

# **The Development of Political Philosophy**

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Iqbal's eminence as a poet has been acknowledged; however, his status as a philosopher is a controversial matter. An important reason for this controversy is that Iqbal's thought has been studied in parts but not as a whole. In order to appreciate a work, whether political or philosophical, it is necessary to analyze the elements that compose the whole; moreover, one must consider the relation of the parts to each other and to the whole. Iqbal's ideas have been divided into fragments but the elements have not been synthesized.

This has resulted in the general impression that Iqbal had certain ideas of philosophical significance, but that these ideas do not form a system. It is important to understand the underlying pattern of Iqbal's thinking and the nature of his vision, for only then is one able to understand the true significance of his ideas.

Concerning his political philosophy, Iqbal is often accused of inconsistencies and contradictions. This accusation is largely the result either of regarding Iqbal's general philosophy as arising from his political philosophy or of studying his political philosophy in isolation from his general philosophy. Actually, Iqbal's political philosophy is an integral part of his general philosophy and is best understood if studied with reference to the wider whole.

What is known as Iqbal's political philosophy is usually based on his writings from 1908 to 1938. However, in order to understand the continuity of his thinking it is necessary to pay considerable attention to the two earlier phases of Iqbal's poetic career, that is, from 1895 to 1905 and from 1905 to 1908. (Most of the poems written during these two periods are found in Parts I and II of *Bang-i-Dara* [The Call of the Highway] first published in September 1924; therefore, special mention will be made of this volume in the earlier part of this study.)

## **DISTINCTION BETWEEN PATRIOTIC AND NATIONALISTIC POETRY**

Iqbal's pre-1905 poetry is often described as nationalistic. It is necessary, however, to differentiate between patriotic and nationalistic verses because the latter implies an awareness of, and an involvement with, political theory or practice which may be entirely absent from the former. "Patriotism is a perfectly natural virtue and has a place in the moral life of man,"<sup>1</sup> wrote Iqbal, and he himself never lacked this virtue.

*Himala*, the first poem in *Bang-i-Dara* and a hymn of the magnificence and grandeur of the tallest mountain range in the world, is patriotic: it was inspired by the beauty of the land of his birth. Like *Himala* (The Home of Snow), Iqbal's other "patriotic" poems are buoyant and heart-lifting. The fire that raged within him left on his poetry the stamp of Miltonic restlessness. There are, amongst the vast bulk of Iqbal's writings, only a few poems which impart a feeling of peace and joy. These poems reflect those moments when the poet sought an escape from the ravages of his soul in thoughts of love and sensuous beauty.

That Iqbal the poet was a patriot there is no doubt. That he remained a patriot is sometimes forgotten. H. L. Chopra, an Indian scholar, has truly said: "Iqbal sprang up in the realm of Indian poetry as a bard of India and even after so many vicissitudes in his career when he left this earth on 21st April, 1938 he remained a truly patriotic poet of India."<sup>2</sup> But it must be kept in mind that patriotism is not the same thing as nationalism.

### **PRE-1905 POLITICAL POETRY: THE TEMPLE OF LOVE**

The two things which stand foremost in Iqbal's pre-1905 political poetry are: (1) his desire to see a self-governing and united India – a country free of both alien domination and inner dissension, in particular the Hindu-Muslim conflict; and (2) his constant endeavor to draw attention to those factors of decadence which caused the decline of the Muslims in India.

The political poems in the first part of *Bang-i-Dara* indicate that Iqbal suffered more on account of the factions which divided the Indian people than the imperialistic yoke imposed on his countrymen. One reason for this was, no doubt, the feeling that until the people of India could resolve their differences and come to terms with each other, the ideal of sovereign rule for India would remain a dream. But as will be explained later, there was another reason – one far more fundamental – for Iqbal's passionate nationalism, which found its expression in poetic outbursts that resounded throughout India.

