

IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF KHUDI (EGO)

Ghulam Sabir

ABSTRACT

We, the human beings on the earth, consist of a small part of universe; the individual is just a tiny atom in it, but in relation to the society of mankind the significance of the individual increases. However, this happens only when the ego (self) is developed in a man to make him an active organ of the body of mankind so that he is able to play his constructive role in society. The development of such an ego in the individual ultimately culminates in the development of a collective ego in a group of people, which strengthens moral values in the society and makes the nation strong in every respect. By developing the collective self or ego, differences between the individual selves are eliminated, and in such a society the desire of an individual does not clash with the collective desire of the society; the 'self' and 'other' become a collective *self* in the individuals. This is the higher stage of the voyage to selfhood that starts with an individual's efforts to awaken in him the consciousness of self-understanding after overcoming his own weaknesses and short-sightedness.

The significance of the Self in an individual is that it is the source through which we can bring ourselves closest to the Ultimate Reality. Iqbal recognised the immense power and potential of the human self and focused his energies on studying its nature. In fact he has gone so deep into the ocean of the self that it has become difficult for a common person to accompany him to that depth at the intellectual level. This is why he had to face severe criticism during his lifetime, particularly from the orthodoxy. Iqbal possessed a very high aesthetic sense, on account of which he adopted a highly literary and poetic method to explain his creative ideas with respect to developing the rich faculties of the human mind through the self. Since the language used by him contains very rich poetic imagination, it creates some difficulty for the reader to understand him, especially when it comes to the expression of his intuitive ideas.

Iqbal's famous book on *Khudi* in Persian language is *Asrar-i Khudi*. His learned teacher Professor R. A. Nicholson of Cambridge translated the book during Iqbal's lifetime and named it *Secrets of the Self*. While translating the book, Professor Nicholson wrote a letter to Iqbal in search of certain answers. The reply from Iqbal received by Professor Nicholson was so interesting that he published the whole of it in the introduction to the *Secrets of the Self*, which was published at London in 1920. The introduction to this book alone covers twenty-five pages. Since we are trying to understand the nature of human Self, a few words from the translator about Iqbal's idea are quoted hereunder:

Everyone, I suppose, will acknowledge that the substance of the 'Asrar-i-Khudi' is striking enough to command attention. In the poem, naturally, this philosophy (i.e. Self) presents itself under a different aspect. ... its logical brilliancy dissolves in the glow of feeling and imagination, and it wins the heart before taking possession of the mind.¹

S. S. Hawi, a prominent modern writer, says about Søren Kierkegaard, the great Danish philosopher, that "Kierkegaard recognised the limits of science and reason in understanding the self and the apprehension of religious faith." For Kierkegaard and Iqbal he asserts that "their humanistic psychology is a victory over the brute facts of science and behaviourism." A passage from the said article of Hawi, quoted below, will help us to understand the dynamic power of the self which Iqbal advocates in his various verses that will come under review later in this article. He writes:

Along with the dynamic concept of the self, if we explore further horizons in Kierkegaard's writings, the self emerges as a vital entity in the individual, an entity which is energetic and productive. Therefore, at the heart of Kierkegaard's conception of the self is a definite element of vitalism. Such a vitalism renders the self an internal dynamic activity with intensity of volition, feeling and thought.²

The above passage highlights the dynamic power of thought and feeling of the self emerging as a vital entity. Iqbal has similar feelings about the dynamic power of the self, but with it he includes Love as an essential ingredient for development of the self.

According to Iqbal, man is the caretaker of all possibilities of life:
Your nature is the caretaker of the possibilities of life.

(Teri fītrat ameen hai mumkinat-i zīndgani ki)

In fact the human being is the master of the seen and the unseen as well as capable of exploring what is still unknown to the temporal eye. It is one's self that is capable of seeing and doing what apparently looks to be a miracle. The self in an individual is speculative and also possesses a sharp insight that enables it to see the whole. It sees not merely the observable part of an object but the whole of it. According to Kierkegaard, if a person possessing such an insight stands on a high point and gazes out over a flat region he will see roads running parallel to each other with fields in between. But a person lacking this insight will either see only the roads and not the fields, or just see the fields and not the roads.

There are signs of God's existence everywhere in the universe, even in man himself. God says to us:

On earth and in yourselves, there are signs for firm believers. Can you not see? ³

Your real existence is your own self. If you want to understand God you first have to understand yourself. To understand and then awaken your *self* you have to pass through strenuous stages; and the most difficult task for you is to fight against yourself. Although such a fight may look odd, it is actually all about self-control. Iqbal says:

Self control in individuals builds families; in countries, it builds empires.

The self is not a ghost in you but it is you in real, it is your very existence, of which you are unaware. Your awareness about yourself is the discovery of the self in you, and for that purpose you have to undergo a long fight against external forces. These external forces determine your actions as long as you are unaware of the power of your self. Once you are free of the grip of external forces you are the master of your destiny. There are different methods for achieving this freedom, including meditations and prayers. However faith and love play a major role in this direction. On this way, says Kierkegaard, "the first part is ethical and spiritual growth, after that

the growth of love.” Defining the process in respect of “upbuilding belief which builds up love in the believer,” he writes:

Spiritually understood, what are the ground and foundation of the life of the spirit, which are to bear the building? In very fact it is love; love is the origin of everything, and spiritually understood love is the deepest ground of the life of spirit. Spiritually understood, the foundation is laid in every person in whom there is love. And the edifice which spiritually understood, is to be constructed, is again love.⁴

This means that love is the foundation material of every thing including self-knowledge. Iqbal says:

Love is the foundation of life, Love is the flashing sword of death. The hardest rocks are shivered by love's glance.⁵

Transparency or purity of heart is one of the subjects widely dealt with by Iqbal. The place of God, as regarded by Iqbal, is the human heart. It is love that purifies the heart, cleans it up, clears it from worldly rubbish, and makes that heart a worthy place for God. The meanings of the term ‘heart’, as far as it is used by Iqbal, according to Iqbal Academy Pakistan Director Suheyl Umar, “range from a seat of emotions and feelings to the centre of human interiority, the deepest seat of consciousness and also the secret of God.” Therefore its purification is the foremost step towards self-awareness. Trying to know the self with an impure heart, says Kierkegaard, is ‘self-deceit’, which he considers a tragedy. Kierkegaard connects the Self, edification, spirit, upbuilding, belief, transparency and purity of heart with love. Iqbal carries the concept of love further to the highest point and connects it with God. In one of his verses he says that the “beginning of the journey to the self is love and the end is Beauty.”

