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## THE THEME OF SELF IN IQBAL'S SECRETS OF THE SELF

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### Abstract:

*Mohammad Iqbal is a distinguished poet, philosopher and statesman of South Asia. For his grand verse and in-depth knowledge of the subject matter he has been hailed as the poet of the East, Allama, Sir Mohammad Iqbal and so on. The basic sources of his philosophy are the Qur'an (holy book for Muslims), the Muslim Philosophers and mystics, and the Western philosophy and science. Drawing on the religious, spiritual, and literary source of Islam, Iqbal in his magnum opus work, Asrar-i-Khudi (written in Persian verse and translated into English language by Professor R.A. Nicholson as Secrets of the Self), offers a detailed statement of his philosophy of Khudi (selfhood), illustrating the main elements of that philosophy with stories and anecdotes. It is tangible in this book that Iqbal is conscious of his role as a bearer of prophetic message to the Muslims of his age and the generations to come. The essence of that message is the cultivation of dynamic human personality through action, struggle and acceptance of life's challenges. In this book, Iqbal mentions primarily factors that strengthen Self (for example, love of God and Prophet Mohammad SAW, devotion to a noble cause, self-discipline and struggle against odds) and the reasons that weaken it (such as dependence on others, inaction or inertia and life-negating philosophy and literature). The concept of self is the central idea of Iqbal's philosophy on which rest of his thought structure is based. The central premises of the Secrets of the Self, revolves around the elevation of the Self and addresses the Muslims to improve their spiritual being rather than bodily and worldly needs.*

### KEY WORDS:

Poet of the East, Muslim Philosophers and Mystics, Qur'an (holy book for Muslims) Western Philosophy and Khudi (selfhood).

### INTRODUCTION

Allama Mohammad Iqbal is generally known as a poet and a philosopher, besides being a social reformer, a politician, a jurist and a great Islamic scholar. To honor him for his broader vision and his unique poetry he is also referred to as "Shaere-Mashriq (Poet of the East)." Unlike Shakespeare, Keats and Ghalib, he wrote poetry with a purpose. Rejecting the idea of art for art's sake, Iqbal used poetry to state and argue for a carefully formed and passionately held-world-view. It is unequivocal that as far as Iqbal's poetry is concerned, he seems to be a less poet but more an instructor to the mankind especially to the Muslim world. It is generally believed that Urdu literary world chiefly rests on two great figures that brought about revolutionary changes and innovative taste to the Urdu world is Ghalib and Iqbal. Iqbal wrote with great facility in three languages—Urdu, Persian, and English—and produced works in all three. He wrote prose

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in English, poetry in Persian, and both prose and poetry in Urdu. The zeal and zest of his poetry made him an eternal figure unshaken by the storms of mortality. His poetry contains variety of themes which include religion and politics, freedom and determinism, art and literature and their role in society, reason and intuition, relationship between oppressor and oppressed etc.

Asrar-i-Khudi was published in 1915. The book was originally composed in Persian language for Iqbal felt the language was well-suited for the expression of various novel ideas. Iqbal believed that many ideas expressed in this book were completely original; they had never been expressed before either in the East or in the West. It was the first philosophical poetry book of Iqbal the great poet-philosopher of British India. Many critics are of the say that this book is by and large Iqbal's finest poetic work. R.A.Nicholson, an eminent English Orientalist, scholar of both Islamic literature and Islamic mysticism translated Asrar-i-Khudi, during Iqbal's life time and named it as Secrets of the Self.

The most important of Iqbal's contribution is the enunciation of the concept of self. And the realization of the 'self' or 'Khudi'; realization of the potential that God has endowed man with is the fundamental theme of all Iqbal's major works and his Secrets of the Self is no exception to it. This is the most prominent lesson he wished to deliver to the man. As he says,

“I unveiled the mystery of self  
And disclosed its wondrous secret.”

