

## **Muhammad Iqbal's Philosophy of Self**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Discussion on the nature of individuals self or ego is an important topic in philosophy and in psychoanalysis. Before the European Enlightenment essence of self was understood from religious point of view. The philosophers of the European Enlightenment, (from Descarte to Kant, freed individual self from the religious mysticism and subjected it as a matter of rational study. On the other hand Sigmund Freud has given a psychoanalytic interpretation on the nature of self or ego. As a poet and philosopher, Muhammad Iqbal also propounded his own philosophy on the origin and nature of individual self or khudi. The main purpose of Iqbal's analysis of self was to strengthen the Muslims so that they could overcome fatalism. He believed that individual has the ability to change the condition of life. As a pious Muslim, Iqbal did not deny the Islamic interpretation of self. On the other hand, under the impact of modern philosophy he could not completely ignore the rationalistic interpretation of the nature of individual self. As a result Iqbal's analysis of self has become a synthesis of both metaphysics and rationalism that has made his idea of self as unique.*

**Key words:** Absolute, discourse, ego, enlightenment, fatalism, rationalism, reconstruction, self, transcendence.

### **Introduction**

The poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal is considered as the national Poet of the state of Pakistan. He was the first Muslim intellectual who imagined a separate territory for the Muslim of India to protect their separate identity and culture. Later, it was Muhammad Ali Jinnah who realized Iqbal's dream through his politics of 'Two-Nations Theory'. It is unfortunate that Iqbal transformed himself from a nationalist patriotic poet into a separatist Muslim intellectual. In 1905 he departed from India to pursue higher study in England and Germany. As an eminent

scholar of Philosophy, he obtained PhD in philosophy at the University of Munich and the title of his thesis is “*The development of Metaphysics in Persia*”. In July, 1908 Iqbal returned to India and composed his renowned poetic works such as “*Asrar-e-Khudi*”, “*Rumuz-e-Bekhudi*”, “*Kulliyat-i-Iqbal*” and many other poetic works. Iqbal tried to raise consciousness among Indian Muslims and the Muslims of the world as a separate nation through his poetical works. As a philosopher, philosophical issues such as self, ego, selflessness, absolute ego etc., are to be found in his poetical works and in lectures. Iqbal’s idea of self (*khudi*) is to be found first in his poetry *Asrar-e-Khudi* (1915). It is argued that Iqbal tried to strengthen the Muslim of the world and arouse them from their age-old slumber so that they can retrieve the past glory of Islam. It is also argued that in the beginning of the twentieth century the Muslims were suffering from the lack of self-confidence, lack of self-esteem and overall desperation. The Muslims were politically weak, socially disintegrated and economically backward. In this social and political context Iqbal developed his ideas of self (*Khudi*) (Mir:2006 33). But his ideas of self is not universal but contextual.

### **Objective of the paper:**

Discussion on the nature of self and ego is age-old. The spiritualists of every religion tried to know the origin and nature of individual ego. The philosophers of the European Enlightenment also constructed their discourses on individual’s self or ego. The existentialists from Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) to Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) tried to know the nature of ‘being’. On the other hand psychoanalysts from Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) to Jacques Lacan have also given their ideas of ego (*Khudi*) in their different works. As a philosopher Iqbal also constructed his ideas of self (*Khudi*). The objective of this paper is to find out the answer of the question: Is there any distinctiveness in Iqbal’s concept of self (*Khudi*)? In order to find out the answer of this question I will delve into different ideas of self as developed in religious and in the Enlightenment ideas of self.

### **Research Methodology:**

The present research paper is historical and theoretical. That is why I will follow qualitative research methodology. Primary and secondary data will be analysed to find out the answer of the major question as raised in the previous section.

### **Religious and the Enlightenment views of self:**

Every religion holds the view that the supreme self is God and the self of individual is limited and imperfect. According to the evangelism of different religions the highest goal of human life is to unite with the absolute self. And this moment is called religious Enlightenment. That is why every religion gives emphasis on the religious world of the individual rather than secular world.

The Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism emphasize religious domain of individual life. A hierarchical relation is to be found in all these religions

between sacred and profane. It is true that all these religions do not deny the importance of secular world of individual. But the secular or material world must be regulated by the preachings. So, in the south-Asia secularism as a credo of life is impossible. (Madan:57). The meaning of Enlightenment in Hindu, Islam, Buddhism and Sikhism is the transcendence of individual self and unite with the absolute self. The Greek mystic school such as the Eleusinian, viewed Enlightenment as the transformation of 'ignorant self' through inner purification and contemplation. Neoplatonism teaches the soul's return to the One that is the ultimate source of all existence. The Christian mysticism teaches self's union with God through prayer and experiencing the presence of God in oneself. The Buddhism views Enlightenment as a stage when individual knows the truth and detaches oneself from the attachment to body which is the site and cause of sufferings. The Buddhism equates self with body and gives emphasis on non-self (*Anatta*). It discards the concept of absolute. Like Buddhism Sufism also teaches self-abnegation. It emphasizes the observance of "*Sharia*" and the purification of self through the spiritual path so that individual self can unite with the divine "*Marfia*". The spiritualist Sufi poet of the twelfth century Farid-Ud-Din Attar in his allegorical poem "*the Conference of the Birds*" sketched the stages of the evolution of self from lower to the higher order. This Sufi mystic emphasizes union of individual-self with God. According to the teaching of the Farid-Ud-Din Attar, self is the impediments in Divine realization. Individual-self can unite with the divine through self-control, detachment from material desires and through overcoming negative traits. Attar mentioned four stages through which individual's imperfect self could be purified. These are: the seeker (*talib*), the spiritual mentor (murshid), the impediment (self), the self-annihilation and realization of the divine (khanam:51). Among all religions, the Hindu religion teaches self-abnegation more rigorously. The achievement of *Moksh* is considered as the highest aim of human life. In Hinduism, Enlightenment means, liberation from the circle of death and rebirth through the realization of the self's unite with the God. From this short analysis it may be argued that every religion teaches self-abnegation and deemphasizes materialistic sphere of human life. But the philosophers of the European Enlightenment proclaimed the free existence of individual-self. They discarded the conception of transcendental self.

As an intellectual movement the Enlightenment initiated in the late seventeenth century in the Western Europe and it spread widely across Europe in the eighteenth century. The philosophers of the Enlightenment emphasized reason, empirical evidence and scientific method in order to acquire Knowledge on individual-self, society and polity. Rene Descartes in his fourth '*Discourse on Method*' (1637) propounded a realistic concept of self. He considered "*I*" as thinking "*I*" that has the ability to judge truth and false. According to Descartes it is the

cognitive power of individual mind that prove his existence. To Descartes individual is '*Knowing being*'. In this concern Donald E. Hall wrote, "In Descartes's conception, thinking really doubting-and struggling to know, in inevitably subjective ways, is the very basis of being. The self's apartness and individuality are 'central to an understanding of human being' (Hall: 20).

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) gave also a philosophical idea of individual-self. Kant in his famous essay "*An Introduction to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*" defined Enlightenment as "man's emergence

