

The human nature: an artistic reflection on origin, infinity, and self-realisation

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Abstract:

This study attempts to answer the self-raised questions, identification of individuals, what are we? To understand two significant but contradictory aspects of human life, both comprise physical and non-physical abilities of humans who are limited biologically. However, humans have infinite capacities and transcend earthly limitations to achieve farfetched success. This qualitative study explores the beliefs about human existence. Reading relates to these aspects with a process of recognition that is defined as 'Khudi' taken as 'Self-realization.' Self-realization is associated with the identification of an individual's peculiar self. Data from books, articles, and recent scholarships have been analysed. The methodology of the creative process and execution was quite experimental and created a three-dimensional space with different mediums and materials. The analysis revealed the process of literature, religion, science, arts, and human dignity. The study concludes that the human being is a perfect man with the achievement of governing his tangible and intangible abilities. The research finds mud as a tangible source of human origin and physical skills; defiantly, it affiliates wisdom and soul with the intangible abilities of humans. Success of being a perfect human is the ultimate purpose of human life, attained by using both abilities in their proper senses.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this research and the creative project is to explore the existence of human life and its purpose. The notion of this research compels the researcher to examine the origin of human life and its physical and spiritual evolution, keeping in mind the idea of self-realization. Using two significant expressive mediums, the objective is to execute the same ideas and concepts in a thematic intervention on different surfaces. The key idea is that humans are mortal, but being mortal, they have a spark of God that lets humans realize their physical, social, and spiritual abilities and see them higher.

*“Main Khud Bhi Nahin Apni Haqiqat Ka Shanasa
Gehra Hai Mere Behr-e-Khiyalaat Ka Pani”*
(Bukhari, 1990, p. 419)

“For me also my nature remains still unravelled,
The sea of my thoughts is too deep and untraveled
(Iqbal, 2011)

What do we think, and what are we? What is the reality of human beings and what is the thought process involved in self-existence? The researcher's quest regarding knowing and accepting reality is the beginning of this curiosity and artistic creativity. The question arose: who am I? What is the origin of humans and the purpose of life? What is the reality of life and the mystery of death? Is everything permanent? Do humans have any might and authority? Are we a mass of mud or consciousness within the body? What is eternal life? Lastly, what is the need to understand the inner self? All curiosity and thought processes lead to literature, religion, science, and art.

In the available literature, the readings of the concept of self-realization or the ‘*Israr-e Khudi*’¹ has been provided by different indigenous poetic writers, particularly Allama Muhammad Iqbal, Bulleh Shah, Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, and many others. The significant individual becomes a source of communication with the ultimate self. Therefore, the study of nature and the enormous superiority that lies in the human self is a necessity of the curious individual as a human being.

Iqbal and other mystic poets helped a person understand the complexity of perception and explore the depth of self. The verse by Iqbal quoted above discloses that the expedition of exploring oneself is associated with his deep thought process, which seems like a deep ocean, and he finds it very hard to grasp the essence of his contemplation. Before understanding personal beliefs regarding oneself, one must ponder different notions provided by mystic poets, who are deeply concerned about the exploration.

*“Agar Na Ho Tujhe Uljhan To Khol Kar Keh Doon
Wujood-e-Hazrat-e-Insan Na Rooh Hai Na Badan”*
(Bukhari, 1990, p. 570)

“If you do not get much disturbed, to you this truth I may unroll
That man, God’s image, on the earth is neither frame of clay nor soul”
(Iqbal, 2011)

Here, Iqbal discloses the truth of the secret of humans as a replication of God’s image or his embodiment in human form. Iqbal ignores human status as clay or soul. Iqbal’s ‘self-realization’ is realizing the inner growth of an individual that directs his consideration towards the individual ‘I’. Exploration of one’s inner leads humans towards divinity, and ultimately, this recognition results in one’s contact with the Absolute.

According to Iqbal’s concept of ‘*Khudi*,’ evolved through three stages and he describe these stages in Javid Namah as:

“Whether thou are alive or dead or the verge of death
Depend on three things
A sense of one’s own existence
One’s own self to see with the help of one’s own inner light
The secondly,
A sense of existence of others; one’s own self to see with the help of the light
of others
And, thirdly, a sense of the existence of God,
And the power to see One’s Self in the light vouchsafed by God”
(Qureshi, 1990)

The whole concept of the inner growth of selfhood comprises of three levels of consciousness:

- i- The self and I am ness (intrapersonal)
- ii- The self and the other (interpersonal)
- iii- The self and God (Transpersonal) (Zeb, 2015, p. 1)

Rendering to Iqbal’s philosophy of ‘*Khudi*’² Self-realization comprises a more profound knowledge of himself or his existence by investigating his physical capabilities, inner faculties, and potential through his wisdom. On the other phase of self-realization, Iqbal associates the process with self-catharsis about others, the self-analysis in the context of historical facts of human evolution. The final and ultimate stage of self-realization is associated with God almighty. By exploring their inner faculties, human beings associate themselves with God. The ultimate truth reveals the purpose of his life as a submission of self to God. Human serves as a mystic servant of humanity and synthesizes his ‘*Zaat*’³, or ‘*Khudi*’ in God’s self, he became a miraculous essence of purity, humbleness, humanity, endurance, and compassion.

Furthermore, the purpose of growing this selfhood is to attain the status of being the ‘Perfect Man’, and the purpose of being perfect is the realization of the inner self, which is the cause of inner might and the wealth of spirituality. Consequently, spirituality is a source of union between man and the divine. The union of temporal and eternal is the leading cause of this self-realization. Thus, Iqbal describes all this in his poetic expression.

The researcher passes through a similar process of finding enquiries regarding the marks of her (ego) that are laid into some origin. The researcher's thought process indicates that she should explore 'mud' as a co-element towards exploring the mysterious mud as an origin.

