Dr. Iqbal and his concept of Ideal Human Being

Muneer Hussain (Azad)
Ishfaq Ahmad Tramboo
Lovely Professional University.

Abstract

Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal is one of the widely read, translated and interpreted poets, born in the Indian subcontinent. He has received immense attention from both the eastern and western academia. His poetry and philosophy are complementary to each other. He has chosen the poetic genre of Urdu Nazm (an organized and compact poem) to propound his philosophy. Iqbal’s poetry, whether Urdu or Persian, offers the reader with a bouquet of philosophical inklings. The issues like the meaning of life, the position of a human being in the universe, his survival, progress and power, the existence of God, the phenomena of action, movement and time, so on and so forth are deeply embedded in his poetry. The current research paper attempts to describe and depict the picture and position of an Ideal Human Being within the scheme of things portrayed by Iqbal in his writings. He holds that an ideal being is a microcosm in whom are reflected all the attributes of the macrocosm. Iqbal pits his protagonist against other supermen projected by other acclaimed philosophers of the world.

Key Words: Superman, Iqbal, Ideal human being, Love, Evolution, Nietzsche

The personality of Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal has three major attributes:

1. A creative involvement with his philosophical insights enshrined in his prose writings, mainly in his “The Reconstructions of Religious Thought in Islam.”

2. His Persian and Urdu poetry which is generally acknowledged to be the best incarnation of poetically mediated thought; the finest harvest of wisdom poetry in modern times.

3. His political activism and social therapy, rising to his social and moral responsibilities.

Since his reputation primarily rests on his philosophical thoughts, he has been taken as “the most serious philosophical thinker of modern times.” The oft-quoted epithet “poet-philosopher” is thus well deserved. In a way, his poetry is serving as a vehicle for his thought. As against Walter Pater’s theory “Art for Art’s sake”, Iqbal held to the doctrine of “Art for Life’s sake”. It is pertinent to mention here that Philosophy is taken as an attempt to reveal the mysteries of the universe at large. To put it in different words, philosophy is a branch of learning that differentiates between appearance and reality. Some philosophers believe that ‘it is an intellectual explanation of human experience as a whole’. “Philosophy” as defined by Robert Flint, “is the highest thought about the highest thing”. If this definition of philosophy is agreed upon, then Sir Muhammad Iqbal doubtlessly makes a niche in the rank of world philosophers.

Dr. Iqbal peeps through the world with meditative eyes and thereby comes up with immediate responses. He is bewildered to witness the state of things in contemporary times. He sees the society out of joints and subsequently thinks of himself as if he is born to set it right. In this way, Iqbal emerges as a crusader whose mission is to reform society. New ideas spontaneously pop up in his fertile mind and he has always something new to comment on religion, love, government, liberty, slavery, charity, superman, empire, economy and anything that comes to his purview. But the amalgamation of thoughts that arrested my concentration the most
is his concept of ‘Ideal Human Being’. The idea of an Ideal Human Being, which without an iota of doubt has been derived from Islamic mysticism, can be put in contrast to Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche’s Superman. Nietzsche exerted a great deal of influence on Iqbal that we can see much of the ideas of Nietzsche revisited by Iqbal in his prose and poetry. Some of the thoughts, motifs, allusions and, symbols in ‘Asrar-i- Khudi’ (The Secrets of the Self) by Iqbal can be seen as having predominance in Nietzsche’s ‘Thus Spoke Zarathustra’. Nietzsche, in his book, offers the readers an ambiguous description of superman which he calls ‘Ubermensch’. The word in the German language means ‘beyond man’, ‘overman’ or ‘superman’. All these terms refer to a human being who is supposed to be beyond or over or superior to his fellow humans for all practical purposes. Nietzsche’s idea of Superman is in no way correlated with the concept of God in Christianity because to him God is dead. The death of God is not different from the death of moral values, cosmic purpose, and divine justice. He sees this universe full of woes and worries which have no inherent meaning. So the only means to survive in such a universe is to find meaning in suffering. Thus, the superman of Nietzsche is a befitting response to such a nihilistic condition. In every respect, his superman is stronger and more independent. He neither seeks suggestions from anyone nor does he follow anyone’s path, instead, he forges ahead through his ways to reach his goal.

