

# CONCEPT OF MAN IN IQBAL

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Human existence has been the concern of philosophers, poets, religious thinkers and mystics from the dawn of civilization. The study of man in the West and in the East reflects apparently the opposite polarities.

The twentieth century, an age of humanism, consciously or unconsciously, with a relative difference in the East and the West, made a radical shift of reference from the Divine or ultimate authority to man. Today, largely for all practical purposes, man is the measure of all things. In the modern age, the sense of human autonomy is very deep, without de-linking the relevance of God. In the East, the destination of man largely remains spiritual.

The concept of man cannot be confined to the metaphysical world. The role of trustee is assigned to man on the earth, assigning him a free personality. The concept of accountability gives him a free choice to perceive his own way in shaping his destiny; he does not disappear completely in the ever-moving wheel of creativity.

The basic concern of the Qur'an is man. God created Adam, making him the vicegerent on this earth. There was eternal loneliness, before the creation of Adam. Man was not thrown into the void or in the vast desert of loneliness. Things had been created for him. The world is the stage for his performance.

In the light of man's place in the Divine scheme, there have been evaluations of man by Islamic thinkers, philosophers, Sufis, theologians and writers. Rēmâ feels that there is in man "the qualities of highness" (M6.3138-43). Ibn 'Arabâ acknowledges the very important position of man and tries to bridge the gap between the creator and creation. In the poetic universe of Ghalib, the image of desire and the motif of journey are the examples of eternal search of a creative man. Similarly man is at the core of Iqbal's writings.

He projects a dynamic concept of man. '*Mard-i-Âur*' bears that personality which feels the pulse of life even in death. '*Mard-i-mu'min*', the ideal of Iqbal, is central in the understanding of the nature of man. '*Mard-i-mu'min*' carries

out the Divine laws, while organic materials and plants are bound by their limited ways and means.

“Iqbalian man” is placed in the tension between determinism and free will. He is alive in the conflict of evil and virtue. ‘*Mard-i-mu’min*’ is ever changing. In his thought and deed he becomes the spokesman of the Divine reality. Iqbal in his book, *Reconstruction*, the magnum opus of his religious philosophy, determines the relationship between man, God and the universe.

It is strange to see the degree of difference in the concept of man in the East and the West. It is observed that the man of the East relies on intuition, while the man of the West on rationality; the East is not dynamic while the West is referred to as dynamic; in the East, mysticism permeates life, in the West social norms and ethics assume importance; man in the former is an introvert and in the latter an extrovert; and the difference also lies in terms of materialism and spirituality.

The issues of life and the universe are associated with the consciousness of man. This human consciousness is very crucial in the identification of the universe. Various thinkers viewed man, in terms of their experiences and understanding. In Plato, there was a kind of disillusionment with reference to man. But Descartes felt that the world is not an illusion: “I think, therefore, I am”. In Western thought, Dante laid emphasis on the search through man; Kant’s focus was on human will; and Goethe pointed out the possibilities and potentialities of man. Man, today, has assumed a great significance. He is not just a subject or object of psycho-social studies. In reality, he is the life of the universe, from Plato’s deceptive man, ‘Aristotle’s man of decision, to the present day thinking, which treats him as the nucleus of the universe.

There were attempts to determine the nature of man in the economic context and historical dialectics. Scientists like Julian Huxley tried to locate man in the background of evolution and scientific values. Lamont visualized him in terms of materialism, while Kierkegaard placed him in the area of Christian existentialism; and Sartre’s focus on atheistic emphasis. Unlike them, Iqbal ponders over the concept of man in *Reconstruction*, tracing the genesis of man in the Islamic background, pointing out the difference between the Biblical and Islamic background.