"Tho' I am but a mote, the radiant sun is mine:
Within my bosom are a hundred dawns.
My dust is brighter than Jamshid's cup,
It knows things that are yet unborn in the world"
(Nicholson, 1920, p. 38)

Iqbal's self-concept has been derived from Rumi's; it reaches its zenith that encircles God's will. Rumi has a different connotation for human independence, self-sufficiency, and volition. Rumi believed in eternity and progression.

Bulleh Shah associates himself with mud as,

*"Na kar bandeya meri meri
Na teri na meri
Char dinan da maila
Dunya fair mitti di dheri"*
(Faqr, 2015)

"O human, leave off this battle for worldly possessions
nothing here can ever truly belong to us
the glittering spectacle of this world only lasts a few days
and then everything turns to dust"
(Shah, 2016)

The concept of self-realization introduced by Saint Kabir introduces moralities that attach all creation to the human self, remaining detaching from worldly pursuits. In Kabir's poems, there is a sense of urgency for us to realise God and be freed from the clutches of Illusion (*Maya*), the impacts of Cause and Effect (*Karma*), Time (*Kal*), and Death (*Yama*). (Das, 2005, p. 19)

"How long O mind!
will you avoid the Eternal Name?
Your childhood days are spent in play,
in adulthood, work keeps you busy.
Old age brings a quivering body,
encased in wrinkly sagging skin,
forcing you to lean on a stick to walk.
The scorching sun becomes unbearable,
your ears become deaf, your eyes dim,
as your teeth, day by day, slowly disappear.
Your wife turns her back on you,
and your son takes to slandering you:
"Old man! You prattle too much,
all day long, you lie around, dishevelled."

Then finally, they'll fetch you from your bed, place you into the ground,
 leaving all your treasures behind.
 Kabir asks, "What will you do then,
 when your appointment with death has come?"
 (Das, 2005, p. 23)

Opposite to Iqbal and Rumi, Ghalib's process of realization of self depends on the exploration of everyday happenings of those constant changes. Therefore, Ghalib's self-realization is associated with worldly pursuits. Comparatively, Amrita Pritam's approach towards life is humanist, through which she provides the concept of the universality of human beings in society. This thought of self-realization holds all that contributes to the development and welfare of the individual, the culture, and humanity.

Gurdas Maan's poetry shows his deep connection with mysticism besides surviving in contemporary times. He finds his roots in clay and considers himself *mitti*⁴ (clay). His philosophical thoughts determine that humans have neither gender nor hierarchies of material status. (Maan, Mitti, 2009). According to Sadhguru, a yogi and mystic, the human being and the cosmic body are made of "Pancha Bhutas" (five elements): earth, water, air, fire, and *akasha* (spiritual dimension). (Sadhguru, 2021)

After reviewing the thought processes of different poets and writers mentioned above, the researcher determines her thoughts regarding the self-concept. In discovering an individual's reality, the researcher feels that we are nothing physically or have no authority. Our reality is dust. Human origin deceits in mud and powerfully connects with dust physically and spiritually. The research revolves around investigating everlasting ideology, the problem of identity and identity crises. The researcher affiliates all three inquiries with probing the self that is entitled, '*Zaat*'⁵ (ذات or self) is an Arabic word that means identity in English. The purpose of the self is to identify the human and its position in the universe. The researcher embodies her identity in a clay' mitt.'

This study prevails to religious fact and is revealed in the Quranic verse as, "He who perfected everything He created, and originated the creation of man from clay" (Itani, 2012, p. 156). Bible says: "And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Vulgate, 1609, 1582). Science has proven that the human body originated from mud and is part of its structure. Scientists in New York State suppose that 'clay might have been the birthplace of life on Earth' (Reporter, 2013).

Religious and scientific views reveal that mud is the origin of human beings. We are a mass of mud or a pile of dust. Originating from a mere blood clot and being created from clay, it turned into flesh after blowing a soul into it. Human life ends in dust or ashes, becoming part of the soil, and one has to go back to the mother's lap (earth) after death. Life and death are two contradictory aspects of reality. Someone is born and dies at the same time anywhere around the globe. This is the circle of life.

Everyone has been shaped from clay so, for what, humans are proud of objective belongings and egos. The material relevant to this objective world that humans embrace in this world becomes the source of ultimate reward in the next world. Life is unpredictable and transient, but the wisdom and actions of an individual rose human on high levels. Every person possesses a God-given dignity, making humans infinite and visible through an individual's deeds.

2. Literature review

This Literature review focuses on inspiration from books, poetry, writings, work by different artists, movies, videos, and speeches.

2.1. The Holy Quran

The first stimulus for references is the book (Quran), one of the fourth religious books. The researcher's first question was, who am I? Being a Muslim, the researcher preferred to consult the holy book, the Quran, as the first inspiration. "And certainly, did We create man from an extract of clay. Then we placed him as a sperm-drop in a firm lodging. Then We made the sperm-drop into a clinging clot, and We made the clot into a lump [of flesh], and We made [from] the lump, bones, and We covered the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So, blessed is Allah, the best of creators." (Itani, 2012, pp. 12-14).

2.2. The Bible

The second source of information was the Bible. It says, "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Vulgate, 1609, 1582, p. 1:26). Both sources describe man as a combination of physical and non-physical. Thus, man had a physical as well as spiritual life. According to the Quran, humans originated from clay, and the Bible revealed his might and ruling abilities as attributes. Allah Almighty granted human beings' wisdom, hidden powers, and sovereignty to rule over the universe.

