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# 8

## Muhammad Iqbal

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To illustrate the paradoxes in the life of Iqbal.
- To assess the political ideas of Iqbal.
- To explain Iqbal's notion of pan-Islamism.
- To analyse Iqbal's ideas on Pakistan.

**M**uhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), like Rabindranath Tagore, was basically a poet whose forays in the domain of socio-political theorisation seemed to have been facilitated by his deep interest in and responses to the social and political happenings and movements in the country and abroad. However, barring this incidental affinity between the personalities of the two poet-philosophers, the core of their socio-political thoughts appears to be diametrically opposite. For instance, while both began their philosophical pilgrimage with singing paeans in the honour of Mother India, very soon the trajectory of their perspectives on nationalism took such an amazing turn that Tagore became an icon of internationalism or cosmopolitanism whereas Iqbal turned out to be a staunch advocate of narrow Muslim nationalism. Consequently, in case of Tagore, 'his voice stood for India and yet it had a vitality which cannot be confined to one particular country or tradition, and as such it reverberates with cosmopolitanism' (Mehta 1996: 261). On the contrary, about Iqbal, a veteran analyst of Indian political thinking wrote,

[I]n the beginning, Iqbal composed poems full of patriotism and love of the motherland. But later, the ardent nationalist turned into a religious fanatic, whose sole objective was to safeguard the interests of his co-religionists even at the cost of the unity of the Indian nation. Hence, Iqbal became well-known for his ideas on Muslim nationalism and his views on religion and politics. He again and again advised the Muslims to consolidate on a religious basis. He propagated the theory of the Muslims as a separate nation. Rejecting the secular Indian nationalism and calling it Hinduised, Iqbal launched the separatist movement among the Muslims by

advocating narrow Muslim nationalism or what may be called communalism. (Appadorai 2002: 246)

Thus, such a U-turn in the conceptualisation of an academically trained intellectual appears quite enigmatic, necessitating a contextualised study of the life and thinking of the poet. The chapter, therefore, attempts to provide a critical review of the evolution and nature of the main components of the socio-political ideas of Iqbal. Such a survey of his ideas ought to be done with special reference to the contextual imperatives which had motivated him to reach an altogether different destination than what was supposed to be at the time of the beginning of his intellectual journey.

## A LIFE IN COMPLETE TURNAROUND

The life of Muhammad Iqbal seems to be a life of complete turnaround, ostensibly due to the factors apparently having their roots in the policy of divide and rule followed by the colonial rulers from the beginning of the twentieth century in India. Iqbal was born on 22 February 1873 at Sialkot in Punjab (now in Pakistan) in a family the ancestors of which were Kashmiri Brahmans some 300 years back. Iqbal appeared to be proud of his lineage whose reflections could be found in his poetic compositions. Having attained his early education in a traditional Muslim religious school, he took admission in the Sialkot Mission School to complete his matriculation. His urge for higher studies apparently took him to Lahore where he joined the Government College and secured a graduation degree from it. Later, on completing his Master's degree, he was selected a lecturer in the Oriental College, Lahore to teach History and Philosophy, in addition to English. However, after working as a lecturer for a few years, he left for Munich in 1905 to pursue his doctoral research.

Iqbal's stay in Europe proved to be a turning point in moulding his intellectual orientation towards various aspects of both local as well as global happenings. On his return to India in 1908, Iqbal was a person with:

... a new world view. He began to reflect on religious issues in the wake of the European aggression against the Muslim countries, including Turkey and Persia. To face the western challenge, he, like

his contemporaries Maulana Azad, the Ali Brothers, Mohammad and Shaukat, and Hasrat Mohani, advocated pan-Islamism as the political goal of the Islamic world. He began to regard himself as Islam's messenger or *Shair-e-Islam*, and his poetry became a vehicle of Islamic thought. (Datta 2002: 5034)

Thus, his brief sojourn in Europe seemed to have transformed Iqbal from a staunch nationalist into the *Shair-e-Islam* whose only passion now appeared to have become to be the saviour of Islam and its followers.

