

Iqbal's Concept of Insan-i-Kamil or Mard-i-Momin (Perfect Man)

Mohsin Afzal Dar

Abstract

The Islamic world has witnessed the emergence of great number of Muslim scholars. The names of those who made positive contributions are mentioned till these days. The poet-philosopher Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), is one of those great scholars who have left a legacy behind to be followed by others. He had a deep insight into the holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and had delved deep in the Western thought. His knowledge of Arabic and his study of philosophy in the West equipped him with a good access to the sources of both Islam and Western modernism. Iqbal has the sensitiveness and the depth of a philosopher and the imagination of a poet. His approach to Islam is thus on broader basis than that of the traditional theologians and the Western educated Muslims, as seen predominantly in his "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam".

In this direction, this paper discusses the views and thoughts, opinions and remarks of Iqbal on Insan-i-Kamil (Perfect Man).

Introduction

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) is a great thinker of the Muslim world. He holds a prominent place among the whole line of Muslim Philosophers, though his place is unique in so far as the current century is concerned, for there is hardly any contemporary Muslim thinker who can match with him. He enjoys high and prestigious position not only among the Muslims of the sub-continent, but throughout the world of Islam. He had a deep knowledge of the holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and had studied the Western thought deeply. His approach to Islam is thus on broader basis than that of the traditional theologians and the Western educated Muslims. Iqbal's later poetry particularly poetical works in Persian and the lectures published under the title "*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*" testifies to his objective and dynamics.

Mohsin Afzal Dar, Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Aligarh, India. Email: mohsinafzaldar@gmail.com

Keeping this in view, the following pages are, to all intents and purposes, an attempt at giving more or less a complete perspective of Iqbal's thought on *Insan-i-Kamil* or *Mard-i-Momin* (Perfect Man). This concept is of great importance in understanding Iqbal's approach to Islam.

Insan-i-Kamil or Mard-i-Momin (Perfect Man)

The vision of the Perfect man that Iqbal presents is unique and fascinating. But he is not the first to propound this conception. Many thinkers before him had endeavoured to develop the idea of the ideal man. Abdul karim al- Jili and Moh-y-ud-Din ibn Arabi are prominent among them. Jili has presented his stimulating views in a book entitled *Al-Insan al-Kamil Fi Maarfa-til-Awakhir Wal-awail*. He views that man is an entity by himself and is a manifestation of both God and universe. He also says that man is the image of God, and in reality, he is a link to unite God with the universe. He further says that man is the main objective behind the creation of the entire universe, because no other creation has the requisite qualities to mirror the truly divine characteristics. The Holy Prophet is the supreme example of the perfect man, and anybody following his path of life is sure to achieve the highest ideal which life is capable of bestowing upon man.¹

Similarly Ibn Arabi is of the opinion that divine consciousness reaches its culmination in the Perfect Man. It is through the Perfect Man that God knows Himself perfectly and it is through him that the unknowable becomes knowable. Like jili, Ibn Arabi unequivocally proclaims that the Holy Prophet Muhammad is the best example of a Perfect Man.

Though Iqbal is indebted to his predecessors, yet the picture that he paints is lively and dynamic. His *Mard-i-Momin*, *Mard-i-Haq*, *Faqir*, *Qalandar* are the expressions which stand for the Perfect Man.

Iqbal condemns all the teachings which lead to self-annihilation and detachment from the world and all its relations. He urges us to return to it again and to utilize it for the purposes of moral, intellectual and social elevation.² His Perfect Man is the crystallization of his ideas presenting the solution of human misery. In his philosophy he aims to give us not a mere abstract ideal, whose colourful vistas may vanish in the glare of reality, but practical guidance as well. Iqbal revolted against all such mystical concepts which killed human individuality. He accepted the Holy Prophet as the Perfect Man without the mystical ramifications mentioned by the mystics like Abdul Karim al-Jili and Mohy-ud-Din ibn Arabi.

