

# Philosophy of Character Education:

## A Study on the Conception of A.M. Iqbal

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### Abstract

No one can develop any intelligent theory of education without consciously postulating some conception of the nature of the individual to be educated, his relationship to the community and, what may be called, his ultimate destiny. For, the essence of the educative process, reduced to its most elementary terms, lies in the fact of a living human organism being in constant interaction and contact with a vast and complex environment, which keeps on changing and growing as a result of this continuous, mutual intercourse. Like the philosopher, the educator must necessarily inquire into the nature of these two terms of his activity, the individual and environment which ultimately determine the solution of all his problems.

According to Allama Muhammad Iqbal, there is no universal life. Everything and every being possesses an individuality which its place in the universe depends upon the degree of development of this individuality. Even matter itself, or not-Self, consists of a colony of Egos of a low order: life and conscience emerge when their association and interaction reach a certain degree of coordination. Individuality is an ascending movement which takes in its train all living beings. This movement goes up the ladder of existence to the point of man's highest development when he becomes a Personality.

In educational terms, the character of the good man, the true believer, the *Momin*, as visualized by A.M. Iqbal is a man who develops all his powers and strengthens his individuality through active contact with his material and cultural environment.

**Keywords:** *Khudi*, Courage, Tolerance, *Faqr*, self consciousness, *Bal-i-Jibril*, complex environment.

## 1. The Nature of Education:

The word Education naturally relates to the whole aspects of human life. So far as it throws light on the problem of life and human destiny, the education implies and postulates a philosophy of education, since both are concerned – from their respective angles of vision, with similar issues and problems, e.g., the meaning and purpose of human life, the relation of the individual to the community, to his environment, as well as the problem of values, etc.<sup>1</sup>

Any coherent system of ideas, therefore, which provides guidance in facing these problems or offers a thoughtful criticism of existing institutions, culture, social practices and ways of thought must necessarily be the basis of the educational theory and practice. For, education is, after all, engaged in the process of critically evaluating and effectively transmitting the cultural heritage, knowledge and ideas of a social group to its young members, thereby securing the continuity of collective life and culture as well as ensuring their intelligent, the creative reconstruction.

The writer has strong conviction, that Allama Muhammad Iqbal<sup>2</sup> has a valuable contribution to make the solution on the

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<sup>1</sup> The Iqbalian philosophy is entirely based on the idea of personality because the secret of divinity resides in the edification of the Self. The development of the Self is the awakening of the universe. For Iqbal, there is no universal life. Everything, every being possesses an individuality and its place in the universe depends upon the degree of development of this individuality. Even matter itself, or not-Self, consists of a colony of egos of a low order: life and conscience emerge when their association and interaction reach a certain degree of coordination. Individuality is an ascending movement which takes in its train all living beings. This movement goes up the ladder of existence to the point of man's highest development when he becomes a Personality. Through the whole gamut of being runs the gradually ascending note of Personality until it attains its perfection in man. Or again: Each atom of the universe burns to reveal itself, each particle yearns to be a god. Every atom is a candidate for greatness. Nevertheless, man is not at the end of the process of evolution; he must not be considered as a complete being. See. Luce-Claude Maitre (1981), *Introduction to the thought of Iqbal*, Iqbal Academy: Lahore, Pakistan, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Iqbal was born, in 1873, at Sialkot. His ancestors were Kashmiri Brahmans of the Sapru caste. His great grandfather migrated to the Punjab sometime in early nineteenth century and settled down in Sialkot, a historical town that has produced many great scholars. His father Nur Muhammad was a saintly man for whom religion was a matter of living experience. As related by Iqbal himself, he had distinct tendency towards mysticism. Heredity and parental influence made Iqbal inherit and imbibe this tendency which continued to mature throughout his intellectual and spiritual development.

problem of education, when he wrote his scientific work entitled: "*The Secretes of the Self*".<sup>3</sup>

