

## **Iqbal's Ego Philosophy and Its Importance in Awakening Man's Spirituality**

### **Falsafah Ego Iqbal dan Kepentingannya dalam Kebangkitan Kerohanian Manusia**

Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak\*

#### **Abstract**

History reveals the fact that the coming of modernity and secularism has allured modern man towards a materialistic concept of life, ignoring his spiritual needs in respect of his role as the vicegerent of God. This predicament has not only marred man's relationship with God but has also failed him toward understanding his true nature and mission in life. The large segment of humanity today is on the brink of losing its human and spiritual values, resulting in severe environmental degradation, racism, terrorism, war, poor mental health, and other psychopathological illnesses. This paper intends to explore and draw out conclusions from the philosophical thoughts of Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) with regard to his ego philosophy that explains man's relationship with God, community and the universe (flora and fauna). Lessons drawn out from Iqbal's ideas can be of great use in awakening man's spirituality and improving his quality of life by establishing a harmonious relationship with God, environment and fellow human beings.

**Keywords:** Iqbal, Ego Philosophy, Man, Spirituality.

#### **Abstrak**

Sejarah menunjukkan satu hakikat bahawa kedatangan kemodenan dan sekularisme telah menarik manusia moden ke arah konsep hidup materialistik, mengabaikan keperluan rohaninya berkenaan dengan peranannya sebagai khalifah Allah. Keadaan ini bukan sahaja mencemarkan hubungan manusia dengan Tuhan tetapi telah membuat dirinya gagal untuk memahami sifat sebenarnya dan misinya dalam hidup. Segmen besar manusia hari ini berada di ambang kehilangan nilai-nilai kemanusiaan dan kerohanian, menyebabkan kemusnahan alam sekitar yang teruk, sifat

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\* Assistant Professor, Department of Fundamental & Inter-Disciplinary Studies, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia, email: maarji@iiu.edu.my; maarji2020@yahoo.com.

perkauman, keganasan, peperangan, kesihatan mental yang lemah, dan penyakit-penyakit psychopathological. Karya ini bertujuan untuk meneroka dan menarik keluar kesimpulan dari pemikiran falsafah Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) dengan mengambil kira falsafah ego beliau yang menerangkan hubungan manusia dengan Tuhan, masyarakat dan alam semesta (flora dan fauna). Pengajaran yang boleh diterima dari fikiran Iqbal boleh menjadi amat berguna dalam kebangkitan kerohanian manusia dan meningkatkan kualiti hidup beliau dengan mewujudkan hubungan yang berharmoni dengan Allah, alam sekitar dan sesama manusia.

**Kata Kunci:** Iqbal, Falsafah Ego, Manusia, Kerohanian.

### **Introduction**

Secularization of the human mind all over the world has deprived modern man from the true meaning of life and the ultimate reality of his existence in this world. Not knowing his actual role as God's vicegerent and his position in the hierarchy of God's creations has led him into conflict with God, nature and rest of the mankind. Moreover, the absence of God in his life has alienated modern him from binding a harmonious relationship with his Self, nature and others. This state of life has taken him to the brink of causing destruction to environment, going into endless war, etc. In the wake of this catastrophic conditions of man, this paper intends to explore the philosophical ideas of Iqbal with regard to the life of the ego and the multifaceted relationship it has, as showcased by Iqbal, to the world through his concept of the ego. As a prelude to the crux of the matter of this research, will be some information on the scenario in the East and West which challenged Iqbal's mind to come up with his ego philosophy. It is hoped that by exploring his ideas on the life of the ego, we can draw out some understanding as to how modern man can find meaning to life and through which he can strengthen his sense of spirituality.

### **Scenario in the Muslim World and in the West**

The scenario in the Muslim World at the time Iqbal appeared on the intellectual stage of the world was not a pleasant one as the Muslim world was lagging behind the West in the areas of education, science and technology. Some of the contributing factors to this pathetic scenario

were the widespread influence of the doctrine of *wahdah al-wujūd* in the Muslim World, particularly in undivided India prior to its independence, prevalence of conservatism in the mental attitude of the masses which led them to fatalistic thinking, and colonization of the East by the West, particularly Muslim countries.<sup>1</sup> The pathetic conditions of the Muslim World challenged Iqbal as a scholar to call for some reformation towards improving the conditions of the Muslims. As such, he formulated his ego philosophy to eradicate some of the more serious problems faced by the Muslim community. Very precisely his ego philosophy came as a response to the following challenges found in the Muslim world:

- a) After the fall of the Mogul empire, Muslims lost their dominant position. As such, under the British rule, Muslims were left behind in education and other sectors of public life;
- b) Iqbal was saddened by the fact that all Muslim countries were under European subjugation. This pathetic situation has robbed their dignity, honor and self-esteem. It also created a state of mental slavery in them towards the West;
- c) Muslims lost their zeal and zest for life. Abandoning active participation in worldly life in the pursuit of attaining the nearness of God;
- d) Sufi teaching which preaches that at the highest level of man's spirituality, man can attain union with God;
- e) Muslims suffered inferiority complex and started imitating the Western culture.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to the Muslim World Iqbal saw in the West emergence of a great number of scientists with fresh and fascinating ideas unearthing the secrets of nature by using science and technology as their instruments. To Iqbal, though the West dazzled the whole world with its creations and discoveries, it was not able to solve the more perplexing issues with regard to the human existence. Scholars and scientists were not able to provide comprehensive answers to such questions like what is the true nature of man, what is the real meaning of his life and what should be his

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<sup>1</sup> See Muhammad Iqbal, *Stray Reflections* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1992), pp.149-152.

<sup>2</sup> Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, *Iqbal's Theory of Personality: A Contrastive Analysis with Freud* (Saarbrücken: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013), p. 315.

ideal position when compared to other creations of God. In addition to this, Iqbal also witnessed how the people of the West were driven in life by the greed for material wealth and the obsession for power for their survival. Iqbal felt that colonization and later the First World War took the humanness out of them.<sup>3</sup>

In his poems Iqbal, time and again, laments on how life has become mechanical in the modern world, depriving man from understanding the true meaning and purpose of life, particularly in the West. To him, such a situation is non-confirmative to the true purpose for which man has been created. Though he agreed with the spirit of scientific research of the West, he was not happy with their philosophy of life, which was detached from religion. According to him, though man in the West gains superiority with science and technology, his life lacks the inner peace and harmony. To him, the reason for this is the attitude of the Western man of going after worldly things at the expense of neglecting his spiritual needs. Iqbal explained the awful situation of people in the West by saying:

Thus, wholly overshadowed by the results of his intellectual activity, the modern man has ceased to live soulfully, i.e. from within. In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself; and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others. He finds himself unable to control his ruthless egoism and his infinite gold-hunger which is gradually killing all higher striving in him and bringing him nothing but life-weariness.<sup>4</sup>

Iqbal being a critical thinker on what was happening to humanity made fair assessment of the situation and stated his unbiased criticisms on people wherever they were. Besides explaining the shortcomings in the West, he also explained the false notion prevalent in the people of the

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<sup>3</sup> See Muhammad Munawwar, *Iqbal and Quranic Wisdom* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1985), pp.105-118. & Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, *Human Nature: A Comparative Study between Western and Islamic Psychology* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM, 1997), pp.1-7.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1996), p. 148.

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East in facing the world. Diametrically opposite to the situation in the West, people in the East, particularly the Muslims were entangled in the web of pseudo-mysticism. Instead of taking an active role in developing the world, which is designated by God, they were doing quite the opposite. Iqbal in analyzing the situation described their attitude towards life as:

Far from reintegrating the forces of the average man's inner life, and thus preparing him for participation in the march of history, it has taught him a false renunciation and made him perfectly contented with his ignorance and spiritual thralldom.<sup>5</sup>

In concluding his criticisms against the East and the West with regard to their attitude towards life, which were either inclined to the material world or the spiritual needs, he made the following comments:

The East perceived God and failed to perceive the World  
The West lost itself in the world and fled from God!  
To open the eyes on God is worship!  
To see oneself unveiled is life.<sup>6</sup>

In realizing the predicaments of the people in the East and West, Iqbal called on man to lead the ideal life for which he has been created for. By going through his ego philosophy, one would sense that Iqbal called for a life which strikes a balance between man's spiritual needs and his worldly needs. He strongly believed that a balanced life-style can be of a great help for man's ego development. Iqbal was also of the conviction that the ideal situation for man's progress will be an approach that integrates the two good qualities found in the people of the East and West. By complementing '*dhikr*' or spirituality of the East with the '*Fikr*' or science, technology and intellectual knowledge of the West we

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-149.

<sup>6</sup> Iqbal in KG.Saiyidain, *Iqbal's educational philosophy* (Lahore: SH Muhammad Ashraf, 1977), p. 91.

can produce the ideal man propounded in the Qur'an.<sup>7</sup> To Iqbal, the message of the Qur'an is not only '*dhikr*' but also '*Fikr*'.

