[ MORE THAN AN OPINION ]

RELIVING THE EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY OF SIR MUHAMMAD IQBAL: POET, HUMANIST, EDUCATIONIST, PHILOSOPHER AND GREAT THINKER – A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

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SUMMARY
The works of Iqbal is a tribute to his thoughts and is extracted from his works on education written in the 1930s, which bears relevance to an ever increasing depressed world were, we find that educational thought is in disarray throughout the modern globe and, in an era of globalization and capitalist imperatives. In a world where the poor are becoming poorer and that, governments in general have failed their nations children and their communities particularly, in the vast rural peripheries of their countries, by not providing proper and sustained education to the masses of their people. His works on education strikes a chord and reality that has not resonated meaningfully in the so-called developing world and, has not made a dent on the arrogant developed world. It is therefore essential that, we attempt to briefly nuance the issues of education and individuality, the social order of Islam and above all his creative vision of education. It is also necessary to thank K.G. Saiyidain for publishing Iqbal’s works almost 80 years ago from which this narrative and opinion emanates. It is an important subject matter that requires some nuancing in a world that has fallen short in terms of education discourse and the development of societies. It is therefore necessary to reawaken and relive the works of Iqbal, primarily from his philosophy and understanding of education which is most relevant to the modern world.

NOTE: This is a narrative and opinion and, therefore, no methodology is used. It is a summary of some of Iqbal’s works on education. There is therefore no bibliography that is cited in this opinion.

INTRODUCTION
In this opinion, an attempt is made to examine the educational implications of the philosophical ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal, who is considered to be one of the greatest poets and thinkers of the present age. Naturally, the narrative cannot do justice to his thoughts because, most of his works had to be translated by writers from the Urdu and Persian languages, which he used with equal grace, fluency and facilitation for the expression of his ideas. He was primarily a thinker and a philosopher and, concentrated on the living problems of the present and suggested solutions to the many problems that, the world confronts even today in the 21st century. It must be realized that Iqbal is not an educationist in the limited everyday meaning of the word and, was
never engaged, except for a comparatively brief period in teaching. By the same token he was not involved in any form with a comprehensive educational theory. It is therefore important for the reader to clearly understand, the real meaning and scope of the term education. It is usually interpreted to mean the limited process of teaching and learning which goes on, somewhat tamely and mechanically, within the walls of schools and colleges and at universities. Iqbal posited that such notions did not take into account all those formative social and personal influences which shaped and modified the ideas of groups but more importantly individuals. In other words, education, in its correct significance, must at all times be seen and visualized as the sum total of all the cultural nuances and forces which play on the life of a person or a community. What are the problems of life and of destiny and therefore, it implies and postulates a philosophy of education? What is the meaning and purpose of human life, the relation of the individual to the community and to his environment? In short the problem of values and so on. Iqbal in his works, does not provide, a full – proof educational technique or education text books on methodology but, he undertakes what is far more valuable and significant and, directs the system to the basic and fundamental principles of education which hits at the heart of sound educational practices. If modern educationists work out these principles in terms of the practical implications, they will quickly find out that his thought processes, intellectual ability and the sharpness of Iqbal’s mind is in harmony with the views which many great modern educationists have expressed about schooling. However, it must be appreciated and clearly understood that the educational works of Iqbal is proof of the important fact that, there are certain urgent forces and characteristics of modern civilization, which no matter how they are viewed, demand a certain type of educational orientation for all modern men and women. On the other hand his works are not mechanically put together; it has a unity of emotional and intellectual outlook and derives from the fundamental sources of conviction, faith and understanding.

THE CONCEPT OF INDIVIDUALITY

No one can develop any intelligent theory of education without consciously postulating some conception of nature of the individuals to be educated and of their destinies. In this regard Iqbal outlines the education process when reduced to its most elementary terms, is the fact of a living human organism in constant interaction, which keeps on changing and growing as a result of this continuous intercourse. Iqbal, therefore, states that like a philosopher, the educator must enquire into the characteristic nature of these two terms of activity, the individual and the environment, which ultimately determine the solution of all problems. It is a question of ego or individuality which is the central ideas of his philosophy. It is therefore absolutely necessary to examine his doctrine of individuality because, of its importance in his system of thought but, also because modern psychology, biology and educational theory have emphasized on these aspects and, recent mass movements and the rise of dictatorships have given this problem an increased political significance. Modern political, industrial and scientific movements have generally tended to suppress individuality in various ways and, therefore, social thinkers who are concerned about the preservation of the values of the human personality are naturally preoccupied, with the problematic of reasserting the primacy of individuality of life. Iqbal as a humanist was sensitive to all the possibilities of growth and expansion open to the human spirit. He devoted much of his thinking and interpretation of thought to this problem. In other words, it was central and a basis of the entire organization of life. He disagreed with many philosophers including Hegel because these people believed that, the highest objective and ideal of man was to
lose his individual identity. Of all living creatures, man has achieved the highest measure of
individuality and is most conscious of his own reality. He has stated that the bold and fearless
self – realization runs right through his works and philosophy, and regards the cultivation of
individuality as the highest goal of all social and educational effort.

