

A Comparative Exploration of Human Potential and Self-Transcendence in Iqbal and Nietzsche

Shadab Ali Khan^{1*}, Faizan Munawwar²

^{1,2}Research Scholars, Department of Philosophy, AMU, Aligarh

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36348/jaep.2024.v08i10.001>

| Received: 24.08.2024 | Accepted: 30.09.2024 | Published: 03.10.2024

*Corresponding author: Shadab Ali Khan

Research Scholars, Department of Philosophy, AMU, Aligarh

Abstract

This study examines the essential conceptual distinctions between Nietzsche's notion of the Superman and Iqbal's conception of the Perfect Man, two divergent goals of human potential. Nietzsche's Superman, grounded on power, autonomy, and the repudiation of conventional morality, aspires to grandeur via individual supremacy and the transcendence of social norms. Conversely, Iqbal's Perfect Man is a fusion of heavenly grandeur and beauty, attaining excellence via spiritual self-actualization, ethical integrity, and altruistic service to mankind. Nietzsche's Superman dismisses metaphysical ideas and flourishes via human will, but Iqbal's Perfect Man derives power from religion, love, and justice. This contrast highlights a profound philosophical divergence: Nietzsche's perspective centers on existential power, while Iqbal's prioritizes spiritual development and collective advancement. The thesis ultimately emphasizes Iqbal's Perfect Man as a paradigm for harmonious human growth, surpassing Nietzsche's individualistic ideal.

Keywords: Superman, Perfect Man, Material, Spiritual.

Copyright © 2024 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, the enigmatic German philosopher, profoundly influenced several philosophers, including the renowned poet and philosopher Allama Iqbal. Iqbal was profoundly intrigued by the depth and vitality of Nietzsche's ideas, leading him to constantly interact with and reflect on Nietzsche's worldview in his prose and poetry. Iqbal saw Nietzsche as a philosophical friend, particularly in relation to his own dynamic and life-affirming perspective. Nietzsche, sometimes considered the apex of the vitalist movement, presented concepts that profoundly aligned with Iqbal's own reflections. Numerous references, analogies, and symbols in Iqbal's poetry—especially in his pivotal work *Asrar-i-Khudi* can be linked to Nietzsche's influential classic, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The symbolic representation of coal and diamond, both significant in Iqbal's works, resonates with Nietzsche's theory of change and transcendence. Beyond these symbolic associations, Iqbal's comprehensive concept of the "perfect man," although deeply anchored in Islamic mysticism, draws a parallel with Nietzsche's Übermensch (superman). In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche articulates the Übermensch as an ideal, positing that mankind must

progress and surpass itself. In Nietzsche's perspective, this superman epitomized the future of humanity, a person much superior to the individuals of his day.

Nietzsche Superman

Nietzsche presents his notion of the superman or overman in alignment with his philosophy of power. He regards Superman as the quintessential aristocrat (Knight, 1933). Nietzsche's fervent denunciation of Christianity arose from his belief that it fostered weakness, subservience, and a subservient moral framework. He said that it was an ideology that suppressed human excellence. Iqbal saw in Nietzsche the dichotomy of a mind that repudiated religion while the heart remained receptive to the divine. Iqbal's juxtaposition of Nietzsche with the Arab poet Umayyah bint Abi-Sait, citing the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), "His tongue is a disbeliever, but his heart believes," establishes a parallel between two individuals grappling with a similar internal conflict—a discord between intellectual dissent and heartfelt conviction.

The Superman fundamentally represents an embodiment of the urge to power. He is a ruling aristocracy, intoxicated by power and only a symbol of brutality. Nietzsche seeks to see the 'noble' man, not as a

universal archetype but as a ruling aristocracy. The 'noble' individual may exhibit harshness and, at times, engage in actions deemed criminal by societal standards; he acknowledges obligations only to his peers (Russell, 1954).

According to Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* is an inherently noble individual. A favorable birth is essential for the existence of Superman. While rigorous training and stringent education are essential for Superman, a favorable lineage is fundamentally requisite. He consistently belongs to the aristocratic class, rather than the middle or lower class. He asserts that the elite few to whom the superman pertains have often been a conquering race or hereditary aristocracy, and that aristocracies have generally been, at least in principle, descendants of conquering races (Russell, 1954).