Iqbal, who grew up witnessing all of the above pathetic conditions of the Muslim Ummah and of the West, was provoked to respond in his own way to bring a change and reform the Muslim mind towards living a dynamic life in a modern and ever-changing world. In order to achieve this, he conceptualized a new philosophy that calls for the realization of the hidden inner potentials that lie within the human psyche.<sup>8</sup> Iqbal with his innovative philosophy also explained to the world that the human ego has a relationship with the Creator, the community/society, with nature/universe and the material world at large. Through his poetry and philosophical writings, Iqbal explained that in order for the ego to develop in the most enriching manner which eventually manifests in the form of a personality, an individual has to maintain and play his or her part without severing his or her relationship with God, the community and nature.<sup>9</sup>

Iqbal's ideas on philosophy as well as his theory on personality are unique in the sense that they are a blend of Islamic values on the one hand and Western dynamism towards life on the other. Many of the hard-liners among the Islamists of his time missed the point when they criticized his philosophy for having an admixture of some elements which are Islamic and others which are truly Western. To Iqbal, the part he has taken from the West is not a thing which is contradictory to the principles stated in the Qur'an. Iqbal, who had a discerning eye and a critical mind, carefully chose from the West what is agreeable to his Islamic background, and rejected and criticized the flaws found in the Western philosophy. In defending his position, Iqbal stated that the elements he has taken from the West were in fact the lost heritage of the Muslims found in the philosophy and life of the Muslim scholars of the Golden Age of

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<sup>7</sup> Sheikh Akbar Ali, *Iqbal his poetry and message*. (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1988), p.103.

<sup>8</sup> Lini S. May, *Iqbal: his life and times*. (Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1974), pp. 299-304.

<sup>9</sup> KG.Saiyidain, *Op. Cit.*, 1977, pp. 54-60.

Islam (750-1258). Moreover, he also stated that borrowing and sharing of ideas between people of different civilizations were always there in the history of mankind. While encouraging Muslims to learn from others, he also cautioned them through his poems that they should not just blindly follow or imitate others.<sup>10</sup>

### **Iqbal's Concept of Human Nature**

Iqbal as a Muslim scholar, who had the opportunity to pursue his philosophical studies in the West, was not at all influenced by the ideas on human nature as perceived by Western scholars, especially those coming from the Darwinian and Marxist background. Iqbal's ideas on human nature are purely based on the ideas on man as stated in the Holy Qur'an. Iqbal in his ideas on human beings, referred to the famous story on the origin and 'fall of man' found in the Torah, Bible and the Qur'an. Based on his understanding of the Qur'an, Iqbal believed that Adam and Eve were forgiven for their transgression committed during their time in *Jannah*. Besides that, he also believed that their coming to earth was not a punishment for their transgression, and this world should not be seen as a torture-hall prepared for Adam and his progeny.

Moreover, Iqbal was of the contention, that during the time Adam was in *Jannah*, he was still in a primitive state that did not require him to respond to the challenges that came from the environment. As such, at the time when Adam was in *Jannah*, he did not feel the human needs, the ones that were necessary for the flourishing of the human culture. In Iqbal's view, the 'fall of man' had certain positive aspects in it. In giving his comments on the issue, Iqbal said:

Thus we see that the Qur'anic legend of the Fall has nothing to do with the first appearance of man on this planet. Its purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self, capable of doubt and disobedience.

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<sup>10</sup> See Muhammad Iqbal *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1996), pp. 6-7, & Muhammad Munawwar, *Iqbal and Quranic Wisdom* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1985), pp. 17-25.

The Fall does not mean any moral depravity; it is man's transition from simple consciousness to the first flash of self-consciousness, a kind of waking from the dream of nature with a throb of personal causality in one's own being.<sup>11</sup>

As a thinker who was deeply anchored in the teachings of the Muslim holy script, the following form the major premises on which his views on human nature were built on:

- 1) Among all creations of God, man is the best and the chosen one of God.
- 2) That man, with all his faults, is meant to be the representative of God on earth.
- 3) That man is the trustee of a free personality which he accepted at his peril.<sup>12</sup>

According to him, among all creations of Allah, man is the most honored creation chosen to be His representative to administer and manage the earth. Iqbal referred to verse of *Sūrah Tāhā* of the Qur'an: "*Then his Lord chose him (for His grace by showing him the way to repent), and He relented towards him and gave him guidance.*"<sup>13</sup> To Iqbal, though man's position is weak compared to the angels and other celestial bodies, Allah chose man to be His representative on earth. In explaining why this privilege is only given to man and not to any other creation of God, Iqbal referred to these verses of the Qur'an:

*And (remember), when your Lord said to the angels: "I am about to place a vicegerent on the earth". They asked (the wisdom behind God's decision): "Will You (Our Lord) put on earth one who will spread corruption and shed blood (killing each other) when we have*

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<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, Op. Cit., 1996, pp. 67-68.

<sup>12</sup> See Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1996), p.76.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Qur'an, 20:122.