The way of approaching the self is communication with one's own self. In order to understand the real self, the individual must question himself and the responses he gets will vary from time to time and state to state. A person is the best judge of himself, and by questioning himself he knows about his weaknesses and his sins. This is a part of the process of cleaning up the heart, which involves a hard struggle against the external forces that drag the individual towards the wrong path. In this way one is able to keep himself within the norms of morality and religious limits.

The process of edification is a process of constant deepening. It can also be described as a process of increasing self-transparency, of making oneself increasingly transparent to oneself. In a beautiful image, Kierkegaard writes:

Purity of heart, it is a figure of speech that compares the heart to the sea, and why just to this? Simply for the reason that the depth of the sea determines its purity, and its purity determines its transparency... As the

sea mirrors the elevation of heaven in its pure depths, so may the heart when it is calm and deeply transparent mirror the divine elevation of the Good in its pure depths.⁶

Benjamin Nelson comments:

Freud longed to add a grain to man's self-knowledge. Toward this end he struggled to plumb the depths of the unconscious and scale the heights of creativity. Midway on his journey he stumbled upon a clue: the road to the heights was by way of the depths.⁷

Another philosopher comments, presenting the same idea in these words: "For thought rises to the heights, when it descends into itself." His 'itself' is Iqbal's Self. Kierkegaard stated:

The dynamic character of existence is manifested paradigmatically neither in society nor in the 'crowd' but in the inner individual (*Den Enkelte*) who strives to exist as an authentic person. In the subjective intensification of existence, truth comes to be in the life of an individual.⁸

Iqbal says:

Dive into your own self, it is the very secret of life.

(Khudi men doobja ghafil ye sirr-i zindgani hay)

It is love that deepens the transparency of an individual, and with the passage of time his or her heart becomes more and more transparent; the person, in this process, veers nearer and nearer to his origin until a time comes when he sees God in his own self. And then, as Kierkegaard once said, the person sees no more. He also said that "the process of deepening transparency is a process of increasing silence." Historically speaking there have been persons—men of God, loving and pious intellectuals— who stand witness to this phenomenon. A famous poet-saint of Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, named Shah Bheek, in two of his verses said: "The one who talks about (Truth) he knows not, but the one who knows he speaks not." Another world-known poet-philosopher, Jalaluddin Rumi of Persia said that he delivered long lectures on the Ultimate Truth to his pupils but when the Reality was revealed to him he laughed at himself (on what he had been preaching).

As for the journey to selfhood, we have seen earlier that according to Iqbal its "beginning is love and the end is Beauty." The destination, according to Iqbal, is Beauty (i.e. God). Kierkegaard states the same in different words:

There is a limit to the process of deepening transparency. The limit is reached when a man, to speak figuratively, achieves a conception of himself— his real self— that is so transparent he sees clear through it, it vanishes as an object and obstacle to his vision, and he sees only the absolute Truth. He sees God.

This becomes possible when man's right to choose is applied within the ethico-religious limits. Thus the edification of belief paves

the way for transformation of the heart. The transparency of the heart is continued till the heart mirrors the self that leads the person to see God; as *"the self has its origin in God."* Iqbal adds further to this idea:

The eternal secret of the ego (self) is that the moment he reaches this final revelation he recognises it as the ultimate root of his being without the slightest hesitation. Yet in the experience itself there is no mystery. Nor there is anything emotional in it.⁹

To Iqbal life is an ever flowing river, which has no beginning and has no end, both its beginning and the end lying in eternity. Rest is not in its nature. Iqbal says that rest means death and death is nowhere in the life of the self. Iqbal says that soul is in constant motion, and that is the fate of the soul. Hegel held a similar belief. In his 'Philosophy of Spirit' he says that spirit is not something motionless; it is 'absolute unrest'. Iqbal says it is hope or longing for hope that keeps man alive. Hopelessness is the result of spiritlessness; but "spiritlessness is not as being without spirit, it is stagnation of the spirit in a man," as maintained by Kierkegaard. It is this hope, which Iqbal narrates in his following couplet:

My sins did not find refuge in the whole world,
The only place where I found shelter - O my Lord! - was Thy forgiveness.

*(Na kabeen jahan men amaan mili, jo amaan mili to kabaan mili,
Meray jurm-i khana kharab ko teray afvi banda nawaz men.)*¹⁰

According to Kierkegaard, greater the conception of God, more is the self. He says that 'the self is created and sustained by God,' and asserts that more the conception of God, more is the self; and more the self, more is the conception of God.¹¹ He says:

God who holds every thing together in His eternal wisdom and who assigned man to be lord of creation by his becoming God's servant and explained Himself to him by making him His co-worker, and through every explanation that He gives a person, He strengthens and confirms him in the inner being.¹²

According to Hegel:

The self is a unified plurality and a pluralised unity in which universality and particularity are reconciled in concrete individuality. The self can be for itself only insofar as it is for others.¹³

Iqbal also has the same view. His idea of a collective self and an individual self, or the universal self and the individual self, highlights the importance of his understanding of the full scope of the 'self':

Individual self, consists of the feelings of personal life, and is as such, a part of the system of thought. Every pulse of thought, present or perishing, is an indivisible unity, which knows and recollects. ... Inner experience is the ego at work. We appropriate the ego itself in the act of perceiving, judging, and willing.¹⁴

A fully developed ego at its height, says Iqbal, is able to retain self-possession, even in the case of a direct contact with the All-embracing Ego (God). Man, without losing his identity, remains a part of the Organic Whole. The ego of man, i.e. his self, is deeply related to the Ultimate Ego or the All-embracing Ego, which is the source that “awakens in man the higher consciousness of his manifold relations with God and the universe. The self is a synthesis of ideality and reality, infinitude and finitude, possibility and necessity, eternity and time, universality and individuality.”¹⁵ The individual self derives attributes from the All-embracing Ego.