Iqbal's Perfect Man is not different from a true and honest Muslim who does not treat his religion as a wooden dogma but makes his life conform to the genuine pattern of the

Holy Quran and attains the highest degree of perfection by living up to it sincerely and honestly and in every way. He is distinguished from fellowmen by the undying quality of his faith. It is the unbeatable spirit of belief which draws the line between him and the rest of humanity. He outshines them in courage and spiritual stamina. The pure and clean Monotheism of the true believer separates him from the worshippers of men and glory. His disinterested humanitarianism and the universality of his outlook overrun the barriers of race and geography. He possesses the plan of an ideal life and abides by it scrupulously.³

Iqbal's Perfect Man is a Momin whose greatest qualities are power, vision, action and wisdom. These qualities are perfectly noticeable in the character of the Holy Prophet, who was also the complete embodiment of the finest attributes. It is by emulating the character of the founder of the Faith, that a Momin becomes a master of his destiny and reaches a stage of perfection. Iqbal has expressed this idea in *Bal-i-Jibril* by saying that the Momin is powerful and is a conqueror of difficulties. He is the goal of reason; the sole harvest of love and all activities in the universe can be attributed to him.⁴ Another place he says that an infidel can be recognized by the fact that he is seeking absorption in the universe, while the Momin is one who is himself the depository of the whole universe.⁵

According to Iqbal, "this universe is not a block universe, a finished product or completed reality, incapable of change".⁶ According to him, the transformation of chaos into cosmos and the emergence of life, mind and consciousness can be referred to an evolutionary process.⁷ But his evolution is neither accidental nor mechanical (ungodly)-taking matter an inert, static and lifeless. Nor did Iqbal consider man's present structure, mental as well as physiological, as full fruition of the biological evolution.⁸ Life is immanent in the universe. Everything organic or inorganic can be traced to a common source of creation, the Self or *Wajud-i-Basit*. This common source of creation or the Self was an indivisible whole in the beginning, possessing definite powers of perception and volition. In order to manifest itself, it posited the not-self, the latter serving for former as a mirror on the one hand and an object on the other. Moreover, the existence of opposition or the not-self provided the self with an immense scope for struggle – the necessary basis of all evolution.⁹

However, it should not be thought that not-self or matter is entirely devoid of life or egohood. It rather consists of a colony of egos of a low order; and finite life and higher consciousness emerge out of them, when their association and interaction reach a certain degree of co-ordination.¹⁰ Thus, egos designated as matter are only less developed, while perfection is measured with the scale of individuality. The different levels of existence signify different stages in the development of the egohood. The urge of self-manifestation and self-development is present in everything, and is expressed in every living being, from a

unicellular organism to man's highly developed personality. As Iqbal said, "Through the entire gamut of being, runs the gradually rising note of egohood, until it reaches its perfection in man".¹¹

It is obvious that Iqbal's main stress is on the Self (Khudi), and it is the nucleus of his Perfect Man (Mardi-Momin). He disagrees with the common interpretation of Hallaj's Anal-Haq (I am the creative truth) according to which, in the highest stage of perfection, the finite ego is completely merged with the Infinite Ego. According to Iqbal, the true Infinite does not efface the finite. On the other hand, it embraces the finite without effacing its finitude, and thus explains and justifies its being. Iqbal says that, a Perfect Man can see God face to face without losing his own self. He can "retain his full self-possession, even in the case of a direct contact with the all-embracing Ego".¹² This conception of the Ego presents an optimistic point of view about the future of man.

Iqbal believes that man is a dynamic centre of energy placed in a dynamic universe. He is conscious of his own insignificance, his own imperfection and the imperfection of the world. But he is bestowed with a free personality, initiative, and creative power, which place him in a position to mould and change what lies in him and outside him.¹³ He is not fettered by space and serial time.¹⁴ To Iqbal space and time are not objective realities external to and independent of man's self. The Self is the only ultimate reality, while space and time are the ways in which it manifests itself. The problem of time is the more important of the two, and is vitally connected with the problem of immortality, which is very much condition to the perfection of personality.¹⁵

