

EDUCATION, PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AND MUHAMMAD IQBAL

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Abstract: Iqbal acknowledges that formal and informal education plays an inevitable role in the development of human beings on individual and collective levels. Though he never claimed to be an educationist but his ideals regarding the methodology and objectives of education can be derived by his poetry and prose. The first impression of early writings of Iqbal leaves the impact that he was curious regarding the nourishment of an individual's intellectual and spiritual abilities through education but the deeper analysis of Iqbal thoughts reflects that he also focused on the *individual* as basic unit of community so that the existence of such individuals may give collective strength to the nation. He admires modern scientific achievements but rejects the idea of separating knowledge from religious domain. Moreover, he suggests that modern knowledge and scientific education should be given to the men only because it might leave adverse effects if it would be included in the syllabus designed for women.

Key Words: Self, Infinity, Knowledge, Intuition, Education.

Progress in human community depends upon the nature and inclinations of its inhabitants. To polish the positive traits and control the negative propensities of human nature, every society makes special arrangements. Some definite sets of norms and system of beliefs always work as the basis of any social order and it becomes the responsibility of the existing generations to pass on these values to the future generations. As every sensible society realizes that the existence of healthy and balanced personalities is inevitable for its sustenance; therefore, almost all human communities focus on educating individuals in formal and informal manners. In the eyes of empiricists, a child starts learning right after his birth; his experiences fill the blank slate of his mind and construct the whole system of knowledge (Gelpi Etor 2019). This empiricist version of knowledge works effectively for the development of education system from childhood to adult levels in almost every society.

According to *The Oxford Dictionary* (2019) “education” is considered as a continuous process of acquiring knowledge on the basis of experience, another definition entails that it is a designed procedure of formal training at institutions and analysis of the teaching methodologies. *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2019) explains “education” as a discipline, and declares that in this kind of education no informal means of socialization can be involved. Secondly, education can be defined as enculturation because it guides young individuals in learning a culture and modifying their conducts to act wisely. It also provides guidance for the understanding of one’s societal responsibilities and roles. The philosophy of education tries to find answers for the questions regarding nature, problems and objectives of education. It is a set of statements that distinguishes the convictions, beliefs and understanding of the residents of any human community with respect to education. It can be taken as an organized body of knowledge and judgment on education (Gelpi Etor 2019).

Generally “education” is considered as a process of teaching, training and learning especially in schools, colleges and universities to improve knowledge and acquire or develop skills. But it will not be wise enough to keep education only to this extent as its domains are beyond the precincts of educational institutions. In fact education is the multidimensional uplift of human beings for the achievement of higher targets related to self-actualization and well-being.

Iqbal is famous not only for his revolutionary poetic thoughts and deep insight in theological debates but he is also known as a socio-political

reformer. His essays, lectures and poetry collectively reflect his constructive approach towards welfare and progress of society. He acknowledges the importance of education and considers formal education necessary for the development of individuals. He indirectly discusses various issues related to the system of education but he should not be categorized with other educationists like Plato, Averroes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau or John Dewey since he is not an educationist in the strict sense of the word. His writings served as premises to help him in deducing his very own conclusions regarding the need of reformation in educational sector (Siddiqi 2012, 29-32).

Iqbal understands the importance of artistic expression and uses poetry as a very meaningful source in spreading his messages. It means that Iqbal is desirous of translating his thoughts into practice and for this purpose he tries his level best to present his philosophical, theological, mystic, socio-political and educational ideas by means of Urdu and Persian poetry. His letters, lectures and essays also address the core issues of modern social and communal life. It can be validly infer that Iqbal uses his poetic and literary skills to bring reforms in the society.

The research paper presents educational philosophy of Iqbal in four parts. The first part consists of Iqbal's philosophical understanding of education, the second part is based upon his methodology of educating individuals, third part elucidates Iqbal's views regarding education of the female segment of society, and the last part presents possible implementations of Iqbal's suggestions along with the comparative analysis of Iqbal's ideals and the contemporary educational system of Pakistan.

