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An Opera of Life in Iqbalian-Exuperian Spectrum

Abstract

'*The Little Prince*' is a complex re-presentation of life in the form of an allegory. The 20th century French author, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, keeps its narrative simple at the surface level but the journey of the Prince has two terrains: through his visits of the small planets, he experiences life at micro level while his visit of the planet Earth shows his encounter with life at macro level. This paper explores how the little prince witnesses human traits that include virtues as well as idiosyncrasies following the clichés and paradoxes of human world. In this context, it would be relevant to mention Muhammad Iqbal, the early 20th century poet philosopher of the Indian sub-continent, portrays the modern world and its issues while unraveling his spectrum of life through poetic pearls of his wisdom. This paper also studies how the author uses innocence - the special trait of the prince, in reasoning and unfolding the idiosyncrasies; that how the prince, through the magnifying glass of maturity, perceives the immaturity of people, committing follies in their own make-belief worlds of knowledge, power, research and abstract realities. It also reflects upon the people's belief that they own the whole world of their specific planet while they lack the essence with which the little Prince is gifted. This paper will also focus upon how the author delineates the narrative with the nuances of human life and re-presents life as a literary musical orchestration of Opera, embedding the 'little' life in the macro framework of Earth, and thus constituting the opera of life echoing with the global politics of power and imperialism, lust, arrogance and conceitedness, and as in Coetzee's perspective, 'what is wrong with today's world, the more contentious the better'.

Key words: Saint-Exupéry; Essence; Opera; Little Prince; Universality; Innocence.

Introduction

The Little Prince is not the story of a mere travel from one planet to another but in reality, it is an allegory of travelling towards one's self. The idea of self has been universalized vis-à-vis the little Prince and off shoots to the delineation of the mega reality of this universe. Mega reality of the universe is contained in the heart of human being, beautifully expressed as:

Thou thinkest thou art a small body,

But no, in thee the macrocosm is containedⁱ

Later on, this concept has been elaborated in numerous ways. In fact the doctrine of the Universal Man "*al-insan al-kamil*", it includes the correspondence between human being and the universe at all the levels, all the stages of the cosmos and the Divine Reality. The divine Reality can be understood through this concept. An Arabic saying also connects to the same idea "The human Being is the symbol of all existence" (*al-insan ramz al wajud*). That is why we can know the world and in fact all levels of cosmic reality beyond the corporeal. This relationship between the human microcosm and the cosmic macrocosm is found in all the genuine expressions of the perennial philosophy of all the religions of the world like in Jewish tradition, Greek conservatism, Christian Hermeticism, Christian Kabbalah and in the Islamic tradition with reference to Quran.

We may, here, refer to the concept of self as expounded by the 20th century poet philosopher of the Indian sub-continent – Iqbal, in one of his poems *A Message to the West*:

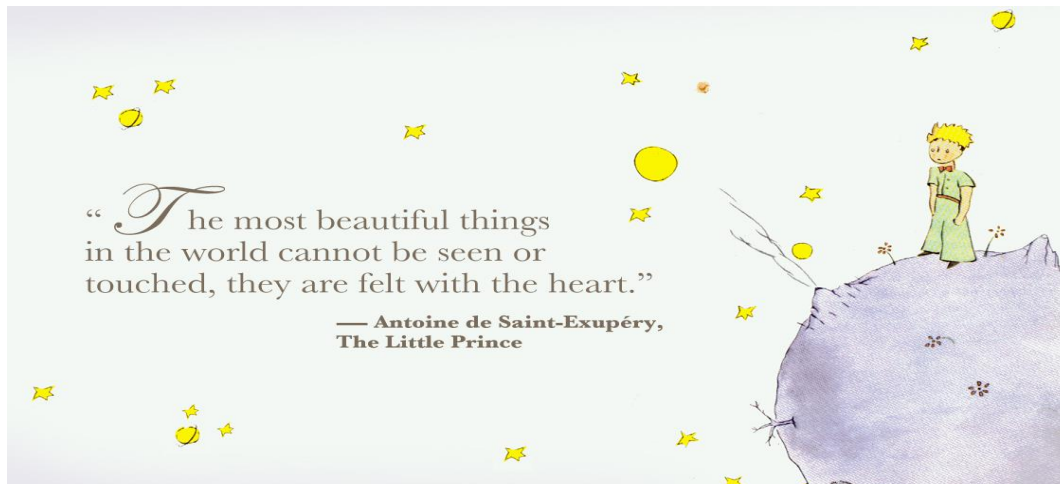
The eye sees just the color of the tulip and the rose;

