

# FACETS OF IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF NATIONALISM\*

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Islamic polity, according to Iqbal, is based on Unity of God (Tauhīd). Hence it demands a complete loyalty to the Almighty and not to the earthly thrones. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal says: "It demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature."<sup>1</sup> Iqbal thus rejects the territorial basis of nationalism. The divisions between human beings on the racial, geographical, social and economic grounds is thus merged into one whole based on the idea of unity of God, because allegiance to God is the ultimate aim of a society. Iqbal's cardinal philosophy is the philosophy of the self. But as he explains in the introduction to his poem *Asrār-i Khudī*, he uses the word, not in the ordinary or in the traditional sense, but to denote "self-awareness" or "self-determination". Thus he has given a new meaning to or dimension of the word not connotated in a general sense. This individualistic concept of Iqbal reveals the fact that earthly fear is meaningless to an upholder of the "secret of self" which gives him a noble and sublime character for the betterment of the society he lives in.

*Khudī* is the source and strength for life both for the individual and the society. Self-revelation with immense potentiality is a boon for the society. It preserves our history and cultural heritage.

The universe, according to McTaggart, is the association of individuals, and individuals have their meaning only if they are united together. Thus Iqbal gives the individualistic idea only to see a powerful *millat*.

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\* Read in the Seventeenth Session of the Pakistan Philosophical Congress, held at Lahore on 20.22 October 1975 ("Philosophy of Iqbal" section).

<sup>1</sup> *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore, 1967), p. 147.

فرد قائم ربطِ ملت سے ہے تنہا کچھ نہیں  
موج ہے دریا میں اور بیرونِ دریا کچھ نہیں

[Individuals have their strength only in Unity,

Waves have their existence only in a river; outside the river, they are reduced to nothingness.]

Thus self-affirmation leads to the highest ideals of man in society. It is strengthened by love. Love to its highest forms gives a sense of value and respect for the Creator and His creation. Through it there flows a law of mutual respect. Thus Iqbal's individualism is in complete accord with society or community. Here he is bound to the earth and does not soar to heaven.

Writing about Iqbal, Arberry says: "But he was not interested merely in the individual and his self-realization; he was equally concerned with the evolution of an ideal society, or community as he preferred to call it. It is only as a member of this community that the individual, by the twin principles of conflict and concord, is able to express himself fully and ideally; it is only as an association of self-affirming individuals that the community can come into being and perfect itself. Iqbal thus escapes from libertarianism by limiting the individual's freedom, making him a member of a homogeneous community, and from totalitarianism by limiting the community's authority, making it a challenge and not an insurmountable obstacle to the individual's self-realization."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the individual and the community, according to Iqbal, are complementary to each other. The individual gains strength from society while society gains respectability from individuals that are well organised.

The community, however, would be guided by the principles of justice, equity and sense of brotherhood and the strong and benevolent leadership like that of the Prophet of Islam. Only in such community a verile and strong leadership will emerge which in turn will work for the common good of the common people and will further bring a healthy and congenial environment.

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<sup>2</sup> A.J. Arberry, Tr., *The Mysteries of Selflessness* (Iqbal's *Rumūz-i Bekhūdī*), (John Murray, London, 1953), Preface, p. xi.

In such a community, democratic forces will work and provide a greater scope for the people to participate in the affairs of the State.

Thus it is imperative that such society should evolve in which the latent power of the individual is developed; this consequently necessitates the evolution of a society having an ideal social, economic, political, moral and spiritual conditions in which individuals have the maximum scope of utilising their talents and potentialities. It is the State's responsibility to help grow such a homogeneous society. Such a society cannot grow in a vacuum. It has a territorial base. But the geographical boundary is not the end of the political aspiration of a nation; it has to convert itself into an ideal nation.