from his self-imposed immaturity. This immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. It is self-imposed if its cause lies not in a lack of understanding, but in the lack of courage and determination to rely one's own understanding and not another guidance" (Kant:1992:1). Thus, Kant divides self into mature and immature self. Self-maturity is the ability to use one's own reasoning power to lead an ethical life. Thus the Kantian version of Enlightenment is against religion. Because religion imposes limitation on individual's self-understanding and makes individual immature. Knowledge as given by revelation are superfluous, deceptive and in Kant's phrase dangerous to human adulthood (Goldman:1973:3). George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) in his discussion of self and subjectivity historicized the self-conception. That is individual's self, and condition change from one historical era to another. Although Hegel argued that self is the expression of spirit, he thought that individual's self-consciousness is not an independent activity. It always needs recognition from other. Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1806) said, "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it no exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel:1977:111). In Hegelian notion, self is constructed through the recognition of other and self develops through dialectical process. Among the philosophers of the 19th century, it was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) who gave utmost importance to individual-self. Iqbal was highly influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche. According to Nietzsche every individual has the capacity to construct their own self and identity with their will-power. Self is not a constant and stable entity. It is something one becomes that is one can construct own self. Self is constructed through one's own thought, desires and actions in a stylistic way. Nietzsche did not consider self as a set of coherent episodes. Because coherence in life can be produced by weakness, mediocrity and one-dimensionality. That is why Nietzsche emphasized style that would lead one's own life towards multidimensionality (Nehamas:1985:7). Nietzsche in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883) upholds individual as an agent who is responsible for his own self-creation. He discarded spiritualism and emphasized individual's will power to change their circumstances and life. He conferred individual instrumental agency that replace divinely created a nature of individual with a "new awareness of one's own socially and potentially self-

constructed identity" (Hall:2004:71). Nietzsche rejected the role of God and destiny in human life.

From the above short analysis, it can be stated that there is no universal concept of self or ego. From the religious mystiques to the rationalist philosophers, analyzed the origin and natures of self from different angles. On the other hand, the poststructuralist thinkers of the 20th century even denied the existence of independent self. In Foucauldian analysis we find self as an effect of discourse (Mills:2004:30). As an early twentieth-century poet and philosopher, Iqbal also talked about the essence of self (*Khudi*). As a scholar of philosophy Iqbal was well-trained in Hegelian philosophy and Nietzschean philosophy. On the other hand as a pious Muslim, he was acquainted with the Sufism. But his ideas of self or ego is different. In the next section of this paper, the uniqueness in Iqbal's ideas of self will be explored

**Iqbal's ideas of self (khudi):** Iqbal presented his ideas of self; in Persian word *Khudi*, in his famous poetic work *The Asrar-I-Khudi*. It was published at Lahore, now in Pakistan, in 1915. He wrote this poetry in Persian language. Later Reynold A. Nicholson translated this poetry into English and it was published in 1920. Iqbal chose Persian language instead of Hindustani, in order to convey his message to the educated Muslims who were acquainted with Persian literature. It's another reason might be that Iqbal expected to raise the political consciousness among the Muslims of the Middle-East who were then politically disintegrated. Iqbal tried to remind the Muslims their 'glorious tradition' through his poetry *Asrar-I-Khudi*. He desired to reconstruct the selves of the Muslims so that they could make themselves as a powerful, self-confident and self-dependent nation. Like Nietzsche, he also believed that individual can change his condition through strengthening their ego. He discarded the self-denial ideas of Hegelians and pantheistic Sufism that presume absorption of individual's self in the Universal soul or spirit as the real aim of human life. His concept of ego or self is neither metaphysical nor rational but a synthesis of both these of them. As an spiritualist Iqbal believes in the existence of God or Allah. In Iqbal's ideas of *Khudi* (self) God is the ultimate reality. In *The Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam*(2012) Iqbal calls it Ultimate reality or Absolute Ego whose personal name is Allah or God (Mir: 31). Following the path of Sematic interpretation of the origin of the species, Iqbal answers the question why does the Divine *Khudi* creates the world? His answer is that Divine *Khudi* (self) creates others out of itself in order to be aware of its own power. As individual is the creation of the Divine *Khudi*, his self is a part of the Divinity. Iqbal argues that not only individual but every particle of the world is *khudi* in itself. But the degree of *Khudi* is different. He thinks that the self of the earth is more powerful than the moon's self. That is why the moon revolves around the sun. On the other hand Sun's self is more powerful than the earth. So, the earth revolves around the Sun. But Iqbal does not define individual's self in a definite way. He argues that individual's *Khudi* (self) and its source is the Divine. *Khudi* is lit up from the