Our educational system, with but few exceptions, is mainly based on borrowed ideas, on the
intellectual resources of a foreign culture, on the slavish, cramping and debilitating use of foreign
language. It is therefore imperative as Iqbal posits that that we need to breaks this spell and must
break the spell, to look upon the world not only through borrowed lenses and glasses, but
through the eyes of others. Education has, in its turn, complacently worked towards this
consummation, not realizing that it was and is undermining and, has undermined all national self
– respect and blocks and has blocked people’s creative impulses. It is important to therefore note
and explicit understand, he says that when education is organized under the inspiration of a
new and healthy ideology, it will aim at the strengthening of people’s individuality and, will
revitalize sources of national culture and will also use its riches to quicken creative activity. It is
the question of true individuality, which is freedom. In other words Iqbal outlines and indicates
man’s rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self,
capable of doubt and disobedience. The unfolding of an individual’s latent possibilities can best
take place in an atmosphere of freedom and that deprived freedom makes man a slave and one
incapable of original creative activity. Iqbal, therefore, projects on the freedom of creativity for
problems of intellectual and moral education. It is the perpetual expansion of knowledge based
on actual experience of trial and error. Error is an indispensable factor in building up of
experience. It allows for exploration into new realms of thought for the enrichment of knowledge
and consequently to life.

Such a view by Iqbal in respect of intellectual education, therefore calls for the rejection of all
those elaborate, strictly logical and full – proof graded methods of teaching which seek to
eliminate, from the process of student learning, all possibility of exercising intellectual initiative
and ingenuity, of making mistakes, and learning from them. It is obvious that intellectual
education can become an effective influence in life when it takes into account the intelligent and
purposeful character of life and experience. The object of this intellectual education should be
the awakening of the critical and questioning attitude which would refuse to take everything on
trust. That is why intellectual curiosity and the search for truth are more important, from the
point of view, than truth itself. However, Iqbal is not consumed into the blind worship of the
intellect which gives a one – sided view of reality to Western thinkers and which minimizes the
comparative value and importance of action in the eyes of so many of the thinkers in the East. In
other word he says that we do not live in order to think but we think in order to live. If
knowledge is not allied to, and acquired through action, it cannot be transformed into power.
And man cannot use it for reconstruction of his environment. It cannot therefore be mere bookish
knowledge, academic knowledge which often saps the student’s vitality and fails to equip the
student for life of active striving in the service of worthy causes. It cannot therefore be the end of the
educative process. In this regard Iqbal says that, it is the active quest, the yearning for
achievement which gives vitality to knowledge and life. That is why he is at one with modern
thinkers who sound a note of warning against an over intellectualistic conception of education
and holds a balance view which gives due weight to all the elements of experience, cognitive,
conative and affective, which make up the variegated texture of life.
On the other hand the implications of the doctrine of freedom are equally important for moral education also. The traditional conception and methods of moral training have demanded a passive conformity on the part of an individual to a rigid, superimposed moral code and they have tended to belittle the role of personal thought and active intellect in the process of achieving a moral personality. Iqbal, takes a different view in that, goodness is not a matter of compulsion; it is the self – free surrender to the moral ideal and arises out of a willing co-operation and thus freedom is seen to be a condition of goodness. What this means is that, education cannot produce or stimulate genuine moral behaviour by teaching a set of ready – made moral maxims which students are to act upon mechanically and without question. Morality involves choice and free will. In social intercourse, theoretical moral maxims cannot be transformed into persistent motive forces of conduct. Morality cannot be taught or learnt in isolation; it arises out of the willing co-operation which implies that schools must provide opportunities for social life and social experience and must utilize in their teaching the healthy motives which operate in community living. All the educational movements which introduce social motives and methods of work in schools and offer scope for work done on a co-operative basis tend to moralize the process of education and should, therefore be welcomed.

