

## Iqbal's Insight of a Perfect Man and Its Relevance in the Contemporary World

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### Abstract:

Perfection is a Divine phenomenon that is linked with the religious belief of the Muslims that says, 'No god but God and Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is his last Prophet'. This belief confirms that no one is perfect except Allah and only his magnificence is meant to be worshipped whereas Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) represents the culmination of Divine perfection on earth being Allah's last messenger. Allama Muhammad Iqbal's insight of perfection in mankind endorses this belief which was meant to remind humanity of their inner strength in the twentieth century. Besides awakening the Muslim *ummah*, his philosophical poetry brought upon a socio-political revolution. He reinforced Divine perfection as a solution to all problems faced by humanity. Mankind as the viceregent of Allah has been given the responsibility to reflect this Divine perfection on earth but if we analyze the contemporary world, does this approach prevails in our lives? Considering the contemporary challenging conditions faced by the Muslim community of Pakistan, this paper is an attempt to strengthen and reinforce this religious belief of perfection to make them realize their inner strength which can then help resolve all conflicts whether personal, social or political. Through qualitative research methodology, related references have been analyzed to support the research question and to reach the conclusion that Iqbal's reinforcement of perfection in mankind needs to be revisited in the present age with more conviction that can lead humanity towards peace and prosperity.

*Keywords:* Perfect man, *Khudī*, Divine perfection, contemporary world, Iqbal, Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H)

Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) is an eminent intellectual poet of the Sub-Continent. He is one of those enlightened philosophers who wrote extensively on the relationship between God and mankind. His religious background helped him to understand the true spirit of Islam and the means of progression as mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān. Having command in Islamic theology, he was well equipped with modern knowledge as well. His professional development allowed him to study, experience, and analyze different notions of being in the world around him. He is credited for introducing the philosophy of *Khudī* in the light of achieving high merits of human perfection (Razak, 2013, pp. 15-34). A man who recognizes his *Khudī* according to Iqbal is *Insān-e kāmīl* (a perfect man), who exemplifies all the attributes of God (but not the essence). The example of perfection in mankind is Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and Iqbal reinforced the conception of human perfection by focusing on the traits of a true believer. Iqbal emphasizes man as being the counterpart of God. For him, embracing Divine attributes does not mean uniting with God but merging God into one's own self (Khan, 2021, p. 14-26). In this way, man develops such potentials of self that represent God's own will. A man with such distinctive qualities is able to shape the world according to his own will which truly represents God's will (Popp, 2019, pp. 201-229). In today's world, this notion needs to be reviewed with the same intention as was identified by Iqbal for living a purposeful life.

### **Objectives:**

Analyzing the present-day challenging conditions, this paper is an attempt to reinforce the religious belief of perfection among the Muslim community of Pakistan as a solution to all existing conflicts on a personal, social or political level. For every individual, it is essential to identify and acknowledge the

purpose of life. Mankind is meant to strive and search for the true dimension of being which is to realize the reflection of Divine perfection within. Upheaval in surroundings is meant to remind man of his inner strength as a solution to all calamities around and I believe this time requires the same thought-provoking awakening in the Muslim community as Iqbal sensed in the first half of twentieth century. In the light of Iqbal's man of Divine perfection, this paper highlights those features which need to be reviewed with careful consideration for reformations in the contemporary world.

### **Research Methodology:**

Qualitative research methodology has been used for this research paper with a focus on APA citation style. To support the research question, relevant books and articles have been studied with intense observation. All selected references have been analyzed with careful consideration for building a strong argument for reaching desirable results in light of the research question generated by the researcher.

### **Literature Review:**

For conducting research on this subject of concern in relation to its relevance and importance in the contemporary world, some thought-provoking references have been studied and acknowledged. These references shed light on man's status being the nucleus of God's creation and a reminder for him to acknowledge his duty towards determining the reason behind his superior status. No doubt, man has remained an important subject of study for ages. In every religion, he is considered the focus of this world's conception.

Islam by endorsing man's supremacy among God's creations also admits that man owns a self which passes through different stages of development (Razak, 2013, pp. 15-34). References in the Qur'ān (2:30 and 20:122) confirm:

And (mention, O Muhammad), when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know."

In another verse (33:72), it is stated, "Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man (undertook to) bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant." Iqbal's interpretation of these verses from the Holy Qur'ān in *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* affirms, "Man is the chosen of God and with all of his faults, he is meant to be the representative of God on earth" (Razak, 2011, p. 76).

