

The Creative Launcher

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Iqbal and Materialism: An Assessment

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Abstract

Iqbal reacted to the materialistic philosophies of his time in a highly intellectual manner. He was always an active propounder of resistance against injustice and exploitative materialism. Therefore, he tried to deconstruct many such notions in his poetry which were responsible for dividing the mankind into the superior and the inferior. He offered counter narrative to the colonial discourse in a very logical way. He tried to show the meaning of love, harmony, peace and co-existence in the age of materialistic competition. Through his innovative concept of *Khudi*, he tried to remind people of their real worth. He was not in favour of conquering the wretched of the earth, rather, in-treating them with mutual love and respect without differentiating them on the basis of cast, colour and creed. In this paper an attempt will be made to foreground the anti-materialistic dimension in the poetry of Iqbal.

Keywords- *Materialism, Spiritualism, Religion, Existence*

Muhammad Iqbal was a poet, philosopher, and politician, as well as an academic, barrister and scholar in British India who is widely regarded as having inspired the Pakistan Movement. He is called the "Spiritual Father of Pakistan". He is considered one of the most important figures in Urdu literature, with literary work in both Urdu and Persian. It is a beauty and greatness of Iqbal's poetry that it is full of insight and penetrating vision with universal appeal and attraction that make it to transcend the boundaries of space and time as is the case with other great writers like Dante, Goethe, Hafiz shirazi, Saadi Shirazi, Mualana Rumi, Ghalib, Shakespeare etc. Iqbal's poetry is full of social, religious, educational, cultural and political insights. Iqbal's poetry possesses rejuvenating aesthetic sense and contemplative shade. This is particularly the case with his first Urdu verse collection *Bang-i-Dara*, although many poems of the same collection also point towards the philosophical and revolutionary dimension of Iqbal. The ghazals of *Bal-i-Jabreel* are full of philosophical touch. In *Zarb-i-Kaleem* and urdu portion of *Armugan-i-Hijaz*, Iqbal has propounded his

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revolutionary ideas on the educational, sociological and political problems of his contemporary world.

Iqbal was a poet of great learning and commitment. There is hardly any poet in Urdu and Persian literature who could run parallel to the intellectual dimension of Iqbal. Iqbal was well read in multiple world literatures. In the domain of philosophy Iqbal was well aware about the philosophical ideas of Berguson, Hegel and Kant etc. In western literature Iqbal had read poets like Wordsworth, Goethe and Shakespeare. He was well read in Eastern literary tradition and had referred to the masters like *Bedil*, *Gani* and *Naziri* in his poetry. *Maulana Rumi*-the famous Persian Mystic poet- was the spiritual mentor of Iqbal. The inter-civilizational intellectual dimension of Iqbal's personality is quite evident from his book "Reconstruction of Religion Thought in Islam".

Iqbal was an important name in the politics of Indian sub-continent. Iqbal was actively involved in the politics of his contemporary period. From local council elections to round table conference in Britain, he was present everywhere. He has commented upon many political events & political personalities of his time as he was thoroughly acquainted with various political currents like capitalism and communism.

In sharp contrast to the Fukuyama's promulgated concept of universal civilization, as understood and propagated by Europe and America, the notion of universal civilization with its European coloring has no place within the theoretical framework of Iqbalian thought. The concept of universal civilization has its basis on the materialistic philosophy of capitalism. Any socio-political system based on such a philosophy cannot be accommodated within the theoretical framework of Iqbalian thought. He is strongly opposed to the system of Capitalism.

Humanity is still the helpless prey to imperialism
Outrageous that Man is the hunter of the human race!

The glitter of modern civilization dazzles the eye
But this is the luster of unreal jewels only!

The science which was pride of the west's sages
Is the battle sword in the blood-stained clutches of greed!

The magic of prudence cannot make stable
The civilization which is based on capitalism. (Khalil 362-363)

According to Iqbal, the capitalistic system can never become a philosophical base for any system of governance covering broader humanitarian values. Iqbal had seen the anti-humanitarian dimension of capitalism in the First World War in which millions of people lost

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their lives. There is an inherent flaw in capitalism as wealth gets unequally distributed in society making few people immensely rich and leaving large sections of society in the deep chasm of poverty and helplessness.

As far as this anti-capitalistic approach is concerned, Iqbal may apparently seem to echo the voice of Karl Marx, as has been said by many Marxist critics of Iqbal. This anti-capitalistic approach of Iqbal within the Marxist paradigm is well-revealed in one of Iqbal's poems namely "*Lenin in Allah's Court*", in which Lenin says to Allah:

When shall this galaxy of Gold's dominion founder?

Thy world thy day of wrath, Lord, stands and waits.

However, before arriving at any hasty conclusion regarding the Marxist undercurrent in the said poem, it is very important to analyze the poem in its proper context. In the beginning of the poem, Lenin says:

ALL space and all that breathes bear witness; truth

It is indeed; Thou art, and dost remain

To-day I witnessing acknowledge realms

That I once thought the mummery of the Church.

