

# Iqbal's "Mard-e-Mo'min" and Nietzsche's Influence

Riffat Hassan

S. Kashyap has observed in his article entitled "Sir Mohammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche" ("Sir Mohammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche," in *Islamic Quarterly*, Volume 2/3, No.1, October/April 1955, p. 181) that the three stages of the development of the Self advocated by Iqbal are Nietzschean in origin. Iqbal seems to have been aware that the "superficial resemblance between the three stages of the growth of "Khudi" and the three stages of the metamorphosis of the spirit in Nietzsche's thought could become a source of confusion. In order to avoid this he ventures an explanation: "The first metamorphosis of life according to him (Nietzsche) is camel, which from his point of view is a symbol of load-bearing strength. The second is lion, that is to say the strength to kill without pity, for pity is a vice and not virtue with Nietzsche. The third metamorphosis is child, that is to say the superman passing beyond good and evil like the child and becoming a law unto himself. This is materialism turning the human ego into a monster." (S. A. Vahid, Editor, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 241). Iqbal

Iqbal's Perfect Person is deeply compassionate though - like Nietzsche's Superman - he, too, is strong, vital and passionate. In him "Power is supplemented by Love, the expression of the Will is chastened through contemplation of the beautiful and the arrogance of Reason is curbed by the mellow wisdom of mystical insight." (N. S. Naravane, "Iqbal," in *Modern Indian Thought*, pp. 294-295). Iqbal says:

Vengeance, forgiveness, piety and power -  
of these four elements a Muslim is made.

(*Zarb-e-Kalim*, p. 57)

Furthermore, Iqbal's Perfect Person cannot be a law unto himself. He must not transgress the limits imposed by the Divine Law. This is one of the fundamental distinctions between Iqbal's Perfect Person and Nietzsche's Superman. The latter considers himself above the law, the former discovers the sources of law within himself.

## Diamond and Coal

In *Asrar-e-Khudi* Iqbal relates the story of the Diamond and the Coal which has been borrowed from Nietzsche. Nietzsche writes:

“Why so hard?” said the kitchen coal once to the diamond: “are you not then near relations?”  
“Why so soft? O my brother, thus I ask: are you not my brothers?  
Why so soft so yielding and submitting?  
Why is so much evasion, denial in your heart?  
So little fate in your gaze ...  
... All creators are hard. And delight it must seem to you to press your hand on centuries as one wax -  
Delight to write on the will of centuries as on bronze - harder than bronze, nobler than bronze. Only the noblest is quite hard.  
This new commandment, O my brothers, I put over to you: become hard.”

(Nietzsche quoted in “*Sir Mohammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche*,” p. 186)

Iqbal writes:

The coal in the mine said to the diamond  
“O thou entrusted with splendours everlasting:  
We are comrades and our being is one;  
The source of our existence is the same.  
Yet while I die in here in the anguish of worthlessness,  
Thou art set on the crowns of emperors.  
“O sagacious friend,” said the diamond,  
“Dark earth, when hardened becomes in dignity as a bezel.  
Having been at strife with its environment,  
It is ripened by the struggle and grows hard like a stone.  
Because thy being is immature, thou hast become abased;  
Because thy body is soft, thou art burnt.  
Be void of fear, grief and anxiety;  
Be hard as a stone, be a diamond.  
In solidity consists the glory of Life;  
Weakness is worthlessness and immaturity

(*Asrar-e-Khudi*, pp. 63-64; translation by R. A. Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self*, pp. 104-107)

### Resemblance

Although the resemblance between Nietzsche's and Iqbal's story and its moral is unmistakable yet Iqbal does not wish his words to be taken as a mere echo of Nietzsche. He says, "When I say 'Be hard as a diamond: I do not mean as Nietzsche does, callousness or pitilessness. What I mean is the integration of the elements of the ego so that it may be able to obstruct the forces of destruction in its means towards personal immortality.'" (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 244). Here Iqbal may be doing Nietzsche some injustice. Just as there is nothing fundamentally harsh in Iqbal's own thought despite all his stress on conquest and self-assertion, there is "in Nietzsche ... behind the facade of cynicism, a tenderness that it often missed on superficial acquaintance." ("Iqbal," p. 298). Perhaps unconsciously, Iqbal too was aware of it, since he said of Nietzsche:

His heart is a believer though his brain is an infidel.

(*Payam-e-Mashriq*, p. 241)

Iqbal agrees with Nietzsche that creeds may be classified as those which say "Yea" to life and those which say "Nay." Like Nietzsche, Iqbal attacks fiercely all those modes of thinking which preach self-negation in any form. Life is to be affirmed not denied as Nietzsche held. In *Asrar-e-Khudi* he subjects to scathing criticism and bitter scorn all life-stultifying creeds which preach such a philosophy:

Forget the self, if thou art wise!  
If thou dost not forget thy self, thou art mad.  
Close thine eyes, close thine ears, close thy lips.  
That thy thought may reach the lofty sky!