The Superman acknowledges just material values. Religious or spiritual values have little importance for him. Nietzsche proclaims, "God is dead." The Superman serves as a replacement for God. Iqbal separated himself from Nietzsche's atheism, since he believed in a personal God, supporting his viewpoint with the Qur'anic concept of Divine reality (Riyaz, 2016). He engaged with Nietzsche with deep empathy and comprehension. Iqbal, as a mystic and philosopher, could comprehend the existential profundity and the philosophical conflicts inherent in Nietzsche's ideas. He acknowledged the significant ramifications of Nietzsche's concepts while yet expressing substantial skepticism over their possible outcomes.

Iqbal saw a kindred spirit in Nietzsche's criticism of Platonism and its interpretation in Christian theology. Nietzsche dismissed the notion of God as a mere "causa prima"- a soulless, abstract principle apart from reality. This view, prevalent in Christian theology during Nietzsche's day, sharply contrasted with the dynamic and vivacious God of prophetic faiths, a concept with which Iqbal could completely resonate. Iqbal's repudiation of this barren conception of God paralleled Nietzsche's, despite their fundamentally divergent motivations and religious underpinnings (Qaiser, 2012).

Although Nietzsche's theory cannot be entirely harmonized with Iqbal's spiritual perspective, the significant insights both philosophers offered about human potential, the criticism of conventional ideologies, and the advocacy for a life of creation and transcendence are indisputable. Iqbal's discourse with Nietzsche was a discussion between two intellects exploring the fundamental nature of existence, both positioned at the intersection of their own spiritual and intellectual legacies. In his esteemed *Javed Nama*, Allama Iqbal references Nietzsche with a deep but critical perspective. Contemplating the life and philosophies of the German thinker, Iqbal posits that had Nietzsche existed during the time of the Prophet Ahmad

(PBUH), he may have encountered the enduring delight and spiritual satisfaction that he ardently pursued in his search for significance. Iqbal considers himself as a tutor to Nietzsche, asserting that,

اگر ہوتا وہ مجذوب فرنگی اس زمانے میں
تو اقبال اس کو سمجھاتا مقام کبریا کیا ہے

If that mystic from the West were alive in this age, Iqbal would have shown him the true stature of Divine Glory (Iqbal, 1986, p. 53).

This couplet is extracted from Allama Iqbal's *Javid Nama*. It illustrates Iqbal's critical interaction with Nietzsche's concepts, recognizing Nietzsche's intellectual prowess while positing that he lacked comprehension of the divine and spiritual dimensions of existence. Iqbal would have revealed to Nietzsche the real magnificence of God—a revelation that Nietzsche's powerful, but tormented, intellect could never comprehend (Vahid, 1973). Iqbal's assertion in *Payam-i-Mashriq* that his intellect is a skeptic but his heart is a believer is a concise and insightful commentary on Nietzsche's internal struggle. It encapsulates the core of Nietzsche's philosophical odyssey, conflicted between his rational repudiation of religion and a profound, maybe subconscious desire for spiritual transcendence. For Iqbal, this is the point at when their trajectories diverge. Nietzsche's notion of the *Übermensch* arises from a reality where "God is dead," but Iqbal's ideal of the perfect man is fundamentally connected to faith in a vibrant, active God.

Nietzsche's *Übermensch* has no more promising future. According to Nietzsche's Law of Recurrence, he will reincarnate in this world after death, as he exists in the present. It is only a mechanical procedure without ambition. This portrayal of Superman has created a significant discourse of criticism. Bertrand Russell incisively advocates and delineates the psychological issue underlying Nietzsche's worldview. He asserts that Nietzsche never considered the notion that the desire for power, which he attributes to his superman, is a consequence of fear. Individuals devoid of dread towards their neighbors see no need to oppress them. He also asserts that there are two types of saints: the saint by nature and the saint by fear. The saint inherently has an instinctive passion for creation; he does good deeds because they bring him joy. The saint, motivated by fear, resembles an individual who refrains from stealing only due to the presence of law enforcement; he would be malevolent if not constrained by the prospect of hellfire or the retribution of his neighbor. Nietzsche can only conceive of the second kind of saint; he is so consumed by dread and animosity that genuine affection for humanity seems unattainable to him. He has never envisioned a guy who, embodying the fearlessness and obstinate pride of the superman, still refrains from causing harm due to a lack of desire to do so (Russell, 1954).