Iqbal is of the view that, real time is not periodic – a succession of events, which can be enumerated like the pearl beads in a thread. It is not a straight line divided into the past, the present and the future, out of which we have partly travelled and partly have to travel, irrespective of our wish. Real time or duration, and is identical with life itself,¹⁶ while special time is a fetter that is forged by life for itself, in order to assimilate the present environment. In real sense, we are timeless, and it is possible to realize it even in this life. This realization of timelessness, however, is momentary only.¹⁷ To Iqbal, the Self or Ego has two sides, efficient or appreciative. The efficient Ego is related to physical existence, and while retaining its unity as a totality, expresses itself as a series of specific and consequently numerable states, which can be conceived a spatial point, like so many stages in a journey. It lives in serial time.¹⁸ The appreciative Ego corresponds to the spiritual realm. Its unity is like the unity of the germ in which the experiences of its individual ancestors exist, not as a plurality, but as a unity in which every experience permeates the whole and all elements interpenetrate. It lives in pure duration, unadulterated by space, in 'a single now' which, in spite of change

and movement, remains indivisible. Space is closely allied to pure time. Space is to time what body is to mind, i.e., time is the mind of space. In the view of Iqbal, “in our constant pursuit after external things, we weave a kind of veil round the appreciative Ego or Self which after that becomes completely alien to us. The efficient Self gets the upper hand in those who consider space or time a reality, while pure duration sinks into abeyance.¹⁹ In spite of all this, if man realizes the significance and power of his appreciative Self, he can transcend space and time, and can shatter the universe and regenerate the personality.²⁰ A revolution in his consciousness can free him from the shackles of serial time, while pure duration becomes a sword in his hand, enabling him to conquer the whole of existence.²¹

According to the common view, all destiny is given readymade, somewhere in eternity, and the temporal order of events is a mere imitation of the eternal mould.²² This view is only mechanism in another form, in which fate or destiny takes the place of rigid determinism, leaving no space for human or divine intervention.²³ This conception, with its paralyzing and deadly effect, is the source of pessimism and pre-destination. Passive resignation to the will of God deprives man of his active will, creative power and the zeal and zest of life. This view was opposed by Iqbal in the following words: The destiny of a thing is an unrelenting fate which overrules like a taskmaster; it is the inward reach of a thing, its hidden and realizable possibilities, which serially actualize themselves without any feeling of external compulsion.²⁴ To exist in real time, is not to be bound by fetters of serial time, but to create it from moment to moment, and to be absolutely free and original in creation. Destiny is time regarded as prior to the disclosure of its possibilities. It is time free from the net of causal sequence... In one word, it is time as felt and not as thought and calculated.²⁵

To Iqbal, a Perfect Man is not fettered by destiny. It is he who governs it.²⁶ God is omnipotent and the creator of the universe, but if the universe does not suit man’s desire and purposes, it can be shattered and rebuilt in his own fashion.²⁷ Man himself can demand from God his fate, because fates are innumerable and he is free to make choice.²⁸ A man can elevate himself even to that lofty height where God will consult his will before assigning him his destiny.²⁹

Thus, man is the possessor of tremendous power and immense potentialities. Iqbal has dissolved space, time and destiny as untraversable barriers to man, and has thus given a satisfactory basis for fresh activity, creativity, originality and initiative. Undoubtedly, man is brought to ‘the lowest of the low’ and is placed amidst an obstructing environment. But all this provides him with an opportunity to develop and assert his potentialities and powers. His imperfection becomes a necessary condition for his perfection. He is not satisfied with his self and his surroundings as they are and complains against God for making them

such. But immense possibilities of his nature compensate him for all the limitations imposed upon him, and thus enable him to become a co-worker with God.³⁰ He is placed amidst the force of obstruction, but he is equipped with the most suitable faculties of adjustment, which enable him to overcome obstacles of his surroundings. Man is destined to become a permanent element in constitution of being. In spite of the limitations imposed upon him from the external world, he possesses an ascending spirit which enables him to rise from one stage of being to another.³¹

Iqbal is of the view that, man can transform both his being and his surroundings according to his own desires and inspirations. Truly, he makes improvement upon what is created by God. For instance, God created night, he invented the lamp; God created the clay and from it he made the cup; God created deserts, mountains and forests, and he made parks, flower gardens, and groves. It is man, who turned stone into a mirror, and it is he who turned poison into an antidote.³² God created the world but man made it more beautiful.³³

To Iqbal the Perfect Man (Mard-i-Momin) is a man of this world, and belonged to all mankind, and lived in all time and clime, as he is an immortal being. He is a world-reality, above and beyond the limitations of time and space. He cannot be imprisoned by the boundaries of race, politics or geography. Iqbal's Perfect Man is timeless. He belongs to no particular place or country. The whole world is his home.³⁴ He is commissioned with a mission, i.e., to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. He possesses great power and strength, that he can change the destiny of the people. That is why Iqbal exclaimed in a challenging mood:

Who can imagine the strength of his arm?