Although Western scholars and philosophers have done extensive research based on the distinctive role of man in this world, their analysis somehow lacks a mutual consensus whereas Muslim scholars including Iqbal emphasize man as being the representative of God in this world (Razak, 2013, pp. 15-34). The Divine attributes hidden in man's personality remained a feature of investigative discourse for Muslim mystics and scholars. Ali Ibn Sina (980-1037), Abdul Karim Al-Jili (1365-1424), and Mohy-ud-Din Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) are among few prominent names who contributed in highlighting perfection as a Divine phenomenon in mankind by using the term *Insān-e-kāmil* (*a perfect man*). For Ibn-e-Arabi *Insān-e-kāmil* is a responsible human being who by focusing on spiritual insight and rational thinking devotes himself fully to Allah (Davids, 2019, pp. 72). Mukhtar quotes Ali Ibn Sina mentioning that the human soul holds three features. The first among them is vegetative, the second is animal and the third is human. The human soul of man is the rational soul which is highly proficient and holds reasoning. The rational soul acquires the tendency to contact the Divine radiance. Through such contact, the soul acquires wisdom, courage, sobriety, and righteousness (Mukhtar, 2009, pp. 141-

158). The main task of the human soul is to attain perfection for the reflection of its Divine connection. As cited in the Holy Qur'ān (15: 29) "So when I have formed him fully and have breathed into him of My spirit (Mokhtar, 1994, pp. 44-71)." This spirit inside man when awakened through contemplation of the rational soul is the first step to reach the status of *Insān-e-kāmil*. Amongst these mentioned religious intellectuals, Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is the ultimate example of Divine perfection on earth as *Insān-e-kāmil*. Following the footsteps of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) mankind can achieve perfection of a high standard (Dar, 2013, pp. 48-56). Alongside these Islamic scholars, Maulana Rumi (1207-1273), a mystic poet from Persia also presented his thoughts through poetry. He shares that a man advances from matter to spirit through different phases of evolution by using reason, intuition, and exposure which helps him in reaching the state of perfection. He also mentioned that Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is the example of a perfect man on this earth who surrendered his will to God for attaining perfection (Iqbal, 1991, pp. 355). Similarly, Iqbal's extensive study of the Holy Qur'ān and his belief in Prophet (P.B.U.H) as the culmination of Divine perfection on earth helped him to present the philosophy of *Khudī* which is aligned with the concept of recognizing the spark of Divine excellence in mankind (Kidwai, 1973, pp. 92; Dar, 2013, pp. 48-56). Through his philosophical and poetic discourse, Iqbal stimulated Muslim *ummah* to develop their character after the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) by awakening their soul. For Iqbal, a perfect man needs to have vision, wisdom, and the power to act accordingly. He needs to evolve himself as the creator of his own destiny for attaining perfection. Dar quotes Y. H. Khan mentioning that Iqbal believes in man as God's image on earth, which means that man is meant to be a link for uniting God with this universe. Being the nucleus of God's creation, man has been given this responsibility to realize his status and to mirror the Divine features in this world. Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is the ultimate example of Divine perfection on earth and whoever

will follow him will surely attain the utmost ideal mankind is meant for (Dar, 2013, pp. 49).

The above-mentioned references have been taken as the prime reason behind acknowledging the Divine spark, mankind is born gifted with. Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was sent on earth as the perfect example for mankind. Analyzing the prevalent chaos in this contemporary age, we need to revisit the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) for enlightening ourselves with the Divine spark which holds perfection of self as a solution to all prevailing problems. For this purpose, Iqbal's philosophical discourse triggering the Divine perfection in mankind is revisited with the conviction to stimulate *Khudī* in the present Muslim community.

### **Discussion:**

*Khudī* is a broader term used for self-affirmation, self-realization and self-analysis that provokes mankind to recognize the Divine attributes of God within themselves for achieving excellence (Telwani, 2019, pp. 23-36). *Khudī* according to Iqbal is the free being that holds an autonomous center. In *Asrār-e-Khudī* (The Secrets of the Self) he says that "The luminous point whose name is the self / Is the life-spark beneath our dust." (Nicholson, 1964, p. 11.)

