

# **IQBAL'S VIEWS ON THE MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL FUTURE OF HUMANITY**

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Iqbal's world-view is based on his deep concern with the future of humanity as well as religion. On the future of humanity his thoughts are scattered in his poetic works and some of his prose writings. But on the future of religion he has elaborated his ideas in the last chapter titled "Is Religion Possible?" of his book: *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.

Broadly speaking, religion is required for the moral uplift of man. If there had been no man, there would have been no need for religion. Therefore humanity and religion complement each other. It is proper to assess Iqbal's view on the future of humanity before considering his ideas on the future of religion.

I wish to commence the discussion by defining two relevant terms. These are: (a) Development, and (b) Modern Man. "Development", in the modern context, means "increase in per capita income of a nation-state". This purely materialistic concept of development is generally considered a Western innovation. And what do we mean by the expression "Modern Man"? Certain changes took place in the mentality and way of life of the Western man as a result of the dissemination of materialism and the evolution of Western Europe from a developing to a developed society. Modern Man is sometimes called Industrial Man, Technical Man, Mass Man, One-sided Man, Angry Man, Lonely Man etc. He believes in the supremacy of science and technology of which he himself is a product. He relies on reason and feverish activity. He is secular, proud, selfish and amoral. He seeks happiness only through multiplying material comforts and wealth. According to Iqbal, he is so much overshadowed by the results of his intellectual achievements that he has ceased to live soulfully i.e., from within.

Many liberal thinkers and poets of the West have criticized Modern Man. There is a very interesting passage in Iqbal's *Reconstruction Lectures* in which he shows his disillusionment from both Western man as well as

Eastern man. About Western man, he comments: "In the domain of thought he is living in open conflict with himself, and in the domain of economic and political life he is living in open conflict with others. He finds himself unable to control his ruthless egoism and his infinite gold-hunger which is gradually killing all higher striving in him and bringing him nothing but life-weariness. Absorbed in the 'fact', that is to say, the optically present source of sensation, he is entirely cut off from the unplumbed depths of his own being"

About Eastern man, he laments: "The condition of things in the East is no better. The technique of medieval mysticism by which religious life, in its higher manifestations, developed itself both in the East and in the West has now practically failed. Far from reintegrating the forces of the average man's inner life, and thus preparing him for participation in the march of history, it has taught him a false renunciation and made him perfectly contented with his ignorance and spiritual thralldom". (Reconstruction. pp.148-149).

Generally speaking, Modern Man is Western man and he is found in materially prosperous countries, technically called I.D.Cs (Industrially Developed Countries) as opposed to U.D.Cs (Under Developed Countries).

What took place in Europe which eventually led to the development of materialism and the emergence of Modern Man?

The European society in the Middle Ages was a feudal society. The average man lived as a serf, totally dominated by cruel feudal lords and a static Church. The hold of the Church was primarily based on Ptolemy's cosmology, according to which the earth was the centre of the universe and everything including the sun revolved around it. On the basis of this cosmology, the position adopted by the Church was that man was under the direct gaze of God. Thus the Church being the Vicar of God, and with the support of the feudal lords, had acquired enormous power over the ignorant, superstitious and frightened masses who were exploited for centuries.

However certain events or movements in Europe changed the then existing state of affairs. These were: Reformation, which released man's faith from the clutches of a dominating and static Church. Renaissance, which liberated man's mind, and in his quest for knowledge man gradually learnt to depend on reason, sense-perception and scientific thinking. The Ptolemaic

cosmology was shattered by the Copernican astronomy, according to which the earth could no longer be considered the centre of the cosmos, but as one celestial body among many, it revolved around the sun and as for its position in the universe, it was merely an insignificant speck. So man was not under the constant gaze of God as such. Then followed Darwin's theory that man had descended from apes or had biologically evolved from animals.

Iqbal feels that this formulation of the view of evolution in Europe (unlike the one advanced in the world of Islam which brought into being Rumi's tremendous enthusiasm for the biological future of man), had led to the belief that there existed no scientific basis for the idea that the present rich complexity of human endowment would ever be materially exceeded. On this Iqbal comments: "That is how the modern man's secret despair hides itself behind the screen of scientific terminology". (Reconstruction. p.148).

However Iqbal realized that all these events collectively made man conscious that he had to depend solely on himself and this led to the awakening of man. He gained confidence through his philosophies of criticism and naturalism. He felt that his future lay exclusively in his control over the forces of nature. Thereafter the Industrial Revolution started changing the face of Europe, and with the French Revolution came the concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity. It was in fact this awakening which led to the rise and growth of materialism, and the disappearance of religion from the collective life of the people.