2.3. Science

Arthur Ernest Wilder Smith wrote, "The necessary information to build man does not reside in the few elements it takes to compose him" (Wilder-Smith, 1981). Richard Windle explained in "the transcript of the Reusable Learning Object (RLO) entitled "Elements that make up the Human Body" that "Human contains similar minerals as mud that is why the human body requires mineral nutrients from earth's crust. Oxygen is the supreme component of the human body and the ground (soil). The human figure is formed from 13 elements. 96% of the human body's mass comprises Oxygen, hydrogen, carbon, and nitrogen. The other 4% of body weight comprises almost entirely sodium, iodine, magnesium, chlorine, iron, phosphorus, calcium,

sulphur, and potassium. In the human body, Silicon is less than one per cent and this is not as dominant in the earth's crust; however, humans require silicon only for bone growth" (Windle, 2005). The researcher found that dust was not the element that human beings were made of; it's the tactic that humans combined with dust didn't make life, but the approach that composed the desired design and perplexing structure.

2.4. Iqbal's philosophy

As a poet, dreamer, politician, and philosopher, Allama Muhammad Iqbal provided the concept of *Khudi* that motivates us to explore human origin, nature, and the purpose of life. Iqbal himself discloses the secret of humans as a creation in the following verses as, Iqbal's poem *Tulu-e-Islam* (The Rise of Islam) from his famous book *Bang-e-Dra*.

*"Tu Raaz-E-Kun Fakan Hai, Apni Ankhon Par Ayan Ho Ja
Khudi Ka Raazdan Ho Ja, Khuda Ka Tarjuman Ho Ja"*
(Bukhari, 1990, P. 324-337)

"You are the secret of creation; see yourself in your eyes.
Share the secret of your own self, become the spokesman of God"
(Iqbal, 2011)

Here, Iqbal discloses the truth of humans' secret as a replication of God's image or his embodiment in human form. Iqbal ignores human status as a clay or soul. Here, he wants to realize human beings' height of dignity.

Iqbal motivates human beings to explore themselves by himself living in this colourful and another *ghazal* is "Khirad Mandon Se Kya Poochun Ke Meri Ibtada Kya Hai" from the book *Bal-e-Jibril*:

*"Khirad-Mandon Se Kya Puchon Ke Meri Ibtida Kya Hai
Ke Main Iss Fikar Mein Rehta Hun, Meri Intiha Kya Hai"*

*"Khudi Ko Kar Buland Itna Ke Har Taqdeer Se Pehle
Khuda Bande Se Khud Puche, Bata Teri Raza Kya Hai"*
(Bukhari, 1990, P. 324-337)

What should I ask the sages about my origin?
I am always wanting to know my goal.

Develop the self so that before every decree
God will ascertain from you: "What is your wish?"
(Iqbal, 2011)

Humans have supreme power and the utmost knowledge. In a perfect man's life, his/her thoughts, deeds, attitudes, and objectives become individual. Humans are the last fruit of the

tree of mortality, and they have all supernatural abilities. These abilities raise humans higher than God values individual's wishes.

2.5. Molana Rumi

From an accomplished teacher and jurist, Rumi transformed into an ascetic. He provides his point of view about the human self "Everything in the universe is within you. Ask all from yourself" (Rumi, 2024). The quote points out the hidden treasure of the human heart and mystic abilities. The exceptional concept of Rumi's philosophy is directed towards the 'self-sufficiency' of a human as a sage. The sage or *Aref*⁶ is self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency helps humans nurture heart, passion, and personal transformation, which are the ultimate results of the process of self-realization.

2.6. Baba Bulleh Shah

Abdullah Shah, popularly known as Bulleh Shah, is a humanist and truth-seeker through his poetry and philosophy. He provides the idea of searching for God and handling the world's sociological glitches. Iqbal, on the other hand, presents three stages of self-realization, whereas Bulleh Shah's poetry determines the four stages of Sufism: *Shariat* (Path), *Tariqat* (Observance), *Haqiqat* (Truth) and *Marfat* (Union) for the process of self-realization (Naqvi, 2014). In a book entitled "*Qanoon-e-Ishq, Kafia "Matti,"*" he encompasses life as,

*"Maati qadam karendi yaar
Maati jora, mati ghora
Maati da aswaar
Maati maati noon doraae
Maati da kharkar
Maati qadam karendi yaar
Maati maati noon maran lagi
Maati da hathiar
Jis maati par bohti maati
Tis maati hankaar
Maati qadam karendi yaar
Maati bagh baghicha maati
Maati di gal zaar
Maati maati noon wekhan aai
Maati di ay bahar
Maati qadam karendi yaar
Has khaid murr maati hoyi
Maati paaon pasaar
Bullah eh bajharat bojhin
Lah sirr bhoyin maar"*
(Faqir, 2015)

"Oh, see how the quickened dust doth move.

The horse is dust, dust the shield
 Dust the rider that rides the steed
 Dust the hunter, dust the game
 The clamour they make is made the same

Dust fights with dust, for dust they war
 The swords, spears and arrows dust are
 Dust with dust fills up its hoard
 Dust the pride on which egos soar

Dust the gardens and the fields
 Dust the bloom the dusty earth yields
 Dust the audience of the spring
 Dust the beauty that springtime brings

Creatures of dust who laugh and play
 And then under the dust they lay
 Bulle, when you this dusty knot undo
 A great burthen from you will move”
 (Shafi, 2013)

Maati ⁷ is clay; earth; dust; soil. Bulleh Shah uses the word in its meaning of something temporary and mortal; much like the word dust or clay is used in English to convey the impermanence of the material world. Everything has an end in dust. He used mitti as a metaphor for all the impermanent objects of the world that will end after a time. These objects include human beings with all their egos, emotion, and self. According to him, the status of all the beauty and materialism is mud, therefore, he concludes that when everything is dust and it will be end into dust, so the worldly materialism will end and move away.

2.7. Ghalib

Mirza Asadullah Baig Khan, popularly known by his penname Ghalib, was a legendary poet of Urdu and Persian. He unveiled the fact of this temporary world and human beings.

