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Iqbal's Educational Philosophy

Author: K.G Saiyidain
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In the book "Iqbal's educational Philosophy" the writer K.G Saiyidain has examined the educational implications of the philosophical ideas of Allama Iqbal. For writing the book he took help from some of his poems like Asrar-i-Khudi, Payam-i-Mashriq etc and also from his lectures.

The Concept of Individuality

In the first chapter, K.G.Saiyidain, has elaborated the concept of ego or individuality in the philosophy of Allama Iqbal.

Giving the rationale for giving it the first importance, he explained that an educationist first should know about the individual and his nature before making any educational program for him.

The writer started with Iqbal's concept of Ego or individuality that has prime importance in his thoughts.

Allama Iqbal first presented the concept of individuality in his Persian Masnvi "Asrar-i-Khudi".

His concept of Ego was different from many other philosophers. Hegel and other people who believed in Pantheism were of the opinion that the highest aim of man is to lose his individual identity and merge himself in the Absolute, like the drop which slips into the ocean and ceases to exist as an individual identity.

This view was strongly rejected by Iqbal and said, "The end of Ego's quest is not emancipation from the limitations of individuality, and it is on the other hand a more precise definition of it".

He was of the view that the proper orientation of human experience “is not the drop slipping in to the sea but the realization and bold affirmation.... Of the reality and permanence of human ego in a profounder personality

According to Allama Iqbal, the struggle toward the achievement of a profounder individuality is not limited to man alone. He is of opinion that this struggle is present in all living organisms.

Philosopher Bergson and the educationist Nunn shared the same thought with Iqbal. They, like Iqbal, believed that all living organisms are struggling to achieve a more complex and perfect individuality. They all believed that “Only that truly exists which can say “I am”.

Iqbal presented the following idea in “Asrar-i-Khudi” in these verses:

*Since the life of the universe comes from the strength of self
Life is proportional to this strength
When a drop of water gets the self's lesson by heart
It makes its worthless existence a pearl.
As the grass discovered the power of growth in its self
Its aspiration clove the breast of the garden.
Because the earth has a being that is firm,
The captive moon goes round it perpetually.
The being of the sun is stronger than that of earth.
There fore is the earth bewitched by the sun's eye
When life gathers strength from the self,
The river of life expands into an ocean*

But among all creatures, man is the most conscious of his own reality.

Further, the writer, informed that Allama Iqbal's philosophy was in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Quran. He said that in Sufism of Islam Unitive experience is not the finite ego effacing its own identity by some sort of absorption in to the infinite ego; it is rather the infinite passing into the loving embrace of the finite”.

Allama Iqbal strongly rejected the ideas of Plato and Socrates because they rejected sense perception, which according to them gives mere opinion and no real knowledge. Iqbal holds that the development of an active individuality is impossible except in contact with a dynamic and concrete environment.

In the words of Quran, man is the “trustee of a free personality which he accepted at his peril” and his unceasing reward consists in his “gradual growth in self possession”.

The development of Ego requires that a person should throw himself open to all kinds of challenging experiences. If he tries to withdraw from the world of strife, his individuality will shrink and wither and his talents will remain unrealized.

Thus according to this view, the highest aim of education should be to strengthen the individuality of all persons so that they may realize their full possibilities/potentialities.

The Growth of Individuality

After seeing the concept of individuality & its importance now the question arises how to develop the individuality.

For this, again the writer has quoted different verses of Iqbal to show that how individuality can be developed.

The writer has also taken help from Iqbal's lectures. In one of his Lectures Allama Iqbal said, 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 turns into stone & he is reduced to the level of dead matter”.

For Iqbal, the development of individuality is a creative process in which man must play an active role. Individual must not remain

passive just adapting his environment. He has to be active to develop his individuality.

Iqbal was aware of the value of a community's culture for the education. He was of the view that if a community wants to keep alive its culture then there should be a continuous critical appraisal of its traditions & values by the community member. Only in this way they will be able to keep intact their genuineness & originality & identity.

The educational system of a country should reflect its culture. Unfortunately, people of subcontinent were under the impression of western culture. The effect of it was that they were ignoring their history & culture & they were doing nothing to strengthen their individuality or stimulate their originality.

In Ramuz-i-Bekhudi he wrote,

*You have acquired & stored up knowledge from the strangers.
And polished your face with its rouge
You borrow luck from their ways,
And I know not whether you are yourself or someone else
Your mind is chained to their ideas
The very breath in your throat plays on others strings
Borrowed converse pours from your lips
Borrowed desires nestle in your hearts.
How long this circling round the assembly's fire.
Have you a heart? Then burn yourself in your own fire.
An individual becomes unique through self realization.
A Nation becomes truly itself, when it is true to itself.*

Another condition which is essential for the development of individuality is freedom. According to Iqbal, one can not find out what is hidden in him, unless he is free to test his strengths & weaknesses.