Iqbal admits that humans are naturally curious; therefore, the desire to know the hidden truths compels them to get knowledge from their surroundings and the whole system of education works to assist human beings in finding out answers of the questions raised by their inquisitive minds. In the realm of education the main theme is knowledge or knowledge can be given taken as the spirit of education. So the first thing to be seen is how Iqbal defines knowledge in his educational system. The first part of Iqbal's philosophy of education consists of the journey from knowledge to education. The most important part of this journey from knowledge to education is the discovery of the mysteries of life. Iqbal admits that with the help of science and art, an individual acquire knowledge which helps him in understanding the mysteries of life but these means are not the manifestation of reality but they actually function as a beacon to find the paths to reality. In other words, Iqbal

declares that the scientific knowledge is not the true face of reality but it works like a torch or light in darkness which means that knowledge is not even a right path but it helps seekers to find right paths. Now the question arises that if it is not in the destiny of science or art to give genuine knowledge of reality, then who can apprehend the true essence of reality? Iqbal says that when a person works for the nurture and purification of his self, then the developed self can approach these realities only (Razak, Iqbal's Ego Philosophy and Its Importance in Awakening Man's Spirituality 2014, 157-158).

He believes that the nurture of inner-self is inevitable for the development of an individual because *self* or *Khudi* is the hallmark of individuality which is the symbol of self-respect, self-assertion, and self-reliance (Vahid 1964, 244). To Iqbal, *the self* remains active in the continuous processes of change because the absence of change results into death. So the true Self always moves forward to find its absolute or ultimate status which is *the infinity* (Iqbal, Zarb e Kaleem 2005, 543). He considers education as a necessary factor in the development of *the self* (588-589). According to Iqbal action plays a pivotal role in translating all these concepts into reality, and self goes parallel to these actions. When the self reaches the stage of intuition it gains the utmost strength and then it starts indicating the paths to reality rightly coming out of the boundaries of rationality and emotions. From this point the mile stone of spirit becomes visible. However it is worth mentioning that according to Iqbal the beginning of this journey originates from experience and in this regard its special importance can never be ignored. Iqbal attaches special importance to individuality and personal freedom.

عمل سے زندگی بنتی ہے جنت بھی جہنم بھی
یہ خالی اپنی فطرت میں نہ نوری ہے نہ تاری ہے

(Iqbal, Bang e Dra 2005, 305)

(Translation: An individual's life can become miserable or pleasant not because of nature but due to his deeds).

He states that the ultimate target of any human being is the development of selfhood. He asserts that self always remains struggling against opposite forces not only to maintain but elevate its special status. Iqbal says that this resistance cannot work negatively as it plays role of a

positive factor in the strengthening of the self. It is also worth mentioning that besides individuality Iqbal emphasizes also on the importance of collectivity (Tufail 1966, 23).

فرد تمام ربط ملت سے ہے تنہا کچھ نہیں
موج ہے دریا میں اور بیرون دریا کچھ نہیں

(Iqbal, Bang e Dra 2005, 217)

(Translation: An individual needs get connected with his nation/
group, because in isolation he will be losing his identity and status.
Iqbal gives example of waves which are nothing outside river.)

Apparently it seems contradictory to support individualism and collectivism (or holism) at the same time but for Iqbal merger of individuality into community is not the termination of individuality rather it is the process of its completion and the utmost objective of mankind. Iqbal in his *Ramooz e Beykhudi* (2005) writes:

از چہ رو بر بستہ ربط مردم است رشتہ ایں داستاں سردرگم است
در جماعت فرد را بنیم ما از چمن او را چو گل چینیم ما
فطرتش وارفتہ یکتائی است حفظ او از انجمن آرائی است
سوزش در شاہراہ زندگی آتش آوردگاہ زندگی

(88)

(Translation: though the beginning of relationship between an individual and society is not perceptible but an individual carries same relation with his community as a flower with the garden. It is in human nature to idealize individuality, but he knows that his individuality is secured within his community.)