*“Sab kahan kuchh lala-o-gul mein numayaan ho gain
 Khaak⁸ mein kya suraten hongy ki pinhaan ho gain”*

“All wherefore? just a few tulips-and-roses in manifested are
 dust/dirt in-it what faces must-be that merged-hidden are”
 (Ghalib)

Ghalib investigated the objects of the world and their termination at the end. He expressed the complexity of the world's end. Therefore, the poet enquires about human existence in the world and, contrarily, answers himself that humans have disguised themselves as flowers. His philosophical concept revolves around beauty and dust, death, and the transformation of human

life. He concludes that the reality of life is eternal and finds beauty in death. Thus, he relates the manifestation of human life in worldly pursuits and into the departure.

2.8. Saint Kabir

Kabir was a well-known Indian spiritual poet and saint of the 15th century. His writings encouraged Bhakti movement of Hinduism, and his verses are found in the scripture of Sikhism Guru Granth Sahib ⁹.

*“Maati kahe kumhar se,
tu kya raunde moye
Ek din aisa aayega,
main raundoongi toye”*

“Clay is saying to the potter:
You can trample on me, as much as you like but
A day will come,
When I will be trampling on you!”
(Anand, 2024)

See how destiny works. Human's body is decomposed in the same earth after his death. The profound philosophy reveals that a potter beats clay to acquire fine molding for an object; he gets into its same clay as a decomposed form. He points out virtually towards the destiny of human life and its end.

2.9. Khawaja Shamsudin Azimi

In Khawaja Shamsudin Azimi poetry,

*“Mitti me he Dfan Admi mitti ka
Putla he wo ik piyala bhari mitti ka
Mekhwar paish ge jis piyale me sharab
Wo piyala bane ga kal ise mitti ka”*

“In dust is buried the man of dust,
A figure made of a handful of dust
The wine-cup serving the thirsty
Will be made of the same dust”
(Azimi, 2009, 131-132)

According to his point of view, clay is the primary substance of human structure because Allah formed Adam from clay; this is why humans must return to dust. He discloses the inferiority of the reality of human beauty and expresses that this beauty is composed of inferior dust particles. The utilitarian objects of human use are made up of the same clay. Therefore, the origin of life and its generating source are the same in its origin. The poet appreciates the

artistry of nature for its productivity in the variation of forms and figures. There are insignia for lovers (human) who want to identify and recognize God.

2.10. Amrita Pritam

Amrita Pritam denotes human status in a social context using the different kinds of coloured clay as a metaphor. The excerpt was taken from her story “Mitti ki Zaat” in a book “Amrita Pritam Ke Afsane.” She differentiates human status as mentioned below,

“Or jun jun Admi ki zaton se chabeli ka aetbar hut-ta gaya, is ke dil me mitti ki zaaton ka aetbar gehra hota gaya ___ Agar koe zaat sachi or asli he’ to miti ki zaat he or jab kabhi chabeli nain kisi larki ko ubtan malty, kisi ke jism par tail ki malish karty, kisi larky ke bal sunwarty, to wo yahi sochty rehty. Chikni miti, raitly miti, kankreli mati, surkh miti, kali miti, peli miti, _ _ _ Miti ki bhi kitni zatain hain. Lekin jis miti se kapas paida hoty he’ is me bus kapas he paida hoty he’ Jis miti me angoor pakty hain’ us me bus angor he pakty hain! Wakai ye zaten kitni sachi or asli hain!” (Shahzad Hussain, 1995)

She affiliates the physical variation of the human complexion with the different kinds of clays to show the variation of human appearances. Based on this variety of human complexion, the status of humans is defined, whereas according to her, all these humans are created from mud, which is their sole origin.

2.11. Eckhart Tolle

Eckhart Tolle is a spiritual educationalist, writer, and therapist. In his influential spiritual book, *The Power of Now*, Tolle defines the purpose of human existence on earth as: “You are here to enable the divine purpose of the Universe to unfold. That is how important you are!” (Tolle, 2004).

2.12. Plato’s Theory of Mimesis

The theory of Mimesis inspires the researcher because the ideas and themes painted by the researcher as an artist derive direct inspiration from nature. In the theory, Plato says, “All art is mimetic by nature; art is an imitation of life. He believed that ‘idea’ is the ultimate reality. Art imitates ideas, and so it is an imitation of reality... Hence, he believed that art is twice removed from reality” (Vijaychavan, 2013).

2.13. Zakir Naik

Dr Zakir Naik clarifies the contradictory concept of human origin mentioned in different ayahs of the Quran. At one place, the Qur’an mentions that man is created from sperm, and at another, it mentions that man is created from dust.

“the Qur’an refers to the lowly beginnings of a human being from a drop of sperm, in several verses, including the following verse from Surah Al-Qiyamah: “Was he not a drop of sperm emitted (in lowly form)”? [Al-Qur’an 75:37]

The Qur’an also mentions that humans were created from dust in several places. The following verse refers to the origin of human beings:

“(Consider) that We created you out of dust”. [Al-Qur’an 22:5]

The speech of Dr Zakir clarifies and authenticates the researcher’s point of view that mud is the actual substance with which the first human (Adam a.s) was created, and later on, the human race was generated from the sperm of that first human being. Dr. Zakir Naik explains it as; “We now know that all the elements present in the human body (i.e., the constituent elements of the human body), are all present in the earth in small or great quantities. This is the scientific explanation for the Qur’anic verse that says that man was created from dust.” (Naik, 2012)

3. Artists and paintings

3.1. Rene Magritte

René François Ghislain Magritte is the source of inspiration because he considered things of daily usage significant and used those in an infrequent ambience. Magritte Developed inspiration from Michel Foucault’s writings, he changed notions of reality. Focusing on the theory of mimesis, he converted the reality of objects into his own perception and executed those perceptions using his personal manners; for instance, his famous painting entitled ‘The Balcony’ displays a coffin to represent human reality. (Magritte R. , n.d.)

