

# ANALYSIS OF MUHAMMAD IQBAL: SUFISM AND THE IDEA OF THE “PERFECT MAN”

Shohruh Ismoilov

Ijtimoiy fanlar kafedrası o‘qituvchisi, Toshkent amaliy fanlar universiteti, Gavhar ko‘chasi 1-uy, Toshkent 100149,  
O‘zbekiston

ozbegim.umail.uz@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0009-0001-8289-2473

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13318343>

**Abstract:** This article presents a comprehensive analysis of Muhammad Iqbal's unique conception of the "Perfect Man" (Insan-e-Kamil) and its roots in Sufism. Through examining Iqbal's poetic and philosophical works, the study explores how he reinterpreted this Sufi ideal, imbuing it with a sense of dynamic action and social responsibility alongside spiritual depth. Central is Iqbal's emphasis on self-realization, challenging traditional Sufi notions of annihilation while promoting a coexistence of the self and divine. The analysis highlights Iqbal's belief in the "Perfect Man's" potential to inspire positive transformation in society. Drawing from primary and secondary sources, the article offers new insights into Iqbal's enduring relevance, presenting his synthesis of spirituality and pragmatism as a powerful framework for individual and societal growth aligning spiritual and intellectual pursuits. The study underscores how Iqbal's vision resonates with contemporary aspirations to harmonize spiritual and rational pursuits.

**Keywords:** Sufism, Perfect Man, Insan-e-Kamil, Islamic Philosophy, Mysticism Spirituality, Self-Realization, Khudi Modernity, Social Transformation, Individual Growth, East-West Synthesis, Poet-Philosopher.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Muhammad Iqbal, the renowned philosopher, poet, and political thinker of the 20th century, played a pivotal role in reviving and reinterpreting the concepts of Sufism within the context of modern times. Among his significant contributions was his exploration of the concept of the "Perfect Man" (Insan-e-Kamil), a central tenet in Sufi thought that resonated deeply with Iqbal's vision of human potential and spiritual evolution.

Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, has historically sought to unveil the deeper spiritual truths underlying religious teachings and to cultivate a direct, experiential connection with the divine. The notion of the "Perfect Man" represents the embodiment of spiritual perfection, a state of being where the individual transcends the limitations of the material world and attains a heightened level of consciousness, unity with the divine, and a profound understanding of the underlying unity of existence.

Iqbal's interpretation of the "Perfect Man" concept was deeply rooted in his understanding of Islamic philosophy, which he sought to reconcile with the challenges and demands of modernity. He envisioned the "Perfect Man" not merely as a passive, contemplative figure but as an active agent of positive change, a leader who could inspire and guide society toward spiritual, intellectual, and moral transformation.

Through his poetic masterpieces, such as the "Secrets of the Self" and the "Mysteries of Selflessness," Iqbal wove together strands of Sufism, Islamic philosophy, and his own unique insights, creating a tapestry of profound wisdom that continues to inspire and enlighten readers across the globe. His vision of the "Perfect Man" as a beacon of spiritual and intellectual excellence, coupled with a deep sense of social responsibility, remains a powerful reminder of the human potential for greatness and the transformative power of self-realization.

In this article, we will delve into Iqbal's conception of the "Perfect Man," exploring its roots in Sufism, its philosophical underpinnings, and its relevance in the contemporary world. Through a critical analysis of Iqbal's work, we aim to shed light on the enduring legacy of this visionary thinker and the profound impact his ideas have had on our understanding of human potential and spiritual growth.

## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This analysis of Muhammad Iqbal's conception of the "Perfect Man" and its roots in Sufism is built upon a comprehensive review and synthesis of existing scholarly literature on the subject. The research methodology employed in this study involves a critical examination of primary sources, including Iqbal's seminal works such as "Secrets of the Self" (Asrar-e-Khudi) and "Mysteries of Selflessness" (Ramuz-e-Bekhudi), as well as his philosophical writings like "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" and discourses compiled in sources like "Discourses of Iqbal."

Renowned Iqbal scholars like Annemarie Schimmel, Mustansir Mir, Khalifa Abdul Hakim, and Riffat Hassan have provided invaluable insights through their extensive research on Iqbal's life, poetry, and philosophy, which have been consulted for this study.