A child should be allowed to do experiment with his environment. He should be allowed to gain first hand experiences. In schools such opportunities should be given to the children.

Enslaved, life is reduced to a small rivulet.

Free, it is like the boundless ocean.

According to Allama Iqbal, when Adam was sent on earth, he was given freedom of choice which was a unique gift from God. This freedom involves great risks. Now the man has the choice either to choose good or bad. It also shows that God has immense faith in human beings. It is for man now to justify this faith.

It also shows highest status of human being among all creatures. Now, according to Iqbal, we can unfold an individual's latent possibilities in an atmosphere of freedom. Further he says that creativity which is the highest attribute of man & links him with God also needs freedom. This means that in an educational system more attention should be paid on awakening & cultivation of intelligence. Without it, it would be impossible for him to live in a full & adequate life in this complex and challenging environment.

Iqbal stressed on experimental method. Iqbal stressed continuously his readers not to be intellectually timid but to go out boldly to conquer new domains of Knowledge.

What is originality of thought and action

An urge to revolution.

What is originality of thought and action?

A renaissance of national life.

It is the source of life's miracle.

Transforming granite into the purest of pearls.

Iqbal rejected stereotyped methods of teaching which give no space for thinking. He favored methods of self activity & learning by doing, methods which confront the student with new situations & problems, compelling them to work purposefully, to learn to overcome their difficulties on their own.

The object of intellectual education should be the awakening of critical and questioning attitude which would refuse to take everything on trust.

Further, Iqbal says that a man should not rely only on intellectual thoughts but he should also do some action if knowledge is not related to and acquired through action, it can not be transformed into power and man cannot use it for the reconstruction of his environment.

According to Iqbal, for teaching morality to child, there should be situations in school environment where he would learn it. School should provide opportunities of social life & experiences.

For learning morality again freedom is needed he said, "Goodness is not a matter of compulsion: it is the self's free surrender to the moral ideal and arises out of a willing cooperation of free egos. A being whose movements are wholly determined cannot produce goodness. Freedom is thus seen to be a condition of goodness.

Iqbal says that it is essential that the teacher should awaken in his students a keen consciousness of their manifold relations with the environment and thus stimulate the formation of new & creative purposes.

So we can conclude saying that, if education is to be a preparation for life, it must be achieved through active participation in life. So according to Iqbal, the growth of individuality demands intense & manifold activity on the part of growing individual.

The Relationship of the Material & the Spiritual

There has always remained a discussion in philosophy about two opposing views i.e. spiritualism & materialism. This is an important issue in education too because educational system of any country is based on prevailing philosophy.

If people of a country believe that this would be a mere illusion then they will develop such theory of education which is in harmony with this idea.

If people believe that the visible world is whole of reality & deny human spirit then their educational system will be shaped accordingly. There is a third view too which takes the "Real" to be the starting point for the realization of the Ideal. Iqbal was also in favor of this third view.

Iqbal stressed on growth & development of individuality. It is not possible without having contact with environment.

The affirmation of the spiritual self demands a willing acceptance of the world of matter with a view to make it an ally in the process of our development. So it becomes obvious that in any balanced scheme of education both should be given importance.

Now a question arises, what is the significance of the ideal & the real in the life of man? Should we assign the supremacy to the values of spirit or to the needs & demands of material life?

Here Iqbal joins the company of spiritualism. According to Iqbal there is no such thing as a profane world. All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the self realization of the spirit.

Iqbal, therefore, holds that the purpose of education is to see that man is not betrayed into the mistake of subordinating the mental to the physical & concentrating exclusively on the efforts to gain the whole world even at the cost of losing his soul in the process.

In the words of Iqbal, the relation of man to nature must be exploited, in the interest of a free upward movement of spiritual life". The practical implication of this view for education is that the school should try to draw out, the intellectual, aesthetic & moral significance of

the ordinary occupations & interests of life and to find the growing part of the mind in its effort to handle the everyday concrete problems.

The modern reconstruction of curriculum and methods which aims at bringing the social activities & occupations of life into the work of school & encouraging methods of self activity, problem solving & project may be interpreted as a recognition of this principle ,a principle with which Iqbal would certainly be in agreement.

The Individual and the Community

In this chapter, the writer tried to answer the questions that what is the relationship between the individual and society & does the cultivation of individuality imply that educated people can afford to be unmindful of their social obligations.

