

IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF SPIRITUAL DEMOCRACY

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According to Iqbal, spiritual democracy is the ultimate goal of Islam. He saw a beam of hope for entire humanity in establishing this kind of democracy. In spite of the fact that 19th century produced many good things for humanity, it also produced aggressive nationalism. Humanity was divided on the basis of race, language and geographical boundaries. On the other hand, according to Islam, common spiritual values are the real binding force for unity among the people. Islam is a social system for a world society. This is the religion which opposes the racial differences and wants to provoke spiritual elements which are common between man and society.

Iqbal says:

“As an emotional system of unification, it recognizes the worth of the individual as such, and rejects blood relationship as a basis of human unity. Blood relationship is earth rootedness. The search for a purely psychological foundation of human unity becomes possible only with the perception that human life is spiritual in its origin.”¹

Iqbal takes man as a unit comprising spiritual reality (ego or self) which is perpetually striving to fulfill itself. It yearns to return to its origin from which it has been alienated.

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The Quran says:

O ye people! Fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul.²

Iqbal views man as a spiritual unity. When we look at this unity as acting in external world it is body and when we look at it as acting in regard to the ultimate aim and ideal of such acting, it is mind. The existence of body got meaning and relevance when ego was housed in it and afterwards entered into a trust with the Ultimate Ego.

Here a question arises that what is the relationship between human ego and the Ultimate Ego. The Ultimate Reality, according to Iqbal, is spiritual in nature. He says:

“Reality is, therefore, essentially spiritual ... I have conceived the Ultimate Reality as an Ego; and I must add now that from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed. The creative energy of the Ultimate Ego, in whom deed and thought are identical, functions as ego unities.”³

Iqbal takes this concept from the Quran. The Ultimate Reality, according to the Quran, is spiritual and its life consists in it, the opportunities in the natural, the material and the secular. Iqbal appreciated the modern thought by saying that it has rendered a great service to Islam as well as to all religions by criticizing what we call material or natural – that criticism discloses that merely material has no substance until we reach and discover it rooted in the spiritual.

A close study of Iqbal’s philosophy manifests that he gives a universal idea of the whole humanity. He has a firm belief that as a religion, Islam is neither national nor racial, nor personal but purely human. As a culture it has no geographical boundaries, no language and no specific mode of dress. He perceives Islam as humanistic and egalitarian. Islam works for the perfection of the world or to raise the humanity towards a high spiritual life. The state which will be established on Islam will naturally be different from a state which is established on national and geographical grounds. Iqbal rejects nationalism and advocates

the idea of Islamic nationalism. The bases of this kind of nationalism would be unity of God and afterwards this idea will extend to a world state. He disliked the idea of Turkish nationalism. There were two main lines of thought which worked in Turkey. One was Nationalist Party and the other was Party of Religious Reform. Nationalist Party's supreme interest was only in state and not in religion. Religion had not as such any independent function. State was of so much importance that it dominated and determined all the other factors of national life. Therefore, the emphasis was on the separation of church and state. In Islam the spiritual and the material are not two distinct domains. Islam is a single and unanalyzable reality. On this ground, Iqbal called the Turkish nationalist theory of state a misleading theory as it suggests a dualism which does not exist in Islam.

“This was due to the fact that the western civilization was enamoured of the visible, has distanced itself from prophetic consciousness, had ignored the real purpose of the creation of the universe and life, and had accepted matter as its goal instead of keeping it at its proper place of being only a means for understanding the reality. In the same way, in social sphere, the west separated politics from *deen* and an un-bridled democracy held sway everywhere which, while endowing man with unrestricted freedom estranged him from the real purpose of his existence. According to Iqbal the real reason for this was the separation of politics from *deen*.”⁴

In fact, Iqbal considers religion as encompassing the entire life and life, according to him, is a unity. Abulala Maududi says in the same manner:

“Life is a unity. It cannot be divided into water tight compartments. The function of religion is to direct the affairs of life. Therefore its domain is life in its entirety and not any specific aspect of it. That is why it not only gives an outlook on life and reality but also lays down the basic principles on which man's relationships to his

own self, to other men and society and to Allah, the Creator, are to be reared.”⁵

Islamic civilization is based on the principle of *Tauhid*. The world unity also depends on this principle. Islam is a practical means to make this principle a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind.