Among his distinguished *world view* which is interestingly to be explored in this paper is Allama Muhammad Iqbal's Conception of Character Education. The theory of Iqbal's education<sup>4</sup>, according to Saiyidain, cannot be profoundly elucidated without consciously postulating some conception of the nature of the individual to be educated, his relationship to the community and, what may be called, his ultimate destiny.<sup>5</sup> For, the essence of the educative process, reduced to its most elementary terms, lies in the fact of a living human organism being in constant interaction and contact with a vast and complex environment, which keeps on changing and growing as a result of this continuous, mutual intercourse. Saiyidain further elaborated that educator is like philosopher must necessarily inquire into the nature of these two terms of his activity; the individual and the environment which ultimately determine the solution of all his problems.<sup>6</sup> The concept of individual is equal to the concept of ego in the philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal. In this

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<sup>3</sup> R.A. Nicholson who has introduced Iqbal's ideas into Europe, has pointed out in his introduction to the translation of the *Secrete of the Self*, an article which still belongs to the best ever written on behalf of the poet, that Iqbal is a man of his age and a man in advance of his age, he is also a man in disagreement with this age (p.XX). What the poet tried was nothing less than to sling from the saddle a deer that has not yet leaped forth from the convent of non-existence. See also, Annemarie Schimmel (1989), *Gabril,s Wing; A study into the religious ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal*, Iqbal Academy Lahore, Pakistan., p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Education, like ethics, politics and philosophy, is not an independent system of knowledge. Every system, program, or plan of education is the creation of an ideal. The textbooks, mentality of the teacher and his general attitude towards life, the views of the managing and governing authorities, whether they are public or private bodies, the environment and the atmosphere of the school, etc. reflect that ideal. Therefore, the ideal is continually attracting pupils towards itself. Education is servent of ideals, whether wrong or right, and can be adapted to serve every one of them equally. Moral behaviour, in accordance with absolute and universal principles of morality, is impossible without a strong love of the Right ideal which it should be the object of educational institutions to inculcate in the mind of the youth. The learners are inspired by the love of wrong ideals, imperceptibly through the agency of the schools that embody the educational system created by those ideals. See. M. Rafiuddin (1971), *Iqbal's Idea of the Self*, Studies in Iqbal's thought and arts, Bazmi Iqbal: Lahore, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> K.G. Saiyidain, (1992), *Iqbal's educational philosophy*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf Publication, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> M. Rafiuddin elucidates that ego is equal to Khudi which is the fundamental Reality of the universe. Khudi signifiy mind or consciousness. Since, wherever there is mind or

regard, Iqbal's ego which has been quoted by Saiyidain is the object of the educator's attention. Ego<sup>7</sup> of human being is a real and preeminently significant entity which is the center and basis of the entire organization of human life<sup>8</sup>. The assertion of the Ego in the concept of Iqbal is not a datum but an achievement, the fruit of a constant, strenuous effort in and against the forces of the external environment as well as the disruptive tendencies within man himself. The life of the ego, he explained is a kind of tension caused by the ego invading the environment and the environment invading the ego. And it is essential that the living intimacy of this relationship between the two should be utilized in education. Through this give and take between the individual and his many sided environment, through establishing as many intensive and fruitful contacts with the surrounding reality as possible, the individual evolves the inner richness of his being. A life of solitary, self sufficient contemplation, which cuts him off from the stimulus and energizing current of social life, is apt to make him ego centric and limited in his interests and sympathies. Iqbal who has been quoted by Saiyidain takes a dynamic view of this continuous process of adjustment between the individual and the environment and points out that it is the lot of man to share in the deeper aspirations of the universe around him and to shape his own destiny as well as that the universe, now by adjusting himself to its forces, now by putting the whole of his energy to mould its forces to his own end and purpose. And in this process of progressive

