

Mapping the Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal from Socio-Religious Standpoint

Dr. Haripriya Sarma

Former ICSSR Doctoral Research Fellow & Former
Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Folklore Research,
Gauhati University, Guwahati-14, Assam.

Abstract: Muhammad Iqbal was one of the dynamic personalities of twentieth century. Along with studying Indian and Islamic philosophy he was very well educated in western philosophy. His contributions have a unique place to the world of Muslim society and religion. Iqbal was truly a religious person, who believes that the social norms and values are closely connected to religion. He believes only on one God, the omniscient, the creator of this universe. His God was a personal God. His religion was essentially a monotheistic religion. Muhammad Iqbal's socio-religious philosophy centres rounds mainly the concept of *Khudi* or Ego or self, human personality, and freedom etc. Iqbal believes in the immortality of self through the unity of God. For him, association of self with God is the way to become a perfect human being. This paper is an endeavour to explore the social and religious philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal and its practical values in current society.

Keywords: Muhammad Iqbal, *Khudi*, Society and Religion.

Introduction: Muhammad Iqbal was a multi-dimensional personality of contemporary world. He was one of the chief exponents of Muslim community of India and Pakistan, who fought against the freedom of their community. He expressed his ideal and thought through his poetical manner, which were highly appreciated both in the Eastern and Western countries. Iqbal was not a Sufi by birth but a pure Muslim. Later he came into the Sufi environment and grown up under their society and environment. Although, his upbringing is happened in a sufistic religious environment, he realised that Sufism make people's attitude very pessimistic. As a result he started to oppose Sufism and introduced his noble concept of ego or *khudi* amongst the Muslim people encouraging them to fight against injustice and become a strong personality, who always gets ready to perform his all duties and throughout his life.

Area of the Study: The present research paper covers up the social and religious interpretation of Muhammad Iqbal in the contemporary world. The study will also make an investigation on the contribution of Iqbal in modern world of religion and philosophy.

Objectives: Following are the primary objectives of this research paper:

1. To understand the importance and significance of Muhammad Iqbal's social perceptive towards modern society.
2. To understand the religious observation of Muhammad Iqbal.
3. To understand the values and relevance of Iqbal's religious philosophy in present context.

Methodology: The method of the present research paper is essentially qualitative in nature. To reach the precise termination followed by the objectives determined for this paper, both descriptive and analytical methods have implemented. Secondary sources like books, journal, articles, E-resources are used to get necessary and helpful information.

Review of Literature: Lot of works are available on the life and philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal. Iqbal himself wrote valuable books based on his experience regarding religion, society, Muslim community as well as on politics. Some of the important books written by Iqbal and other thinkers are- *Secrets of the Self (Asrar-I Khudi)*(1920), *Muhammad Iqbal : Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought*(2015). *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930), *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (1999) etc.

Discussion and Findings: The most significant concepts of Muhammad Iqbal's socio-religious philosophy is the concept of Ego (*Khudi*). The concept of ego came to life to show Muslims a new direction in their bad times in India. Iqbal was a person who always fought for their community people and gave all his effort to lift the Muslim community to the way of development and progress. He felt that the Muslims of India in his time were reacting passively with full of pessimistic thought. That is why he introduced his noble concept of ego among the Muslim community. He also emphasized Quranic ideals from different angles and tried to bring the Muslims back in track encouraging towards a good mission. His ideals tried to made Muslim people realise life in a good way and made them feel proud of being themselves as Muslims. "The Ego attains to freedom by the removal of all obstructions in its way. It is partly free, partly determined, and reaches fuller freedom by approaching the individual who is most free-God. In one word, life is an endeavour for freedom." (Iqbal, 1920, p.xxi) In fact, Iqbal believes that individuality is a matter of degrees. There is a rising note of ego hood through out the universe; it has not reached perfection even in human beings. Therefore, Iqbal comes to conceive God as the Supreme Ego-as the ideal of ego hood. It is from this point of view that Iqbal interprets the Quranic description of God as Light. (Lal, 1999, p.325) In this connection, we may mention Riffat Hasan's view,