Iqbal admired Nietzsche and his powerful superman at the first instance but at the same time, he adds a spiritual dimension to the idea. This appreciation of Nietzsche’s superman led Iqbal to the creation of an Ideal Human Being. The concept of Ideal Human Being given by Iqbal was, however, an idea of superman who evolves in culture and history. Contrary to the concept of Nietzsche’s superman, Iqbal propounded the Ideal Human Being to be the amalgam of both eastern and western values. In the eastern part of the world, a man’s spiritual aspect is as important as his material aspect. That is why Iqbal projected his Ideal Human Being as a man also beset with the spiritual and transcendental elements. His Ideal Human Being transcends the illusory peaks of perfection. He is the actualization of his highest possibility of being, and by his spiritual element, he becomes the crown of the creation. Unlike Nietzsche’s superman, Iqbal’s Ideal Human Being is never a master over lesser beings. He is essentially a spiritual force who realizes himself in time and space. He can be understood as a living force who is always and equally in possession of rights and duties with which a well-knit social organism can exist.

Iqbal calls his Ideal Human Being by different names such as Mard-i-Mumin(the man of belief), Insan-i-Kamil(the perfect man), etc. and he employs different metaphors for him like Uqaab(eagle), Shaheen(falcon), etc. The qualities of an Ideal Human Being are vehemently presented in his poetic outpourings. He says that the Ideal Human Being should possess the qualities of anger (anger towards the enemies of God), forgiveness, piety, and might. He is not a callous and cunning person committed deriving sadistic pleasures through brutality and oppression. He is a moderate one who safeguards his ego by imposing physical and spiritual discipline and thereby rising above his material state of affairs. He creates a new universe infinite in choices and possibilities. His freedom is based on his rational power and capacity. It is this rational power and capacity by which he decides actions and chooses between good and bad, beautiful and ugly, profitable and unprofitable, comfortable and miserable.

Iqbal says that the formative influences of selfless love and powerful action are at the back of his Ideal Human Being. His concept is tooth and nails different from that of George Bernard Shaw’s doctrine of creative evolution. G. B. Shaw provides us with a biological “Life-Force” as an expediting force behind the evolution of superman. He opines that man is merely an agent of this life force for the creation of higher forms. The force is operating through a woman to give birth to a man who is invented to transport life to higher levels. To substantiate his point of view, Shaw asserts in his play ‘Man and Superman’, “Sexually, a woman is Nature’s contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually, man is woman’s contrivance for fulfilling
Nature’s behest in the most economical way”. Thus the theory reduces man to a stature of biologically evolved superman, conditioned by his environment. On the other hand, in his ‘Stray Reflections’ Iqbal states “The idea of Christian God is more divinely merciful but the idea of Muslim God is more divinely powerful”. According to him, there is only one truth in this universe that is power. But it is not only the muscular power that we take for granted in our day to day affairs of life. It is the power of maintaining harmony in the society. For feeding poor and powerless, you need power; protecting dear ones, you do not need morals, you need power. To take gauntlets against the oppressors, you do not require morals and ethics, instead, you need power. To stop the tsunami, the Coronavirus and the like, what you need is power. So instead of being a fascist, Iqbal’s Ideal Human Being is primordially philanthropist. The one who takes pride in sacrificing himself for the sake of others. Such a man does not feel alienated and estranged but considers himself as an organic part of the society. As the human heart is central to the human body, so is human being central to human society. In a couplet, Iqbal says:

An individual is a firm by the community’s coherence, otherwise nothing
A tide exists only in the ocean, and outside the ocean, it is nothing.

