

# **IQBAL'S VISION OF A COMPOSITE MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN-JEWISH NATIONALISM**

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Iqbal's concept of Muslim nationalism is neither local, nor parochial; it is universal in its essence. Iqbal regards his concept of Muslim nationalism as a "stepping stone towards the final integration of humanity". It is a pity that Iqbal's concept of Muslim nationalism has only been partially realized so far, and its universal dimension is only an unnoticed and unrealized ideal as yet.

Iqbal's famous Ilahabad address of 1930 is well-known for enshrining the vision of separate Muslim homelands in South Asia on the basis of his concept of a separate Muslim nationalism in India. But it is still unknown that Iqbal had espoused another vision of a composite Muslim-Christian-Jewish nationalism in the very same Ilahabad address. While rejecting the concept of a composite Indian nationalism, Iqbal cherished the view of a composite Muslim nationalism in the heartlands of Islam, highlighting the world-view shared by the People of the Book i.e. Muslims, Christians and Jews.

This simultaneous rejection of composite nationalism in India and affirmation of the composite Muslim nationalism in Muslim majority countries seems paradoxical. But a deeper study of Iqbal's philosophical arguments against the concept of a composite Indian nationalism is bound to clear the ambiguity. The Muslims of India cannot accept the territorial concept of a composite Indian nationalism because they "are differently situated". They are in a minority. The majority in India believes in the concept of a divinely created caste system. This exploitative system has divided even the Hindu community itself into high, low and untouchable classes. The existence of various social barriers means that mankind is divided into touchable and untouchable, pure and impure races.

According to Iqbal “Islam does not recognize caste or race or colour.”<sup>1</sup> His concept of a separate Muslim nationhood in India is based on spiritual homogeneity and not on territorial affinity or racial solidarity. Elaborating upon the fundamental concepts of Islamic culture, he has pointed out that “as an emotional system of unification Islam recognizes the worth of the individual as such, and rejects blood-relationship as a basis of human unity,” he asserted that Islam has laid the basis of a new human culture by rejecting the old “culture of throne, and the systems of unification which were based on blood-relationship...The new culture finds the foundation of world-unity in the principle of *Tawhid* i. e. belief in one God. Islam, as a polity is only a practical means of making this principle a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind. 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>2</sup> Hence, his total rejection of the concept of a composite Indian nationalism based on the modern Western concept of territorial nationalism. Since, the construction of a polity on Indian nationalist lines is in conflict with the Islamic principle of solidarity and is contrary to the spirit and ideals of Islam, Muslim India is bound to reject it. The idea of a composite Indian nationalism is inspired by the great Hindu writers, the central themes of whose writing is the veneration for *Bharat-Mata* (Mother India), which is *Arya-Verta* (Aryan homeland). Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto has aptly observed that “the kind of consciousness of past greatness, regenerated by Indian writes to inspire Hindu cultural and political revival, has been the main spring of twentieth-century Indian nationalism. Nehru’s *Discovery of India* shows how the most westernized of Hindu minds fell captive to this spell of the essential Hindu-ness of India”.<sup>3</sup> The famous Hindu writer, Nirad C. Chaudary has discussed in detail the nature and extent of the conflict between the Hindu society and Muslim society in India in his book *The Continent of Circe*. Elaborating upon the cultural significance of the advent of Islam in India, he has stated that unlike all previous conquests:

the Muslim conquest of India could not be made innocuous for the Hindus through the caste system. The conquest was an extension into a

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<sup>1</sup>. Iqbal’s Interview to *The Bombay Chronicle*, September-December 1931, included in Dar, B. A. Dar, (Editor), *Letter’s and Writings of Iqbal*, Lahore, 1981, pp. 55.

<sup>2</sup>. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore 1996, edition, pp. 116-117.

<sup>3</sup>. *The Myth of Independence*, Lahore Edition, pp.166-167.

new country of a well-established and mature society, with a fully developed way of life and a living culture. What was even more important was the fact the Muslims were not barbarians at a low level of culture who would consider admission to the Hindu fold as a promotion. On the contrary, not only were they themselves the creators and defenders of a new and aggressive culture. They were the first people in history to put forward the idea of an irreconcilable conflict between a particular way of life and all others, and to formulate a theory of permanent revolution.<sup>4</sup>

In order to avoid this “irreconcilable conflict” and to avoid the perpetual civil war going on between the two communities, Iqbal formulated the theory of a separate Muslim nationalism and demanded separate and sovereign Muslim homelands in the Indian sub-continent. This concept of separate Muslim nationalism in India is organically related to the concept of composite Muslim nationalism in Middle East.

Iqbal is of the view that in the countries where Muslims are in majority and the minorities there, are monotheists sharing the same world-view with the Muslim majority, “there is no conflict between Islam and nationalism”. He advised “the Muslim leaders and politicians” not to be “carried away by the subtle but placid arguments that Turkey and Iran and other Muslim countries are progressing on national, i. e. territorial lines”. Muslim India cannot follow the ideals of territorial nationalism because:

The Muslims of India are differently situated. The countries of Islam outside India are practically wholly Muslim in population. The minorities there belong, in the language of the Qur’an, “to the people of the Book”. There are no social barriers between Muslims and the “people of the Book”. A Jew or a Christian or a Zoroastrian does not pollute the food of a Muslim by touching it, and the law of Islam allows inter-marriage with the “people of the Book”. Indeed the first practical step that Islam took towards the realization of a final combination of humanity was to call upon peoples possessing practically the same ethical ideal to come forward and combine. The Qur’an declares: “O people of the Book!

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<sup>4</sup>. London, 1965 p.63.