“Central to Iqbal’s vision is his philosophy of *khudi*, which is his greatest contribution to world thought. Developed in a certain historical context wherein the most burning questions that confronted Indian Muslim were concerned, directly or indirectly, with politics, this philosophy was Iqbal’s intellectual response to the political and cultural realities of his time. But as he grappled with the particular issues that confronted the Muslim community of India during the final, and most difficult, phase of its struggle for freedom from alien domination—whether of the British or of the Hindus—Iqbal developed a philosophical vision that was not bound to any land or time. That is why his message is of crucial importance and relevance not only to Pakistan and Muslims, but also to the world at large. (Hasan, 2015, p.1-11) Iqbal was a very good learner, he learned the western philosophy and made a comparison of the world philosophy. Hence, he gave the view that we should adopt all those good things of western education, which can bring progress in life and society. His sophistic believe and thought has changed from different angles by the impact of modern and western education.

Human personality: The main teaching of Iqbal was to build every people a strong personality by mind. His ideal of human personality was purely religious and philosophical. According to him, the life of the ego is started with God, it is connected with God. Everyone has to be strong; everyone should face their challenges and ready to face the real world. To run away from challenges is not the nature of human. The ego has to fight and struggle with all the negative things, the world shows us. If we keep our self isolated and secluded from the challenges we have to face then those attitudes make our ego less strong or minimized the strength of our ego and as a result these attitudes prevent a person to be strong person. The human imperfections and the unsuitable social environment always appear as the conditions in the way to the development of human personality. For Iqbal, for development of human personality and to actualize human hidden power and potentiality, one must not let these conditions happen as a barrier. Like Tagore, Iqbal also believed that man is the best creation of God. According to his concept of human personality man should try to assimilate into his own personality, which is full of God’s attribute. In his *Asma’ al-Husna* (The beautiful names of Allah), he described many attributes of Gods. By assimilating with the attribute of God reside into human being itself a man can convert himself into a complete individual. By this process a man can occupied the Godly attributes which makes a man solid person and makes ready to that man to prepare his ego immortal after his demise. Here, Iqbal again said that mans ego is not a God given right, to acquire this stage a man need to perform all his actions those are measured as ego nourishing acts and have to work hard throughout his life. In performing all necessary duties and actions a person must be careful not to perform those actions which are regarded as ego dissolving acts. This is how man by assimilation with Gods attribute comes near to the spirituality of God. How much the man become closer to the God that much the man becomes a strong personality. Iqbal’s notion o Human personality tells us that human personality is the result of the connection of individual self and God, the connection of God and human self makes a human a perfect human. It is not solely a outer behaviour and reaction, but the manifestation of mental state which is a production of mental psyche. Iqbal was a follower of Islamic religion, he believed in monotheism and Quranic ideals. According to him, God is only one, the omnipotent, the real creator of this universe. He stressed on the uniqueness and individuality of man. He believes on the personal nature of man. According to him, God is personal. Being a Muslim Iqbal studied the Quranic ideal of man and mentioned three aspects of man. These are-. God has chosen man, on earth man with all his faults is referred as the representative of God and man is the trustee of a free personality. God knows everything and pleased equally the religious urge of man and metaphysical inquisitiveness. In Islam religion, it is believed that there is no difference between God and the absolute. Iqbal does not believe any argument which can prove the existence of God. He directly opposed the traditional proofs for God’s existence. He held that there is none who can grant proofs for Gods existence. According to him, cosmological, ontological and the teleological proofs all so inadequate to proof the existence of God. He says that our knowledge is so limited to comprehend the nature of god. The understanding of God cannot be recognized by providing proofs. Here he mentioned the importance of the authority of intuition. The nature of the self or the nature of the world can merely be identified through intuition. He said, Man is the architect of his own destiny. His notion of human personality and *Khudi* impacted the religious view of the Muslims not only in India and Pakistan, but also in western continents in numerous ways. His political, religious and philosophical reflections made him to be one of the most eminent personalities of the 20th century. “Iqbal made the notion of the self a keystone concept for Muslim selfhood. He rehabilitated the Persian notion of *khudi* by divesting it of its negative meanings of selfishness and egoism, two prevalent meanings in Persian and later Urdu uses of the term. He subverted *khudi* into an affirmative and constructive rendering. Iqbal reconstructed and then redeveloped *khudi* in multiple uses and forms, making it the centrepiece of both his poetic and political aesthetics. In this sense, Iqbal produced an intellectual masterpiece by repetitively brandishing the notion of selfhood and the self as the essential element of the human condition to his multiple audiences. Bereft of self and selfhood, the human was a mere husk. But his intellectual gesture was carefully calibrated; it was a reflexive one, caught between the security of tradition and the self-questioning impulses of modernity. He was fully aware of the fact that to question or alter the inherited notion of the self would have multiple cultural and philosophical implications.” (Ebrahim Moosa, 2015, p.12-32) Iqbal’s voice, echoing the message of the Quran, calls upon individual human beings, different communities, and different traditions to build up a ‘renewed self’ that views an affirmation and acceptance of the alien other as a uniquely valuable resource for increased self-awareness, depended self-understanding, and genuine self-affirmation. This spiritual grounded and philosophically articulated conception of the self and its relationship to the alien other is something that is sorely needed in the West, the world of Islam, among believers and non-believers alike. Because he responds to this very global need of the hour, Iqbal had to come back, even if many had thought that he had become irrelevant. (Basit Bitai Koshul, 2015, p.56-87) ‘The unceasing reward of man consists in his gradual growth, in self-possession, in uniqueness and intensity of his activity as an ego...And the climax of this development id reached when the ego is able to retain full self-possession, even in the cause of a direct contact with all-embracing ego.’ (Iqbal, 1930, p.163 Iqbal, *Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.) In man the centre of life becomes an Ego or Person. Personality is a state of tension and can continue only if that state is maintained, relaxation will ensure. Since personality, or the state of tension, is the most valuable achievement of man, he should see that he does not revert to a state of relaxation. That