Dr. Jamila Khatoon says:

Divine attributes do not savour of limitations and finitude. Iqbal depicts God as the Dynamic Will, as Thought, Light, Love and Beauty. God is not identified with any one element but all the above-mentioned elements are comprehended in His Essence. Further, He is attributed with Creativeness, Omniscience, Omnipotence, Eternity, Freedom, Wisdom and Goodness. But these attributes and aspects do not imply limitations or restrictions, differentiations, distinctions or duality in the Divine Essence. God is one Organic Whole in which all the above mentioned attributes are comprehended.¹⁶

The role of the self in this world is constructive and is defined by a fight against destructive forces. In order to perform its role in entirety the self must be a part of the society of mankind. Being individual and remaining individual it must nevertheless also be universal as a part of the Whole. Keirkegaard says:

The deepest reason for this is to be discovered in the essential characteristic of human existence, that man is an individual and as such is at once himself and the whole race, in such a way that the whole race has part in the individual, and the individual has part in the whole race.¹⁷

We learn from history that sometimes a whole nation is faced with the misery of occupation by a foreign nation. According to Hegel such a misfortune as a result of the defeat or fall of a nation, is always due to fragmentation of the individual, which in turn is the result of spiritlessness within the individual. Spiritlessness, as already explained earlier, is not being without spirit, it is the stagnation of spirit. The spirit is “pure self-recognition in absolute otherness - it is that which relates itself to itself and is determinate, it is other-being and being-for-self, and in this determinateness or in its self-externalisation, abides within itself.”¹⁸

Iqbal, Hegel and Kierkegaard, all three of them, pointed out the damaging fragmentation of the individual of their respective countries. For Denmark Kierkegaard remarked that his country was stuck on the mud-bank of reason. In fact his remarks were applicable

not only to his country but also to many other nations during the 19th and the 20th centuries. This is the reason that the philosophy of the self with all three of them revolves around the centre of ethico-religious thought. By applying this method Hegel and Iqbal achieved what they desired, and to a great extent they succeeded in integrating the fragmented individual and managed to build a united society. But Kierkegaard was not fortunate enough to see a change in his nation during his lifetime. It is my hope that we eventually understand what he meant by saying: "My whole life is an epigram to make men aware."

We, the human beings on the earth, consist of a small part of universe; the individual is just a tiny atom in it, but in relation to the society of mankind the significance of the individual increases. However, this happens only when the ego (self) is developed in a man to make him an active organ of the body of mankind so that he is able to play his constructive role in society. The development of such an ego in the individual ultimately culminates in the development of a collective ego in a group of people, which strengthens moral values in the society and makes the nation strong in every respect. By developing the collective self or ego, differences between the individual selves are eliminated, and in such a society the desire of an individual does not clash with the collective desire of the society; the 'self' and 'other' become a collective *self* in the individuals. This is the higher stage of the voyage to selfhood that starts with an individual's efforts to awaken in him the consciousness of self-understanding after overcoming his own weaknesses and short-sightedness and then developing his self by cleaning his heart from the dust of egotism in order to make it transparent. Thus when the heart is transparent, man is able to discover the right path and then continue his journey onward with God-given power, wisdom and courage to fulfil his duty and work as a representative of God on this earth. To be clearer at this stage we quote hereunder an extract from 'Wafaring', which is part of the book *Journeys to Selfhood, Hegel Keirkegaard* by Mark C Taylor:

As soon as a person accepts responsibility for himself as a free agent, other dimensions of selfhood come into sharp focus. Most importantly, the subject clearly distinguishes what it is from what it ought to be by differentiating its givenness and its possibility, its reality and its ideality. The self that the ethicist wills to become is not an abstract self which passes everywhere and hence is nowhere, but (is) a concrete self which stands living in reciprocal relation with these specific surroundings, these conditions of life, this natural order. This self which is the goal (*Formaalel*) is not merely a personal self, but a social, a civic self. He has,

then, himself as a task for an activity in which, as this definite personality, he grasps the relations of life.¹⁹

Iqbal says:

The final act is not an intellectual act, but a vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego, and sharpens his will with the creative assurance that the world is not something to be seen or known through concepts, but something to be made and remade by continuous action.

It is a moment of supreme bliss and also a moment for the greatest trial for the ego. Iqbal in his following verses explains the way of such trial (self-examination). This is translation of his Persian verses done by Iqbal himself:

Art thou in the stage of 'life', 'death', or 'death-in-life'.

Invoke the aid of three witnesses to verify thy 'station'.

The first witness is thine own consciousness—

See thyself, then, with own light.

The second witness is the consciousness of another ego—

See thyself, then, with the light of an ego other than thee.

The third witness is God's consciousness—

See thyself, then, with God's light.

If thou standest unshaken in front of this light,

Consider thyself as living and eternal as He!

That man alone is real who dares—

Dares to see God face to face!

What is 'Ascension'? Only a search for a witness,

Who may finally confirm thy reality?

