

IQBAL'S SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT
IN THE LIGHT OF HIS PROSE WORKS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a reflection of Sociological thought as expressed in the prose works of Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, a celebrated Muslim Philosopher and the Poet of East. Sociology is a discipline which encompasses various social institutions with a vast range of relevant concepts. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal has discussed many of these sociological dimensions in his prose works. These include education, poverty, stratification, gender equity and social change. Social statics and dynamics have also been discussed in the light of work done by sociologists such as Herbert Spencer. Malthus explanation of population growth and its effects have been integrated to further elaborate the phenomenon. The analysis suggests that society has an independent existence, however will of individuals plays pivotal role in shaping the existence and determining the destiny of any nation. Social phenomena such as role of education, controlling over population, participation of both the genders in the relevant fields are pertinent in this regard. These carry a great degree of concern regarding maintenance and healthy survival of human population and civilizations.

Introduction

The present study is an analysis of Sociological thought as reflected in the prose works of Dr. Muhammad Iqbal. It discusses various sociological dimensions including population, poverty, education, gender equity, cultural understanding, and social change. To introduce briefly, the scientific study of society including social groups, institutions, and social interaction is called Sociology.¹ It is one of the social sciences which studies human societies, how these are maintained and get changed over time. Moreover, the social processes and dynamics remain an integral part contributing to comprehensive understanding of any social phenomenon or issue. Dr. Iqbal's various prose works have been studied to cull out his thought pertaining to sociology. This study would enable us to understand his sociological thought, the significance of some sociological aspects discussed by him and their relevance to the present time.

Dr Iqbal's lecture delivered at M.A.O.College Aligarh entitled "The Muslim Community---A Sociological Study" is very basic regarding his sociological thought. He explained the relation of a society and individual as follows:

The interests of a society as a whole are fundamentally different and even antagonistic to the interests of the individual whose activity is nothing more than an unconscious performance of a particular function which social economy has allotted to him. Society has a distinct life of its own, irrespective of the life of its component units taken individually. And just an individual organism, in a state of disorder, sometimes unconsciously sets up within itself forces which tend to its health, so as social organism, under the corroding influence of destructive forces, may sometimes call into being counteracting forces--such as the appearance of an inspiring personality, the birth of new ideal, or a universal religious reform--which tend to restore its original vitality and finally save the organism from structural collapse by making the inward communal self to bring into subjection all the insubordinate forces, and to throw off all that is inimical to the health of its organic unity. Society has or rather tends have a consciousness, a will, and an intellect of its own, though the stream of its mentality has no other channel through which to flow than individual minds.²

A sociological perspective that is structural functional approach suggests the similar view that society has an independent existence

and humans are the entities who fill the slots in the form of social positions and roles. Furthermore, society gets evolved over the period of time and so do the social needs of its people. With these changes, humans tend to find and innovate new mechanisms of survival while maintaining some previous ones. Social institutions and people get adjusted to these changes.

Iqbal expressed his views about the society in the following words:

Society is much more than its existing individuals; it is in its nature infinite; it includes within its contents the innumerable unborn generations which, though they ever lie beyond the limits of immediate social vision, must be considered as the most important portion of a living community.³

Dr Iqbal was against the idea that the people living in a region constitute a nation. He rather presented the Islamic concept of a Nation using the terms *millat* and *ummat*. Responding to views of Maulana Husayn Ahmad Madani that 'nations are formed by land' he said: *Qaum* means a party of men, and this party can come into being in a thousand places and in a thousand ways upon the basis of tribe, race, colour, language, land and ethical code. *Millat*, on the contrary, will carve out of the different parties a new and common party. In other words, *millat* or *ummat* embraces nations but cannot be merged in them.⁴

The concept of nation could be related to institutional forces that determine collective conscience. A sociologist Emile Durkheim's view of structural forces is external to and coercive of individuals, he termed these as social facts.⁵ These include institutional laws and moral beliefs. These external forces contribute to the collective mind which according to him, leads to healthy functioning of society. However, it needs to be pondered that social norms and values are made by individuals of social group or community, therefore they have the power to change these as well.