“*Tauhid* articulates the larger Islamic unity of thought, action and value across humanity, persons, nature and God.”⁶

The doctrine of unity of being has uniform principles of action such as the promotion and advancement of the entire humanity. The followers of Islam are directed to struggle hard to achieve the ethical and religious goals set by their religions. Iqbal calls essence of *Tauhid* as a working idea of equality, solidarity and freedom. The above-mentioned three principles could be transformed in space time forces by establishing a state based on spiritual democracy. Iqbal is of the view that the ultimate goal of Islam is to establish such democracy. In Indo-Pak subcontinent, Iqbal was the first one who defined the Islamic state in terms of spiritual democracy. He established relationship between the state and religion by penetrating understanding of Islam and a critical study of western philosophical ideas and values.

He says:

“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 people 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 hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam that spiritual democracy which is ultimate aim of Islam.”⁷

According to the Quran, man is God’s vicegerent on earth,

so it is the duty of man to establish and implement the will of God for the whole humanity. The Islamic *Shariah* is a code of ethics as well as religious laws. This manifests the will of God and provides the basis of all laws of the Islamic state. The Quran addresses man as such and not a single person or single class. While Iqbal talks about the community, in fact, he talks about the collective ego. The entire Muslim community is required to achieve the real collective ego in order to live, develop and have its being as a single individual. The aim of the state is the perfection of humanity, *i.e.* the highest well-being to which humanity may attain, and this well-being is both material and spiritual. The Muslims accept God as Ultimate Reality and it is the first element of their *Iman*. The whole building of religion as well as social life depends upon it. Sovereignty of the universe belongs to God and man and especially Muslims are required to establish His will on earth. Man is required by God to enforce His will. Islam emphasizes on individual as well as collective life. God and His Prophet (*Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*) have given lesson for more than one time that all the Muslims should lead a life with perfect unity. The Quran says:

“And hold fast, all together, by the rope of Allah and be not divided.”⁸

Thus, Islam stresses on the concept of unity. According to Iqbal, the individual is important as long as he/she remains with society. While Iqbal talks about the ego of individual, immediately he turns towards ‘collective ego’. Collective ego could be ego of a nation, ego of a community. An ego for a nation lies within the revival of individual ego.

It is quite right that an individual can sustain his ego only within a society and a collective ego could not be built if each and every individual of the society do not take a keen interest in developing the same. Man is vicegerent of God on earth and he is duty bound to enforce His will on earth. A good relationship between an individual and society can only be developed if the relationship among individuals is good. An ego develops and progresses when it clashes with the other ego. Other egos are not a fear but a blessing.

In case of Islamic Spiritual Democracy the Holy Quran is the main source of law. There are other sources also, *i.e.* *Hadith*, *Ijma* and *Qiyas*. All the Muslims are custodian of this Islamic heritage. Iqbal deeply felt that Islamic law should be reinterpreted and re-examined according to the prevailing circumstances. Islam is a religion which has flexibility. It is not a static religion. Change and movement are signs of God. So Islamic law could be reconstructed without any harm to its basic spirit. It is desirable to keep in view the past experiences of our predecessors. While reinterpreting Islam we should keep in mind the *Ijtehad* of Turkey. Iqbal appreciates the efforts of Turks for an elected parliament of an Islamic country, the power to interpret, explain and re-examine the Islamic law. For this reason Iqbal considered the growth and gradually developing the democratic spirit in Islamic countries. Iqbal admires the establishment of legislative assemblies in the Islamic world. This is not true that Iqbal liked monarchy and dictatorship and disliked democracy. He was only against practicing of western democracy in the Indo-Pak subcontinent due to its special circumstances. On the other hand, he appreciated the steps taken by the Islamic state of Turkey, because of the majority of Muslims there.

Iqbal appreciates in this way:

“The truth is that among the Muslim nations of today, Turkey alone has taken off its dogmatic slumber, and attained to self-consciousness. She alone has claimed her right of intellectual freedom, she alone has passed from the ideal to the real, a transition which entails keen intellectual and moral struggle. To her the growing complexities of a mobile and broadening life are sure to bring new situations suggesting new points of view and necessitating fresh interpretation of principles which are only of an academic interest to a people who have never experienced the joy of spiritual expansion.”⁹

Iqbal's firm belief in Tauhid as a working idea of an Islamic state leads him towards to define Islamic state in this way:

“... is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an inspiration to realize them in a definite human organization.”¹⁰

M. M. Sharif writes:

“Iqbal has passed through a phase when he believed that multi-communal and multi-cradle conglomeration of the teeming masses of the Indian subcontinent, although riddled with caste and religious cleavages, could be welded into a nation of the Western type, the people could not be freed unless they felt a psychological unity based on a common love for the motherland.”¹¹

Afterwards this phase ended with his return from Europe with this conviction that in fact Europe was leading towards a catastrophe, because of its purely materialistic approach which has nothing to do with ethical and spiritual values.