*for so long sung Your praises and sanctified Your name" He said: "I know what you do not know."<sup>14</sup>*

*And He has made you vicegerents in the world, and exalted some of you above others in rank, so that He might try you with His gifts. Indeed your Lord is Most Swift in punishment, and yet He is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful."<sup>15</sup>*

Besides man being the chosen and handpicked by God to be His representative on earth, Iqbal also highlighted in his concept of human nature that man is the trustee of a free personality, which he accepted at his peril. As a point of reference to man's acceptance of a free personality, Iqbal referred to the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

*We did indeed offer the trust to the heavens, to the earth and to the mountains (to bear it), but they declined to bear it, and were afraid that they would not be able to fulfill it (for they do not have innate disposition to bear it. (Remember that) man is prone to do injustice and to do things in the manner of the ignorant."<sup>16</sup>*

In the above verse, the great responsibility accepted by man is metaphorically stated as the *amānah*. This trust which was refused by the heaven, earth and mountains due to the immense burden that was attached to it, was a thing willingly accepted by man. Since the word *amānah* is metaphoric in nature, it meant many different things to many different scholars in writing their exegesis of the Qur'an. To some scholars, the word *amānah* in *Sūrah al-Ahzāb* can be referred to the 'human intelligence', 'the Qur'an' or the 'office to the vicegerency', while to a few others it either means the 'total sum of all the do's and don't's that are stated in the *sharī'ah* or the *mīthāq* (the covenant) made by the human souls in the realm of the souls, before they came to exist in this world. As for Iqbal, the word *amānah* means the human individuality or personality. Despite many shortcomings of man, Iqbal deemed man to be superior in nature. This high opinion of Iqbal on man finds reference in

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<sup>14</sup> Al-Qur'an, 2:30.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Qur'an, 6:165.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Qur'an, 33:72.

what had been mentioned about man in the following two references of the Qur'an:

*By the fig, and the olive, by Mount Sinai, and by this city of security (Makkah), truly, We created man in the best of moulds (and with capabilities and powers suitable with his high and noble station).<sup>17</sup>*

*And truly We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam, and carried them by land and sea by various means of transportation. And We have provided them with good things and exalted them above many of Our creation.<sup>18</sup>*

Iqbal believed that man is not a static being. By relating to the Qur'anic message that the universe in which man lives is one that is constantly growing every minute and second, Iqbal applied the same to state that in man too there is a constant growth.<sup>19</sup> In reading Iqbal's philosophical ideas on the human personality one can understand that he highly valued the role, potentials and creative mind possessed by man. Iqbal's ideas on man perfectly reflect the message found in the Qur'an. Iqbal's positive views on man can be clearly seen in what he said in his monumental philosophical work, the Reconstruction:

Man, therefore, in whom egoism has reached its relative perfection, occupies a genuine place in the heart of Divine Creative energy, and thus possesses a much higher degree of reality than things around him. Of all the creations of God, he alone is capable of consciously participating in the creation of life of his Maker. Endowed with the power to imagine a better world, and to mould what is into what ought to be, the ego in him aspires, in the interests of an increasing unique and comprehensive individuality, to exploit all the various environments on which he may be called upon to operate during the course of an endless career.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Al-Qur'an, 95:1-4.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Qur'an, 17:70.

<sup>19</sup> See KG.Saiyidain, Op. Cit., 1977, pp. 16-43.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, Op. Cit. 1996, p. 58.

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With regard to the ancient philosophical issue on the human mind and body relationship, Iqbal differed in his viewpoint compared to the various ideas presented by medieval Muslim scholars, early Greek and modern Western philosophers. Iqbal did not agree to the bifurcation of man into two separate entities which have a point of contact, but in their nature these two are opposed to one another. To him, the mind or soul and the body show unity in their working in the real world otherwise known as reality. As such, they complement each other. Iqbal further elaborated on the issue by saying:

The truth, however, is that matter is spirit in space-time reference. The unity called man is body when you look at it as acting in regard to what we call the external world; it is mind or soul when you look at it as acting in regard to the ultimate aim and ideal of such acting.<sup>21</sup>

Man being the vicegerent of Allah has been imbued with many godly attributes. Due to this reason Iqbal feels that the ideal believer in God should be one whom he calls as the co-worker with God. Since Allah gave this world to man as a raw and unfinished product to deal with, it becomes the duty of man to beautify and ameliorate what is unfinished. This idea of man being the co-worker with Allah has been stated by Iqbal in one of his poems in *Payām-i- Mashriq* (Message from the East):

You made the night and I the lamp.  
You made the clay and I the cup.  
You made the deserts, forests, mountains high,  
I flower-beds and orchards and the park.  
It is I who grinds the mirror out of stone.  
It is I who makes from poison, antidote.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.122.

<sup>22</sup> Iqbal in Annemerie Schimmel. *The Secrets of Creative Love: The Work of Muhammad Iqbal*. (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1998), pp. 26-27.