We, manacled in the chains of day and night!

Thou, moulder of all time's atoms, builder of aeons

From the very beginning of the poem it is clear that it is not the atheist Lenin who is speaking to Allah but the one who has acknowledged the supremacy of Allah and thus asking his questions not in a confrontational tone but in the spirit of enquiry as he himself feels deviated from the way of God due to injustice committed by the capitalistic system in the materialistic world. Therefore, after acknowledging the supremacy of Allah and after giving vent to his intense emotions, Lenin says:

Omnipotent, righteous, Thou; but bitter the hours,

Bitter the labourer's chained hours in Thy world!

When shall this galaxy of gold's dominion founder?

Thy world Thy day of wrath, Lord, stands and waits.

In this way, the desire for the destruction of capitalistic system falls far beyond from the domain of Marxism because in dialectal materialism propounded by Marx, there is no room for God and God's religion as these are only superstructures to guard the structure or economic base.

The desire for the destruction of the capitalistic system, as expressed by Iqbal, falls absolutely in line with the teaching of Islam. In one of his poems: *Iblees Ki Majlessi Shura* (The Parliament of Satan), after rejecting capitalism and communism as potential threats to his evil rule, Satan expresses his only fear in the revival of Islamic teaching when he says:

Hundred times beware, of the

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Law of the Prophet!
The protector of Women's honor. the
Tester of men's capacities, the rearer of
Worthy men!
The message of death to any kind of slavery!
No sovereigns and no monarchs, no
Mendicants begging!
It does purify wealth of all pollution:
It makes the wealthy trustee of wealth
And property.
What greater revolution in thought and
Action will there be:
Not to the crowned heads, but to God
Alone does this earth belongs!

Another important component of Fukuyama's universal civilization is liberal democratic set up which could become the basis of equality and justice. However, when analysed from Iqbalian perspective, liberal democracy is not a very good concept as propounded by the European nations and America. In the regard, we can back our argument by the verse of Iqbal's famous poem "Iblees Ki Majlisi Shura" (The parliament of Satan). This poem, according to Masood A Raja, is a scathing criticism of the major socio-political and economic systems offered by the west":

The Poem is organized as a discussion between satan and his advisors. In the process of discussion Iqbal brings up all the major challenges-mostly western systems to satan world system and it is in these challenges that Iqbal articulates the bankruptcy of various western systems of government and socio-economic control.

For Iqbal, the liberal democratic process with its European connotations is nothing but the continuation of materialistic approach of governances where masses are under-estimated for the benefit of the privileged few. Thus, in its spirit, liberal democracy is only another form of Kingship. In above mentioned poem, Stan's first counsilar answers to his second counselor when he asks about the future of liberal democratic set up and Satan's awareness about the same:

Second councilor

Is the clamour for "government by the
People" evil or good?
Art thou unaware of the fresh mischief of
The world?

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First councilor

Aware am I! but tells me my cosmic
Foresight:
No danger from what is but a masquerade
For imperialism.
We ourselves have dressed imperialism in
The garb of democracy
When man has grown to be a little self-
Conscious and self-observant.
The true nature of the system of
Imperialism lies elsewhere:
It depends not on the existence of an
Individual leader or a king.
Be it assembly of nations or the Court of *Pervaiz*
Whoever caste a covetous eye on other's
Harvest is king
Has thou not observed the democratic system of the west
With a brilliant exterior, its interior is darker than *Ghenghis's*

From the above discussion, one should not infer that Iqbal was opposed to democracy in totality. Iqbal was a great political visionary who was well aware about the positive and negative aspects of various political processes including democracy. He was opposed only to western notion of democracy with its connotations based upon the materialistic world outlook. Otherwise Iqbal says:

Democracy has a tendency to foster the spirit of legality. This is not in itself bad; but unfortunately it tends to displace the purely moral stand point, and to make the illegal and the wrong identical in meaning. (Iqbal Stray 108)

Thus, it is quite evident that for Iqbal democracy in itself is not a bad concept, rather, it is the western liberal connotation associated with the term that makes it objectionable to Iqbal. Iqbal is opposed to it because people are only counted and not weighed on the scale of merit. Thus, it is not difficult to infer that if people are not only counted but weighed also and 'purely moral standpoint is not displaced the term democracy with its new connotations within the frame work of Islam could find the possibility of accommodation in Iqbalian political thought. Thus, it is not difficult to conclude, when analyzed from Iqbalian Perspective, that Fukuyama's notion of universal civilization and liberal democracy runs anti-parallel to the political ideas of Iqbal.

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Conclusion

From the aforementioned discussion it has been discursively proven that Iqbal was vehemently opposed to the materialistic philosophies of Communism and Capitalism. Iqbal is well ware with the ill effects and implications on the humanity in general and Muslims in particular. Through his poetry he raised his voice against the anti-human and materialistic philosophies of Communism and Capitalism. He made scathing attacks against these two philosophies by juxtaposing them with the universal and humanitarian teachings of Islam.

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