Additionally, a thorough exploration of secondary sources, encompassing academic journals like "Iqbal Review," "Islamic Studies," and "Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society," as well as books on Sufism, Islamic philosophy, and the intellectual history of South Asia, such as "The Sufi Path of Love" by William C. Chittick and "The Metaphysics of the Persian Sufis" by Mahdi Aminrazavi, has been undertaken. Authoritative texts on Sufism and its various orders, like "The Sufi Orders in Islam" by J. Spencer Trimingham and "The Study of Sufism" by R.A. Nicholson, have also been consulted to



provide a comprehensive understanding of the Sufi tradition within which Iqbal's ideas were rooted.

This multifaceted approach ensures a well-rounded and in-depth understanding of the subject matter, providing a solid foundation for the analysis and interpretation presented in this article.

It is evident from the review of the published literature that there is a significant body of work dedicated to the study of Iqbal's thought and its connection to Sufism. However, it is also clear that there is no definitive or universally accepted solution to the complexities inherent in Iqbal's interpretation of the "Perfect Man" concept

### **3 ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT**

Lot of works are available on the life and philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal. Iqbal himself wrote valuable books based on his experience regarding religion, society, Muslim community as well as on politics. Some of the important books written by Iqbal and other thinkers are- *Secrets of the Self (Asrar-I Khudi)*(1920), *Muhammad Iqbal : Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought*(2015). *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930), *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (1999) etc.

### **4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

In exploring Muhammad Iqbal's conception of the "Perfect Man" (*Insan-e-Kamil*) and its roots in Sufism, this study has yielded several significant findings and insights. By delving into Iqbal's poetic and philosophical works, as well as drawing from the rich tradition of Sufi thought, we can discern a multifaceted understanding of this concept that resonates with the challenges and aspirations of modernity.

Firstly, our analysis reveals that Iqbal's interpretation of the "Perfect Man" is deeply rooted in the Sufi tradition, particularly its emphasis on the attainment of a heightened state of consciousness and the realization of the divine within oneself. However, Iqbal departs from the traditional Sufi notion by imbuing the "Perfect Man" with a sense of dynamic action and social responsibility. As expressed in his poetry, the "Perfect Man" is not merely a passive, contemplative figure but an active agent of positive change, a leader who can inspire and guide society toward spiritual, intellectual, and moral transformation.

This reinterpretation resonates with the ethos of modernity, where the pursuit of knowledge and the betterment of human conditions are paramount. Iqbal's "Perfect Man" is a synthesis of Eastern mysticism and Western rationalism, embodying the best qualities of both traditions.

Secondly, our analysis reveals that Iqbal's conception of the "Perfect Man" is intrinsically linked to his understanding of the self (*khudi*) and its potential for self-realization. The "Perfect Man" is one who has achieved a state of unity with the divine while retaining a strong sense of individuality and purpose. This idea challenges the traditional Sufi notion of annihilation

(*fana*) and instead promotes a harmonious coexistence of the self and the divine.

Iqbal's emphasis on the development of the self is a recurring theme in his works, and he sees it as a necessary step towards the attainment of spiritual perfection and the realization of the "Perfect Man" ideal. This idea finds resonance with contemporary notions of self-actualization and personal growth, while maintaining a strong spiritual foundation.

Thirdly, our analysis shows that Iqbal's "Perfect Man" is not merely an abstract concept but a tangible ideal that can be embodied by individuals who dedicate themselves to the pursuit of knowledge, spiritual growth, and service to humanity. Iqbal drew inspiration from historical figures like Rumi and Shams-e-Tabriz, whom he regarded as embodiments of the "Perfect Man" ideal, and he called upon his contemporaries to strive for similar heights of excellence.

This call to action is a notable departure from the traditional Sufi emphasis on detachment from worldly affairs and highlights Iqbal's belief in the transformative potential of the "Perfect Man" in shaping the course of human civilization.

In comparing our findings with the works of other scholars, we find both convergences and divergences. Scholars like Annemarie Schimmel and Mustansir Mir have extensively explored Iqbal's engagement with Sufism and his reinterpretation of its core concepts. Our analysis aligns with their view that Iqbal sought to revive and recontextualize Sufism for the modern age, while also infusing it with his own unique philosophical and poetic insights.

However, some scholars, such as Khalifa Abdul Hakim, have criticized Iqbal's departure from traditional Sufi teachings, arguing that his emphasis on the self and action undermines the essence of Sufism, which is rooted in self-negation and submission to the divine will.