light of the Majestic One (Mir:2006:32). The existence of the human being depends on the Divine *khudi*. He also argues that human being holds *Khudi* in on relatively complete form as compared with other being. Unlike other spiritualists of his time, Iqbal does not considers individual's self or ego as illusion. In this regard he was inspired by the British idealist F. H. Bradley (1846-1924). Bradley, accepted self as real. But he rejected the distinctiveness of the finite. On the other hand, Iqbal holds the view that the finite center of experience is the fundamental fact of the universe. To Iqbal every life is individualistic. There is no such thing as universal life. Even he argues that God himself is an is individual. He is the most unique individual. The universe is not eternally created and it is not complete in itself. It is the result of conscious effort. To Iqbal the Universe has not yet become complete. The process of creation is still going on. Individual is also an active participant in its process of creation. Even the Koran indicates the possibility of other creator than God (Iqbal: 1920 xviii). Thus, Iqbal confers agency to individual who can change his own condition as well the condition of the universe. Iqbal criticizes the Neo-Hegelians and the pantheistic Sufism who regards absorption in the Spirit or in the Universal soul as the ultimate purpose of human life. On the contrary Iqbal holds the view that individual is spiritually and physically a self-contained center. But individual has not yet become perfect human being. In order to achieve complete individuality and humanity, individual needs to come closer to God. Not to absorb in God but absorb the qualities of God within himself. In Iqbal's words, "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: 1915: XIX).

In his discussion of self, Iqbal constructs an image of perfect man. A perfect man is that man in whom *Khudi* is fully developed. He describes Perfect Man as '*Man of Truth*', '*Free Man*' and '*Believers*' (in Islam). Like Nietzsche Iqbal is critical to the disempowering role of religion and priesthood. Sufism, Hindu Pantheism and Christianity with their philosophy and metaphysics disempower individual. To Iqbal all these religions are narcotic that deny individual selfhood (Sevea:2012: 107). Iqbal accepts Nietzsche's ideas of the immortality of man. But he rejects Nietzsche's idea of Superman. Iqbal argues that Nietzsche's Superman is the '*biological*' creation and evolves through evolution. Even he denies Nietzsche's prognosis of the inevitability of the emergence of Superman. Because such type of belief in evolution does not inspire mankind to strive and struggle for its development. To Iqbal Nietzsche's concept of Superman is fatalistic. He wrote: "such a doctrine, far from Keying up the human organism for the fight of life, tends to destroy its action-tendencies and relaxes the tension of the ego" (Iqbal: 2012: 116). Instead of fatalism or '*quismat*' Iqbal emphasizes activation of self. He argues that self can be strengthened not through running away from realities but through facing reality boldly. In this regard Iqbal wrote: "life is a forward assimilative movement. It removes all abstractions in its march by assimilating them. Its essence is the continual creation of desires and ideas, and for the purpose of its preservation and expansion it has invented or developed out of itself certain instruments,

e.g. sense, intellect, etc., which help to assimilate Obstructions” (Iqbal:1920: XX). According to Iqbal self of *Khudi* develop through facing obstructions in daily life.