(*Asrar-e-Khudi*, p. 32; translation by R. A. Nicholson, *The Secrets of the Self*, p. 53)

Like Nietzsche, Iqbal believes that "The Superman is the meaning of the world" and that he lives in perpetual tension. But while Nietzsche's Superman is a fanatic, Iqbal's "*Mard-e-Mo'min*" is tolerant. The Superman seeks power for its own

sake but for Iqbal power is not an end in itself. About power, Iqbal says:

If it is irreligious, it is worse than deadly poison,  
if it is in defence or religion, it is the antidote to all kinds of poison.

(*Zarb-e-Kalim*, p.23)

Furthermore, by power Iqbal means “the power of the spirit, not brute force.” To him the Superman “is a biological product. The Islamic Perfect Man is the product of moral and spiritual forces.” (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 242)

Iqbal always maintained that the idea of the Perfect Person was Islamic, not Nietzschean. Yet, as A. M. Schimmel points out, “Nietzsche’s Superman may still have acted as a ferment in the formation of Iqbal’s ideals.(*Gabriel’s Wing*). The question of the degree of Iqbal’s indebtedness to Nietzsche is, by no means easy to decide. Certainly it is true that Iqbal had begun to think about the idea of the Perfect Person long before he studied Nietzsche. But Iqbal did recognize a kindred spirit in Nietzsche. That is hardly surprising - they were both great dissenters, almost repudiators of most that is conventionally hallowed, iconoclasts who brought about intellectual revolutions. What they had in common above all was “the brave and heroic will to accept life as it is and to master it.” (*Gabriel’s Wing*, p. 323)

Iqbal appreciated Nietzsche’s dynamic spirit, he also agreed with him in his positive evaluation of suffering: “We must in the words of Nietzsche’s say yea to the suffering of life.” In *Payam-e-Mashriq* Iqbal brings out very cleverly the difference between Schopenhauer’s pessimistic and Nietzsche’s undaunted heroic will. The former is the bird which is forever lamenting:

A bird flew from its nest and ranged about the garden, its soft  
breast was pierced by a rose-thorn.  
It reviled the nature of Time’s garden; it throbbed with its own  
pain and the pain of others.  
It thought the tulip was branded with the blood of innocents; in  
the closed bud it saw the guile of spring.

(*Payam-e-Mashriq*, p. 234; translation by R. A. Nicholson, “Iqbal’s  
‘Message of the East’”, p. 121))

The latter makes his remedy from his pain:

From its cries of burning woe a hoopoe's heart caught fire.  
The hoopoe with its beak drew forth the thorn from its body.  
Saying, "Get thee profit out of loss: the rose has created pure gold  
by rending her breast.  
If thou art wounded, make the pain thy remedy. Accustom thyself  
to thorns that thou mayest become entirely one with the garden."

(*Payam-e-Mashriq*, p. 235; translation by R. A. Nicholson, "Iqbal's  
'Message of the East'," p. 121))

But while Iqbal strongly agrees with Nietzsche's "will-to-power" (meaning thereby the fullest possible realization of a complete self-reliant personality) "for the shrewd observer the differences between the Nietzschean and the Iqbalian concept of the Perfect Man are immediately visible. Iqbal's Perfect Man is not the Man without God, or who replaces a God 'who has died'...but contrariwise the Man who has fully realized his personal relation with the God with whom he lives, works and talks." (*Gabriel's Wing*, pp. 119-120).

Nietzsche was escaping from the "mass man" who was "born of industrialism, living on newspapers, dying in the dregs of Christianity; a man incapable of evil, because all his passions will have been atrophied, security, incessant mass-produced entertainment; content because no longer eager to create, but only to consume, at one with his neighbours and himself because indifferent to all that makes for truth." (F. A. Lea, *The Tragic Philosopher*, London, 1957, p. 201). One can understand, and Iqbal understood too, why Nietzsche created the Superman.

That he was inspired, Iqbal admits when he calls him "Hallaj without a cross" and a "*majzub*" - one who receives illumination in his heart without any endeavor on his part. In Iqbal's view it was undeniable "that a really 'imperative' vision of the Divine in man did come to him" (Nietzsche). Elaborating on this point, Iqbal stated: "I call his vision 'imperative' because it appears to have given him a kind of prophetic mentality which by some kind of technique, aims at turning its visions into permanent life-forces. Yet Nietzsche was a failure, and his failure was mainly due to his intellectual progenitors such as Schopenhauer, Darwin and Lange whose influence completely blinded him to the real significance of his vision. Instead of looking for a spiritual rule which would develop the Divine even in a plebeian and thus open up before him an infinite future, Nietzsche was driven to seek the

realization of his vision in such schemes as aristocratic radicalism.” (*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*). Nietzsche failed, then in Iqbal’s opinion, “for want of external guidance in his spiritual life.” (*Ibid.*) Iqbal refers to Nietzsche as “*majzub*” (God-absorbed) and says regretfully and not without a note of affection:

Had that “*majzub*” of Europe been living at this hour,  
Iqbal would have explained to him the station of God.

(*Bal-e-Jibril*, p. 82)

“Iqbal's “*Mard-e-Mo'min*” and Nietzsche's Influence,” in *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, Pakistan,  
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