

CURING SOCIAL ALIENATION AND IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF PRAYER

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Abstract: Modern scientific development has given human beings highly facilitated life. Objective world is getting more and more smart and attractive technologically day by day, but the inner or subjective world of an individual is having more complications with the development of science. Science has nothing to compensate the emotional deprivations of human beings. Therefore, modern society has generated social alienation and loneliness among individuals. Religion can play an important role in eliminating these negative trends. As in Islam, if the spirit of associative prayer can be reflected in public affairs, levels of loneliness and isolation can be decreased or even diminished. This article will address Muhammad Iqbal's views regarding the role and importance in socialization. He highlights the impact of congregation upon the individual and collective life of people. Although, he did not face existing issues of alienation due to social networking or rapid growth of self-centered activities, but he felt and anticipated the disastrous hazards to the mankind and suggested to follow the patterns of socialization offered by Islam especially in the form of associative prayers.

Key Words: Alienation, Associative Prayer, Congregation, Iqbal, Religion, Socialization, Humankind.

The socio-economic, and political conditions of today's world reflect anarchy, brutality, selfishness, egocentricity, and chaos almost in every part of the world. The ultimate results of these negative forces are alienation, isolation and loneliness among people. Although man is more facilitated in technological terms, but he has slightly become dependent upon scientific mechanism. Nobody blames science for not being helpful in making human life more convenient, but these comforts and conveniences have reduced the importance of the metaphysical or spiritual aspect of human life.

The changes in modern society have increased isolation and alienation among individuals. Professional routines and confidence in social technology rather than inter personal interactions have made today's man more alone and isolated. Consequently, human relations have become superficial. The modern life styles are making individuals isolate and loneliness might become the next biggest hurdle in health issue. Review of studies which indicates that mortality risk is increased up to twenty six percent due to loneliness, further states that Fund and *The Church of England*¹ and *Church Urban Fund*² noticed that the number of clergy members was increased by ten percent who believed that social isolation was the major social problem in their local areas from last three years.³ The *Mental Health Foundation*⁴ stated that in the United Kingdom, one out of ten individuals often feels himself lonely and forty eight percent of people think that they are getting lonelier generally. The status of *the loneliness capital of Europe* is granted to Britain.⁵

While admitting this fact that human beings are facing severe problem of loneliness, *BBC News Magazine* reported that it does not only make men unhappy, but it is also dangerous for all socio- economic and socio-political matters of humans. Aloneness can produce deficiency of confidence and can generate issues regarding mental health such as stress, depression and anxiety. *BBC News Magazine* further states that quantitatively it is observed that one out of ten individuals experience loneliness and a problematic issue reported by Mental Health Foundation is that young people are increasingly becoming victims of it. Moreover, sociological changes have also altered the ways of mutual interactions among people which are isolating individuals from each other⁶. In 2010 the Mental Health Foundation prepared a report "*The Lonely Society*" in which it was clearly mentioned that people in United Kingdom were suffering from mental and health disorders because the lack of mutual interactions. The findings of last fifty years have shown

that this mental disorder is not only destroying general health of public but also pushing back the economy of the country.⁷

It is important to note that by nature human beings are designed to live in societies. Unlike other species, humans like to share their feelings and thoughts on complex levels. Although scientific inventions and discoveries have improved the quality of human life but scientific investigations have nothing to do with the emotional aspect of humanity. With the help of quantificational studies, statistical data can show how many people have depressive attitudes in any society or which medicine could be useful to decrease their depression or anxiety level, but scientific findings cannot reduce social alienation or lonesomeness of people. Science may suggest medicines to cure but spiritual disorders cannot be settled by scientific methods. Science always focuses on materially existent objects and never addresses the subjective part of human personality. On the other side, it is only 'religion' which satisfies the integral and most powerful emotional aspect of individual and collective human life.

Religion gives importance to the basic psychological and physical need of humans therefore it offers obvious societal codes for its believers. Durkheim affirms that religion plays a vital role as a social platform to sustain and improve mental health of the followers. He highlights that the religious beliefs are always helpful in the development of strong worldly bonds. Moreover, the beliefs in the existence of an all powerful God, death and accountability after death effectively design the societal structures in moral contexts. As religion admires socialization, he states that collective prayers, worships or religious practices enhance the strong sense of togetherness among worshipers.⁸

Almost every religion has some definite moral and social systems for societal and family life. It also exhibits a set of norms to regulate the cycle of life in society. Religion establishes a strong relation of *man to his Creator* and highlights the importance of mutual relationships among individuals. The social relations are the basis of healthy society. Therefore every religion demands from its followers to stay connected with each other. To maintain one's relation with God the concept of "prayer" arises, and "associative prayer" helps people to regulate their societal relations and structure.

