

## ***Iqbal's Shaheen and the Moral and Spiritual Formation of the Young Muslim***

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*Dedicated to the Youngsters of the Muslim World*

**Abstract:** *This article examines Allamah Muhammad Iqbal's concept of the ideal young man through the symbol of the Shaheen (eagle), which occupies a central place in his poetic, moral, and intellectual vision. In Iqbal's thought, the Shaheen is not merely a poetic image but a complete model of youth marked by freedom, self-respect, courage, purity, spiritual energy, and high ambition. Against the traditional symbolic use of birds in world poetry, Iqbal assigns the eagle a distinctive ideological role: it becomes the emblem of the self-aware, action-oriented, and Allah-conscious Muslim youth destined for moral leadership and civilizational renewal. The article explores how Iqbal contrasts the eagle with degraded forms of existence, especially the vulture, to stress the importance of lawful sustenance, noble character, independence of spirit, and refusal to live on the remains of others. It further shows that Iqbal's ideal youth combines physical vitality with faith, discipline, visionary thinking, and resistance to oppression. Special attention is given to Iqbal's critique of Western colonial education, which, in his view, weakens the natural powers of Muslim youth and diverts them from their spiritual and historical mission. The discussion also highlights the Qur'ani and Nabawi foundations of youth as a stage of strength, receptivity, and moral training. Ultimately, Iqbal's ideal young man emerges as a Muslim whose inner fire, lofty aspiration, and dynamic action enable him to transcend materialism, reject servility, and pursue excellence in both individual and collective life. The study concludes that the revival of the Muslim community, in Iqbal's framework, depends upon awakening within its youth the spirit of the Shaheen—a spirit that unites Aqidah, character, freedom, and transformative purpose.*

**Keywords:** *Allamah Iqbal; ideal young man; Shaheen; Muslim youth; selfhood; spiritual education; Islamic thought; symbolism in poetry; moral formation; revolutionary consciousness*

### **Introduction:**

Poets often use symbols and references to express their ideas. These symbols carry deep meanings and wisdom. For example, the English poet Wordsworth mentioned the cuckoo and described it as his favourite and imaginative bird. Shelley used the skylark beautifully in his poetry. The famous American poet Robert Frost also mentioned different birds in his poems. In Persian and Urdu poetry, the nightingale is often mentioned because the flower and the nightingale reflect stories of beauty and love in our social and cultural life. Allamah Iqbal was an ideological and revolutionary poet. He worked seriously to guide the Muslim nation in the right direction. For a self-respecting and revolutionary young man, he presented the eagle - Shaheen as a symbol. In reply to a question by Syed Sulayman Nadvi, Iqbal wrote in a letter that he liked the eagle because it has great qualities. It represents simplicity, movement, strength, and honour.

Iqbal's symbolism of the Shaheen is commonly linked by scholars and readers to the eagle imagery found in the poetry of the Great Persian Poet and Ismaili Dai and Philosopher Sayyiduna Nasir'e Khusraw. This connection is usually made because eagle symbolism occupies an important place in Sayyiduna Nasir'e Khusraw's poetic and moral imagination. In later literary reception, he is even associated with the title "Uqab'e Yumgan" ("the eagle of Yumgan"), a designation that reflects how deeply the eagle came to be identified with his poetic persona. The association is strengthened by his famous moral poem about the eagle, in which the bird becomes a vehicle for reflection on pride, downfall, consequence, and inward responsibility. That poem is often linked with the moral insight expressed in the saying *az mast ki bar mast*, namely that what comes upon us often arises from within ourselves.

At the same time, the matter should not be presented in overly absolute terms. It is more careful and accurate to say that Iqbal's Shaheen is commonly connected with Nasir-i Khusraw's eagle imagery, rather than to claim that Iqbal simply took or copied the symbol from him. Iqbal's intellectual and poetic formation belongs to the much wider Persian classical tradition, and his symbolic world was nourished by several earlier masters, above all Rumi. In addition, some modern comparative studies have pointed to parallels between Iqbal's Shaheen and the *baaz/shaheen* imagery found in Khushhal Khan Khattak. Therefore, Nasir-i Khusraw should be seen not as the sole or exclusive source, but as one especially significant precursor whose eagle symbolism offers an important background for understanding Iqbal's later development of the image.

Among major scholars of Iqbal, Annemarie Schimmel gives particular support to this line of influence. She explicitly remarks that Nasir'e Khusraw was one "to whom Iqbal owes a lot of inspiration." This is an important scholarly observation because it places Nasir within the acknowledged line of Persian thinkers and poets who helped shape Iqbal's imagination. It also helps explain why the connection between Nasir's eagle and Iqbal's Shaheen has remained persuasive in critical discussion. Yet even where influence is accepted, one must still recognize

that Iqbal does not merely repeat an inherited image. He receives it, reworks it, and gives it a new philosophical and civilizational meaning.

