

## An exposition of Iqbal's ideas on human nature and personality

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**Abstract :** Early ideas on human nature and personality were presented by Muslim scholars during the Golden Age of Islam (750-1258). The decline of the Islamic civilization and the dawn of the era of European colonization has somehow dwindled the study on man and his personality until the poet-philosopher Mohammed Iqbal (1879-1938) came up with his philosophy on the Ego (*Khudi*). Using philosophy and poetry as his vehicles, Iqbal called upon the Muslims to pay attention to the development and maintenance of the human Ego. Given Iqbal's fame in the East and West, it is pertinent to explore his ideas on human nature, philosophy of Ego or self, and personality. This study surveys the underlying factors that challenged Iqbal to conceptualize a theory on personality which is very different from others in the Islamic world.

**Keywords :** Exposition, Iqbal, Ideas, Human nature, Personality.

### Introduction

It is generally agreed that among the vast creations of God the Almighty, only man has carved out a personality for him as he passes through the various developmental stages in his life. Although Western scholars have conducted research on man and his personality, they have yet to arrive at a consensus on the true nature of man and the purpose of his creation (Mohd Abbas, 2011). Muslim scholars, however, have almost unanimous opinion on this issue which is well expressed by Iqbal. This study explores ideas presented by Iqbal on human nature and personality. Of necessity, the study begins by analyzing the scenario in the East during the time Iqbal showcased his theory and also on the nature of the personality studies done prior to his time in the Islamic world. Such a discussion would help understand as to why Iqbal came up with his ideas on personality.

### Iqbal's philosophy of personality : The context

Muhammad Iqbal (1879-1938) who hailed from the Indian-subcontinent was a great thinker, barrister, philosopher, poet, Sufi and a religious reformer (*Mujaddid*) of the twentieth century. His strong Islamic background, travel and acquaintances with Western scholars had given him the impetus to formulate a new philosophy known as the Ego-

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philosophy. In addressing his ideas on the human personality development, Iqbal preferred to use the term *Khudi*.

Although '*Khudi*' in the ordinary Persian language and in the Urdu literature means arrogance, vanity, pomp, Egotism or selfishness, Iqbal, following his mentor and spiritual guide, Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi (767-820), gave somehow a different meaning to it. Both to Rumi and Iqbal, the word *Khudi* describes the innermost being of a person, otherwise known as the Self, Self-hood, Ego or Individuality (Schimmel, 1996). Iqbal provided several descriptions to the term in his introductions to '*Asrar-i-Khudi*' (1983), '*Bal-i-Jibril*' (1979) (Gabriel's Wing) and to his other collection of poems. *Khudi*, to Iqbal meant :

- 1   ... an emotional unity of a bright thing of the conscience, by which all human ideas and inspirations are enlightened. This is an eternal reality, which is a binding force or the scattered and unlimited mental state.
2. A silent force but anxious to come into action. By action (again) bound to the cause of action.
3. The abode of the *Khudi* is within your heart as the sky is within the pupil of the eyes" (Iqbal in Nuruddin, 1978 : 32).

At the time when Iqbal first mooted this idea, some Muslim scholars criticized him. But, Iqbal persisted and continued to highlight the weaknesses in the societies of the East and the West. In response to his critics, he wrote:

I am the voice of the poet of To-morrow  
 My own age does not understand my deep meanings,  
 My Yusuf (Joseph) is not for this market  
 I despair of my old companions (Iqbal, 1983 : 4).

The word 'Yusuf' in line three metaphorically means his beautiful and constructive ideas. Professor Nicholson, who translated Iqbal's *Asrar-i-Khudi* into English, wrote that Iqbal "is a man of his age and a man in advance of his age; he is also a man in disagreement with his age" (Nicholson in Iqbal, 1983 : xxxi). Iqbal believed that his new and progressive ideas were Islamic and vital in putting the Islamic Ummah on the true path shown by the Prophet of Islam (SAW). The Western colonization of the Muslim lands aggrieved Iqbal. The plight of Muslims under colonial rule is well described by Javaid Iqbal, in his introduction to his father's 'Stray Reflections' (1992) :

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The Ottoman Empire was tottering. The Central Asian Muslim Republics had been absorbed into Tsarist Russia. The old dynasty in Iran was decaying and the economy of the country was collapsing. In China the Muslim provinces had been absorbed into the Chinese Nationalist Empire and Muslims had ceased to exist as a distinct political entity.