Figure 1: The Balcony, (1950) by Rene Magritte



Oil on canvas

This painting of Magritte shows human reality in coffins, which are the end places of humans. The work relates to the Artist's work as mud symbolizes termination. Both artists associate the human end as a definitive reality.

3.2. Salvador Dali

The artwork by Dali represents both narcissism and narcissism. Sigmund Freud signified it as an early stage of the formation of the "ego" or "self of human life. The painting derived inspiration from Greek mythology, in which the human character of Narcissus turned into a narcissus flower as punishment for his being lost in his self-obsession (Dali, n.d.). Contrary to Dali, the artist showed individuals on a journey to knowing themselves, as this is the purpose of life: to reach the divine.

Figure 2: Metamorphosis of Narcissus, 1937 by Salvador Dali



Oil on canvas, 511 x 781 mm

3.3. Movies and performances

The artist inspired by some scenes of Bab'Aziz is a feature film in Tunisian directed by Nacer Khemir's that executes a highly praised desert trilogy that displays frequent themes of splendid beauty, love, storytelling, and nomadic wandering that are meant to raise the dialogue, to be multi-layered, complex, full of abstract symbolisms, and faith of human physical and metaphysical life through a magical myth (khemir, 2005)

Figure 3: Bab'Aziz (The Prince That Contemplated His Soul)



Director: Nacer Khemir, Writers: Tonino GuerraNacer Khemir, Screenshot, YouTube

3.4. Gurdas Maan

Gurdas Maan is a Punjabi writer and singer. The lyrics of his song “Mitti” describe human as a part of mud,

*“Main mitti, meri jaat v mitti
te mere gal mitti da baana.
Maa meri ne mitti jammi
te mera babul mitti khaana.
Mitti jammi khushi manai
te mera na rakhya mar jaana.
Jad mitti ne mitti shaddi
saade dhuk dhuk pain makaana”*
(Maan, Mitti by Gurdas Maan, 2019)

The poetry of Gurdas Maan shows his deep concern with mysticism. The artist found similarity in concept as the artist takes *mitti* as human origin and ultimate reality. The artist considered himself a *mitti*, and the poet Gurdas Maan also finds himself a *mitti* (clay) and expresses this in the verses above. He conveys that he has originated from mud, and the origin of this mud is her mother, who is also born of mud. He says that his mother, who is also a mud, kept his name, “Mar Jana”, which points out his being over from this worldly life. He negates the differences among human status, classes, and gender hierarchies. According to him, the result of the world is mud, which is the origin and mortality.

4. Idea towards execution in art

The notion of “self-realization,” explores sincerely the aspects of human origin, limitation, and infinity. The researcher represents human nature, a person’s limitations, and liberation. To signify the concept, two contrasting symbols are used: the first one is mud, and the other is sky. Mud shows human linkages with their origin, while the sky symbolises a person’s infinity: “the sky's the limit”¹⁰ The creative project revolves around highlighting and contextualizing the researcher's notion through a philosophical study of ‘self-realization,’ and the generated ideas have been executed on the creative surfaces.

The theory of mimesis helps researchers by using mud as an original material in making installations, which clears the vision of imitating nature through creative work. Although the artwork is an original execution of reality, it is not reality but rather an illusion representing nature's reality.

The researcher, being an artist, executes the idea of human infinity in a three-dimensional space. The artist explores different mediums and experiments to achieve artistic expression. The artist uses oil paints and emulsion paints as medium. Two panels of canvas are used. The wooden structure and lasani (wood) used for creating require space for installation. Foam, a smoke machine, and two electric soft lights were used.

Figure 4 and Figure 5: Photography



Photographed by the first author (2017)

Figure 6 and Figure 7: Manipulated photography



Manipulated photographed in photoshop

Figure 8 and Figure 9: Paintings



Paintings from left to right: 6x6 feet and 4x4 feet, oil on Canvas

Figure 10 and Figure 11: Making of panels



Making of panels left and right, wood and lasani (wood)

Figure 12 and Figure 13: Making of ceiling and entrance



Left and right: making of panels ceiling and entrance, wood and lasani (wood)

Figure 14 and Figure 15: Painting sky on wall and placing foam on floor



Left to right: painting sky on walls and placing foam on floor

Figure 16 and Figure 17: Ceiling before and after insertion canvas



Left to right: ceiling before and after incorporation of 6x6 feet canvas

Figure 18: Installation



Installation after insertion of both canvas on ceiling and floor by first author

Figure 19 and Figure 20: Smoke effect



Smoke effect (smoke machine)

The artist evolves her work through experimentation, in which the artist photographed models and covered them with mud (Figure 1-2). The medium helped to display the idea through photography. After this step, the photographs are manipulated through graphics art by using software such as Adobe Photoshop (Figure 3-4). Getting the required visuals, the artist executes the ideas on the surface of the canvas using oil paints (Figure 5-6). It is an interactive installation; the viewer is part of the three-dimensional space. The required space has been formed using wood strips and lasani (wood) (Figure 7-8-9-10). The artist makes a space comprising a length of 10 feet, a width of 10.5 feet and a Height of 9 feet. The dimensions of each canvas used in the surrounding space are 6x6 feet and 4x4 feet.

All six sides were painted using Emulsion paints, and two canvases were painted using oil paints (Figure 11). The space is split into six parts: a ceiling, a floor and four walls. Three layers of one-inch foam were used on the floor to produce a soft surface (Figure 12). Incorporate 6x6 feet of canvas on the ceiling (Figure 13, and 14). Foams were also painted using emulsion paints to create the illusion of a clouded sky (Figure 15). A Smoke machine created a smoky environment for the illusion of sky (Figure 16-17).

5. Methodology

The process started by collecting and studying scattered references regarding the researcher's thoughts. At first, relevant books, dictionaries, and authentic studies were assessed. After gathering the appropriate data and clarity in the thought process, the researcher started documenting the research. While recording the ideas in writing, the process of painting and execution helps to convey the philosophies. Qualitative research has been done for this research study.