It is obvious, therefore, that when the repressive forces of the environment or of a blind educational system discourage the formation of new desires, ideals and purposes or when the repressive discipline of an absolute all – powerful State imposes its own ready – made purposes on every citizen, the development of a free, creative and unique individuality becomes impossible and one of the most important objectives of education is defeated. It is therefore, essential, in the interest of a right and effective education that the teacher should awaken in his students a keen consciousness of their relations with the environment and for all intents and purposes this should lead to the formation of new and creative purposes. These purposes, however, are not formed in a vacuum; they grow out of dynamic, forward – moving activity which brings the individual into a fruitful, manipulative relation with the environment. From this follows that, if education is to be a preparation for life, it must be achieved through active participation in life, a principle which, has brought about far reaching changes not only in the theory but also in the practice and technique of education.

THE SOCIAL ORDER OF ISLAM

It must be clearly understood, fully appreciated that, thus far the concentration on the education of the individual character as was envisaged by Iqbal. We had undertaken this aspect very briefly and have not exhausted this very important issue in this discussion. The individual is but one pole of the process of education. The entire social order, including the world of nature and its environs is the other pole. The function of education is therefore, to bring about a progressive interaction and dynamic adjustment between them. The school, using the term to include all kinds of educational institutions, is only one of the numerous factors which determine the course and direction of the individual’s development. It is far more powerfully and irresistibly influenced by the nature of the environing society and the ideology which inspires its group relationships and its social, political and economic life. What then is the conception of the social order implicit in Iqbal’s thought? What kind of society does he visualize in which his fully developed individual will be able to play his part effectively, without being frustrated at every step by adverse social conditions? What is the social order which will favour and stimulate the growth of such an individual?
In this regard it must be remembered and recalled that the development of the individual does not take place in a vacuum or only under the influence of the academic atmosphere in schools. It is the result of all the various forces, natural and cultural that plays on the individual. It is indeed a very controversial issue in a world full of different ideologies and political nuances and, therefore, has to be faced courageously. This is what precisely Iqbal did. In the attempt to analyze this social order the sources of Iqbal’s inspiration must be looked for in the teachings of Islam. In other words the Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) conception of Islam. The issue that requires some reflection is Iqbal’s desire, to resurrect the values of Islam, a reactionary step, a counsel of obscurantism? The question demands an unbiased and dispassionate examination of these social values and a mental readiness to take them on their merits, not rejecting them merely because they are old and derive their sanction from religion, nor accepting them unquestioningly on the same ground, but evaluating them with reference to actually existing social conditions and problems. He has constantly stressed in his works the fact of change and the dynamic nature of human society. On the other hand he stressed historic continuity. Life he further stated was not change, pure and simple but has within it elements of conservation also. No people can afford to reject their past entirely; for it is their past that has made their personal identity. This is only a philosophical argument for not rejecting the experience and institutions of the past and present; for the acceptance and affirmation of Islamic institutions as valuable for the modern age. He has more positive reasons to offer. He did not confine himself or his works to Islam but, was keenly interested in the search for a better social order. It is therefore, impossible to ignore the existing social system because his main object was and is to abolish all distinction of race, caste and colour. These issues according to Iqbal should not be dividing factors because of the rising tide of racialism and nationalism. His works therefore provide the greatest guarantee and hope of a society based on the principles of equality, social justice and human brotherhood, in order to build a social order on the broadest humanistic basis.

