

Understanding Iqbal's Educational Thought

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Abstract

The paper presents an overview of Iqbal's philosophy and its application to educational process. His philosophy has tremendous significance not only for Pakistan educational system, but for the entire world. The nucleus of Iqbal's philosophy on which the whole educational process builds, is the concept of self-identity (khudi) that strengthens the individual's innate powers to realize his full potentials towards goodness. His theory of education is subordinated to his fundamental philosophical thought rooted in Islam that (i) ultimate reality is Allah (swt); (ii) ultimate source of knowledge is revelation (wahi); and (iii) ultimate value is unconditional surrender before the will of Allah (swt). As the paper is aimed to provide only some glimpses of Iqbal's educational thought in an outline form, it warrants a comprehensive and detailed study on the reconstruction of educational thought in the context of Iqbalian philosophy.

Key words: Philosophy, Educational Theory, Educational Process

Introduction

Iqbal is not only a renowned thinker on education; he, in fact, practiced his thought. He taught in the institutions of higher learning both in the sub-continent and European world. His contribution as an active member of All India Mohammadan Educational Conference, 'Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam', Punjab Educational Conference, and other educational forums further established him as an eminent educationist.¹ Saiyidian, an eminent educationist and a pioneer researcher on Iqbal's educational philosophy rightly observed that, "I do hope that educationists in India and Pakistan, who are seriously exercised about the problem of educational reconstruction in their countries will give thoughtful consideration to rich contribution which Iqbal can make to our

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educational ideology".² With this background, an analysis of his philosophy and educational thought is presented below in an outline form.

Content of Iqbal's Philosophy

Iqbal's philosophy, in terms of ontological, epistemological, and axiological content areas, which ultimately influenced his educational thought, is examined below:

Ontological View

Iqbal's ontological view is presented under three sub-headings:

Theological aspect

- Iqbal's concept of God is rooted in the Quranic diction. *He is the First (nothing is before Him) and the Last (nothing is after Him), the Most High (nothing is above Him) and the Most Near (nothing is nearer than Him), And He is the All-Knower of everything.*³
- The absolute Reality is Allah (*swt*) who is the Creator of whole universe and the Unity of God (*tauhid*) is the basis of 'unity of thought and action'.⁴
- Personality of the last Prophet (*saws*) is the eventual role model of an ideal character towards the holistic development of man and the entire humanity for all time and space.⁵
- The attributes of the Creator (*Khaliq*) demands that there is a life hereafter (*aakhirah*). This belief makes the individual and the society responsible and accountable in all spheres of life.⁶

Cosmological aspect

- Allah (*swt*) created the universe and natural laws with definite purpose – The entire universe is at the disposal of man as trust (*amanah*) to make it a service to humanity.⁷
- An important characteristic of the dignity of the caliph (*khalifah*) is to conquer the whole universe in order to surrender before the will of Allah (*swt*) in all matters both individual and societal.⁸

Anthropological aspect

- Man is the best creation of Allah (*swt*). He has been entrusted with the vicegerency of Allah (*swt*) for a major

purpose of His worship (*ibadah*) in both individual and collective life systems. Man is composed of soul (*ruh*), intellect (*aql*), and body (*jasad*). The proper education (*tarbiyah*) of this composition makes a balanced personality which distinguishes man from other creatures. With his typical personality, he discovers the signs (*aayat*) of the Creator.⁹

- Man is free to make choice and for that he is responsible and accountable before the Creator and the whole humanity. Man with his responsible attitude and continuous struggle must unfold his hidden potentials and use those towards seeking the pleasure of Allah (*swt*).¹⁰
- Man has a specific entity called the good will (*khudi*). This concept of *khudi* (*al-nafas*) has to be related with the holy Will of Allah (*swt*).¹¹
- Individual has meaning only if exists in relation to community or nation (*ummah*). Iqbal asserts:¹²

The individual exists in relation to the community. Alone he is nothing.