Society, for Iqbal, is not merely an association of self-affirming individuals. It is, in fact, an association of persons with a necessary bipolar dialectic. In Iqbal's society, self-denial goes along with self-affirmation. Both these opposing tendencies in individuals give rise to a higher stage of existence and it is that of social cooperation. This social cooperation issues itself in the cultural spirit of the society, in its value-structures, ethical system and common beliefs. Iqbal's *Rumūz-i Bekhudi* shows this inner structure of human society and it must be kept in mind to understand Iqbal's conception of nationalism. A word of caution must be put with regard to Iqbal's concept of self-denial. It should not be taken to mean self-annihilation or self-immolation, as is the case with some non-Islamic and Hindu philosophies, It means denying to the self. This falls short of human dignity and sublimity. Self-denial, in the true sense of the word, is *faqr*.

Contemporary nationalism, in fact, is not different from love for place and family of the ancient tribal societies. This, however, leads to parochial and racial discrimination and is opposed to the idea of the usual kinship or relationship of humanity at large. Iqbal's main source of this inspiration is the Qur'an which very explicitly exhorts people to be above race, colour, language and tribal affiliation. Therefore, Iqbal keeps the high ideals and teaching of Islam in mind and preaches for the unity of mankind. In Islam, he finds an answer to this universal brotherhood.<sup>3</sup>

Islam teaches that all Muslims are brothers irrespective of territorial connections, but they must identify themselves with one society. This conception of society advocated by Iqbal is erroneously called Pan-Islamism.

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<sup>3</sup> Iqbal, op.cit., pp. 155-56.

It is, in fact, the true Islamic concept of universal brotherhood.

قلب ما از هند و روم و شام نیست      مرز و بوم ما بجز اسلام نیست

[Our heart is not of India, Turkey and Syria,

Our common birthplace is nothing but Islam.]

Territorial nationalism is the root of social and political evil. It has put nations against each other and has led to much suffering for humanity at large. Even Western thinkers have realised its sinister aim, whereas "Islam was from the very beginning a civil society, having received from the Qur'ān a set of simple legal principles which, like the twelve tables of the Romans, carried, as experience subsequently proved, great potentialities of expression and development by interpretation. The nationalistic theory of State, therefore, is misleading inasmuch as it suggests a dualism which does not exist in Islam."<sup>4</sup> The Qur'an is the guiding principle and the law which binds the members of Islamic Society into one organised whole:

گر تو می خواهی مسلمان زیستن      نیست ممکن جز به قرآن زیستن

[If you want to be a true Muslim,

You cannot live without following the Qur'an (exemplified through the Holy Prophet).]

One would naturally ask: How could Iqbal pass from his universal brotherhood to the idea of Pakistan, as a distinct nation? How can a person reconcile Iqbal's internationalism with his nationalism as expressed in his demand for Pakistan? We must remember that Iqbal has two bases for the demand of Pakistan. Firstly, Islam is not, like other religions, a private affair; secondly, the concept of Pakistan is based on Islamic principles of life, not on territorial nationalism which tears society into pieces. These principles of life are distinctly different from those of other societies and accordingly generate a different value-structure. Iqbal has this in mind. The Muslims

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<sup>4</sup> Shamloo, Speeches and Statements of Iqbal (Lahore, 1944), p. 204.

need a home-land, the way we have a body. However, our bodily limitations are no bar to our aspirations; boundaries of Pakistan are no obstacle for realising our ideals.

Similarly, regional aspirations are the outcome of ideal Islamic aspirations which are to be realised through regional efforts. It is like realising Divine injunctions through individual efforts. Individual ideals do not make Divine ideals redundant; rather the former get their content by the latter and not *vice versa*.

The talk about regional culture must be in the light of these thoughts. As a matter of fact, local and regional cultures are the component parts of the super-culture which is the Islamic culture from which they derive their worth. In other words, the sub-cultures are like the essential organs of a body without which the concept of a person with a proportionate figure cannot be conceived. It is like bricks and mortar; with their uniform mixture alone a magnificent building can be raised. The Muslims in other countries have different social customs, rituals and linguistic and cultural heritage, yet, without any racial and parochial prejudices, they are one on one ideology — the followers of one Holy Prophet and reciters of one *Kalimah* with-out any antagonistic feeling toward each other.