Iqbal the young poet was deeply disturbed by the discord and distrust between Hindus and Muslims which he saw all around him. With his usual eloquence he cried out against the forces of disruption. No one was spared; the *Mulla* and the *Brahman* were criticized equally. He maintained that from their gods they learned only hatred and hostility ("You think in idols carved of stone there is divinity") and professed allegiance to a faith other than theirs ("Each particle of my country's dust is as a god to me").

The poet adored his country, but its places of worship were defiled by hatred; hence he believed a new temple, a sanctuary of love, had to be built wherein all could

worship. In *Naya Shiwala* (New Temple) the poet addresses the keepers of the temple and the mosque:

Come, let us lift the curtain of Apartness once again,  
Unite once more the parted ones, erase duality's stain.  
Since a long time heart's habitat has been so desolate,  
O Come, a temple new, in this land, let us elevate.<sup>3</sup>

Although the theme of this poem recurs in Iqbal's early verses, it is unique because it gives a message of universal love not in general terms as it appears elsewhere in Iqbal's poetry, but in specifically Hindu vocabulary. This poem was a direct appeal to the Hindus, and its terminology indicates the poet's sincere desire to establish intellectual communication and spiritual rapport between Hindus and Muslims.

In *Taswir-i-Dard* (Portrait of Anguish), the poet cries for Hindustan whose people are lost "in tales of ancient days" and do not indulge even in "the joys of complaint." The poet expresses his own determination "to string together the separated beads of the rosary," the religious association of the image making it more effective. In the name of an all-embracing principle of human love, the poet urges his compatriots to transcend cultural and religious boundaries, attaining true freedom:

In Love is hidden Liberty, if only you could see  
And bondage is discrimination between you and me.<sup>4</sup>

Iqbal did not minimize the difficulty of eliminating bias. He admired natural phenomena for their "impartiality"; nature's beauty entertained one and all. The poet was conscious, however, of his own limitations. To the shama' (the candle), he said wistfully:

In the Ka'bah and the house of idols, your glow is the same,  
But in differences of mosque and temple lost I am.

And to his compatriots he said unequivocally:

People of India, if you do not learn, you'll be no more.<sup>5</sup>

The message of the poet for the people of India was that of love and faith. Many years later, when discussing the problems of India, Iqbal wrote: "It is, and has always been, a question of faith. Our faith too depends on affection and understanding. What we need for a swift solution of the political problem of India is faith."<sup>6</sup> This message of love and faith must be kept in mind because Iqbal's political philosophy is an integral part of his total commitment, and to regard his words as possessing merely political significance

is to elude the core of his thought.

A number of poems for children were obviously written with India's political situation in mind. *Parinde ke Faryad* (The Bird's Lament), the longing of a caged bird for the freedom of the skies and its nest, bears reference to the greater bondage and deeper yearnings for liberty of a whole subcontinent. The vision of *Hindustani Bachon Ka Qawmi Git* (National Anthem of Indian Children) is again one of universal love, peace, and good will. The poet wished to create in little children the feeling that to live in India was to lead "a heavenly life," and that they must "adorn my country as a flower adorns a garden." Iqbal's *Tarana-i Hindi* (The Song of India) became the unofficial national anthem of India.<sup>7</sup> According to one Indian writer, it "remains to this day the best patriotic poem written by any Indian poet in modern times. It comes nearest, in fact, to a truly non-communal national anthem of India."<sup>8</sup> The message it contained said nothing new, but perhaps the words were more explicit than they had been before:

Religion does not teach us mutual belligerency,  
We are the people of India, and India is our country.

Perhaps it was the tragedy of Iqbal's youth that the India-mother-of-all myth exploded before the children who sang his songs and grew to manhood. Disillusionment came, as it must when the idealism of youth is touched by the coldness of reality. But, as Keats had clung to the principle of beauty even as sickness and sorrow consumed his mortal self although the tune of his melody became more solemn as the ease of the first fresh notes of his singing became burdened with experience.