A witness whose confirmation alone makes thee eternal.

No one can stand unshaken in His Presence;

And he who can, verily, he is pure gold.

Art thou a mere particle of dust?

Tighten the knot of thy ego;

And hold fast to thy tiny being!

How glorious to burnish one's ego.

And to test its lustre in the presence of the Sun!

Re-chisel, then, thine ancient frame; And build up a new being.

Such being is real being;

Or else thy ego is a mere ring of smoke.²⁰

The life of the self receives importance in relation to its practical involvement in the affairs of society. Kierkegaard maintains:

The more of the universally human an individual is able to realize in his life, the more extraordinary he is. The less of the universal he is able to take up in his life, the more imperfect he is.²¹

In the latter case, he may become an extraordinary person in the eyes of people due to certain reasons but surely "not in a good sense," says Kierkegaard.

During the journey of *self-development* the individual is alone, and despite all the hustle and bustle of life around him he remains mostly

alone throughout this journey. Mark C. Taylor has described Kierkegaard's views:

The journey to selfhood winds along 'a solitary path, narrow and steep,' where the individual wanders 'without meeting a single traveller.' To follow the way is to embark upon an extraordinary (*U-almindelig*) pilgrimage, a venture that suspends one 'above seventy thousand fathoms of water, many, many miles from all human help.' However to Kierkegaard this is the only way that 'holds the promise of a radical cure for spiritlessness'.²²

Iqbal's conception of self— particularly with regard to collective selfhood— is very much similar to that of Hegel. Both of them belonged to their age as much as they belong to us today. They were indeed great reformers who not only offered reforming ideas but saw their lives as a mission to guide the people of their respective countries towards the right path. On the contrary, Kierkegaard, as stated earlier, did not belong to his age and as such could not possibly move his fellow countrymen. It was almost a century later that his nation started understanding the essence of his moral and religious teachings.

One thing common to the aforesaid three philosophers was their respective countries' fragmented individual. Since they were basically reformers of their time, they wanted to gather together the fragmented splinters of the individuals of their society. This they believed was the result of stagnation of spirit. According to them, men with stagnant spirits were the cause of misfortune for the whole nation. Hegel and Iqbal maintained their unique mystical and religious approach, while at the same time remained involved in the affairs of their respective society. Iqbal made himself a real force of change in the society and ignited the power of the collective self within his countrymen. His final goal was to create a realisation of the importance of the collective self at a higher level in the society of mankind as a whole. This is the concept of belonging to a single family on this planet. "To be is to be related," opined Mark C. Taylor. After quoting Hegel's view point on the development of the self, he observes that selfhood is essentially social and that the individual self remains totally abstract, utterly indefinite, and completely incomprehensible in the absence of creative interrelation.²³ Hegel spent much of his time contemplating 'how can we restore the unity of man?' If every one of us keeps this question in mind, we may be able one day to find the answer to the existing misfortune of the scattered family of mankind.

According to Iqbal, when the individual assumes responsibility it is the courage in him and the force of his passion that carry him towards the final goal, and the final goal of Ego is the individual's

direct relationship with the Divine Ego. Then his self-knowledge becomes ‘God knowledge’, and the entire world, as Socrates said, is centred in him. It is courage through which one attains his place in this world as well as in the world hereafter. The credibility of a person among his fellow beings as well as before God is always relative to the amount of courage in him. In the following verses Iqbal highlights man’s creditability in this world:

Those with elegant courage do not accept even ocean,
Oh neglected one, how long would you hold dew in your skirt
like the flower bud.

*(Himmat-i Aali to darya bhi naheen karti qubul,
Ghuncha-san ghafil teray daman men shabnam kab talak.)*²⁴

About man’s credibility before God, when he attains the status of immortality after developing his self, Iqbal says,

When your ego becomes self-observing, self-building and self-examining,

It is just possible that you do not die.

*(Ho agar kbud nigar-o kbudgar-o kbud-gir kbudi,
Ye bhi mumkin hai key tu maut sey bhi mar na sakey).*²⁵

Infinity is not beyond the reach of the finite man, but of course it is only possible when he qualifies for it by developing his inner power and transparency of heart. Einstein’s four-dimensional space-time then becomes meaningless to such a person. Bergson is also of the same view:

We can go beyond ourselves and extend our time in both directions; the way down leads towards pure homogeneity or pure repetitiveness, that is, materially; on the way up we come closer and closer to living eternity.²⁶

Iqbal says the same in a beautiful way:

In the world of love the *Time* is not limited to past, present and future,
There exist other *times* as well, which have no names.

*(Ishq ki taqveem men asr-i rawaan key siva,
Aur Zamaney bhi hain jin ka naheen koi nam.)*²⁷

When the person achieves that end, i.e. as soon as he is ‘closer to living eternity’, as Bergson said, his time extends in both directions. He is then able to see beyond the temporal past and future; he can see all at once, as the ‘eye with which he sees becomes God’s eye.’²⁸ Such a person holds an intuitive eye, which can see things that one’s temporal eye is unable to see; his instinct works like the instinct of a bee. The intelligence in a person, as Bergson maintains, is just ‘the human way of thinking’. This intelligence is transformed into a sort of revelation, a bee-like instinct– intuition. In Bergson’s view just denying the characteristics of matter does not serve the ultimate purpose for the human mind; the best way lies in cultivating and

developing its faculties by giving attention to the power of the mind itself that leads to creation of the intuitive power. He remains related to the transcendent without breaking his ties with the physical world.