In Eastern Europe also the Muslims were gradually being driven out. Egypt was under the heels of the British. France was preparing to seize Morocco. The Dutch were ruthlessly oppressing and exploiting the Indonesian Muslims. After the suppression of 1857 Mutiny the Muslims of the Indian Sub-Continent had given up all hope of regaining their lost freedom and political power (Javaid Iqbal in Iqbal, 1992 : 10-11).

M.G. Husain (1996 : 4) in describes the plight of the colonized Muslims by saying that “the Muslims had tumbled from the top of their political role. Their language was rejected and over shadowed, their culture diminished and their identity threatened. Colonial rules also paralyzed Muslim societies, congealed their thoughts and froze their history.

Demoralized, the Muslims tried to find peace and solace by following the spiritual path laid down by Sufi circles. Iqbal did not oppose the Sufi movements as he himself was a practicing Sufi in modern day clothing. He, however, opposed the pseudo-mysticism which called for the negation of the “Self”/Ego. Iqbal argued that the doctrine of self-denial (*fana*), religious seclusion (*'uzlah*) and the advice to stay away from active participation (*zuhd*) in worldly activities had its roots in Pantheism, which has its origin in Neo-Platonism preaching mystical ideas on the existence of God, man and the universe. Neo-Platonism came to the Muslim world when they embarked upon the translation of Greek sciences and philosophies (Abu Sayeed Nuruddin (1978 : 11). The pantheists believe that everything in the universe is the manifestation of God. Another aspect of Pantheism states that the highest objective and ideal in the life of an individual is to lose one's individuality in the Absolute (God). In modern times, in the West, some aspects of Pantheism have attracted great number of adherents towards its doctrine, namely Spinoza (1632-1677), Bruno (1548-1600) and Hegel (1770-1831).

Iqbal felt that pseudo-mystic ideas would be detrimental to the survival of the Muslims. Consequently, he called for the abandonment of the pessimistic approach in confronting all worldly affairs. He refuted the pseudo-Sufi's gloomy and pessimistic lifestyle by stating:

Remember that Islam was born in the broad day light of history. The great democratic Prophet lived and worked among intelligent men, who have transmitted to posterity every word that dropped from his sacred lips. There is absolutely nothing esoteric in his teachings. Every word of the Qur'an is brimful of light and joy of existence. Far from justifying any gloomy, pessimistic mysticism, it is an open assault on those religious teachings, which have for centuries mystified mankind. Accept, then, the reality of the world cheerfully and grapple with it for the glorification of God and His Prophet (Iqbal, 1992 : 151-152).

In tracing the origin of the doctrine of self-negation, Iqbal came to the understanding that it was one of the aspects preached by the proponents of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of

Existence). Though in the beginning, Iqbal agreed with the teachings of *Wahdat al-Wuju'*, which was popularized by Shaikh Muhiyiddin Ibn Al-Arabi (638/1240), later he vehemently revolted against it. To him, he could not reconcile the teachings of *Wahdat al-Wujud* with the true spirit of Islam. He vehemently opposed the idea that man in his highest level of spirituality should lose his own personality in seeking communion with God. Metaphorically explained, the concept of man losing his personality in God is like a drop of water falling into the ocean. Iqbal thought that such an idea was to be found in the doctrine of Nirvana which was not preached by the Prophet of Islam. Iqbal stated that "Unitive experience is not the finite Ego, effacing its own identity by some sort of absorption into the Infinite Ego; it is rather the Infinite passing into the loving embrace of the finite" (Iqbal, 1996 : 88).

Contrary to the doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujud*, Iqbal believed that the highest struggle of man in his spiritual life is to have the attributes of God in him which are translated into good actions. By doing so, one will be able to lead a good and purposeful life as the vicegerent of Allah on earth. In scrutinizing the Qur'an and Sunnah, Iqbal found out that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had a dynamic personality, which was anchored in the teachings found in the Qur'an. Throughout his life, the Prophet (SAW) showed great vitality in toiling and struggling together with his companions to propagate the message of Islam. Iqbal was convinced that man as the *Khalifah* (vicegerent of Allah) has a vital role to play in administering and developing this world. Man has to use his God given potentials to bring out the material wealth that lies in the belly of the earth for his spiritual upliftment and development.