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consciousness, there is life, Iqbal has frequently used the words hayat and zindgi for Khudi or consciousness. The consciousness is to be found in both man and animal. But the standard of human consciousness is higher than that of animal consciousness. Because an animal is conscious, it knows, feels, and thinks. But a human being not only knows, feels and thinks. Thus in the human beings consciousness knows itself and human consciousness is of the nature of self consciousness. See. M. Rafiuddin (1971), *Iqbal's Idea of the Self*, Studies in Iqbal's thought and arts, Bazmi Iqbal: Lahore, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore a man who is conscious of his manhood does not stoop down to earth without showing resistance. If he stoops down to earth and does not try to lift himself up, it means he gives himself to dust. This means he is satisfied to live an animal life at the scale of animals. He may still go down, because as animal can remain an animal for ever. A human being who surrenders before clay must be claimed by clay, by and by. See. Muhammad Munawwar (1992), *Iqbal Poet Philosopher of Islam*, Iqbal Academy: Lahore, Pakistan, p. 150. See also, p. 142. Man to become man in the true sense of the word, has to imbibe habits and attributes of Allah and, unless he understands this reality, he remains a homo-sapiens who, in spite of qualities and elements of man in him, lives on the level of instinct only, and can as per his will, surpass the cruelest of animals in cruelty and the meanest of creatures in meanness.

change, God becomes a co-worker with him, provided man takes the initiatives. This basic concept of education is based on the teaching of the Holy Qur'an: "Verily, God will not change the condition of men, till they change what is in themselves.

According to Saiyidain, Iqbal has repeatedly stressed the point that *question*, (i.e. asking dependence on others, the slavish imitation of their weakens the self and that, unless individuals as well as the community develop self reliance and evolve the inner richness of their own being, their potentialities will remain warped and repressed. From the explanation above it is clear that the word education is closely related to the existence of man as its object and to the strong relationship between man and his environment. However, the impact of society upon the individual is another dimension to be elaborated in order to elucidate the term of education in general.

Society, according to Sayyid Sajjad Rizavi, can change the behavior of individuals, who constitute it, in so far as it liberates and limits the activities of men and sets up standards for them for being followed and maintained. This change in the behavior of the individuals, which brings them closer to the collective norms, necessitates the existence of any agency through which influences from without the individual affect his behavior and orientate it towards desired as well as desirable goals and objectives<sup>9</sup>. Unless the behavior of individuals is changed according to the genus of the society and molded into a type, generally needed and approved by the social order, the society cannot perpetuate itself. This process of changing their behavior of individuals starts very early, immediately right after their birth. Known as socialization, it is both a molding and creating process, in which the group tries to bear upon the child, and in which the individual's thoughts, feelings and behavior gradually and continually change and develop in accordance with the values set by the society. Society exists through a process of transmission quite as much as biological life. This transmission occurs by means of communication of habits of doing, thinking and feeling from the older to the younger. This transmission is necessary to acquaint the child with what is desirable, followed and respected by

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<sup>9</sup> Sayyid Sajjad Rizavi, (1986), *Islamic philosophy of education*, Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, p. 21.

the society so that he may have a frame of reference to judge his actions and try to conform to the accepted norms of the society. Thus, it can be concluded that, in order to build up and maintain an ideal individual and a society, not only do we need a change in the behavior of a newly born child, but also have to develop a sense of social adjustment among its members. To the mind of the writer, the relationship of an individual with his environment like what has been discussed in this introduction vividly could be made as the basis of developing the nature through character education.

## 2. The Basic Qualities of Human Education:

Study on the conception of Allama Muhammad Iqbal on character education is naturally related to his concept of the good man as formed by the type of education foreshadowed in his philosophy<sup>10</sup>. The good life must be a life of active effort and struggle, not one of withdrawal or seclusion or slothful ease. Life must be carried out through doing creativity and activity. This activity must not, however, run into routine patterns. It must be creative and original, for creativity is the most valuable and distinctive gift of man; through it a man has been able to transform this crude, unfinished world and fill it with what order and beauty it can claim. In his poetry Iqbal elaborates:

Life is ever welcoming the difficult, ever rejecting the easy,  
 Ever creating, ever achieving new things!  
 It weaves a garment out of water and clay  
 And creates the hands and feet, the eyes and the heart<sup>11</sup>

A man according to Iqbal lives his daily life in active contact with his environment and dynamically reshapes it to suit his purposes. This active quality of the good character is brought out with great power in his secret of the self. This good man must learn to apply his intelligence increasingly to the exploitation of the forces of Nature, thereby adding to his knowledge and power. Without the fullest development of his intellect, he will remain at the mercy of the forces which surround him and his activity will be limited and inconsequential. Iqbal further elaborated in his poetry:

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<sup>10</sup> Saiyidain, Iqbal's Educationla Philosophy, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1992, p. 100.

