

The Philosophical Notion of Muhammad Iqbal Regarding Nationalism and Modernity

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Abstract: Iqbal had a substantial understanding of both Islamic and contemporary Western philosophy. The magnitude of gaging Iqbal's ideas in light of current events is accentuated throughout this research paper. Iqbal asserts that among all the world's religions, Islam has the most thorough conception of people as unique individuals with limitless potential who can carry out deeds that enhance their sense of 'Khudi' or Self. In this instance, the idea of "Will" served as the link between truth and action rather than intelligence and comprehension. This research adopted a qualitative methodology. Content analysis of Iqbal's works has been done to understand his idea of 'Khudi' or Self to challenge and reconcile modernity and nationalism. The article finds that the conception of self and community are associated with the phenomenon of modernity. Iqbal did not accept Western civilization and Western-oriented modernity, rather Iqbal suggests Muslims to choose the path of modernity from Islamic history and the Quran.

Keywords: Muhammad Iqbal, Islam, Modernity, Nationalism, Secularism, Revelation, Islamic Modernism, Traditionalism, West, Islamic Civilization, Western Civilization.

1. Introduction

‘ভয় নাই তর গলায় তাবিজ
বাঁধা যে রে তোর পাক কোরান।
নহি মোরা জীব ভোগ- বিলাসের,
শাহাদাত ছিল কাম্য মোদের,
ভিখারির সাজে খলীফা যাদের
শাসন করিল আধা জাহান-
তারা আজ পড়ে ঘুমায়ে বেহঁশ
বাহিরে বহিছে ঝড় তুফান।’

[Translation: Fear not, with a talisman around your neck,
Bound by your pure Quran.

We (Muslims) were never people for seeking life's
pleasures,
Martyrdom was the desired joy of us,
In beggar's clothes, those(Muslims) caliphs(leaders),
Ruled half the world.

(Alas!) Today those (Muslims) sleep unconscious,
(while)Outside, storms and hurricanes rage.]

- Kazi Nazrul Islam

Since the advent of British colonization in the Indian subcontinent, the degradations of the Muslims, especially of Indo-Pakistan, were noticed by different Muslim scholars, leaders, poets, and writers; and they, in their effort, tried to ameliorate the condition of the Muslims. The “Jihad” (struggle and effort) movement of Syed Ahmed Brelvi (1786-1831) and his followers tried to free Indo-Pakistan from the hands of the British. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898) tried assimilating Western thought and culture through his Aligarh Movement (Iqbal, 1992, p. 09). Syed Amir Ali (1849-1928) tried to raise the past glory and the contributions of the Muslims before the world through his memorable works, *The History of the Saracens* and *The Spirit of Islam*. On the other hand, he tried to win over some favours from the British rulers through constitutional ways. Urdu poets Altaf Hussain Hali (1837-1914) and Akbar Allahabadi (1846-1921) sang the past glories as well as the present miseries of the Muslims. In Bengal, the rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976) sang the past glories and the lofty humanitarian ideals of Islam. Earlier, the “Puthi” (book) literature and the writings of some writers, especially Shaikh Abdur Rahim (1859-1931), Syed Ismail Husain Shiraji (1880-1931), and Maulana Muniruzzaman Islamabadi (1875-1950), Maulana Akram Khan (1868-1969) played a significant role in strengthening the spirits of the Muslim community.

However, all of these could be considered superficial. What is the reason behind the past achievements and the current challenges? The true essence lies in understanding this, and Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) achieved just that. He showed that the present miseries of the Muslim world, in particular, and the East in general, lie in the philosophy of Self-abnegation, the philosophy of inactivity.