For Iqbal the individual's life should be adorned by God and His Messenger Prophet is the arch-builder of the society. In respect of Islam, he is the final Prophet. This means that the principles of social reconstruction are complete and final.<sup>5</sup>

What we have said so far about Iqbal's views on nationalism is:

- (a) Here a distinction ought to be made between territorial and geographical nationalism and supra-territorial nationalism.
- (b) That societies owe their existence to cooperation, but this cooperation must encompass the entire human race, keeping in view the principle of social and community life having supra-territorial elements (Islamic principles).

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 38-39.

- (c) From this follows that the talk about regional loyalties and regional cultures is merely to deny social cohesion and is manifestly a betrayal of Islamic universalism.
- (d) The demand for the creation of Pakistan was based on universal principles of life and not on particular or regional considerations.

I know turn to the historical reason which led to the development of the territorial nationalism in the West. In this regard I refer to Iqbal's address in the Muslim League Session in Allahabad in 1930. Here Iqbal says that the rejection of Christianity as a unifying moral force led to the division of Europe into different nationalities and this finally developed into political philosophies of national loyalties and parochial consideration. Once Europe got divided into a dozen nations, their industrial and colonial interests clashed with each other and resulted in numerous wars between them. Iqbal believed, and rightly too, that economic changes have profound effects on social attitudes. Once the destiny of societies was identified in Europe with geographical loyalties and social interests were identified with economic, industrial and colonial interests, the centre of reference was shifted from faith to political authority. Religious ties were replaced by territorial patriotism and regional loyalties and nationalism was identified with secularism.

However, political ascendancy of Europe over the East influenced the Eastern political thinking. Hence we too have this jaundiced view of socio-political life. Iqbal fights against such a view since for him separation of religion from political or social life finally ends into "Changeiziate" — the symbol of brutality and barbarousness.

جدا ہو دیں سیاست سے تو رہ جاتی ہے چنگیزی

[If religion is separated from politics, there remains nothing but barbarity.]

Iqbal was the first person amongst the modern Muslim thinkers to realise the gravity and magnitude of this problem. His verses as well as prose writings are pregnant with this burning topic which is even to-day a menacing problem to all of us In Pakistan, it shows itself in the form of the

slogan of four nationalities. As said earlier, Islam teaches complete loyalty to the Creator. In the early days of Islam this brought about a complete change in the existing Arab social order which was based on class and tribe. The Arabs submitted to the code of life which was divinely ordained and practised, through *Sunnah*. After his migration to Medina the Prophet gave a constitution for the State. This revolutionised the whole socio-political system. Tribal loyalty was shifted from class to God and in political and social terms to *Ummah* (community) based on Faith instead of kinship or any other relation.

For centuries the Muslims believed in "universal Islamic brother-hood" and considered Caliphate as the best political organisation. This gave rise to the idea of *Dar al-Islam*, the place of believers, having complete freedom to move freely in any part of the Muslim States.

However, when complacency set in and Islamic perspective got shifted, the Western nationalistic outlook crept in imperceptibly in some of the Muslim States like Turkey and Indonesia, for instance. A section of the Muslim world adhered to the principles of universal Muslim brotherhood, whereas a section fell under a secular type of nationalism.

Credit goes to Iqbal in that he gave a lead to the Muslim world in expressed terms and, except for a few years prior to his departure for Europe, when he advocated for narrow nationalism, he always held that territorial loyalty is the divisive curse in the body politic of the Muslim nation.

During his stay in Europe (1905-08), a great change came in his political thought. This was, in fact, a reaction against the materialistic view of life in Europe, and a deep study of the European intellectual environment led him to think differently. He was completely disillusioned and disenchanted with the Europe of that age.