which tends to maintain the state of tension tends to make us immortal. Thus the idea of personality gives us a standard of value: it settles the problem of good and evil. That which fortifies personality is good, that which weakens it is bad. (Iqbal, 1920, p.xxi-xxii) “Personally, I think the description of God as light, in the revealed literature of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, must now be interpreted differently. The teaching of modern physics is that the velocity of light cannot be exceeded and is the same for all observers whatever their own system of movement. Thus, in the world of change, light is the nearest approach to the Absolute”. (Iqbal, 1930, p. 64-65)

“Religion is not satisfied with mere conception, it seeks a more intimate knowledge of and association with the object of pursuit. The agency through which this association is achieved is the act of worship or prayer ending in spiritual illumination. The act of worship, however, affects different varieties of consciousness differently. (Iqbal, 1930, p.90) The moral and religious ideal of man is not self-negation but self-affirmation, and he attains to this ideal by becoming more and more individual, more and more unique. Iqbal said, ‘*Takhallay bi-akhlaq Allah*’ ‘Create in yourself the attributes of God.’ Thus man becomes unique by becoming more and more like the most unique individual. What then is life? It is individual: its highest form, so far, is the Ego (*khudi*) in which the individual becomes self-contained exclusive centre. Physically as well as spiritually man is self-contained centre, but he is not yet a complete individual. The greater his distance from God, the less his individuality. He who comes nearest to God is the complete person. Not that he is finally absorbed in God. On the contrary, he absorbs God into himself. (Iqbal, 1920, p -xix) Scholastic philosophy has put forward three arguments, known as the Cosmological, the Teleological, and the Ontological, embody a real movement of thought in its quest after the Absolute. But regarded as logical proofs, I Am afraid, they are open to serious criticism and further betray a rather superficial interpretation of experience. (Iqbal, 1930, p.29) Iqbal does not attach much value to the traditional proofs for existence. He feels that the Cosmological, Ontological and the Teleological proofs for Gods’s existences are attempts on the part our limited intellect to comprehend the nature of God. He feels that as proofs they are utterly inadequate because they are somehow based on a superficial interpretation of experience and on an intuitive experience of reality. (Lal, 1999, p.323) Here, he says about the power of intuition, which can conceal the nature of God. He agrees with Quran that God is the light of heaven and earth. He consented to acknowledge the superiority of the mental greater than the physical. He assumed two other qualities of the ego. For example- the life of the ego is not a mechanical life and the life of the ego is going after the knowledge of the self. Iqbal says that endless freedom appears under the belief of ego merely. He believes in the principle of immortality of self. He says that, it is as well mentioned in the Quran. He said, despite of knowing the reality that death will raze the body, still the self is referred as eternal. Immortality is regarded as the main character of the self. He applies I for self. The truth behind cosmos for Iqbal, is the entire powerful consciousness. He referred it as *Khudi*.