Man learnt to produce energy through coal and steam. Thus cheap energy and labour were used for running factories and mills. Europe manufactured so many goods that in the history of mankind this had never been achieved before.

For the sale of these goods markets were required. The search for markets and more raw material led to colonialism and imperialism. Thus in Europe a market society was created, and the standard of life of an average man improved. Through the emphasis on freedom of trade autocratic powers of monarchs were curtailed, and capitalist democracies were established on the basis of territorial nationalism.

In Europe these events engendered the formation of a new mentality and a new freedom. But the new man who came into being in this process, demanded absolute freedom. Absolute freedom meant ruthless trampling over the rights of others. Therefore, Modern Man with all his dedication to and respect for human rights, maintained double standards. Broadly speaking, human society was divided into exploiters and exploited.

The competition and jealousy among the exploiter-robber nations of Europe eventually led to the First World War on the one hand and the establishment of atheistic socialism or communism in Russia on the other.

However the struggle of Modern Man for supremacy over the others continued and resulted in the Second World War. But no lesson was learnt by man from these two wars of mass destruction of human life and property.

The race for the manufacture and production of fatal arms did not stop. According to the figures provided by Dr. Hans Blix upto 1985 the member-states of the Nuclear Club possessed 50,000 nuclear devices with an explosive yield of 1000 Heroshima bombs. In other words, according to him, there was 4 tons TNT explosive available for the destruction of each and every human being in this world, and this was the position in 1985.

How are the I.D.Cs sustaining their prosperous position or what is the secret of their material power? It is the production and use of energy. The position is that the population in the I.D.Cs is 27% of the population of the whole world whereas they consume 80% of the energy produced in the world. The population of the U.S.A is only 6% of the world population but it consumes 36% of energy. As for the U.D.Cs, they constitute 73% of the world population and the energy used by them is only 20%.

The U.D.Cs aspire to become like the I.D.Cs and the model of man before them is the Western Modern Man. But the I.D.Cs maintain their economic and technological hegemony over them by imposing a system of economics based on loans. If the U.D.Cs increase the prices of raw material, the I.D.Cs increase the prices of technology or finished products., This results in global inflation which is not as destructive for the I.D.Cs as it is for the poor U.D.Cs. Thus the material prosperity of Modern Man is founded and is being maintained on this discrimination between man and man.

However, despite the oil crisis, global inflation, and population explosion in the U.D.Cs, the movement in those countries for economic freedom and technological emancipation is gaining momentum.

Meanwhile a depressing picture of the future is presented in the annual reports of the Club of Rome. According to these reports by approximately middle of the 21st century the world's food resources may be completely exhausted. According to their estimate hunger is likely to strike first in certain parts of Africa and thereafter Bangla Desh, India, Pakistan etc. if the growth rate of the population remains the same as it is at present, and this situation is likely to arise in the first quarter of the 21st century. The reports also state that the conventional means of obtaining energy or the world's power resources may be completely exhausted before the end of 21st century.

In the light of these reports, some liberal thinkers of the West are recommending that the political leaders of the I.D.Cs should review their definition of "development". According to some of them the Utopias of early twentieth century i.e., communism and capitalism, as economic orders, have both failed to get rid of under-development on global scale, and that at present no one possesses any such economic system which can generate will and courage in man to improve his living conditions in the future.

Eminent Marxist philosophers like Herbert Marcos and Maximilion Robe] had been extremely critical of the Soviet policy of only concentrating on breaking the Western industrial and technological supremacy instead of using the Soviet revolution for the economic betterment of man. In a way, these thinkers had forestalled the eventual break-down of the Soviet economy if such a policy was to be pursued.

The worlds politics at present are not development oriented but are power oriented. If power is dependent on economic stability, then the emergence and continuance of the U.S.A as a unipolar power, would involve the length of time it can remain in the field as such. But the unipolar power cannot live in the ivory tower when 73% population of the world is afflicted with global inflation, population explosion and under-development. According to the liberal thinkers the world today is standing on the edge of a global economic crisis which can lead to total destruction of mankind. Consequently these thinkers are suggesting the establishment of a new

international economic order based on ethics and morality. According to them such artificial discriminations like blacks and whites, capitalists and communists, developed and under-developed etc. had been harmful for the natural advancement of humanity. Tofler suggests that the U.N. should establish an international body composed of economic experts belonging to both I.D. Cs as well as U.D. Cs, in order to control the threatened global economic crisis or to keep an eye on the negative trends of world economy. Tofler is of the view that in order to save humanity from all future economic crises, it is necessary to think in terms of unity of human beings rather than nations. According to him the world's population should be planned according to its resources and that these resources should be fully exploited. All men are under-developed in the sense that for their economic survival they have to depend on one another. Therefore the future survival of man is possible only if he becomes mature by his bitter experiences of the past and learns to respect his fellow men. (The Future Shock/ The Ecco Spasm Report).

