

Nietzsche and Iqbal on Human Perfection: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

There is a debate in the literature that Iqbal's concept of Ideal Man, which he called 'Mard-e-Momin' was not only highly influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy, rather it was an Oriental adaptation or a reproduced version of Nietzsche's Ideal Man, known as 'Übermensch' often translated as 'Overman' or 'Superman'. The paper presents a comparative analysis of Nietzsche's 'Übermensch' and Iqbal's 'Mard-e-Momin' arguing that there are fundamental differences between the metaphysical, epistemological, religious, moral and methodological beliefs of Nietzsche and Iqbal with reference to Ideal Man. Using foundationalist/ anti-foundationalist approach, it is argued that Nietzsche was an anti-foundationalist; since, he rejects all foundational grounds and advocates total rejection of religion and conventional morality, which he considered to be the mainly responsible factors of nihilism. His concept of Superman emerges from anti-foundationalism. Whereas, Iqbal was foundationalist for he takes Religion, the Quran and Sunnah as foundations and his Ideal man is a true representation of these foundations. These foundations, Iqbal argues, provide guidance during the journey of his life.

Keywords: ideal man/overman / superman / mard-e-momin; foundationalism and anti-foundationalism; nihilism; will to power

Introduction

There is a debate in literature that compares Iqbal's Mard-e-Momin with Nietzsche's Superman. Most of the commentators argue that Iqbal's concept of Mard-e-Momin is highly influenced by Nietzsche's Superman. Perhaps, it is because of the reason that Iqbal has often admired Nietzsche in his works and considered him as a man with "a kind of prophetic mentality" (Iqbal A. M., 2004, p. 170). However, for Iqbal, religion, the Quran and Sunnah are the foundations and guiding principles (Dar, 2013). Mard-e-Momin will be a true reflection of Quran and Sunnah. Nietzsche was an anti-foundationalist. Superman will not be a product of religious and traditional morality. For Nietzsche, both religion and traditional morality produce weak people. Superman will be an architect of his own will.

The paper utilizes interpretive and analytical methodology. Firstly, it reviews the literature that says that Iqbal's Superman is a replica of Nietzsche's Superman; secondly, it elaborates foundationalism and anti-foundationalism and finally interprets and analyses both the concepts using foundationalist lens.

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Many scholars, especially in the West, argue that not only Iqbal's concept of overman was influenced by Nietzsche, his whole philosophy is highly indebted to Nietzsche and other western philosophers. Edward Brown claims that "Iqbal's thought was an Oriental adaptation of Nietzsche's philosophy" (Malik G. R., 2009, p. 169). This opinion has been repeated since then by many of the Western critics like Nicholson, Arberry and Montgomery Watt, though Arberry is generous enough by granting Iqbal's idea of the higher selfhood to be partially borrowed from the Islamic mystical concept of the Perfect Man.

Tara Charan Rastogi while commenting on Nietzsche's influence upon Iqbal's doctrine of power and hardness as the law of life, writes that Iqbal's poem *Asrar-i-Khudi* reveals that "it is hardness that gives glamour to life. That is, strength and greatness go hand in hand". Rastogi claims that this idea of Iqbal is nothing more than just a re-incarnation of Nietzsche's idea of will to power. "The soul is the same, only the body-garment has undergone change". He says further that in *Bal-i-Jibril* too, Iqbal is critical of being weak, hence, "mouthpiece of Nietzschean doctrine". Like Nietzsche's Overman, Iqbal's Ideal Man is "aggressively assertive", and in order to pursue his objectives, "he would even be a tyrant". The *Mard-e-Momin*, Rastogi says, is always ready to fight with no principles in order to get success, because "what he does is right" (Rastogi, 1987, pp. 60-80).