After his return from Europe, the sequence of events in the life of Iqbal did not appear to be guided by his sole discretion. For instance, on returning to India, he was offered a Professorship by the Oriental College where he had taught previously but he refused and went for practicing law on the advice of his friends. But his legal practice did not turn out to be a success story and, as a result, much of his time now was utilised in his poetic compositions. What was surprising, however, was the fact that Iqbal did not get enticed by the realm of politics at all during this time. For instance, 'when the All India Muslim League session took place in Lahore in 1920, Iqbal did not take care to attend it even though the meeting was held at the Gulab Theatre just opposite his residence' (Datta 2002: 5035). His seemingly incidental entry into politics came in 1925, when, on the advice of his admirers, he contested and won the election to the Punjab Legislative Council and remained a member of the Council till 1928. Thereafter, he presided over the Allahabad session of the All India Muslim League in 1930. In his presidential address, he advocated the idea of two separate administrative areas in India, one for Muslims and one for Hindus as a solution of the persisting differences between the two communities. His last political assignment happened to be his nomination as a delegate to the second and the third Round Table Conferences held in London to deliberate on the proposed constitutional reforms for India. The last few years of his life were spent under the shadow of deep sorrow caused by the death of his wife, followed by a long spell of bad health. He died on 21 April 1938 in Lahore after a brief illness. However, in surveying the main aspects of his life, and in a perceptible study on the social and political thought of Iqbal, the seemingly most intriguing as well as quite pertinent issue remains to be an analysis of the circumstances and events which led to the

total transformations in his intellectual frame from being a staunch nationalist having faith in the secular and composite cultural traditions of India to that of a parochial visionary eager to get the country partitioned to get a separate homeland for Muslims.

## **POLITICAL IDEAS OF IQBAL**

Being a poet at the core of his heart, Iqbal did not appear to be a political theorist articulating his political contemplation in a systematic and organised manner. Hence, much of the political ideas of Iqbal were articulated in his poems, in addition to the numerous lectures delivered by him at various times and in varying capacities. Moreover, in his poetic compositions and lectures, he did not seem to propound any profound theory or put forward an ideology. What he apparently did was to articulate his feelings and emotions enmeshed in abstract eulogy of certain things, persons or ideas, on the one hand, and formulation of some sort of probable responses to the issues and problems bothering the minds of the enlightened Indians of the time, on the other. Hence, at times, there appears some degree of inconsistency and contradictions in the ideas of Iqbal as they were articulated in a particular context and in response to a particular problem. Yet, the common theme which seemed to be pervading the main body of political thinking of Iqbal was his undying passion to bring about a subtle revival of the past glory and vibrancy of Islamic thought and action. It was this passion which eventually boiled down to calling for the creation of a separate state of Pakistan which could 'become a laboratory for revision and reconstruction of Islam as visualised by Iqbal' (Puri 2003: 492).

## **VIEWS ON NATIONALISM**

Reflecting the context-driven fluctuations in the political views of Iqbal, nationalism happens to be one such notion on which there appears to be a wide variation in his views over a period of time. Beginning his poetic forays as a believer in the personality of Mother India, Iqbal remained a fan of Indian nationalism till his

departure for Europe in 1905. However, owing to various influences of European ideas, notions and incidents, he developed a sort of new-found love for Islamic religion and people which paved the way for the shaping of ideas on the lines of pan-Islamism and turning him into a foe of the concept of territorial nationalism.

A perusal of the early poetries of Iqbal would not convince a person that he was the same Iqbal who vied for the partition of India on religious lines to create the state of Pakistan. Initially, Iqbal appeared as a poet of Indian nationalism, who would admire and preach innate cultural virtues, composite nature of the socio-religious life of the people and his exhortations of Hindu gods and incarnations as the ideal for all the people irrespective of their religion if they happened to be residents of India. In 1904, eulogising the notion of India in superlative terms, for example, *Sare Jahan se Achchha Hindustan Hamara* (India is the best in the whole world), Iqbal represented the voice of Indian nationalists who were bent upon decrying the British rule in India by highlighting the inherent creative properties of the country. In another poem, *Naya Shivala*, Iqbal was categorical in calling upon his countrymen to consolidate their affection for Indian-ness by shedding their parochial outlook based on primordial affinities and developing a broader perspective on the notion of India.

Iqbal's love for nationalism as reflected in his early poetic compositions dissipated once he started experiencing the nationalist, rationalist and secular view of life on the one hand, and the seemingly inimical policies of various European countries towards Muslims in certain parts of the world, on the other. Apparently sensing some sort of danger to Islam and its followers in various places across the globe, Iqbal turned to be a votary of pan-Islamism, claiming that China, Arabia and India are ours: 'We are Moslems, and the whole world is ours'. He started denouncing European values such as territorial nationalism, atheist socialism and secularism and condemned the proponents of these ideas. For instance, he chided Machiavelli for arguing for separation of politics from religion, calling him as messenger of Satan (Dar 1944: 254). Thus, the motivation for his strong anti-national feeling appeared to be rooted more in his fear of threat to pan-Islamism as it would render the whole idea of pan-Islamism redundant, rather than any subtle antipathy to political discourses in Europe.