Here lies the point where one can see morality as the core of Iqbal's philosophy of education. He perceives morality connects an individual with his community and then manifests individuality and self in totality (Tufail 1966, 85-86). So morality is the most important part of Iqbal's philosophy of education that becomes visible completing the concept of action in all respects. Iqbal does not confine knowledge to theory only and includes using knowledge in practical matters of life. In this way he establishes unity in theory and practice.

Iqbal believes that the ultimate reality is spiritual in nature that is why he says that it should become the desire of an individual to transcend from ordinary material world and foster his inner self to know the ultimate truths of life. Iqbal's philosophy of education seems like a journey of the self trying to transcend itself from material world to spirituality to gain more strength so that it may be able to keep itself intact in search of its absolute status. According to Iqbal, the beginning of knowledge takes place from experience and concludes in intuition and all his other thoughts regarding education are the reflection of the same philosophy.

To understand Iqbal's philosophy of education, one needs to have foreknowledge regarding the existing socio-religious traditions of his age. Iqbal was unhappy with the social, psychological and economic conditions of the Muslims of United India. He was the admirer of glorious achievements of the early Muslims in the fields of knowledge, and felt the absence of attitude of ancient Muslims towards science and knowledge after the decline of Islamic civilization. The Golden age of Islam¹ reveals that Muslims were eager to get knowledge through empirical investigations and expeditions. They were not hesitant in analyzing the new concepts from earlier civilizations. For the development of knowledge and enrichment of civilization, early Muslims evaluated the ideas presented by different cultures. Their inquisitiveness made it possible to study philosophical thoughts of ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. They also utilized those parts of Greek Philosophy which were not contradictory to the Islamic system of beliefs. Similarly, the pioneering work of Muslim scholars and scientists served European thinkers in the fields of astronomy, trigonometry, algebra, medicine and mathematics (Muhammad 2003, 15-27).

Unfortunately, during the Mongol invasion a large number of Muslims were brutally murdered and the accomplished works by the Muslims of the Golden age were either destroyed or remained unattended during invasion of Baghdad in 1258CE. Political and social changes confined Muslims to their own polemic in the area of Islamic Jurisprudence. The spirit of free rational inquiry was disappeared and the negative inclinations of discrediting each other, squabbling and internal conflicts captured the minds of Muslims resulted in the loss of the paths which could disclose unseen truth with the help of science and

¹The period from 750 CE to 1258 CE is considered as the Golden Age of Islam.

technology. The Western world continued its journey of scientific research but Muslims could not do any remarkable work in the field of knowledge (Razak, Iqbal's ideas on Science and the Muslims 2011, 85-87).

After witnessing the scientific advancements made by the Western world, Iqbal concluded that the pioneers of modern branches of knowledge were no longer remained seekers of knowledge but became the inefficient followers of dominant Western traditions; therefore, he tried to present his own solutions for the revival of the distinct identity of Muslim Ummah. He realized that without nurturing the self, Muslim nation could not regain its lost glory. For this purpose he emphasized on the importance of education that could refine human identity. He accepted the significance of scientific knowledge, therefore, he asked Muslims to use it to get access to the ultimate truths. At this point he considered that the development of the self could guide Muslims to understand their actual purpose of life (87).

جس بندۂ حق میں کی خودی ہو گئی بیدار
شیر کی مانند ہے بڑندہ و بڑاق

(Iqbal, Zarb e Kaleem 2005, 587)

(Translation: A truth-explorer with enlightened ego is like a sharp sword...)

Iqbal believes the phase of training must be started from early childhood; therefore, he claims that the education of children is a prerequisite for the development of any nation. In his essay *Bachon ki Taleem aur Tarbiyat*², he expresses his ideals regarding the methodology of teaching children. He asks teachers and family members to abstain from delivering abstract knowledge to the young ones because at young age, mental capabilities do not support the process of learning. The gradual development of the intellect of a child depends on his teacher; therefore, the teachers must realize that the responsibility to produce healthy and balanced personalities lies in their hands. Only teachers can induce the understanding of prima facie moral duties into little brains so that they might develop the ability to evaluate moral judgments. Iqbal