But far more obvious, could we see it, is the flower's core.ⁱⁱ

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The recent article on *Nuances of Spirituality and The Resurrection in Saint Exupéry's The Little Prince*ⁱⁱⁱ has explicated the nuances of spirituality with reference to the weaknesses of human beings. The current paper may be considered a sequel, exploring the goal of the spiritual life and its essence that enables man to lift up the veil of outwardness so as to behold the inward and eventually come to know the outward in the light of the inward. This reality of the inward eye is exteriorized in poetic verses by the celebrated eleventh-century Persian philosopher and poet Nasir-i-Khusraw :

See with the eye of inwardness the inner reality of the world,
For with the outward looking eye thou canst never see the inward.^{iv}

The present study will hence interrogate how the man in this contemporary world is obsessed by possessing the world sans essence. On a comparative note, we observe that it is this very essence that is referred to as the core of the flower in Iqbal's concept of self and it aptly resonates with the essence of the little prince and his soul, as testifies the subsequent discussion.

Saint Exupéry begins the story with a simple plot and develops it further into a travelogue of the little prince. This travel also reminds the reader about the following lines of Wordsworth in which the poet says: "Child is the father of man."^v It also unfolds that the essence of the soul of the little prince is intact with the holistic phenomenon of nature. The little prince explicates the intricate threads of human emotions at many levels: for example, on one hand it is about visitation to different planets and on the other hand the journey follows the clichés and paradoxes of the human world and its emotional zenith. The reason as to why the little prince carries global implications is obvious: that it symbolizes the essence – the essence of life, having a share of universality with the core of the mega reality.

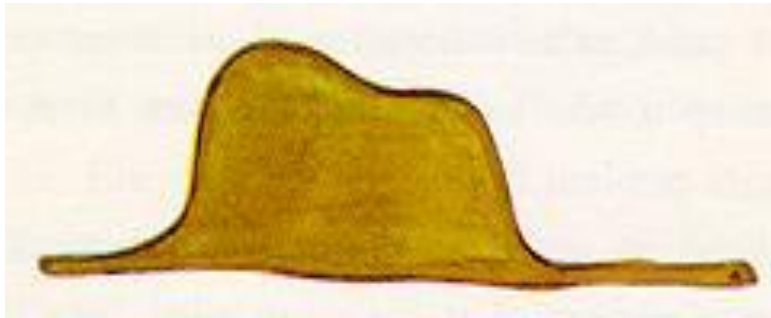
On the surface level, Saint-Exupéry portrays that the little prince has gone through the war between emotional conflicts including isolation, fear, inevitability of death, uncertainty and the intimate and eternal love for the human essence – that is called soul, and in Iqbalian school of thought, the self. The narrator has woven the history of the world and its issues along with the human destiny in such a way that the experience of the little prince becomes overwhelming for the readers. The moment the little prince embarks on the journey, the story takes an entirely different form that makes the prince stand out as an individual with an affirmed self by the end of his journey. The delineation of the human life and the narrative unfolds the nuances of human life in the form of literary musical orchestration of opera, with the embedded discourse of the "little" life of the little prince in the macro framework of the Earth besides adding towards the global politics of imperialism, power, lust, arrogance and conceitedness.

In the context of prior mentioned narrative of modern times, Iqbal says:

How strange that in present times
No one owns the joy sublime!
Some passions leave the mind intact

While others make it blind to fact
You die because from God you flee,
If living, linked with God shall be
The pearls have all their covering cleft
Of urge to show you are bereft^{vi}

The Little Prince trains his Soul in order to enter into the world of Reality. In other words, we can say that he tamed his Soul to cast aside the veil and see beyond the veil that which it veils yet reveals. Remarkably enough, what is ultimately revealed is the essence of the Reality.



Saint Exupéry illustrates the narrative by drawing his readers' attention to the picture of Boa at the beginning of the story where there is an illustration of Boa constrictor swallowing an entire elephant; the image appears to be a hat in the eyes of grown-ups and their interpretations of the image are nothing but a lifeless and dull elucidation, obscuring the reality (image by Saint Exupéry is produced below along with his



I showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups and asked them if my drawing frightened them.

They answered: 'Why should anyone be frightened by a hat?' My drawing did not represent a hat. It was supposed to be a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. So I made another drawing of the inside of the boa constrictor to enable the grown-ups to understand. They always need explanations. My drawing No. 2 looked like this:



text)^{vii}:

Saint-Exupéry reveals the enigma of reality and truth of life by highlighting the fact that the so-called adults and grown up members of the contemporary society have lost their imagination and their emotions and feelings have faded out because of the mask of “materialism” over their eyes. Consequently, they refuse to see or feel the reality.