According to Kierkegaard, the self is the immediate man “whose essential structure is an internal dynamic activity with intensity of feeling and thought.”²⁹ Kierkegaard’s ‘immediate man’ is Iqbal’s *Mard-i Momin* (perfect man). In his famous long poem ‘Masjid-i-Qartaba’ (Mosque of Cordova) Iqbal says that the marvellous beauty and architecture of this historic mosque came into existence through the hands of a perfect man. It is a living example of the ‘internal dynamic activity with intensity of feeling and thought’ of the men who built it. These were the people “who lived in the hope for eternal via the moment, yet retained touch with temporal.” It is simple to understand Iqbal’s contention that “truth exists only as the self produces it in action.” In the absence of self-knowledge man is incomplete— rather he is non-existent; as such he is bound to play in the hands of his aesthetic first self, seeking moments of pleasure in immediacy, with the result that as soon as such a moment is over he is desperate, with a feeling of guilt at times; but soon after he again desires repetition of the same enjoyment and again he is faced with the same fate. This goes on until the moment of death arrives and the man is doomed forever.

The man himself is the architect of his fate. He can make either paradise or hell for himself, since the power of choice rests with him. As described by Iqbal, in one of his flights of imagination he was taken to the paradise where he saw everything promised by God. He then wished to see the hell also, so his guiding angel took him into hell. To his utter surprise Iqbal found the place so cold that its inhabitants were almost freezing. He therefore said to his guide that he had heard a lot about the intensity of burning fire in the hell but he could not see any fire at all there. The angel replied to him:

The people who come here from the earth
Bring their own burning ember with them.

(*Ahl-i dunya yahan jo aatey hain,
Apney angar sath latey hain.*)

Iqbal’s every verse carries a universal message. The poem mentioned above also gives us a message that tomorrow we will reap the fruit of seed that we are sowing today. It is the activity or the movement of one’s first self towards the right direction that can achieve perfection and become an authentic *self*. The individual then becomes a ‘perfect man’. However Iqbal stresses that the movement of the self must strictly remain within the domain of the ethico-religious. The individual is an integral part of society, he is a limb of

the body of mankind, which loses its identity if detached from the body and becomes a thing of no value. As for religion, Iqbal says:

The religion is not merely a body of dogmas or rituals; it is rather a form of experiences which ensures a grasp of nothing short of a direct and immediate illumination of the very core of Reality.³⁰

The illumination is not a mysterious thing but it is as much 'cognitive as other forms of experience'. Religion keeps one's self within the norms of morality; this leads to cleaning up of the heart and making it transparent to grasp the Reality. Faith and belief play a major role in this; the expectancy of faith, Kierkegaard says, is victory. He says that doubt is guileful, on secret path it sneaks around a person, and when faith is expecting victory, doubt whispers that this expectancy is a deception. But he believes that doubt cannot disturb the expectancy of the faithful as it comes from the outside and the belief of the believer is from inside. However one should guard himself against the deception of doubt, as it is a 'crafty passion'.³¹

To guard oneself against the influence of doubt, Iqbal says:

O Man! Thou art the hand of God and also His tongue,
Create expectancy of faith in you and don't be the victim of doubt.

*(Khuda-i Lam Yazal Ka dast-i qudrat too zaban too hai,
Ya qeen paida kar aye ghafil ki maghloob-i guman too hai.)*³²

In another beautiful verse he is saying:

A believer's expectancy of faith is in this world of doubts,
The candlelight of a hermitage in a dark night of the desert.

*(Guman abad dunya men ya qeen mard-i Musalman ka,
Biaban ki shab-i tareek men qandeel-i rubbani.)*³³

The self is fundamental to Iqbal. It is the most important and dominant area of his philosophy. Iqbal himself had passed through various stages of developing his own self. Whatever he wrote about the self was from the knowledge achieved through his own experience and his dialectic was not merely a literary work or philosophical theory. To Iqbal pantheism is not the way to Reality; he is against the very root of it, since "pantheism does not admit any finite centre of experience neither it attributes any objective reality to world." Iqbal is very clear on this issue. How realistic on his part to say that "the sense-data and the perceptual level of thought cannot be regarded as unreal." The world exists, he says, and we cannot doubt this fact.

The second vital condition and an unimpeachable certainty against pantheism is the reality of the self or Ego that even pantheism cannot wholly deny.³⁴

Pantheists regard the world as being something that merely appears to us but does not actually exist. Iqbal asserts forcefully that

“the world exists,” but at the same time, he says, the *self* also exists beyond any doubt. The self plays a constructive role in the world by virtue of being itself a part of society. The *self* being individual and remaining as individual has got to be universal as a part of the Whole. Iqbal is not in favour of self-negation for the sake of a closer relationship with God, which is in fact a pantheistic belief. It was this that influenced the two great religions of Christianity and Islam by creating among the believers a groups of mystics and Sufis believing in pantheism of a Neo-Platonism trend of mind that ignores the world and with that destroys the inner power of self or ego to become the favourite of God. To Iqbal:

The moral and religious ideal of man is not self-negation but self-affirmation and he attains this ideal by becoming more and more individual.³⁵

According to Iqbal, “being real and existent its end cannot be self-absorption in the Absolute, as the pantheists maintain,” as that would imply the very negation of the ego; ego or self does exist, it is real, and gives man the status of being ‘existent’. Descartes said, “I think, therefore, I exist.” According to Iqbal:

All thinking presupposes a subject who thinks; therefore, the subject of our thinking process does exist.³⁶

Earlier it has been said that ‘the self is the actuality of man; self itself is man himself’. In relation to God, Kierkegaard says:

Man is for ever captive in the presence of God and there is no possibility for him to make himself unobserved before God or to run away from Him, for God is there with him behind and before.