In calling the Sufi scholars and the Muslim Ummah to the pristine teachings of Islam, Iqbal was doing what was done by Imam al-Ghazali (1043-1111) in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Al-Ghazali called upon the Muslim philosophers (like Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, and others) to discard the blind imitation of the Greek philosophers. Al-Ghazali appreciated the Greek philosophical thoughts but discarded some fragments of their philosophy, which were contradictory to the teachings of Islam. Al-Ghazali thought such ideas needed to be Islamized before they could be accepted by the Muslims. Similarly, Iqbal, through his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1996) called for the resuscitation and revival of the true Islamic spirit and the need to maintain the life of the Ego, which is vital for the development of a strong personality. Unlike al-Ghazali who directed his call and criticism towards philosophers, Iqbal directed his attention towards Sufi scholars. Both, however, succeeded in clearing the mist of misunderstanding that clouded the Muslim minds during their respective times.

### **Iqbal's concept of human nature**

Iqbal was very much disturbed by the situation in India, the birth place of Iqbal. The India into which he was born and grew up was, in the words of May (1974 : 41-42) :

an India torn by caste, by Hindu-Muslim antagonism sharpened by the rise of Arya-Samaj (1875) representing Hindu extremism, (torn by) divided loyalties

among Muslims and Hindu to the older and the newer culture, to or against the British, an India within which had borne modern-type Muslim and Hindu political organizations and where the Muslims had lost their former power, glory, properties, and lust for life. They had sympathy neither from the British who were responsible for the Muslim decadent in Bengal and throughout India nor from the Hindus. Their lot and apathy stirred the deepest strings in Iqbal's sensitive soul. Here therefore, decided early that he would dedicate his life to their improvement.

To solve the problems faced by the Muslim Ummah and to awaken their spirit of the *Jihad* (striving for excellence), Iqbal had to develop a philosophy. This philosophy that will be carried by his poetry and all other philosophical writings was named *Khudi* (Self/Ego). Before spelling out this philosophy, Iqbal studied history and civilization of the past generations and realized that nations that were able to establish and strengthen their Ego were able to thrive and create great civilizations, while those with a weak Ego crumbled and disintegrated leaving no trace behind.

Though Iqbal studied in the West, he was not influenced by the ideas on human nature as perceived by Western scholars. Iqbal's ideas on human nature are purely based on the holy Qur'an. On human beings, Iqbal referred to the on the origin and "fall of man" in the Torah, the Bible and the Qur'an. Reading the Qur'an Iqbal came to believe that Adam and Hawwa were forgiven of their transgressions; that their coming to earth was not a punishment for their transgression; and that this world should not be seen as a torture-chamber prepared for Adam and his progeny.

Moreover, Iqbal contended that Adam, while in *Jannah* (paradise), was still in a primitive state without the challenges emanating from the environment. As such, Adam did not feel the human needs, the ones that were necessary for the flourishing of the human culture. To Iqbal, the "fall of man" had certain positive aspects :

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. 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 (Iqbal, 1996 : 67-68).

Iqbal's views on human nature were built on the following premises :

- i. Among all creations of God, man is the best and the chosen one of God.
- ii. That man, with all his faults, is meant to be the representative of God on earth.
- iii. That man is the trustee of a free personality which he accepted at his peril (Iqbal, 1996).

In support of these premises, Iqbal referred, among others, to surah ta ha (20 :122) :

“Then his Lord chose him (for His grace by showing him the way to repent), and He relented towards him and gave him guidance” (Basmeih, 2007).

Iqbal also referred to surat al-baqarah (2 : 30) and surat al-an’am (6 : 165) respectively to explain the status of *Khalifat Allah fi al-ard* (Allah’s representative on earth) :

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 for so long sung Your praises and sanctified Your name” He said : “I know what you do not know” (Basmeih, 2007).

“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” (Basmeih, 2007).

“Iqbal also highlighted that man is a trustee. He was given the great responsibility, the Amanah, a responsibility he accepted at his peril. Iqbal referred to the Surat al-Ahzab” (33 : 7 2) :

“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” (Basmeih, 2007).

Understood differently by different exegetes of the Qur’an, the term *amanah*, to Iqbal, meant the human individuality or personality. Despite many shortcomings, man is considered superior to all other creations as stated in various verses of the Qur’an including in Surah taha (95 : 1-4) and Surat al-Isra (17 : 70) :

“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).”

“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” (Basmeih, 2007).

Furthermore, 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, Iqbal

applied the same to state that in man too there is a constant growth (Schimmel, 1998). Iqbal 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 *Reconstruction* :

Man, therefore, in whom Egohood 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 (Iqbal, 1996 : 58).

