

**Sources of Knowledge in Iqbal’s Philosophy of  
Education: An Analytical Study**

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**Abstract:**

Allama Muhammad Iqbal was a poet and philosopher as well as an educationist. Although there are no formal works of his on the philosophy of education, yet his poetry, prose and sermons contain ample educational guidance. In terms of education, the sources of knowledge are very important. Iqbal has thoroughly discussed the sources of education and has discussed revelation, intuition as well as teacher, curriculum and research. These ideas of his not only clarify the lines of his philosophy of education, but also determine a course of action for Muslim education.

**Keywords:** *Iqbal, Philosophy of Education, Intellect, Revelation, Intuition, Teacher, Curriculum, Research*

Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal was a famous philosopher and poet as well as an educationist. He performed teaching services in leading educational institutions of the world. He had a keen eye on the education system of the subcontinent. Like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, he was striving and painstaking for the betterment and welfare of Muslim Community of the subcontinent. It is also a fact that apart from philosophical writings and poetry, there is no regular writing of him regarding the philosophy of education. In this regard, he can be counted with the great Muslim philosophers Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) and Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) that both of them have discussed the philosophy of education and the system of education, but there is no formal work of theirs.

Allama Iqbal's philosophy of education can be well derived from his poetry, his lectures and essays. In this regard, there are some articles of his early  
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period that he wrote regarding the education and training of children (1902) and civil life (1904). According to him, education is the main source of the rise of a nation. Education is necessary for the intellectual, moral, collective and social development of a person. He has described knowledge as a basic and important factor that can play an important role for social and individual development. Man is a small phenomenon of this vast universe like other phenomena of nature, but knowledge is the main feature which distinguishes him from all of them. Knowledge is such a light that makes this thin dust the most superior creature on the earth. The main purpose of the knowledge is to ignite and enlighten intellect in him. According to Iqbal, the intellect gained from knowledge is of two types, which he mentions in his poetry:

اک دانش نورانی، اک دانش برہانی  
ہے دانش برہانی، حیرت کی فراوانی

“One intellect is derived from light and one intellect is derived from logic. The intellect that comes from logic is so much astonishing.”[1]

The intellect derived from light comes through revelation, religious experience or intuition. Human effort does not involve in its achieving, while the second type of intellect is obtained from the knowledge that is achieved by human effort. Iqbal in his work has discussed in detail these two types of knowledge. Thus below we will discuss these types and sources of knowledge.

**Revelation:** According to Iqbal, revelation is inner experience and source of knowledge that the Lord reveals through an angel or directly to the heart of His Prophet. Iqbal also calls it a religious experience. According to Iqbal's mentor Mavlana Rumi, revelation is knowledge that God Himself teaches His prophets:

بے تعلیم حق دہدا اور علوم  
علمہائے برتر از درکِ فہوم

“The Prophets were given knowledge directly by Allah Almighty without being taught by any teacher and such knowledge is beyond the understanding of a non-prophet”. [2]

Iqbal considers other forms for which the word revelation is used in the Qur'an are actually lower forms of intuition that can be attributed to the nature of any living being. He describes revelation as a universal attribute of life. Just like stages in the evolution of life, he is convinced of the stages of revelation.

He does not consider it limited only to the human being, but in his opinion, a plant growing freely in the air, an animal with a new evolving part of the body according to the new environment and a human being receiving light from the inner depth of his life, are different conditions of revelation. He says:

“In his (Prophets) personality the finite centre of life sinks into his own infinite depths only to spring up again, with fresh vigour, to destroy the old, and to disclose the new directions of life. This contact with the root of his own being is by no means peculiar to man. Indeed the way in which the word 'Wahy' (inspiration) is used in the Quran shows that the Quran regards it as a universal property of life; though its nature and character are different at different stages of the evolution of life.”[3]