His address is to all mankind. It is true that sometimes he only addresses Muslims and sometimes only Muslims of the subcontinent but only does so to start with his own people. His vision is broad enough to embrace all the humanity. He thought that Islam is the religion closest to the understanding of man. He criticized and condemned nationalism as he says:

“I have been repudiating the concept of Nationalism since the time when it was not well known in India and the Muslim world. At the very start it had become clear to me from the writings of European authors that the imperialistic designs of Europe were in great need of this effective weapon. The propagation of the European conception of Nationalism in Muslim countries is to shatter the religious unity of Islam to pieces.”¹²

The word “nation” is like a principle of human society and today it is used as a political concept; similarly the word “country” is also used in a political concept. Thus it comes into conflict with the universal idea of man society. If the aim or purpose of human society is to provide peace and security to all nations and to change present existing social system into one

new world order, then the best social world order would be Islam only. Because Islam does not emphasize the moral reformation of individual only, it also emphasizes on the social reforms to be brought in the social life of entire humanity. Islam do not talk about heavens but about earth also. The most important element in all this process is harmony, harmony among the thoughts and emotions of all the mankind. The ultimate goal of a Muslim state is not only the glorification of its own but love and sympathy for other nations too, thus it is a journey towards the cause of the world state. If a Muslim nation defines its boundaries, it is only for a convenience of administration. Iqbal was fully aware of the evils of territorial nationalism. In this context he endows a responsibility on the *Ummah*.

“He wants the various units of the *Ummah* to rise above territorial nationalism, sort out their disputes amicably and subsequently weld themselves into single community, a venture which he would like to pend until such time that each Muslim political unit has acquired optimum political power and economic stability and consolidated its position as an independent self-reliant and sovereign nation. These societies could thereafter be welded together into a single suitable forum to forge greater unity of ideas and objectives.”¹³

اس دور میں اقوام کی صحبت بھی ہوئی عام
 پوشیدہ نگاہوں سے رہی وحدتِ آدم
 تفریقِ ملل حکمتِ فرنگ کا مقصود
 اسلام کا مقصود فقط ملتِ آدم
 مکے نے دیا خاکِ حینوا کو یہ پیغام
 جمعیتِ اقوام کہ جمعیتِ آدم!

Iqbal devoted his philosophical thought to awake the Muslims from a dogmatic slumber. He was totally against the

territorial nationalism. He conceived Islam as a universal religion, which envisaged all the mankind as a unity. For this he considered that this purpose could be fulfilled only by 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 spiritual bases. Algerian thinker Malek Bennali's statement in this connection is of very much interest.

He says:

"The difference between the Islamic democratic concept and either the French, Russian, or Chinese democratic concepts that Islam endows man with a significance that transcends any political or social value. While other democratic definitions detect in man the presence of humanity and society, the Islamic democratic conception recognizes in man the presence of God. In other words, the first definition of democracy is of secular type, while the second democracy is of sacred kind."¹⁵

In fact, Iqbal's spiritual democracy has almost the similar meaning as this Algerian thinker. He does not want to eliminate man as well as God. Keeping in view his concept of ego, we come to the conclusion that man is nowhere separated from God. The whole story revolves around the relationship between the Ultimate Ego and finite ego. This relationship is the sole basis of his concept of spiritual democracy. His spiritual democracy is a democracy plus religion. Capitalism of Europe and Communism of Russia have failed to establish spiritual as well as material satisfaction of man. Iqbal thought that a religion could meet these both kinds of needs of man, he visualizes that Islam is a religion which could be a source of rescue of mankind which is by the prevailing commercial, political and ethical disputes. He takes light from the glorious past of the Muslims and visualizes coming future. He believes that without thinking about the future, history remains dominant and the present remains oppressive.

In this connection Iqbal says that the educational forces of the whole world should be directed to inculcate in every individual respect of mankind. We can depend on only one unity and that unity is the brotherhood of man, which do not believe in race, nationality, colour, or language. So long men do not realize the dire need of time by shattering the false distinction of race, colour and geographical nationalities completely, they will never be able to lead a happy and contented life. They will never enjoy the beautiful ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. It is a dire need of the time to move forward with a clearer insight into the ultimate aims of Islam.

Man occupies a unique place in the philosophy of Iqbal. World is of man and for man. The concept of globalization is connected with the concept of new world Islamic order. Thus, unity of man is a means to get a global peace. The situation of today is alarming enough to reconsider the Islamic teachings as well as the thoughts of Iqbal. Big institutions for establishing peace in the world will never meet their target until and unless they shake off all the elements of prejudice and hatred. Iqbal's message is for the whole mankind and not for a special class. In fact he wants to see all humanity in peace and love developing its ego to get the goal.

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