6. Analysis

Figure 21: Human limitation and infinity, installation



Installation College of Art and Design, University of the Punjab, 2017

Figure 22 and Figure 23: Installation



Left to right Installation (ceiling view and front walls)

Figure 24: Installation, panorama view (top to bottom)



Figure 25: Panorama view (left to right)



Figure 26 and Figure 27: Paintings



Left to right: Painting on floor, 4x4 feet, and painting on ceiling 6x6 feet, oil on canvas

Figure 28: Entrance door and wall with lights



Door and wall (Detail)

Figure 29 and Figure 30: Smoke effect in space



Left to right space with lights and smoke

6.1. Formal analysis

6.1.1. Line

“Everything in nature adheres to the cone, the cylinder and the cube” (Mattedi, 2015).

The human eye is trained to see and find shapes everywhere. The installation area looks like a cube. It was a cuboid.¹¹ Because of its six sides and differences in proportions, it was a cuboid in shape. Height, weight, and length were different. Length was 10 feet, weight 10.5 feet, and height 9 feet. Paints created a delusional effect by showing the area bigger than its actual size. In that space of the square area in the centre of the ceiling and opposite to this on the floor, there forms a square shape by placing layers of foam.

The edges of the wall, roof, and floor were restricted through the vertical and horizontal lines. The window and door lines were the part of the space that created a soft illusion of atmosphere. All the inclusive harsh lines were treated with paints to transform the space into a soft and cloudy illusion. The lines remind the famous saying of Manet quoted as, “There are no lines in nature, only areas of colour, and one against another” (Manet, 2010). According to the artist, when we see in nature, there are no lines; it is the limit of our eye, which considers these lines an edge. In the space of the ceiling, figures added a few outlines that separate them from the background and seem like big segments of colour. Figure lines were curvy, bulky, natural, muscular, and delicate. The blurred and hazy lines represented soft clouds.

6.1.2. Texture

A combination of textures has been used visually and physically. A renowned painter Paul Klee, says about texture, “Like people, a picture has a skeleton, muscles and skin” (Klee, n.d.). In visual texture, the feel of mud and wet figures is presented. Soft textures of clouds were

created as a fantasy, whereas physical texture was used all around the space. On the floor, the foam made a smooth and uneven texture. The window and a door on the walls helped create an illusion of relief. The artificial smoke used by the artists played an essential role in fantasizing about the artwork's environment to provide viewers with a deceptive feel of the sky. To grasp the real sense of surroundings, viewers experienced and inhaled that smoke. For this, artist got inspiration from her experience of visiting northern areas. The artist observed that on the high points, the illusive groups of smoke formed groups of clouds that could be felt through inhaling rather than touching. From the observation, the artist determined that nature creates illusion.

6.1.3. Colour

“By using patches of colour and tone it is possible to capture every natural impression most only, freshly and immediately” (Klee).

The artwork used contradictory colour palettes for the environment and figures. The illusion of colour in that space changed the whole atmosphere. The painted figures in an entire form seem like segregated segments of colours that were prominent from the background. A combination of colour palates used by the artist was an earthy colour palate for muddy figures and blues for an environment that combines different colours. For muddy figures, the inspiration is derived from the work of Teresa Eliot. She had painted the human covered with clay years earlier. Her inspiration was her memory captured by a photographed visual of her 10-year-old daughter. Contrarily, the artist symbolizes mud as the origin and termination of humans.

Figure 31: The Javelina Clays by Teresa Eliot



Oil on canvas, 36 x 22 inches

Sky's inspiration came from Rene Magritte's work. Magritte shows human reality in coffins, which are human's end places. The work relates to the Artist's work as mud symbolises termination. Both artists associate the human end with definitive reality. (Magritte)

Figure 31: La magic noir (Black Magic) by Rene Magritte



Colour Lithograph, 20 x 15 inches

The artist chooses specific tones as Klee says, "Colour is the place where our brain and the universe meet" (Klee, 2014). The colour tones of muddy figures were represented in variations such as brown, yellow, and green to enhance the feel of daytime. The specific treatment of paint converted muddy figures into golden bodies. This warm, sensational feel of golden symbolises the mystical status of these figures and represents them not as mere a body but rather a self as a pure soul. The chosen sky colours in specific blue tones create a particular dawn time.

6.1.4. Chiaroscuro

The researcher, being an artist, used chiaroscuro, a medium that enhances the effect of space, objects, and time. Highlights of figures created a dramatic situation that was heightened by using soft electrical lights.

6.1.5. Composition

The composition spreads all around to create an interactive space in which the viewer becomes a part of the installation. Viewers can move and see all six sides: ceiling, floor, and walls. Four figures placed in the centre of the ceiling above eye level add a central and circular composition. The figures' circular movement shows the life cycle, from life to death. On the floor, a child's figure has been painted parallel to the figures on the ceiling on the acute centre of the surface. Placing painted figures on the ceiling and floor created a central point of the whole space. Paul Klee has provided a similar notion,

"Every artist would like to live in the central organ of creation... Not all are destined to get there... but our beating hearts drive us deep down, right into the pit of creation" (Klee, Paul Klee notebooks, 1969).

The artwork is inspired by the placement of figures on Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. (Buonarroti, 1975)

Figure 32: Sistine Chapel Ceiling by Michelangelo



1508-1512, Fresco

6.2. Conceptual analysis

6.2.1. Idea

The idea and creative work address two opposite aspects of human life: the origin of life and its transience. A set of inquiries starts emerging: What is the reality of a human being? Who am I? What is the reality of life and the mystery of death? Do humans have any might and authority? What is the purpose of life? What is eternal life?

6.2.2. Concept

The progress of concept takes us towards thoughts representing an individual's limitation and sovereignty.