Iqbal, so concerned about the fate of India, was, naturally enough, concerned about the plight of his coreligionists. He participated in the activities of the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam (Society for the Support of Islam), an organization in Lahore which did much to disseminate modern Western education among the Muslims. At the annual meetings of the Anjuman Iqbal read several poems expressing eloquently the sorrows and aspirations of the Muslims. (For detailed information about these poems, see pages 16-17.) It is important to keep this in mind because it is sometimes assumed that in the first phase of his poetic career Iqbal's thought was exclusively nationalistic and that he was not particularly concerned about the Muslims. Even in this phase, however, Iqbal shared with the Indian Muslims their feelings of desolation at finding themselves faced both with political bondage and spiritual and economic poverty. He felt very deeply that Islam as he saw it practiced was not as it was meant to be. He protested against those who failed to understand or deliberately distorted the true spirit of Islam. His protest was to continue all his life.

It is difficult to say that before 1905 Iqbal had a definite philosophy. But an

analysis of his early poems reveals in embryo most of the ideas which later played a prominent part in the system of his thought. For instance, one finds the idea that the development of the individual depends on his capacity for purposeful action. The destiny of a nation too depends on action:

‘Tis Divinity’s decree and Creation’s mode –  
Who walks along the path of Action is by Nature loved.<sup>9</sup>

“Action is the highest form of contemplation,”<sup>10</sup> Iqbal wrote in 1925, but he knew this truth a long time before. He knew it, in fact, before the active West had sharpened his awareness of the consequences of unpreparedness and unwillingness or inability to act when action was required. Perhaps he learned to believe in action from the Qur’an, which “emphasizes ‘deed’ rather than ‘idea’.”<sup>11</sup> But it is more likely that his love for action sprang from his particular disposition and that it was strengthened rather than induced by his religious faith.

Another interesting idea in Iqbal’s early verse is that religion does not demand that a man neglect his material needs. In *Din-o-Dunya* (Religion and World) Iqbal states that in fact “religion is the guardian of the material world.” In another poem, the spirit of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan tells the poet:

To teach religion in the world, if this be your aim,  
Do not teach your nation that the world they should disclaim.<sup>12</sup>

This is the foreshadowing of the idea which later became one of the pivots of his political philosophy – that the spiritual and temporal aspects of human life, far from being mutually exclusive, were organically related to each other, and that there was no need to bifurcate the unity of individual and collective life into the domains of church and state.

*The Temple of Love* may be said to symbolize the first phase of Iqbal’s poetic career. E. M. Forster has misunderstood the vision enshrined in this symbol. He described the new temple as “the Temple of India” and observed: “The glory of the courtyard from Mecca shall inhabit that temple; the image on its shrine shall be gold, inscribed Hindustan, shall wear both the Brahman thread and the Muslim rosary, and the *Muezzin* shall call worshippers to prayer upon a horn.”<sup>13</sup> The new temple is in India, but it is not of India. Nor is it conceived by Iqbal as heralding the advent of a new faith containing elements of Hinduism and Islam. Such a faith could not create an organic unity and might very well have destroyed the distinct identity of either faith. The temple is raised to love, which transcends the images in which it is expressed.

### **1905-1908: SOJOURN IN EUROPE**

Also, it is asserted that Iqbal's thinking was completely changed by his contact with Western civilization. This is hardly true; Europe crystallized rather than fundamentally altered his thinking. Coming face to face with a society so different from his own, he had the opportunity to compare the modes of living and the systems of values he saw in the East and the West. No longer was it sufficient for him to believe instinctively or vaguely in the reality or validity of a certain world order. He had to develop a rational basis for his beliefs. The spontaneous outpourings of his verse had to give way to poetry based on considered judgments. In his future work he was to guard against what T. S. Eliot has called the "dissociation of sensibility."