But there is a radical departure in Iqbal's religious thought which is not in tune with generally accepted religious metaphysics. In the Islamic tradition, too, this is an innovation. While focusing on the creation of Adam, our sensibilities are conditioned to visualize paradise as a distant place beyond the stars, somewhere in the firmament.<sup>151</sup> Iqbal is innovative in his approach, which may not be true from the prevalent religious point of view, but has such an appeal that it cannot be rejected out right. To him, Paradise is not a different place outside the earth. It is, in fact, the attainment of consciousness on the earth itself.<sup>152</sup>

Man is born of clay, but he is in tension with heroic temperament, witnessing the constant conflict with *aflak* (heaven). In this process, he bridges the gap between his own *self* and the *Absolute Self*. He is at the centre of creation. In reality, the whole universe is at his disposal: In the vast cosmos, he is not a mere statue. He witnesses a changing phenomenon. Through his experience and communication, he unveils the mystery.

There is a very unique image of man's individuality. The urge for submission to the Divine is a distinct quality of man. It is important to such an extent that the poet of the East does not want to exchange it with the semblance of magnificence of God.

The poet philosopher, Iqbal got exposure to multiple sources of the values, apparently different. The difference was largely due to isolation and xenophobia. He derives strength for his concept of *self* from the eastern and western sources without surrendering his distinct voice.

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<sup>151</sup> This could only be true on a popular mass level. Islamic Intellectual Tradition has offered extremely sophisticated interpretations of the profound meaning of these concepts. (Editor's Note).

<sup>152</sup> This is difficult to substantiate from Iqbal's prose and poetic works. The writer has, perhaps, thought of the oft-debated remarks that Iqbal made in his *Reconstruction* (see *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, IAP, Lahore, 1989, p. 98) that read as follows:

HEAVEN AND HELL ARE STATES, NOT LOCALITIES. THEIR DESCRIPTIONS IN THE QUR'AN ARE VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF AN INNER FACT, I.E. CHARACTER. HELL, IN THE WORDS OF THE QUR'AN, IS 'GOD'S KINDLED FIRE WHICH MOUNTS ABOVE THE HEARTS' - THE PAINFUL REALIZATION OF ONE'S FAILURE AS A MAN. HEAVEN IS THE JOY OF TRIUMPH OVER THE FORCES OF DISINTEGRATION.

These words can hardly lend themselves to the interpretation that Dr. Azmi has suggested! (Editor's Note).

In our age, science, which is instrumental in changing our perception through its assertion, brings partial truth, when it closes the doors of perception and other modes of comprehension besides rationalization and analytical methods through argument. Intuition that does not fall in this line of thinking is equally an important mode of knowledge and perception. Iqbal is very critical of such a myopic vision of science, which ignores this perception completely.

In his *Jawād Nama*, the poet says that prophetic as well as mystic consciousnesses are required for the fulfilment of human destiny. Therefore, living links exist between the *Mi'raj* (Ascent) and *Hijrat* (Migration), where man reaches a new height. The *Mi'raj* of the prophet underlines the truth that the sky is within the reach of man. In terms of Eliot's idiom, one can conquer time with time only. Iqbal determines a revolutionary approach with spiritual and metaphysical values for the shaping of human destiny. No spirituality can be meaningful and relevant if it doesn't have roots in human history and experience. Iqbal presented Lenin before God through the poetic fancy. In spite of the refutation of God by Lenin, he is presented before God with the realization that he played his role in human history. Lenin assumed importance because he nourished his *ego* (self) and in the view of the poet, this act was more meaningful than the passive submission of saints, devoid of actions and lost in prayers as a mechanical process. To Iqbal, spirituality is devoid of meaning if it teaches passivity.

Using the metaphor of 'God's Sovereignty on the earth, which is the famous idiom of Christianity, Iqbal believes that the new generation will be composed of such individuals, who do not adhere to discrimination. The poet's philosophy of action reaches great imaginative heights and fancy, when he says that the paradise, which comes as a gift, is not welcome; the real paradise lies in the blood stream.