<sup>11</sup> Javid Nama, pp. 216-17.

Intellect reigns over all beings of clay and light  
Nothing is beyond the reach of the God-given mind!  
The entire world bows to its eternal glory,  
The heart alone challenges its sway at every step!<sup>12</sup>

The last line gives a clue to the spirit in which intellect is to be used as an instrument in the service of action. Intellect does confer power on us but, as we have seen, this power can be utilized constructively for the good of humanity only if it is guided and controlled by love. This love, however, is not a mere vague humanitarian sentiment; it is an active force which gives an explosive quality to individuality if it is pressed into the service of worthy ends. It links man with his Maker in a co-operative Endeavour for perfection. The real motive force in the conduct of the true Believer is that, in religious phraseology, he lives his life in the name of the Lord, dedicating all his powers to the working out of His increasing purpose on earth. Allama Iqbal gives vivid description of this perfect individual, who has identified his will with the Divine purpose like in the following poem:

He subordinates everything to God:  
His seeing and not seeing, his eating and drinking and sleeping!  
In all thy actions let thy aim be to draw nigh to God,  
That His Glory may be made manifest by thee!  
Peace becomes an evil if its object is aught else,  
War is good if its object is God!  
Whoso draws the sword for anything except God,  
Finds it sheathed in his own breast.<sup>13</sup>

The word war in above poem according to Saiyidain is fighting in the name of the Lord which is not necessarily fighting in the physical sense; in fact, it is so only in extreme cases of defense against aggression and injustice. It is, more correctly, a struggle in every possible way, to bring about a reign of peace, justice and humanity in individual and collective conduct and often it takes the form of striving against one's lower nature, and according to Islam is Jihad in the true sense. Iqbal further elaborates in his poem:

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<sup>12</sup> Zarbi-Kalim, p 34.

<sup>13</sup> Asrari Khudi, pp.70-72.

The Momin is alive and at war with himself.  
He sweeps down on himself as the wolf on the deer.<sup>14</sup>

With his high ideal before him, man sets out on the arduous course of self-affirmation, self-realization and self development, lives a life of strenuous activity and thereby evolves his inner strength and richness. The development of the inner resources of his individuality enables him to rise to undreamt of heights, when he becomes the architect of his destiny and a co-worker with God in His plan. In order to develop such a character, which has both sensitiveness and strength – sensitiveness to the good of humanity and to ideal values, strength in carrying out one's purposes - there are three qualities which education, as envisaged by Allama Muhammad Iqbal, should sedulously cultivate: *Courage, Tolerance, and Faqr*.

Allama Muhammad Iqbal which has been elaborated by Saiyidain in his educational philosophy believes that the cultivation of an attitude of *courage* is essential for the proper education of character. This education should be so planned as to eradicate all influences which tend to produce an attitude of fear. He considers fear to be one of the most degrading and inhibitory of emotions. Just as Love strengthens the Self, Fear, which is the negation of Love, weakens it and becomes the source of all kinds of corruption in the individual's character. The fear of the Lord, it has been rightly held, is the beginning of wisdom. But it is equally certain that every other kind of fear undermines the joy of life, weakens the capacity for action, and, when greatly accentuated, inhibits it altogether. It is the parent of all the vices characteristics, flattery.

A.M. Iqbal has elucidated in the following poem:  
Flattery, treachery, cunning and spite  
Are all nurtured in the bosom of fear;  
Every hidden evil, nestling in your heart,  
Is the product of fear if you will rightly regard.<sup>15</sup>

Modern psychology as well as experience, have also revealed the significant fact that even those manifestation which, on the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Rumus-i-Bekhudī, p. 110.



surface, appear to be a parade of brute strength, such as: bullying tyranny, display of military force, are, in reality, veiled and distorted expression of fear. The exploitation of the weak by the strong, the suppression of new ideas, unjust legislation to protect the ill-gotten gains privileges of the rich of the powerful, the armament race amongst the nations of the world, this and many other kindred phenomena of contemporary life really show that our entire civilization is dominated by fear and jealousy, which is fear's inevitable companion. Thus it is that fear undermines the character of the weak as well as the strong.

