

Iqbal's Culture of Islam

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It is customary to divide Allama Iqbal's career into three phases. The first phase, which ended in 1905, was a period when the young poet strove to teach the bitterly divided people of India the lesson of love and faith. He addressed not only those who defiled his homeland with religious and communal bickering, but also the children who were its future citizens.

In the second phase, which lasted from 1905-1908 and coincided with Iqbal's stay in Europe, his focus shifted from the issue of sectarian conflict in India to serious reflection about the nature of the Islamic "*millat*." The reason underlying this shift was his growing realization that his universal vision could only be actualized by a "like-minded" homogeneous group which was "non-temporal, non-spatial." He believed that in essence, the Islamic "*millat*" possessed these characteristics.

In the third phase, which lasted from 1908 onwards, Iqbal wrote much on this subject, emphasizing the universalism which he believed was implicit in Islam. Ironically, this made him open to attacks such as the one made by the Cambridge Professor Lowes Dickinson, who, while reviewing Iqbal's *Asrar-e-Khudi* said: "Thus, while Mr. Iqbal's philosophy is universal, his application of it is particular and exclusive. Only Muslims are worthy of the Kingdom. The rest of the world is either to be absorbed or excluded." Denying this allegation categorically and strongly, Iqbal said:

The humanitarian ideal is always universal in poetry and philosophy, but if you make it an effective ideal and work it out in actual life you must start, not with poets and philosophers, but with a society exclusive in the sense of having a creed and well-defined outline, but ever-enlarging its limits by example and persuasion. Such a society according to my belief is Islam. This society has so far proved itself a more successful opponent of the race-idea which is probably the hardest barrier in the way of

the humanitarian ideal ... it is in view of practical and not patriotic considerations ... that I was compelled to start with a specific society (for example, Islam), which, among the societies of the world, happens to be the only one suitable to my purpose. All men and not Muslims alone are meant for the Kingdom of God on earth, provided they say goodbye to their idols of race and nationality and treat one another as personalities. The object of my Persian poems is not to make out a case for Islam: my aim is simply to discover a universal social reconstruction, and in this endeavour, I find it philosophically impossible to ignore a social system which exists with the express object of doing away with all the distinctions of caste, rank and race.

Iqbal saw no conflict between his commitment to Islam and his universal ideals because to him Islam was universal in essence. For him, "the ideal nation does already exist in germ" but the germ has to grow. The seed needs air and sunshine in order to develop, and the individual needs the social security provided by the community. In his view, "Muslim society, with its remarkable homogeneity and inner unity, has grown to be what it is under the pressure of the laws and institutions associated with 'the culture of Islam'." Here, it is important to note that the expression "the culture of Islam" was not used by Iqbal to refer to the cultural practices of Muslims in India or elsewhere but to the value-system implicit in the normative teachings of Islam.

Iqbal believed that in order to become "a living member of the Muslim community," a person "must thoroughly assimilate the culture of Islam. The object of the assimilation is to create a uniform mental outlook, a peculiar way of looking at the world, a certain standpoint from where to judge the value of things which sharply defines our community, and transforms it into a corporate individual giving it a definite purpose and ideal of its own."

Iqbal had become convinced that the Muslim community in India had been able to survive only through the preservation of the culture of Islam. How strongly he felt about the preservation of cultural identity can be seen from the following statement: "That

which really matters is a man's faith, his culture, his historical tradition. These are the things which in my eyes, are worth living for and dying for, and not the piece of earth with which the spirit of man happens to be temporarily associated." In a letter to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Iqbal said, "It is absolutely necessary to tell the world both inside and outside India that the economic problem is not the only problem in this country. From the Muslim point of view, the cultural problem is of much greater consequence to most Indian Muslims." In another letter, which Iqbal wrote to Jinnah a year before his death, he said, "the enforcement and development of the *shari'at* of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim state or states." This realization inevitably led to another one: "The life of Islam as a cultural force in this country depends on its centralization in a specified territory."

What would Pakistan have meant to Iqbal had he been alive in 1947? He would have seen it as a successful culmination of the historic struggle spearheaded by the Aligarh movement to preserve the rights of Indian Muslims as a "nation." But - more importantly - he would have seen Pakistan as a model environment in which "the culture of Islam" which he understood as the highest ethical values of Islam, could be actualized to the fullest degree.

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