Roy Jackson, in his book, *Nietzsche and Islam*, argues that Islam in the present age "appears to be faced with a crisis not dissimilar to the audience Nietzsche was addressing", that is to say, a process of secularization in the Muslim world, a nihilism as Nietzsche calls it. In order to counter this situation, calls are being made for a form of 'Islamic Reformation'. He says that though majority of the Muslim scholars on this subject have remained largely silent, yet one Muslim scholar Muhammad Iqbal, in order to deal with the problem of the Muslim world, however has embraced Nietzsche's philosophy - particularly his call for the *Übermensch* (Jackson, 2007, p. 12).

It would be unjust to deny the influence of Nietzsche and other western philosophers on Iqbal, but to deny his originality is equally unjust. During the process of developing his thought, Iqbal always has made a criticism of other theories, ancient, Islamic and modern. The negative of him is always a preface to the positive, because whenever he has criticized some position, he at the same time has pointed towards a positive direction in which his mind has moved (Enver, 1955). While crafting his own philosophical ideas, Iqbal took the positive ingredients from his predecessors, made a critical analysis of them and went beyond their thought by adding his own views. This going beyond is the '*sine qua non*' of originality. Though there are critics of Iqbal's thought both in the West and East, yet there are people like Dr. Sprangling, who places Iqbal amongst greatest Western

Philosophers (Ma'ruf 1987, p. v). Iqbal's legacy can be concluded in these words that in the history of modern thought originated in the non-Western tradition, he will be remembered as "one who mounted a spirited defense of the possibility of religion in a so-called scientific age" (Mir, 2008, p. 146).

Foundationalism and Anti-Foundationalism

The central claims of foundationalism are: that there are some basic and foundational beliefs and propositions which do not make any appeal to other beliefs for justification, while all other beliefs and propositions require these basic beliefs or propositions for justification (Deery, 2004). Foundationalism views a belief to be a rational belief only if it is related to a set of propositions in an appropriate way, which constitute the foundations of what is believed (Phillips, 1988). Foundationalism is an epistemological doctrine, which says that "there are or can be secure foundations for knowledge" (Tom Rockmore, 1992, p. 5). The foundationalist strategy seeks to establish knowledge on firm foundations of definite beliefs and knowledge-extending procedures of reliable nature.

Anti-foundationalism unlike foundationalism is an epistemological doctrine which says that "there are or can be no secure foundations for knowledge"; hence, it denies the possibility of a grounded epistemological system in philosophy (Tom Rockmore, 1992, p. 5). It is a philosophy that rejects any foundational and basic beliefs and principles, which would serve as foundations and grounds of an enquiry or knowledge. Anti-foundational epistemology is based on the notion that human's knowledge of the world is mediated through conceptual schemes (CruickShank, 2003). In the recent philosophical literature, anti-foundationalism has been associated at one time or another, with an almost perplexing collection of current trends including "incommensurability, hermeneutics, objectivism, relativism, postmodernism, forms of literary theory, deconstruction" and so on, and with thinkers like Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Heidegger, Hans Gadamer, Derrida, Foucault, Quine, Richard Rorty and Lyotard (Tom Rockmore, 1992, p. 2).

Nietzsche's Overman and Iqbal's Mard-E-Momin

Nietzsche's Übermensch (Overman)

Nietzsche was extremely conscious of an approaching period of nihilism. He thought that in the next two hundred years, the western society will plunge itself into nihilism or nihilistic situation (Nietzsche, 1968). In the *Birth of Tragedy*, he describes the present condition of man as, "Once truth has been seen, the consciousness of it prompts man to see only what is terrible or absurd in existence" (Nietzsche, 1999, p. 40). Nihilism arises in reaction to the collapse of absolutism (Simpson, 2012). What is nihilism? Nietzsche defines nihilism as "a

radical repudiation of values, meaning and desirability”, or it refers to a period in the history of man where the “highest values devalue themselves” or “Nihilism is the conviction that life is absurd” (Nietzsche, 1968, pp. 7,9,23), or “it is a conviction that life is meaningless, or not worth living” (Reginster, 2006, p. 8). It refers to a condition or a state where “the highest values are devalued” (Allison, 1977). Nihilism can also be taken as a “condition of tension, as a disproportion between what we want (or need) and how the world appears to be” (Carr, 1990, p. 85). It is like a situation in life when ethical, religious, social, political and aesthetic values etc. are gone from the society. Where people have lost their desires to achieve higher and nobler values and life has become meaningless.