As to philosophical issue on the human mind and body relationship, Iqbal did not agree with many medieval Muslim, early Greek and modern Western philosophers, who conceived of man as being divided into two separate entities 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. As he puts it:

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 (Iqbal, 1996 : 122).

Man being the vicegerent of Allah (SWT) has been imbued with the many attributes. As such, Iqbal feels that the ideal believer in God should be one whom he calls as the co-worker with God. Since Allah (SWT) gave this world to man as a raw and unfinished product, it becomes the duty of man to beautify and complete what is unfinished. This idea of man being the co-worker with Allah (SWT) comes out clearly in Iqbal's *Payam-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 flowerbeds and orchards and the park.

It is I who grinds the mirror out of stone.

It is I who makes from poison, antidote (Iqbal in Schimmel, 1998 : 26-27).

Being the co-worker of Allah (SWT), man has to be an active individual who is strong in his will to further develop what has been given to him by Allah (SWT). In this sense, Iqbal has asked man to take a vital role of being in possession or in control of one's

environment. Furthermore, 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 Allah (SWT) and given the faculty of naming things and forming concepts, man must use these gifts to gain dominance over the world of matter for his own spiritual upliftment (Iqbal, 1996).

Iqbal's concept of man is one where man does not passively leave everything to God without making any effort to change his fate. Being one who does not easily surrender to *Taqdir* (fate) man strives hard to improve his life with knowledge, skills, expertise and energy. After doing all within his capacity, such a man leaves the ultimate decision to Allah (SWT). This concept of Iqbal that emphasises 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 the many dynamic verses of the Qur'an that calls for hard work and initiative from man is verse in surat al-ra'd (13 : 11) : "...Allah surely does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in their hearts" (Basmeih, 2007).

Iqbal further explained 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 reiterated that a passive surrender to destiny does not befit the nature of *khalifat Allah*. Such an attitude can reduce the spirit (Ego) of man from gaining higher level of growth. To quote:

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 (Iqbal, 1996 : 10).

By considering all of Iqbal's views on man, one would be able to construct a comprehensive picture of man which is without doubt a positive one. Furthermore his ideas give one the actual reason as to why man has been created and put in an exalted position. According to Iqbal, man as the Khalifah has to make good use of all that has been given to him by Allah (SWT). By using these gifts, man has to conduct his life in proportion to the ideal position he is capable of reaching in the sight of Allah (SWT). 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. 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 inmost 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 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 (Iqbal, 1996 : 9-10).

As a source of reference to the above idea, Iqbal refers to surat al-inshiqaq (84 : 17-20) :

"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?" (Basmeih, 2007).

Besides the many positive things he said on human nature, Iqbal also lamented on the situation and reality man has been pushed into in the modern world, particularly referring to the conditions in the West. To him, such a situation does not fit into the true purpose for which man has been created. Though he appreciated the spirit of scientific research of the West, he was not happy with their philosophy of life which was one that is detached from the religion. According to him, though man in the West gains superiority through the use of science and technology, his life lacks the inner peace and harmony. To Iqbal, the reason for this is his attitude of going after worldly things at the expense of neglecting his spiritual needs.

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 trying him nothing but life-weariness (Iqbal, 1996 : 148).

Besides explaining the shortcomings in the West, he also explained the false notion prevalent in the people of the East in facing the world of matter. People in the East, particularly the Muslims, were entangled in the web of pseudo-mysticism. Iqbal described their attitude towards life as follows :

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 (Iqbal, 1996 : 148-149).

Iqbal concludes his criticisms of the East and the West with regards to their attitude towards life as follows :

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 (Iqbal in Saiyidain, 1977 : 91).

Iqbal fervently called upon 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 and his worldly needs. Having such an approach can cater for the Ego's growth and development. Iqbal also believed that the ideal situation for man's progress will be an approach that merges the two good qualities found in the people of the East and West. By complementing 'Zikr' or spirituality of the East with the 'Fikr' or intellectual knowledge of the West, it is possible to produce the ideal man propounded in the Qur'an (Ali, 1988).

### **Iqbal's concept of the human personality**

Unhappy with the situation of the Muslims of the past and of his time, Iqbal came up with a new philosophy which can inject new ideas and vitality for life and herald the Muslims to live a dynamic, creative and purposeful life. He summarized his critique of the life-denying philosophy as follows:

To the living the world of living phenomena is welcome;  
 The world of ideas is meant for the heartless.  
 The ascetic had no recourse but to flee;  
 Since he had no strength to face this real world.  
 The people (Muslims) were corrupted by his soporific;  
 They slept and took no interest in action (Iqbal in Khan, 1977 : 20).