² This essay was written in 1902, compiled and edited by Syed Abdul Wahid Moeeni and Abdullah Qureshi in *Maqalaat e Iqbal*.

argues that children should not be involved in lengthy discussion; therefore, he lays emphasis on experimentation and observation. He suggests that a teacher should present himself having sound moral character in such manner so that he may leave unforgettable impressions on students. Moreover, children possess strong quality of imitation; therefore by presenting himself as a role model, a good instructor can inculcate constructive attitudes among children. It is also the responsibility of a teacher to make the students understand the difference between two extremities so that they may identify contradictions in this universe to behave more logically. Iqbal focuses on theory based practices therefore he strongly affirms that theoretical knowledge cannot confer any benefit in the absence of practice. He states that the whole education system must work to enhance the creativity among children so that it may become an integral part of their personality. Some people opine that the Iqbal's philosophy of education and Montessori system of education are alike. But that is not the real case. As Montessori system of education is based purely on observation and experimentation whereas Iqbal only lays the foundation of education on experimentation and observation, and then continues the journey beyond this material world. Iqbal attaches much importance to morality in his philosophy of education and for the same reason whenever he discusses education he emphasizes on nurturing or "tarbiyyat" of children (Iqbal, Maqalaat e Iqbal 1988, 33-42).

In his essay *Quomi Zindagi*³, he connects civilizational reforms with education of all members of the community. He claims that the main objective of national education is the gradual development of the potentials of young people in accordance with the requirements of their time(97).He accepts that practical implantation of knowledge, especially technical knowledge involved in industrial development, can play important role in the economic growth of nations(99).

In the same essay, Iqbal discusses the role of educated mothers in the society. He acknowledges that an educated mother can nurture her children better than an uneducated mother but Iqbal's conception of education for women is different from his version of educating male members of the society (101). His definition of women's education confines to religiously educated mothers and wives only. In seems surprising that Iqbal does not allow Muslim women to have

³ This essay was written in 1904, compiled and edited by Syed Abdul Vahid Moeeni and Abdullah Qureshi in Maqalaat e Iqbal.

contemporary scientific knowledge. In his *The Muslim Community- A Sociological Study*⁴ (1910) he states:

Considering, then the peculiar nature of our community, the teachings of Islam and the revelation of Physiology and Biology on the subject, it is clear that the Muslim women should continue to occupy the position in society which Islam has allotted to her. And the position which has been allotted to her must determine the nature of her education. I have tried to show above that the solidarity of our community rests on our hold on the religion and culture of Islam. The woman is the principal depository of the religious idea. In the interests of a continuous national life, therefore, it is extremely necessary to give her, in the first place, a sound religious education. That must, however, be supplemented by a general knowledge of Muslim History, Domestic economy, and Hygiene. This will enable her to give a degree of intellectual companionship to her husband, and successfully to do the duties of motherhood which, in my opinion, is the principal function of a woman. (Iqbal, *The Muslim Community - A Sociological Study* 2015).

According to Iqbal, there should be separately designed courses for women so that they may not behave like males. In his *Quomi Zindagi* (1904) and *The Muslim Community- A Sociological Study* (1910), he repeatedly rejects the idea for of giving western education to the Muslim Women.

All subjects which have a tendency to de-womanize and to de-muslimize her must be carefully excluded from her education. But our educationists are still groping in the dark. They have not yet been able to prescribe a definite course of study for our girls; and some of them are, unfortunately, too much dazzled by the glamour of western ideals to realize the difference between Islam which constructs nationality out of a purely abstract idea, i.e. religion, and westernism which builds nationality on an objective basis i.e. country (135).

⁴This lecture was delivered in 1910 and can be seen in *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal* edited by Latif Ahmad Sherwani

Moreover, in his poetry the same point of view is expressed that modern education should not be included in the whole system of education for women.