Revelation is a source of knowledge that is solid and based on authenticity. There is no room for any kind of doubt in it. Although it is beyond the senses, its truths are met by sense experiences. Iqbal gives priority to revelation over intuition. He says in the context of the discussion of Prophethood consciousness and Mystic consciousness that the nature of Mystic experience is merely personal, internal and non-revolutionary for society because the Mystic develops a close relationship with God, desires for His closeness. This eternal closeness is his spiritual ascension and the purpose of his life. That's why Mystic's intuition and spiritual manifestations cannot lead to revolution in the society. On the contrary, the Prophet gets close to God, gets His gaudiness, leads a great social and collective revolution in the outer world and creates a new nation. He comments on the comprehensive effectiveness of this revolution-wide reform program of the Prophet:

“The desire to see his religious experience transformed into a living world-force is supreme in the prophet.”[4]

**Intuition:** Intuition is the source of knowledge which is based on feeling instead of mind and senses and it is also used in the meaning of insight. Islamic culture has declared the heart as its center. The knowledge acquired through this means is called wisdom (Ma'arfat) and its expert is called wiser (Arif). Iqbal says that two criteria can be resorted to in order to assess the validity of information or spiritual observations obtained through the medium of intuition or mysticism. One is a rational standard and the other is a practical standard. A

rational standard refers to the critical interpretation of a spiritual observation that proves, regardless of the pre-established assumptions of human experience, which intuitive information leads to that particular reality. , to that critical interpretation leads him. As far as a practical criterion is concerned, it refers to evaluating the soundness of spiritual observation with respect to its results. According to Iqbal, a philosopher works by the rational standard and the prophet by the practical standard. [5] Mavlana Rumi describes intuition as a continuation of revelation. In his view, the series of revelation reserved for Prophethood is now over, but other people are still to benefit from it. According to him, all knowledge and art around the world is the product of revelation. He considers it the source of all scientific achievements and inventions through sudden manifestation of the thought in the consciousness without intention:

قابلِ تعلیم و فہم ست اس خرد  
لیک صاحبِ وحیِ تعلیمش دہد

“Education and wisdom are obtained from the intellect. The intellect gets knowledge from Prophet.”[6]

In imitation of Mavlana Rumi, although Iqbal attributes meditative or spontaneous knowledge to mystical experiences and spiritual conditions, but he does not consider it as final as revelation. He believes that intuition is not as reliable as revelation, because sometimes Satan interferes in the purely spiritual feeling or intuitive circuit of a human being and leads him to error. [7] On the contrary, revelation is free from all kinds of evil influences and interference.

**Teacher:** The second type of knowledge that according to Iqbal, from which intellect of logic is obtained is contemporary education, for that the two main sources of knowledge are the teacher and the curriculum. The importance of the teacher is more than the curriculum because he is a living example for his students; he inspires them through his character and actions. Whether it is the training of the theoretical intellect or the practical intellect, the acquisition of knowledge or the building of character, the teacher plays the role of the person who has the greatest influence on the student. So, according to Iqbal, the teacher should have the grace of sight (Faizan e Nazar), through which he should illuminate the student's inner as well as his appearance. In this regard, he presents the example of Ismail (AS):

یہ فیضانِ نظر تھا یا کہ کتب کی کرامت تھی  
سکھائے کس نے اسماعیل کو آدابِ فرزندگی

“Was it the grace of sight or the mystery of the school, who taught Ismail the manners of sonhood? [8]

Iqbal obviously emphasizes on ideologically oriented system of education. He wishes a teacher to have understanding and insight of ideal education, which he is going to transmit to the students mainly through his ideal character. Every system of education is the creation of an ideal. The text book, mentality and behavior of teacher and the atmosphere of institute in so far as they uphold that system reflect the ideal. Therefore, the ideal is continually attracting pupil towards itself. Education is a servant of ideals, whether wrong or right. In the opinion of Iqbal a strong love of the right ideal should be the object of education. [9] It is necessary for the teacher to be well aware of the principles of child development. He should have complete expertise in his subject. In the educational process, he should consider the order of nature and the development of mental organs. He should present his character as an example to the children in order to exercise the instinct of imitation. Iqbal writes about teachers:

“Teachers are actually protectors of the nation, because it is their job to groom the future generations and make them capable of serving the country. It is the greatest and highest work of all works. Although unfortunately this profession is not valued as it should be in this country. The duty of a teacher is the most difficult and important of all duties, because the key to all kinds of moral, cultural and religious virtues is in his hands and the source of all country's development is its hard work. Therefore, it is necessary for the teaching professionals to establish their teaching methods on high-level academic principles in terms of the sanctity and dignity of their profession.”[10]

Iqbal terms the teacher as custodian of society, architect of nation, responsible of nation's prosperity and above all spiritual mentor of a student. [11] Iqbal holds that in the absence of perfect teacher development, promoting individuality is impossible. The teacher as a dynamic personality could promote human excellence in diverse dimensions, intellectual, emotional and moral. His personality is a main source of student's creative activity. Iqbal observes that the teacher in contemporary India does not fulfill his ideal role; he reveals the <https://journalsriuf.com/index.php/IJLL/index>

characteristic of a good teacher, who should perform his role like a dazzling sun, which enlightens the whole universe, whose heat nourishes even what is hidden in the earth. [12] According to him teacher is a builder, who shapes better the souls of human beings:

شیخ مکتب ہے اک عمارت گر

جس کی صنعت ہے روح انسانی

"A teacher is like a builder whose business is the training of human souls." [13]

Iqbal not only presented theoretical ideas for a good teacher, but also he recommended effective learning methods i.e. self-activity, learning by doing and critical thinking and reasoning to improve teacher performance and achieve the objectives in better way.

**Curriculum:** Curriculum is a unit without which no education system is complete. This is the source of knowledge whose importance cannot be denied in any way. In view of its importance, Allama Iqbal on various occasions not only discussed the importance of curriculum but also gave suggestions for a balanced curriculum. Iqbal emphasizes a curriculum that is realistic and related to the needs and demands of developing individual and reflecting the norms, values and aspirations of society. He wanted subjects which should help the students to have all round development: physical, social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual. [14] Through the curriculum, Iqbal wants to create a nation in which every individual is filled with feelings like love of knowledge, compassion, helping the weak, striving for the prosperity of the country and promotion of goodness in the world. So he expresses his wish in his poem "Child's Prayer":

دور دنیا کا مرے دم سے اندھیرا ہو جائے

! ہر جگہ میرے چمکنے سے اجالا ہو جائے

"O God! May the darkness of the world be removed from my existence! May all places be illuminated by my light!" [15]

Although Iqbal called himself just talkative personality (Guftaar ka Ghazi) but he was a practical man. He accomplished many practical feats in his life. Education and learning were very much attached to him and in this regard he was very careful about the curriculum so he compiled a textbook of 316 pages in 1924 along with Hakeem Ahmad Shuja which was published by Kapur & Sons Lahore. In its introduction he elaborates on the principles of purposeful

curriculum in detail. [16] As a true benefactor and reformer of the nation, Iqbal was in favor to establish a great educational institution. In this regard, he presented the idea of an ideal university while speaking at Aligarh in 1910. He said:

“It is absolutely necessary to establish a new ideal University based on the Islamic civilization in which the ancient and the modern have been mixed in a wonderful way. It is not an easy task to draw this kind of ideal image. It requires a high imagination, a subtle sense of the trends of the times and a correct interpretation of the meaning of Muslim history and religion.” [17]

The main task of Iqbal's proposed ideal university is to prepare the model of civilization in which the present Muslims should be molded. In this model there should be a beautiful mixture of manifestations of Kaleem and observations of the sage. Islam will be its soul and modern sciences will be its main part. Regarding modern sciences, Iqbal's opinion is that the ideas and experiences of Islamic thinkers and scientists paved the way for them, so Muslims should follow the steps of the fast pace of these sciences. [18] How was it possible that Iqbal could outline the ideal university and forget its most important element, the curriculum? According to him, in order to fit the motto of this ideal university into the teaching material, the classification of the curriculum will be as follows:

Teachings of Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, Tafsir and Logic etc. should be given priority in Curriculum. These subjects will highlight the spiritual basis of the universe and build a strong character that will provide the perspective under which civil and physical sciences will be studied later.