Being the co-worker of Allah, man has to be an active individual who is strong in his will to further develop what has been given to him by God. In this sense Iqbal in many of his poems has asked man to take a vital role of being in possession or in control of one's environment. Iqbal believed that it is the duty of man to bring forth the riches from the belly of the earth to be utilized for his spiritual development. In order to do this, man must equip himself with knowledge. As man has been taught by God, and given the faculty of naming things and forming concepts it should be this gift of God that man must use to his advantage to gain dominance over the world of matter for his own spiritual upliftment.<sup>23</sup>

Iqbal's concept of man is one which is not passively leaving everything to God without making any effort to change one's fate. Being one who does not easily surrender to *taqdīr* (fate) man strives hard to improve his condition with knowledge, skills, expertise and energy. After doing all within his capacity, such a man leaves the ultimate decision to God. This concept of Iqbal that emphasizes vitality and boldness on the part of man in making decision for his survival on earth is something that is in line with the message of the Qur'an. One among many verses of the Qur'an that call for hard work and initiative from man is: "*...Allah surely does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in their hearts.*"<sup>24</sup>

Iqbal reiterates that man who has been given the creative intelligence should avoid all passivity in life, and an attitude of leaving everything to destiny. To Iqbal, life means living courageously in the midst of the forces of nature. He also noted that a passive surrender to destiny does not befit the nature of Allah's vicegerent. In turn, such an attitude can reduce the spirit (ego) of man from gaining higher level of growth. Iqbal's exact words on this matter are:

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<sup>23</sup> See Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1996), pp. 9-11.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Qur'an, 13:11.

If he does not take the initiative, if he does not evolve the inner richness of his being, if he ceases to feel the inward push of advancing life, then the spirit within him hardens into stone and he is reduced to the level of dead matter. But his life and the onward march of his spirit depend on the establishment of connexions with the reality that confronts him.<sup>25</sup>

By considering Iqbal's views on man, one would be able to construct a comprehensive picture of man which is without doubt a positive one. His ideas give one the actual reason as to why man has been created and put in an exalted position. According to Iqbal's ego philosophy, man as the *khalīfah* or vicegerent of God, has to make good use of all that has been given to him by God, be they mental, body or things available in the physical world. By using these gifts man has to conduct his life in proportionate to the ideal position he is capable of reaching in the sight of God. Only man has the tendency to reshape and recreate his environment and make it more conducive to his survival. To Iqbal, if man can realize the hidden potentials of the human ego, he can lead a more dynamic and productive life in this world and in the next world. Moreover, in explaining the power and hidden potentials of the human ego, Iqbal said:

When attracted by the forces around him, man has the power to shape and direct them; when thwarted by them, he has the capacity to build a much vaster world in the depths of his own inner being, wherein he discovers sources of infinite joy and inspiration. Hard his lot and frail his being, like a rose-leaf, yet no form of reality is so powerful, so inspiring, and so beautiful as the spirit of man! Thus in his innermost being man, as conceived by the Qur'an, is a creative activity, an ascending spirit who, in his onward march, rises from one state of being to another... It is the lot of man to share in the deeper aspirations of the universe around him and to shape his own destiny as well as that of the universe, now by adjusting himself to its forces, now by putting the

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<sup>25</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, Op. Cit. 1996, p.10.

whole of his energy to mould its forces to his own ends and purposes. And in this process of progressive change, God becomes a co-worker with him, provided man takes the initiative.<sup>26</sup>

As a source of reference to the above idea, Iqbal refers to the following verse of the Qur'an:

And by the night and all that it brings together; and by the moon, in its full perfection: That you shall certainly march onwards from state to state (before meeting your Lord- to be rewarded or otherwise). Why then do they not have faith?<sup>27</sup>

### **Iqbal's Ideas on the Human Ego**

In assessing the problems and needs of his time, Iqbal presented a dynamic concept on the development of the human personality. Central to his theory on personality is his philosophy of the ego. As highlighted by many scholars on Iqbal, better known as 'Iqbalians', his philosophy of the ego is not a new thing altogether. The existence of the human ego has been a matter discussed by many Western and Eastern philosophers. Modern Western philosophers have written on the subject of the ego by using different terms and terminologies. Descartes (1596-1650), the father of modern Western philosophy has written on the subject of man's inner dimension a few centuries earlier than Iqbal. After that came Spinoza (1632-1677) with his own notion on this immaterial component of man as the 'Conatus Preservandi'; while Schiller (1759-1805) preferred to call it the 'Karl Moor'; Fichte (1762-1814) used the term 'Ich' to describe it; Schopenhauer (1788-1860) named it the 'Genus' (will to live), Carlyle (1795-1881) described it the 'Hero'; Nietzsche (1844-1900), the controversial philosopher, addressed it as the 'Will to power'; and Bergson (1859-1941), the French philosopher, called it the 'Elan Vital' (the creative energy).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp.9-10.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Qur'an, 84:17-20.

<sup>28</sup> H. H. Bilgrami, *Glimpses of Iqbal's mind and thought* (Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1966), p.77.