Since time immemorial, man has been torn between different realms of destiny (Taqdeer) and self (Khudi). Iqbal prepared the way and made them clear two different entities. He asks mankind to change the destiny which means that self must come into action in man to alter it. Complains to destiny bears no validity in Iqbal's idea of self. Time and again he portrays in his works the determination of man's self. Infact, he wants that man must recognize his powers assigned to him by God, which he defines magnificently in the following lines:

“Do not defame self by complaining the fate  
By anticipation the riches of the world came to the being  
From the heart of man comes out the natural voice  
One who came across himself, mind he came across God.”

For Iqbal Self is an active and creative force in which a person strives towards the achievement of rich personality as well as the participation in the affairs of the universe to suit his highest position as the vicegerent of God on earth – Iqbal calls him naib-i-haqq (God's Vicegerant). The man in whom 'self' is fully developed is called the Perfect Man. The terms Iqbal uses to describe the perfect man include 'Man of Truth', 'Free Man' and 'Believer' (one who is a true Muslim). The Perfect Man is the one who directs the course of history, develops life's potentialities, and creates a society that is based on the principles of peace, equality and justice. Iqbal in Secrets of the Self, describes prophet Muhammad as the Perfect Man. The prophet's life-giving breath grew tulips in Arabia's desert, creating such outstanding personalities as Abu Bakr, Umar, Ali and Hussain. The prophet therefore, ought to command a Muslims highest loyalty, for it is the only by following him that one who is imperfect can hope to become perfect. The 'Perfect Man' represents a model that is valid for all ages.

Iqbal equates self with life and both with action. The state of passivity and inaction is a disease in his eyes in which, he believed, can be cured by self-affirmation, self expression and self development. Iqbal would urge the Muslims to arise, awake and act. Action is life and inaction is death. This thought is brilliantly expressed by him in the following verse:

“Life springs from perpetual moment  
Motion constitutes the wave's whole existence.”

Iqbal abhorred inaction and laziness for if man becomes inactive he is bound to be suppressed and used by the oppressors. In his own words, “someone else will make the bricks of thine earth.” Thus he gives the resounding call to his brethren in Secrets of the Self as:

“Build thy clay into Man  
Build thy Man into a world.”

He uses the term 'asking' i.e., su'al in the sense of inaction. He pleads to avoid all forms of asking i.e., inaction for it brings disintegration to human self. It deprives the self of the light of illumination. In

order to fortify the ego we should cultivate love – the power of assimilative action. The lesson of assimilative action is given by the life of Prophet Mohammad, at least, to a Muslim. The whole life of Mohammad was of action. His actions justified his ideals. It is through action that we can achieve our aspirations and rise to a higher level of existence. Anything achieved by one's own labor is more pleasing than the one got by asking (begging). He writes in the Secrets of the Self:

“A whole ocean if gained by begging, is  
but a sea of fire;  
Sweet is a little dew gathered by one's own hand.”

Action is necessity of life. It makes our personality strong. Iqbal is a staunch advocate of the importance of activity and creativeness in life. Infact all, our creativeness comes through action. No action, no creativity. And without creativity no progress is possible. Not only man but even God is active in order to be creative. The following passage from Secrets of the Self, forcefully states Iqbal's philosophy of action:

“Action sums up the lesson of life;  
The joy of creation is the law of life.  
Rise, and be creator of a new world;  
With flames about you, earn the fame of Abraham  
To conform to a contrary world  
Is to lay down arms on the battlefield.  
The world itself conforms to the ways  
Of a self-respecting, seasoned man.  
And if the world does not conform to his ways,  
He declares the war against the heavens.  
He destroys the foundations of the existing world...  
By his own power he brings into being  
A new world that is friendlier to him.  
If it is not possible to live like men in the world,  
Then to lay down one's life like men—that is life.”