6.2.3. Theme

The theme covers various self-contradictory aspects of human physical and metaphysical life. The researcher feels that life is mortal. Human life is temporary, and one day, it must finish. Humans have no permanent authority but the granted one. They have sovereignty rather than supremacy because supremacy belongs to the divine, whereas the will of the sacred has granted sovereignty. This is why the divine (Allah) has made humans the most eminent of created beings and provided him the status of his representative. So, it is stated in the Quran, 'Indeed, Allah has made the human in the best of forms' (Ali, The Holy quran, Roman translation, and English translation, 2014).

This verse grants humans the status of Allah's best and most noble creation, who has been given many physical and spiritual abilities. This has been revealed through an ayah on the Holy Prophet (PBUH): the highest man of humanity as "Your Lord said to the angels, "I am creating

a human being from clay. When I have formed and breathed into him of My spirit, I fall prostrate before him. So, the angels fall prostrate, all of them." (Itani, 2012, p. 186).

According to the Quranic verse above, the origin of human beings is mud, a fundamental element of their physical structure. In this physical structure, the soul that is a part of divinity has been transferred. The basic physical component of the human body is humble, contrarily the metaphysical element: the soul is higher in status. Accordingly, human beings are a combination of physical and metaphysical, humble and exalted simultaneously.

After the divine created human beings with such a fantastic combination of elements, the divine granted them wisdom and knowledge so that they might explore the universe and its secrets. The sacred (Allah Almighty) introduced humans to the names of objects. This is documented in the verse, "And He taught Adam the names, all of them; then he presented them to the angels, and said, "Tell Me the names of these, if you are sincere." (Itani, 2012, p. 13).

After imparting knowledge to Adam, Allah Almighty asked angels the names of objects taught to humans. But angels could not answer because they were unaware of these objects. It is as mentioned in the Quranic verse quoted: "They said, "Glory be to You! We do not know what You have taught us. It is you who are the Knowledgeable, the Wise." (Itani, 2012, p. 13).

After examining the angels, Allah presented Adam in front of the angels and asked him to disclose the taught knowledge of objects. Adam disclosed the taught understanding with ease. Through this process of acquiring knowledge, humans were exalted in status than angels. It is revealed below as "He said: 'O Adam! Inform them of their names. Then, when he had informed them of their names, He said, 'Did I not say to you that I surely know what is hidden in the heavens and the earth and (that) I know what you manifest and what you hide?'" (Ali, The Holy quran, Roman translation, and English translation, 2014).

In this surah, the dialogues between Allah and angels show human magnanimity. The facts revealed that humans are made up of clay, but they are granted superior status to other creatures because of their knowledge, intelligence, talents, physical abilities, intellectual abilities, authorities, and determined spirit.

*"Kham Hai Jab Tak To Hai Mitti Ka Ek Anbar Tu
Pukhta Ho Jaye To Hai Shamsheer-E-Bezanhar Tu"*
(Bukhari, 1990, p. 288)

"While you are still immature, you are a heap of dust.
When you ripen, you will become an irresistible sword"
(Iqbal, 2011)

The concept of the interactive installation is the dominance of humans. The idea is to recognize human beings as superior to any other creature. The first human being originated from the humble mud. Raise your head and look upon yourself with dignity. Therefore, the artist painted

figures covered with dirt and showed them on the sky's surface. Showing them a higher focus is on the presentation of human infinity. The ideas motivated the symbolic display of three exciting elements—the human, mud, and sky.

6.2.4. Human

The researcher, an artist, used human models of different ages to present the other aspects of human life. According to the artist, humans are an essential creative element in the pattern of life. The researcher explored that humans are the most dominant and elevated creatures of the divine. Humans are masterpieces of the God (Allah Almighty) that are a combination of tangible and intangible beings. The kids symbolise purity, innocence, and holiness.

For the seeker, searching for the divine or connecting with the sacred, making one's inner self unpolluted is crucial. The execution displays the third stage of self-realization according to Iqbal's philosophy. The third stage of Iqbal's philosophy discloses a relationship between the human self and God that reveals the phase of being transpersonal¹². To be transpersonal, one must achieve the extent of consciousness beyond the limits of personal identity. Therefore, according to the artist's perception, the child's age best describes the phase of a transpersonal human being. Four figures of kids, placed in the centre of the ceiling above eye level, have been added to a central and circular composition. The figures are placed in circular movements that show the life cycle, life to death. On the floor, a walking figure represents a new step up the journey towards knowing reality.

The researcher found a similarity between her notion and Akram Dost's conception. Dost, a Pakistani artist, finds human reality in mud as its origin. He analyses human affiliations with his surroundings and his being rooted in mud. Therefore, he explores man's relationship with his surroundings as complex and contradictory in separate ways. We are composed of clay, connected to our environment, and end up in the ground beneath our feet. For many, the soil in our surroundings is not just a substance. Still, it symbolises and manifests the land or location, bringing forth a particular or several identities. (Baloch)

Figure 33: Soil by Akram Dost



36x36 inches

6.2.5. Mud

The artist relates human identity to mud and uses it as a metaphor. The element of mud symbolises humans' origin, humbleness, and mortality. Different mystic poets and writers have perceived mud as an allegory that has concealed humans' mysterious physical abilities.

6.2.6. Sky

The sky is boundless and infinite; therefore, it symbolises the intangible and spiritual abilities of humans that connect it with the limitless divine. The famous quote, 'The sky's the limit' (Anything is possible), authenticates that humans can achieve all the impossible. Humans are creations with uncountable abilities; anything is potential for this earthly creature. In the installation, the artist presented the thought of being surrounded by sky. Skydiving inspired artists to fly higher in the sky. The experience of wandering in the clouds effortlessly is a crazy feeling that surpasses human fears. It lets humans discover their hidden selves through their different emotions and courageous abilities. (Pendikainen, 2015)

Figure 34: Skydiving without parachute



Screenshot, YouTube

6.2.7. Composition

In this work, different compositions highlight different aspects of the artist's thought process. The centre point represents the natural law that everything revolves around a central point: planets circulate the sun in their orbits. The earth's centre creates a gravitational force that sustains everything on the surface. The combination of square and circle reminds the ritual of circumambulation around the Kaaba. In real life, this ritual is performed by humans around the outer sides of the Kaaba, which attaches them physically and emotionally to the divine. Perversely, the researcher displayed the figures in the circular movement in the square surroundings, revealing her thought process. According to the artist, human souls are attached to divinity so that their inner self performs circumambulation inside the Kaaba; it reveals their mystical relationship with the divine.