He has also refuted unification of humanity on the basis of race, language and territory in the 6th lecture delivered at Madras entitled "The Principles of Movement in the Structure of Islam". According to him Islam rejects blood relationship as the basis of human unity⁶ and envisages an emotional system of unification that is beyond racial, linguistic or territorial limits.

Allama Dr Muhammad Iqbal is a Philosopher-poet who has discussed various social issues faced by his community. His first Urdu book entitled '*Ilm al-Iqtisad*' is about economics that is basically a social science. This work also includes Iqbal's sociological thought as he has discussed in it the civilizational issues of India, poverty, low

literacy rate and violation from industrial education. Such topics have briefly been touched by the greatest philosopher of the Indian subcontinent. In Iqbal's view human dignity and equality entail democratic and egalitarian socio-political and economic governance. He wished for an Islamic welfare state where poor such as labourers and peasants would be liberated from oppression of *zamindar* and industrialists.⁷ He recognized both internal (capitalists and money lenders) and external factors (British imperialism) behind the Muslim's plight. He also expressed concern that poverty affects all human faculties.⁸ It has many implications, poor people lack basic human necessities of life, poor living conditions are likely to affect their mental health, lack of exposure to knowledge would further contribute to perpetual oppression.

In its preface, he has raised the issue of poverty prevailing in his society in very impressive way. He wrote: "In the current age, the question has arisen whether poverty is essential ingredient in administration of the world. Is it possible that painful voice of those who are crying silently in streets be silenced and dreadful scenes of poverty, terrifying a sympathetic heart, would be wiped out from the face of earth?"⁹

Population is a topic studied under ambit of economics, sociology, political science and statistics. Iqbal has dealt it in his book in an analytical way. Elucidating the relation of human population and economics, he states that the value of wealth is inclined to decrease with the progress of culture and civilization day by day. If population would not multiply and the circle of human wants and necessities would not have broadened, the topics of economics would have reduced even to the extent that there would be no need of it.¹⁰ He has also observed: "Human population is increasing day by day and its necessities increase with the progress of civilization. If he had trusted only in production through natural resources and had not searched new avenues to fulfill his needs, there would have been worst discontinuity in his peace and luxury to the extent that survival of his species would have become impossible."¹¹

Dr Iqbal has discussed the law of population that is being presented in English below:

There is no doubt in it that with the increase in individuals of a nation, the number of its workers increases. We want to look at the principle of population from the nexus that exists between population growth and production of wealth. It comprises of the following three components:

1. Population has always a tendency 'to increase' and population growth does not care whether economic resources would be sufficient for more people or not. Experts have estimated that population get doubled or

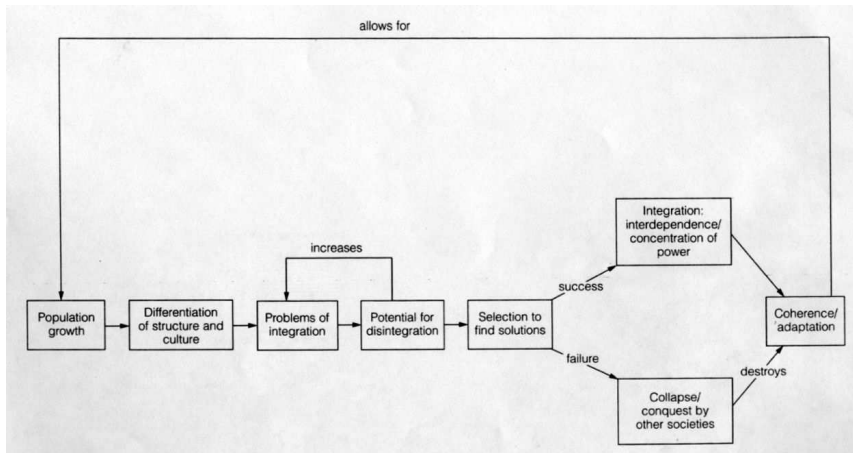
becomes threefold after every thirty years, if there is no epidemics or starvation.