It must be acknowledged and appreciated that Iqbal was in many ways socialized by Islam being a Muslim and therefore, the extraordinary and remarkable personality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) provides another important focus of his loyalties for the growing polity of Islam and, its importance to the modern world and, this emotional concentration is and was a powerful means for transforming Muslims and the world into a vital and unified community. On the other hand this must be intertwined with the real significance of Muhammad’s (PBUH) prophethood, which lies in the nature of the message which was offered to mankind, enslaved in cruel bonds of its own making; a message of freedom, social equality and human brotherhood, an affirmation for the first time in history, in unequivocal terms, of complete equality of social status and legal rights. It restored to the full status of citizenship those who had been deprived of their human权利 on the grounds of race or colour or sex or social and economic circumstances. These aspects still remain perplexing issues in a modern and so – called civilized world. It is an indictment to modern civilization, in a world that has offered little hope to unity and in dealing with racial discrimination, poverty, and overt inequality. His works therefore reflected a living faith in social democracy so far as it could be practicable at the time of his writings and, bears relevance even today in a deprived and depraved world. It gave a new set of values and offered liberation to mankind, particularly to the poorer and the oppressed classes which had been kept under and are even today in many instances, kept under suppression by the exploiting rich and privileged elite based on patronage, who are the usurpers of political power. He pointed out poignantly how it rendered back to the people their natural rights, raised the status of the workers
and weakened the power of the usurpers. This has to be reengineered once again in a modern world that has lost its way in spite of its technological advancement and, much to the disadvantage of the predominantly poor that make up the world. Thus Iqbal wrote and argued that, the social order, contemplated by Islam, throws the weight of its legislation and, its sanctions towards redressing injustices and inequalities and tends to side with the weak against the strong. By its essentially democratic spirit and by cutting across the social and economic divisions of society it has always made for the mobility of social intercourse and arrested the stratification of society into mutually exclusive groups. Any social order which rejects or ignores these conditions of social health would militate against the vision of society implicit in Iqbal’s thought.

On the political side, this social order definitely rejects the claims of racial and geographical factors to dictate and circumscribe people’s loyalties. The exaggerated modern emphasis on territorial nationalism and aggressive patriotism is mischievous because it cuts across the international outlook of Islam and disrupts the essential solidarity of mankind. It strikes at the root of political sanity and it has been directly responsible for the bloodshed, destruction and unjust persecutions which embitter the present political situation. We recall in this regard Machiavelli who raised the State to the position of an absolute deity and openly preached the subordination of moral and ethical principles of political expediency. The pernicious practice of subjecting all values to the interests of a particular race or nation has been vigorously revived by the reactionary political systems of Fascism and Nazism or for that matter by Anglophone and Francophone colonization which was exemplified by overt superiority and racism of the apartheid regime of South Africa. In this regard Iqbal said that that these tendencies must be condemned and that the consequences of worshipping these idols of race, colour and nation are too obvious to need any detailed examination. We are living today in a veritable hell of their making.

In the days of its unquestioned ascendancy, Christianity frowned upon science and tolerated a great deal of the persecution of the scientific spirit carried on its name with the result that, in the early Middle Ages, Europe found itself plunged into intellectual darkness. On the other hand the civilization of Islam stimulated and encouraged the pursuit of science to a remarkable degree, so much so that, according to Briffault, the famous historian of civilization – science is the most momentous contribution of Arab civilization to the modern world. Nowhere is this decisive influence of Islamic culture as clear and momentous as in the genesis of that power which constitutes the distinctive force of the modern world and the supreme source of its victory in natural science and the scientific spirit. Iqbal makes it abundantly clear that the strengthening and fulfilment of national life is impossible without the fullest development of science and its utilization for its growing and expanding purposes. The issue that we must raise as a question is – Can there be a more passionate advocacy of science as an essential factor in the organization of education and of life? Iqbal, in this regard insists on it strongly, because one of the main causes which have been responsible for the later decline and decadence of the Muslim peoples is their neglect of science which has arrested their intellectual growth and weakened their political and economic position which, in the present age, is mainly dependent on scientific power. Education must, therefore, endeavour to make good this deficiency. Lastly, this social order must be a dynamic order, keenly alive and responsive to the fact of change and the formative forces that are playing on it constantly. Like some great thinkers of the age, Iqbal realized very clearly that life is constantly in a state of flux; it is perpetual change or motion. He postulated cogently
independent judgment and interpretation of religious law in the light of changed and changing circumstances to be essential for the healthy growth of the body politic. Iqbal, however, disagrees with those legists who would deny this right to present day Muslims. There should be no surrender of intellectual interdependence. The social order must not be allowed to be static. In this regard, Iqbal contends that the social order becomes static and lifeless when intellectual initiative and independent thinking become atrophied and people cling to the old and outworn ideas and forms because they do not have the courage to face and experiment with new ones. The possibilities of change Iqbal says is the greatest asset of man in his present surroundings.