The absolute self stands simply as a synonym of God; I chose the Absolute, which chooses me, I posit the Absolute, which posits me.³⁷

Iqbal highlights this relation of man’s ego with God’s Ego. He points out that ‘the Qur’an declares the Ultimate Ego to be nearer to man than his own neck-vein,³⁸ and goes on to say:

I have conceived the Ultimate Reality as an Ego; and I must add now that from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed. The world, in all its details, from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego, is the self revelation of the great ‘*I am*’, i.e. God... every atom of Divine energy, however low in the scale of existence, is an ego. But there are degrees in the expression of egohood. Throughout the entire gamut of being runs the gradually rising note of egohood until it reaches its perfection in man.³⁹

The concept of self can be easily understood, but it remains in the mind as a mere concept. Iqbal says that we can go further and “we can intuit the self. We can directly see that the self is real and existent. Indeed our selfhood is the most real thing we can know. Its reality is a fact.”⁴⁰ Bergson also says that “intuition is only a higher

kind of intellect.” Besides the self being understandable through intuition, Iqbal firmly asserts that we can see the self, which is revealed as the centre of our activity and action. He says:

It is ego, which acts in our likes and dislikes, judgements and resolutions. Thus the ego is directly revealed to be existent and real. The knowledge of the existence of the ego is in no way an inference, it is a direct perception of the self itself.⁴¹

Professor Nicholson explains Iqbal’s conception of the self in these words:

Physically as well as spiritually man is a self-contained career, but he is not yet a complete individual, because he is away from God. The greater his distance from God, the less his individuality. He who comes nearest to God is the completest person. Nor that he is finally absorbed in God. On the contrary, he absorbs God into himself. The true person not only absorbs the world of matter by mastering it, he absorbs God into his Ego by assimilating Divine attributes.⁴²

How to be a self in terms of space-time?, Iqbal explains:

To exist in pure duration is to be a self, and to be a self is to be able to say “I am”. Only that truly exists which can say “I-am”. It is the degree of the intuition of “I-am-ness” that determines the place of a thing in the scale of being. We too can say, “I am”; but our “I-am-ness” is dependent and arises out of the distinction between the self and the not self. The Ultimate Self, in the words of Qur’an “*can afford to dispense with all the worlds*”. To Him the not self does not present itself as a confronting “other”, or else it would have to be, like our finite self, in spatial relation with the confronting “other”. What we call Nature or the not-self is only a fleeting moment in the life of God. His “I-am-ness” is independent, elemental, and absolute.

Iqbal says that Nature is to the Divine Self as character is to the human self, and the knowledge of Nature is the knowledge of God’s behaviour.⁴³

Iqbal considers matter as the greatest obstacle in the way of life. He says that his criticism of Plato is directed against those philosophical systems, which hold up death rather than life as their ideal— systems which ignore the greatest obstacle to life, namely, matter, and teach us to run away from it instead of absorbing it.⁴⁴ According to him, a true person absorbs the world of matter and by mastering it he absorbs God Himself into his ego. The life of ego, he maintains, “is a forward assimilative movement and it removes all obstructions in its march by assimilating them; even the death which is also an obstacle is removed away in its onward march.” Actually, death to an existent ego is a moment of transit, says Iqbal; it is not the end of life for a truly existent person. “The personality is a state of tension,” and according to him, the essence of the life of *self* or ego lies in a “continual creation of desires and ideals.” If the state of

tension is maintained life continues, and if not relaxation would ensue. To Iqbal relaxation is death. He says that the personality or the state of tension is the most valuable achievement of man and he should see that he does not revert to a state of relaxation. The idea of personality (self) gives us a standard of value; it settles the problem of good and evil. That which fortifies personality is good, that which weakens it is bad.⁴⁵

Iqbal says that maintaining the state of tension is to make a person's life immortal. He says that after death there may be an interval of relaxation, an intermediate state, which lasts until the Day of Resurrection. The belief in Day of Resurrection as well as resurrection of human bodies is fundamental to all religions. Bergson also says that resurrection of the body is possible. There must be no doubt that the Day is bound to come and everybody from us will be there in person. This is the promise of God, Who says:

To Him will be your return—of all of you. The promise of God is true and sure...⁴⁶

Man says: "What! When I am dead, shall I then be raised up alive?" But does not man call to mind that We created him before out of nothing?⁴⁷

The self remained the focus and centre of the entire philosophy of Iqbal in his works of poetry and prose. Iqbal's famous Persian work *Asrar-i Khudi*, (Secrets of the Self), has been translated in various languages of Europe and other continents, and innumerable treatises and books have been written on Iqbal's philosophy of the self. Iqbal's way of development of personality, i.e. person's ego or self, is similar to that of Kierkegaard, namely, it is ethico-religious. According to Iqbal there are three stages in the movement of ego towards its perfection. A person on arriving in the final stage becomes a perfect man. These three stages are following:

1) Obedience of Law.

2) Self-control, which is the highest form of self-consciousness or ego-hood.

3) Divine vicegerency.

The third stage, i.e. divine vicegerency, is the last stage in the process of development of the self when man becomes the vicegerent of God on earth.

[He is then] the completest Ego, the goal of the humanity, the acume of life both in mind and body; in him the discord of our mental life becomes harmony. He is last fruit of the tree of humanity, he is the real ruler of mankind; his kingdom is the kingdom of God on earth.⁴⁸

The rule of God can only be promulgated on earth by people developing in them the ego or self to the extent that they can sacrifice all their means of worldly comfort for the sake of common good. The kingdom of God on earth, Iqbal says, means true

democracy, a democracy of “more or less unique individuals, presided over by the most unique individual possible on this earth”—the individual possessing the authentic *self*, who is the ideal of Iqbal.

The ego or the self is not only a subject but the object as well. Fichte says:

The ego is at once as subject and object. Our ideas of things are produced by the activity of thought, and there can be nothing in the ego which is not product of the ego’s own activity.⁴⁹

Iqbal agrees with Fichte and regards ego as a unity of subject and object. According to him you can see the self yourself. He says:

Self does not belong to this phenomena,
Our senses do not come between us and it.
Our eyes have no access to its secret chamber,
You see the self without the help of the physical eye.