On the second level the knowledge of history, economics and sociology will come that have a lot of influence in determining the direction of our individual and national life. The study of national literature will also be necessary to gain access to national thought and imagination.

Physics based on inductive observation will also be taught. Scientific research and inventions improve our social life and change our thinking patterns and spiritual needs.

Nature has laid special emphasis on two things. Anfus and Afaq, Anfus refers to one's own self. Therefore, it is necessary to include such subjects in the curriculum that can build a person's character and cultivate the self.

1. Afaq is a big world that invites man to study and contemplate the

- universe beyond him. Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Geology, and Astronomy etc. are related to universal knowledge. So it is important that all of them should be made a part of the curriculum. [19]
2. 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. [20]
  3. The modern era is the era of industrial and technical development. The greatness and exaltation of countries and nations is associated with the development of industry, mechanics and craftsmanship, so technical education should be the part of the curriculum. [21]

**Research:** Although research is not a source of knowledge, it is definitely a tool that helps in arriving at new facts. Iqbal was not only a researcher himself but also loved research very much. According to him, research is very important for the development and rise of nations. The nations that make research their motto rule the world. While nations that ignore it soon become subjugated. Absence of research among modern Muslims is a source of pain and suffering for him. He expresses this sorrow in his poetry:

شیر مردوں سے ہو ایشہء تحقیق تھی  
رہ گئے صوفی و ملا کے غلام اے ساقی!

“The field of research has become empty of brave and honest people. Now only those who blindly believe in the words of Sufis and Mullahs are left.”[22]

Iqbal calls research the achievement of life, the key to success and the cause of greatness. He believes that if the work of research is carried out sincerely keeping the goal in front, then the complex problems of the world can be accessed by reaching the hidden secrets of God and revealing them as well.

تُو نے یہ کیا غضب کیا، مجھ کو بھی فاش کر دیا  
میں ہی تو ایک راز تھا سینہ کائنات میں!

“What a strange thing you have done; you revealed me. I was the only secret that was hidden in deep of the universe.”[23]

In his last days, Allama Iqbal had a strong desire to devote all his time to Islamic research. In his opinion, the solution to this degradation of Muslims lies only in research. He wanted to write tafseer e Qur'an. He wanted to codify jurisprudence



afresh and to do research on Islamic laws. In this regard, he presented some principles of research in his letters and lectures which have been included by Muhammad Ahmad Khan in his book "Iqbal aur Masla e Taleem":

- Western civilization and modern intellect are very fascinating, but proper research and analysis of Islamic problems is possible only when the mind is freed from the grip of these things.
- Quran and Sunnah are the real source, standard and criteria for researching and analyzing Islamic issues in the light of current thoughts, construction and interpretation. The thoughts and actions of Muslims should be judged on the same criteria, rather than judging Islamic issues by making the thoughts and actions of Muslims a criterion.
- The basic beliefs and basic metaphysical concepts of Islam should be reconstructed in the light of modern thoughts or philosophy.
- In view of the changing social conditions of the present age, modern social ideas and movements and its effects on Muslims, especially Muslim youth, the current anxiety of the human world and the need for a new world order in the future, the interpretation, explanation and formation of the collective system of Islam should be done.
- Special arrangements should be made for the education and training of those working in Islamic research. They should be introduced to ancient and modern knowledge and should also be taught Languages i.e. Arabic, Persian, English, German and French.[24]

From all this discussion we come to the conclusion that Iqbal sees sources of knowledge from a particular perspective. According to him, real knowledge is that which comes from revelation and intuition. If the self (Khudi) of individuals is stable, intuitive knowledge can be very helpful in the development of nations. The importance of teacher, curriculum and research in modern teaching cannot be denied. A teacher influences students by his or her behavior, so he or she should have exemplary character. Curriculum plays an important role in the organization and formation of beliefs and thoughts, so where the curriculum is in accordance with the modern needs, it should also take care of the intellectual needs of the nation. The importance of research in the development of nations cannot be denied, so it is very important for research to be pure, standardized and balanced.

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