Iqbal's Concept of Perfect Man

Iqbal often alludes to the notion of the ideal man in his poetry, using numerous appellations such as *Mard-e-Momin*, *Mard-e-Kamil*, *Mard-e-Hur* (the freeman), and *Darwesh-e-Khuda Mast* (God-intoxicated man) (Rafique, 1974). Numerous poetry by Iqbal delineate the features and characteristics of such an individual. He saw him as a collaborator with God. His ideal man also subdues and shapes the cosmos in accordance with his own principles. Iqbal cites verses from the Qur'an that acknowledge the existence of creators apart from God. In his *Bal-e-Jibril*, Iqbal delineates the attributes of *Mard-e-Momin* as follows: The hand of *Mard-e-Momin* represents the hand of God, which is authoritative, creative, problem-solving, and action-oriented. Despite being composed of dust, his essence is of light; he is a servant of God but has divine traits:

ہاتھ ہے اللہ کا بندہ مومن کا ہاتھ
غالب و کار آفرین، کارکشما، کار ساز

The hand of the believer is the hand of God,
Powerful, creative, and full of purpose, solving and
accomplishing. (Iqbal, 1986, p. 124)

Iqbal's notion of the Perfect Man sharply contrasts with Nietzsche's Superman, signifying a significant difference in values and goals. Nietzsche's Superman is defined by an insatiable desire for power, without compassion or love, while Iqbal's Perfect Man is a harmonic synthesis of *Jalal* (Divine Majesty) and *Jamal* (Divine Beauty). Iqbal's Perfect Man is not motivated by a desire for supremacy or the subjugation of others. He serves as a moral, fair, and loving guiding force, transcending social and economic divides. In contrast to Nietzsche, who saw equality as applicable just to an elite few, Iqbal's Perfect Man encompasses all of mankind, irrespective of socioeconomic standing (Rafique, 1974).

Nietzsche's concept of the Superman posits that he is a natural aristocrat—biologically superior, akin to the distinction between humans and animals. In sharp contrast, Iqbal's Perfect Man attains grandeur not by virtue of birth, but via self-actualization, with his superiority derived from his acts, virtues, and inner growth. The liberty and eternal life he attains are the results of his spiritual and ethical endeavor (Qaiser, 2001).

A significant distinction is in their spiritual perspective. Iqbal's Perfect Man is fundamentally anchored in faith and devotion to God, while Nietzsche's Superman is characterized by atheism. Iqbal posits that trust in God is fundamental for the evolution of human personality, and unlike Nietzsche's rejection of the ego's immortality, Iqbal's Perfect Man achieves resurrection, not as an external occurrence, but as a completion of the ego's development. This resurrection represents the ongoing development of the self, ever advancing towards the attainment of greater potential. According to Iqbal,

life is an ongoing path of spiritual enlightenment, whereby the Perfect Man receives divine instruction while actively determining his fate.

Iqbal challenges Nietzsche's fatalistic conception of the Superman's return, contending that this ideology, rather than motivating action, undermines the impetus for struggle and development. Nietzsche's thesis posits that existence is confined to a preset cycle, without desire and creativity, akin to the deterministic idea of destiny or 'Qismat'. Conversely, Iqbal posits that life is inherently dynamic and that the ego's development is directed towards novel and unparalleled opportunities.

Notwithstanding these pronounced differences, some erroneously assert that Iqbal emulated Nietzsche in his notion of the Perfect Man. Nevertheless, while Iqbal esteemed Nietzsche's focus on life and vigor, he refrained from embracing the concept of the Superman. The concept of the Perfect Man was not new to Iqbal; it has profound origins in Islamic philosophy, with thinkers such as Rumi, Ibn-i-Arabi, and Al-Jili having examined this idea far before Nietzsche. Iqbal's image of the Perfect Man was influenced by preceding Muslim philosophers, Plato's philosopher-king, and the Islamic interpretation of the prophet.