Subsequently, Iqbal's critique of nationalism became quite scathing. To him, nationalism was a subtle form of idolatry (Iqbal 1961: 26). He argued that the idea of territorial nationalism betrays the innate unity among human being and absolves the pernicious distinctions of caste, creed, colour and economic status in society, thereby undermining the idea of an Islamic worldview. He, in fact, wrote that when he realised that the conception of nationalism based on the differences of race and country, was beginning to overshadow the world of Islam also and that Muslims were in danger of giving up the universality of their ideal in favour of narrow patriotism and false nationalism, he felt it his bounden duty to exhort them to be aware of the dangers of nationalism and try to get back to their ancient roots to reclaim the ground lost to others. Iqbal's apprehensions about the idea of nationalism also emanated from his perceived danger that it would divide Muslims in various parts of the world on numerous worldly grounds such as culture, race, territorial affinity, clan, tribe and political affection to one's motherland or fatherland. As Iqbal had started arguing for a pan-Islamic worldview, he was sure that the rise and consolidation of European brand of nationalism would definitely loosen the grip of the Islamic religion on people and hamper the realisation of some sort of spiritual and religious unity amongst Muslims in all parts of the world. Hence, he construed that the advocacy of the idea of nationalism was a ploy on the part of the imperialist countries to weaken Islam by ingraining the poison of nationalism, as it would destroy the innate fraternity amongst the Muslims all across the globe (Iqbal 1973: 204).

Finally, the demonising of nationalism at the hands of Iqbal was also prompted by the dynamics of the internal socio-cultural and political circumstances in the country. He appeared convinced that the fruition of the idea of a pan-Indian nationalism would inevitably accompany the emergence of pre-dominant position for Hindus in the country given the demographic composition of India. Such an eventuality would never have been acceptable to Iqbal as he had been arguing for the elevation of position of the Muslims as the people born to rule over the world having established a pan-Islamic world order. Thus, the critique of nationalism by Iqbal was factored by a number of both external as well as domestic factors, and the way out of the idea of nationalism seemed to the notion of pan-Islamism to Iqbal.

## PAN-ISLAMISM

Pan-Islamism, to Iqbal, was a comprehensive idea aimed at bringing about a sort of fraternity and unity amongst Muslims in various parts of the world irrespective of their geographical location. In place of territorial nationalism, he argued for the adoption of pan-Islamism as a humanitarian notion defying the barriers put up by irritants like race, caste, geography or other worldly barriers. As has been noted, 'Iqbal's passionate commitment to Islamic universalism, his notation of separate Muslim identity and citizenship and his complete disregard of territorial nationalism provide sound clue to an understanding of his political conduct' (Datta 2002: 5035). In fact, during the late 1920s, he delivered a series of lectures to put forward his opinion on the issue of universality of Islamic brotherhood and the need for the pan-Islamism in the world.

Providing an eloquent reinterpretation of the basic tenets of Islam, Iqbal tried to reorient the crux of Islam from being a religious faith of the people to a worldview of Muslim brotherhood. In such an order, people living in various parts of the world must feel liberated from primordial affinities and worldly restrictions to feel the common bond of Islam, so that they could become what Iqbal calls a unified *Millat*. He tried to profess a new perspective on Islam which would be in consonance with modern philosophy and science, on the one hand, and afford a growing accommodation to the people due to its inherent dynamism and flexibility, on the other. Indeed, there appears some sort of discrepancy in the interpretation of Islam by Iqbal as at one point of time he argued for going back to the classical notion of Islam while at another, he argued for a modernised, dynamic and accommodative nature of Islam. However, his later conceptualisation of Islam was ostensibly aimed at convincing people of the viability of Islam as the world order which can accommodate people all across the world irrespective of their territorial and biological differentiations.

The advocacy of pan-Islamism by Iqbal was based on his understanding of the essential unity amongst Muslims breaking out of the barriers of this world. As he wrote,

My real purpose is to look for a better social order and to present a universally acceptable ideal before the world, but it is impossible for me, in this effort, to outline this ideal, to ignore the social system and

values of Islam whose most important objective is to demolish all the artificial and pernicious distinctions of caste, creed, colour and economic status. Islam has opposed vehemently the idea of racial superiority which is the greatest obstacle in the way of international unity and cooperation; in fact, Islam and racial exclusiveness are utterly antithetical. (Iqbal 1973: 182)

Iqbal, thus, argued for pan-Islamism as the correct way to approach the problem of securing an accommodative and unifying social order in the world.