(*Khudi az kaa-i-naat-i rangi bu neest*
Hawaas-i maa mian-i maa-o ou neest.
Nigab ra dar hareemash nest rah-i,
*Kunee khud ra tamaasha bey nigahay.)*⁵⁰

Iqbal says that the world of object is not alien to the self. He explains one-ness between the relation of the ego and non-ego beautifully in his *Asrar-i Khudi*, which has been translated by Prof. Nicholson in English:

The form of existence is an effect of the Self,
Whatsoever thou seest is a secret of the Self.
When the Self awoke to consciousness,
It revealed the universe of Thought.
A hundred worlds are hidden in its essence;
Self-affirmation brings Not-self to light.
By the Self the seed of opposition is sown in the world:
It imagines itself to be other than itself.⁵¹

The journey to selfhood must in no case seek an end; Iqbal says that the self is lost in the search of an end. It is a journey to the land of love and the traveller in this vast land of love must never try to relax, as relaxation brings one to an end, and the end of the journey becomes death. A spiritless person’s life comes to an end with death, but the one with an authentic self in possession of a transparent heart never dies. Iqbal says that “action alone is the highest form of contemplation.” If man wants eternal life, he should never relax. Man’s authentic self is never asleep; his inner eye is always open. His life does not end with the death and destruction of his finite body. Death is a moment of transit for him; he enters the eternal as soon as the moment of death is past. Death, says Iqbal, “is renewal of the life” that takes the man to a New World which is more illuminated than our earth.

In one of his articles 'Self in the Light of Relativity', Iqbal says that the study of empirical science is an indispensable stage in the moral evolution of man. However, he attaches a condition to the study of empirical science:

This scientific study should be only for moulding the stimuli to ideal ends and purposes, and it is thus only that the total self of man realises itself as one of the greatest energies of nature. In great action alone the self of man becomes united with God without losing its own identity, and transcends the limits of space and time. Action is the highest form of contemplation.⁵²

In the following verses of his book *Bal-i Jibreel* (Gabriel's Wing), Iqbal says:

There are as yet many worlds to be manifested,
For the womb of Being is not empty.
Every world is waiting to be attacked by you,
To feel the sharpness of your thought and deed.
This is the object of the revolutions of day and night.
That your self may reveal itself to you.

*(Jahaan aur bhi hain abhee bey namud,
Ke khalee naheen hai zameer-i vajood.
Har ik muntaẓar teri yalghar ka,
Teri shokhiy-i fikro kirdar ka.
Ye hai maqsad-i gardish-i rooẓgar,
Ke teri khudi tujh pe ho aashkaar.)*⁵³

Transparency of the heart is the first and foremost step towards the journey into selfhood. As said earlier, love is the tool to clean your heart. Kierkegaard says that 'love edifies self' and 'self edifies love.' Kierkegaard has also used the term 'love and love'. Out of the two kinds of love as specified by Kierkegaard, the love '*Kjærlighed*' i.e. divine love or pure love has been the focus of our discussion, and the same kind of love relates to Iqbal's philosophy of the self. This love is above our sensuous feelings:

It is not love which man feels for the fair sex however spiritualised. It is a cosmic force, which moves heavens and stars. It is operative in all the universe.⁵⁴

Iqbal in his famous poem 'Masjid-i-Qartaba' from his book *Baal-i Jibreel* explains this fact in the following two verses:

The song from the strings of life is the result of the plectrum of love,
The light and flame of life are all due to love.
*(Ishq key mizraab sey naghma-i taar-i hayaat,
Ishq say noor-i hayaat, Ishq say nar-i hayaat.)*⁵⁵

To Iqbal love proves the fact that 'I am'. He agrees with Kierkegaard that 'love edifies the self'. Iqbal, however, believes that self, life and love are not three different things. He says that in the end they become one— *the man*, Nietzsche's 'Super Man',

Kierkegaard's 'Authentic Person' and Iqbal's 'Perfect Man'. Such a man is 'God's vicegerent'. To Iqbal the self is incomplete without love and love is incomplete without the self. Without the destination in view man's life is not the life that ought to be and for what God made him superior to all of His creations. He has to build himself; he is his own architect. In a perfect man, intellect comes under the governance of love and love edifies intellect. In the absence of love man is lost; without love intellect leads man astray. However, when love accompanies intellect the individual is at once a man and an angel. Preaching such an intellect, Iqbal says:

What an intellect! that both the worlds are assimilated in it; with it goes the angelic light and it has the company of Adam's burning heart.

*(Aey kebush aan aql ki pehna-i do aalam baa oost,
Noor-i afrishta-o soz-i dil-i- aadam baa oost.)*

Before Bergson (1859-1942), materialism prevailed in the West so thoroughly that spiritual love (*Kjærlighed*) had lost its meaning. It had no place in the mind of the so-called modern world. Bergson was among the few persons who were fortunate enough to receive the divine inspiration of love, which is the most important part of human life, and without which man is incomplete. He realised the importance of the force of love for the human intellect. He believed that life revolves between the two poles of the attachment and detachment of intellect and love.⁵⁶ Intellect alone is not the right source for exploring secrets of the universe. It is in fact love that develops the ego through which man attains the power to move a mountain. However, man must not ignore acquisition of knowledge from empirical sources; true freedom demands accurate judgement for choosing the right path. It is love that directs the intellect to the right path. Therefore, we must widen our intellectual outlook and at the same time delve into the deeper levels of consciousness. Iqbal says:

Plunge into the inner depth of yourself and get the secret of life.