2. If population in a certain area gets doubled or threefold and there is no control on its increase (e.g. epidemics, war, decrease in marriage rate etc.), then after a certain period, the production of that area would hardly be sufficient for the people and ultimately would not sustain or in other words the supposed growth in population would not continue.

3. Our previous experience does not testify that with the future advancement in agriculture, we could produce sufficient food for the supposed increased population.¹²

Iqbal is of view that nature controls overpopulation through famine and epidemics but population should not only be checked by these natural calamities. He has also discussed human fertility.¹³ On social side, population growth beyond certain limits results in poverty and other bad effects.¹⁴ Iqbal has referred to experts on population like Thomas Robert Malthus (1766—1834) who wrote “An Essay on the Principle of Population” in 1798 and Herbert Spencer (1820—1903) who wrote books in the field of social science like “Social Statics”, “The Study of Sociology”, “The Principles of Sociology”, “The Principles of Psychology” etc.

The basic argument depicting ‘social statics’ can be stated in a way that humans can achieve happiness and satisfy their desires and needs without infringing on others’ rights. Spencer’s Sociology can be divided into two modes of analysis; first part might include the invariant principles of social organization and second one explains the analogy between society and living organism. Social statics reveals close reflection of functionalist approach. He viewed society as comprised of humans who have certain needs to be met for their survival. With the help of specialized organs, persisting and emerging needs are usually met. He also added the term ‘social health’ referring how well these needs are met by certain ‘social organs’. To Spencer, structural differentiation and growth should be accompanied by integration. Furthermore, centralization of regulatory functions and mutual interdependence of different parts matters in this regard. He added that institutionalization is a process in which growth takes place followed by differentiation, integration and adaptation. This is represented in the form of a model of evolution of society by Spencer.¹⁵ It shows how growth in population leads to differentiation, potential disintegration, solutions, coherence and adaptation to a new integrative form.



Source: The Sociology of Herbert Spencer in
 ‘The emergence of Sociological theory’ (2002) by Turner & et al.

Malthus concludes that population is inclined to such increase that natural resources become insufficient to sustain it. Contemplate for a while if human population would increase without any control and man would not think to increase his resources needed for life using his intellect gifted by God, what would be his future? Man is a creation of God whose faculties can combat with the forces of nature that are against the survival of his life. Nature itself reduces population of human beings and animals through great wars, epidemics and starvations. Man can overcome his sexual desire due to danger of his extermination or can opt for population control willingly. According to Malthus the real cause of poverty and other evils is population growth beyond estimation. It is observed in most of the countries that human population gets doubled in 25 years. If in some country, population is increased without control, the people would be worried about their future by adopting such measures that may possibly reduce the population growth. Human faculty of procreation is natural and if it is not controlled willingly or unwillingly, it would become devastating for humanity collectively. When working persons would feel bad result of over-population they would adopt such measures that cause decrease in population. But our observation is otherwise. The contemporary conditions in China and India show that poverty increases fertility in human beings that results in fast population growth which intensifies the pain of poverty. And its result is natural cure of overpopulation i.e. starvations often hit such countries.¹⁶

Addressing the Punjab Legislative Council on 23rd February 1928, Allama Muhammad Iqbal said, “In these days of birth control I think infanticide does not matter.”¹⁷

On the annual budget 1929-30 of the Punjab Legislative Council on March 4, 1929, Dr Iqbal shed light on the issue of education in the province. He emphasized it and regarded it as the foremost issue to be considered. He pointed out: “The state of things so far as Education is concerned is very disappointing. I was going to say awful. In 1922-23, 55 new schools in all came up for grants-in-aid, out of which 16 were Islamia schools. The total amount of grants made to schools was Rs. 1,21,906, out of which a sum of Rs.29,214 went to Muslim schools. In 1926-27, the total amount of grant to high schools was Rs.1,22,287 and the same amount, namely, Rs. 29,214 went to Muslim schools .i.e. 23 per cent of the total amount. In 1927-28, the total amount of grant was Rs 10,13,154 and the share of Muslim schools was Rs.2,04,330, that is to say, the population which is most backward in Education and most indebted got only 2 lakhs out of 10. This is affairs which cannot be regarded as satisfactory.”¹⁸