Prayer is a defining feature of many religions of the world. Although it may have different forms in accordance with the respective religion but

generally it is admitted that while praying worshippers establishes a close relationship with his Creator...

Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. "Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him."⁹

In religious scriptures, Prayer is emphasized because it is considered as very important religious practice. As Bible says, "... and he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart."¹⁰

Again it is said, "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."¹¹

According to Rig Veda, "Lord of creation! no one other than thee pervades all these that have come into being. May that be ours for which our prayers rise, may we be masters of many treasures!"¹²

The Quran clearly states that God wants His followers to offer prayer regularly, "Verily I am Allah: there is no god but I: so serve thou Me, (only) and establish regular prayer for celebrating My praise."¹³

The third lecture of Iqbal's 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' is about the *concept of God* and *meaning of prayer*. Iqbal states that the concept of God described in the Quran is Unique, Essentially Individual, Perfect and Independent, hence everything in the universe depends upon Him. Although God is the Creator but He is not the father, nor He has any father¹⁴. Iqbal understands that this is beyond human beings' imagination to have a complete concept of God's individuality, because God cannot be explained in the spatio-temporal terms. Iqbal says that the requirements of individuality can only be satisfied if God is considered as an Ego. He considers God as Supreme Ego. He differentiates between pure and serial time by saying that God lives in pure time whereas serial time, in which human beings are living, has no effect on Him. Therefore the notions of past, present and future can never be applied on God. Iqbal states that God knows the potentials of His creation, but His knowing does not entail determinism. He has introduced the concepts of reward and punishment because man is free to choose between alternative courses of action.¹⁵

To highlight the significance of prayer, Iqbal discusses William James's stance in his third lecture. William James asserted that in spite of marvelous discoveries and inventions science could never stop human beings from performing religious practices because it is in the psychological designing of human beings to pray until and unless their mental structures would be acquiring some different status which is not logically possible. As an individual wants a true friend to share his pains and pleasures, prayer provides spiritual support to believer which helps him to get rid of loneliness. With the help of pleasure, a believer gains self confidence. He feels being attended and observed by a Supreme Authority. Iqbal admits that the intensity of this feeling may differ from one person to another as it depends upon the association one has with his religion. He says that whosoever denies that these feelings are non-existent, will be either a liar or a self-deceiver.¹⁶

Iqbal concludes that in psychological context prayer is originally instinctive and human beings are naturally inclined towards prayers. Iqbal says that knowledge acquired by prayer is resembled with reflection. He differentiates between pure thought and prayer by saying that in spite of similarities, prayer is higher than abstract reflection. He states that reflection is also a process of incorporation but in the matter of prayer this assimilative procedure acquires an unknown power. He compares that the mind perceives the functions of Reality in the process of thinking; prayer elevates the follower from the ordinary level of gaining knowledge. While performing prayer, mind rise itself higher to understand Reality.¹⁷

Khatoon (1977) writes regarding Iqbal's concept of prayer that due to prayer man develops his very special and significant link with his Creator. It must not be confused with some mysterious, magical or mystical act. In fact it is an act of worship which is more than any other intellectual activity. As a dynamic power it extends the perspective of human consciousness, broadens its range and renders it capable of spiritual illumination. It enables the finite personality to discover suddenly its situation in the larger whole of the reality and to come into direct contact with the total infinite.¹⁸

Iqbal says that pure thought can never approach ultimate reality. It is a slow process; therefore, no philosophical doctrine can claim that it can have access to ultimate truths. He says that prayer brings spiritual illumination in human life. It gives realization of individual to

understand his position in the larger sphere of life. Iqbal denies associating any mystic meaning to it.¹⁹

Afaqi analyzes that the expression of gratefulness and praise in the form of prayer is common in Islam, Judaism and Christianity. A believer surrenders himself to the Creator's will by performing the acts of adoration and gratitude. Surah Al-Fatiha explains this claim in its entirety. When any individual prays, he considers himself in the presence of God without any intervening third source. The purpose of the believer is to show his submission and appreciation of God's glory. It relates the believer to God with pureness of mind, heart and body. Prayer is essentially a source to come in contact with the Creator. Prayer gives spiritual strength to the performer. While offering prayers with regularity, the believer feels spiritual contentment, security and pleasure. He feels himself in the state of harmony and delight.²⁰