Iqbal as a Muslim philosopher called his version of the ego philosophy as '*khudi*'. In comparing his concept on the ego with those presented by Western scholars one would discover that his is a religious concept laden with all the ideals spoken of man in the Qur'an. Through his concept, Iqbal explained to the world on the life of the ego; its place of origin, its hidden potentialities, its challenges in the external world and its final journey or state of being after going through this mundane life. Iqbal's theory of personality which is philosophical and religious in its approach, explains that the life of the ego begins with God. In order to achieve a strong personality, the ego has to struggle against the forces of nature. As such, an individual is not supposed to run away from the challenges he has to face in the real world. Iqbal explained that isolation and seclusion from the challenges of the world can weaken the strength of one's ego. This act in turn will prevent the individual from attaining a strong personality. In Iqbal's view, nature or environment should not be seen as something that hinders the growth of the personality. To him, man's imperfection and an obstructing environment should be viewed as conditions that are necessary for the growth and development of man's personality by actualizing his latent powers and potentialities.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the above, Iqbal's theory of personality also explains that man who is God's best creation, needs to assimilate into his own personality many of God's attributes mentioned in the *Asmā' Al-Husnā* (the Beautiful Names of Allah). Through this process of assimilation, man can transform himself into a complete individual. What one sees as an end result of this assimilation of the godly attributes in man is one that has strengthened and solidified his personality.<sup>30</sup> In Iqbal's view such an individual has prepared his ego for immortality. According to him, the assimilation of God's attributes by an individual prepares his

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<sup>29</sup> See Muhammad Iqbal, *The secrets of the self (Asrar-i-Khudi)*. (Renold A. Nicholson, Trans.) (Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1983) & Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> See Muhammad Uthman El-Muhammady, (2002), Iqbal and the Malay world (pp.161-177). In Abdul Rashid Motten (ed.). *Intellectual Discourse*. Vol. 20, No. 2., (Selangor: Research Centre, International Islamic University Malaysia, 2002).

ego for a state of immortality after death. In his theory, Iqbal further stressed that the immortality of an individual's ego is not a God-given right to him. As such, in order to achieve the state of immortality of the ego, one has to work hard during this earthly life, performing all actions which are considered ego sustaining acts, and at the same time one has to refrain from all ego dissolving acts. Another interesting fact stated by Iqbal in his theory of personality is that man by assimilating God's Divine attributes gets closer to God spiritually. The closer he is to God, the stronger is his personality. On the contrary, the further one moves away from God the weaker becomes his personality.<sup>31</sup>

Supplementary to man's relationship with God in building up a good character and personality, he has to build a good relationship with the society. In the act of maintaining a good relationship with the society, one has to participate actively in all communal activities. Through his involvement in the society, man also assimilates all the positive cultural values and the past heritage of the society. In stating the importance of the relationship between the individual and the society, Iqbal highlighted that it is a two-way relationship whereby both the individual and the society will benefit from each other.<sup>32</sup> The individual exists and feels a sense of belonging because of the society, and the society survives because of the contributions of the individuals living in the society. Below here are some lines of his poem that highlight the importance of the cohesiveness of the individual with the community:

The Individual exists in relation to the community.  
 Alone, he is nothing!  
 The wave exists in the river,  
 Outside the river it is nothing!<sup>33</sup>  
 When a word is taken out of its verse,  
 It causes the sense to be lost.  
 The green leaf that falls from the branch

<sup>31</sup> Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, Op. Cit. 2013, pp. 337-341.

<sup>32</sup> See Mazheruddin Siddiqui, *Concept of Muslim Culture in Iqbal* (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamic Research Institute), pp.73-76.

<sup>33</sup> Iqbal in K.G.Saiyidain, Op. Cit., 1977, p. 56.



Loses all hopes of enjoying the spring.  
He, who does not drink from the fountain of society,  
Will find that the fire of his melodies dies out in him.<sup>34</sup>

### **Man and his Environment**

Iqbal emphasizes a great deal on the relationship between man and the environment. He explained that man and his physical environment have a close knitted relationship. In this relation, man and his environment struggle to dominate one another. Sometimes the environment would be able to penetrate man's ego and weakens him, and at other times the ego would be able to defeat the environment and strengthen its position. In describing the tension that goes on between the ego and environment, and what sort of a position the ego should take, Iqbal said:

The life of the ego is a kind of tension caused by the ego invading the environment and the environment invading the ego. The ego does not stand outside this arena of mutual invasion. It is present in it as a direct energy and is formed and disciplined by its own experience.<sup>35</sup>

In Iqbal's idea, the calling of man to conquer the material world is not a call meant for man to behave as a tyrant who recklessly plunders the riches and wealth found in the belly of the earth. What he really meant is that, man should use his God-given intelligence in a just and systematic manner in managing the resources available in the physical world to attain his spiritual nearness with God. In order not to be misguided by his sense-perception in witnessing the bounties found in the physical world, man needs to be guided by his inner spiritual dimension to be just and fair in his manner and conduct. Guarded and guided by such principles, man will utilize the wealth found in the world, share with and distribute among other fellow human-beings. The exact words of Iqbal on this matter are:

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<sup>34</sup> Iqbal in Sheikh Akbar Ali, Op. Cit. 1988, p. 240.