This distinction is crucial. In Sayyiduna Nasir'e Khusraw, the eagle is tied mainly to moral meditation. It serves as a symbol through which themes such as pride, self-awareness, frailty, consequence, and ethical responsibility are explored. The emphasis is reflective and admonitory. In Iqbal, however, the Shaheen undergoes a profound transformation. It becomes one of the most powerful symbols in his poetry, representing Khudi, freedom, courage, self-respect, spiritual energy, detachment from luxury, and the discipline of ceaseless ascent. The Shaheen in Iqbal is not merely a bird of moral illustration; it is an ideal type, an emblem of the elevated human self that refuses passivity, dependency, and comfort. It embodies loftiness of vision, strength of character, and an uncompromising aspiration toward higher spiritual and moral possibilities. For this reason, the relationship between Sayyiduna Nasir'e Khusraw and Iqbal should be understood as a relationship of inheritance and transformation. The earlier Persian tradition provides the symbolic material, but Iqbal recasts that material within his own philosophical vision. What may have appeared in earlier poetry as a moral or didactic image becomes in Iqbal a dynamic symbol of life, movement, power, and self-realization. His Shaheen is therefore distinctly Iqbalian. It carries the resonance of older Persian and Islamic imagery, yet it is reshaped to express Iqbal's own concerns: the awakening of the self, the recovery of dignity, the rejection of servility, and the cultivation of a spiritually vigorous human being. This is especially why the symbol speaks so strongly in his address to Muslim youth. Accordingly, the safest and most balanced formulation is that Iqbal was indeed inspired by Shi'i Ismaili Da'i of Khurasan and Badakhshan, Sayyiduna Nasir'e Khusraw, and that the concept of the Shaheen is commonly linked to Nasir'e Khusraw's eagle imagery. However, the symbol does not remain confined to its earlier context. In Iqbal's hands, it acquires a fresh meaning and becomes a symbol of Khudi, spiritual elevation, independence, courage, and lofty aspiration. Thus, while its roots may be traced to earlier Persian poetry, in Iqbal it emerges with renewed philosophical depth and civilizational significance.

It would not be wrong to say that Iqbal's eagle stands for the brave and revolutionary youth of the Muslim nation. Youth means honour, passion, movement, courage, strength, life, freshness, and speed. Iqbal's eagle also stands for purity, greatness, fearlessness, and high ambition. Today's young person can be Iqbal's eagle if he has sharp vision, beautiful speech, and powerful character. Iqbal believed that those travelers who have the spirit of dawn prayers and inner fire never lose in the field of life. To describe the free nature of the true believer, Allamah Iqbal says: "Your dwelling is not on the dome of a king's palace; You are an eagle, so live on the rocks of mountains."

The rocks of mountains stand for vastness, height, and strength. These qualities suit only a bird like the eagle. Living on mountain rocks is a symbol of freedom and broad thinking, while making a nest on the dome of a king's palace points towards greed, temptation, selfish desire, and slavery. Freedom develops a person's natural abilities and raises him to the honour Allah gave to human

beings. Iqbal adopted a bold attitude against oppression and repeatedly used the eagle to highlight the revolutionary and noble qualities of the believing youth.

Youth is a stage of life in which a person has strength, power, and energy. It is the source of hope and ability. A young person has passion and determination and the ability to achieve great things. He faces life's difficulties with courage and full energy. If faith is also added to this state, then he can become Iqbal's eagle and a successful traveler on the path of excellence in every stage of life. That is why Allamah Iqbal addressed the youth and said that they should awaken the spirit of the eagle within themselves. Just as the eagle touches the heights of the sky through its high flight, when this spirit awakens in young people, they begin to see their destination in the skies. The poet says:

*"When the spirit of the eagle awakens in the youth,  
They begin to see their destination in the heavens."*

Qur'an has also described youth as the stage of strength and power:

*"Allah is the One who created you in weakness, then after weakness gave you strength, then after strength made you weak and old again. He creates whatever He wills, and He is the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful."*

A believing young man always has a smile on his face. He is full of hope, energy, and determination. Amir al-Mumineen (Ali) said:

*"You will see that laziness stays far away from him, and he always remains active and energetic."*

The eagle is a bird with great qualities, and every being is known through its qualities. There are many birds in the same sky and with similar appearance, but the special qualities of the eagle give it its identity. In the same way, if a person develops positive and noble qualities within himself, he becomes a true personality. But if he falls from the level of humanity, he is counted among the lowest. These positive and negative values decide whether someone rises or falls. Iqbal also pointed out the difference between the vulture and the eagle. Vultures eat dead animals; eating carrion is part of their nature. But the eagle flies in the sky looking for fresh prey. It does not eat what another has killed. Because of this difference, their worlds and ranks are also different.

