stars tremble in their courses over man's upward march,

Lest this fallen star should become the perfect moon.'

One of the facets of Iqbal's genius is the fluidity with which he displays his in-depth knowledge and critical analysis of both Islamic and Western

philosophies, theories and concepts. His critical assessment is sparing of no one.

In his famous lectures, which were delivered at the request of the Madras Muslim Association in Madras, Hyderabad and Aligarh, he quotes about thirty-four Western writers. Twenty-five of these were his contemporaries. Some of these whom he gave a lot of consideration are Whitehead, Eddington, Wildoncarr, Louis Rougier, Einstein and Nicholson.

Allama Iqbal's work regarding Western writers is characterised by ambivalence of admiration on the one hand and dissatisfaction on the other. One of the important recommendation that he addressed to the Muslims was: "Approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us".¹

Iqbal's purpose is to enrich the intellectual life of Islam by a thorough knowledge and critical examination of the current trends in Western and Eastern thought. He had a strong faith in both the resilient and the dynamic character of Islam.

His message stands as fresh today, for the present day Muslim *ummah*, as it did when he first transmitted it at the beginning of the twentieth century. Vested interests of most political regimes have not allowed the Muslims to reach the ideal of emancipation and creativity, as envisioned by Iqbal.

But this should not be a cause for despair because Islam espouses faith and hope as its intrinsic principles. One of the most outstanding qualities of Iqbal's philosophy is his emphasis on the universality and the futuristic appeal of Islam. He has been described, very aptly, as the philosopher of the future. The relevance of Iqbal's message for the next millennium will become apparent as we explore his concept of creative evolution that is an integral aspect of his over all philosophy.

¹Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore, Iqbal Academy, 1989, p. 78.

Iqbal's mission was to raise the level of consciousness of the Muslim *ummah*. He endeavoured to do so by presenting his unique vision of *kbudâ* or ego that is expressed within his dynamic concept of creative evolution. Iqbal believed that Islam aimed at preserving the values of eternal truths, which, if correctly understood, allowed human beings to become alive towards and take part consciously in, the creative evolution of life around them. He says in his lectures, "humanity needs three things today, spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis."²

Iqbal was inspired by the integral Islamic concept of *tawââd* or the Oneness of Allah. He vehemently opposed the Cartesian/ Mechanistic philosophy of scientific determinism that divides reality into that of body and spirit. His whole philosophy is a revolt against the idea of scientific determinism that advocates that human beings are under the sway of laws of science and nature only. Iqbal was an ardent advocate of concept of human freedom and evolution. He believed that the concept of *tawââd* contained within its ambit the unity of the spirit and matter, body and soul, the individual and society.

He believed that the Ultimate Ego was Allah, who, though Transcendent in His Essence, was intimately connected to human beings through His *amr*. For Iqbal *amr* stood for the creative power and will of God. Iqbal continued the tradition of the great Muslim intellectuals who pioneered the evolutionary theory, such as Ibn Maskawaih, Ibn Khaldën and Mawk« Rêmâ. According to this theory of creative evolution, the Ultimate Ego manifests itself, from the lowest forms of matter to the highest evolutionary form i.e. the spiritually most advanced human personality.

Iqbal explains the concept of *tawââd* beautifully when he says, "Reality is essentially spirit," yet he qualifies his belief by mentioning that there are degrees of reality reflecting degrees of spirit.³ He writes:

² *Ibid.* p. 142.

³ *Ibid.* p. 57.

Indeed the evolution of life shows that, though in the beginning the mental is dominated by the physical, the mental as it grows in power, tends to dominate the physical and may eventually rise to a position of complete independence....⁴

What Iqbal means by this is that the process of creative evolution involves a gradual growth of the human individuality or ego (*kebudâ*). The ego grows from a position of hardly having any freedom from natural laws and natural appetites, to the position where the ego, through the use of its creative will and power, becomes more and more powerful, free, dynamic and independent. Iqbal says: "The 'unceasing reward' of man consists in his gradual growth in self-possession, in uniqueness, and intensity of his activity as an ego."⁵

In fact the ideal of the evolutionary growth of the human personality is presented by Iqbal through the words of the Qur'«n referring to the Prophet ﷺ vision of the Ultimate Ego i.e. Allah at the journey of ascension called the *mi'raj*:

'His eye turned not aside, nor did it wander' (Qur'«n 53:17)

When Prophet Moses came into contact with God's Light, he could not sustain the impact. He lost consciousness due to the overwhelming effect of, in Iqbal's words, the Ultimate Ego. But the emergence of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ heralded perfection in human personality or ego in the evolutionary scale. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was able to reach such a height of spiritual perfection that his identity and differentiation remained intact despite a direct contact with the 'most Real' or the Divine Reality as is revealed in the Qur'«n regarding the Prophet's ﷺ *mi'raj*.