The comments of Allama Iqbal on the budget of year 1930-31:

I would draw your attention only to the special grants to unaided schools during 1928-29. You will see that the total number of schools to which grants have been made is 21. Out of this there are 13 Hindu institutions, 6 Sikh institutions and 2 Muslim institutions. The grant that goes to the Hindu institutions is Rs 16,973, to Sikh institutions Rs.9,908 and to Muslim institutions Rs.2,200. The cause, therefore, of this remarkable phenomenon must be sought in the way in which money on education is spent.¹⁹

On the invitation of the King of Afghanistan, Dr Muhammad Iqbal, Sir Ross Masud and Sayyed Sulaiman Nadwi went there to guide the Afghan minister for education.²⁰ About the proposed Afghan University, a joint statement was published on 19th October, 1933.

On his return from Afghanistan, he said on November 6, 1933, “The government of Afghanistan intends to organize education in a modern way”. Iqbal also said: “A beautiful and commodious palace in Kabul has already been reserved for the new university which is gradually developing. Higher education is being imparted in medicine, this being the first faculty to be organized will be that of civil engineering.”²¹

According to Syed Abdul Wahid, most of the reforms suggested by him have been carried out. He took great interest in the Jami'ah Milliyah of Delhi and was always ready to help its promoters in every

possible way. He has left a permanent impression on three important universities of the East: Kabul, the Panjab and the Jami'ah Milliyah.²²

He was of the opinion that Arabs should set up universities in their land on modern style. On the 1st January, 1932, his following statement was published in this regard: "Actually I am a strong advocate of Arabic-speaking countries setting up not one but several universities for the purpose of transferring modern knowledge to Arabic which is the only non-European language that has kept pace with the progress of thought in modern times."²³

On return from visit of Afghanistan, Iqbal expressed his vision about education system for Muslim in the following words: "Personally I believe that complete secularization of education has not produced good results anywhere especially in the Muslim lands. Nor is there any absolute system of education. Each country has its own needs and its educational problems must be discussed and solved in the light of those needs."²⁴

Speaking on the annual budget of 1927-28 in the Punjab Legislative Council on March 5, 1927, he pointed out that there was no allocation for village sanitation and health and proposed to allocate budget for medical aid of women.²⁵

Dr Iqbal also emphasized on education in his budget speech delivered on March 10, 1927. He proposed that elementary education should be made compulsory. He articulated: "My submission is that in so far as primary education is concerned, it is absolutely necessary in this province to adopt the principle of compulsion at once."²⁶

In his article "Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal" Dr.Iqbal has expressed his viewpoint about the system of education needed for his community.

Education, like other things, ought to be determined by the needs of the learner. A form of education which has no direct bearing on the particular type of character which you want to develop is absolutely worthless. I grant that the present system of education in India gives us bread and butter. We manufacture a number of graduates and then we have to send titled mendicants to Government to beg appointments for them. Well, if we succeed in securing a few appointments in the higher branches of service, what then? It is the masses who constitute the backbone of the nation; they ought to be better fed, better housed and properly educated. Life is not bread and butter, alone; it is something more; it is healthy character reflecting the national ideal in all aspects .And for a truly national character, you ought to have a truly national education."²⁷

Iqbal wanted that Indian Muslim should establish male and female cultural institutions in all big towns of India. These institutes as such should have nothing to do with politics. Their chief functions should be to mobilize the dormant energy of the younger generation by giving them a clear grasp of what Islam has already achieved and what to achieve in the religious and cultural history of mankind.²⁸