Come, let us join together on the word (Unity of God), that is common to us all.<sup>5</sup>

The basis of Iqbal's concept of nationalism is derived from the Qur'an. The unifying principle is the common word (*Tawhid*: belief in one God). The Qur'an urges upon, again and again, the spiritual harmony of the people of the book. I am tempted here to the Qur'an:

1. Say [to the Jews and Christians], we [Muslims] believe in that which was revealed to us as well as that which was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one and the same. We all submit to Him (Qur'an 29:46).
2. Say, we [Muslims] believe in God, in what He revealed to us, to Ibrahim, Isma'il, Ishaq, Ya'qub and the tribes, to Moses, Jesus and all the revelations of the Prophets-without discriminating between them. To God we submit (Qur'an 2:136)."

Iqbal's rationale is rooted in Muslim history, as well. History bears witness to the phenomenon that during the hay day of Muslim civilization, spiritual was the order of the day. Tracing the origins of the academic discipline of comparative religion (*Ilm al Milal wal Nihal*), Isma'il R. al Faruqi states that:

In the early Middle Ages, the caliphal courts of Damascus, Baghdad and Cordova witnessed countless meetings of Jews, Christians and Muslims in which the learned adherents debated the three faiths. The reigning culture gave such honour to the three religions, such respect to their principles and institutions, that inter-religious debate was the subject of salon conversation, a public pastime.<sup>6</sup>

The most recent testimony to this fact comes from Karen Armstrong. While delivering the first Fazlur Rahman Memorial Lecture in Oxford, she has correctly observed that "in the Islamic empire, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians enjoyed religious freedom. This reflected the teaching of the Koran, which is a pluralistic scripture, affirmative of other traditions. Muslims are commanded by God to respect the "People of the Book", and reminded that they share the same beliefs and the same God. Constantly the

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<sup>5</sup>. Syed Abdul Wahid (Editor), *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, Lahore, 1973.

<sup>6</sup>. Ibid. p. 190.

Koran explains that Mohammad has not come to cancel out the revelations brought by Adam, Abraham, Moses or Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

In the light of the foregoing, Iqbal’s concept of Muslim nationhood is aimed at the final unity of mankind. Reconstructing Muslim political theory in the context of modern nationalist ideals, Iqbal formulates a new theory of composite nationalism of the followers of Abrahamic Faiths (*Millat-i-Ibrahimi*). He even widens the scope of his theory to include it its fold Zoroastrians and others possessing the same word-view. In reply to the questions raised by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in his three articles published in the *Modern Review* (Calcutta), Iqbal stated categorically that:-

Nationalism in the sense of love of one’s country and even readiness to die for its honour is a part of the Muslim’s faith: it comes into conflict with Islam only when it begins to play the role of a political concept and claims to be a principle of human solidarity, demanding that Islam should recede to the background of a mere private opinion and cease to be a living factor in the national life. In Turkey, Iran, Egypt and other Muslim countries it will never become a problem. In these countries Muslims constitute an overwhelming majority and their minorities, i. e., Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, according to the law of Islam, are either “People of the Book” or “like the People of the Book” with whom the law of Islam allows free social relations including matrimonial alliances. It becomes a problem for Muslims only in countries where they happen to be in a minority, and nationalism demands their complete self-effacement. In majority countries Islam accommodates nationalism; for there, Islam and nationalism are practically identical; in minority countries it is justified in seeking self-determination as a cultural unit. In either case, it is thoroughly consistent with itself.<sup>8</sup>

This Qur’anic ideal of “the final unity of humanity” could not be realized so far, because of “the wars of Islam and Christianity. And later, European aggression in its various forms, could not allow the infinite meaning of “the

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7. *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, op. cit, p. 188.

8. *Dialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths*, Virginia, 1986, Foreword.

Qur'anic verses, quoted above, "to the countries of Islam in the shape of what is called Muslim Nationalism."<sup>9</sup>

Iqbal has finally an irrevocably rejected hereditary kingship as well as theocracy as contrary to the original spirit of Islam. He regards "spiritual democracy" as "the ultimate aim of Islam".<sup>10</sup> In his Ilahabad address he has stated categorically that in the separate Muslim homelands of his dream spiritual pluralism is going to be the order of the day:

Nor should the Hindus fear that the creation of autonomous Muslim States will mean the introduction of a kind of religious rule in such States. The truth is that Islam is not a church. It is a State conceived as a contractual organism long before Rousseau ever thought of such a thing and animated by an ethical ideal which regards man not as an earth-rooted creature, defined by this or that portion of the earth, but as spiritual being understood in terms of a social mechanism and possessing rights duties as a living in that mechanism. (p. 172)<sup>11</sup>

Muslim nationalism is a tolerant, liberal and humanistic political and social creed. Referring to the teachings of the Qur'an, Iqbal declared that "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 Qur'an, even to defend their places of worship, if need be. Yet I love the communal group which is the source of my life and behaviour and which has formed me what I am by giving me its religion, its literature, its thought, its culture and thereby recreating its whole past as a living operative factor in my present consciousness."<sup>12</sup> The concept of Muslim nationhood is thus inspired by the profound love with one's own community i. e. the Muslim community, and immense respect for all other communities.

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<sup>9</sup>. *The Guardian*, London, Thursday, June 20, 2002. Karen Armstrong is the author of *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (Weidenfeld); *The Battle of God; Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Harper Collins), and *Islam: A Short History* (Weidenfeld).

<sup>10</sup>. *The Reconstruction*, op. cit, P. 142

<sup>11</sup>. *Thoughts and Reflections*, op. cit. p. 172.

<sup>12</sup>. *Ibid*, p. 169.

This divinely inspired ideology of the “essential unity of humanity” could not be translated into actuality, yesterday, because of the crusades and later on, by the “European imperialist encroachment, in its various forms, on Muslim soil”. It remains an unrealized ideal even today as a result of a fresh onslaught of the western hegemony.