Scholars like as Professor M.M. Sharif have asserted that conflating Nietzsche's atheistic Superman with Iqbal's ideal would reflect a misinterpretation. Iqbal may have appreciated Nietzsche's critique of weakness; nonetheless, he would unequivocally refute Nietzsche's rejection of God, social equality, and the immortality of the soul. Iqbal's Perfect Man is driven by a moral and spiritual struggle, pursuing lofty goals within the boundaries of ethical principles. His power is continually used not for tyranny, but for the protection of justice and humanity. Iqbal's Perfect Man serves as a spiritual and moral paradigm, embodying celestial qualities and committed to continuous self-improvement and society progress. This image sharply contrasts with Nietzsche's Superman, whose power is based on individual superiority and the rejection of traditional values. Thus, it is clear that while Iqbal valued certain aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy, his notion of the Perfect Man is fundamentally different, grounded on Islamic thought and spiritual tenets.

Comparison

Both Iqbal and Nietzsche critique Plato. Both delineate three phases that an individual must traverse in the pursuit of self-realization. Nietzsche delineates three stages: the camel, the lion, and the child, while Iqbal identifies adherence to law, self-control, and the vicegerency of God. Both romanticize yearning and fervor for existence. Iqbal seems to agree with Nietzsche that power equates to truth and establishes the criterion of values, although he does not endorse Nietzsche's iconoclastic nihilism. Knight asserts that liberation from ethical constraints, in pursuit of significant objectives,

acts, creative excellence, and pleasure, is goodness. Restraints will be removed and power will be repudiated. This existence should be deemed the only life and regarded as virtuous. All that obstructs grandeur, strength, and beauty will be eradicated. The apprehensions of sin, damnation, mortality, and conscience will be dispelled. Since a soul cannot exist without a body, spiritual grandeur cannot thrive in the presence of physical illness; hence, health is of paramount importance. Pity constitutes a malady. It obstructs activity or provides an unhealthy gratification to the petty. Resilience is an invaluable characteristic (Knight, 1933).

This was the apex of the Romantic Rebellion initiated by Rousseau's 'Social Contract,' which asserted that 'Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains.' Iqbal acknowledges and embraces Nietzsche's fervor for life, his disdain for rigid principles, and his admiration for dynamism, initiative, and ambition; nonetheless, he finds Nietzsche's lawlessness and destructiveness completely foreign. Iqbal does not, for instance, share the following key sentiments of Nietzsche as expressed in 'Thus Spake Zarathustra':

"Destroy for me, oh destroy for me, the Good and the Just." or "God is dead, Now let us will that the Superman live." or "God is dead, God died of his pity for man. Therefore be warned against pity." or "Must not we ourselves become gods to seem worthy of it? Never before was so great a deed performed and all those born after us will by that very fact belong to a higher form of history than any that has hitherto existed. (Nietzsche, 1954)

Iqbal contends that the fundamental distinction between these two eminent intellectuals is their belief systems. Nietzsche's conception of human transcendence is predicated on the absence of God, but Iqbal's philosophy of selfhood (*Khudi*) is fundamentally linked to the presence of God. According to Iqbal, authentic greatness—the consummate self—can alone be attained via spiritual enlightenment and a profound relationship with the divine.

Iqbal's reverence for Nietzsche, especially on the notion of the Superman, is unequivocal. While Nietzsche conceptualized a being motivated only by desire and force, Iqbal imbued this potent notion with a deep spiritual essence. Iqbal's reaction to Nietzsche resulted in his own notion of the *Insan-i-Kamil*—the Perfect Man. Nietzsche's Superman aimed to surpass mankind by power and domination, but Iqbal contended that genuine transcendence could only be realized via the integration of the material and spiritual, the Eastern and Western, and the temporal and eternal (Hasan, 1987).