## **IDEAS ON PAKISTAN**

Iqbal's propagation of the idea of creating a separate homeland for Muslims, later on named as Pakistan, may be traced to his anxiety in securing the ascendance of Muslims in the world in general and in India, in particular. In his various speeches and lectures, Iqbal had lamented the loss of prime position of the Muslims in the country and sought to create a sort of enlightenment amongst them, so that they could aspire to regain the glory and lost status in the Indian society. However, the run of British colonialism in India presumably presented an ambivalent perspective for Iqbal, as it presented the immediate target of seeking the independence of the country from the yoke of colonialism. Moreover, his initial infatuation with the personality of the Mother India inspired Iqbal to write in praise of the composite culture and the ethno-religious unity of the country. Thus, in his early life despite being a votary of Islamic resurgence, Iqbal did not argue for the division of the country probably in the hope that Muslims would be given their due share of participation in the affairs of the country after independence.

The turnaround in the views of Iqbal on the political unity of India came during his stay in Europe where his experiences in seeing concerted efforts being made to demolish the elements of Islamic religion and culture made him sceptical of the well-being of Muslims in plural societies, including India. Indeed, Iqbal was so shocked at the ongoing intellectual and imperialist misadventures in Europe that he found no other means than to raise the bogey of pan-Islamism to counter the impending threats to Islam in certain

parts of the world. He was convinced of the need to have a common basis on which Muslims all over the world could be united in order to put up a brave front in the face of growing threat to Islamic culture and its followers. Hence, Iqbal adopted the twin strategy consisting of denouncing ideas like nationalism on the one hand, and advocating an alternative in the form of pan-Islamism, on the other. Iqbal's critique of western ideals such as secularism, unity in diversity and nationalism were attempts at negating the seemingly western value systems which foster divisions and cleavages in the society and try to keep people divided on those bases for longer durations. Iqbal noticed such tendencies on the part of the western countries as sinister designs to harm the interests of Muslims in various parts of the world.

Significantly, Iqbal did not call for the partition of the country as late as 1929, though he was aggressively pursuing the agenda of presenting Islam as a viable system of life which can accommodate people in various parts of the world on the basis of its innate humanitarian concerns. Moreover, in his lectures during this time, he presented a whole new perspective on Islam with a view to make a workable philosophy of life in modern times. He tried to establish the scientific nature of the precepts of Islam and called for its acceptance as a dynamic and flexible system which could adjust itself with the imperatives of the contemporary times (Iqbal 1930: 128). Thus, it seems that before putting forward his ideas on reorganisation of the country on religious and spatial grounds, Iqbal wanted to convince people of the viability of the Islamic order to be a successful alternative on which the various provinces of the country could be reorganised to create Muslim majority states.

Iqbal's first explicit reference to the reorganisation of India on religious basis came in the form of his presidential address delivered at Allahabad in April 1930 at the annual session of Muslim League. However, it is pertinent to note that in his quest for a separate homeland for Muslims, Iqbal's conceptualisation went only to the extent of seeking a reorganisation of the country, and not its partition, as it turned out to be the case in final analysis. He was quite harsh on the various statutory committees and commissions such as Nehru Committee and Simon Commission for denying Muslim their utmost right of having a separate homeland. He was particularly furious with the Nehru Committee report which had

rejected his demand for the creation of the 'consolidated North-West Indian Moslem state' on the ground of difficulties in the running of such an unwieldy state. He was quite categorical on the point that there was no future for Muslims in a united India as it existed at that point of time. The basic argument of Iqbal, thus, in Allahabad was that in order to secure for the Muslims the propitious circumstances in which they could develop themselves to the fullest of their abilities, they needed to have an autonomous predominantly Muslim province within the boundaries of united India.

In Iqbal's scheme of the reorganisation of certain parts of the country, the epicentre of such reorganisation would have to be the north-western part of the country. As he laid down,

[I] would like to see the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Self-government within the British Empire or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India. (Coupland 1945: 198)

Such a blueprint for the creation of a consolidated Muslim state in India appears to be the first concrete proposal advanced by the President of the Muslim League in the country despite demanding more and more autonomy and concentration of Muslims in certain parts of the country. The distinguishing point of this blueprint, however, appears to be its focus on securing a homeland for Muslims to manage their affairs within the geographical boundaries of India, and not separate from it.