جس علم کی تاثیر سے زن ہوتی ہے نازن
 کہتے ہیں اسی علم کو اربابِ نظر موت
 بیگانہ رہے ہیں سے اگر مدرسہ زن
 ہے عشق و محبت کے لیے علم و ہنرموت

(Iqbal, Zarb e Kaleem 2005, 108)

(Translation: the knowledge that takes away femininity from any women is equivalent to death, and if the institutions for women education will not be teaching religious doctrines, this kind of knowledge will varnish soft emotions of love and passion)

Iqbal's thoughts regarding education deal with each and every member of Muslim society. He considers education an inevitable factor in the process of national development. As he was not a proponent of gender equality and participation of women in outside house activities, therefore, he suggests specially designed curriculum consisting on knowledge of religion, history, basic and requirements of maintenance health of their family members. He focuses of the formal and modern education for the male segment of society only. Although his approach seems to be strange but the same approach can be seen in other parts of the world such as in the Great Britain woman was allowed to learn purely feminine skills to find a suitable husband for her. She wasn't allowed to get higher education because it was a widely accepted thought that the delicacy of woman could be lost if she could be given high education, and she would be losing her fertility in the end (Bukhari 2017, 2-4). At this point Iqbal seems a conservative Muslim who evaluates women's character in pure traditional manner. As he witnessed his own mother managing a traditional house based on Islamic teachings or his respect for the women in the beginning of Islamic history, he considers house - an ideal place and nurturing family-the prime responsibility of any women. But Iqbal equalizes women and men when he talks about the purification of the self to know the divine truths. His

“individual’ is absolutely gender free therefore it can be concluded that he designs his whole system of education on the basis of socially and biologically assigned responsibilities to both sexes.

Iqbal never claimed that he has presented a systematic philosophy of education. He merely gives suggestion to have better future for the people of United India in accordance with their hostility against modern branches of knowledge. Some of the aspects of his philosophy of education can be helpful in the development of contemporary educational systems of Pakistan.

The Constitution of Pakistan focuses on free education⁵ for young children (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 2019, 10) but practically the whole education system in Pakistan is not designed to develop creative skills and intellect among individuals as the curriculum does not pay attention to the practical aspect of educating children. Books are considered as tools to get success in examinations only. The inadequacy of skills is increasing the number of jobless persons; skilful persons earns more than a degree holder, therefore, degree holders are working under non-degree holders to meet their day to day expenses. Iqbal’s pedagogical analysis and emphasis on the practical side of education can be helpful in this regard.

In Iqbal’s educational system, an instructor or teacher plays a fundamental role in the personal growth of his students. For this purpose, he must be properly qualified not only in the relevant field but also he must have proper understanding of his student’s psychology. He must be having passion to work for the moral, social and spiritual growth of his students. Unfortunately in Pakistan, a few individual passionately adopt teaching as their career, whereas most of the people accept teaching as a profession after remaining unsuccessful in finding some desirable jobs. As a result, most of school level teachers are not aware of the output of their scheme of studies and the revision of syllabus is completely ignored which is very important to have knowledge of the current social, geographical, economic and technological trends in the world. Political and bureaucratic interventions effect the hiring of skilful teachers at public level whereas private institutions mostly focus on hiring inexperienced staff on low

⁵Article 25-A of the Pakistani Constitution was created in 2010, stating that "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law."

wages which continuously disturbs the quality of education. (National Educational Policy Framework 2018).

Iqbal seems to be a religious utilitarian. Although both terms *religious and utilitarian* look strange as religious foundations are based upon faith and utilitarian approach relies on reason alone but Iqbal asserts that the development of a single person leads towards the welfare of a nation. He demands religiously qualified mothers so that their children may have better understandings of religious doctrines. He wants highly qualified teachers so that they may help their students in acquiring knowledge of modern world. His ambition is to see a religiously enriched and balanced community with ideal personalities having knowledge of the incapacibilities of reason in finding out the ultimate truths, and the supremacy of revelation over scientific knowledge. Although he was an admirer of modern scientific developments but he shows his dissatisfaction over scientific approach of eliminating metaphysics or religion from the realm of genuine knowledge. His suggestions regarding education shows his discontentment for confining human mind to the material realities only, therefore he strongly emphasizes on the development of selfhood to get a better chance of understanding an individual status in this universe.

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