Dr Iqbal wanted to bring a change even in the field of medicine. Speaking on the resolution tabled in the Punjab Legislative Council regarding Unani and Ayurvedic system of medicine he said: "I think our Unani and Vedic systems very much suit the people. Of course the way in which our medicines are prepared is defective and requires improvement. An institution is needed to teach pharmacy. Our own system of pharmacy, I believe, is more conducive to the health of the people than any other methods."²⁹

In his lecture delivered at Aligarh, he also shed light on the issue of education of Muslim women. Elucidating various aspects of female education, he said:

I must, however, frankly admit that I am not an advocate of absolute equality between man and woman. It appears that Nature has allotted different functions to them, and the right performance of these functions is equally indispensable for the health and property of the human family. The so-called "emancipation of the western women" necessitated by western individualism and the peculiar economic situation produced by an unhealthy competition, is an experiment, in my opinion, likely to fail, not without doing incalculable harm, and creating extremely intricate social problems. Nor is the higher education of women likely to lead to any desirable consequences, in so far, at least, as the birth rate of a community is concerned. Experience has already shown that the economic emancipation of woman in the west has not, as was expected, materially extended the production of wealth. On the other hand it has a tendency to break up the Physical life of society.....Considering then the peculiar nature of our community of Physiology and Biology on the subject, it is clear that the Muslim woman should continue to occupy the position in society which Islam has allotted to her. And the position which has been allotted to her must determine the nature of her education.³⁰

Once an American lady visited his residence who had conversation on the status of women in Islam. She complained that Islam had not done justice with women. He replied in such words that she was silenced and convinced. Iqbal also said, "There is only one personality in the world who recognized the nature of a woman completely and that was the worthy personality of Muhammad of Arabia (upon whom be peace and greeting)."³¹ He believed that gender

equality would be surfaced considering knowledge, education and personal capabilities.³²

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal's thought has been manifested eloquently in his lectures entitled *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* wherein he has also employed sociology at various places. In his first lecture on "Knowledge and Religious Experience" he has used sociological terms like social experience, social intercourse.³³

In the following lines he has discussed social change in the light of Islamic teachings:

It is the lot of man to share in the deeper aspirations of the universe around him and to shape his own destiny as well as that of the universe, now by adjusting himself to its forces, now by putting the whole of his energy to mould its forces to his own ends and purposes. And in this process of progressive change God becomes a co-worker with him, provided man takes the initiative:

Verily God will not change the condition of men, till they change what is in themselves'. (13:11).³⁴

According to Dr Iqbal change is occurring everywhere. In this regard, he has quoted the following from Bergson, a Western philosopher upon whom he has showered his praises: 'I pass from state to state. I am warm or cold. I am merry or sad, I work or I do nothing, I look at what is around me or I think of something else. Sensations, feelings, volitions, ideas --- such are the changes into which my existence is divided and which colour it in turn. I change then, without ceasing.'³⁵

Commenting on it Iqbal observes: "Thus, there is nothing static in my inner life; all is a constant mobility, an unceasing flux of states, a perpetual flow in which there is no halt or resting place. Constant change, however, is unthinkable without time. On the analogy of our inner experience, then, conscious existence means life in time."³⁶

Change is an inevitable aspect of any living society; it can appear in any shape and form. Population dynamics is one such prominent form of it. On one hand, society is claimed to be more than a collection of individuals or various social groups, on the other hand individuals can play significant role which brings certain checks and limitations on unnecessary growth causing detrimental effects in the long run.³⁷ One can extend the argument by stating that change in one element brings about or alters the functioning of the rest of the social institutions. This implies that institutional structures are interdependent and also imperative to be taken care for smooth functioning. On time assessment of situation can prevent societies from some serious damage or future disaster. Individual if do not take charge of controlling of population it could bound to bring about various social issues and major threat to living conditions.