Islam provides an ideal way of action, a doctrine of self-

assertion, and a perspective of exploring nature and utilizing one's abilities for the betterment of mankind. The Muslim attitude brought them fame, advancement, and the opportunity to establish a new culture. Iqbal was well-learned in both modern Western philosophy and Islamic principles. That means Iqbal is not only knowledgeable about Western thought or Muslim education, even though he is also versed in both. The article emphasizes the significance of analyzing Iqbal's ideas from a contemporary context. Iqbal asserts that among all the religions in the world, Islam possesses the most comprehensive understanding of human beings as individuals with boundless potential, capable of performing actions that nourish their sense of self. The bridge between truth and action in this context was characterized by the concept of "will" rather than relying on intellect and understanding (Webb, 2008, p. 194). The notion of self and community are associated with the phenomenon of modernity.

Muhammad Iqbal, born in modern times (Halepota, 1974, p. 225), was inspired by other influential Islamic modernists, including Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (1703-1762), Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), Jamal al-Din Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), Zaghul Pasha (1859-1927) and Syed Amir Ali (1849-1928). Iqbal was widely regarded as a leading figure in the world of modernism. Similar to other Muslim reformers, Iqbal expressed a deep concern regarding the philosophical and political hegemony of the West over the Muslim world. It became clear through colonising vast Muslim territories in the 19th century. Iqbal developed a strong interest in political matters during his time in Europe. There, he had the chance to delve into European political thought and witness the detrimental effects of nationalist policies on the continent and European power's often ruthless imperialist actions abroad (Mir, 2006, p. 132).

Iqbal commenced his educational adventure at the Government College. He meets orientalist professor Sir Thomas Arnold (1864-1930). During that period, Arnold held the position of a philosophy Professor. Iqbal acquired knowledge from Arnold. Nevertheless, towards the culmination of Arnold's scholarly pursuits, he returned to London. Iqbal was displeased with his return to London. In 1905, Iqbal commenced his academic pursuits in Cambridge under the guidance of Professor Arnold. Iqbal obtained his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1908. He delivered his thesis on "*The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*". He strengthened his ideas by drawing on the philosophies of Hegelian philosophers John McTaggart (1866-1925) and James Ward (1843-1925). Iqbal acquired profound intellectual insight throughout this period and refined his poetry abilities. His *Shikwa* (1909) and *Jawab-e-Shikwa* (1913) have gained acceptance among Muslims. Subsequently, Iqbal's most impactful idea resonated globally. *Asrar-i-Khudi*, published in 1915, encompasses the core ideas of Iqbal's philosophy, whereas *Rumuz-e-Bekhuri*, published in 1918, serves as a companion piece. *Khudi* discusses the notion of self, whereas *Bekhuri* delves into selflessness.

Iqbal embarked on his political journey in 1926. During that period, he joined the Punjab Council. Before 1930, he

attempted to coexist harmoniously and peacefully with both Hindus and Muslims. Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) comments on Iqbal's involvement in politics with the State; despite being a very skilled poet and philosopher, he was as adept at practical politics. Due to his strong belief in the principles of Islam, he was among the few individuals who initially contemplated the possibility of creating an Islamic State in the North-West and North-East regions of India, which have historically been the ancestral areas of Muslims (Ahmed, 1976, p. 115). At 1930, Iqbal delivered a speech at Allahabad that was a magnificent political masterpiece, advocating for the creation of a separate state for Muslims. He seeks to construct a sovereign nation where Muslims constitute the majority and are governed according to Islamic principles. Iqbal asserts:

I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Self-government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim state appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India. (Sherwani, 1995, p. 11)

Iqbal responded to Maulana Hussain Ahmed Madani's (1879-1957) 1938 statement by discussing the concepts of *Islam and Nationalism*. This is Iqbal's ultimate declaration regarding politics. Iqbal specifically elucidated two concepts: "*qaum*" and "*millat*". Iqbal opposed Western-oriented nationalism and instead advocated for the values of Islam. Iqbal asserts that any legal code other than that derived from Islam is insufficient and not worthy of acceptance. This principle gives rise to political controversies strongly linked to India (Shamloo, 1948, p. 225). Iqbal's perspective is explicit; religion is neither individual, private, national, nor racial. The objective of religion is to unite all humanity in the natural distinctions, and it is entirely human. Iqbal's perspective on nationalism and religion is unambiguous. He refrained from intertwining religion with nationalism. Iqbal condemned Western-oriented nationalism as a means of achieving Islamic modernity. What would be the outcome if we addressed and resolved the difficulties within nationalism and religion? Iqbal provided a lucid exposition of this situation:

If some Muslims have fallen into the error that religion and nationalism can go hand in hand as a political concept, then I want to give a timely warning to the Muslims that this course will ultimately lead to irreligiosity. And if this does not happen, Islam will be reduced to an ethical ideal with indifference to its social order as an inevitable consequence. (Shamloo, 1948, p. 228)

Nevertheless, Iqbal's comprehension of nationalism and religion is evident. What is the outcome of his contemplation? Pakistan is a result of Iqbal's political vision. In 1947, a separate homeland was established for Indian Muslims. It is widely acknowledged that Muhammad Ali Jinnah played a pivotal role in establishing Pakistan.

2. Iqbal and Modernity

Muhammad Iqbal, who firmly grasped Islam's aims and worldview, distinguished Western modernism from the conventional wisdom that modernity is an unavoidable

historical trend that needs attention, not denial. Rather, he used his cultural history as a lens to critically examine all parts of Western modernity. He advocated for a careful and thorough analysis and evaluation of Islamic tradition rather than blithely adhering to it. Atheism, nationalism, and secularism are integral components of contemporary Western civilisation. These concepts, which ostensibly separate religion from politics, are cunning tactics designed to deceive the gullible. Instead, they highlight the Western tradition's arrogance and certainty in rationality, which dismisses beliefs and divine revelations. Iqbal states: "The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is organically related to the social order which it has created" (Sherwani, 1995, p. 08).

Muhammad Iqbal called for Islamic modernity to advance culture and civilisation. Iqbal did not want to accept Western civilisation or Western-oriented modernity. He asked Muslims to take the path of modernity from Islamic history, tradition, and the Quran. Iqbal states: "The unity of religious belief on which our communal life depends, is supplemented by the uniformity of Muslim Culture. Mere belief in the Islamic principle, though exceedingly important, is not sufficient" (Sherwani, 1995, p. 08). The dynamics of the Quran can only be modernity in the progress of world culture. Therefore, he did not feel a contradiction or conflict between Islam and Western civilisation. Iqbal did not accept secularism and traditionalism, although he accepted Islamic modernity.

Moreover, the modern way of life is based simply on religious ideas. Thus, marginalising religion or adopting a secular attitude does not provide any possibility of becoming modern. Iqbal emphasised harnessing inner unity to achieve political objectives, facilitating the establishment of a contemporary society and state. Iqbal's self-examination talks about the progress of life, people, and world culture. Iqbal clarified this in his literary work "*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*": "Reality lives in its own appearances, and such a being as man, who has to maintain his life in an obstructing environment, cannot afford to ignore the visible. The Quran opens our eyes to the great fact of change, through the appreciation and control of which alone it is possible to build a durable civilisation" (Iqbal, 1930, p. 13).

As long as Muslims are not able to develop their civilisation, as long as they are unable to accept the civilisation of the West as a challenge, they must remain followers of the West. Iqbal, who talked about the liberation of the slave, thinks that it is possible only by accepting the "Dynamic conception of the universe" (Iqbal, 1930, p. 152) of the Quran. This perspective is additionally strengthened by Ibn Maskawaih's concept of existence as a progressive process and Ibn Khaldun's approach to civilisation. Iqbal states: "History or, in the language of the Quran, the days of God, is the third source of human knowledge according to the Quran (Iqbal, 1930, p. 152).

Iqbal kept a limit on Western civilisation with modern civilisation but connected it with the present world's real life and livelihood. Iqbal did not confront Islam and the West. He made it clear in his *Reconstruction* speech that Islam ought to act as a bridge between the East and the West, positioned between Asia and Europe, and represent the combination of

Eastern and Western perspectives on life. Iqbal clarified in *Islam and Nationalism*: "That religion is a power of the utmost importance in the life of individuals as well as States, and finally who believes that Islam is itself Destiny and will not suffer a destiny (Sherwani, 1995, p. 06).

What is Iqbal's idea of secularism? He said secularism has nothing to do with religion (Shamloo, 1948, p.227). He highlighted the importance of religion and said that religion is an absolute subject that plays an important role in individuals and the state. While secularisation was inherently associated with the concept of progress, secularism unintentionally led to the exclusion and distortion of religious belief. Iqbal believed that the secular agreement is the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious symbols and institutions (Ali, 2011, p. 10). Secularism is impossible in terms of religious and state life. On the one hand, Islam is considered a moral ideal; on the other hand, it is considered when applying state policies and laws. Therefore, there is no opportunity to reject Islam in the state's mind. Iqbal States: "Politics have their roots in the spiritual life of man. It is my belief that Islam is not a matter of private opinion. It is a society, or, if you like, a civic church" (Sherwani, 1995, p. 31). Iqbal thinks that if religion is separated from politics, dictatorship remains. Although secularism was created in the interests of progress, Iqbal did not accept the marginalisation and distortion of religion. Therefore, Iqbal took Western culture and civilisation as a sociological theory and accepted Islamic culture and civilisation as religious modernity. Iqbal states:

The most remarkable phenomenon of modern history, however, is the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islam is spiritually moving towards the West. There is nothing wrong in this movement, for European culture, on its intellectual side, is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islam. Our only fear is that the dazzling exterior of European culture may arrest our movement and we may fail to reach the true inwardness of that culture. (Iqbal, 1930, p.06)

We see that secularism controls every step of real life by talking about modernity. As a result, people are deprived of freedom of movement, speech, economic balance, and human values. In the Indian subcontinent, Nehru's doctrine is known as secularism. Nehru's understanding of religion was irrational, wrong, and inimical to the universe. Nehru's extremism (secularism) was a fitting response to Iqbal's religious modernism inspired by the Quran. In keeping with the modern world, there is no alternative to applying religion from an individual to a collective life. The proper answer to extremism in the name of modernity can be to gain a good religious outlook. With his spiritual philosophy, Iqbal talked about creating political parties through the moral reform of the Muslims of South Asia and the Muslims of the Muslim world.

Iqbal did not adopt the path of modernity in imitation of the West. Nor did he talk about modernity's compromise with Western civilisation. A Muslim cannot form a political community without forming his personality. It is not possible to achieve modernity with a weak and loyal personality. Instead of living the history, tradition, and *Quranic* life of Islam,

Muslims are constantly running towards slavery as a result of living an irreligious life. So, the question may arise: Is Iqbal's thought relevant in the modern world? If a Muslim wants to regain his thoughts and traditions, then there is no alternative to the modern philosophy of life inspired by the Quran.

3. Islam and Nationalism

It is important to note that Iqbal's opposition to nationalism was not just driven by his belief in Muslim universalism. He firmly believed this philosophy was detrimental, even from a secular perspective. According to him, nationalism restricts the range of human affiliations and sympathies and is a perpetual cause of strife among individuals. Iqbal condemned Nationalism because it has caused the fragmentation of humanity into aggressive factions, undermining the chances of achieving global peace and harmony (Ali, 1948, p. 2007). In a letter to Nicholson, Iqbal explained his point of view on the nationalism view:

Since I find that the idea of nationality based on race or territory is making headway in the world of Islam, and since I fear that the Muslims, losing sight of their own ideal of a universal humanity, are being lured by the idea of a territorial nationality, I feel it is my duty as a Muslim and a lover of all mankind, to remind them of their true function in the evolution of mankind. Tribal or national organizations on the lines of race or territory are only temporary phases in the unfoldment and upbringing of collective life, and as such I have no quarrel with them; but I condemn them in the strongest possible terms when they are regarded as the ultimate expression of the life of mankind. (Ali, 1978, p. 203-204)

The notion of nationalism originated in 19th-century Europe as a reaction to autocratic kings who, with the backing of their religious institutions, enforced oppressive regulations on their citizens. During his university study, Iqbal observed the rise of totalitarian nationalism. He vocalised the message, "*Muslim hai ham, watan hai sara jahan hamara,*" which translates to I myself as a Muslim and consider the entire world as my homeland (Zilani, 2024, p. 7, Foreword). This thought was intriguing due to the global engagement of Muslims throughout Iqbal's era in their fight for independence against European imperialism. In India, Muslims were also engaged in resistance against British colonial rule. Several Muslim leaders were engaged in a debate, asserting that Patriotism is an integral aspect of one's religious belief. Later, Iqbal conceived of establishing independent Muslim nations in India to respond to Indian nationalism. Do these ideas not contradict each other? Where should one direct their loyalty? How can one reconcile the concept of considering the entire world as their homeland, perceiving India as their homeland, and identifying a certain state within India as their homeland? In addition, Pakistanis hold the belief that Iqbal was the creator of their nation, while the Indian armed forces use Iqbal's songs praising India as the motherland. Iqbal States: "The idea of nationality is certainly a healthy factor in the growth of communities. But it is apt to be exaggerated, and when exaggerated it has a tendency to kill the broad human elements in art and literature" (Iqbal, 1992, p.92).

Iqbal noted that Europe's imperialistic impulses supported

the rise of European nationalism in Muslim countries, repressing and dividing Islam's secularised teachings. Some self-proclaimed Muslims are inspired by European terminology like nationalism, secularism, socialism, etc, disregarding Islamic limitations and becoming nationalists driven by a desire for power and wealth. Iqbal states:

In the world of Islam we have a universal polity whose fundamentals are believed to have been revealed but whose structure, owing to our legists want of contact with the modern world, stands today in need of renewed power by fresh adjustments. (Sherwani, 1995, 06)

Iqbal has shown that nations are based on the Polity. He says in his address delivered at the annual session of the All-India Muslim League, "to a careful study of Islam, its law and polity, its culture, its history and its literature" (Pirzada, 1970, p. 154).

Moreover, with which Islam has no conflict. In the distant past, all the nations were connected with the polity, and the polity was connected with the nation. He introduced himself as an Indian. The term polity has been used primarily as a geographical term. Love for the homeland is a natural instinct for the people; no theory is needed to nurture it. However, in today's political world, the idea of a nation is not merely geographical. It is a principle of human society and a political concept. Since Islam is also a provision of human society, there is a conflict with the word "nation" as a political concept. Furthermore, Islam declares that any law except Islamic law is incomplete and unacceptable.

Iqbal said that I have realised by studying the Quran that Islam has more goals than just working with the goal of moral reform. It speaks of a gradual and fundamental revolution in the social life of the human race so that its national and group-based perspectives change and give birth to pure human consciousness (Shamloo, 1948, p. 226). When Christianity was preached, religion was a personal and domestic affair. Europe began to think that the responsibility of the people's social life was solely the Govt. Iqbal's point here is that Islam and Islam alone are the first to convey to mankind that religion is not national and ethnic, not personal and domestic. However, it is purely human and aims to unite all human beings.

In Allahabad's Speech in 1930, Iqbal stated that religion significantly influences individual's lives and the state's governance. "This is further implied in his statement that Islam is something more than a creed; it is a community of a nation" (Sherwani, 1995, p. 114). Iqbal further implied, "The membership of Islam as a community is not determined by birth, locality, or nationalism; it consists of the belief in identity" (Sherwani, 1995, p. 114). Iqbal argued that Islam is a philosophy of life (Iqbal, 1930, p. 101). The embodiment of definite historical and cultural traditions, social and legal institutions, and ways of living.

Iqbal states: "Islam is neither Nationalism nor Imperialism but a League of Nations which recognizes artificial boundaries and racial distinctions for facility of reference only, and not for restricting the social horizon of its members" (Iqbal, 1930, p. 186). Whenever Islam is incorporated with nationalism, its essence will be annihilated. Moreover, with that, impiety will rise. Many people believe that Islam and nationalism can go

hand in hand, but in this case, Islam will lose its propriety and transform it into a moral standard only. In the current political propaganda, Muslims were attracted to the use of nationalism terminology to hold these beliefs independent of politics. Accepting religion as a personal matter should be restricted to personal life only.

Iqbal never equated Muslim nationalism with religious intolerance and a narrow communal outlook. He said Islam does not bisect the unity of man into an inimical spirit and matter; in Islam, God and the universe, spirit and matter are organic to each other. Iqbal states: "If some Muslims have fallen into the error that religion and nationalism can go hand in hand as a political concept, then I want to give a timely warning to the Muslims that this course will ultimately lead to irreligiosity. Furthermore, if this does not happen, Islam will be reduced to an ethical ideal with indifference to its social order as an inevitable consequence" (Sherwani, 1995, p. 304). Iqbal stated the need to reform Islam by quoting the development process of social thought and science in the West. The leaders of the world must understand the true meaning of Islam today in Europe and then move forward with self-control and a clear insight into the ultimate aims of Islam as a social policy.

Iqbal emphasised Islam earlier as a *Qawm* (national community), whereas in the later period, the move emphasised Islam as a part of *Millat* (religious community). He elaborated that *Millat's* body and soul are composed of a belief in the unity of God (Sherwani, 1995, 2009). Iqbal states that: "the Muslims collectively a single, united and definite party founded on the Unity of God and the Finality of Prophethood as its basis (Sherwani, 1995, p. 306). Iqbal sang the song of the Muslim *Millat* in his Urdu and Persian poems. He called upon the entire Muslim entity to unite in the unity of heart with the power of solidarity through self-denial of self-determination and self-determination in *Khudi*.

4. Conclusion

*Khudi ko kar baland itna
Keh har taqdeer sey pehley
Khuda bandey sey khud poochhey
Bata, "Teri raza kya hai?"*

Endow your will with such power
That at every turn of fate it so be
That God Himself asks of His slave
"What is it that pleases thee?" (Singh, 1983, p. 19)

Iqbal says "Make your ego so elevated that before every *taqdir*, *Khuda* Himself asks his *Banda*: What is your desire?" To me, this is the keynote of Iqbal's philosophy. Further, Iqbal says, "Should I tell you the sign of a *Marde Mumen*? When death comes, there is a smile on his lips" (Singh, 1983, p. 19). This is the main message of Iqbal. Iqbal's philosophy, or rather the message, is a philosophy of life, life augmentation, and elevation. Life is a fact, and fact should be taken as it. His philosophy is not armchair, though based on a clear analysis of Nature.

Iqbal philosophy has sometimes been characterised as the philosophy of Islam. It is no doubt a philosophy of Islam. Iqbal

argues, "The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is organically related to the social order which it has created" (Sherwani, 1995, p. 08). However, this Islam should not be taken as something communal or sectarian; Islam, seen from one angle of history, is a religion preached by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). However, from another angle of history, Islam is not that alone. It is the right way of life since the dawn of humanity. It is this Islam that Iqbal preaches in his philosophy. Iqbal's philosophy is neither communal nor sectarian; it is cosmopolitan.

In propounding his philosophy, Iqbal spoke of Islam for two reasons. Iqbal propounded man's everyday conduct, which could not be done in abstract terms alone. For this, concrete illustrations of social life were needed, and these were taken from Islamic society. Secondly, Islam has aimed to abolish all artificial barriers between man and man, has always upheld the cause of the downtrodden by removing all disabilities, and has given humanity a message of equality, fraternity, and freedom. Iqbal states: "I shall confine my attention to the Islamic ideal in its ethical and political aspects only" (Sherwani, 1995, p. 08).

Iqbal believed that Islamic Society advanced civilization. Iqbal did not accept Western civilization and Western-oriented modernity. He told Muslims to take the path of modernity from Islamic history and the Quran. Iqbal did not seek a contradiction and conflict between Islam and Western civilization. He did not accept secularism and traditionalism, though he accepted modernity. The modern way of life is built on religious life. Secularism has knowingly accepted religion as marginal and irreligious.

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