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, Op. Cit. 1996, p. 82.

The naturalism of the Qur'an is only a recognition of the fact that man is related to nature, and this relation, in view of its possibility as a means of controlling her forces, must be exploited not in the interest of unrighteous desire for domination, but in the nobler interests of a free upward movement of spiritual life. In the interest of securing a complete vision of Reality, therefore, sense-perception must be supplemented by the perception of what the Qur'an describes as *Fuad* or *Qalb*, i.e. heart.<sup>36</sup>

To Iqbal, like man, nature is also a handiwork of the Ultimate Self, through which He shows the 'I-amness'. Metaphorically, he explained that nature to the Ultimate Self is like what character is to man. In other words, nature can be seen as God's creative activity otherwise known as God's habit.<sup>37</sup>

As such, the state of this relationship between man and his environment is one that is full of tension. In further elaborating his ideas on man and his environment, Iqbal pointed out that man has to subdue the demands of the environment in order to build a strong personality. On the contrary, man will have a weak personality when the human ego is defeated by the environment. Iqbal lucidly explained this tussle between the human ego and environment in his anthology of poems known as the *Rumuz-i- Bekhudi*:

Whoever conquers the world of matter  
 Can build a world out of a speck of dust!  
 The hills and the deserts, the rivers, the plains-  
 They are all means of education for those with a vision!  
 You, who have been put to sleep under opium's narcotics;  
 Regard this world of cause and effect as contemptible!  
 Its real purpose is the expansion of the Muslim's  
 personality  
 And a testing of his hidden possibilities!  
 Conquer it, or it may conquer you

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.45.

And hold you as the flagon holds the wine!  
So that through the control of all its forces  
Your manifold capacities may attain perfection!  
So that man becomes the vicegerent of God,  
Laying down the law for all the elements!  
Dip your hands in the blood of the mountains,  
Extract the bright pearls from the bosom of the sea!  
Take from the Sun its bright luster,  
And from the flood the lightning that illumines the palace!  
Press intelligent into the services of your quest;  
And conquer the world of the matter and the spirit!  
He who controls the world of matter,  
Can make lightning and heat into his chariot!<sup>38</sup>

In a nutshell, Iqbal's theory of personality gives one the understanding that personality is the outcome of the association of the human self with God, environment and society. His theory also explains that personality is just not the mere outward behaviour of an individual. Like the Muslim scholars of the past, Iqbal believed that human personality as well as behaviour is actually produced in the human psyche. Personality manifests itself in the form of the mental state of an individual which is eventually displayed in the form of behaviour.

In Iqbal's theory of personality, he does not divide the human psyche into different entities contending for supremacy, like what has been stated by Freud through his id, ego and superego.<sup>39</sup> Iqbal prefers to call the human soul-substance as the Self or the Ego. His philosophy of the Self uses the Persian word '*khudi*'. Through the philosophy of the '*khudi*', Iqbal explained that the ego has two aspects. One aspect or part that deals with the external world which he called the 'efficient ego' and the other which is the 'appreciative ego' that stays connected with the

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<sup>38</sup> See Muhammad Iqbal in *Bazm-i-Iqbal*, (Vol. 22). (Lahore: Bazm-i-Iqbal, 1975), p. 60.

<sup>39</sup> See Sigmund Freud & Peter Gay, *The ego and the id* (London: W.W. Norton & Company Inc. 1989), pp.11-36.

Creator, from where it has originated. Iqbal further explained that it is the duty of the 'appreciative ego' to remind the 'efficient ego' of its purpose in life. The 'efficient ego' while being busy in the external world, weaves a barrier around separating itself from the 'appreciative self'. However busy with the external world, the 'efficient ego' will be reminded of its true nature and relationship with God during the time an individual engages in prayer and deep meditation.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the above, Iqbal also explains that it is during the five daily prayers and other prayers done either individually or collectively that the ego is constantly reminded of its origin and the link that it has with the Almighty. As such, prayer in Islam, in a way depicts the scenario of an individual ego reporting to the Ultimate Ego of its activities and its God-centered life in conducting its affair in the material world. Iqbal's exact words on the impact of prayer to the life of the ego are:

As a means of spiritual illumination it is a normal, vital act by which the little island of our personality suddenly discovers its situation in the larger whole of life... and it must be regarded as a necessary complement to the intellectual activity of the observer of Nature.<sup>41</sup> The timing of the daily prayer which, according to the Qur'an, restores 'self-possession' to the ego by bringing it into closer touch with the ultimate source of life and freedom, is intended to save the ego from the mechanizing effects of sleep and business. Prayer in Islam is the ego's escape from mechanism to freedom.<sup>42</sup>

To Iqbal, the ego is the entity in an individual that provides the energy for life. Besides a life giving entity, the ego dictates to him, his likes and dislikes. In human beings the acts like judgments and resolutions are performed by the ego. Moreover, it is the entity which creates the 'will attitude' or 'mental attitude' in man. The ego's existence de-

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<sup>40</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, Op. Cit. 1996, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

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pendes very much on the action, wishing and desiring. An individual who is devoid of these ingredients in his ego is devoid of life. The ego in human beings forms the core of their personality. In short the ego is the centre for all human activities.

