

A poet of Eternal Relevance

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Abstract:

This paper is a modest attempt to reflect on the essential message of Iqbal, the poet of humanity and what relevance it has for our contemporary times. We are living at a time in which mankind has made vast strides and progress in almost all fields of life. But with all these advancement in knowledge, science and technology and the information revolution, it is a tragedy to see that this is also the age of crisis, wars and bloodshed, armed aggression, social and economic injustice, human rights violation, alcoholism and drug addiction, sexual crimes and psychological disorders, increasing suicides and the disintegration of the family. All these are symptoms of a sick and decadent society, which is drifting aimlessly like a ship in an uncharted ocean. Modern man has alienated from himself and had lost the meaning and purpose of life. Really speaking, the political problems, the conflict between nations, violence and crime, environmental crisis are external manifestations of the inner crisis of the contemporary societies, manifested in social and economic injustice and the violation of human rights, denial and deprivation of the fundamental freedom of man, social disparity and inequality and in turn are causing social tensions and conflicts in human societies all over the globe. It is in this context, that Iqbal's concept of dignity of man and the sanctity of human personality and freedom assumes significance.

Economic philosophy of Iqbal: *Ilmul Iqtisad* was the first book on economics in Urdu authored by Allama Iqbal in 1903. During the years in around 1903, books authored by Adam Smith, J. S. Mill, Ricardo, Alfred Marshall were being taught all over Europe. Consequently, the above publication established him as the first Muslim Economist of the then British Sub-continent. Thus his work served as a beacon light for the next generation of writers on Economics. He delivered three speeches on Budget in the Punjab Legislative Council of those days, namely, 1927-28 to 1930-31. He also delivered a speech on the resolution regarding application of the principle of assessment of income tax to the assessment of land revenue on February 28, 1928 in the Punjab Legislative Assembly. His two historical presidential addresses of Allahabad (December 29, 1930) and Lahore (March 21, 1932) are of significant importance and present outlines of the strategy for his economic thinking.

The contemporary era of Globalization is in the final analysis, a sparkly exploitative system in the epoch of corporate capitalism with a substantial percentage of international trade in the hands of MNC's much of Iqbal's fears have proved themselves to be true. Iqbal's denunciation of modern capitalism and his profectious of the maladies which this system of economics makes him a real visionary. We would like to trace the development of corporate capitalism in order to see what Allama Iqbal had to comment on this cancerous development. Globalization means shutting out possibilities of economic growth for the third world. It has been creating virtual fences to shut our people of schools, hospitals, workplace, farms even houses & communities. Mass privatization and deregulation have bred armies of locked out people, whose service are no longer needed, whose life style are written off as "backward" whose basic needs must go unmet. Throughout his book *Ilm- ul-Iqtisad* the first ever effort by an Urdu poet to understand the basic roots of Adam Smith, Ricardo & Marshal who could be called fathers of international capitalism, we come across a basic disagreement of Iqbal towards an economic philosophy which believes in exploitation of weaker sections of the society. He

believes that nothing good could come out of a morally bankrupt view of thriving on an economically weak people battling with scarcities of life.

His article National Life & view of Millat i Baiza (A view of the Muslims community) and his Introduction to Asrar-i-Khudi (Secrets of the Self), his first collection of Persian poetry, Allama seems to be concerned with the cause of economic rise of Japan & the West- and the causes of the decline of Muslim society. He thought that the world's view of mystical poetry was mainly responsible for the decline of the élan vitale (soul-energy) which was necessary for the spiritual & material development of a society.

Throughout his poetry Iqbal has hit out western imperialism. In his poem "Gift of Hijaz", he describes, according to Jagan Nath Azad, an Indian scholar of iqbalen studies, western imperialism "as an idol which must be thrown down the arch of mind, he says:

***"You have bowed before Darius and Jamshed; the ignored one,
Don't bring a bad name
to Harerm don't go to western imperialism
For the fulfillment of your desire;
Fell this idol down the arch of your mind, You have dedicated yourself to European idols;
Very unmanly, you have expired in the idol-house
Your intellect is far away from your heart, your heart from warmth.
As you have not tasted wine from the vine of ancestor.***

G.P Polinskaya, in her paper, Iqbal and Social Justice, has taken full cognizance of Iqbal's exposure of the evils of social oppression & social injustice. Iqbal wanted to liberate his country from colonial hegemony. He was greatly influenced by the Great October Revolution. He composed these lines (Azad, 1977, pp. 145-146):

***Let us give new regulations to the magicians & their temples,
Let us overturn the feudatory of strong old tavern.***

He went on:

***"Now is the time for establishing a new order
Let us wipe the heart's slate clean & begin everything anew
The imperial crown is tarnished it has been cast away
Kuhkun carver came with a chipping hammer in his hands,
And demanded for himself the estate of Parvaiz".***

Iqbal thinks that the Quran is a message of death for the capitalist & of course for the destitutes. It forbids accumulation of capital and is opposed to usury & speculation. It stands for the abolition of feudalism in all its forms, because, according to its principles, land is God's state (Polinskaya, G.P, 1977, pp. 149).

Political Philosophy of Iqbal: For Iqbal, Democracy was the most important aspect of Islam as a political ideal. In fact, according to Iqbal, it is Islam which has imported to the people their natural rights, equality, freedom and justice. He writes:

*Liberty took its birth from its gracious message,
This sweet wine dripped from its grapes!
It was impatient of invidious distinctions.
Equality was implicit in its being!*

The above words of Iqbal throw abundance of light on the fact that the modern Western discourse on liberty and equality can be traced back to Islam, particularly from the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the period of Khulfa-i-Rashideen. It was during this period that the real meaning of liberty and equality was translated into practice. In other words, this principle of democracy-liberty and equality are not new to Islam at all. In fact, it is Islam which has presented these concepts to the world to liberate man from all sorts of man-centered authoritarianism and dominations. It clearly implies that Islam is totally against hereditary monarchies, dynasties, empires, military dictatorships and self-imposed rule over the people. Islam does not tolerate any form of despotism, whether it is despotism of single monarch or despotism of some people in power.

Some of the important principles of democracy that are appreciated by Iqbal include 'freedom', 'equality' and 'election'. He finds these principles compatible with Islam to a certain extent. However Iqbal clearly rejects Secular foundations of Democracy and go entirely against it and its important principle i.e. popular sovereignty. Democracy in the West being originated from the economic regeneration of European societies is secular and materialistic by its very nature. It mainly caters to the material life of a society leaving the spiritual aspect altogether. Consequently, democracy in the West tends to move away from moral and ethical values. He points out the main difference between democracy in Islam and democracy in Europe:

“The Democracy of Europe – overshadowed by socialistic agitation and anarchical fear – originated mainly in the economic regeneration of European societies. ...The Democracy of Islam did not grow out of the extension of economic opportunity, it is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is a centre of latent power, the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating a certain type of character”.

Iqbal's rejection of the secular and material foundation of democracy is rooted in his comprehension of the Islamic concept of Tawhid, the unity of Allah and the unity of life. Tawhid, for Iqbal, is the unifying force which joins the spiritual and material aspects of life into a single and the united entity of life. Unlike the dualistic concept of life of the West which separates 'matter' from spirit' according to Iqbal, in Islam 'all this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the self-realization of spirit ^[1]. For Iqbal, distinction between the Church and the state does not exist in Islam as he argues that according to the law of Islam there is 'no distinction between the church and the state'. The state (in Islam) is not a combination of religious and secular authority, but it is a 'unity' in which no such distinction exists. The caliph is not necessarily the high priest of Islam; he is the representative of God on earth. As Iqbal said:

*“Jalal-e-paadshahi ho, ya jamhoori tamasha ho
Juda ho deen syasat say, tou reh jaati hai chengezi”*

John L. Esposito fully comprehends Iqbal’s criticism of democracy. He writes:

“He (Iqbal) believed that the success of a democratic system was contingent upon the preparedness of its members.... Thus, Iqbal did not accept the absolute democracy of undeveloped individuals. This is at the heart of his criticism of modern Western democracy: ‘Democracy is a system where people are counted but not weighed’”.

The Social Order of Islam: The development of a child is result of various forces – natural and cultural – that play on him. Allama Iqbal preached the social values of Islam because they constitute the strongest bulwark against racialism and nationalism and because they provide the greatest guarantee and hope of a society based on the principles of equality, social justice and human brotherhood. He gives reasons for his choice that social order of Islam is based on the principle of Tawhid. It demands loyalty to God and not to the throne. It implies the recognition infinite worth of every individual and the rejection of blood relationship. It brings a new sense of freedom and release from various kinds irrational of fears and superstitions. According to Allama Iqbal, the wonderful personality of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) provides another important focus of loyalties for the growing polity of Islam and this emotional attitude has proved a powerful mean for transforming the Muslims into a vital and unified community. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gave a message of freedom, social equality and human brotherhood. He rejected differences based on caste, color, sex, social and economic circumstances. Islam gave back to the people their natural rights, raised the status of workers and weakened the power of usurpers. Iqbal looks upon geographical and racial grouping responsible for all sorts of political evils, oppressions and conflicts. Islam seeks to establish the community of mankind not on geographical accidents but on belief in one God. Iqbal holds the view that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) migrated from Mecca to Madina. This migration suggests that mere geographical ties meant nothing to him and they should mean nothing to Muslims. The prophet migrated from his birth place, and thus revealed the secret of the Muslim’s nationalism His wisdom established a world encircling community. On the foundation of the Kalima By the grace of his overflowing bounty, the whole earth became a mosque for us Live in the ocean like the fish Freed from the fetters of locality. He who frees himself from the prison house of directions becomes all pervasive like the sky.

According to Allama Iqbal, it is essential that social order of Islam should actively exploit the forces of modern science and thereby gain effective control of its material environment. Iqbal insisted on it so strongly because he realized that one of the main causes responsible for the decline of Muslim people has been their neglect of science which has arrested their intellectual growth and weakened their political and economic position which, in that age, was mainly dependent on scientific power. According to Iqbal the social order must be a dynamic order, keenly alive and responsive to the basic fact of change. He is of the view that Ijtihad is essential for the healthy growth of religious thoughts in Islam. He disagrees with those people who would deny this right to present day Muslims. A study of history reveals that every social order becomes static and lifeless when intellectual initiative and independent thinking becomes atrophied and people cling to the old & outworn ideas. Iqbal holds the opinion that social order of Islam must always remain responsive to the material and cultural forces that play upon it from time to time.

Conclusion

A product of the colonial system, Iqbal not only was criticizing the West from a native perspective but also from within western philosophies. In that critique he exposed the class hierarchies of western liberal democracy and wealth distribution. At the same time, Marxism was also criticized for focusing only in the material world. A modern system should offer the best of all other systems and, for Iqbal, Islam was that true system. So, he was not only fighting against the colonial system but also offering his own political and philosophical system as a solution for the problems of colonial masters. If it is true that Iqbal admired the West's dynamic spirit, the intellectual tradition and technology, he also criticized its excesses: European imperialisms and colonialisms, capitalism's economical exploitation, the atheism of Marxism and the moral bankruptcy of secularism. So, he looked to the Islamic past to rediscover principles and values which could be used to reconstruct an alternative Islamic model for modern Muslim society, resulting in the discovery of Islamic versions of democracy and parliamentary government. Iqbal believed that, through reinterpretation, Islamic "equivalents" of western institutions and concepts could be developed. If applied in letter and spirit we can find the true social order for contemporary societies.

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