Courage can be cultivated as an attribute of character by making *Tawhid* (monotheism) and active working principle of conduct. This according to A.M. Iqbal, implies a rejection of all fears except the fear of Allah, a surrender of our will and purposes to His increasing purpose, and an attitude of manly defiance towards all other powers which may threaten to arrest our freedom of thought and development and the existence of our legitimate human rights. Iqbal again express his poem:

Let love burn away all fear,  
Fear only God and live like the lion!  
The fear of God is the beginning of faith  
The fear of others is veiled idolatry!  
Relieve yourself of the fears of others,  
You are a power asleep; shake yourself awake!<sup>16</sup>

In his *Rumus-i-Bekhudi* Iqbal has discussed at some length how fear, despair and cowardice are the source of most evils, including the slowing down of the tempo of life, and how the doctrine of *Tawhid*, translated into practice, is an effective remedy against them.

The essence of *Tawhid* as a working idea, Iqbal explains, is equality, solidarity and freedom, and when it becomes the guiding principle of conduct, it transforms miraculously the character and life of individuals and gives them a new sense of courage and self-respect. This courage does not require any extraordinary imagination or insight to perceive that the whole of social life and education are dominated by fear and devotion to false ideals.

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<sup>16</sup> *Rumus-i-Bekhudi*, p. 114.

The children in their earliest infancy, are terrified at home by ignorant mothers and nurses and grow up timid and apprehensive, not only of authority but of imaginary ghosts and demons with whom they people very dark nook and corner of their home. At school, the sensitive, growing child often passes through a veritable reign of terror, afraid of his teachers and of the irrational public opinion of his fellows who are generally impatient of newness and originality and often impose all kinds of silly, unnecessary taboos on their fellows who happen to be out of the common run. In the college and university, where these cruder forms of fear do not prevail, youth is often under the tyranny of expressed emotional conflicts which embitter his sensitive nature and check the freedom of self-expression- conflicts that the teachers have generally neither the sympathy nor the imagination to resolve. Add to this that, in the name of religion and politics and social conventions, the right of free criticism and of forming independent judgment on some of the most vital issues and problems is denied to them in the interest of an unjust status quo, and they are taught not only to respect, but to be afraid of, every kind of constituted authority. Is it any wonder, then, that generations of the youth have had their character and outlook warped? They have been growing up with cramped natures, lacking initiative, courage, and self-reliance. They are limited in their sympathies, narrow in their loyalties, and timid in the formation of their purposes. They are often fanatical, for tolerance and generosity can only develop when the self is courageous and strong. It is love, in the sense in which Allama Muhammad Iqbal has used the word, which casts out fear, and releasing its potential capacity for greet needs, gives an explosive and dynamic quality to individuality.

The second quality which Iqbal considers to be an essential constituent of the good character is *Tolerance*. Iqbal has sometimes been maligned by ill-informed critics for intolerance and, therefore, the emphatic advocacy of this quality by him may cause them surprise. But really there is nothing surprising in it, for true Tolerance must find a place in any pattern of thought which lays stress on individuality. If individuality is to be developed to its fullest extent in all members of a community, intolerance will be suicidal, as it will lead to perpetual conflict and clashes and thus arrest the desired development.

The principle of the ego sustaining deed, Iqbal remarks, is respect for the ego in myself as well as in others which clearly implies that, unless education strengthens in man a sense of respect for other's individuality, their opinion and beliefs, their thought and behavior, their differences with man his own will remain warped, distorted, incomplete.

It must be clearly realized that this tolerance, which A.M. Iqbal preaches, is very different from the pseudo-tolerance of the man without strong convictions which is become quite common in this age and is the result of an attitude of general skepticism and indifference, of not caring sincerely and passionately enough about any values or beliefs or ideals. Iqbal's tolerance is born of strength, not of weakness; it is the tolerance of a man of strong faith who has fervently cherished convictions of his own, but on that ver account, realizes that respect is due to those of others.