The square shape symbolises the human's bond with the earth. The square's four sides represent various meanings; it points out the four directions: north, east, south, and west. It also indicates the four great primary forces: gravitational, electromagnetic, strong nuclear force and weak nuclear. These four points symbolise air, fire, water, and earth as sacred symbols. These four elements also symbolise the four seasons: winter, spring, summer, and fall. This square is also associated with the four stages of human life: birth, growth, maturity, and death. It also includes the four cosmic elements of the sun, moon, planets, and stars.

The inspiration for working on the composition has been taken from a famous painting, "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" by Paul Gauguin. In the painting, Gauguin raised similar questions and executed through his artwork as the artist did in her research and creative works (Gauguin, 1897–98). Gauguin derived inspiration from the dogma of his teacher Dupanloup, who raised the three essential questions in his painting: "Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?"

Figure 35: Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? By Paul Gauguin



1897, Oil on Canvas, 55 in × 148 in (Howard, 1992)

His questions were, "Where does humanity come from?" "Where is it going to?" "How does humanity proceed?" and "Where?" became the critical question. The painting from right to left, with the three central figures, depicts three phases of human life as the beginning of life is represented by the three women with a child; the middle group symbolizes the daily existence of young adulthood; an old woman approaching death appears acquiescent and reconciled to her thoughts by the third group. The other symbolic elements are a strange white bird that signifies the ineffectiveness of words, and the blue idol in the background embodies what Gauguin described as "the Beyond."

Contrarily, the artist shows the life cycle in different ways. The models were kids as a preeminent allegory of purity. The composition was rounded, and the poses of the figures represented the journey from life to death. The figure on the left lay straight on the surface, representing demise, but that is not still a lifeless body. His posture shows movement, revealing that the model is on a journey to the divine. The bottom figure's open eyes denoted the curiosity to know everything. The correct figure pose showed the courage and authority to live life willingly, and the baby model on top disclosed the courage and journey toward the divine.

7. Conclusion

The analysis provides an insightful determination of all the work and compares the researcher's ideology. The researcher explores the idea of religion and science that discloses human physical basis in mud. In literature, firstly, Iqbal associated the concept of self-realization with three stages: the first stage motivates self-discovery, the second its relational self and social interactions and lastly, the transpersonal form that is the goal of human life to find a perfect man with a combination of physical and spiritual abilities. Bulle Shah relates the process of self-realization in the context of four stages of mysticism: first path, second observance, third truth and final union, whereas Saint Kabir familiarizes ethics assigned to the human self, remaining detached from worldly pursuits. Amrita Pritam sees the human self in the context of universality

Discovering an individual's reality reveals in religion that humans are a combination of physical and spiritual beings. The researcher feels that we are nothing physically nor have any authority. The researcher embodies her identity in *mitti* (clay). Everyone has been shaped from clay; consequently, why are humans proud of worldly materials and egos? Life is unpredictable and transient, but the wisdom and actions of an individual rose human on high levels. Every person possesses a God-given dignity, visible through an individual's deeds, making human infinite.

The researcher, being an artist, explored significant mediums for executing the concepts that evolved through the research. The artist used various artistic materials and surfaces, such as oil paints, emulsion paints, wood strips and lasagna (wood), foam, and a smoke machine, in the installation.

The artist's determination was keen, presenting the enigma of human nature, a person's limitation in physical life and limitlessness in spiritual life as infinity. The process of seeking and understanding physical abilities is significantly associated with knowing the state of 'I am ness'. The second phase of realization of self-denotes the aspects of human social life and interactions with others, in which humans see and analyse themselves and their status from the point of view provided by other human beings in the society, culture, and civilization. The third and last phase of self-realization reveals hidden human abilities to the researcher. Which humans explore their inner remains in the world, but the aim is to observe ethics and morality and attain ecstasy or a state of mystical consciousness which helps them become perfect men and consequently attain the union with the divine.

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Notes:

- ¹ Persian: خودی اسرار English: The Secrets of ; the Self
- ² Self, selfhood, ego hood, I-ness
- ³ Meanings of word are self, being, person, personality, the body person.
- ⁴ Urdu is "مٹی", English is Soil, clay, mud
- ⁵ The dictionary denotes the following meanings of word self as body, caste, entity, existence, kind nature essence, origin, person, personality, the body person
- ⁶ The name Aref is of Persian origin and means "wise, intelligent". It also means "wise, intelligent" in Arabic (most commonly spells as Arif in Arabic).
- ⁷ Urdu word means clay or mud
- ⁸ literally means dust and symbolically, mortality and impermanence of the body.
- ⁹ Guru Granth Sahib is a world's great scripture that is collection of devotional hymns and poetry which proclaims God, lays stress on meditation on the True Guru (God) and lays down moral and ethical rules for development of the soul, spiritual salvation, and unity with God.
- ¹⁰ This metaphoric idiom means there is no limit, first recorded in 1920.
- ¹¹ A cuboid is a 3D shape. Cuboids have six faces; the basic difference between a cube and cuboid is that a cube has equal length, height, and breadth, whereas in cuboids these three may not be the same.
- ¹² Extending or going beyond the personal or individual, relating to, or being psychology or psychotherapy concerned especially with esoteric mental experience (such as mysticism and altered states of consciousness) beyond the usual limits of ego and personality.