Iqbal's *Mard i Mu'min* or the Perfect Man, always moves towards a purpose. The goal is clearly given to Muslims in the concept of *tawÁád*, the belief in the unity of God and the underlying unity, equality and interconnectedness of all humanity as derived from the unity of Allah. God

⁴ *Ibid.* p.85.

⁵ *Ibid.* p.94.

clearly announces in the Qur'ān that all mankind was created from a single individual. (Qur'an 39:6) Iqbal writes:

It was Islam and Islam alone which, for the first time gave the message to mankind that religion was neither national and racial, nor individual and private, but purely human and that its purpose was to unite and organise mankind despite all its natural distinctions.⁶

This is the goal set to us through the concept of *tawĀād*. The message of *tawĀād* is not just the Oneness of God but also the interconnectedness and intrinsic unity of all of creation despite the apparent multiplicity of manifestations of Reality. Iqbal understood the deep implications of the central concept of *tawĀād*. He passionately advocated the unity of the Muslim *Ummah* and the equality and brotherhood of the whole human race. He believed in the central principle of tolerance in Islam which accepted diversity and distinction within the overall concept of unity. This is one of the evolutionary goals Iqbal set up in front of Muslims. We can judge why it is an evolutionary goal because it will need a great deal of spiritual growth within the collective psyche of present day Muslims, to achieve this end.

But how do we achieve this goal where mankind can live peacefully under the canopy of *tawĀād*, equality and justice as espoused by the Qur'ān. Iqbal set out the goal and he also spelt out the method of achieving this destination through his concept of *khudā* or ego.

Iqbal used the word *khudā* to denote the ego, the individuality of a person or the self. He described *khudā* as follows:-

Metaphysically the word *khudā* (self-hood) is used in the sense of that indescribable feeling of 'I' which forms the basis of the uniqueness of each individual. Ethically the word *khudā* means (as used by me) self-reliance, self-respect, self-confidence, self-preservation, self-assertion when such a thing is necessary, in the interest of life and power to stick to the cause of truth, justice, duty etc. even in the face of death. Such behaviour is moral in my opinion because it helps in the integration of the forces of the Ego, thus hardening it, as against the forces of

⁶ Shamloo, *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal*, Lahore, Al-Manar Academy, 1948. p. 226.

disintegration and dissolution, practically the metaphysical ego is the bearer of two main rights that is the right to life and freedom as determined by Divine Law.⁷

Iqbal believed in the gradual rising note of *kebudâ* or self-hood in the universe through the process of creative evolution till it reaches its highest potential in human beings. The universe according to Iqbal is the spatio-temporal order, where egos of varying levels dwell, interact and take part in the process of continuous change and continuous evolution. Iqbal's concept of heaven and hell is deeply connected to his concept of *kebudâ*. Hell is basically a disintegration and dissolution of the self or ego whereas heaven is a state where the personality has reached a heightened sense of self-awareness, self-consciousness and distinction. Hell is nothingness, an annihilation of the self. Heaven is the opposite of nothingness. It is to be real, an important, integral part of the Greater Reality.

Iqbal emphasises the role of the heart or *dil* or *'ishq* in his philosophy. This is another unique and integral concept of his philosophy which was inspired by, what he terms, '*higher Sufism*' or the Islamic mystic discipline.

Iqbal believed that behind the process of evolution is the vital impulse (Bergson's *elan vital*) of *'ishq* or love which is metaphysical in nature and which makes life grow towards higher evolutionary goals.

It is love that imparts colour to the tulip

It is love that agitates our life.

*If you could rip open the heart of the earth
You would see love's blood coursing through it.*⁸

He writes:

Beneath this visible evolution of forms is the force of love which actualises all strivings, movement and progress. Things are so constituted that they hate non-existence and love the joy of

⁷ Syed Abdul Wahid, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, Lahore, 1964, p.80.