Iqbal has, although, attached the highest value to individuality but he duly recognizes the importance of culture patterns of community life. He believes that growth of a full and free personality is impossible because it draws spiritual sustenance from the culture of the group to which it belongs. Iqbal has discussed this issue in his Masnavi, Rumuz-i-Bekhudi which explains the relationship between individual and the community in which he lives, moves and has his being. According to Iqbal, if an individual is alone he is weak & powerless, his energies are scattered and his aims narrow, diffuse and indefinite. It is the membership of a community that gives him a sense of power.

*The individual exists in relation to the community,
Alone he is nothing
The wave exists in the river,
Out side the river it is nothing.*

Now, again a question arises what is the right basis for the unity of a community? What is the cementing bond?

There are some thinkers who are of the view that, color, race and the country are the only integrating forces.

In their comparison, Iqbal holds that it is not the racial or geographical unity which is the basis of people's unity.

It is the unity of emotions and out look purposes, cooperative ideals and objectives which cement a collection of individuals in to a genuine Millat or community.

When ever such unity of out look and emotions is achieved, it becomes a source of unlimited power for individuals as well as the community which can be used for any ends, goals or evil.

*The unity of hearts brings the Millat into being
The sina is a glow with that single flame
A nation should have unity of ideas
One single purpose running through its mind*

Creative Evolution

In this chapter the writer G.K. Sayidain has discussed the role of man in nature and in shaping his destiny.

Allama Iqbal holds the view that this world has meaningful reality to him; the world is really a growing universe capable of infinite increase and extension.

At one place, he remarked, "To my mind there is nothing more alien to the Quranic world than the idea that the universe is a temporal working out of a preconceived plan an already completed product which left the hand of its Makers ages ago and is now lying stretched in space as a dead mass of matter to which time does nothing and consequently is nothing.

In Bal-i-Jibril, he said,

*The universe is perhaps still unfinished
For one can hear the command
Let there be and to it is born*

Man through his creative efforts is bringing constantly change in this universe. Man has brought order, beauty and utility in it.

In Payam-i-Mashriq, Iqbal said to Allah All Mighty,

*Thou created the night, I the lamp
Thou created the clay, I the vase
Thou created the jungle, mountains and deserts,
I created gardens, orchards and flower plots,
It is I who make glass out of stone
It is I who extract elixir out of poison.*

Now again a question arises, what is the role that a man has to play on this earthly stage?

Iqbal answers the question by saying that as a possessor of free personality, he is superior to all other created beings, shaping his own destiny and that of his universe.

Man has become a co-worker with God and taken the initiative for bringing about far reaching changes in the natural as well as the social and moral world around him.

Iqbal does not believe that the process of creative evolution has come to an end. He has complete faith in the unlimited possibilities of man's development; he visualizes persistent effort and struggle to the position of God's vicegerency

*The stars tremble in their courses over man's upward moral
Lest this fallen star should become the perfect moon*

Man is the repository of unlimited powers waiting to be perfected

*There are hundred worlds from start to star
Whenever intellect flies it finds new skies
But when I looked deep into my self
Lo a boundless ocean was hidden within me.*

The role of intellect and Intuition

This chapter discusses the role of intellect and the intuition in human life. Ethics and philosophy have always been concerned with the problem of how man's growing activity is to be controlled and guided. Some philosophers are in favor of intellect, they say that through intellect we can guide life's activities.

Iqbal has a different view about it. He says that there are two ways of apprehending reality. One is through observation and use of sense perception; we grasp reality piecemeal, fixing our gaze on its temporal aspects. This is the function of analytic intellect. Through intuition or love or direct perception by the heart we apprehend and associate directly with reality in its wholeness, as it reveals itself to us in an intuitive flash.

There are some of his verses in which it appears that he deprecated the importance of intellect.

*With thou tread the path of love
By the light of the Intellect
With thou set out on the quest for the sun
In the light of a flickering candle*

Does it shows that he wished us to shun the guidance of scientific knowledge?

The case is not so. He says that conquest of nature through knowledge has deep significance, in reality, all search for knowledge is essentially "an act of prayers".

The answer to above stated question is that at that time people were overwhelmed by the materialism and achievement of science and they had rejected the values that were associated with intuition, love and religious experiences.

It was to maintain balance that Iqbal had strongly emphasized the role of heart in the understanding and direction of life.