Iqbal differentiated his Perfect Man from Nietzsche's Superman, asserting that his idea was shaped by Sufi philosophy long before to his exposure to

Nietzsche's writings. Iqbal's Perfect Man transcended simple material conquest, embodying a synthesis of spiritual and historical realms of life. In contrast to Nietzsche's Superman, who sprang from the void of divinity, Iqbal's Perfect Man, or *Insan-i-Kamil*, is a being that flourishes in the presence of the divine, attaining the pinnacle of life via a deep relationship with God (Hasan, 1987).

For Iqbal, the *Insan-i-Kamil* represented not just the result of intellectual or physical process, but the apex of humanity's spiritual evolution. The spiritual aspect made Iqbal's Perfect Man the pinnacle of creation, adept at harmonizing the tangible and the metaphysical. His vision was fundamentally grounded in Islamic philosophy, particularly the doctrines of Al-Jili, a medieval Muslim intellectual, who saw the Perfect Man as the personification of heavenly traits. Iqbal posits that this ideal reached its zenith in the prophetic grace of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who not only influenced history and culture but also exemplified the perfect model for all of mankind (Siddiqi, 1995).

While Nietzsche dismissed established religion, especially Christianity, for fostering weakness and subservience, Iqbal saw the possibility for divine might amid human frailty. Nietzsche's Superman, bereft of divinity, was solitary in a meaningless universe, depending only on the want to power. In contrast, Iqbal saw the Perfect Man as the instrument of God, deriving his power from divine desire rather than human ambition.

Nietzsche's brilliance was in his articulate depiction of the Superman and the drive to power, a valiant archetype that aspired to transcend the banality of the populace. Nonetheless, despite his intellectual prowess, Nietzsche's perspective was ultimately constrained by what Iqbal saw as a spiritual deficiency. The heroic individual Nietzsche aimed to cultivate was spiritually deprived, ensnared in a realm devoid of divine direction. Iqbal identified Nietzsche's critical error as the conception of mankind motivated by power but without a divine purpose.

Although Nietzsche presented a formidable and transformative notion of the Superman, Iqbal saw it as insufficient. Nietzsche's vision, devoid of spiritual sustenance, remained desolate, a manifestation of brilliance that could not achieve its whole potential. Iqbal's Perfect Man, conversely, was a being who amalgamated the fortitude and vigor of Nietzsche's Superman with the modesty and sanctity of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This amalgamation of force and spirituality enabled Iqbal to surpass Nietzsche's concepts and provide a more comprehensive and enriching image of human excellence.

Nietzsche, despite his defiance and proclamations of strength, was deeply aware of his own

spiritual longing. In a moment of vulnerability, he confessed, "To confront alone an immense problem is overwhelming... It is as if I am lost in a primeval forest. I need help, I need disciples, I need a master. It would be too sweet to obey." He lamented that he could not find a living man who could see beyond him, someone to guide him: "Why do I not find among the living a man who sees higher than I do and looks down upon me? Is it that I have made a poor search? For I long so greatly for such a master." (Knight, 1933)

Unlike Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, who aspires to dominate others and delights in his lonely superiority, Iqbal's notion of the *Insan-i-Kamil*, or Perfect Man, is intrinsically a spiritual being. He recognizes his potential within the continuum of space and time, not as a despot but as a dynamic being, actively interacting with his environment. He is not alienated from society; rather, he is profoundly integrated into it, with both obligations and rights as a member of the social organism to which he belongs.

Iqbal's Perfect Man is neither harsh nor sadistic, nor does he gain pleasure from dominance or violence. He does not originate from the "slaughter of generations" but arises from the midst of common individuals, strengthened by stringent self-discipline, both physical and spiritual. Through this process, he surpasses his present condition, establishing a new realm rich with significance and limitless potential. For Iqbal, the paramount objective of the *Khudi*, or self, transcends simple perception or observation; it is to exist. The Ideal Man refines his actions via self-exploration and attains a profound, intrinsic understanding of "I am."

In Iqbal's worldview, the Perfect Man is a completely realized individual who has achieved total freedom and immortality. This sharply contrasts with Nietzsche's Superman, which emerged as a response to the nihilism that would ensue after the proclamation that "God is dead." Nietzsche's Superman epitomizes the apex of humanity—a being who arises not via slow evolution but from the tumult of modernity, a person of exceptional potential who has attained self-mastery and repudiated traditional Christian ethics. Nietzsche posits that the Superman will establish his own ideals, grounded only in earthly existence and liberated from conventional moral limitations.

