

Social Philosophy of Allama Muhammad Iqbal: Views on *Ummah* and Islamic Society

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Introduction

Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) belonged to the age of early twentieth century. He had a profound insight into the holy Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and had delved deep into the Western thought. His Islamic knowledge and his study of philosophy in the West equipped him with a good access to the sources of both Islam and Western modernism. His approach to Islam is thus on broader basis than that of the traditional theologians and the Western educated Muslims. Iqbal's later poetry particularly poetical works in Persian and the lectures, entitled "*The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*" testifies to his objective and dynamics. Keeping this in view, this paper discusses the Social Philosophy of Allama Muhammad Iqbal, with a special focus on his views on *Ummah* and Islamic Society.

Iqbal's Views on the Concept of *Ummah*

The term *Ummah*, frequently interpreted as "Muslim community", designates a basic concept in Islam. The Qur'anic concept of *Ummah*, occurring sixty four times in Quran, mostly designates a people to whom a Prophet was sent by God or a people who are objects of a divine plan of salvation. According to these analyses, the term *Ummah* refers to a single group sharing commonly religious orientation.¹ As Community is generally defined as a group of people organized together in a space-time, so the Islamic community is one where its members share Islamic principles and duties in common. It is different from 'nationality' in the western sense of the term because it is against the territorial boundaries.²

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The Qur'anic words for Islamic community are '*ummah*' and '*millah*'. Following verse of the Quran bear the wide and comprehensive nature of Islamic community, "Let there be of you an ummah which calls for the good, enjoins the good workers and prohibits the works of evil. Those are truly felicitous."³

Society is an association of individuals. But it is not a mere assemblage of individuals. It is like an organic whole. In an organic body, the part and the whole cannot remain separate from one another. The individual and society cannot remain separate from one another. Individuals and society act and react upon each other. A society is strong only if its individuals are strong, and the individuals are weakened if the society declines. While it is essential that one has to develop his individual ego, he has also to create in himself a social awareness. Man is a social animal. A proper relation between individual and society has to be established for the fruitful achievement of both.⁴ To develop personality is not to cut one's relation with social affairs. Rather it is the duty of an individual to enrich the society by the wealth of his thoughts and actions otherwise his individual existence is worthless and meaningless. To Iqbal, an individual should not even refrain from any sacrifice if the society gains something from it. A Muslim is not a true Muslim apart from the Islamic Society. In Islam there is no gap between the spiritual and social order.⁵

According to Iqbal "Islam is non-territorial in character, and its aim is to furnish a model for the final combination of humanity".⁶ This community is of unique character in terms of its good and felicity and has its heritage in the past traditions of Prophets. Iqbal's use of '*millah*' in his Urdu and Persian poetical works and 'community' in his English writings is in this Qur'anic sense.

On the basis of this Qur'anic version Iqbal develops his theory of Islamic community in logical and systematic manner and exposes its dynamics both to psychological and moral spheres of life for the actualization of the will of God.

Iqbal believes in the universality of the *Ummah* (Muslim community) and is of the view that the body and soul of the *Ummah* are composed of a belief in the unity of God, and this very unity is the basis of the affinity of thought among Muslims. In similar manner *Risalat* (Prophethood) creates a spirit of oneness among the Muslims. It is because the Muslims received the message of God and the mission of life through the Prophet. In the view of Iqbal the commonness and solidarity of the Muslim

Ummah depends on Prophethood and that millions of Believers are joined together into one religion because of the Prophet. The whole Muslim *Ummah* draws inspiration from him.⁷

The main result of *Tawhid* and *Risalat* is that the *Ummah* is not circumscribed by territorial limitations. A Muslim does not belong to India, Rome, or Syria. His destiny is Islam; in other words, the *Ummah* demands unity of hearts and belief rather than that of race or territory.⁸

This shows that Iqbal's concept of *Ummah* is a universal community of Believers, crossing all barriers of caste, colour, race, nationality and territory.