The first principle states that the ego has a place of origin and it came into existence in accordance to the precise time appointed to it. It is only through the command of God that the ego came to exist in the spatio-temporal order. Prior to that, it did not pre-exist in this dimension of earthly life. One such reference in the Qur'an stating that the ego is a creation of God, and it was brought to existence through His directive can be seen clearly from this verse of Sūrah al-Isra':

They ask you concerning the spirit. Say: "The spirit is of my Lord's command. Little indeed is the knowledge granted to you."<sup>43</sup>

The second principle explains that the ego will pass through this earthly life once and it is never going to pass through this spatio-temporal order again. This understanding of Iqbal on the human soul is in accordance with the Islamic belief that each individual is only born once into this world. Islam and Muslims do not believe in the idea of the reincarnation of the soul many times during its earthly life until it reaches a state of Nirvana as taught in Hinduism and Buddhism. This is evidently true when referred to many verses of the Qur'an in relation to the life of the ego. Below here is one such reference:

Until when death comes to one of them from among the disbelievers, he will say: "O Lord, let me go back (to life again in the world) so that I may work righteousness in the things that I neglected. "Never! It is only a word which speaks out. Behind them there shall be a barrier till the day they are raised up (on the Day of Judgment)".<sup>44</sup>

In the third and the last principle, Iqbal explained that the state of

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<sup>43</sup> Al-Qur'an, 17:85.

<sup>44</sup> Al-Qur'an, 23:99-100.

the finite ego upon its resurrection on the Day of Judgment will meet God as a single irreplaceable individuality and it will be shown the fruits of its labor done during its earthly life. A state of reward or punishment awaits the ego after it has been judged of its previous actions. Upon the judgment it will be decided on the ego on its next course of journey. In stating this view, Iqbal referred to the following verses of the Qur'an:

There is none in the heavens and on the earth but shall come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a servant. Certainly, Allah has kept strict count of all (with His absolute knowledge) and numbered them all exactly in detail. And each one of them will come to Him on the Day of Judgment, alone.<sup>45</sup>

And We have tied everyman's fate around his neck; and We shall produce for him on the Day of Judgment a book (of his deeds) spread wide open (for him to see). (Then We commanded him): "Read your book (of deeds). Enough for you this day that your own soul should call you to account (on all the matters that you have done)."<sup>46</sup>

### **Ego's Immortality**

Iqbal also expounded the issue on the ego's immortality. According to the Islamic belief, the human body of an individual disintegrates upon the death of an individual but his or her soul goes on to live on a new dimension of life. Iqbal in his philosophy stated that the ego can reach a state of immortality. By saying that, Iqbal also stressed that this state of immortality is not the ego's right, but it is a state that the ego has to earn. Since the state of immortality of the ego is not a God given right to it and man is just a candidate for reaching it, each individual has to work hard to attain it. The ego in its progress, growth and development will be able to reach the status of immortality when it undergoes actions that were termed by Iqbal as 'ego-sustaining deeds'. Among the ego sustaining deeds which also can be seen as elements that can strengthen the ego as explained by Iqbal in his philosophy, will be love, *faqr*, courage, tolerance, *kasb-i-halāl*, performing creative and original works. By per-

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<sup>45</sup> Al-Qur'an, 19: 93-95.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Qur'an, 17:13-14.

forming the ego sustaining deeds, one has to abstain from all 'ego-dissolving acts' such as fear, dependency (*su'āl*), slavery and pride of ancestry.<sup>47</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Iqbal's earnest search on the question as to who or what man is, led him into the conceptualizing of his own theory on personality. His ego philosophy not only impressed the people in the East but also in the West. Iqbal's concept of the human ego was a unique one, very different from many of his counterparts in the West. His theory focuses on many positive aspects of man. Based on his philosophy of the ego, he gave a very special position to man. This honored position occupied by man in his philosophy and theory of personality is an idea not only acceptable to the Muslims but to others as well. Iqbal's ideas on personality which were thought-provoking also carried the message that man as the best creation of God can change and improve his condition. By doing so, man can make this world a better place for the survival of the human race. Iqbal's ideas have highlighted that the ego has its beginning with God and it is man's duty to tap the hidden and latent potentials that lie within the ego. In order for the ego to attain its state of immortality, man has to bind a good relationship with God, nature and other egos in the society. Besides that, man has to perform all ego sustaining acts and avoid all ego-dissolving activities. When this ideal situation is achieved one can witness that the human race as a whole will enjoy the much needed peace, harmony and happiness in this world.

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<sup>47</sup> See Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1996), pp.76-98