*"Both fly in the same sky, however the world of the vulture is different from the world of the eagle."*

By comparing the vulture and the eagle, Iqbal points to the quality of eating lawful and pure food in a true believer. No impure blood runs in the veins of a believer from unlawful food, because impure food becomes an obstacle to spiritual flight.

*"O heavenly bird, better death than the food  
That weakens your power of flight."*

Nations whose food is pure and lawful remain alive and honourable. Rasulullah (S) also described lawful earning as the cause of truthfulness, nobility, and courage. Since the eagle is unfamiliar with dead meat, its courage and self-respect keep it active in creativity, action, freshness, and search. Iqbal calls the youth of the Muslim nation towards leadership in the world and tells them the way to achieve it:

*“If your head is bare, then develop high ambition;  
In this world the crown is only for the eagle’s head.”*

*This means: O young man of a nation that is meant to lead others, if today you see yourself without a crown, honour, or greatness, then there is only one way to gain it - develop high ambition. In this world, only the eagle, which has great courage and high resolve, deserves the crown. If you want leadership and dignity, you must have great ambition and firm determination. Those with weak courage and low thinking remain without honour and glory. Allamah Iqbal reminds the Muslim youth of their great past and wants them to realise that they can still rise and dominate the world:*

*“O young Muslim, have you ever reflected?  
What a great sky you were, of which this is only a broken star.*

*You were raised by that nation in the lap of love  
Which once crushed the crowns of kings under its feet.”*

*The real philosophy of education and training is to bring out within a human being the qualities of Allah’s vicegerent on earth, to make him a reflection of divine attributes, and to develop his hidden abilities so that he can rise from the material world to the spiritual one. Rasulullah (S) also placed young people at the centre of training and advised that they be treated kindly. He said:  
“I advise you to treat the youth well, because their hearts are softer. When Allah sent me as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner, it was the youth who supported me, while the old people opposed me.”*

*Rasulullah (S) advised reformers of society that their efforts in education and training should focus on the youth, because Islam is a collection of heavenly laws and deep truths, and only prepared and soft hearts can truly understand them. Young people have not yet fully trapped their hearts in the low desires of the world. Their hearts are not yet rusted by blind love of worldly things. They still have hope, the ability to accept mistakes and correct them, and the courage to change their path. Because of this, they have a much greater ability to accept the truth. In youth, the human heart is still pure from many evils. Knowledge is a light, and at this stage of life it can illuminate hearts more effectively. It is like a sword that has not yet become rusty - it is easier and more useful to polish such a sword than one already rusted by the dirt of society. So youth is the best time to gain knowledge. In youth, the heart is like fertile land: whatever is planted in it grows.*

*With little effort, great benefit can be gained. If the steps of knowledge are not climbed in youth, then the difficult paths of life become harder to cross.*

*But in Iqbal's view, the Western system of education has handed teaching over to people who are themselves misguided. They do not know the true purpose of education, and one who does not know the way cannot guide others.*

*O Lord, I complain against the people of the schools:*

*They are teaching the eagle's children to play in the dust."*

*This Western education makes young people strangers to their own history and traditions, and makes them admirers of Western lifestyles, speech, behaviour, and ways of living. The false standards, ideas, and glitter of the West blind their eyes. In this way, they lose their natural freedom, bravery, and high ambition, and fall into an inferiority complex. In blindly copying the West, they adopt its faults and leave their own strengths. The spirit of Western education is empty of high purpose. Its only aim is earning a living. It makes young people prisoners of materialism and slaves of the stomach, trapping them in worldly pleasures and making them empty of higher goals.*

*Nature gave you the eye of an eagle,*

*But slavery has put in it the sight of a bat."*

*The Muslim nation is a nation that carries the idea of leadership over the world, and Allah has promised that Islam will prevail. Now the reins of this nation are in the hands of its youth, who must always remain high-flying. Only through this high flight can Muslims reach honour, success, dignity, and dominance. The forces of falsehood will never tolerate this flight and will place obstacles in the way. But the duty of an aware and honourable young man is to turn these obstacles into opportunities and move forward. Even if the world burns with jealousy at this flight, Muslim youth should raise it even higher.*