Iqbal, who had sung so many hymns to love, felt nothing more acutely in the West than its lack of love. The heart (regarded by the mystic tradition to be the repository of love and the source of true knowledge) had been displaced in the West by the mind. Iqbal was not anti-intellectual; for him, thought (the source of which is the mind) and intuition (the source of which is the heart) both occupy a necessary place in the life of man. However, the problem of the place of the head and the heart in the scale of values had also stirred the imagination of Western thinkers and poets.

Tennyson, faced with the problem of reconciling science and faith, wrote about the respective ranks of knowledge and wisdom:

Who loves not knowledge? Who shall rail  
Against her beauty? May she mix  
With men and prosper!

but

Let her know her place;  
She is the second, not the first.  
A higher hand must make her mild,  
If all be not in vain; and guide  
Her footsteps, moving side by side  
With wisdom, like a younger child:  
For she is earthly of the mind,  
But wisdom heavenly of the soul.

Iqbal, confronted with a similar problem, believed in almost the same thing. He saw reason and revelation, intellect and intuition, as part of the same plan but differing in function and in importance. (For detailed discussion on Iqbal's concept of intellect and intuition, see pages 188-90; 238-39; 278-80; 303-306.

Nearly all the poems written during the second phase of Iqbal's career (1905-1908) are concerned with love. This is no accident; Iqbal believed in love as a principle of eternity, which in a world of flux gave meaning and stability to human life. In Western society Iqbal saw that love meant weakness and surrender, if anything. But for him love was to be the informing vision giving unity to his poetical as well as philosophical concepts.

It is also misleading to assert that Iqbal was anti-intellectual "essentially as a revolt against modern capitalism."<sup>14</sup> First of all, there was no necessary connection between intellect as Iqbal conceived it and capitalism. Intellect was a gift of God which gave man the power to form concepts and thus raised him above the angels.<sup>15</sup> Second, even if it is assumed that in Iqbal's mind there was a link between intellect and capitalism, it still does not follow that Iqbal's philosophy became anti-intellectual as a result of his revolt against capitalism. Iqbal's conception of intellect is of prime importance in his philosophic system and it was evolved carefully, the chief influences which molded it being religious and philosophical, not political. The European political scene did strengthen Iqbal's belief that intellect alone was not enough, but he did not arrive at that belief because of what he observed.

The poems Iqbal composed during his three-year stay in Europe revealed a few new contours of his developing ideas. First, his recoil from the glamorous and materially prosperous West, which intoxicates rather than enlightens:

The European tavern-keeper's wine brings jubilee,  
It has not sorrow's ecstasy: give home-brewed wine to me.

Second, Iqbal started thinking philosophically about the nature of the Islamic community. With the widening of his intellectual horizon, India and its problems no longer loomed so large before him. Away from the scene of turmoil he could think more clearly about fundamental issues which had been obscured by the dust of constant controversy. In 1908 he wrote:

The life of the individual is contingent,  
the life of the community is real,  
Sacrifice yourself for your community,  
burn the magic of the illusory.<sup>16</sup>

(In the latter part of this essay an attempt will be made to present an outline of Iqbal's ideas regarding the place of the individual in society. Here it is sufficient to draw attention to the first appearance of this subject.)

Perhaps the most important political idea in the second part of *Bang-i-Dara* is that in Islam “nationality ... is a pure idea; it has no geographical basis.” The Prophet of Islam, says Iqbal, taught: “What determines the bounds of our nation is not oneness of state.”<sup>17</sup> This is not a rejection of nationalism, but a glimpse of a wider concept. Earlier Iqbal had visualized a particular fulfillment of his universal vision of love and good will in a unified India. It seems that now he had begun to realize that unity, in order to be real and lasting, must spring from within; that is, it must be organic. Even if it were possible to impose some kind of unity on the naturally ill-adjusted nationalities of India, such a unity would not fulfill Iqbal’s ideal. In his search for a group with an inner cohesion, Iqbal began to concentrate more and more on the Muslims. He then wrote:

The creators of sects in India are acting like Azar;  
Protecting yourself from idols,  
become the dust of the way to Hejaz.<sup>18</sup>

### **1908-1938: THE VISION UNVEILED**

During the next thirty years Iqbal wrote his major poetical works and his Lectures on the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. When Iqbal returned from Europe, a number of his most significant ideas had already emerged, but these had yet to be developed into a consistent and dynamic philosophy of life, a philosophy which satisfied the intellect and also gave sustenance to the spirit and an impetus to action. The most burning questions of the day in India were concerned, directly or indirectly, with politics, and a man of Iqbal’s wide sympathies and interests could not remain indifferent or aloof. Writing in 1920 on Iqbal’s poetry, E. M. Forster had observed: “Poets in India cannot be parted from politics. Would that they could! But there is no hope in the present circumstances, one could as easily part Dante from Florence.”<sup>19</sup> It is true that Iqbal cannot be separated from politics, but this is so because politics cannot be isolated from human activity. Owing to Iqbal’s great influence on the political history of his country, it is easy enough to think of him as a political poet, sometimes even as a politician. He was a political thinker, but it is misleading to stress this too much, for it may lead one to think that he was only, or even primarily, a political philosopher.

It would not be true to say that on his return from Europe Iqbal ceased entirely to try to unify India and began to concentrate exclusively on the effort to present in practicable shape his moral and political ideal to the Muslims. He still considered unity a good thing even though he realized that conditions being what they were, his ideal of unity could not be achieved in India. In 1927 Iqbal said in the Punjab Legislative Assembly: “I do not know whether it is desirable to become a nation.”<sup>20</sup> Iqbal was concerned with the fate of India as a whole, and especially with the place of the Muslims

in India, till the end of his days. Although he wished to see peace and good will between the various peoples in India, he could no longer think of an Indian nation, “in view of India’s infinite variety in climates, races, languages, creeds and social systems.”<sup>21</sup>

Soon after his return to India, Iqbal wrote:

Islam is something more than a creed, it is also a community, a nation. The membership of Islam as a community is not determined by birth, locality or naturalization. The expression “Indian Muhammedan,” however convenient it may be, is a contradiction in terms; since Islam in its essence is above all conditions of time and space. Nationality with us is a pure idea, it has no geographical basis. But in as much as the average man demands a material center of nationality, the Muslim looks for it in the holy town of Mecca, so that the basis of Muslim nationality combines the real and the ideal, the concrete and the abstract.<sup>22</sup>

The transition from India to Hejaz has been made, and Iqbal has arrived, quite conclusively, at what is perhaps the most significant idea in his political philosophy – the extraterritorial, supranational character of the Islamic community.

The first corollary of this idea is the rejection of a social order which is subject to the limitations of territory or is nationalistic in outlook. But Iqbal was loath to reject anything outright. He recognized that “the idea of nationality is certainly a healthy factor in the growth of communities.”<sup>23</sup> He also believed that it was not always necessary to reject nationalism, for it was not always inconsistent or incompatible with Islam.

It comes into conflict with Islam only when it begins to play the role of a political concept and claims to be a principle of human solidarity demanding that Islam should recede to the background of a mere private opinion and cease to be a living factor in the national life. In Turkey, Persia, Egypt and other Muslim countries it will never become a problem. In these countries the Muslims constitute an overwhelming majority and their minorities, i.e., Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians, according to the law of Islam, are either “People of the Book” or “like the People of the Book,” with whom the law of Islam allows free alliances. It becomes a problem for the Muslims only in countries where they happen to be in a minority, and nationalism demands their complete self-effacement. In majority countries, Islam accommodates nationalism, for there Islam and nationalism are practically identical, in minority countries it is justified in seeking self-determination as a cultural unit. In either case, it is thoroughly consistent with itself.”<sup>24</sup>