⁸ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Payam-i-Mashriq*, (reprint) Delhi, Kutub Khana Nazireya, 1962, p.12 quatrain 5 from 'Lala-i-Tur'.

individuality in various forms. The indeterminate matter, dead in itself, assumes or more properly is made to assume by the inner force of love, various forms and rises higher and higher in the scale of beauty.⁹

But this “forward push to life cannot be called creative unless hitched to some goal.”¹⁰

Unlike Bergson, Iqbal believed that evolution has a goal. In fact, the evolution or dissolution of life is dependent on how far the individual chooses to use his or her creative will and power. The perfect man of Iqbal’s conception is *mujahid* who is ready and willing to face the problems of life, culture and society as he is to face the problems of after-life, spiritual welfare and death.

Iqbal quotes the Qur’« to support his concept of *khudā* the creative will and power inherent in human beings:-

“And they ask thee of the soul. Say: the soul proceedeth from my Lord’s *amr* (Creative Will and Power) but of knowledge only a little is given to you.” (17:85)

It is this nature of the soul that makes human beings distinct and the chosen ones from the rest of creation. Iqbal translates and interprets the word *amr* as the ‘Directive, Creative Will and Power of God.’ He believes that human beings can share in the creative activity of God by using their own God given creative will and power. Iqbal is an advocate of the freedom of the human personality. He quotes the Qur’«n to substantiate his views:

By the soul and He who has balanced it, and has shown to it the ways of wickedness and piety, blessed is he who has made it grow and undone is he who has corrupted it. (91:7-10)

According to Iqbal the trust or the challenge which man accepted, is to become conscious of his own true *fiṣṣrah* or nature. Man’s *fiṣṣrah* has its roots in the Divine Life and it is part of his nature to grow and evolve towards greater and greater perfection by using his creative will and power.

⁹ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, 1959, p. 33.

¹⁰ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Payam-i-Masbrig*, (reprint) Delhi, Kutub Khana Nazireia, 1962, p. 52.

“It is by rising to a fresh vision of his origin and future, his whence and whither, that man will eventually triumph over a society motivated by inhuman competition and a civilisation which has lost its spiritual unity by its inner conflict of religions and political values.”¹¹ His words resonate with an eerie ring of truth, even today, after a century that has proved his analysis to be correct.

Iqbal believed that the vision of unity and equality of mankind could be achieved through ‘higher religion.’ He believed the religion of Islam to be eminently suitable for this task because it contained within its ambit the tools for the advancement and evolution of mankind. He emphasised *ijtihad*, the method that unfetters truth from the forces of conservatism.

Conservatism is as bad in religion as in any other department of human activity. It destroys the ego’s creative freedom and closes up the paths of fresh spiritual enterprise.¹²

He admitted that the need for new interpretation of Islam in the face of ‘new realities.’ “The claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to re-interpret the foundational legal principles, in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of social life, is, in my opinion, perfectly justified.”¹³

Islam aims to free the human ego from the bonds of material and social habits and norms so that the individual’s deepest self is in contact with the ‘Most Real’ or God in other words. This contact with the ‘Most Real’ or the Creator who is upon a new creation at all times, opens the individual to a process of continuous growth, challenge, struggle and creation.

The theory of ‘creative evolution’ as envisaged by Iqbal harnesses human creative potential under the spiritual discipline of religion as the instrument

¹¹ Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore, Iqbal Academy, 1989, p. 149.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 145.

¹³ *Ibid.* p.180.

with which human beings become co-workers with God, effecting the destiny of the universe.¹⁴

In the *Javid Nama* God addresses human beings in this stirring call:

Life is both mortal and immortal, it is all creativity and eagerness

*Art thou alive? Be eager, be creative
Like us encompass the whole universe!*

Shatter into pieces what is uncongenial.

Bring forth another world out of thy imagination!

*It is irksome to the man who is free, to live in a world of another's making.
He who lacks the power of creation is naught to us but an atheist and an agnostic!*

He has not taken his share of our Beauty.

He has not eaten the fruit of the tree of life.

Man of truth! Be sharp and incisive like the sword and forge the destiny of they own world.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Javád Nama* by G. Saiyiddan, 1992, p.75-80.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 74.