(Apney man men doob kar paajaa suragh-i zindagi.)⁵⁷

God has given proportion and order to the human soul, He is constantly revealing right and wrong to it. Surely he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it.⁵⁸ According to Fichte, "pure ego holds the key to the universe." Pure ego is the *self* which is 'authentic', the awakened self of the individual. And when the self awakens, it becomes a moving force in the practical world; the individual is then fully engaged in playing his role— a role assigned to him by God; he is then His co-worker, since God "assigned man to be lord of creation." For such an individual the visible world is not only a place; he can see far ahead to a new world, a wonderful world.

The movement of his self does not end anywhere, his journey goes on and he becomes ever closer to the Ultimate Reality. Even death does not stop his movement. He is then an existent individual and death is no more than a transitory moment for him. He is not afraid of death but welcomes it; for when death approaches him, he sees the beauty of the other world very clearly through the mirror of his transparent heart. At the time of death the sign of his victorious life, in the words of Iqbal, is “a smile on his lips”. In his letter dated 30th July 1913, Iqbal wrote to his beloved German teacher, Emma Wegenast:

You remember what Goethe said in the moment of his death— ‘MORE LIGHT.’— Death opens up the way to more light, and carries us to those regions where we stand face to face with eternal Beauty and Truth.

NOTES AND REFERENCE

¹ Prof. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Secrets of the Self*, English translation of Iqbal's *Asrar-i-Khudi* (Persian), published by Sheikh M. Ashraf, Lahore, p. xxix.

² *Iqbal Review*, April 1999, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, p.108.

³ Qur'an, 15:24.

⁴ Jeremy Walker, *Kierkegaard— The Descent into God*, published by McGill-Queen's University Press, Kingston and Montreal, p.34-35.

⁵ Prof. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Secrets of the Self*, P.29.

⁶ Jeremy Walker, *Kierkegaard - The Descent into God*, p.121.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, selected Annotations by Benjamin Nelson, Harper and Row, New York, p. X.

⁸ George J. Stack, *On Kierkegaard Philosophical Fragments* by Nyborg. F. Løkkes Forlag, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., Humanities Press, 1976, p. 26.

⁹ Allama Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1989, p.156.

¹⁰ Allama Iqbal, *Bang-i-Dara*, Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, Lahore, p.281.

¹¹ Ibid., p.172.

¹² Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA, p.87.

¹³ Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood, Hegel and Kierkegaard*, University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles, London, p.200.

¹⁴ Allama Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.81-82.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.7.

¹⁶ Jamila Khatoon, *The Place of God, Man and Universe in the Philosophical System of Iqbal*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, p.105.

¹⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, published by Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA, p.180.

¹⁸ Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood*, p.216.

- ¹⁹ Ibid, p.244.
- ²⁰ Allama Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.157.
- ²¹ Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood*, p.245.
- ²² Ibid, p.262.
- ²³ Ibid, p.274.
- ²⁴ Allama Iqbal, *Bang-i-Dara*, p.263.
- ²⁵ Allama Iqbal, *Kulliyat-i Iqbal* (Urdu), Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, p.43.
- ²⁶ *Leszek Kolakowski – Bergson*, Oxford University Press, New York, p.27.
- ²⁷ Allama Iqbal, *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal* (Urdu), p.40
- ²⁸ Once God revealed to Prophet Muhammad: “My *Banda* (servant of God) continues to be closer and closer to Me until he becomes My loved one, and when he becomes of My loved ones, then I become his ear with which he hears, and I become his eye with which he sees, and I become his hand with which he catches, and I become his foot with which he walks.”
- ²⁹ *Iqbal Review*, April 1999, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, p.105.
- ³⁰ Dr. M. Maruf, *Iqbal’s Philosophy of Religion*, Islamic Book Service, Lahore, ‘Introduction’.
- ³¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, p. 23.
- ³² Allama Iqbal, *Bang-i-Dara*, p. 269.
- ³³ Ibid, p. 270.
- ³⁴ Dr. Ishrat Hasan, *Metaphysics of Iqbal*, Sheikh M. Ashraf, Lahore, p. 32.
- ³⁵ Prof. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Secrets of the Self*, p.xviii.
- ³⁶ Dr. Ishrat Hasan, *Metaphysics of Iqbal*, p. 35.
- ³⁷ Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulova Thulstrup, *The Theological Concept in Kierkegaard*, C. A. Reitzels Bohandel A/S, Copenhagen, Denmark, p. 40.
- ³⁸ Also Qur’an, 50:16.
- ³⁹ Allama Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 57.
- ⁴⁰ Dr. Ishrat Hasan, *Metaphysics of Iqbal*, p. 35.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, p.35-36.
- ⁴² Prof. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Secrets of the Self*, p.xix, ‘Introduction’.
- ⁴³ Allama Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.45.
- ⁴⁴ Prof. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Secrets of the Self*, p.xxii (Introduction).
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, p.xxi (Introduction).
- ⁴⁶ Qur’an 10:4.
- ⁴⁷ Qur’an 19:66-67.
- ⁴⁸ Prof. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Secrets of the Self*, p.xxvii-xxviii (Introduction).
- ⁴⁹ B. A. Dar, *Iqbal & Post-Kantian Voluntarism*, Bazm-i Iqbal, Lahore, p.57.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid, p.62.
- ⁵¹ Prof. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Secrets of the Self*, p.16-17.
- ⁵² B. A. Dar, *Iqbal & Post-Kantian Voluntarism*, p. 99-100.
- ⁵³ Ibid, p.100.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid, p.163.
- ⁵⁵ Allama Iqbal, *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal* (Urdu), p.421/97.
- ⁵⁶ B. A. Dar, *Iqbal & Post-Kantian Voluntarism*, p.175.
- ⁵⁷ Allama Iqbal, *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal* (Urdu), p.331.
- ⁵⁸ Qur’an 91:7-10: “By the soul and proportion and order given to it, And its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right; truly he succeeds that purifies it, And he fails that corrupts it.”