*The wave exists in the river. Outside the river, it is nothing.*¹³

- Explaining this point, an eminent educationist Dr. Saleem aptly interprets Iqbal's concept of individual and community. To him, the "overriding objectives of both (the community and the individual) are the same, that is, eradication of evil and establishment of a just moral order in this world. There is, so to say, natural cooperation, rather than inimical confrontations between the community and the individual."¹⁴

Epistemological View

- The absolute source of knowledge is Divine revelation (*wahi*) that is *Quran* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (*saw*). Seeing (*basar*), hearing (*sma'*) and soul (*qalb*) are fundamental faculties. Thought (*taffakur*), reflection (*taddabur*), intuition (*wijdan*), and exerting the faculties to the utmost endeavor (*ijtihad*) help in creativity, innovation, and solving difficult problems.¹⁵
- In fact, the composite of two activities that is rational analysis (*tajziyah*) and purification of heart (*tazkiyah*) is the best way to seek the ultimate truth (*sadaqat/sehat-e-*

fikr), beauty (*husn/ehsas-e-jamal*), and goodness (*khair/akhlaq/amal*).¹⁶

- Rational and empirical sources, despite their importance, have limitations. They grasp only the partial and piecemeal. Truth or Reality in its totality can best be apprehended under the supremacy of absolute source of knowledge.¹⁷
- Dr. Saleem, in his scholarly paper 'Permanent value of Iqbal's philosophy', makes it clear that knowledge "can be categorized in two kinds: (i) Acquisitional knowledge or observational and scientific knowledge – in Quranic diction it is called '*Ilm-ul-Asma*'; and (ii) Revelational knowledge (*Ilm-ul-Kitab*)."¹⁸ Both kinds have significance but with a superiority of Revelational knowledge.

Axiological View

- Axiology to Iqbal is rooted in the metaphysical outlook. With this perspective, the ultimate or root value (*qadr-e-aala*) is unconditional surrender before the will of Allah (*swt*). All other values e.g. social, political, economic, education, ethics, aesthetics etc. are subordinated to the ultimate value.¹⁹
- Based on the root value, both individual and society are required to strengthen their individuality (*khudi*), abandon their dependence on others, and finally achieve a self-respecting identity. In this context, Dr. Saleem commented that, "Iqbal devotes considerable time and talent to the problem of self and self-identity or to borrow his own expression, the concept of *Khudi*. How our self gets strengthened and intensified, and how it gets dissipated and destroyed is indeed one of the central problems of his thought and philosophy"²⁰
- Good life must be developed around dynamic positive struggle. In this context, the value of freedom (*hurriyyat*) plays a significant role. To Iqbal:²¹

Enslaved life is reduced to small rivulet.
*Free it is like the boundless ocean.*²²
- For leadership development, other values like contentment (*faqr*), passion (*jazbah*), action (*amal*), power & dynamism (*qudrat-o-harkat*), trust (*ammanah*), honesty (*diyanat*), tolerance (*tahammul*), courage (*jur'at*), sense of honor

(*ghairat*), discipline (*nazm-o-zabt*), and supreme holy effort in the cause of Allah^{swt} (*jihad*) are also required to be inculcated among individuals right from the beginning.²³

- On the whole, values related to moral conduct (*ethics*); and values related to the subtle feelings and beauty (*aesthetics*) expressed through art, literature, and architect etc., must be rooted in the ultimate value.

Iqbal's Educational Thought

Based on the above fundamental philosophical views, Iqbal's educational thought is presented below under two headings i.e. theory of education; and process of education.