As a remedy to nihilism, Nietzsche presents us with the idea or concept of an ideal man and he believes that by cultivating the virtues displayed by this ideal man in our own being, we will be able to prepare grounds for the emergence of the Overman and thus will be in a better position to effectively counter and overcome nihilism. Nietzsche’s ideal man will be one, who will be over and above the normal and average man of the present. Nietzsche named this ideal man as the “The Overman” , “Übermensch”. The Overman is the one who guides man towards his true nature, an actuality who goes beyond himself by affirming the “necessity to pass beyond himself and to perish in this crossing” (Allison, 1977, p. 124). Nietzsche says that most people are concerned with the preservation of man and only Zarathustra being the first one asks: how is man to be overcome?

Following are some of the important traits of an overman. One can notice the anti-foundationalist trend in the traits.

Exceptional Being

The greatest attributes, which places the Overman over and above the present man and makes him an exceptional being, are creativity, becoming, self-determination, overcoming, flexibility, discontent, self- confidence, self-mastery, cheerfulness, and courage (Firestone, 2017).

Faithful to the Earth

The Overman remains loyal and faithful to the earth by denying God, soul, immortality, any other real world and heaven or the afterworld. All these beliefs being merely fictions are the symptoms of suffering, sickness and weariness with life. Nietzsche says that the enormously healthy body, which is perfect and uprightly perpendicular, speaks more honestly and purely, and “it speaks of the meaning of the earth” (Nietzsche, 1978, p. 33). The Overman rather than looking into transcendent existence in search of meaning himself will become the meaning by remaining faithful to the earth.

Creator of Values

The Overman is the creator of values. But the creation of new values cannot take place without the corresponding destruction of the older ones. Nietzsche says that man, however, needs to become that, what he needs to be, that is, a human being, who is unique, new and incomparable. Who gives himself laws and who creates himself (Nietzsche, 2001).

Exact anti-Thesis of the Nihilists

The 'Overman' as conceived by Nietzsche is the exact anti-thesis of the modern man, good man, Christians and other nihilists. An impotent good man cannot do anything against injustices and evils of the world; hence, they make more harm than good- "the harm of the good is the most harmful of harms" (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 147).

The Will to Power

Nietzsche's Zarathustra, the prophet of the Overman, says, "Where I found the living, there I found will to power; and even in the will of those who serve I found the will to be master. . . ." (Nietzsche, 1978, p. 114). The will to power seeks truth and creates values. It is a mean to mastery and self-control, even a mean to more power. The Overman, as conceived by Nietzsche, possesses a central drive or motive in his character, that is "The Will to Power".

Free Death

Another important characteristic of the Overman is free death. The Overman dies at the right time and he is free in his death (Nietzsche, 1978, p. 71).

Courage as Virtue

Another basic quality and an important virtue of the Overman is courage. Being a courageous being, Nietzsche's Overman will fight against nihilism with courage and bravery in order to ensure nobility. According to Nietzsche, courage, however, is the best slayer, it is the best instrument which even slays death (Nietzsche, 1978).

Iqbal's Mard-e-Momin

Allama Muhammad Iqbal, like Nietzsche, too has grasped the presence of nihilism in the Muslim world[‡]. He has realized that the root cause of decadence, downfall and decay in the Islamic world is nothing but nihilism, which is present in different forms and shapes.

[‡] Roy Jackson in his book, Nietzsche and Islam writes, "Indeed, certain Muslim modernist scholars believed that parts of the Islamic world had returned to the state of Jahiliyya", of nihilism and decadence (Jackson 2007, P. 57).