The third quality, that of *faqr* or *istighna*, has come in for great stress in the later writings of Iqbal. It is difficult to render it into English satisfactorily because there is no one word which could convey its full and precise significance. Its underlying idea has been long familiar to the East, but it is somewhat alien to the modern thought in the West. This third quality of character education is related to the fact that the highest aspiration of man are apt to become stifled by the weight of his material possessions, and riches often arrest the growth and expansion of the spirit. He elucidated in his following poem:

The self-respecting Faqr will soon have its day,  
The greed for gold and silver has corrupted the soul of the West.<sup>17</sup>

He is, therefore, anxious that, while man is engaged in the conquest of this world, he should retain an inner attitude of detachment and superiority to his material possession, this is Faqr in the real sense, for only then can he guard himself against becoming a slave to them and use them for the expansion, instead of the impoverishment, of his spiritual life and for the service, instead of the exploitation, of his fellowmen. It is a kind of intellectual and emotional asceticism which does not turn away from the world as a source of evil and corruption but uses it for the pursuit of good and

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<sup>17</sup> Zarb-i-Kalim, p. 24.

worthy ends. It makes the good man a crusader of the spirit, as it were, who wields his Faqr as a shield against becoming contaminated by the corruptions and temptations which beset him at every step. He wrote his clear poem in relation with this quality such in the following:

In power, as in subjection, Faqr is the shield,  
That protects the pure hearted.<sup>18</sup>

Iqbal further explains that Faqr when it is in power, saves man from an attitude of arrogance and self-intoxication; in political subjection, it enables him to spurn the temptations, bribes and snares with which the ruling power tries cynically to corrupt the integrity and character of a subject people. He further defines that Faqr by contrasting it with the renunciation, preached by some religions, which implies an attitude of escape or withdrawal. This Faqr, then instead of being in the nature of a renunciation by the weak, becomes a source of incorruptible idealism and effort in the strong, who learn to spurn luxury and temptation and refuse to be caught up in their snare. It gives the right intellectual and emotional tone to individuality.

To sum up in educational terms, the character of the good man, the true believer, the Momin, as visualized by A.M. Iqbal is a man who develops all his powers and strengthens his individuality through active contact with his material and cultural environment. This strong, concentrated individuality, sharpened and steeled through a life of active experience, is to be dedicated to the service of the Lord in whose name he is out to conquer the world. But, when the world lies conquered at his feet, he is strong enough to stand aloof from, and superior to, the well-nigh irresistible temptations which weaken man's moral fiber. His self respect gives him courage and adventurousness; his tolerance and respect for the rights and personality of others make him sensitive to the claims which their common humanity makes on him. In the pursuit of his ideals he is strong enough to defy with contempt the vested interests and forces which stand in the way of their realization. A.M Iqbal explains in his poem:

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<sup>18</sup> Bal-i-Jibril, p. 38.

He is a flashing sword against untruth,  
And a protecting shield for truth!  
His affirmation and negation  
Are the criteria for Good and Evil!  
Great is his forgiveness, his justice, his generosity and his grace,  
Even in anger he knows how to be kind!<sup>19</sup>

So emphatic is his insistence on these qualities that, according to Allama Muhammad Iqbal the real difference between a Momin (the true believer) and a Kafir (the unbeliever) is not a narrow theological difference but one of fundamental attitude towards life, namely, whether he does, or he does not, develop all his capacities and use them for the conquest and the remaking of the world in the name of the Lord.

### 3. Conclusion:

According to Allama Muhammad Iqbal *Character Education* in its full and correct signification, must be visualized as the sum total of all cultural forces which play on the life of the individual and the community. If this clearly understood, it follows that the emergence of an outstanding creative thinker, who has a distinctive message to give new values to present before the world, is a phenomenon of the greatest interest for the educationist, and the more his ideas catch the imagination, the understanding and the enthusiasm of his contemporaries, the greater must be his influence as an educative force.

It is with strong conviction that A.M. Iqbal has a valuable contribution to make to the solution of the ever recurring but ever fresh problems of character education.

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<sup>19</sup> Bal-i-Jibril, p. 132.

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