Iqbal was truly a religious person, who believes Islam to be the best input to the world thought and gave best to revive and protect Islam society. According to Iqbal, to work a society in an appropriate way, a social system is very much necessary. Because without the rule and regulations formed by a society, society cannot run in its proper and stable way. Unities of God, inevitability of phophethood, brotherhood are some of the most essential elements are found in Islam society which can administrate people life. He mentioned *Tawhid*, *Risalah*, and *Akhuwah* as the principles and fundamentals behind the Muslim Society. He holds that deviating any of these fundamentals by the Muslim community is deviating from the actual goal. He gave stress on the teachings and morals of holy Quran basically on prayer and fasting in order to lead a prosperous social life. Iqbal believes that the growth of creativity is an attribution of the peak of humanity that is associated with God. For Iqbal, every atom, molecule, cell, organism, plant, tree, insect, bird, animal, mountain, continent, planet, galaxy, person, tribe, society, culture, religion and so forth, as well as the universe itself and God Himself is a *khudi* or self. This means that everything in the universe is a conscious ‘self or a ‘person’ capable of saying ‘I am’-and every ego that is capable of saying ‘I am’ is for its parts ‘the self-revelation of the “Great I am”. (Basit Bilal Koshul, 2015, p. 56-87) Religion is not satisfied with mere conception; it seeks a more intimate knowledge of and association with the object of pursuit. The agency through which this association is achieved is the act of worship or prayer ending spiritual illumination. The act of worship, however, affects different varieties of consciousness differently. (Iqbal, 1930, P. 89) Prayer, whether individual or associative, is an expression of man’s inner yearning for a response in the awful silence of the universe. It is a unique process of discovery whereby the searching ego affirms itself in the very moment of self-negation, and thus discovers its own worth and justification as a dynamic factor in the life of the universe. (Iqbal, 1930, p.93) According to Iqbal the universe is of the nature of a free creative force. He also says that the world-process is not blind but purposive. The teleological character of the world shows that the world-process is being rationally directed. (Lal, 1999, p.324) Iqbal gives a detailed analysis only of the intellectual attributes like-Creativeness, Knowledge, Omnipotence, Eternity, Immanence, Transcendence etc. (Lal, 1999, p.326) Iqbal considered that the expansion of creativity is an ascription of the height of humankind that is connected with God. Each and every person who has understood himself as truth of self conscious, he has an self-governing spirit, and has a freedom liability, so he has a prospective to amplify his ingenuity optimally for a major change in the universe. “Iqbal’s description of a third age of religion is an attempt to create a new teleological source of meaning based on the cultural and religious tradition of Islam. But while this description is rooted in Islamic tradition it is at the same time faithful to the scientific spirit and liberal values of modernity and is therefore non-metaphysical and relies on a constant revaluation and creative individual and political interpretation of those traditions. This new interpretation of religion relies on what Iqbal calls the tension of the ego. This is a tension between one’s drive towards shaping the future based on personal experience and interpretation, and one’s rootedness in a community and religious tradition that always shapes one’s efforts. (McClure, 2015, p.142-166)