Iqbal, after returning from Europe with a new outlook, realized that growth of the West was unspiritual and unethical and “the religiosity of the East was a hollow and life-thwarting force” (Sharif, 1966, p. 1619). Iqbal laments about Eastern man and says that medieval mysticism, by influencing his religious life, has taught him false repudiation (Iqbal D. J., 2004). Moreover, it also has made, man of the East, perfectly contended with his unawareness and spiritual slavery (Iqbal A. M., 2004). His philosophical and poetical works point towards metaphysical, epistemological, religious or mystical, moral and political nihilism and his philosophy and poetry is a response to the problem of nihilism in its metaphysical, epistemological, mystical or religious, moral and political dimensions (Yilmaz, 2016). These various types of nihilisms have resulted in stagnancy, rigidity and orthodoxy in the Muslim world, which finally led it to decadence.

In order to counter and overcome nihilism in the Muslim world, Iqbal has introduced his concept of an Ideal Man. His main aim is “the renaissance of dormant Muslim community by countering the forces of decadence” (Khan A. I., 1977, p. 4). According to him, humanity in the present era is in need of special and unique individuals as the world has become an idol house again[§] (Iqbal A. M., 2011).

He has based his concept of an Ideal Man on Quranic values. Iqbal’s Ideal Man is in fact a dynamic and physical living shape of the Quran as he tells us, ‘No one is aware of the secret that a Momin, who apparently appears to be a Qari (reader/ reciter) is in fact a living role model of the Quran^{**}’ (Iqbal A. M., 2011, p. 573). Iqbal’s Ideal Man follows, obeys and practices the values and principles as recommended by the Quran. We can notice the foundationalist trend in the following few characteristics of Mard-e- Momin:

Unique Individual

Iqbal in his Reconstruction gives a detailed description of the nature of man. He says that the Quran lays emphasis on the uniqueness and individuality of man as unity of life. Iqbal writes, “The powerful man creates environment; the feeble have to adjust themselves to it” (Iqbal A. M., 2012, p. 82).

Self-Affirmation or Self-Possession

The Mard-e-Momin with his highly developed ego possesses the highest quality of self-affirmation or self-possession. His individuality is not annihilated and absorbed even by coming face to face with Reality “the climax of this development is reached when the ego is able to retain full self-possession, even in the case of a direct

[§] For English translation, see Ghulam Rasool Malik’s work, “The Western Horizon” (Malik 2009, P. 15).

^{**} Translated by authors

contact with the all-embracing Ego” (Iqbal A. M., 2004, p. 104). Dr. Annemarie Schimmel, while commenting on Mard-e-Momin of Iqbal, writes, “the faithful who has realized in himself the Divine call to vicegerency, and who has consolidated his ego so much that he is able to have a person to person encounter with his creator is, for Iqbal, the Perfect Man, the Free Man” (Schimmel, 2009, p. 118).

Free Being

Having a true developed ego, Iqbal’s Mard-e-Momin has earned complete freedom. According to Iqbal, this freedom helps an individual to strive for individual growth, maintenance and development of personal identity (al, 2013). Iqbal himself writes in the Reconstruction, “the element of guidance and directive control in the ego’s activity clearly shows that the ego is a free personal causality” (Iqbal A. M., 2004, p. 97)

Immortal Being

Mard-e-Momin being the perfect individual also earns immortality. He has the capacity to earn everlasting lives. Mard-e-Momin being a full-grown ego becomes immortal; since, in him the ego has touched the very uppermost point of intensive strength. According to Iqbal, the act of Universal Destruction, preceding instantly the Day of Judgement, even fails to affect the perfect calm of Insan-e-Kamil (Iqbal A. M., 2004).

Blend of Ishq (Love, Intuition) and Intellect^{††}

According to Iqbal, Mard-e-Momin deals with the affairs of life by combining love and intellect^{‡‡}.