The new philosophy of life which he came up with is called the philosophy of *Khudi* or Ego philosophy. To his critics, the Persian word *Khudi* means Egotism, selfishness and so on, to Iqbal and his spiritual-guide, Al-Rumi, it means the "innermost being" of an individual or of a thing. Following the Qur'an, Iqbal emphasized action and dynamism through his philosophy. Iqbal believed that action, effort and constant striving in life would be able to open to man the real essence of his being and he too would be able to realize the existence of the self. Iqbal also believed that the Ego can be felt through intuition. Iqbal explains *Khudi* as follows :

Metaphysically the word *Khudi* is used in the sense of that indescribable feeling of 'I', which forms the basis of the uniqueness of each individual.

Metaphysically it does not convey any ethical significance... Ethically the word *Khudi* means (as used by me) self-reliance, self-respect, self-confidence, self-preservation, even self-assertion when such a thing is necessary, in the interests of life and the power to stick to the cause of truth, justice, duty, etc., even in the face of death. Such a behaviour is moral in my opinion because it helps in the integration of the forces of the Ego, thus hardening it, as against the forces of disintegration and dissolution (vide Reconstruction); practically the metaphysical Ego is the bearer of two main rights that is the right to life and freedom as determined by the Divine Law (Iqbal in Khan, 1977 : 19).

Iqbal presented his ideas on the development of the human personality or individuality first in *Asrar-i-Khudi*, written in the Persian language. This idea later saw further development in his *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, and finally presented systematically in his *Lectures*. Iqbal's ideas on the human self or Ego is a theme that runs conspicuously throughout his philosophical writings and works on poetry.

Despite Iqbal's clarification of philosophy of the Ego, the *Asrar-i-Khudi* created a storm of protest that came from the Sufi scholars of his time. The protest was also directed towards Iqbal's over veneration on the maintenance of one's personality which is enshrined in his philosophy of the Ego. In the introduction to *Asrar-i-Khudi*, Iqbal stated that the existence of the self is real and he had spent many years contemplating its existence. This assertion was contrary to the existing philosophies in the East. According to these Eastern philosophies, the word 'I' that emanates from the self of the human psyche is something thought to be a mere illusion in the imagination of the human mind. Iqbal realized that what is deemed as an illusion that does not receive attention in the East, is a thing that the West had realized its importance in establishing itself as a domineering power in controlling the East ('Azzam, 1985).

To Iqbal, personality carries the distinctive mark of the individual which is very exclusive or unique to the individual and that no one entirely can be like him in his character, behaviour and personality. The following call for the importance of maintaining personality :

Everything is looking for self-expression;  
 Every atom is dying for greatness.  
 Without self-expression this life is no life;  
 By the perfection of his individuality man becomes like God.  
 By the force of individuality the mustard is turned into mountain;  
 When weakened it reduces the mountain into a mustard seed.  
 Thou (the Ego) alone art real in this universe;  
 All else is a mirage (Iqbal in Khan, 1977 : 9).  
 Inasmuch as the life of the universe comes from the power of the Self,

Life is in proportion to this power.  
 When a drop of water gets of Self's lesson by heart,  
 It makes its worthless existence a pearl.  
 When the grass found a means of growth in its self,  
 Its aspiration clove the breast of the garden.  
 Because the earth is firmly based on itself,  
 The captive moon goes round it perpetually.  
 The being of the sun is stronger than that of the earth :  
 Therefore is the earth fascinated by the sun's eye.  
 When Life gathers strength from the Self,  
 The river of Life expands into an ocean (Iqbal, 1983 : 20-22).

In defining what he meant as personality, Iqbal said :

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. If the state of tension is not 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, 1983 : xxi-xxii).

In another place, Iqbal defined personality by taking himself as an example :

My real personality is not a thing, it is an act. My experience is only a series of acts, mutually referring to one another, and held together by the unity of a directive purpose. My whole reality lies in my directive attitude. You cannot perceive me like a thing in space, or a set of experiences in temporal order; you must interpret, understand and appreciate me in my judgments, in my will-attitudes, aims, and aspirations (Iqbal, 1996 : 82-83).