It is interesting to note that the views which are being expressed by the liberal thinkers of today about the future of humanity, are more or less the same which had been expressed by Iqbal in his writings more than fifty years ago. Iqbal rejected territorial nationalism as a basis of human unity even when he was a student in Europe. In the Allahabad Address (1930) which contained his suggestion of the formation of a Muslim state in the North-West of the "Indian subcontinent, he had stated: "Luther... did not realize that in the peculiar conditions which obtained in Europe, his revolt (against the church-organization) would eventually mean the complete displacement of the universal ethics of Jesus by the growth of a plurality of national and hence narrower systems of ethics. Thus the upshot of the intellectual movement initiated by... Rousseau and Luther was the break up of the one into mutually ill-adjusted many, a human into a national outlook., y' (and) the transformation ill-adjusted states dominated by interests not result but national. And these mutually ill-adjusted states after trampling over the morals and convictions of Christianity, are today feeling the need of a federated Europe, i.e., the need of a unity which Christian church-organization originally gave them but which, instead of reconstructing it in the light of Christ's mission of human brotherhood, they considered it fit to

destroy under the inspiration of Luther.” (Speeches and Statements ed. by A. R. Tariq pp.4-6).

In a poem titled “Mecca and Geneva” included in his *Zarb-e-Kalim*, he points out that in this age nations seem to be mixing freely with one another, although the principle of human unity remains hidden from the discerning eye. This is so because the aim of Western diplomacy is to divide humanity into nations, whereas the mission of Islam is to unify human beings into one fraternity.

Respecting this matter Mecca sent a message to the city of Geneva: Are you content to be a seat of the League of Nations or would you prefer to be the centre of United Humanity?

In a statement recorded a couple of months before his death in 1938, Iqbal pointed out: “The modern age prides itself on its progress in knowledge and its matchless scientific developments.

No doubt, the pride is justified... But inspite of all these developments, tyranny of imperialism struts abroad, covering its face in the masks of (capitalist) democracy, (territorial) nationalism, communism, fascism and heaven knows what else besides. Under these masks, in every corner of the earth, the spirit of freedom and the dignity of man are being trampled underfoot in a way of which not even the darkest period of human history presents a parallel. The so called statesmen to whom government had entrusted leadership have proved demons of bloodshed, tyranny and oppression. The rulers whose duty it was to promote higher humanity, to prevent man’s oppression of man and to elevate the moral and intellectual level of mankind, have in their hunger for dominion shed the blood of millions and reduced millions to servitude simply in order to pander to the greed and avarice of their own particular groups. After subjugating ... weaker peoples... they sowed (the seeds of) divisions among them that they should shed one another’s blood and go to sleep under the opiate of serfdom, so that the leech of imperialism might go on sucking their blood without interruption.... The governments which are not themselves engaged in this drama of fire and blood are sucking the blood of the weaker peoples economically. It is as if the day of doom had come upon the earth, in which no voice of human sympathy or fellowship is audible. The world’s thinkers

are stricken dumb. Is this going to be the end of all this progress and evolution of civilization?... Remember, man can be maintained on this earth only by honoring mankind, and this world will remain a battleground of ferocious beasts of prey unless and until the educational (and moral) forces of the whole world are directed to inculcate in man respect for mankind... National unity too is not a very durable force. Only one unity is dependable and that unity is the brotherhood of man, which is above race, nationality, colour or language. 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 geographical nationalities are not wiped out completely, they will never be able to lead happy and contented life, and the beautiful ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity' will never materialize". (Speeches and Statements ed. by A.R. Tariq pp.226-228).

Now we can consider the question: What are Iqbal's views on the future of religion? It has already been pointed out that broadly speaking, religion is required for the moral uplift of man. However a counter-argument may be advanced that morality or ethics being a branch of philosophy, why should it be founded on religion? This line of reasoning would naturally take us to the discussion as to what is the difference between philosophy and religion?

According to Iqbal, philosophy is an independent inquiry based on reason for the comprehension of Reality, and religion, in the broader or higher sense, is also a search for Reality. But its foundations are laid on experience which is other than the normal level of experience. If one claims that the normal level of experience is the only level of knowledge-yielding experience, then religion need not attract anyone's attention. But Iqbal argues, if the universe, as it is normally perceived, is only an intellectual construction, and there are other levels of human experience capable of being systematized by other orders of time and space, and in which concept and analysis do not play the same part as they do in the case of our normal experience, then the matter is different. It is precisely for this reason that a person who relies on religious experience, the knowledge gained by him through his experience is essentially personal and incommunicable. However, Iqbal maintains that the fact that the knowledge gained through religious experience is incommunicable does not imply that the pursuit made by the man of religion has been futile.