*O eagle, the age burns because of your flight;*

*Then fan this fire even more with your wings."*

*The true believer is one who remains concerned with fulfilling his duty and leaves the result to Allah. Since human beings are representatives of Allah, their goal is to seek closeness to that Perfect Being. This nearness gives man an unlimited horizon. Therefore, man has a high destination before him and should continue flying towards it. He should not stop at any stage, but must continue his journey. Iqbal says to the believing youth:*

*You are an eagle, and flight is your work;*

*There are many more skies before you.*

*Do not remain trapped in this day and night alone;*

*There are many more times and places before you."*

*Yes - Iqbal's young man is the name of such strong faith that, once it appears, the chains of slavery are broken. Iqbal's young man is the name of that thinking which frees a man from false Ibadah. Iqbal's young man is the name of that vision which makes youth so great that the destination itself begins to call them. Iqbal's young man is the name of that passion in which martyrdom becomes eternal light. Iqbal's young man is the name of that flight where one leap of love finishes all stories. Iqbal's young man is the one who, though made of dust, is not tied to dust; who does not call deadly poison sweet sugar; who stays silent even in the flames of Nimrod's fire; and who knows that the world exists for him, not he for the world. Iqbal's young man is the name of such strength:*

*By whose strike deserts and rivers split in two,  
Before whose awe mountains shrink into grains;*

*Better than Darius and Alexander is that poor man  
Whose poverty carries the fragrance of Ali's courage."*

*It is true that difficulties are hard, resources are limited, progress is slow, there is hunger and poverty, there are bombs and even suicide attacks - but:*

*The code of brave youth is truthfulness and fearlessness;  
The lions do not know fox-like cunning.*

*Real men do not lose courage because of life's hardships. They do not become weak and start eating carrion out of fear and helplessness, because "the world of the eagle is different from the world of the vulture." They do not hide their heads in the soil, because "for the eagle it is disgrace to build a nest." They do not remove crowns from other people's heads, because "the eagle is not hungry for pigeons and doves." Yes, Iqbal's eagle is the one who knows how to strike and return, who knows the art of dying in order to truly live.*

*"Strong faith, constant action, and love that conquers the world -  
These are the swords of men in the struggle of life."*

*Even today, we can become a living nation if our thinking becomes alive and free. And the one whose thinking is alive is Iqbal's eagle. Every young person of my homeland can become Iqbal's eagle. And I firmly believe:*

*When our caravan sets out with resolve and faith,  
The path will appear from wherever we wish.  
Let me rub my heels into the soil of my homeland,  
I am certain a spring will burst forth from here."*

### **Message to Young Muslims**

*Young people of the Muslim World, Iqbal's message to you is not to live small lives. You belong to a land created with sacrifice, faith, and hope; therefore, you must not surrender yourselves to despair, corruption, imitation, or helplessness. Build knowledge, but also build character. Seek success, but do not sell your conscience for it. Love your country, but serve it through honesty, discipline, competence, and moral courage. Muslim World does not need youth who merely complain about darkness; it needs youth who become light. Awaken within yourselves the spirit of the Shaheen: think high, live pure, work hard, speak truth, and stand firm against injustice. Do not let poverty, fear, or social disorder convince you that greatness is impossible. Nations rise when their youth rise. If your faith is strong, your purpose clear, and your conduct honourable, then you can rebuild trust, revive institutions, and lead Muslims toward dignity and renewal. The future of Muslims is not waiting in distant hands; it is resting in your mind, your character, and your resolve.*

*Iqbal's ideal young man is not a romantic fantasy, nor merely a poetic ornament; it is a demanding moral, spiritual, and intellectual programme. Through the symbol of the Shaheen, Iqbal defines the qualities that can restore dignity to both the individual and the nation: self-respect, lawful living, courage, vision, discipline, freedom from servility, and unwavering faith in Allah. His young man does not live on imitation, convenience, or borrowed identities. He rises through inner strength, purity of character, and purposeful action. The force of Iqbal's message lies in the fact that he does not separate spirituality from struggle, nor faith from movement. For him, true youth is not identified by age alone, but by energy of soul, nobility of conduct, and readiness to serve a higher cause.*

*At the same time, Iqbal's thought offers a profound critique of societies that fail their youth. When education becomes merely a means of livelihood, when ambition is reduced to material success, and when foreign models are copied without thought, the Shaheen is turned into a captive bird. This is why Iqbal's call remains urgently relevant. He asks youth to resist intellectual slavery, moral weakness, and cultural inferiority. His message is not escapist; it is civilizational. He wants young people to recover their history, refine their character, strengthen their minds, and reclaim leadership through excellence rather than complaint. Therefore, Iqbal's ideal young man stands as a model of renewal: a Muslim who is inwardly awake, socially responsible, and capable of transforming both self and society.*

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