Another interesting fact that surfaces through the analysis of this story is that Saint-Exupéry wants to explicate the “feeling” itself rather than the “statistics”. He remains focused upon the qualitative ability of the little prince instead of quantitative. The richest way to see the little prince’s journey is as an extended story of the intensity of emotions and follies of abstraction along with the poignancy of feeling. Saint-Exupéry dramatizes the struggle of life in philosophical terms of life and death.

There are three main streams which have been taken into account for this research and that are discussed under the following subtitles:

1. Essence of life

Why the essence is important? In one of the prayers made by the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) complies the answer of this question and He prays “O Lord, show us things as they really are.”^{viii} It is significant to pay attention to the realization of this prayer in the context of the essence which further relates to see things in their transparency as symbols and not only as facts, as reflection of the Ultimate Reality and also as the Self-Disclosure of Divine rather than veils. As Rumi says :

If only existence has a tongue,
So that it would lift the veils of existents^{ix}

In this respect, Exuperian thought is related to the essence where he presents it through the different characters in his novella. The first statement is by the fox who teaches to the little prince the lesson of “essence” of life: “One sees clearly only with the heart; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”^x Saint Exupéry endorses this statement through the little prince when the latter meditates deeply through his inner eye and says that most beautiful things cannot be touched but can only be felt and perceived with the heart. As Wordsworth would express in his poem Daffodils: *In pensive mood, They flash upon an inward eye*; and in Iqbal’s words:

Though you have gathered knowledge,
You have thrown away the heart,
With what a precious treasure,
You have thought it fit to part!^{xi}

Preserving the same Iqbalian rhythmical discourse, Iqbal says while drawing the comparison between *Reason and Heart*, which has similarity with *The Little Prince* and connects aptly with its theme of *Reason and Heart*^{xii}:

One day reason said to heart
I am a guide for those who are lost
I live on the earth, but I roam the skies
Just see the vastness of my reach...
The heart listened, and said: This is all true
But look at me now, and see what I am
You penetrate the secret of my existence
But I see it with my eyes
You deal with the outer aspects of things,
I know what lies within.

Attaining the ultimate knowledge only make one restless,

I am the cure of that malady
You are hobbled by space and time
While I am the bird in the Lotus Tree
My status is so high
I am the throne of the God majesty.

2. Taming



The little Prince on his Asteroid, taming his friend Rose !

Saint-Exupéry develops a unique imagery through the character of rose and the way it is tamed by the love and innocence of the little prince throughout the parable. The concept of taming the rose by the little prince is in fact ‘taming of the essence’ and the ‘core’; this constitutes the taming of the self and the soul, and taming of uniqueness of the essence in the entire world. If we take the little prince’s rose as an example, what comprises the taming process is actually the time that one spends with one’s rose: as the little prince tames his beloved rose, the phenomenon of taming takes the prince away from the delusion of this material world’s grandeur; on the other side of the picture, the little prince reconciles with his real, unique self. The phenomenon of taming develops, flourishes, unfolds and exhibits itself with other themes of individuality, realization and singularity of the uniqueness of the self, and eventually leads towards the discovery of the ‘self’ as well as of the ‘other’. The rose of the little prince is reflected in the poetry of Rumi as he writes in his *Diwan-e-Shams*:

Come, come, for you will not find another friend like me,
Where indeed is Beloved like me in all the world?
Come, come, and do not spend your life in wandering to and fro,
Since there is no market elsewhere for your money
You are as a dry valley and I as the rain...
Close the eye that sees falsely and open the intellectual eye.^{xiii}

This very journey towards the discovery of the self awareness and to the discovery of one’s ‘khudi’ is also emphasized by the well-known poet philosopher of the sub-continent, Iqbal, in whose poetic works as well as in that of prose, we find his philosophical narratives of khudi constituting the life’s core and essence. There is the path of atonement through which one can tame his ‘self’. This path is unraveled by Iqbal in his first two anthologies of Persian poetry, *Secrets of the Self* and *Mysteries of the Selflessness*. As for the little prince, he lived through the stages in his life that tamed down his Self, as established by the dialogue of the fox who teaches the lesson of taming to the little prince: “If you want a friend, tame me!” (Chapter XXI). While learning this lesson, the little prince finally begins to understand what he feels for his rose: “I think

she has tamed me...” (Chapter XXI). The little prince thus realizes that by taming someone, he picks out from the general mass a being that becomes, for him, “unique in the whole world”. It is apparent that through this discourse, Saint-Exupéry focuses upon the fact that our eyes alone are not enough to perceive the singularity of an individual or an object. People, things and objects are wrapped up by their outward appearance, and only by taming them can we begin to know and appreciate their individuality.

