

IQBAL—A VIEW OF POLITICO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE·

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The year 1977 was dedicated to the memory of Iqbal in Pakistan, and a back view of the philosopher-poet's teaching was made in the light of the changed world conditions. In Pakistan, Iqbal's contributions to thought obviously possess a definite con-text; Iqbal stands for Muslim nationalism and for Islamic inter-nationalism. But the thinking which got consolidated over the year 1977 made a good progress in understanding Iqbal's place in a wider context: in the context of the larger world. Iqbal has, in-deed, addressed the Muslims in their twentieth-century historical situation, but there certainly are the areas of his thought which are even more relevant to the common situation of man in the modern world. Thus, politico-cultural perspective which guides and dictates the affairs of practical life of men demands its evaluation also in terms of Iqbal's philosophy.

In his long creative career which covered the crucial thirty-five years of the present century, Iqbal employed poetry as his principal medium of expression; nevertheless, he also communicated in prose on serious subjects which demanded closer study and systematic analysis. He took part in active politics, and was a prominent leader of Muslim political opinion in India. He was perhaps the most important modern Muslim of the subcontinent who had an international worldview, and who looked upon the shifting perspectives of world affairs as the movement of history. He began his career as a poet of subjective experience, but very soon he gave up this mode of writing, and was inclined towards the life of men in their natural setting which brought him face to face with what is called the state of man-in-the-situation. Thus, he became the poet of the man-in-the-situation. Colonialism, which was then the system of British imperial administration in India, defined the situation, and the human scene in India appeared in Iqbal's eyes as the scene which demanded his creative and intellectual involvement.

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In retrospect, however, two questions appear which had serious impact on Iqbal's poetically sensitive political awareness. And they were: Why has colonialism taken possession of the sub-continent? and how is it possible to live through such a distressing situation? The state of colonialism, of course, meant the suppression and isolation of the history of the people of India, and Iqbal had an acute sense of loss of the collective memory in this context. A large body of his writings, therefore, consisted of transmission of historical memory to his audience, and he soon became a spokesman of past history in a political environment which failed to accommodate such awareness in the subcontinent. His early poems sing of the Indo-Aryan memory, and of the glorious achievements of Muslims in the past and create a mental landscape of history in a geography which was controlled by alien rulers. Thus, as creative act, Iqbal's poetry in its earlier phase achieved one important political objective: it saved the collective memory from extermination in a colonial rule.

Politically, however, India of the British imperial era was sharply divided even in its collective memory. Two different strands of historical awareness ran parallel to each other, and in the absence of any principle of unification and of a united effort the situation could hardly be resolved satisfactorily in favour of the people of India. Iqbal hoped for a conciliation between the divided collective memories of the Hindus and the Muslims of the subcontinent, and he held out the idea of geographical nationalism where the Indian soil appeared as the sacred motherland for the two major communities. He pointed out that communal and ethnic division was mainly the outcome of psychological attitudes, and once these narrow and culturally restricted attitudes were changed and transformed a more rewarding principle of existence would emerge and resolve the inner and outer contradictions of the Indian situation. His poem "The New Temple" invites conflicting ethnic and religious groups to transcend their myopic visions and to merge into a positive and creative totality.

Iqbal's political thought, in its creative framework, was geographically oriented before he left for Europe in 1905. His idea of nationalism was soil-based, and the identity of the people derived its meaning from the idea of a common homeland. His stay in Europe, however, enabled him to observe the working of geographical nationalism in its materialistic setting, and he found to his great disappointment the clashes among European nations for various materialistic ends. He also found an inner cleavage in the European

thinking process, and felt that ordinary reason had elevated materialism to the status of a new deity which demanded unconditional submission and worship from modern man. Though he was fairly appreciative of the achievements of Europe, yet he could hardly incline himself to subscribe to its extreme materialism. Consequently, the rise of materialism in Europe shattered his faith in nationalism in its strict geographic form. He, therefore, naturally looked elsewhere for the fulfilment of his politico-national aspirations. The Muslim world, as a fact of collective geo-historical memory, offered him a subject for serious consideration.

In the history of the Muslim world, Iqbal discovered the principle of unity which was extraterritorial, and supranational, a unity which was not geographical but creative and experiential. It was a unity which was non-spatial. The Muslim world, as a phenomenon of history, appeared to Iqbal as an idea which could transform the condition of man and promised the growth and fulfilment of human life. This awareness changed the entire political perspective, and Iqbal related India to the larger world of Islam for its future orientation. This change of perspective was in fact a change from abstraction to concrete humanism, and from the idea of the indifferent soil to the state of real human beings.