According to Iqbal, the community is an entity whose functions and activities are motivated by power and a spirit of triumph. The unity acquired through the emergence of several individuals gives the community a unique personality of its own.⁹ Iqbal's theory of *Ummah* owes much to his concept of ego (self). Ego to Iqbal is the awareness of the individual about his own position and potentialities.¹⁰ According to him, a nation also has its Ego, which has all the attributes of the individual Ego. Vigour, force, power, determination, will to rise and move forward, and courage to fight, are the characteristics of the collective Ego of the community. Iqbal has drawn a graphic picture of the Muslim community in his famous poem entitled *Shikwa* (Complaint). In this poem he states that the Muslim *Ummah* at the time when it was endowed with a sense of purpose and spirit of triumph, during this period, though small in number, the Muslims fought with power and vigour to spread the message of God. They never hesitated to shed their blood provided the cause was righteous and the mission devoid of all ulterior motives.¹¹

Iqbal put forward ideals and the principles of Muslim *Ummah* with full efficacy in his poetical and prose works. In the eye of Iqbal, *Tawhid* (oneness of God), *Risalah* (prophethood) and *Akhuwah* (brotherhood) are the foundational principles of Muslim ummah.

Regarding *Tawhid*, Iqbal means stickness to the belief in one God (Allah), single value, single truth and moving forward to this single Divine goal. *Tawhid*, states Iqbal, is the fundamental principle that unites Muslims in a single community where they can have a proper and full expression of their divinely conscious life. Firm

faith in *Tawhid* transforms uniformity in both thought and deeds of the members of the community.¹² The following verse of the Quran refers to this ideal of the community: “Truly, this your *Ummah* is one religion, and I am your Lord, therefore worship Me.”¹³

According to Iqbal, *Tawhid* is the basic and fundamental principle that unites the entire Islamic world. Iqbal’s second basic guiding principle of Muslim *ummah* is *Risalah* (Prophethood). Iqbal had a firm conviction in *Risalah*.¹⁴ Iqbal views that it is an important duty to illustrate the truth and the validity of prophethood and its finality in the raising of Prophet Muhammad.¹⁵ Iqbal was against the materialistic ideals of the secular community, based on country, race and language and stands for *Tawhid* preached by Prophet Muhammad and considers it the solid and valid fabric of Islamic community.¹⁶

Iqbal considers the basis of Muslim *Ummah* in the adherence to Prophet Muhammad by stating:

“The essential difference between the Muslim community and other communities of the world consists in our peculiar conception of nationality. It is not the unity of language or country or the identity of economic interest that constitutes the basic principle of our nationality. It is because we all believe in a certain view of the universe, and participate in the same historical tradition that we are members of the society founded by the Prophet of Islam. Islam abhors all material limitations, and bases its nationality on a purely abstract idea, objectified in a potentially expansive group of concrete personalities. It is not dependent for its life principle on the character and genuine of a particular people, in its essence it is non-temporal, non-spatial”.¹⁷

Another basic and important principle of Muslim *Ummah* is *Akhuwah* (Brotherhood). Humankind, an entity of interrelationships and the Islam’s guidance, is of full significance in this domain. *Akhuwah* (Brotherhood) is thus taught to make firmer equality, peace and harmony in the world. It teaches love and brotherhood among believers and is sought to realize the God’s will in all spheres of life harmoniously. *Akhuwah* does not teach material dominance and pride of one over the

other Muslim. In terms of faith and moral obligations the whole Muslim world is interrelated.¹⁸ This ideal of *Akhuwah* is repeatedly propounded in the writings of Iqbal both in poetry and prose.