*Intellect is but a chain shackling the feet of this age
Where is the restlessness of spirit that is mine?
Behold the universe with the eyes of love
If you wish to discover its secrets
Viewed with the eyes of intellect
It is nothing but an illusion and a mirage.*

Intellect uninspired by love and science uncontrolled by faith has given Europe and America a ruthless economic system, an unjust social order, a bitter conflict among classes, a craze for ornaments and a perpetual threat of impending waves.

Iqbal observed that, "Vision without power brings moral elevation but cannot give permanent culture. Power without vision tends to become destructive and inhuman. Both must continue for the spiritual expansion of humanity".

Like Goethe, he looks upon Satan as the embodiment of purer intellect which in itself is of great value but without the guiding hand of love may become an instrument of terrible destruction.

In the words of Iqbal, "knowledge based on senses gives man power which should be subordinated to religion. If it is subordinated to religion, it is a satanic force".

The knowledge of truth is gained first through the senses and then through direct realization. Its ultimate stages cannot be encompassed within consciousness.

Knowledge which cannot be circumscribed within consciousness and which is the final stage of truth is also called love or intuition. Intellect divorced from love is a rebel (like Satan) while intellect wedded to love has divine attributes".

A Muslim should try to convert such knowledge to Islam.

The Education of the good Character

It is necessary for every system of educational philosophy to define clearly the type of human being which it aims at producing.

According to Iqbal's educational philosophy; firstly, the good life must be a life of active effort and struggle. The activity must be creative and original because creativity is the most valuable and distinctive gift of man.

A person should have close contact with his environment and he should constantly reshape it to suit his purposes.

Secondly, the good man must learn to apply his intelligence through, intellect he can take command of nature.

Intellect does give us power but this power can be utilized constructively for the good of humanity only if it is guided and controlled by love.

Iqbal is of the view that there are three qualities which should be cultivated by education. These are courage, tolerance and faqr.

Iqbal believes that the cultivation of an attitude of courage is essential for the proper education of character.

Education should be such which should eradicate all types of fear. Love weakens the self and it becomes the source of all kinds of corruption in the individual's character. It is the parent of all vices characteristic of the weak, deceit, hypocrisy, meanness, cowardice, flattery. In Rumuz-i-Bekhudi, he wrote:

*Flattery, treachery, cunning and spite
Are all nurtured in the beam of fear
Every hidden evil, nesting in your heart
Is the product of fear, if you will rightly regard.*

Psychology and experience has revealed the fact that even those manifestation which appear to be a parade of brute strength e.g. bullying,

tyranny, display of military force are in reality veiled and distorted expression of fear.

Courage can be cultivated as an attribute of character by making Tawhid an active working principle of conduct. This according to Iqbal implies a rejection of all fears except God, a surrender of our will. When it becomes a guiding principle of conduct, it gives human beings a sense of self respect and courage.

In Asrar-i-Khudi, he wrote

*When they moulded thee of clay
Love and fear were mingled in thy making
Fear of this world and of the world to come, fear of death
Fear of all pains of earth and heaven
Love of riches and poor, love of country
Love of self and kindred and wife
So long as thou hold'st the staff of a La illah
Thou will break every spell of fear
One to whom God is as the soul in his body
Does not bow his head before untruth*

The second quality which Iqbal considers to be an essential constituent of good character is Tolerance.

He remarks, "The principle of the ego sustained deed is respect for the ego in my self as well as in others.

It clearly implies that unless education strengthens in us a sense of respect for the other's individuality their opinions and belief their thoughts and behavior, our own will remain distorted and incomplete.

The third quality according to Iqbal is Faqr or Istighna.

It is a kind of intellectual and emotional asceticism which does not turn away from the world as a source of evil and corruption but uses it for the pursuit of good and worthy ends.

The writer says that it is evident from the history too that all great achievements in history were due to individuals inspired by this

ideal of Faqr, not in the accretion of material possessions for them selves but in the selfless service of some great purpose.

Our education on the contrary tends to instill in the minds of youth an attitude of selfishness and a mean desire to fight for petty jobs and secure them at the cost of every thing else.

When a few of them manage to gain high offices or a little of the riches of the world, many of them lose their humanity in the process and spirit in them turns into stone.

To Allama Iqbal, the real difference between a Momin and Kafir is not a religious difference but of the attitude towards life namely, whether he does or does not develops his all abilities and use them for the conquest and remaking of the world in the name of the Lord.

*The unbeliever loses himself in the universe
While the universe itself is lost in the Momin*

The Social Order of Islam

In this chapter the writer has brought forward the ideas of Allama Iqbal concerning social order of Islam. It means that what type of social order will favor and stimulate the growth of an individual. The development of a child is result of various forces – natural and cultural – that play on him.

