

## **Karl Marx and Allama Iqbal's Islamic Socialism: A Comparative Analysis**

- Ajaz Ahmad Lone

### **Abstract**

*Karl Henrich Marx and Allama Iqbal are the two most illustrious philosophers. In Javednama Iqbal generously praises Marx, giving him the highest status that a person could aspire to, short of prophethood. "He is not a prophet but he holds a book under his arm," says Iqbal about the author of Das Capital, which Iqbal calls the "bible of Socialism. Iqbal's tribute is well deserved. Marx's great life is permeated by boundless revolutionary optimism. He saw happiness as consisting in action and in struggle—a theme that resonates powerfully, as well, throughout Iqbal's poetry. He staked everything on the progressive change that history fosters. He believed that change to alleviate the misery of the toiling masses is worth fighting and dying for. Selfless, unflagging struggle to emancipate society and the toilers of the world—that is the sum and substance of Karl Marx, the greatest revolutionary philosopher of the world. The paper will focus on the general thought of Marx and Marx's influence on Iqbal. The paper will also focus on the relevance of Karl Marx in the contemporary world where capitalism is failed entity*

*Key Words: Marx, Iqbal, Das Capital, Javid Nama, revolutionary, contemporary, Prophet-Hood.*

### **Introduction**

Karl Marx (1818-1883), a German philosopher and economist is often considered as the father of socialism. Socialism emerged as an ideology just before the turn of the eighteenth century. It developed as a protest against the exploitation of workers and of other ordinary people that was common to capitalism. The Industrial revolution, which was made possible by use of the scientific method, had given people a new framework for thought. It also brought mechanized production and replaced human or animal energy with steam. Yet, as machines and energy sources became more sophisticated, the costs of mass production exceeded the resources of the individual. Consequently, cottage industries were replaced by the factory system. Family ownership of Industry was eventually displaced by stock market investors and professional managers. Each of these developments removed ownership from production and estranged the owners from the workers. The political oppression and economic exploitation, together with the social evils that accompanied them, were decried by Karl Marx. He demanded that they be replaced by a system that treated people justly and humanely.

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Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877 - 1938) was one of the most illustrious poet-philosophers of contemporary Urdu literature and Islam who was later adopted by Pakistan as national poet. Iqbal has written many worthy and thought provoking poems about Karl Marx and was influenced by his thought. Before we proceed further to discuss the views of Iqbal, let us have some idea about Marx and Marxism, Communism and Socialism etc. After the Industrial revolution in Europe, the hydra-headed monster of Capitalism threatened the lives of the poor and thus a social change became incumbent. Karl Marx who came forward with a new gospel called Das Kapital (The Capital) was the son of a German Jewish lawyer who became a Christian. However, we once again return to Iqbal and many of his poetical works testify to his sincere interest in the movement and principles of socialism. He was attracted by mankind. But, as Iqbal was opposed to a materialistic view of the world, he didn't believe in the materialistic interpretation of the modern socialism of the west, rather, he was sympathetic to the spiritual socialism akin to Islam. Iqbal had the great respect for the founder of modern socialism, Karl Marx. He addressed Marx as the prophet and founder of a new social order founded on the equality of all the people, and in his 'Das Capital' Iqbal saw a kind of religious book in which are contained the principles of a new and just social order. To him, in Marx's teachings, there is an unconscious, hidden truth, i.e., the Islamic principles of equality of all people before God-a truth hidden there despite the fact that Marx's social system is materialistic and Marx did not acknowledge God. Apart from Marx's Godlessness and irreligiousness, Iqbal referred to Marx as a prophet with an angel. As in his book *Javid Nama*, Iqbal spoke of him:

*“The author of ‘capital’ comes of the tribe of Abraham,  
He is a prophet, without Gabriel.  
For, in his error there is a hidden truth,  
With the heart he is a Fidel, with the brain a heretic.  
The people of the west have lost the heaven,  
They seek the pure spirit (soul) in the stomach.  
The pure spirit does not receive colour and fragrance from the body,  
But socialism has no concern other than with the body.  
The religion of this prophet who does not know the truth,  
Is founded on the equality of stomach”*

Marxian socialism begins with the simple observation that in order to survive, man must produce food and material objects. In doing so he enters into social relationship with other men. From the simple hunting to the complex industrial state, production is a social enterprise. Production also involves a technical component by known as the forces of production which includes the technology, raw materials and scientific knowledge employed in the process of production. Each major stage in the development of the forces of production will correspond with a particular form of the social relationship of production. Marx saw history as divided into a number of time periods or epochs. Each being characterised by a particular mode of production, Major changes in history are the result of new forces of production. The key to understanding society from a Marxian socialism involves an analysis of the infrastructure. In all historical societies there are basic contradictions between the forces and relations of production and there are fundamental conflicts of interest between the social groups involved in the production process. In particular, the relationship between the major social groups is one of exploitation and oppression. The superstructure derives largely from the infrastructure and therefore reproduces the social relationships of production. It will thus reflect the interests of the dominant group in the relations of production. Ruling class ideology distorts the true nature of society and serves to legitimate and justify the status quo. However the contradiction in the infrastructure will eventually lead to a disintegration of the system and the creation of a new society.