Theory of Education

Significant points regarding Iqbal's theory of education (i.e. *application of his philosophy to educational process*) are as under:

- The nucleus of Iqbal's theory of education on which the rest of his thought structure builds is the concept of good will (*khudi*) that strengthens the individual's innate powers. In this sense, education (*ta'lim-o-tarbiyah*) is to unfold the hidden best potentials of the individual's and to channel those to attain goodness (*khair*).²⁴
- Education is about change for goodness. In this perspective, if an individual or a nation tries to withdraw from struggle or become passive, their individuality (*khudi*) will lose color or strength and their talents will remain unrealized.²⁵
- Education is uniquely a human endeavor. Acquiring knowledge is the natural need of the human being, which eventually helps in making choice between good (*khair*) and bad (*sharr*), and between just (*haqq*) and unjust (*batil*).²⁶
- The foundation of education is to examine and critique the world research, and finally develop its own viewpoint. Iqbal states that "our duty is to carefully watch the progress of human thought, and to maintain an independent critical attitude towards it".²⁷
- Education system structured on mere instinctual needs without purification (on the criteria of absolute knowledge) will produce a mal-adjusted and split-personality. Only meeting the right and just natural needs of spirit (*ruh*), mind (*aql*), and body (*jasad*) will develop a

balanced healthy personality. Without axiological emphasis, education would be either useless or destructive. In this perspective, education is never value-free.²⁸

- On the whole, education is holistic, harmonious, and balanced only if it is spread over the whole life i.e. *life-here* to *life-hereafter*. Education advocating for mere *life-here* having no link with *hereafter* is distorted and faulty.²⁹

Process of Education

Iqbal's philosophy and theory of education coordinate the whole process of education, particularly its four essential elements viz. (a) aims of education; (b) curriculum; (c) teacher's role and methodology; and (d) evaluation. These are discussed below:

Aims of education

The aims of education in accordance with Iqbal's philosophy are to:

- Produce a true personality (*maumin*) by strengthening his unique individuality (*khudi*) in order to play his destined role in the world to meet the diversified challenges of all times;³⁰
- Develop an everlasting attachment and great love (*ishq*) with the last Prophet (*saws*) and to practically follow him (*saws*) as a role of ideal character in every domain of life;³¹
- Eradicate intellectual secularism right from the early childhood;³² and
- Produce such intellectuals (*mujtahideen*) in all fields who reflect and interpret the sciences (*ulum*) on the belief that Islam is a complete way of life; and finally regain leadership of the world (*imamat-e-alam*) having insight and vision for the future to establish world peace (*amn*), justice (*adl*), and overall welfare (*falah-o-behbud*).³³

Curriculum

For achieving the aims of education, Iqbal considers curriculum as the most important element of the educational process. His curriculum model is based on the following points:³⁴

- For producing a balanced personality, curriculum must offer a core knowledge drawn from the following:
 - (i) Compulsory component: Revealed knowledge i.e. *Quran* and *Sunnah* as a compulsory component and nucleus of the whole curricular scheme. This

component is to be manifested in every discipline at every level. Moral education to this effect is, therefore, obligatory part of the curriculum.

(ii) Humanities and Social Sciences: Subjects relating to humanities and social sciences essential for the social, material, and spiritual betterment of humanity are required to be developed in the perspective of compulsory component. In this context, Islamic culture and cultural languages, particularly Arabic should be the part of curriculum at all stages.

- Natural-Physical Sciences and other Technologies: Those sciences and technologies helpful in acquiring material benefit and for bringing world peace should be an essential part of the curriculum. The excellence and competence in this area should be for the total welfare of the whole world under Divine blessing (*rahmat*).
- The above points assert an overall supremacy and direction of compulsory component i.e. Revelational knowledge. This type of curriculum, therefore, does not only deal with the 'requirements of life', but also with the 'objectives of life'. In fact, the later one is of prime importance.
- 'History' should be compulsory subject at all levels of education, but instead of depending upon its materialistic philosophical interpretation, moralistic philosophical interpretation should be given preference for understanding the causes of a nation's rise and fall (*uruj-o-zawal*).
- Considering the educational stage, such subjects/skills need to be included in the curriculum, which develop artistic and creative expression. However, the prescribed curricular activities, in the name of 'Art', should not negate the eternal moral, ethical, and aesthetical norms.
- Religion, philosophy, and science have to find out mutual agreement. Philosophy and science rooted in religion are most appropriate to the minds of present and future generation. In all areas, the atheist or secular notions need to be rejected; since both pollute the human mind. Iqbal makes it clear that "the only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge..."³⁵