Why did Iqbal move away from nationalism? Certainly the ravages, of fierce

nationalism he had witnessed in the West influenced his judgment. Nationalism was considered by Iqbal to be a “subtle form of idolatry; a deification of a material object,” and consequently, “what was to be demolished by Islam could not be made the very principle of its structure as a political community.”<sup>25</sup>

Iqbal also saw nationalism as a weapon of European imperialism:” I have been repudiating the concept of nationalism since the time when it was well-known in India and the Muslim world. At the very start it had become clear to me from the writings of European authors that the imperialistic designs of Europe were in great need of this effective weapon – the propagation of the European conception of nationalism in Muslim countries – to shatter the religious unity of Islam in pieces.”<sup>26</sup> It is suggested sometimes that Iqbal repudiated nationalism because nationalism was a Western concept, and that he was opposed to all things Western. This is palpably untrue; he has given many reasons for his attitude, and there is no reason to doubt them.

The narrowness of the political concept of nationalism was Iqbal’s greatest difficulty in accepting it. “From nationalism thoughts naturally turn more towards the idea that mankind has been so sharply divided into nations that it is impossible to bring about unity among them.”<sup>27</sup> Such a concept could not but be opposed to the universal nature of his vision.

Why did Iqbal move away from nationalism and toward the conception of the Islamic community? The psychological and religious orientation of Iqbal’s early education offers a partial explanation (For this aspect of Iqbal’s life, see pages 6-8,), but there are other, perhaps far more important, reasons to be taken into account.

In order to appreciate Iqbal’s dedication to the Islamic community, one must first grasp the concept of the “*millat*” (Islamic community). Iqbal repeatedly stressed that it was not a narrow concept:

It is not the unity of language or country or the identity of economic interest that constitutes the basic principles 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 genius of a particular people. In its essence, it is non-temporal, non-spatial<sup>28</sup>

The second characteristic of the “*millat*” was its homogeneity. Ideally, Islam was a great unifying force; the unity it could achieve would be a “true and living” unity.

The law of Islam does not recognize the apparent natural differences of race, nor the historical differences of nationality. The political ideal of Islam consists in the creation of a people born of a free fusion of all races and nationalities. Nationality with Islam is not the highest limit of political development; for the general principles of the law of Islam rest on human nature, not on the peculiarities of particular people. The inner cohesion of such a nation would consist not in ethnic or geographic unity, not in the unity of language or social tradition, but in the unity of the religious and political ideal; or in the psychological fact of “like-mindedness.”<sup>29</sup>

For Iqbal, “like-mindedness” was a necessary condition for the fulfillment of his ideal. The lack of this “like-mindedness,” implying the absence of unanimity of aims and purposes, as well as of mutual faith and good will, made Iqbal doubt the ideal of a nationhood for India. In 1909, he had written: “I have myself been of the view that religious differences should disappear from this country [India], and even now act on this principle in my private life. But now I think that the preservation of their separate national entities is desirable for both the Hindus and Muslims. The vision of a common nationhood for India has a poetic appeal, but looking to the present conditions and the unconscious trends of the two communities, appears incapable of fulfillment.”<sup>30</sup> In 1927 he repeated the same thought: “The talk of a united nationalism is futile and will perhaps remain so for a long time to come. The word has existed on the lips of the people of this country for the last fifty years, and like a hen it has cackled a great deal without laying a single egg ... in this country one community is always aiming at the destruction of the other community. ... the present state of things is such that the communities do not trust each other; they have no faith in each other.”<sup>31</sup>

Consequently, Iqbal asked himself an important rhetorical question: “Look at the history of mankind, it is an unending succession of deadly combats, blood feuds, and internecine wars. Now the question arises as to whether in these circumstances it is possible to bring forth a community, the basis of whose collective life will be peace and good-will.”<sup>32</sup> Iqbal had come to believe that the Islamic “*millat*” was such a political community.