Iqbal was not ready to admit prayer as auto-suggestion²¹. Hassan states that auto-suggestion does not have any connection with the opening of the sources of life which subsist in deepness of human ego. Iqbal highlights that human personality acquires new powers due to the changes bestowed by transcendental illumination. But auto-suggestion never leaves eternal life-effects behind. At this point Iqbal seeks help from William Brown, who perceives that "I am disposed to say that auto-suggestion is prayer ... Just as the mere fact of seeking for the causes of a particular phenomenon involves as its intellectual basis the assumption of the principle of the uniformity of nature, so I would urge the emotional basis of a particular auto-suggestion is some measure of confidence, implicitly felt if not explicitly confessed, in the general beneficence of things. In religious natures this confidence expresses itself definitely as faith in God, and with this explicitly assumed, auto-suggestion is quite clearly a form of prayer."²²

To Iqbal mystic consciousness leaves lasting effects but auto suggestion has no permanent impact on life. Iqbal discusses a special way of knowledge and says that this type of actual human experience has its own type of history and future. It is not resembled with any magical trick nor is it related with any sudden and special source of knowledge. The above experience is closely related with the depths of human ego. The special source of knowledge is evolutionary in nature; it requires hard work, self-control and self-realization. Iqbal says that mysticism under the title of Neo-Platonism, Christian or Islam, cannot provide adequate satisfaction to the curious modern mind which demands a real

experience of God. Iqbal analyses that the modern mind is used to get knowledge on empirical and logical grounds so it demands to have a concrete concept of God. Iqbal claims that this concrete conception of God can be acquired by modern mind if the modern mind adopts the similar attitude adopted by a follower during his prayer. For this purpose, one must not cut him away from the objective environment; instead he has to maintain a living link with the objective atmosphere.²³

Now it becomes clear that the relationship between man and God cannot be developed unless man observes the universe from the point of view of prayer. Iqbal states that prayer must be given the status of an essential complement to the intellectual actions of any individual involved in observing Natural events. Empirical investigations not only connect observer with Reality's behavior but improve capabilities of inner insight for a profound image of it.²⁴

Iqbal wants to state that prayer is like a light that can show man his actual way towards his destination. He believes that the whole world is having various indicators to prove the existence of a supernatural being. He considers all knowledge a form of prayer. He says that if someone scientifically studies the nature, he also has the status of mystic seeker while performing prayer. Iqbal says that if performed on individual level, prayer leaves different impacts on different minds. Iqbal says that collectively offered prayer is prior than individually offered prayer. He asserts that the real objective of prayer can be achieved in its collective or associative form and according to Islamic view, prayer's spirit is social. He further states that a congregation is an association of believers animated having same objective concentrating on a single object. Congregation or gathering for performing religious services opens the inner selves of the followers.²⁵

Iqbal elaborates that the purpose of prayer is to generate living link between egos. Prayer finishes the so called social differences created by human beings on the basis of color, family or economic status. It generates same feelings of love, affection and submission in the hearts of the creatures for their creator. He says that association with God is the real target of prayer. He declares that it is a psychological truth that congregation improves intellectual abilities of individuals; it sharpens the performance of sense, develops observation and increases learning capabilities:

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 association²⁶.

Thus, for Iqbal associative prayer is prior and has lasting effects upon personalities. Consequently, socially and psychologically congregation plays more effective role. He says that Islam likes the concept of congregation:

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.²⁷

Iqbal asserts that following same body posture during prayer shows unity in associative prayer. It destroys the social ranking between rich and poor. He further points out in the end of his third lecture that the division of mankind into races, tribes and nations is only a matter of identification in the Islamic perspective. The concept and importance of associative prayer in Islam show that Islam likes the unity of mankind as Iqbal writes in this regard, "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."²⁸

In religious context prayer plays a vital role in the development of actual relationship between the Creator and creation, on the other hand it also brings harmony and balance in society. The actual spirit and objective of associative prayer must be understood by each believer.

And when you are among them and lead them in prayer, let a group of them stand [in prayer] with you and let them carry their arms. And when they have prostrated, let them be [in position] behind you and have the other group come forward which has not [yet] prayed and let them pray with you, taking precaution and carrying their arms. Those who disbelieve wish that you would neglect your weapons and your baggage so they could come down upon you in one [single] attack. But there is no blame upon you, if you are troubled by rain or are ill, for putting

down your arms, but take precaution. Indeed, Allah has prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment.²⁹

In fact, this point should be understood by the believers that the actual spirit of congregation must be reflected in social living. Daily meetings, acquaintances and associations may diminish alienation. Islam understands the basic requirement of socialization as Abu Hurairah narrated that the Holy Prophet Muhammad highlighted the significance of congregation by saying, "Indeed a man's *Salat* in the congregation is increased by twenty five rewards over his *Salat* alone."³⁰

Congregation has religious important for followers but its philosophy should be reflected in believer's daily life. Associative prayers provide basis to reduce socio-economic differences among people and promote the spirit of brotherhood. A follower learns the lessons of discipline, unity, alignment and order which discourage selfishness, arrogance and schism. Therefore; it may reduce loneliness or social isolation and teach people to stay connected with each other which may help in the sustenance of their own mental health.