Iqbal's proposal for the reorganisation of the political map of India, especially in the north-west region, did not amuse the leaders of various political parties, including the Muslim League, apart from people in general. His plea for the creation of a consolidated north-west India Muslim state within the federal setup of the country seemingly appeared less attractive to the different Muslim leaders, both from within and outside the Muslim League. Still, Iqbal stuck to his proposal in his speeches at the different Round Table Conferences and argued that the protection and promotion of the interests of Muslims could be possible only with the creation of a Muslim state as suggested by him. Later on, in his correspondences with Jinnah, Iqbal emphatically argued for his

intellectual and political support in securing a consolidated Muslim state in the country, so that the mass of Muslim populations did not fall prey to the vagaries of the majoritarianism of Hindus. He even called upon Jinnah to repudiate the 'aesthetic socialism' of Jawaharlal Nehru which tried to perceive the Muslim problem of Indian from an economic perspective.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in his last days, though Iqbal was not able to forcefully work for the creation of a consolidated Muslim state in India, his consistent position that the protection and promotion of the interests of Muslims in India could be ensured only through the implementation of his proposal, he remained the ideological inspiration behind the subsequent move for the creation of Pakistan as a separate state in the Indian subcontinent.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Arguably, Iqbal stands as a unique, though acutely controversial personality of undivided India. His uniqueness presumably lies in his superb quality in articulating his views in such superlative terms that what he says appears to be the final word on the subject. Moreover, his ideological persuasions in first glorifying Mother India and later arguing for its indirect vivisection on a parochial basis, present a bewildering view in the minds of the people as to how to conceptualise and assess his contribution or activities in the national movements of both India and Pakistan. For instance, his description of India as *Sare Jahan se Achchha Hindustan Hamara* seemingly remains the unparalleled eulogy of the motherland by any poet in the country since time immemorial. Similarly, his articulation of the Muslim problem and its probable solution in the country remained, by and large, the fundamental formulation over which Pakistan was created in 1947 to provide a separate homeland to Muslims in the region.

The varying perceptions regarding the life and thinking of Iqbal seemingly emanate from the absolute comprehension of his ideas by the people on both sides of the border without looking at the context and the circumstances in which his intellectual explorations underwent drastic transformations. In other words, Iqbal happens to be a poet-philosopher whose ideas and formulations could be understood only by keeping in mind the particular contexts and

circumstances in which such conceptualisations would have taken place. Therefore, if Iqbal's political philosophy is comprehended by people in absolute abstraction, he would remain an enigma for the people whether to call him a patriot or a communal thinker.

## NOTE

1. Iqbal's letter to Jinnah written on 20 March 1937 (Chopra 1985: 67).

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# 9 M.N. Roy

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To examine the circumstances leading to the transformation of M.N. Roy from Marxism to Radical Humanism.
- To assess Roy's critique of Gandhian thought and action.
- To describe Roy's ideas on Radical Humanism.

**I**nspired by revolutionary terrorism, Manvendra Nath Roy (1887–1954)<sup>1</sup> was politically baptised when he was entrusted with the task of receiving a German steamer carrying arms for the revolutionary terrorists. This 1914 attempt to smuggle arms in ships failed and the plan for an armed insurrection against the British was aborted. He tried again to procure arms from China and that also did not succeed. Inducted into the revolutionary terrorist movement in Bengal, Roy appeared to have endorsed the 'terrorist' methods in the nationalist campaign for freedom. This was however short-lived. As he himself realised, these revolutionary organisations were crushed and prevented 'from constituting any serious danger because they relied more upon conspiracies than upon revolutionary social forces' (Roy 1971: 210). Roy escaped to America where he was introduced to socialist ideas and later on he participated in the formation of the Communist Party of Mexico. It was his involvement in the Communist Party of Mexico which gave him an opportunity to participate in the Second Congress of the Communist International. In 1927, he redefined Lenin's draft thesis on the national and colonial question that immediately made him a celebrity in the political circle. While elaborating his views on national and colonial question, he argued,

[I]t will be necessary to examine which social class is the most revolutionary in the respective country so as to make the contact with this social class and in this manner to rally the entire people and to support it in its struggle against Imperialism. If we do not consider the problem from this viewpoint, we will make no headway at all.... The only way to fulfill the great task of [revolution] is through the organisation of the exploited classes to become the revolutionary