Iqbal states in this regard in the following verse:

This is the destiny of nature; this is the secret of Islam;
 World-wide brotherhood and abundance of love;
 Break the idols of colour and blood and become lost in the
 community;
 Let neither Turanians, nor Iranians nor do Afghans remain.¹⁹

Iqbal talks of this ideal dynamically and vigorously. In his “Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal”, he states:

“Islam is a unity in which there is no distinction, and this unity is secured by making men believe in two simple propositions – the unity of God and the mission of the Prophet propositions which are certainly of supernatural character but which, based as they are on the general religious experience of mankind, are intensely true to average human nature. Now this principle of equality of all believers made early Musalmans the greatest political power in the world. Islam worked as a living force; it gave the individual a sense of his inward power; it elevated those who were socially low”.²⁰

Finally, it can be said that, the sort of society which Islam preaches and which Iqbal wants to expound in his writings, we find it to be quite different in its ideal from any other society in the world. The aim which the Islamic society has in view is not the propagation of learning, or the preservation of peace or the consideration of means for the increase of wealth, power or fame; but something above all these, something higher and nobler in quality and to which all these aims may be subordinated. It is the propagation of true religion in the world. It is this ideal which unites all its members. This ideal is the most universal and includes within it all other ideals which can be

useful for a group of people. This is, in short, the fountain head of all benefits. In this law lies the peculiarity of Islam.²¹

Conclusion

Iqbal was a firm believer in religion without which the social system cannot work properly. That is why he focussed his efforts on the revival of Islam and the protection of Islamic society. He believed Islam to be the most valuable contribution to world thought. Islamic society has a permanent element in its structure of thought, such as the unity of God, the finality of Prophethood, the sharia't, the Islamic code of law and Akhuwah, (Brotherhood). To Iqbal, the stable character of a society directly depends upon the essential regard for the ultimate realities that govern life. From the above assessment of Iqbal's views it can be said that Iqbal defines *Tawhid*, *Risalah*, and *Akhuwah* as the foundational and basic principles of *Ummah* (Muslim community). For him, if a community deviates from any of these principles, it will deviate from the actual goals.

Thus, Iqbal was the most dynamic scholar-philosopher of the twentieth century, who gave many valuable ideas and vehemently emphasized that Muslims should hold fast to the teachings of the Qur'an in order to progress in life.

References/Endnotes:

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² Abdur Rashid Bhat, *Iqbal's Approach to Islam : A Study*, Islamic Book Foundation, New Delhi, 1996, p. 84

³ *The Holy Quran*, 3: 14

⁴ S.E. Ashraf, *A Critical Exposition of Iqbal's Philosophy*, Associated Book Agency Patna, 1978, p.145

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146

⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, London, Oxford University Press, 1934, p. 158

⁷ Iqbal, *Asrar-o-Rumuz*, Kutub Khana Naziriya, Delhi, 1971, pp. 92-93

ان کوشاں اوست یقیدی من یلید
 از رسالت حائز گرد ما کشیدو
 این گہرا زحر بے پایان اوست
 ما کہ یکا یثیم از احسان اوست

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 102

⁹ S.A.V. Moeeni, *Maqalat-i-Iqbal*, Lahore, 1963, p. 118

¹⁰ Bhat, *op.cit.*, p. 85

¹¹ Iqbal, *Bang-i-Dara*, Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1975, p. 165

نقش تو حید کا ہر دل پہ بٹھایا، م نے
 زیرِ خنجر بھی یہ پیغام سنایا، م نے

¹² Bhat, *op.cit.*, p. 87

¹³ *The Holy Quran*, 21: 92

¹⁴ Bhat, *op.cit.*, p. 90

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93-94

¹⁷ Latif Ahmad Sherwnai, *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, New Delhi, 2008, p. 121

¹⁸ Bhat, *op.cit.*, p. 95

¹⁹ D. J. Mathews, *Iqbal: A Selection of the Urdu Verse, Text and Translation*, New Delhi, 1993, p. 78-79

یہی مقصود و فطرت ہے یہی رمزِ مسلمان
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 تان رنگ و خون کو تو ذکرِ ملت میں گم ہو جا
 نہ تو رانی رہے باقی، نہ ایرانی، نہ افغانی

²⁰ Sherwani, *op.cit.*, p. 116

²¹ Bashir Ahmad Dar, *Iqbal's Philosophy of Society*, Lahore, 1944, p. 37-38