Though Iqbal is not anti-rationalist as we have seen in the above lines, because he does not deny the role of intellect and reason in dealing with the affairs of life, yet he is a critical of it as well. He thinks that intellect by following the method of analysis divides Reality into various parts; hence, fails to grasp it in entirety and wholeness. It is only intuition, thinks Iqbal, which is capable of leading an individual towards a complete and wholistic vision of the Reality.

He advises Mard-e-Momin in these words:

*Wisdom is thy shield and sword
The flaming love Divine,
So accoutered, my, “Dervish”*

^{††} Iqbal uses terms like *ishq*, love, intuition, mystic or religious experience and religion on the one hand and thought, reason, intellect and philosophy on the other in synonymous meanings (Iqbal 2004).

^{‡‡} There is a debate that Iqbal gives priority to love or intuition over intellect. Even if he seems to prefer intuition over intellect, he never suggested to do away with the latter altogether (Munawwar 1992).

Seize the world, it is thine? (Iqbal A. M., 2011, p. 136)^{§§}.

Mard-e-Momin with his heroic qualities of intellect and intuition will lead the world towards higher and nobler goals and values of life.

Powerful and Courageous Being

Iqbal's Mard-e-Momin, like Nietzsche's Overman, is a powerful and courageous individual who has no fear of difficulties. Iqbal believes that the Perfect Man by possessing the developed state of his ego is even not afraid of death. Rather than fearing death, he welcomes it with a smile on his face. (Iqbal A. M., 1955, p. 165). Although Iqbal champions power, strength and courage, yet his concept of power is not devoid of moral values as he believes in Jamal (Divine Beauty) and Jalal (Divine Majesty). Iqbal's concept of power is combined with the kindness, tenderness and elegance of man (Qaiser, 2012).

Faqir

The other name of Iqbal's Perfect Man or Mard-e-Momin is Faqir. The character and personality of Mard-e-Momin possesses all the qualities of Faqr. By combining Divine Beauty and Majesty, he becomes a true Faqir. Rather than an idle mystic, he is a man of action, who lives an active and dynamic life. Not being a slave of greed, he earns lawful livelihood. Although poor in appearances, yet he is the owner of countless treasures. Instead of segregating himself from the community, he plays a responsible role in order to bring a healthy social order; hence, contributes to the general wellbeing of the world. Though he displays the qualities of Divine mercy and Divine wrath in his personality, yet he prefers mercy over revenge (Qaiser, 2011), (Qaiser, 2012).

Religious Believer

Iqbal is highly influenced by the teachings of Rumi. Rumi's remarks about the Authentic Human Being are remarkable. He says: "The human being who can do without God and makes no effort to realize God is not a human being at all.... The Authentic Human Being, then is one who is never free from striving, who turns restlessly about the light of the Majesty of God" (Harvey, 2000, p. 9).

Mard-e-Momin follows the dictates of the nobler Quran as Iqbal says:

^{§§} Translated by Sultan Zahur Akhtar in Representation and Reply (Akhtar 2011, P. 136).

His (Faqir's) strength is due to the Quran *** (Iqbal A. M., 1954, p. 20).

Besides following God and His revealed Book, Mard-e-Momin also obeys the verdicts of tradition of the Holy Prophet as Iqbal expresses poetically:

Faqir is Ishq and submission to the Beloved,

This is the treasure of Muhammad, and we are its guardians††† (Iqbal A. M., 1954, p. 20).

Feeling-full and Appreciative Heart

Iqbal's Mard-e-Momin has a feeling-full and appreciative heart that enables him to get the knowledge of the ultimate and essential nature of things. His Qalb (heart) is the place of God and his knowledge is intuitional or appreciative rather than derivative. Iqbal observes:

God has nothing to do with a believer who does not possess an efficient and conscious spirit in his body††† (Iqbal A. M., 1955).