Man, with his awareness, agreed to accept the trusteeship of this earth, which was declined by one and all. The relationship of God, man and the universe in this context becomes meaningful. It is not only man in search of God but God is also in search of man. The configuration of the earth is changed by man, who assumes the responsibility of becoming the co-sharer. This concept is not absolutely un-Islamic, in the light of the Qur'an (*A'Asan al-Khaliqân*). Man is given the power of creativity to bring a change in the

light of the Divine scheme. There is an emphasis on the distinct emergence of man in Iqbal's poetry. Herbert Read, a leading western critic while reviewing the *secret of the Self*, paid a rich tribute to the powerful poetic voice of Iqbal, presenting the powerful emergence of man from the East while in his contemporary situation of the West, the English poets felt proud of writing about cats and dogs.

"Iqbalian Man" is free from time-space bond. Breaking this bond he reveals his existence. In this journey, love becomes his guide. This love, gathering creative energy, refreshes itself. When love becomes the essence of life, contemporary age and many ages merge. Man conquers the universe through his ego.

The training of the *self* wipes out the possibility of destruction, the evil force in man. In fact, '*Mard i mu'min*', the embodiment of *self* has a few aspirations, but the objectives are great. This personality is not condemned to be free, as Sartre feels; he is free to choose; and he is not a helpless creature on the rock in the ocean. The individual self ultimately merges with the collective *self*.

Like Eliot, Iqbal pays a rich tribute to Sri Krishna: In the intellectual history of the world, he receives respect forever through his philosophy to mankind. He made it very clear that negation of action does not mean the total negation of it. Iqbal, through his hermeneutics, looked for the dynamism of self-awareness in the Buddhist thought, too. As he disliked the negation of self, therefore, there is no appeal for him in the philosophy of Maya.

Many critics felt that Nietzsche influenced Iqbal for his concept of perfect man. Iqbal denies it very categorically. In spite of his declaration, some critics trust the text, noticing the influence in varying degrees. The Poet-philosopher making his position clear comments that al-Jâlâ's concept of '*Insan-i-kamil*' anticipates of ideas of man, of the German thinker.

In the works of Shakespeare, Milton and Eliot, there is an assimilation of Christian consciousness in determining human identity. In the background of the powerful tradition, Iqbal's Islamic consciousness has been the focal point in his concept of man. However, this concept is not parochial, except in

terms of seeking its realization for partial application in the cultural perspective.

Mulk Raj Anand, a prominent Indian novelist, records his feeling: "In fact all through my Philosophical studies, specially into sceptical thought of David Hume and Bertrand Russell and Heisenberg, Einstein ... I returned to the *Asrar* to integrate myself". He feels, Iqbal evolved a new idea of man, 'resilient' and 'integral'. Anand considers Iqbal, 'the prophet of a new concept of man'.

The purpose of religion in Iqbal's thought is human liberation as pointed out by the eminent Indian philosopher, Radhakrishnan. Iqbal realizes, "the ultimate nature of reality is spiritual and must be considered as an ego". *Shu'ër* (awareness) is the central factor in his poetry. In the story of man, Iqbal traces the origin of man from the point when he acquired awareness and created the environment for the journey of the *self*. Tracing the religious and non-religious endeavours with the images and symbols of *nër*, Cross, cave of Hira, Greek thought, *Suröd-i-Rabbæni* of Hind, the light of Buddha, and the age of science and technology, there is a realization that reality lies within.

The qualitative and distinct emphasis of the poet on man provides a resemblance with the existentialists. From the existentialist point of view, the structure of personality is based on freedom, identity consciousness, the sense of death, anguish and dread. The poetry of Iqbal lends itself to a clear explication about its concern with these problems; there is a commonality and difference, too. Unlike what the existentialist thought about it, death is not anguish in his poetry. The Poet-philosopher says: The cold touch of death remains outside the purview of man; his immortality is the reality. Freedom is the essence of the Iqbalian man. The Nietzschean man, the Sartrean man also shows some affinities. The Marxian man is to be viewed in the social context and historical dialectics. The sense of freedom, and existential anguish of the poet can be seen deeply in the "The Wild Tulip". Iqbal creates a new East, through his concept of man, full of dynamism and the commitment of man to himself is significant and meaningful.