Modern Man is secular in the sense that he is indifferent towards religion. The reason is that according to his evaluation religion is in conflict with science, and since the findings of science are rationally demonstrable, religion is reduced to mere superstition providing solace to man in his stages of ignorance, but of no authentic relevance in the present and the future. Iqbal does not agree with this conclusion. In his view Reality has outer as well as inner dimensions. Science is concerned with the external behavior of Reality whereas the domain of religion is to discover the meanings of Reality in reference to its inner nature. In this respect both scientific and religious processes run parallel to each other. While commenting on these processes Iqbal states: "A careful study of the nature and purpose of these really complementary processes shows that both of them are directed to the purification of experience in their respective spheres". (Reconstruction. p.155).

Iqbal divides religious life into three periods. In the first period religious life appears as a form of discipline which is voluntarily accepted by an individual or a group of people as unconditional commands without any rational understanding of the ultimate purpose of those commands, It is only in this sense that religion is based on dogma, ritual or some kind of priesthood. In the second period revelation is reconciled with reason and discipline is followed by a rational understanding of the discipline and the ultimate source of its authority. It is at this state that religion may claim itself to be the sole possessor of the Truth and becomes exclusive or relative and engenders hatred of one religion against the other as well as within a religion itself when one mode of interpretation comes into conflict with another. In the their period religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the Ultimate Reality and it is at this stage that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power.

For Iqbal this stage of religious life is, what he calls higher religion. He states: "It is, then, in the sense of this last phase in the development of religious life that I use the word religion... Religion in this sense is known by the unfortunate name of Mysticism, which is supposed to be a life-denying, fact-avoiding attitude of mind directly opposed to the radically empirical outlook of our times. Yet higher religion, which is only a search for a larger

life, is essentially experience and recognized the necessity of experience as its foundation long before science learnt to do so” (Reconstruction. p.143-144).

The question may well be asked that if in the context of higher religion, God is the centre of all religions and the Truth is absolute, then why the diversity or relativity of religions? The answer provided by Martin Lings is that God has sent different religions especially suited to the needs, requirements and characteristics of the different groups of humanity in different temporal cycles. But if these groups of men, in the course of human history, have persecuted one another on account of religious differences, then Providence cannot be held responsible for it. However, despite winning converts through persuasion or slaughter of human beings in the name of religion, many religions which have fought against or competed with one another in the past history, have survived and now dominate different parts of the world. It is therefore necessary that irrespective of the position adopted by the partisan religious authorities we must carefully examine what, according to Iqbal, higher religion teaches about the nature of God.

The modern Western civilization has dealt with the problem of religion through encouraging the development of two types of secularism. One type of secularism is based on indifference towards religion and this is the attitude adopted by Modern Man in the capitalist democracies. The other type is based on the suppression of religion and for a number of years this policy has been followed by the socialist countries. But the experience tells us that indifference towards religion automatically leads to the demand for that variety of “freedom” which Albert Camus calls “tyranny” or “waywardness”. On the other hand, the recent developments in the U.S.S.R and the other socialist countries indicate that atheism cannot be successfully imposed from outside on a people, and whenever such an attempt is made, it is bound to fail. Thus it is evident that the existing types of secularism have not been able to resolve the problem.

It is perhaps in this background that Iqbal rejected the methodologies of territorial nationalism, capitalism, atheistic socialism as well as religious conservatism as drawing upon the psychological forces of hate, suspicion and resentment which tend to impoverish the soul of man closing up his hidden sources of spiritual energy. He points out: “Surely the present moment is one of great crisis in the history of modern culture. The modern world stands in

need of biological renewal. And religion, which in its higher manifestations is neither dogma, nor priesthood, nor ritual, can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of modern science necessarily involves, and restore to him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it hereafter. It is only by rising to a fresh vision of his origin and future, his whence and whither, that man will eventually triumph over a society motivated by an inhuman competition, and a civilization which has lost its spiritual unity by its inner conflict of religious and political values". (Reconstruction. p.149).