Iqbal's poetic discourse on *Khudī* introduced different dimensions of being that holds strong essence. In *Bāng-e-Drā* (Rise of Islam) he says:

Oh, negligent submerge thyself in thyself, to recognize  
the secret of life;  
Emerge out from the restraints of sunset and sunrise to  
become immortal (Iqbal, 1977, p. 273). (Translation by  
the author)

In another phrase of *Bāng-e-Drā* he says:

You embrace creation's secret, disclose thyself to thy vision  
 Be the guardian of *Khudī*, be the interpreter of God  
 (Iqbal, 1977, pp. 273) (Translation by the author)

Iqbal's extensive study of the Holy Qur'an and his command over eastern and western philosophical and scientific knowledge facilitated him to present the notion of *Khudī* for enlightening the soul of the Muslim community. He wanted to make Muslims aware of their true spark as the representative of God on earth. He was of the view that a believer who in himself acknowledges the Divine calling and connects with it after unification of his ego, reaches perfection (Ali, 2009, p. 118). His belief in man was reflected through his poetry by means of different titles including *Insān-e-kāmil*, *Mard-e-Khudā*, and *Mard-e-mo'mīn*. All these titles represented his faith in a perfect man who surrenders himself to God's will. He also adds that for seeking perfection man has to pass through different phases which include *Aṭā'at-e-Ilāhi* (Obedience of God), *Zabt-e-Nafs* (Self-control), and *Khalīfah-tullāh* (Divine viceregency) (Nicholson, 1964, p. 5). These are the stages of evolution for achieving perfection and on the basis of these, a man is called a perfect man. According to Iqbal a believer who is conscious of this Divine feature in himself after establishing a connection with the Divine is a man of free will, he is a perfect man who acquires wisdom (Qaisar, 2012, p. 60).

i) ***Aṭā'at-Elāhi*** (Obedience to God):

The first stage towards identifying *Khudī* for achieving perfection is the acknowledgement of *Tauḥīd* that says "No god but God" which is the primary step toward Muslim belief. This stage refers to the Obedience of God. Iqbal mentions that:

(Islam) finds the foundation of world unity in the principle of *Tauḥīd* and Islam, as a polity, is only a practical means of making this principle a living factor

in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind. It demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature. (Iqbal, 1994, p. 147; Schimmel, 2018, p. 86)

Islam serves as a practical guiding principle that makes the notion of *Tauhīd* a dynamic feature whereas *Khudī* is the comprehension of all such traits which are linked with Divine unification. This notion of oneness is the fundamental aspect of religious belief. Iqbal mentions in *Rumūz-e-BeKhudī* that “the quintessence of Muslim *ummah* is the propagation and preservation of *Tauhīd* (Schimmel, 2018, pp. 87).” Certainty *Lā ilāhā illā Allāh* (No god but God) became a favorite configuration in the philosophical poetry of Iqbal. He says in *Zarb-e-Kalīm*:

The essence of self is concealed in the belief that confirms “No god but God”

The grinding stone for the sword of self is “No god but God (Iqbal, 1977, p. 15) (Translation by the author)

The formula *Lā ilāhāillā Allāh* holds such power that it works like a sword in a believer's hand. It became a protective shield in challenging conditions. Islam is a religion that requires unity of action and this belief provokes a believer to act in the direction of God. Iqbal in *Armaghān-e-Hijāz* says “Whosoever knotted the *Lā ilāhā illā Allāh* into his mind, / Has left the fetters of school and Mullā.” (Schimmel, 2018, pp. 88)

Iqbal was of the view that once a believer understands the significance of this declaration for union with the Divine, nothing can deviate him/her from his desired destination. Even his conviction will help him in moulding nature according to his own wish. If he will remain submissive toward God, everything will remain under his control (Schimmel, 2018, pp. 89). Obedience to the law of God and its compliance according to the directed path



by Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) through *Sunnāh* is mandatory (Khan, 2017, pp. 18). Following the prophetic tradition that says, *tukhli-qū bi akhlāq-Allāh* (to formulate the characteristics of God in one's own self) man can realize his inner strength. He believes that a true believer is equipped with the desire to perform his duty with conviction, devotion, and patience which is the initial step towards self-realization. He described the image of a perfect man having high goals and determined ambitions (Schimmel, 2018, pp. 111). The Holy Qur'ān (6:104) affirms that "There has come to you, enlightenment from your Lord. So, whoever will see does so for (the benefit of) his soul, and whoever is blind (does harm) against it. And (say), 'I am not a guardian over you". A man has to be vigilant in his actions and responsiveness to understand his position in this world and hereafter being God's representative.

ii) ***Zabt-e-Nafs*** (Self-control):

The second stage of acknowledging *Khudī* according to Iqbal is *Zabt-e-Nafs* (self-control). Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) acknowledged as *Insān-e-kāmil* is the best example who devoted his life in obedience to God and having self-control. Longings for worldly gains in front of a true devotee become unknown. With the compliance of God's defined laws, a believer attains wisdom that transcends from self-awareness to Divine awareness. In the Holy Qur'ān it is mentioned that:

O you who have faith! Be maintainers of justice and witnesses for the sake of God, even if it should be against yourselves or (your) parents and near relatives, and whether it be (someone) rich or poor, for God has a greater right over them. So do not follow (your) desires, lest you should be unfair, and if you distort (the testimony) or disregard (it), God is indeed well aware of what you do. (4:135)

