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Anti-Colonial Dimension in the poetry of Iqbal

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Abstract

This paper tries to highlight the Anti-colonial dimension in the poetry of Iqbal. As we know from the historical facts that the phenomenon of colonialism was never a smooth phenomenon. Consequently, there was always a feeling of revolt in the hearts and minds of the natives against the occupation forces. In this paper an attempt has been made to show how the poet like Iqbal developed his narrative of resistance against the myth of European superiority. Furthermore, the paper also tries to highlight the significance of the concept of '*khudi*' in developing the counter-narrative to the discourse of colonialism.

Key Words- *Khudi, Colonialism, Anti-Colonialism.*

The counter discourse dimension of Iqbal's Poetry is quite evident when analyzed from the postcolonial point of view. He has logically reacted to many western notions. He was a man with penetrating insight and futuristic vision. As a result of his close encounter with European civilization during his tour of European lands, he was quite convinced that the apparent luminosity of it is not going to last long. After seeing the moral deprivation of the European lands, his was deeply mournful for the ascendancy of materialistic forces and ideologies. In this aspect he bears close resemblance with T.S. Eliot whose famous poem *The Wasteland* is an epitome of the feeling this spiritual loss.

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Iqbal reacted to these materialistic philosophies 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.

One of the fundamental assumption of the western colonial discourse was that of the western superiority against the inferiority of so- called the Orient. For them culture, tradition and history of the non-European people was worthless. This fact is well demonstrated by the statement of Lord Macaulay in which he arrogantly proclaimed that a single shelf of good European library is superior to the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The poetry Iqbal shows opposite of it. He was very proud of his culture, tradition and history. With particular focus on Islamic civilization, he tried to deconstruct the myth of the European superiority. He proudly and enthusiastically sings of its achievement and contribution. For him, Islam is a system of equality and justice where there is no room for dividing mankind in the name of caste, color and creed. According to Rafiuddin Hashmi :

Iqbal had to live under the yoke of colonialism and the British had not only colonized Iqbal's homeland India but had also subjugated the major parts of Asia and Africa. The free soul of Iqbal could never reconcile with the western subjugation. His intellect could not be arrested by the shackles of slavery and soared high. Since he had a unique outlook towards life and universe, quite different from the prevalent, he always felt restless in his contemporary

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surrounding. Naturally, he never felt satisfied with the society he lived in, the prevailing world order and the situation found by the humanity as a whole.

Iqbal's anti-colonial strategy involves the process of sensitization accompanied by the call for action. In order to bring about a revolution in any nation or community the foremost requirement is to prepare the individual members of that community or nation to work in an organized fashion. To work in organized fashion means that every member of the society should remain dedicated to some noble cause. Therefore, the pre-requisite of any great revolution is to prepare the individual members of that nation or community to work as a organized whole. Every great revolution is a direct reaction to the stagnancy in the socio-political thought of a given community which precedes that revolution. People start taking many things for granted, as a result of which there appear a lack of dynamism and flexibility in the socio-political thought. For instance, following 1857 anti-colonial revolution there was a sheer disillusionment in the hearts and minds of Indian people in general and Indian Muslims in particular. There was a pessimism in the hearts and minds of Indian Muslims because their political and economic influence was gone and so was their hope for any bright future.

However, with the arrival of Iqbal on a literary and political scene, his philosophy of *khudi* injected fresh blood in the arteries of a dying nation. He sensitized people of their downtrodden condition so that they can start organizing themselves for an effective struggle against oppression and colonial hegemony of colonial Britain.

There is no fixed meaning of the term "*khudi*" in the poetry of Iqbal. It has been translated as the '*Ego*' or '*Self*' or conscience by different scholars of the field. The problem with such a rigid and one word translation is that it fails to grab the operational flexibility of the word *khudi* with which it has been used by Iqbal in his poetry. When analysed from the reader's point of view, it is very difficult to comprehend the dynamism of word *khudi* in the English word '*Ego*' or '*Self*'. The word '*Ego*' is insufficient to substitute the word *khudi* as

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there are many dimensions which lie far beyond the realm of psychology. Similarly the word self also fails to accommodate many aspects of *khudi*, which are covered by its philosophical connotations. The context in which it is used at many places in the poetry of Iqbal, different meanings of the word *khudi* emerge. It simply highlights the fact that the word *khudi* with its unique iqbalian connotations is dynamic in nature and here lies its real philosophical beauty. Whatever be the dimension of his poetry, the philosophy of *khudi* is always accompanying it. Iqbal's *khudi* is a philosophy of action in which stagnancy has no role to play. Iqbal is vocal critic of any philosophy of life which brings idleness and stagnancy in the human society. He considers action as life and stagnancy as death. The philosophy of *khudi* proposed by Iqbal is in line with the actual Islamic philosophy because as per the saying of Hazrat Ali^(R.A), "whosoever recognised his self has recognised his God". In this sense we can safely assume that Iqbal's philosophy is in line with Islamic philosophy. The philosophy of *Khudi* played important role in awakening the people of the sub-continent in general and Muslims in particular. In sharp contrast to the philosophy of Pantheism, the philosophy of self paved the way for the restoration of the lost honour and prestige as it acted as spark for emotional fuel already present in the hearts of people. As a result, the people started organising themselves into groups, political parties and literary circles where from an effective and organised voice was raised against the colonial rule of the coloniser. There are a great number of verses in Iqbal's poetry which are meant to sensitize the people for anti-colonial movement. Iqbal achieves this sensitization phase in his unique way. Iqbal's main tool in this process of sensitization is the retrieval of the past. In poetry, retrieving the past is a common practice as is evident from the poetry of Keats and Wordsworth and other world poets. Even in the early poetry of Iqbal the retrieval of the past is there. However, in the post 1908 poetry of Iqbal this retrieval to the past Muslim history is not meant for escapism from the harsh realities of day to day life. This retrieval is intentionally done with an optimistic vision. Through this retrieval, Iqbal tries to generate contrasting pictures of present and past Muslim societies. By this process, he tries to inculcate the feeling of hope and betterment in the minds of his

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contemporary Muslims. It is purely meant to bring renewed inspiration from the past to prepare people for the present struggle for overall betterment of mankind in general and the Muslim community in particular. The whole poem of 'Taranah-i-Milli' and 'Address to Islamic Youth' can be taken in this category. In this way Iqbal develops the anti-colonial narrative to deconstruct the myth of western superiority in the hearts and minds of the fellow countrymen.

Conclusion

The anti-colonial dimension is quite evident in the poetry of Iqbal. Iqbal tries to deconstruct the myth of western superiority by celebrating the native culture, tradition and history on its own merits. By using the philosophical connotations of the term 'Khudi', he tries to achieve some desired goals. One of the goal being to sensitise the people of their deplorable socio-political situation and to prepare them mentally and physically to challenge the social reality of their age.

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