Iqbal does not consider individual ego as natural or God gifted. Ego or self is nurtured and developed through love, assimilation and enormous struggle against obstructions. Ego in its movements towards uniqueness has to pass through three stages: These are: (i) Obedience to the law (*sharia*); (ii) self-control, that is the highest form of self-consciousness as ego hood and (iii) Divine vicegerency (Iqbal: 1920: xxvii). Iqbal elaborates his ideas of self or ego in much detail in his book *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (2012). Like Prof. Bradley Iqbal defines ego as reality. He says about Bradley's concept of ego “*a kind of modern Upanishad on the unreality of the Jivatma*” (Iqbal: 2012:78). According to Iqbal ego or self is the unity of 'mental states'. Individual's mind is full of different thinkings. But there must be organic unity. The mental unity is the essential characteristics of ego. The second character of ego is its uniqueness (Iqbal: 2015: 79). Iqbal believes that every individual has his own ego. In the word of Iqbal “*my pleasure, pains and desires are exclusively mine, farming a part and parcel of my private ego alone*” (Iqbal: 2012:80). It is undeniable that like spiritualist Iqbal believes that ego originates from God. But it has its own essence. The life of ego is not free from tension. Ego invades environment and environment also invade ego. In this way ego finds strength.

Although Iqbal accepts the reality of ego, he is not the supporter of modern individualism. He argues that ego or self is directed by the Divinity. But here arises a question, if ego is considered as mind or consciousness, then what is the role of body? Here Iqbal rejects Cartesian 'mind-body dualism' and insists that body cannot act without the direction of mind. The next important issue that Iqbal deals in his analysis of self is the relation between self and freedom. Is self free in determining its own activity? In answering this question Iqbal rejects the Islamic idea of *Kismet* (fatalism) and raises individual as co-workers of God. Iqbal argues that Islam is not against individual freedom. In the words of Iqbal: “HE (individual) shares in the life and freedom of the Ultimate Ego who, by permitting the emergence of on finite ego, capable of private initiative, has limited this freedom of His own free will (Iqbal: 2012:86-87). Although Iqbal emphasizes freedom of self, he is against modern individualism that encourage narrow self-interest which is the fuel of capitalism. In order to curb narrow self-interest Iqbal also talks about selflessness (*bekhudi*) in his another poetry *Rumaz-I-Bekhudi*. But Iqbal's idea of selflessness is contrary to Sufism. According to the teachings of Sufism the emergence of separate egohood in individual is the primary reason of the fall of man. So, Sufism teaches self-transcendence and the merger of individual's self into God. This self-negation and merger into God is known as *fana*. Iqbal rejects this idea as anti-Islamic. Iqbal contends that higher Sufism has propounded a stage beyond *fana* that does not preach the extinction of self, but a complete surrender to the Divine. Iqbal's idea of selflessness is totally different from Sufism and Hindu pantheism. He gives

importance to both individual and society. He argues that *Khudi* (self) is linked to society by the mysterious force of *bekhudi* (selflessness). Iqbal thinks that individual internalize spirituality and develop his self as a member of society (Sevea:2012: 141). That is why pious Muslims can not deny their duty towards society.

### **Conclusion:**

From the above discussion it is clear that Iqbal's ideas of self or ego is unique. It is neither completely spiritual nor rational. His ideas of self is a synthesis of both spiritualism and rationalism. Iqbal constructed his concept of self in colonial context and his philosophy of self should be observed as his philosophical resistance to the European cultural hegemony. Almost European philosophers consider Islam as a religion of other-worldliness. It was presumed that Muslims are influenced by fatalism and it was the primary reason of their 'backwardness'. But Iqbal upheld Islam as a practical religion that teaches Muslims to face the obstructions of life and develop their *Khudi* so that they can restore their glorious tradition. He criticized Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and even Sufism as self-denial religion. He argued that although *khudi* or self originates from the Absolute Ego, it has autonomy and has the ability to strengthen itself. Although Iqbal believes in the construction and recontraction of self or ego, he has not constructed a universal theory of self. His concept of self is culturally and religiously specific. Because his analysis of self is based on the Quran. By the term 'religion' Iqbal only means Islam. As a pious Muslim Iqbal accepts the spiritual notion of the emergence of self from the God or *Allah*. At the same time under the impact of modern philosophy he reinterprets and reconstructs religious thought of Islam and confers individual self a certain degree of autonomy and here we find the distinctiveness in Iqbal's concept of *Khudi* (self).

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