Iqbal was emphatic in his conviction that the *Khudi* or Ego/self-hood is not an illusion but real. Challenging those who did not believe in the existence of the Ego, Iqbal wrote :

If you say that 'Ego' is merely a superstitious thing, and its appearance is just like any other fantastic thing in the world, then tell me who has caused the doubt in your mind? Once look into yourself, and tell me who is the Invisible Being that dwells within you? Obviously the world exists, and still it requires

some arguments for its existence, and it can't be grasped even by Gabriel. On the other hand, however, Ego is concealed (in our mind), and does not require any argument for its existence, - once think well what is the secret behind its activities? Now, take your 'Self' to be a Truth (fact), and don't think there is any touch of Evil in it. Never imagine that 'Self' (Ego) is a Farm without any produce. When your 'Self' becomes mature, it is immortal, for the separation of true lovers is itself a Union (Iqbal & Tariq, 1973 : 146).

To Iqbal, the Ego is the entity in an individual that provides the energy for life. Besides, the Ego dictates one's 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 depends 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.

Further exploring Iqbal's ideas on the Ego reveal the fact that the life of Ego depends on its established mutual relationship with nature or external world, society or community and the Ultimate Reality. Iqbal also asserted that it is of vital importance for the Ego to relate itself with nature and other Egos living in the society. Iqbal stressed that the Ego cannot grow in isolation and solitude. Though nature can be seen as a hindrance on its way to maturity, it is not seen as an evil. In reality, the obstruction caused by nature can cause the inner potential of man that is within the Ego to unfold. The Ego becomes glorified and reaches its destination when it is able to overcome all obstacles on its path or by conquering the forces of nature. Based on the facts presented in the Qur'an, Iqbal explained three basic principles of his Ego philosophy:

One, 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 Allah (SWT) 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 Allah (SWT), and it was brought to existence through His directive can be seen clearly in Surat Al-Isra'(17 : 85) :

"They ask you concerning the spirit. Say : "The spirit is of my Lord's command. Little indeed is the knowledge granted to you" (Basmeih, 2007).

Two, the Ego will pass through this earthly life and it is never going to pass through this spatio-temporal order again. This understanding of Iqbal on the human soul is parallel to the Islamic belief which states that each individual is only born once into this world. Muslims do not believe in the idea of the reincarnation of the soul during its earthly life until it reaches a state of Nirvana as taught in Hinduism and Buddhism. This is evidently true when referred to the many verses of the Qur'an in relation to the life of the Ego. *Surat al-Muminun*, verses (23 : 99-100) reads :

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)” (Basmeih, 2007).

Three, upon its resurrection on the Day of Judgment, the Ego will meet Allah (SWT) as a single irreplaceable individuality and it will be shown the fruits of its labour done during its earthly life. A state of reward or punishment awaits the Ego after it has been judged of its previous actions. In stating this view, Iqbal referred to Surah Maryam (19 : 93-95) and (Surat al-Isra' (17 : 13-14) respectively :

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 (Basmeih, 2007).

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 (Basmeih, 2007).

Iqbal also discussed the issue of the Ego's immortality. According to the Islamic belief, the human body of an individual disintegrates after the death but the soul goes on to live on a new dimension of life. Parallel to what has been stated in the Qur'an, Iqbal in his philosophy stated that the Ego can reach a state of immortality. 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 and man is just a candidate for attaining 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 will be love, *faqr*, courage, tolerance, performing creative and original works. By performing the Ego sustaining deeds, one has to abstain from all “Ego-dissolving acts” such as fear, dependency, slavery and pride of ancestry (Iqbal, 1996).

In further explaining the nature of the human self, Iqbal divided it into two aspects: the “efficient self” and the “appreciative or affective self”. Between the two, it is the efficient self that enters the world of space and time. In conducting itself to the demands of the external world, it lives as though it is outside itself. It is the nature and activities of the efficient self that continuously keeps an individual busily immersed in the demands of the external things that often push the affective or appreciative self to the background. Iqbal further elaborates on the two aspects of the human self :

We weave a kind of veil around the appreciative self which thus becomes completely alien to us. It is only in moments of profound meditation when the efficient self is in abeyance that we sink into our deeper self and read the inner centre of experience (Iqbal, 1996, p. 38).

Iqbal also explained 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 :

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 (p. 72) 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 (Iqbal 1996 : 87).