Allama Iqbal preached the social values of Islam because they constitute the strongest bulwark against racialism and nationalism and because they provide the greatest guarantee and hope of a society based on the principles of equality, social justice and human brotherhood.

He gives reasons for his choice that social order of Islam is based on the principle of Tawhid. It demands loyalty to God and not to the throne. It implies the recognition infinite worth of every individual and

the rejection of blood relationship. It brings a new sense of freedom and release from various kinds irrational of fears and superstitions.

According to Allama Iqbal, the wonderful personality of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) provides another important focus of loyalties for the growing polity of Islam and this emotional attitude has proved a powerful mean for transforming the Muslims into a vital and unified community.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gave a message of freedom, social equality and human brotherhood. He rejected differences based on caste, color, sex, social and economic circumstances. Islam gave back to the people their natural rights, raised the status of workers and weakened the power of usurpers.

Iqbal looks upon geographical and racial grouping responsible for all sorts of political evils, oppressions and conflicts. Islam seeks to establish the community of mankind not on geographical accidents but on belief in one God.

Iqbal holds the view that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) migrated from Mecca to Madina. This migration suggests that mere geographical ties meant nothing to him and they should mean nothing to Muslims.

*The prophet migrated from his birth place,
And thus revealed the secret of the Muslim's nationalism
His wisdom established a world encircling community.
On the foundation of the Kalima
By the grace of his overflowing bounty
The whole earth became a mosque for us
Live in the ocean like the fish
Freed from the fetters of locality
He who frees himself from the prison house of directions
Becomes all pervasive like the sky*

According to Allama Iqbal, it is essential that social order of Islam should actively exploit the forces of modern science and thereby gain

effective control of its material environment. Iqbal insisted on it so strongly because he realized that one of the main causes responsible for the decline of Muslim people has been their neglect of science which has arrested their intellectual growth and weakened their political and economic position which, in that age, was mainly dependent on scientific power.

According to Iqbal the social order must be a dynamic order, keenly alive and responsive to the basic fact of change. He is of the view that Ijtihad is essential for the healthy growth of religious thoughts in Islam. He disagrees with those people who would deny this right to present day Muslims. A study of history reveals that every social order becomes static and lifeless when intellectual initiative and independent thinking becomes atrophied and people cling to the old & outworn ideas. Iqbal holds the opinion that social order of Islam must always remain responsive to the material and cultural forces that play upon it from time to time.

A Creative Vision of Education

In Rumuz-i-Bekhudi, Allama Iqbal wrote.

*You have drunk of the flagon of Khaled.
Your blood is warmed up by his wine.
Strike the sword of "there is not god but God".
Over the head of this Untruth, masquerading as truth
Light up the darkness of this age.
Share with all what has been revealed to you in full measure.
I tremble to think of your shame when, on the judgment day.
God will put you the question.
You learnt the word of truth from us.
Why did you fail to pass it on to others?*

Iqbal is of the opinion that world is moving toward destruction it is the responsibility of Muslims to make earth a place worth living because

they are given guidance through their religion Islam. Iqbal says that to further communicate the message of peace Muslims can take help from their educational system. Further giving the details of educational system, he says that education should be dynamic and creative which would help to release the creative spirit in man and which will arouse an interest in Muslims to conquer new realms of arts and science, knowledge and power. Science will occupy a prominent place in it because it is through science that a man can gain not only control over nature but also through the use of scientific methods he can consciously reconstruct this world. But giving importance to science should not mean neglect of religious education.

*For the man without Faith,
The pen and the sword are alike worthless
When there is not Faith.
Neither the pen nor the swords have any value.*

Iqbal is of the opinion that religion has always elevated individuals and transformed whole societies. He was of the view that this religious education should be radically different from present religious education. Because the present religious education does not take into account modern, social political, scientific and philosophic problems.

According to Iqbal, education should be such which would bring the human being toward life of action, development of individuality should be the objective of education. Thus a man should appear as an active agent, a doer, a shaper of purposes who is not only engaged in the reconstruction of his world but he would also try to unfold & perfect his own individuality.

Finally Iqbal was of view that this education must be conducted in the most liberal and broadminded spirit so as to develop in youth an all

embracing humanism and a truly international outlook and to arrest the growth of narrow, political, racial, sectional or geographical loyalties.

At the end the writer K.G Sayidian concluded that the conflict and tension have acquired such a momentum that they are seemingly out of control of man and the leaders of the world are unable to solve them. Every increase of power political or technological is making the situation worse. The only defense is to humanize the educational system which should be built up with love and patience in building up of such system the study of Iqbal's ideas can offer most valuable guidance.