Destines are changed at the mere glance of a Perfect Man.³⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion Iqbal points out the following characteristics of his Perfect Man (Mard-i-Momin): The 'Perfect Man' is the divine vicegerent of God on earth. He represents the last stage of human development upon our planet. The goal of humanity is to be realized in his personality. He is the complete ego, both in mind and body. He will possess the highest power blended with highest knowledge. All the painful trials of evolution are justified as he is bound to come. He is the real ruler of mankind. Out of the richness of his nature, he lavishes the wealth of life on others and brings them nearer to Himself. The more we are advanced in the scale of evolution the nearer we are to him. For the present he is mere ideal to us, but the evolution of humanity, both in mind and body, is tending towards his emergence. The Perfect

Man (Mard-i-Momin) is the ultimate goal of the evolutionary process, and he is developed out of the present man, just as the full moon from the crescent.

References/Endnotes:

¹ Yousaf Hussain Khan, *Ruh-i-Iqbal*, Delhi, 1962, pp.174-75

² See R.A Nicholson's "Introduction" in *Secrets of the Self*. Available online at <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/works/poetry/persian/asrar/translation/index.htm>.

Throughout this work, I have used this online version for Nicholson's Introduction.

[hereafter cited as Nicholson, "Introduction"]

³ Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Glory of Iqbal*, tr., Muhammad Asif Kidwai, Islamic Research and Publications, Lucknow (India) 1973, p. 92

⁴ Iqbal, *Bal-i-Jibril*, Educational Book House, Aligarh, 1975, p.98

عقل کی منزل ہے وہ عشق کا حاصل ہے وہ حلقہ آفاق میں گرمی محفل ہے وہ ۔

⁵ Iqbal, *Kulliat-i-Iqbal*, Educational Book House Aligarh, 1988, p.506

کا فر کی یہ پہچان کہ آفاق میں گم ہے مومن کی یہ پہچان کہ گم اس میں ہیں آفاق ۔

⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore, 1958, p.10

⁷ Nicholson, *Introduction*, *op.cit.*

⁸ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, London 1934, p.115.

⁹ Sayyid Abdul Hai, *Iqbal the Philosopher*, Islamic Cultural Centre, Chittagong. Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dacca. 1980, p.42

¹⁰ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, Lahore, 1958, *op.cit.*, p.106

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.71-72

¹² Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, London 1934, *op.cit.*, p.111

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 11,12

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94

¹⁵ Nicholson, *Introduction*, *op.cit.*

¹⁶ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, London, *op.cit.*, pp.45,46,47

¹⁷ Nicholson, *Introduction*, *op.cit.*

¹⁸ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, London, *op.cit.* pp.45-46

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,pp.45

²⁰ Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, Lahore, 1932. pp.15-16, As cited in Abdul Aleem Helal's *Social philosophy of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*, Adam Publishers and distributors, Delhi, 1995, p143

²¹ Iqbal, *Asrar-o-Ramuz*, Kutub Khana Naziriya, Delhi, 1971, pp.80-85

²² Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, London, *op.cit.*, p.51

²³ *Ibid.*, p.51

²⁴ *Ibid.*,p.47

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.47

²⁶ Iqbal, *Asrar-o-Ramuz*, *op.cit.*, p. 83

²⁷ Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, *op.cit.*, p.196, As cited in Helal *op.cit.*, p.144

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.123, As cited in Helal, *op.cit.*, p.144

²⁹ Iqbal, *Bali-i-Jibril*, Educational book house, Aligarh, 1975, p.55

³⁰ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*, London, *op.cit.*, pp.11-12

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11

³² Iqbal, *Payam-i-Mashriq*, Lahore 1923, p.132, As cited in Helal, *op.cit.*, p.145

³³ *Ibid.*, p.16, As cited in Helal, *op.cit.*, p.145

³⁴ Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *op.cit.*, p.98

³⁵ Iqbal, *Bang-i-Dara*, Educational Book House Aligarh, 1975, p.281

کوئی انداز کر سکتا ہے اسکے زور بازو کا نگاہ مرد مومن سے بدل جاتی ہیں تقدیریں -