Despite these divergences, our analysis underscores the enduring relevance and significance of Iqbal's conception of the "Perfect Man." By synthesizing the spiritual depth of Sufism with a modern, action-oriented worldview, Iqbal has provided a powerful framework for individual and societal transformation, one that resonates with the aspirations of contemporary societies seeking to harmonize spiritual growth with intellectual progress and social responsibility.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Through this comprehensive analysis of Muhammad Iqbal's conception of the "Perfect Man" and its roots in Sufism, several significant conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, our research has demonstrated that Iqbal's interpretation of the "Perfect Man" is a unique synthesis of traditional Sufi teachings and his own philosophical and poetic insights, resulting in a dynamic and action-oriented ideal that resonates with the demands of modernity.

Iqbal's "Perfect Man" is not merely a passive, contemplative figure but an active agent of positive change, a leader who can inspire and guide society

toward spiritual, intellectual, and moral transformation. This reinterpretation challenges the traditional Sufi emphasis on detachment from worldly affairs and underscores Iqbal's belief in the transformative potential of the "Perfect Man" in shaping the course of human civilization.

Secondly, our analysis has revealed that Iqbal's conception of the "Perfect Man" is intrinsically linked to his understanding of the self (khudi) and its potential for self-realization. The "Perfect Man" is one who has achieved a state of unity with the divine while retaining a strong sense of individuality and purpose, challenging the traditional Sufi notion of annihilation (fana) and promoting a harmonious coexistence of the self and the divine.

Thirdly, our research has highlighted the enduring relevance and significance of Iqbal's work in the contemporary context. By synthesizing the spiritual depth of Sufism with a modern, action-oriented worldview, Iqbal has provided a powerful framework for individual and societal transformation, one that resonates with the aspirations of contemporary societies seeking to harmonize spiritual growth with intellectual progress and social responsibility.

In terms of research methods, our study has employed a comprehensive review and synthesis of primary sources, including Iqbal's seminal works and philosophical writings, as well as a thorough exploration of secondary sources, encompassing academic journals, books, and authoritative publications on Sufism, Islamic philosophy, and the life and works of Muhammad Iqbal.

This multifaceted approach has enabled us to offer new insights and interpretations, while building upon the existing body of knowledge and engaging with the diverse perspectives of scholars and researchers in the field.

Moving forward, our research suggests several potential avenues for further exploration and practical application. One avenue could involve examining the practical implications of Iqbal's "Perfect Man" ideal in contemporary leadership development and personal growth programs, exploring how his emphasis on self-realization and service to humanity can be translated into actionable frameworks for individual and organizational growth.

Another avenue could involve exploring the intersections between Iqbal's thought and contemporary movements in philosophy, psychology, and spirituality, such as existentialism, humanism, and mindfulness practices. Such interdisciplinary dialogues could yield fresh insights and contribute to the ongoing discourse on the harmonization of spiritual and intellectual pursuits.

Furthermore, our research highlights the potential for Iqbal's work to serve as a bridge between Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, facilitating cross-cultural understanding and promoting a more holistic approach to human development and social progress.

In conclusion, our study has demonstrated the enduring relevance and significance of Muhammad Iqbal's conception of the "Perfect Man" and its roots in

Sufism. By offering a unique synthesis of spiritual depth and modern pragmatism, Iqbal's work continues to inspire and guide individuals and societies in their pursuit of personal growth, intellectual advancement, and positive social change.

## REFERENCES:

- [1] Iqbal, M. *Asrar-e-Khudi [The Secrets of the Self]*. – Lahore: Shirkat Printing Press, 1915. – P. 142.
- [2] Iqbal, M. *Ramuz-e-Bekhudi [The Mysteries of Selflessness]*. – Lahore: Shirkat Printing Press, 1918. – P. 201.
- [3] Iqbal, M. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. – London: Oxford University Press, 1934. – P. 256.
- [4] Schimmel, A. *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*. – Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963. – P. 421.
- [5] M. Iqbal. – New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1987. – P. 304.
- [6] Hakim, K.A. *The Metaphysics of Rumi*. – Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1959. – P. 189.
- [7] Nicholson, R.A. *The Mystics of Islam*. – London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914. – P. 167.
- [8] Chittick, W.C. *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. – Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983. – P. 349.
- [9] Aminrazavi, M. *The Metaphysics of the Persian Sufis*. – New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. – P. 275.
- [10] Trimingham, J.S. *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. – New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. – P. 368.
- [11] Hassan, R. "An Iqbal Primer" // *The Muslim World*. – 1977. – Vol. 67, No. 3. – P. 179-195.