The working of nationalism in Europe had enabled Iqbal to see the weight of numerical majority in a democratic form of government. He realised that the numerical majority, if it so intended, could as well bring about the total effacement of the identities of the minority groups through a democratic process.

In India, he also realised that the Muslims had to face a permanent, unchanging majority of the ethnic group which, for certain historical reasons, could hardly extend any confidence to Muslims in any future form of government in the subcontinent. The idea of numerical majority, unless it was properly educated, caused anxiety and fear, and compelled the minority groups to save and preserve their identity from total effacement, and their humanity from complete liquidation.

Thus, between his European experience and the Indian ethnic and cultural situation, Iqbal moved towards the idea of Islamic community, because it promised regeneration to mankind. This conviction was strengthened in the decade following the end of the First World War in 1918. His lectures on the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1929) were delivered precisely with the purpose to assess the role of Islam and Islamic

community in the changed conditions of modern times. The moral of the lectures, however, was, and it still sounds convincing, that Islamic community in a reconstructed thought-environment can offer hope to mankind. This conclusion formed the basis of Iqbal's Presidential Address to the Annual Session of the A11-India Muslim League at Allahabad in 1930 which pleaded for the establishment of an independent Muslim State in the Indian subcontinent. The State, he observed, would demonstrate the efficacy of the role of Islam as the principle of regeneration in the future world order.

Iqbal's politico-cultural perspective does not consider the human situation as a mad hunt after material ends. Still, it does not mean that Iqbal did not have any sympathy with the materially depressed condition of men and nations. In fact, Iqbal wanted a healthy balance between the material and the spiritual aspects of human life. His politico-cultural view had a strong philosophical basis where political enslavement of nations meant the suppression of the human ego. It also clearly suggested that the idea of political freedom definitely ensures the liberation of the ego from its unrealised state of existence. In a politically handicapped environment the ego remains dormant, and, as such, it exists simply as an inanimate object. Freedom from political over-lordship brings it back to life, and opens up innumerable possibilities of its expansion. The expansion, in a creative sense, is the destiny of the human ego which must yield a life-giving expansion in both horizontal and vertical dimensions.

Iqbal's thinking relates politics to philosophy and offers an aim to the man-in-the-situation. The situation, once altered, can hardly stop the ego from its expansion. In his poem addressed to the Russian people, Iqbal, while complimenting them on their success in the creation of a new mode of society, holds out a warning to them in no less strong terms to beware of materialism. He advises them to realise their collective ego in its fullest creative expansion which transcends the matter and approaches the spiritual. The ego, Iqbal points out, integrates the material with the spiritual, and the Divine appears in the human at the point where the horizontal intersects the vertical. Unless the ego operates in this framework the kingdom of God on earth cannot be witnessed by the unfortunate children of Adam.

The idea of expansion of the ego, as a politico-cultural idea, has its basis in the behaviour of the individual. Iqbal points out that only the eternal values of human conduct can provide destination to the wandering human ego. The fragmented human psychology can expose it to another more

serious predicament. The human being stands in need of a happy combination of love and reason. The Western heritage must come closer to the heritage of the East and the mind must come closer to the human heart in order to bring about a happy reunion between the complements of the human ego. Without this reunion, the human ego cannot have a second birth. All political philosophies and, indeed, all political movements have hardly any meaning if their destiny is not enriched by the experience of the second birth. In *Jāvīd Nāmāh*, Iqbal emphasises this idea, and says:

"It was by way of birth, excellent man.

that you came into this dimensioned world;

by birth it is possible also to escape,

it is possible to loosen all fetters from oneself;

but such a birth is not of clay and water

that is known to the man who has a living heart.

The first birth is by constraint the second by choice:

the first is hidden in veils, the second is manifest ;

the first happens with weeping, the second with laughter,

for the first is a seeking, the second a finding;

the first is to dwell and journey amidst creation,

the second is utterly outside all dimensions;

the first is in need of day and night,

the second—day and night are but its vehicle.

A child is born through the rending of the womb,

a man is born through the rending of the world;

the call to prayer signalises both kinds of birth.

The first is uttered by the lips, the second of the very soul.

Whenever a watchful soul is born in a body,

this ancient inn, the world, trembles to its foundations."

In the perspective suggested by Iqbal's politico-cultural thinking the human ego has a definite political and cultural destiny which anticipates its fulfilment in the ever-shifting geo-historical situations of the modern world.