Another interesting aspect of Iqbal's concept of the human Ego is that it has the "freedom of will" which enables it to choose between what is good and evil, right and wrong. Upon the death of an individual, the Ego departs leaving the body to decompose, while it moves on to live in the next dimension of life through the force it has cultivated during its companionship with the body. It passes through the new dimension of life either in pleasure or in pain based on what it has accumulated during its earthly life before finally appearing in front of its Creator (Bilgrami, 1966). In stating the Ego's freedom of choice Iqbal referred to Surat al-Isra' (17 : 7) and Surat al-Kahf (18 : 29) respectively :

If you do good it shall be to your own advantage; but if you do evil, you shall sin against yourselves... (Basmeih, 2007).

Say (O Muhammad) : "The truth is from your Lord. Let him who will, believe in it, and him who will, disbelieve in it." For the wicked, We have prepared a Hellfire which will encompass them like the walls and roof of a tent. When they cry out for relief by reason of thirst, they shall be showered with water like molten brass, which will scald their faces. How dreadful a drink, how evil a place of rest (Basmeih, 2007).

Any discussion on Iqbal's concept of the human Ego will be incomplete if it does not touch on its relationship with God as the Infinite/Ultimate Ego. Iqbal by making reference to God as the Ultimate Ego states that all Egos proceeded from God. By stating this, he did not subscribe to the pantheistic view that the Ultimate Ego is the only reality and all other Egos which are finite in nature have no independent existence apart from the

Infinite Ego. He also disagreed with the idea that the Ultimate Ego exists in isolation without having any contact with the finite Egos. Iqbal believed that the existence of the Ultimate Ego engulfs the finite Egos in His own Self without negating their independent existence and selfhood. Iqbal clarified the relationship between the finite Egos and the Infinite Ego as follows :

I have conceived the Ultimate Reality as an Ego; and I must add now that from the Ultimate Ego only Egos proceed. The creative energy of the Ultimate Ego, in whom deed and thought are identical, functions as Ego-unities. The world, in all its details, from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in human Ego, is the self-revelation of the ‘Great I am’. Every atom of Divine energy, however low in the scale of existence, is an Ego. But there are degrees in the expression of Egohood. Throughout the entire gamut of being runs the gradually rising note of Egohood until it reaches its perfection in man. That is why the Qur'an declares the Ultimate Ego to be nearer to man than his own neck-vein. Like pearls do we live and move and have our being in the perpetual flow of Divine life (Iqbal, 1996 : 57-58).

Iqbal's statement that God is closer to man than his jugular-vein is a reference found mentioned in Surah Qaf (50 : 16) : “And indeed!, We have created man, and We know the promptings of his soul, and We (by Our knowledge) are closer to him than his jugular vein” (Basmeih, 2007).

According to Iqbal, the personality of a person becomes stronger when he or she is closer to God. On the contrary, the personality becomes weaker when one is further away from God. The word “further away from God in this earthly life” means one who does not pay attention to the do’s and the don’ts in the Qur'an. It also means that one who does not submit to the will of God and does not take the role of Allah’s Khalifah in managing his life on earth. Far from being the *Khalifat Allah*, his character and behaviour will all be contrary to the things mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah. To Iqbal, the condition of one who is far away from God will be placed under the category of those who are weak in their personality. This idea of Iqbal is in line with the teachings of Holy Qur'an, according to which those who purify their souls are those who are successful in the eyes of Allah, and those who pollute their souls are deemed as those who have failed. This idea has been mentioned in many verses with different variations in the style of its narration, though they relate to the same message. One among the many Surahs which has stated this is Surah Shams (91 : 7-10) : “By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it; and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right; truly he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it!”

Seen from another perspective, man being God’s vicegerent on earth has also been imbued with the divine attributes of his Creator. By getting closer to God by performing

acts of righteousness man can actualize these divine attributes. Through the actualization of the divine attributes man can gain a higher level of self-consciousness. By displaying such consciousness, the act of an individual comes parallel to the dictum of Socrates, "know Thyself" and also to what has been stated by Sayyidina Ali ibn Abu Talib, "awareness of self is awareness of God" (Kazmi, 1995).

### **Ideal society and stages in personality development**

To Iqbal the development of individuality is important, and he carried this message in almost all of his philosophical writings and poetry. In studying his Ego philosophy, one would discover that though he emphasized a great deal on the Self, he nevertheless, did mention the important fact that the human Ego cannot fully develop in isolation without interacting with other Egos of the society. Due to this reason, the individual member of a society needs to mingle and interact with other members of the society. In other words, an individual Ego blooms, grows and develops to maturity through mutual cooperation and collaboration with other Egos of the society.