Summary and Conclusion: Iqbal was the guide and philosopher of the Muslims people, who show a new way to revise and preserve Muslim Religion and Culture in their darkest time. He gave strength to the Muslim people not to lose believe towards the win. He taught to love people and be kind to people as well as live freely maintain peace in society. “Iqbal’s contribution to

modern Muslim Philosophy and thought was not only his relentless effort to understand the impact of modernity on Islam and Muslims, but his writings also reveal his own titanic struggles to come to terms with a modern Muslim self and the construction of personhood in the early twentieth century. Iqbal was fully aware that ideas and concepts and life worlds that humans inhabit were not givens but rather constantly constructed: societies were retooled conceptually and technologically; communities were constantly reconstructed in tandem with the evolution of the imaginaries and spirits of individuals. (Ebrabin Moosa, 2015, 12-32) Iqbal was the liveliest philosopher of the twentieth century, who bestowed Muslim community through many precious ideas to develop their community enjoying freedom to the way on how the Muslims can co-exist with the rest of humanity. The entire socio-religious philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal was based on *khudi* through which he told a person to be perfect man as well as to a good and strong human being. Iqbal intensely emphasized that Muslims should clutch fast to teachings of the Qur'an to facilitate the growth in life. He tried the Muslim community to understand the conception of Quranic ritual and sacrifices and its deep meaning. The message of the Qur'an is not merely rituals but scientific. In the endeavour to bring back their missing vitality Muslims should not only be hard-working in carrying out the rituals but should be in the same way good in operating science for the amelioration of the Muslim community. According to him, the dynamism we see throughout current times in the West is the vanished tradition of the Muslims of the past. As such, he advised Muslims to gain knowledge of all that are good in terms of knowledge, science and technology from the West and leave out the dreadful part of the Western nation and people. This big Urdu poet-philosopher's rethought and remade the innovative milieu of Islamic messages not only for his current Muslim society but also for the future generation. Iqbal's ideas on philosophy and his perception of personality were unique that they were an amalgamation of Islamic morals and the liveliness of the West.

Bibliography:

1. Dalvi, Mustansir. *Shikwa & Jawaab-e-Shikwa, Iqbal Taking Issue & Allah's Answer*, Translated from the Urdu by Mustansir Dalvi, Penguin Books
2. Diagne, Souleymane Bachir. (2010). *Islam and Open Society: Fidelity and Movement in the Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*, translated from French to English by Melissa McMahon, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa: DAKAR, 2010
3. Hasan, Riffat. (2015). Introduction in *Muhammad Iqbal : Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought* edited by H. C. Hillier & Basit Bilal Koshul. Edinburgh: University Press.
4. Hillier, H. C. & Basit Bilal Koshul (edited). (2015)' *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought*, Edinburgh: University Press, 2015
5. Iqbal, Muhammad. (1908). *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia: A Contribution to the History of Muslim Philosophy*. BAZM-I-IQBAL:2, NARSINGHDAS GARDEN CLUB ROAD, LAHORE.
6. Iqbal, Sheikh Muhammad. (1920). *The Secrets of the Self (Asrar-I Khudi)* translated by Reynold A. Nicholson, Macmillan and Co., Limited :St. Martins Street, London.
7. Iqbal, Muhammad. (1930). *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.
8. Lal. Basant Kumar. (1999). *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Private Limited, 1999. Print
9. Majeed, Javed. (2009). *Muhammad Iqbal: Islam, Aesthetic and Postcolonialism*. Routledge :Taylor & Francis Group, London New York New Delhi.
10. McClure, Christopher Scott. (2015). Reconstructing Islam in a Post-metaphysical Age: Muhammad Iqbal's Interpretation of Immortality in Iqbal's thought in *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought* edited by H. C. Hillier & Basit Bilal Koshul. Edinburgh: University Press.
11. Moosa, Ebrahim. (2015) The Human Person in Iqbal's thought in *Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought* edited by H. C. Hillier & Basit Bilal Koshul. Edinburgh: University Press.
12. Ozturk, Sevcen. (2018). *Becoming A Genuine Muslim: Kierkegaard and Muhammad Iqbal*. Routledge :University of Kentucky.
13. Rashid, M. S. (1986). *Iqbal's Concept of God*, KPI. 1986
14. Sevea, Iqbal Singh. (2012). *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India*. Cambridge University Press.