In Secrets of the Self, Iqbal as often as not mentions that individuals do not exist in a vacuum. They live in a material world. They are confronted with an environment in which thoughts, beliefs and actions have their natural occurrences for the external world exists. It is impossible to deny the very things which we see, feel and hear in our day-to-day life. The denial of external world and self – negation have only brought calamity to the eastern people. The idea of other – worldliness and renunciation is very injurious for self – development. Self can realize its potentiality only through the immensity of a material world. He firmly believes that the development of the 'self' is possible only through proper relation between it and its environment. He therefore, vehemently denounces Plato's theory of super sensuous world. Plato thought that our world was a shadow of the real external world – the world of ideas. To him, the world of phenomena was a myth. The revelation of the secret of life for Plato was possible only after death. Such an attitude of retirement was never healthy for any nation. In Secrets of the Self, Iqbal calls Plato 'a sheep in man's clothing' – one who preferred dreaming to living and scorned action. For Iqbal, the world is not illusory and the secret of life does not consist in death, self negation and other worldliness but in desires and ideals. He thinks that since Plato was devoid of any taste for action, he disbelieved in the material world and became the worshipper of an invisible world. Iqbal says:

“Sweet is the world of phenomenon to the living spirit.  
Dear is the world of ideas to the dead spirit.  
He (Plato) could not endure the noise of this world.  
He set his heart on the glow of a quenched flame.  
And depicted a world steeped in opium.”

Iqbal argues that only being convinced of the importance of self and by leading a life of self-affirmation, self-expression and self – development, a nation can only rise. He therefore writes, “The moral and religious ideal of man is not self – negation but self – affirmation. This is the philosophical basis of his Secrets of the Self, and major portions of his other poetical works.

In Secrets of the Self, Iqbal has recommended three stages for the development of self: obedience to law, self – control and Divine Vicegerency. Acting without any law is to bring lawlessness and world –

wide chaos. The reign of law makes our life significant and valuable. Iqbal affirms that it is due to the obedience of law that even a man of no worth becomes quite worthy. If a man aspires to master the sun, the stars and the moon, he will have to become the prisoner of law. His highest purposes and ideals can be achieved by obeying some law. The grass grows up in obedience to the law of growth; when it does not follow this law, it is trodden under feet. It is by the law of union that drops of waters are converted into sea, and grains of grains of sand into Sahara. Iqbal thus advises Muslims to act according to the religious law of Islam. And they should not complain of the hardness of the law even if they have such a feeling. They should be obedient like camel, the traits of which are service and toil, patience and perseverance. The love of God makes a man obedient to his law. Thus, obedience requires conviction in the unity of God and His laws. And it is imperative for Muslims to follow in true spirit the ideal character of Prophet Mohammad and to cultivate his love in his heart. Obedience of God and the Prophet Mohammad based on the love is depicted in the following line:

“So wilt thou enjoy the best dwelling place,  
which is with God?  
Endeavour to obey, O heedless one!  
Liberty is the fruit of compulsion.  
By obedience the man of no worth is made  
worthy;  
By disobedience his fire is turned to ashes.  
Whoso would master the sun and stars,  
Let him make himself a prisoner of law!  
...Do not complain of the hardness of Law.  
Do not transgress the statues of Muhammad!

Self – control is fighting all kinds of fear and releasing oneself from the love of material bonds. In Iqbal's view self – control is achieved by acting up to the obligatory commandments of religion. There are five obligatory commandments in Islam (faith, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and alms-giving). Self - control is brought through faith, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and alms giving. As long one believes “there is no God but “He” all fears are dispelled from one's mind. For Muslims prayer is like a dragger which kills all sins, selfishness and wrongs. Fasting makes an assault upon hunger and thirst and weakens our sensuality. Pilgrimage is a source of enlightenment to the soul of the individual. Through alms giving our love for wealth and the riches passes away and makes us realize the importance of equality. The third stage naturally follows the first two. One has trained his self through obedience and self – control attains to the Divine vicegerency. The Divine vicegerent, in Iqbal's words, is “the copletest individual, the goal of humanity, the acme of life.” His advent is the birth of the new man, the harbinger of the golden age of peace, liberty, equality and human dignity.

Iqbal's philosophy of self is opposed to the philosophies and thoughts that endorse the inaction, renunciation of self and unworldliness. He calls us to the world of action; to the joys and sorrows of life; to the strives and struggles of life. He awakens the man in slumber and tells to delight in deeds. According to him, 'A person by his nature is destined to be neither saint nor sinner, by his own action, he creates Heaven or hell.

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