Iqbal believed that the society in which an individual lives is very important because the society is the place where the Ego draws its spiritual strength. For this reason the individual Ego has to participate actively in all social activities organized by the society. In relating to the life of an individual, Iqbal's ideas on the Ego and its relation with the society reflect the idea that an individual becomes weak, powerless and aimless without his association with the society. It is the active participation/involvement of an individual in the society that gives him a sense of belonging and identity. It is this relationship that gives him the vitality to strive for a higher purpose in life. His feelings and aspirations to live within values set by the society can enrich the Ego of an individual. Iqbal in stressing the importance on the relationship of the Ego with the society wrote the following:

The Individual exists in relation to the community.

Alone, he is nothing!

The wave exists in the river,

Outside the river it is nothing! (Iqbal in Saiyidain, 1977 : 56).

When a word is taken out of its verse,

It causes the sense to be lost.

The green leaf that falls from the branch

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 (Iqbal in Ali, 1988 : 240).

Besides stressing the importance of the relationship between the individual and the society, Iqbal went on to expound on the nature of the society. According to him, in order for the human Ego to develop healthily, an individual should live or be placed in a very conducive social environment suitable for the growth of the Ego. He believed that the nature of the society has great impact on the growth of the Ego. Under the influence of a good and healthy society, the human Ego develops in a more enriching manner. To Iqbal, the ideal society for the development of the human Ego is one that is God conscious which abides by all the religious and moral values. On the contrary, when the society's philosophy is detached from the religious and moral values, it no longer becomes ideal for the development of the Ego. Iqbal lists the following eight criteria which will be conducive for the growth of the Ego :

- a. It must be based on spiritual considerations like monotheism.
- b. It must centre round inspired leadership or prophethood.
- c. It must possess a code for its guidance.
- d. It needs a centre.
- e. It must have a clear goal towards which the whole society should strive.
- f. It must gain supremacy over the forces of nature.
- g. The communal or collective Ego must be developed in the same way as the individual Ego is developed.
- h. It must safeguard maternity (Vahid, 1960 : 34).

Iqbal through his Ego philosophy not only explained the life of the Ego, elements that strengthen and weaken it, the ideal society for its development, but also explained on the stages the Ego has to pass through in order to reach its ideal level of maturity. Like education and any other process of learning which normally starts from the simple and moves on to advance and complex levels, Iqbal also conceptualized three stages that an individual has to pass through in order to reach the stage of *al-Insan Kamil*. The three stages emphasized by Iqbal in his theory of personality development are :

- a. Obedience to the Law.
- b. Self-control, which is the highest form of self-consciousness or Ego-hood.
- c. Divine vicegerency (Iqbal, 1983 : xxvii).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it may be noted that Iqbal's theory on the personality development comes as a response to the prevalent condition (especially the colonization) of the Muslim Ummah of his time. His philosophy of the Ego, the *Khudi*, is eclectic combining the ideas he has taken from the philosophers of the West and East. His theory of the self is in line with the basic principles stated in the holy Qur'an. To Iqbal, the Ego is a soul-substance

that provides energy and vitality for an individual. The Ego has two aspects: the appreciate Ego and the efficient Ego. In order for the Ego to bloom and grow into its fullest potential an individual has to indulge in Ego-sustaining activities. Iqbal also emphasized that the human Ego can grow and develop in an ideal state. Lastly, personality is the reflection of the *Khudi/Self* of an individual through his mental attitude and behaviour. This reflection is the outcome of the interaction of an individual's Ego with the environment/nature, society, and the relationship with Allah (SWT).

It should be evident that Iqbal presented a positive theory on man and his personality development. In the history of Muslim intellectual contribution to the world, Iqbal who occupies a position midway between the early and contemporary Muslim scholars presented a philosophical and modern version on man and personality by not cutting away from the past Islamic heritage. By relying on ideas mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah and to some early Muslim and Western scholars he erected the edifice of his theory on personality. He was careful in the sense that whatever he has taken from the Western scholars were elements that did not contradict with the Islamic teachings. In fact, he justified that such elements are the Muslims' past dynamism and heritage which were taken by the West during the glorious days of Muslim intellectualism. Iqbal's ideas are in line with the process of Islamization of knowledge. What makes Iqbal's theory interesting is that he not only gave details on the characteristics of the human psyche but also laid down in his poetry and philosophical writings on matters like, what elements can strengthen and weaken personality. Moreover, Iqbal also explained on what should be the ideal environment for the growth of personality and the stages one has to pass through in order to reach the status of a true *khalifat Allah*, the vicegerent of Allah (SWT).

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