THE CREATIVE VISION OF EDUCATION

It is the duty for all and particularly Muslims to translate the ideals of a progressive and humane social order that Iqbal talks about, in order to arrest, or at least avoid, the insane destruction, conflicts and injustices which characterize the modern civilization of the West. All have to pursue the ideal of the betterment of the world. This can be achieved by better communication by means of better values and in this regard education must play a major role. This education must permeate and vitalize the spirit and the ideals of the cultural social order which mankind must be in pursuit of. In this regard Iqbal talks of a dynamic and creative education, directed to the nurturing and the release of the creative spirit in man, in order to equip him with the desire and capacity to conquer new realms of art and science, knowledge and power; an education inspired by the optimistic faith in the destiny of man. Science he says must occupy a central space in it, giving man not only sovereignty over nature but control over the scientific method through which he can explore and consciously reconstruct his world. It must allow for continuity of purpose because the centrality of science in terms of the practical and intellectual significance cannot be ignored in the modern world and therefore consequently in education. It must occupy with religion a central place in any synthesis of all the data of human experience. We must not be opposed to science and has to be given a prominent place in education, for it is the most powerful source of idealism and intuitive love for humanity according to Iqbal because, it ensures that man will use his tremendous powers, for the good of man and the world. In this regard, he says that only by raising a fresh vision of his origin and future that man will eventually triumph over a society motivated by inhuman competition and a civilization that has lost its spiritual unity by an inner conflict of religious and political values. Thus we return to the conception of man with which we started because, the conception of man as an active agent, a doer, a shaper of purposes, who must not only be engaged in the reconstruction of this world but also be involved in the far more significant experiment of creatively unfolding and perfecting his individuality. This is what Iqbal alludes to and speaks to the justification and reaffirmation of faith in the methods of education which must stimulate self – activity and thus cultivate the will to courageous effort in behalf of great causes. In other words the significance of action is cardinal and, therefore, he says that people must not be contented with political and intellectual slavery. But at the same time he denounces ruthless efficiency as was experienced during the age of the puritan work ethic and, the preoccupation with trivial, pointless activity which ignores the appreciation of life. Man must he says make a distinction between the efficient and the effective self which is of great significance for education. Finally, education must be conducted in the most liberal and broad – minded spirit so as to give the generation of youth a definite bias in favour of an all – embracing humanity, and a truly international outlook and to arrest the growth of narrow, political, racial or geographical,
loyalties. However, it must appreciate group culture and indeed group psychology, it must act as a bulwark against modern forces of obscurantism which, under the names of nationalism or patriotism, or purity of blood and race or carrying the white man’s burden which and are undermining international peace and thus setting at naught all principles of justice and humanity. Iqbal has postulated that — can education build a world worthy for man’s habitation? This is Iqbal’s challenge to mankind and is captured in one of his poems as follows:

This world which is a riot of colour and sound,
This world which is under the sway of Death;
This world which is an idol – house of sight and sound,
Where life is naught but eating and drinking;
It is only the first stage in the perfection of the ego,
Traveller! It is not the goal;
Forge ahead, shattering this great obstruction,
Conquering this illusion of space and time;
There are many worlds still unborn,
For the mind of Existence is not a void;
All are awaiting thy triumphant advance,
And the subtlety of thy thought and action;
What is the purpose if this whirligig of Time?
That thy Ego may be revealed to thee!
Thou art the conqueror of the world of Good and Evil,
I dare not reveal thy great destiny;
My heart is aflame with the light of inspiration
But the power of my speech confesses its defeat;
“If I step further even by a hair’s breadth
The glaring light will burn up my soaring wings.”

CONCLUSION

In a short narrative of this nature, it is impossible to do justice to Iqbal’s education philosophy. It is important to acknowledge and pay tribute to this outstanding personality and thinker who has written for all times and his works have to be relived and recalled, in an unfolding and confused world. A world that has failed the education dialogue, narrative and conversation. Saiyidain has with great skill related Iqbal’s principles and has explained what they imply as far back as the 1930’s. It is an illuminating synthesis of the philosophy of a great thinker. We can only do justice to Iqbal by pondering upon his rich poetry which was a hallmark of his writings, thinking and philosophy. Saiyidain attempted to glean from Iqbal’s poetry and writings a systematic account of his ideas about and his attitude towards various problems within education. These problems still confront the modern face of education throughout the world. We would do ourselves as great service to look more intently into the works and writings of Sir Muhammad Iqbal because of its relevance to the contemporary world of education. There is no doubt that his works are in some ways controversial but most relevant to education discourse. Saiyidain himself an ardent educationist discerns in Iqbal’s poetry the creative ideology of an educational philosopher par excellence. In so doing he rightly understands education in a wide sense, as the sum total of all the cultural forces which play on the life of a person or a community.