The present study also explores the above-mentioned narrative in Iqbal’s philosophical thought. In Iqbalian narrative, the concept of self is centralized. On an analytical note, we find the parallels of this idea through the concept of taming in Exuperian discourse. He offers the perspective of taming the ‘Self’ or ‘khudi’ that eventually leads to the formation of such an individual who has an affirmed Self which further reveals the macro reality of Self-affirmation: This analytical part of the research also constitutes the highest ideal of Islamic mysticism. Again, Self-affirmation can be attained through Self-annihilation but in Iqbal’s school of thought Self-annihilation is actually not annihilation of the ‘Self’; rather, it is the affirmation of the real ‘Self’ and is achieved when one gets hold on to the ‘reins of the Self’.

The pragmatic manifestation of the concept of Self-affirmation unfolds through the phenomenon of Eternity: In *The Little Prince* the symbol of Rose that represents Eternity can thus be related to the symbol of Eternity in Rumi’s poetry where he exposes the men of God being those who experience the death of their annihilation:

For the sake of a single ‘Yes’
Spoken by the spirit in eternity-without-beginning
The men of ‘Yes’ (bala) must submit themselves to affliction (bala)
until eternity-without-end.
Once you set out in this way,
Your only provision will be annihilation.^{xiv}

These verses from Rumi’s *Diwan-e-Shams* reflect the basis of Iqbal’s argument on the development of the ‘Self’. It is interesting to remark the parallel note in Iqbalian’s perspective where one witnesses that:

خودی کو کر بلند اتنا کہ ہر تقدیر سے پہلے
خدا بندے سے خود پوچھے بتا تیری رضا کیا ہے^{xv}

*Develop the Self so that before every decree,
God will ascertain from you: “What is your wish?”^{xvi}*

In this respect, the development of self with reference to Iqbalian thought is quite unique in its essence, given the fact that Iqbal frames the idea of self vis-à-vis ‘eternity-without-end’. The ‘wish’ to which Iqbal is referring, in reality, manifests itself after the affirmation of the self. In the same context, another example from Iqbal’s text generates the same ideological discourse of ‘Self’ which in turn emphasizes the essence of ‘death’ in the context of ‘eternal life’. Here, a significant contrast can be witnessed where Rumi, as cited above, refers to the ‘eternity-without-beginning’ while Iqbal emphasizes the ‘eternity-without-end’.

3. Death or Eternity-without-end

مردِ خدا کا عمل، عشق سے صاحبِ فروغ
عشق ہے اصلِ حیات، موت ہے اس پر حرام^{xvii}

Deeds of the godly radiate with Love
The essence of life, which death is forbidden to touch.

The last dimension of this research is explored through the perspective of death when the Exuperian snake says: “I resolve all enigmas (of life)” and further it has a linking thread with the lines of the little prince as he says : “People will think I am dead but I shall not be dead in reality.”^{xviii} The self-affirmation resonates with self-annihilation, in order to see through the reality of realities, that the prince experiences as an inevitability of death. The pain as an experience is an integral part of the Exuperian narrative for the reason that the pain is the culmination point that leads to the revelation of ‘eternal life’.

The fundamental perspective of this research is the exploration of the essence of life with reference to the Iqbalian lens of self-affirmation through self-annihilation. In the light of the previously discussed arguments, it can hence be ascertained that the image of the Exuperian little prince fits well in the Iqbalian

mould of self-affirmation through self-annihilation; the trek of the little prince is besieged with trials and pain that help him in elevation from worldly prospects to the celestial highs. The reader thus sees the little prince in the realms of eternity.

A journey from the “Conclusion” of research towards the “Conclusion” of Life

The philosophical subject of self is explored with the adventurous travel of the little prince, who ‘realized’ the reality beyond the rose and the narrative of its taming. *The Little Prince* does not only travel from planet to planet but that travel signifies one’s travel towards the inner being. Moreover, this research is not the conclusion of the study but it is the conclusion of “*Life*” on the whole for the matter of fact, we all are born to find the meaning of “*Life*” in one way or the other and that meaning further leads us towards the reality of “*Life*”, which then travels towards the understanding of the Ultimate Reality.

The paper concludes with these lines of Rumi :

Silence! Speak from the direction of your awareness.
For the Universal intellect is asking you,
Will you not understand?^{xix}

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