Almost all revealed religions strongly teach the socialization of people. It does not mean that an individual has no importance in religious contexts but the gathering of individuals has more significance. Human beings need each other to fulfill physiological, psychological and many other types of communal requirement. To enhance socialization, different associative practices are offered for believers.

If any religion claims to provide complete mode of conduct for its believers, it becomes its necessary duty to address the requirements of the followers. Moreover, religion admits the significance of psychological and biological needs of individuals therefore; it also addresses the societal requirements by offering various types of rituals, traditions and customs. Islam as a divine religion shows more concern with socialization of people. A unique concept of *associative prayers* as a main pillar of Islam can be observed for this special purpose of creating association among believers. Islam holds strict position to regularize associative prayers not only to enhance the sense of obedience but to create the feeling of mutual attachment among people.

Iqbal as a philosopher and theologian is a strong advocate of the idea of associative prayer as a special pillar of religion. Iqbal, following basic Islamic teachings, includes Muslims from all over the world into a single nation "Ummah" and ask individual believer to acknowledge the

importance of his association with the whole group of followers. He praises the concept of collective worship in religion. He relates this concept with the progress of social sector and considers it as an important tool for a living human society. He says that whenever a group of believers having the similar passion and focusing on the same object join each other in prayer, this kind of association enhances the power of perception of an individual, it not only deepens his sentiment but also dynamizes his will to a degree unknown to him... “In other words, associative prayer or congregation enhances human sensibility to attain highest objectives.

Although the contemporary problems regarding isolation and alienation among people were not found in Iqbal’s era but his concern with the meaningfulness of socialization and the fear of alienation of his fellow beings reflects from his thoughts. He accepts that scientific achievements and investigations are advantageous, but scientific development ignores some of the basic human needs. According to his opinion, religion ties knots among individuals in the form of rights and responsibilities to gather them. Therefore, the concept of associative prayers can develop social relations not only on local or communal level but on wider level too.

End Notes

¹ The Church of England also known as The Anglican Church is the primary state church in England.

² CUF was established by the Church of England as a practical response to unmet need and has been active in local communities for over 30 years.

³ Rebecca Harris, *The loneliness epidemic: We're more connected than ever - but are we feeling more alone?* March 30, 2015. (accessed November 30, 2015).

⁴ The Mental Health Foundation(1949) is a British charitable organization that provides information, carries out research, and campaigns to improve services for people affected by mental health problems. It now incorporates the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities.

⁵ John Bingham, "Britain the loneliness capital of Europe" *The Telegraph*, June 10, 2014.

⁶ Vanessa Barford. *Is modern life making us lonely?* April 8, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine> (accessed November 30, 2015).

⁷Jo Griffin, *The Lonely Society* (London: Mental Health Foundation, 2010) .

⁸ John P Bartowski, "Prayer, Meditation and Anxiety: Durkheim Revisited." *Religions* (MDPI), 2017.

⁹ Exodus 24:1-2.

¹⁰*The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Luke 18:1

¹¹*The Holy Bible*, Psalm 145:18

¹² Rig Veda, 10.121.10

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv10121.htm>

¹³*The Quran*, 20:14

¹⁴*The Quran*, 112:1-4, 9:51

¹⁵ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction*, 55,57,87.

¹⁶ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction*, 89.

¹⁷ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction*, 72.

¹⁸ Khatoon, Jamila. (1977) *The Place of God, Man and Universe in the Philosophic System of Iqbal* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan) p. 98

¹⁹Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction*, 72.

²⁰ Afaqi, Muhammad Iqbal. (2011) *A Comparative Study of Christian*

and Islamic Epistemologies (Islamabad: National Book Foundation) p.380

²¹ Influencing an individual's own physical condition, attitude or behavior by mental processes other than conscious thought. An auto-suggestion may be defined as a self-imposed idea which tends to realize itself automatically. An auto-suggestion involves three phases: (1) the introduction of an idea into the mind by the self, (2) faith in the realization of the idea, (3) the self-realization of the idea. No auto-suggestion can be effective when anyone of these three characteristics is waiting.

²²Hassan, Riffat. *Iqbal's Concept of Prayer*. 2015. <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/oct87/5.htm> (accessed December 3, 2017).

²³ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction*,90.

²⁴ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction*,90.

²⁵ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction*,91.

²⁶ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction*, 73.

²⁷ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction*, 73.

²⁸ Iqbal, Muhammad. *The Reconstruction*,93.

²⁹ *The Quran*, 4:102

³⁰ *Tirmidhi*, 2:215

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