From the Marxian point of view, in all stratified societies there are two major social groups; a rich class and a poor class, or the Haves and Have-nots; or a ruling class and subject class. The key to understanding a given society is to discover which the dominant mode of production within it. All the other relations stem out of it. From a Marxian view, a class is a social group where members share the same relationships to the forces of production. Thus during the feudal stage, there are two main classes distinguished by their relationship to land, the major force of production. They are the, (feudal nobility) who own the land and, (landless serfs) who work in the land. Similarly, in the capitalist stage, there are two main classes, the bourgeoisie or capitalist class which owns the forces of production and the proletariat or working class whose members own only their labour which they hire to the capitalists in return for wages.

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relations of production and there are fundamental conflicts of interest between the social groups involved in the production process. In particular, the relationship between the major social groups is one of exploitation and oppression. The superstructure derives largely from the infrastructure and therefore reproduces the social relationships of production. It will thus reflect the interests of the dominant group in the relations of production. Ruling class ideology distorts the true nature of society serves to legitimate and justify the status quo. However the contradiction in the infrastructure will eventually lead to a disintegration of the system and the creation of a new society.

The communist society which Marx predicted would arise from the ruins of capitalism will begin with a transitional phase, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Once the communist system has been fully established, the reason for being of the dictatorship and therefore its existence will end. Bourgeois society represents the closing chapter of the prehistoric stage of human society. The communist society of the new era is without contradictions. The dialectical principle now ceases to operate. The contradictions of human history have now been negated in a final harmonious synthesis.

Iqbal was opposed to a materialistic view of Karl Marx, he did not believe in the materialistic interpretation of the modern socialism of the west; rather, he was sympathetic to the spiritual socialism akin to Islam. However, his interest in the socialist movement of Bolshevik Russia was immense, because he regarded it as a storm that swept away all the foul airs in the atmosphere. He was, perhaps, the first Urdu poet of Asia to greet the victory of the great October socialist Revolution in Russia. When soviet power was installed in Russia, Iqbal wrote an Urdu poem under the caption: “*Sarmaya wa Mehnat*” (capital and labour). In this poem he exhorted the working people of the east and the west, with the dawn of a new social order, to follow the soviet revolution and cut off the chains of capitalism.

Thus Iqbal gave a clarion call to the workers of the world to get a lesson from the Great October Revolution of 1917 of the soviet Russia. Iqbal’s sympathy for the socialist revolution might have been due to his utter dislike for social injustice and economic exploitation of mankind. Iqbal would welcome a revolution in which the do-nothing absentee landlord, or the various money-lenders, is swept away. On the contrary, Iqbal’s thought is wholly permeated with the concept of the spiritual nature of the universe and the positive social philosophy and ethical ideology of Islam. Although the family is the basic unit of the Islamic social order, the moral and social injections of Islam are such that they unite all

believers into a fraternity in which everyone is solicitous of the well-being of all, despite the existence of economic disparities. Instead of class-war, Iqbal preaches the principles of equality and solidarity in a social system in which the holder of legitimately acquired wealth is the trustee of all that exceeds his own requirements, for the benefit of his less favoured fellow-men. Islam, according to Iqbal, visualizes a democratic fraternity of dignified individuals, conscious of divine guidance and a centralized welfare organization, with sufficient scope for individual initiative in thought and action, subject to the limits imposed by the Islamic shariah. The institutions of interest-free loans are an index of the fraternal solicitude of members of the community for one another. There is to be complete equality of opportunity and equality before the law; the head of the Muslim state is as much subservient to the dictates of God's law as the lowest individual in the social scale. All human beings will be accountable for their mundane action in the hereafter. The maintenance of the disabled, the sick and the indigent, who in spite of effort are unable to earn their livelihood, and the education for the young, become the collective responsibility of the community in the social order of Islam. Thus Iqbal's approach to the doctrine of socialism is wholly moral and, in the highest sense, is spiritual and idealistic.

The only thing Iqbal shares with the communist's doctrine of socialism are its outright condemnation of laissez-faire capitalism. He, however, advocates the golden mean of Islam which maintains the necessary balance between capitalism and socialism. The dialectic that is contemplated in his system of thought is the dialectic of love rather than of hate and strife. On the one hand, this dialectical process enables man to assimilate the world of matter with a view to conquer it, on the other, it provides the human individual with a scope for progress to the exalted level of absorbing Divine attributes, by ever fresh creation of desires and ideals in the spiritual sphere.

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