*Zabt-e-Nafs* (self-control) makes a person fearless, when they acknowledge God as the Only powerful authority then

nothing can harm them. Self-control is one such pillar that strengthens *Khudī*. It can be activated by practicing patience, tolerance, devotion and submission to God's will as an outcome of human spiritual and intellectual advancement. Self-control serves as the foundation for the religious belief of Islam which rests on its five pillars. These five pillars include *Shahādat* (the profession of faith) that says, "No god but God and Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is His last Prophet, *Ṣalāt* (prayer), *Zakāt* (alms-giving), *Ṣaum* (fasting), and *Haj* (pilgrimage). The practice of these religious mainstays helps in controlling human *nafs* (Khan, 2021, pp. 14-26). This control of worldly desires helps man towards his journey of becoming God's representative on earth.

iii) ***Khalīfah-tullāh*** (Divine Viceregency):

The third stage of recognizing *Khudī* is being familiar with man's role in this universe. In the Holy Qur'ān it is mentioned that human is the trustee of God, "Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man (undertook to) bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant." (33: 72)

And another verse it is mentioned,

It is He who made you successors on the earth and raises some of you above others in rank, to test you through what He gives you. (Prophet), your Lord is swift in punishment, yet He is most forgiving and merciful. (6:165)

Iqbal also highlights this feature of man's creation which certainly has a purpose. He provokes the Muslims for acknowledging the attributes of God in themselves. He says who realizes his strength of being God's trustee is a perfect man (Schimmel, 2018, pp. 111).

Whereas analyzing man's stature among God's creations, in *Bāl-e-Jibrīl* he says, "You are not for the earth, nor for the Heaven / the world is for you, you are not for it." (Schimmel, 2018, pp. 112)

Iqbal declares that *Khudī* holds immense significance in the *fiṭrah* (instinct) of man as an eternal feature. In the Holy Qur'ān, the reference to *fiṭrah* is mentioned as:

So, direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth, (Adhere to) the *Fiṭrah* of Allah upon which He has created (all) people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most people do not know. (30:30)

This *fiṭrah* in man is the reflection of God's Divine spark which needs to be acknowledged for realizing man's status in this universe being the exegesis of God. Anne Marie Schimmel quotes that "Iqbal's Perfect Man is not the man without God, or who replaces a God but the man who has fully realized his personal relation with the God with whom he lives, works, and talks (Schimmel, 2018, pp. 119)." At this point, it needs to be quoted that however, Iqbal was criticized by a few critics for having similarities with Nietzsche's superman which he himself mentioned that Nietzsche's superman is a man without God and Divine guidance (Dar, 2011, pp. 290). Iqbal's perfect man is a man of God, a developed personality who realizes the reflection of Divine strength in himself being the representative of God on earth and follows Divine guidance. Inspired by Rumi's *Mard-e-Ḥaq*, Iqbal's perfect man has unconditionally love for God and the passion burning and love makes him an example of Divine perfection on earth by means of his action and spiritual immortality.

Iqbal by foreseeing the condition of the Muslim community provoked them to raise their *Khudī* which unlocks the significant feature of their personality being *Khalīfah-tullāh* (the

vicegerent of God on earth). Similarly, analyzing the directionless state of Muslims in the contemporary world this research stresses on mankind to realize the strength of their righteous action for shedding the curtains of darkness around. Their awakened soul can be a source to reform like a rose which spreads its fragrance in the surroundings to make it worth living (fig. 1).

**Figure 1**

*Awakened Soul-I*



*Note.* Source: picture by the researcher, Farah Khan, 2017; mixed media on *vaslī*, 20.32 cm x 16.51 cm, private collection.

“In great action alone the self of man becomes united with God without losing his own identity and transcends the limits of space and time. Action is the highest form of contemplation” (Schimmel, 2018, pp. 118).

## Conclusion:

Iqbal's insight of a perfect man reflects the Qur'ānic references which confirm the status of man being God's representative on earth and *Khudī* is the realization of this belief which needs to be acknowledged by every Muslim religiously. In the present world, materialism in surroundings has affected man's essence. This is the time when we need to seriously analyze our role in building a peaceful and prosperous environment which can be possible only after recognizing the traits of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as being a Perfect man and a source of blessings for all humanity.

Iqbal in *Bāng-e-Drā*, (The Rise of Islam) says, "Express the secret of life hidden in your soul, / Share with Muslims the account of passionate burning and reformation of life" (Iqbal, 1977, p. 269) (Translation by the author).

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