Sincere Lover of God

Mard-e-Momin is a sincere lover of God. He loves God neither because of greediness for Heaven nor because of fearing Hell. Rather God is the ultimate end of his Ishq. The spiritual hunger of man compels him to search for someone higher than himself for his own sake. Man's gradual and slow search for a better object of adoration and love leads him rising to celestial heights. Since man's craving and thirst is inborn; hence, it makes him feel lonely and incomplete. This in return impels man to try his potentialities for overcoming the sense of loneliness or incompleteness (Munawwar, 1992). This journey of searching the higher object of love for its own sake leads towards perfection and an individual becomes the Perfect Man. According to Iqbal, Mard-e-Momin does not love God for the sake of 'Heaven' as pictured traditionally (Qaiser, 2011), rather his love for God is unconditional.

Conclusion

To summarize, Nietzsche has struggled in almost all of his works to reject the philosophy of foundationalism, where one can find claims of transcendent foundations which can serve as points of reference about all of our knowledge claims. Each of his work is an

*** Translated by Sultan Zahur Akhtar in Representation and Reply (Akhtar 2011, P. 136).

††† English translation is taken from Dr. Nazir Qaiser's work "Rumi's Impact on Iqbal's Religious Thought" (Qaiser 2004, P. 103).

††† For English translation, see Prof. Muhammad Munawwar's work, "Iqbal and Quranic Wisdom" (Munawwar 1992, P. 123).

attempt to target the foundational grounds as claimed by religion, morality, science and politics. He never hesitated to raise his voice against the “modern ideas” as believed by the modern man. What he always struggled against are the grounds as believed by man in the modern era. Nietzsche thinks that a belief in foundational grounds of metaphysical and transcendent nature, whether in religion, philosophy, science, morality and politics etc. is the main cause of the advent of nihilism, that will finally lead the modern world to a condition of absurdity and meaninglessness. In short, he claims that belief in foundations will finally lead the modern world towards nihilism.

Being a forerunner of postmodernism and an anti-foundationalist, Nietzsche if on one hand has rejected the foundational grounds as believed by humanity before him on the grounds of factors being responsible for nihilism, however, as an active nihilist, he on the other hand, offers his own grounds in the form of *Übermensch* for countering nihilism. His philosophies of the *Übermensch*, The Eternal Return and The Will to Power are attempts to reject foundations in order to provide new foundations. In this manner he attempts to reject absolute foundations by declaring them as responsible factors leading humanity towards nihilism.

As opposed to Nietzsche’s anti-foundationalist position, Iqbal deems in the philosophy of foundationalism, since he believes in a transcendent Being God, Who, according to him is the Higher Ego, the ultimate source of all inspiration and guidance. “Iqbal’s philosophy is essentially a philosophy of religion” (Khatoon, 1963, p. xiii), and as a cultural and social force, religion for him is primarily functional and practical. Although Iqbal suggests the reconstruction and revival of religious thought in Islam in the light of contemporary knowledge; however, he believes in the permanency of fundamental principles of Islam. Change and permanence are the two main aspects of life and religion is an attempt to provide guidelines for life; hence, Iqbal believes in both permanent and dynamic principles of Islam. Life^{§§§} is a dynamic process of change and evolution and religion in order to remain compatible with it must show dynamism or else it will become obsolete. In order to justify its unity, religion besides its dynamic nature must possess some fundamental principles too, which will serve as its foundational beliefs.

According to Iqbal, out of all the religions of the world, it is only Islam, which has synthesized both the dynamic and permanent aspects of life; therefore, is the actual representation of it. The *Mard-e-Momin* of Iqbal, being a dynamically free individual, always look

§§§ Iqbal records in *Reconstruction*, “There is a progressive formation of fresh ends, purposes and ideal scales of values as the process of life grows and expands. We become by ceasing to be what we are. Life is a passage through a series of deaths. But there is a system in the continuity of this passage. Its various stages ... are organically related to one another” (Iqbal 2004, P. 54).

towards the fundamental teachings of Quran and Prophet Muhammad, which serve as foundations for his guidance, during the journey of life. Iqbal's poetical and philosophical thought provides us with ample proofs to infer his position as a foundationalist.

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