Iqbal adopted the conception of the Islamic community as a gradual unveiling of his vision because “the ideal territory for this nation would be the whole earth,” but some critics believed it made his philosophy narrower in scope. For instance, Dickinson, in reviewing Iqbal’s *Asrar-i Khudi* (The Secrets of the Self), 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.”<sup>33</sup>

Iqbal answered thus:

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 am compelled to start with a specific society [e.g., 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 endeavor, 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, and which, while keeping a watchful eye on the affairs of the world, fosters a spirit of unworldliness so absolutely essential to man in his relation with his neighbours.<sup>34</sup>

Iqbal referred repeatedly to the universality of his ideal. The question then arises: If Islam is extraterritorial and supranational, why was it not sufficient for Iqbal to have exposed the limitations of the political concept of nationalism? Why did he work so hard to win points of material political importance for the Indian Muslims? Did his policy differ from his theory? How, in the final analysis, is it possible for his antinationalism to be compatible with the nationalist movement – of which he was a pioneer – which resulted in Pakistan? In view of Iqbal's ideal it would not be difficult to answer these questions. In a word: having willed the end, he had to will the means to achieve the end.

In practical terms Iqbal interpreted the unity of man's spiritual and material life as a double-edged intellectual weapon. He asserted that the "*Mullas*" who considered themselves responsible for the Muslims' spiritual welfare could not justifiably condemn material progress as profane. And those who were concerned with the temporal side of life could not isolate it from the spiritual aspect. Material progress, although necessary, could not be regarded as sufficient in itself. Standing between the two world views, Iqbal

maintained:

Body lives and spirit lives  
By the life their union gives.<sup>35</sup>

If it had been possible to separate the spirit from the body, then it would have been possible to separate the church from the state. A British Catholic, for example, could owe spiritual allegiance to the Pope and temporal allegiance to the Queen of England. But in Islam the religious order could not be separated from the temporal order. To believe that “religion is the private affair of the individual, and has nothing to do with what is called man’s temporal life,” was to deny that “spirit and matter, Church and State, are organic to each other.”<sup>36</sup> Islam as an extraterritorial and supranational polity was concerned with the total life of man and could not confine itself to its spiritual aspect alone. In Iqbal’s words, it was an “individual experience creative of a social order. Its immediate outcome is the fundamentals of a policy with implicit legal concepts whose civic significance cannot be belittled merely because their origin is revelational. The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is organically related to the social order in which it

For Iqbal, “the ideal nation does already exist in germ,” but the germ had to grow. The incipient nation needed political guidance and intellectual direction. Iqbal provided this leadership, employing the philosophic concept of the individual ego and the collective ego of the Muslims. “Just as in the individual life the acquisition of gain, protection against injury, determination for action, and appreciation of higher values, are all dependent upon the gradual development of the ego-consciousness, its continuity, enhancement and consolidation, similarly the secret of the life of nations and people depends on the same process, which can be described as the development, preservation and consolidation of the communal ego.”<sup>38</sup>

Under what political and psychological conditions could the collective ego flourish? Iqbal explained that “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.” In an environment in which the Islamic culture could not develop, the individual would not become “a living member of the Muslim community.” In order to internalize the values of Islam the individual

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 ... the mental outfit of the individual

belonging to the Muslim community must be mainly formed out of the material which the intellectual energy of his forefather has produced, so that he may be made to feel the continuity of the present with the past and the future.<sup>39</sup>

Obviously, Iqbal felt strongly about preservation of Muslims' cultural identity. He stated unequivocally: "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." Referring to Nehru's concept of organic nationalism, Iqbal asserted that if Nehru stood for "the fusion of the communities in a biological sense," he could not subscribe to such a notion. This would have destroyed the entity of Muslim collective life in India, completely thwarting the realization of Iqbal's ideal.