Iqbal’s Ideal Human Being is proud of being human and has no desire to take part in divinity. He is the epitome of creation who has been sent on earth as the vicegerent of God. He has been bestowed with all the sources of knowledge to equip himself with all the necessary tools to accommodate the relations and fulfill the responsibilities. His relationship with God is one that of a co-creator who is entrusted with knowledge, responsibilities, and freedom. Such a being is endowed with the ability to cognize or comprehend the whole universe. In a poetic frenzy, Iqbal once said: “the hand of God is the hand of an ideal human being”. To be God is to have concerns and subsequent worries that would give one a headache, but to be human is to have that sweet pain called heartache. Hence Iqbal strikes hard at the concept of Love. He is an overt way says:

To be God is to have charge of land and sea,
Being God is nothing but a headache!
But being a servant of God, God forbid!
That is not a headache; it’s heartache!

In this way, an ideal human being’s destiny is not preordained. It is he who designs his fate as per his wishes. As we acknowledge that God is omnipotent and He is the only creator of the universe. In case the universe does not fit squarely within the framework of man’s desires and purposes, he is capable enough to recreate it according to his own choices. ‘Man himself can demand from God his fate. A man can elevate himself even to that lofty height where God will consult his will before assigning him his destiny’, says Iqbal.

Sir Muhammad Iqbal appreciates action and movement in any form and any shape. To him, one who is in action is in life. One, whose action comes to a standstill, faces death. Life in itself speaks of action, progress, and evolution. It is contrary to stagnation and inertia i.e death. Life as action, progress and evolution is a creative process. Human existence is the precious part of this grand scheme of life and existence. It is a growing phenomenon. As John Milton eulogizes the action of Satan in ‘Paradise Lost’, so does Iqbal praise the action and movement of Iblees (Satan) in his poem ‘Jibreel aur Iblees’ (Gabriel and Satan). In this poem, Satan has been bestowed with the status of the protagonist, and the reason behind all this process is determination and action. As the couplet reads:
I rankle in God’s heart like a thorn, what about you?

All you do is to chant ‘He is God’ over and over again.

Love and time are perceived to be two major concepts in the philosophy of Iqbal. The Ideal Human Being, who is engrossed in love, rides the horse of timelessness, transcends the boundaries of space and finally enters into the realms of eternity. Iqbal’s Ideal Human Being is not found relishing the rarities of the present but is always seen involved in the trials and tribulations of the future. Once Iqbal said: “I seek the end of that which has no end. From the spark, I seek a star, from the star a sun”. He can understand that human potentialities are miraculously endless. He suggests that humans should embark on a limitless journey of discovery. ‘Time’ to him ‘is nothing but eternal recurrence’. Time repeats itself and gives a man a chance to be the superman. His Ideal Human Being is always ahead of his times. He takes the reins of time and sets forth for the regions forlorn. In a poem, Iqbal says:

The cycle of day and night is the engraver of events
The cycle of day and night is the essence of life and death
The cycle of day and night is a bi-colored thread of silk
With which the eternal being weaves its attire of traits.

Conclusively speaking, Dr. Iqbal’s Ideal Human Being is one who possesses immense potentialities and tremendous powers. Without an iota of doubt, man has fallen to ‘the lowest of the low’ and has been placed in an environment that is replete with impediments. But with the absence of these opposing currents, he can never qualify himself for self-assertion. His flaws turn out to be an essential condition for his flawlessness. Iqbal believes that an ideal human being is capable enough to transform both his self and his surrounding, in accordance with his desires. God has created the universe, now it becomes the duty of a good human being to make positive improvements upon it. Every coming event is an examination of the collective consciousness in general and of his consciousness in particular. When he wishes to rise again, he marks a departure from his painful past and the tormenting present and gallantly moves onto the revolutionary process of reconstruction. He plans his future as per his crystal clear ideas and well-thought-out goals. He always keeps his mind open for new changes and developments. To Iqbal, an Ideal Human Being is a man who belongs to all mankind and lives in all time and clime. He can never be confined within the boundaries of geographical locations, racial classifications, and political ideologies.

Works Cited:
