

# **IQBAL'S IDEA OF PROGRESS**

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Iqbal's idea of progress is rooted in the very central core of his philosophy of Reality. Here we are not concerned with how Iqbal came to this view of Reality, nor with a detailed statement of the con-tent of the view itself. For our purposes it is sufficient to state (a) that Reality is by its very essence "pushing outward", expanding and moving and also by its very nature demanding such dynamic expansion on the part of anything that would be real, and (b) that this dynamism is not just any movement in the ordinary sense of that word but has a built-in quality of purposive self-direction. Without this latter quality, which is shown to be spiritual-moral in character involving knowledge, will and purpose, there would neither be creativity nor order in the true sense of these words. On this view, which may be called the philosophy of "expansive actionism", even the elemental fact of existence is not just a fact but essentially an act. Indeed, this part of existentialism Iqbal would have certainly confirmed and on this point he anticipates this form of existentialism. Now, in the entire range of being man has a unique status in the sense that he is the most proper and developed locus of this moral dynamism; as such, he has the greatest range of prospects and possibilities before him but by the same token, faces equally serious penalties for his failure to discharge these potentialities. This proper moral expansion of the human age when it reaches its full fruition is

describable par excellence by Iqbal's term "Khudi," which is a kind of "enfrenched self-hood" and the dynamic process whereby it is attained—a process really of "self-giving" and self-sacrificing endeavour—is called "Ishq".

It is obvious, I think, from this account that progress is not just an added attribute of Reality or an effect of it; Reality itself is just this purposive, creative flow of energy: an infinite progress itself. Anything that is real can claim this nature of being real only to the extent that it shares this progressive, creative energy. I think it is also obvious that this philosophy of actionism is at bottom inspired by a vision of the thoroughly moral-spiritual nature of Reality. God is active, creative, self-demanding. He wants others to act and demands from them to do so. No human ever stood in a genuine contact with this God without being wholly transformed and impelled to action through imperatives. The effect of these imperatives imperiously commanded by God he feels in his very bones. He sets out to change the world in the interests of progress and collaboration with God. He sets out to establish a sane, just, good world order. Anything short of this is simultaneously a betrayal of his own humanity and the godhead of his God.

One most capital conclusion that flows from this picture is the concept of indivisibility of right and truth. You cannot divide life into the allegedly religious and so-called secular sectors. Indeed, if the terms 'religious' and 'secular' are used thus mutually exclusively and consequently restrictively—as is the obvious

intention—then neither is applicable to the process of Reality which is one unitary flow without tolerating bifurcation or duality. In Iqbal's own words, "all is holy ground", and he even categorically denied that 'religious' and 'secular' or spiritual and material were even two aspects of Reality. Of course, if, e.g. an act of mine is motivated by wholly selfish ends and is not integrated into the directed flow of the process as a whole, then it would be an action cut off from the springs of Reality; it would be an action simply wrong. This would be an action springing from an attitude of mind that Iqbal would be prepared to call 'secular'. Indeed, it seems that on this view "secular" and "kufr" would be, in the final analysis, identical, if the term "secular" is to be given any tenable meaning. The term 'secular', however, whatever its meaning may be, has attained a kind of religious status in the modern West. Various contributory causes have influenced its genesis and growth but the most deep-rooted spiritual foundation from which it seems to feed is the assumption that truth cannot succeed in the world which is essentially evil; it must, therefore, suffer the tragedy that is its due share in the world. Success is almost a sin and truth may not really commit this sin.

Such a truncated view of spirituality assumes a permanent dislocation between God and the world-process and in order to overcome, in some measure, the pessimism that flows from it, is forced to postulate some kind of a special Divine intervention in God's own good time. In the meantime, the governance of the world is entrusted to a 'secular' system that is little more than a grandiose and systematic hypocrisy. If hypocrisy creates

difficulties and becomes intolerable in certain situations, but the premises of secularism are not to be changed, then some form like that of Communism is the logically inescapable conclusion.

Iqbal's vision of Reality as a ceaseless, creative, purposive flow went hand in hand with his discovery of the true meaning of the Islamic Movement and the message of the Qur'an. The Muslim orthodoxy, at its best hands and most perceptive moments and, indeed, as a whole, had kept faithful to the active and the Commanding God of the Qur'an. Its conceptions of the actual imperatives flowing from God may have become at times rather history-bound but it never let go the essential vision that man is here to make an incessant and positive endeavour and God is there to Command. Iqbal's demanding Reality and the Qur'an's Commanding God are absolutely identical. And in the Islamic Movement, which started with the positive achievement of the Holy Prophet who implemented a moral-spiritual ideal of goodness and justice in the actual texture of history. Iqbal found a paradigm to which he untiringly called people—not only Muslims but the whole world.

To the Secularist West he said, at times with a good deal of bitterness, that if they really meant to set up a sound world-order, secularism could not conceivably deliver the goods. In fact, it was a mere instrument of national glorification through which they gratified certain primitive drives of man for power and exploitation. To the Muslims, Iqbal said that Islam, which they claimed to follow, is undoubtedly pure progress and is the only

system that has the necessary conditions for an integrated, onward-moving world-order. But he reminded the Muslims, at times with biting sarcasm, that Islam lay in the Qur'an and in the biography of the Holy Prophet and in the very early history of the Community, but not in their actual life. How could a Community call itself truly Islamic that did not move onward, when God Himself acts and moves and imperiously demands that every thing move? How can you move at all with a system that is manifestly history-bound? That is why Iqbal called the Muslims back to the Qur'an, and to receive inspiration from the example of the Holy Prophet.

The most basic desideratum of Iqbal Studies still remains a serious attempt at working out the central theme of Iqbal's philosophy of life. Only when his central thesis is worked out clearly and stated satisfactorily will every statement that he made on every individual subject fall into a true perspective and receive its due importance and meaning. Otherwise his utterances are likely to appear and have, indeed, appeared too many, a juxtaposition of contradictions. It is also primarily because of a lack of a clear formulation of his central message, that devotees of a whole range of opinions from the extreme right to the extreme left have claimed Iqbal's support. Such a formulation of Iqbal's central philosophy, as is envisaged here, cannot be found in Iqbal himself. This is not a peculiarity of Iqbal alone but a problem that confronts, in varying degrees, the thought-legacy of many thinkers. The reason is that a creative thinker expresses his thought, rather than neatly formulates it; it may even be said that

he suggests rather than enunciates. It would not, indeed, be a misuse of Iqbal's own terminology if we say that a creative thinker operates by 'Ishq rather than by 'Aql. It is the task of a serious interpreter to enunciate and neatly formulate. The task of interpretation, if taken earnestly, is, indeed, in itself a task of high intellectual creativity. Such an interpretation of Iqbal, which may ipso facto indicate the path of a genuine future philosophical development in Islam, still remains to be achieved.