Dr Iqbal is such philosopher who sees congregational prayer from sociological angle. He possesses similar views about pilgrimage of Makkah. According to him, these are human association at different levels. He observes:

The real object of prayer, however, is better achieved when the act of prayer becomes congregational. The spirit of all true prayer is social. Even the hermit abandons the society of men in the hope of finding, in a solitary abode, the fellowship of God. A congregation is an association of men who, animated by the same aspiration, concentrate themselves on a single object and open up their inner selves to the working of a single impulse. It is a psychological truth that association multiplies the normal man's power of perception, deepens his emotion, and dynamizes his will to a degree unknown to him in the privacy of his individuality. Indeed, regarded as a psychological phenomenon, prayer is still a mystery; for psychology has not yet discovered the laws relating to the enhancement of human sensibility in a state of association. With Islam, however, this socialization of spiritual illumination through associative prayer is a special point of interest. As we pass from the daily congregational prayer to the annual ceremony round the central mosque of Mecca, you can easily see how the Islamic institution of worship gradually enlarges the sphere of human association.³⁸

About sociological importance of different Islamic worships, he observes at another place: "The giving of alms to the poor was also a means of developing the sense of brotherhood. So, likewise, was the pilgrimage to Mecca....the pilgrimage proved in the end a great aid in unification for the men of every tribe and race met at Mecca with a common purpose and in a common worship and a feeling of brotherhood would not but be engendered in the process."³⁹

Closing the third lecture, he emphasizes on the equality of mankind. The Indian subcontinent was divided into four major castes among Hindus and Muslim community has also allowed the infiltration of this system. In Hinduism, caste are defined as pure or polluted thus practicing discrimination whereas in Islam it is mere an identification system showing one's lineage.⁴⁰ Refuting such division in Muslim society Iqbal says: "The division of mankind into races, nations and tribes, according to the Qur'an, is for purposes of identification only. The Islamic form of association in prayer, therefore, besides its cognitive value, is further indicative of the aspiration to realize this essential unity of mankind as a fact in life by demolishing all barriers which stand between man and man."⁴¹

In his doctoral dissertation, Allama Iqbal has presented his analysis of metaphysics in Persia. While discussing *tasawwuf* he has written about saints:

But the Sufi holds that mere transformation of will or understanding will not bring peace; we should bring about the transformation of both

by a complete transformation of feeling, of which will and understanding are only specialized forms. His message to the individual is---“Love all and forget your own individuality in doing good to others.” Says Rumi :“To win other people’s hearts is the greatest pilgrimage; and one heart is worth more than a thousand Ka’bahs. Ka’bah is a mere a cottage of Abraham; but the heart is the very home of God.”⁴²

At another place in his thesis, he has quoted rendering of Rumi’s verses as follows:

O thou pleasant madness, Love!
Thou physician of all our ills!
Thou healer of pride,
Thou Plato and Galen of our souls!⁴³

In a letter to Dr. Nicholson, he emphasizes such social system which is free of any distinction: “I find it philosophically impossible to ignore a social system which exists with the express object of doing away with all the distinctions of caste, rank and race; and which, while keeping a watchful eye on the affairs of this world, fosters a spirit of unworldliness so absolutely essential to man in his relations with his neighbours. That is what Europe lacks and this is what she still learn from us.”⁴⁴

Dr Iqbal has not only preached love and fraternity for the Muslim community, he possessed equal respect for other religionists. He says: “A community which is inspired by feelings of ill-will towards other communities is low and negligible. 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.”⁴⁵

Conclusion

The findings of various Sociological phenomena as highlighted in the prose works of Dr. Muhammad Iqbal suggest that society is a living entity which is constantly evolving over the period of time. Nevertheless, individuals have very significant role in maintaining social order and also in bringing about change in the required fields as per the demands of prevailing circumstances. Iqbal’s prime emphasis was on certain sociological aspects including population, poverty, gender equity, education and social change; all these being key elements of any society. He believed that change is an inevitable part of any living society and humans can and should play proactive role in bringing about social change in the existing system according to the emerging need of the time. Furthermore, this way no nation can lag behind and fell victim rather develops the capacity to cope with the requirements of changing times and relevant social needs would be met in an effective way.

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