He realised that, if this kind of nationalism is followed by the Muslims, it will create disunity and discord among them. This is further indicated during the First World War when a section of Muslims in the Arab world collaborated with the British against the Turks. Iqbal, in reply to a statement of Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, said: "I have been repudiating the concept of nationalism since the time when it was not known in India and the Muslim world. At the very start it had become clear to me from the writings of European authors that the materialistic designs of Europe were in great need of this effective weapon — the propagation of the European

conception of nationalism in Muslim countries — to shatter the religious unity of Islam to pieces."<sup>6</sup>

I now come to what Iqbal has to say about *Patriotism* and *Nationalism*. Iqbal had a clear notion of patriotism and nationalism. For him "Patriotism is a perfectly natural virtue and has a place in the moral life of a man," and "Nationalism in the sense of one's love of one's country and even readiness to die for its honour is a part of Muslims' faith."<sup>7</sup>

However, Iqbal explicitly distinguishes modern nationalism in a political sense with patriotism as a virtue.

Alluding to the Prophet's saying: "Love of one's homeland is a part of faith," he says in one of his verses:

ارشادِ نبوت میں وطن اور ہی کچھ ہے      نیست ممکن جز بہ قرآن زیستن

[Love for a land in the political sense is different from the Prophet's saying.]

Iqbal's condemnation of nationalism is not a condemnation of love for the fatherland. "It is a condemnation of the modern concept of a nation, since the idea of nation is not merely geographical: it is rather a principle of human society and as such it is a political concept."<sup>8</sup>

Iqbal's opposition to modern nationalism is Islamic and human — which are two sides of the same coin. If he was not tilted so much to the religious side, as some of his critics say, he would have reasons to oppose it on the ground of his broad human outlook which has strong feeling for mankind, since modern nationalism tends to narrow down brotherly feeling and broad human outlook.

Iqbal's nationalism not only contains both universalism and patriotism, as we have seen, but also Islamic humanitarianism. The third element is unity in diversity.

It should not be thought that Iqbal, through his concept of nationalism,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 225



reduces all diversity to a neutral colour. Iqbal is alive to the demands of individual caprices. In his writings, he keeps in view the present-day conditions. He allows for diversity which enriches cultural homogeneity.

We have already observed that Iqbal's thought involves a necessary dialectic of self-assertion and self-denial. This bipolar dialectic adds colour to national aspiration and gives it a life of never-ending dynamism.

In conclusion I would say that Iqbal's nationalism not only goes beyond the traditional Western concepts, but it also gives it a more contemporary significance. Pakistan is not only the spiritual brain child of Iqbal, but, in one respect, it can get now energy from Iqbal's concept of nationalism. Our national integrity lies, as does its origin, in an awareness of our spiritual moorings. I believe that most of us would agree that Iqbal's concept of nationalism is not only a blue-print for our national integration, but also a message for Islamic brotherhood. It has been nicely illustrated by his poem "Mecca and Geneva":

اس دور میں اقوام کی صحبت بھی ہوئی عام      پوشیدہ نگاہوں سے رہی وحدتِ آدم!  
تفریقِ مللِ حکمتِ افرنگ کا مقصود      اسلام کا مقصود فقط ملتِ آدم!  
مکے نے دیا خاکِ جنیوا کو یہ پیغام      جمعیتِ اقوام کہ جمعیتِ آدم

[The association of nations is very common these days, but the unity of mankind is hidden from our sight.

The disruption of human communities is the mission of Frankish statesman-ship ; the object of Islam is the unity of mankind.

Mecca gives this message to the soil of Geneva: A league of nations or a league of human beings?]

I end this paper with Iqbal's words which, in fact, summarise his message. Only three months before his death, in a New-Year's message, he said: "Only one unity is dependable, and that unity is the brotherhood of man, which is above race, nationality, colour or language. So long as this so-called democracy, this accursed national-ism and this degraded imperialism are not shattered, so long as men do not demonstrate by their actions that

they believe that the whole world is the family of God, so long as distinctions of race, colour and geographical nationalities are not wiped out completely, they will never be able to lead a happy and contented life and the beautiful ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity will never materialise."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.203.