From the above analysis it appears that the solution of the problem lies in the adoption of the policy not of indifference towards or suppression of religion, but of respecting all religions. Every religion in the narrower sense consists of dogma, ritual and some form of priesthood. This aspect of religion is exclusive or relative to the people who adhere to it and it is only in this context that the international community is multi-religious. Unfortunately some of the religious communities in the world today are passing through a phase of conservatism or fundamentalism which has let loose the forces of hatred and resentment. Whatever be the reasons for this affliction, let us hope that the phase is temporary and shall pass away. However according to Iqbal, each great religion, at the higher level contains the absolute Truth. Therefore it is necessary for every religious community to discover and project the higher level of its religion. It is at this level that religion can restore to humanity its spiritual unity and ethically prepare man to respect his fellow-men.

Iqbal does not consider Islam as a religion in the ancient sense of the word. For -him, he explains: "It is an attitude- an attitude, that is to say, of Freedom, and even of defiance to the Universe. It is really a protest against the entire outlook of the ancient world. Briefly, it is the discovery of Man". (Stray Reflections. p. 193).

It is interesting to note how Iqbal deduces the principles of higher religion from the verses of the Quran and bases his political idealism on them. The citing of a few examples may be useful.

In sura XXII. verse 40 it is stated: “ If God had not raised a group (i.e., Muslims) to ward off the others from aggression, churches, synagogues, oratories and mosques, where God is worshipped most, would have been destroyed”. Broadening the interpretation of this verse so as to include all the religious minorities (and not only the people of the Book) in a Muslim state, he proclaims in the Allahabad Address: “A community which is inspired by feelings of ill-will towards other communities, is low and ignoble. I entertain the highest respect for the customs, laws, religious and social institutions of other communities. Nay, it is my duty according to the teaching of the Quran, even to defend their places of worship, if need be”. (Speeches and Statements ed. by A.R. Tariq. p.10).

For Iqbal “Tauhid” (Unity of God), as a working idea, stands for equality, solidarity and freedom of man. Therefore the state, from the Islamic standpoint, is essentially an effort to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces. (Reconstruction. p.122-123). According to him, the republican form of government is consistent with the spirit of Islam. In fact he is convinced that the ultimate object of Islam is the establishment of a “spiritual democracy”.

In support of this thesis, on which specific verses of the Quran, Iqbal could have possibly relied? Let us examine the relevant verses.

In sura XL. verse 78 while addressing the Holy Prophet, God say: “Verily We have sent messengers before thee. About some of them have we told thee, and about some have We not told thee”. The self-evident meanings of the verse are that God has not only sent those prophets whose names are known to the Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), but also other messengers had been sent by Him bearing the tidings of numerous other modes of the Religion of Truth.

The second relevant piece in this connection is sura V. verse 69 in which it is stated: “Verily the Faithful (Muslims) and the Jews and the Sabians and the Christians, whoso believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth good deeds, no fear shall come upon them neither shall they grieve”. As for the expression “Sabians” there is no general agreement as to which religion is referred to. However, as is indicated in the verse it is that category of religions which are based on a central idea of God, of accountability and

which emphasize on the doing of good deeds. Thus according to the Quran, everyone who believes in God, eventual accountability and who does good deeds need not fear as no grief shall come upon him.

The third is sura V. verse 48 in which God addressing human beings declares: “For each of you We have appointed a law and a way. And if God had willed He would have made you one (religious) community. But (He hath willed it otherwise) that He may put you to the test in what He has given you. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God will ye be brought back, and He’ will inform you about that wherein ye differed”. If God had only sent one religion to a world of widely differing aptitudes,, it would not have been a fair test for all. Therefore He has sent many different religions and in this Quranic verse He expects human beings to enter into rivalry with one another only in doing good deeds and nothing else. It appears that it was in the light of such verses of the Quran that Iqbal desired the Muslims of today to evolve and establish a “spiritual democracy”.

He maintains: “Humanity needs three things today - a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis. Modern Europe has, no doubt, built idealistic systems on these lines, but experience shows that truth revealed through pure reason is incapable of bringing that fire of living conviction which personal revelation alone can bring. This is the reason why pure thought has so little influenced men, while religion has always elevated individuals and transformed whole societies. With him (i.e., the Muslim) the spiritual basis of life is a matter of conviction for which even the least enlightened man among us can easily lay down his life; and in view of the basic idea of Islam that there can be no further revelation binding on man, we ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated peoples on earth. Early Muslims emerging out of the spiritual slavery of pre-Islamic Asia were not in a position to realize the true significance of this basic idea. Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve, out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam”. (Reconstruction. p.142).

The conclusion is that if for the survival of humanity it is necessary for man to respect his fellow-men, in the same way it is necessary for him to

learn to respect religions other than his own, It is only through the adoption of this moral and spiritual approach that, borrowing Iqbal's phrase, man may rise to a fresh vision of his future.