The concept of the Superman was then appropriated and perverted by the Nazis into the harsh archetype of the Aryan master race, which diverged significantly from Nietzsche's original intent. Nietzsche desired, as he acknowledged, a "Caesar with the soul of Christ"—a leader with the power and command of a sovereign, but infused with the empathy and spiritual profundity of Christ.

Iqbal's Perfect Man, in contrast to Nietzsche's Superman, is not a solitary embodiment of strength, but

a cohesive being that attains grandeur by its relationship with both the divine and mankind. He exemplifies the equilibrium between inner fortitude and spiritual elegance, so presenting a picture of human completeness that surpasses simple worldly power.

CONCLUSION

The philosophical distinction between Nietzsche's Superman and Iqbal's Perfect Man extends beyond theoretical discourse, presenting two fundamentally divergent interpretations of human potential. Nietzsche's Superman, propelled by an unyielding ambition to power, epitomizes a future characterized by individual supremacy, autonomy, and the repudiation of conventional morality. He embodies raw, uncompromising might, devoid of sympathy or community connections, with power as both his aspiration and inheritance.

Iqbal's Perfect Man is defined not by biological superiority, but by the inner path of self-actualization, anchored in a deep sense of spiritual duty. Unlike Nietzsche's atheism and dismissal of metaphysical concepts, Iqbal's Perfect Man is profoundly linked to the Divine, deriving his strength from love, justice, and moral purity. He is not a sovereign of individuals, but a servant to mankind, elevating people via his integrity and foresight, rather than aspiring to subjugate them.

Nietzsche's Superman exists inside a realm of everlasting repetition and fixed cycles, but Iqbal's Perfect Man progresses in a continuously rising spiral of development towards an Infinite Reality that enlightens his journey. Nietzsche's Superman presents a self-centered and materialistic picture of mankind, while Iqbal's Perfect Man envisions a future where power is balanced with empathy, and the ego grows by contact with the Divine rather than through conquering.

The disparity between these two numbers signifies a profound philosophical dichotomy—one that contrasts existential isolation with spiritual oneness, and power pursued for its own purpose with power used to elevate the human spirit. Iqbal's Perfect Man serves as a perennial solution to the dilemmas of modernity, presenting a paradigm in which human excellence is defined by service, love, and ongoing self-transformation rather than by domination. Iqbal's vision surpasses Nietzsche's, presenting not just a novel paradigm of human potential but also a superior, more radiant purpose for mankind.

REFERENCES

- Hasan, M. (1987). *A New Approach to Iqbal*. Publication Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India. Bombay.
- Iqbal, M. (1986). *Gabriel's Wings*. (S. G. Qadir Andrabi, Trans.). Iqbal Academy Pakistan. Lahore

- Knight, A. H. (1933). *Some Aspects of the life and works of Nietzsche*. Cambridge Press University. London.
- Nietzsche, F. W. (1954). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. (W. Kaufmann, Trans.) Penguin Classics.
- Qaiser, D. N. (2001). *Iqbal and the Western Philosophers* (First ed.). Iqbal Academy Pakistan. Lahore.
- Qaiser, D. N. (2012). *Creative Dimensions of Iqbal's Thought* (First ed.). Iqbal Academy Pakistan. Lahore.
- Rafique, M. (1974). *Sri Aurobindo and Iqbal: A Comparative Study of their Philosophy*. Aligarh Muslim University. Aligarh.
- Riyaz, A. (2016). *Islamic Metaphysics with special reference to Mohammad Iqbal and Wittgenstein's Philosophy*. Educational Publishing House. Aligarh.
- Russell, B. (1954). *History of Western Philosophy*. George Allen and Unwin. London
- Siddiqi, P. N. (1995). *Iqbal in His Varied Aspects* (First ed.). Iqbal Academy Pakistan. Lahore.
- Vahid, S. (1973). *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*. Mohammad Ashraf Publishers. Lahore.