- For better and healthy development of women, the curricular scheme should not include that content, which works against woman's unique character (*nisaiyat*).³⁶
- Desirable co/extra curricular activities in line with educational aims will play a major role in comprehensive development of body, mind, and spirit. The educational institution should carefully organize and monitor such activities.
- Change for betterment is an important part of Iqbal's curriculum model. However, change for the sake of change, ignoring the established perennial values, and destroying the cultural heritage is not acceptable.
- On the whole, curriculum at all levels should be developed in line with the balanced approach of building on 'past-present-future' needs and prospects.

Teacher's Role and Methodology

The teacher's role and methodology according to Iqbal's educational theory is described below:

- In the teaching-learning process, Iqbal considers teacher as a central and unique figure in shaping students' personality towards moral development. Khawaja Ghulam Saiyadain interprets it beautifully. To him, teacher is a man of character, a role model, and 'architect of the souls of men'.³⁷
- The essence of humanity (*aadamiyat*) is respect (*ihtram*) for man. Iqbal asserts:³⁸ The manifestation of above concept in education is that teachers should respect their students, and students should accordingly respect their teachers. Mutual respect is the key to effective teaching-learning process.
- Immoral teacher and value-free school environment ruin the moral integrity of the students. Iqbal condemns those teachers using such instructional methods having no relevance with character building. He deplors:³⁹

*"Masters of education (the teachers) have strangulated you (the students). How can you proclaim? no guard but the Guard"*⁴⁰
- Teacher's role is to diagnose, polish, and activate the hidden potentials of the students in order to channel those towards goodness. Just pouring information in the minds of the students and exercising no reflection and foresight

(*taddubar*) is undesirable. It is the teacher's subject excellence and pedagogical competence (*salahiyat*), his righteousness and model of morality (*salihiyat*); and overall healthy institutional climate which inspire the students to transform desirable values.⁴¹

- Depending upon the age and grade level, methods like lecture, dialogue, discussion, study of nature, and research projects are very effective but not in a free-thinking mode and value-free environment. With teacher's overall guidance, the students acquire knowledge gradually and finally shift to reflective and critical thinking. However, the teacher should be cautious about the type of critical thinking which creates skepticism about eternal truths.⁴²
- On the whole, in order to create better teaching-learning process, the school and the classroom should be an axiological place linked with the vital pre-condition of compulsory curriculum component.

Evaluation

In the light of Iqbal's philosophy, following points are important for students' overall evaluation:⁴³

- The evaluation system should take care of both transmission part (*instruction*) and transformational part (*tarbyiah*).
- Evaluation should focus more on examining the reflective and creative abilities.
- Depending upon the levels of education, students' evaluation should also be based on practical learning/ participation in social work.
- Both formative and summative parts should be kept in view while evaluating students' progress. Since teacher is involved in the process of formative evaluation; especially in tasks of inculcating permanent values and maintaining subject excellence, he is the best judge for the overall evaluation of students' learning.

Wrapping up

Iqbal's educational thought emphasizes such type of education which manifests the inspiration of Islamic ideology; aims at strengthening individuality (*khudi*); transforms the spirit of believing in the 'unity of God (*tauheed*)' and 'prophet-hood (*risalat*)' with the faith that the last prophet Muhammad (*saws*) is

the ultimate role model; upholds the rational and empirical knowledge under the Divine revelation (*wahi*); cultivates values shaped under absolute knowledge; and produces reflective, creative, and responsible teachers who refrain from borrowed ideas and value-free instructional practices – As this paper presents just a sketch of Iqbal's educational thought, it warrants an in depth study. It is, therefore, recommended that a research project on Iqbal's educational thought be undertaken jointly by the 'Philosophy' and 'Education' faculties of the University of the Punjab Lahore (or any other university in Pakistan), through sponsorship of Higher Education Commission (HEC).

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