In order to create the intellectual climate for the development of the Muslims' collective ego in India, it was necessary to achieve "self-determination as a cultural unit."<sup>40</sup> Political and territorial separation explicit in the concept of self-determination may be sought as an end in itself, or it may be only a means to an end. Political power for Iqbal was a means to an end (the end being the preservation of Muslim identity), not an end in itself. To M. A. Jinnah, he wrote: "It is absolutely necessary to tell the world both inside and outside India, that the economic problem is not the only problem in the country. From the Muslim point of view, the cultural problem is of much greater consequence to most Indian Muslims."<sup>41</sup>

Iqbal stressed that "the Indian Muslim is entitled to full and free development on the lines of his own culture and tradition in his own Indian homeland." Did he believe this right could be exercised in India? On March 20, 1937, less than a year before his death, Iqbal again wrote to Jinnah: "The enforcement and development of the *Sharia*'t of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim State or states."<sup>42</sup> Actually, he had publicly stated this idea in the presidential address to the annual session of the Muslim League in 1930: "The life of Islam as a cultural force in this country very largely depends on its centralization in a specified territory." To Iqbal a "consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State" appeared "to be the final destiny of Muslims, at least of North-West India." This state was to be part of a confederation as a "Muslim India within India."<sup>43</sup>

Would Iqbal have supported the idea of Pakistan as a sovereign state? It is almost certain that he would have done so. The question for him (had he been alive in 1947) would not have been to choose between nationalism or antinationalism. It would have been the preservation of Islamic culture in India. In 1930 he had put forward a suggestion for a Muslim state in India, believing that this end could be achieved. But if his

suggestion had proved unworkable or unacceptable he would have accepted any alternative means of achieving the desired goal. If the territorial unity of India had appeared detrimental to the cultural identity of the Muslims, undermining their solidarity, Iqbal would have emphatically rejected it. However, the creation of Pakistan would have been for Iqbal only a means to achieving a universal brotherhood of man baptized with love.

Although this interpretation of his ideas sounds hypothetical, even a casual reading of his published views leads one to believe that they are in accord with the overall pattern of his thought. Only four and one-half months before his death Iqbal reiterated these ideas in a New Year message broadcast on January 1, 1938 from the Lahore radio station:

National unity is not a very durable force. Only one unity is dependable and that unity is brotherhood of man, which is above race, nationality, color or language, and so long as this so-called democracy, this accursed nationalism and this degraded imperialism are not shattered; so long as men do not demonstrate by their actions that they believe that the whole world is the family of God; so long as distinctions of race, color and geographical nationalities are not wiped out completely they will never be able to lead a happy and contented life, and the beautiful ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity will never materialize.<sup>44</sup>

### **IQBAL AND SOCIALISM**

In recent years, Iqbal's attitude toward socialism has been the subject of growing interest. Iqbal was sympathetic to the socialist movement because he regarded it "as a storm that sweeps away all the foul airs in the atmosphere." Khalifah 'Abdul Hakim explains the factors which might have determined Iqbal's attitude toward socialism:

The laissez-faire capitalism of the industrial West had pulverized humanity into hostile national groups, and within every nation too there was class war because the classes of haves and have-nots were at loggerheads. His (Iqbal's) own country was predominantly an agricultural country where no industrial proletariat had developed but the conflict of the landlord and the tenant was becoming an acute socio-economic problem. The usurious money-lender was even more callous than the landlord. Through usury and the judicial support of the system set up by British in complete disregard of local traditions, the ownership of land was rapidly

passing into the hands of money-lending owners who did nothing to improve the soil or the condition of the tiller. Iqbal would welcome a revolution in which the do-nothing absentee landlord, or the usurious money-lender, is swept away.<sup>45</sup>

However, the revolution of Iqbal's choice was not along the lines of communistic socialism with its ideal of absolute equality, representing "an unlimited extension of the ideal of the family to the State" and finding its expression in the maxim "from each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs." It was more along the lines of the socialism which has as its ideal "not a mechanical equality of all members of society, but rather a potential equality in the sense of the maxim of Saint-Simon's followers: 'From each according to his capacity, to each according to his merit,' which has as its fundamental tenet not common ownership, but the elimination of all unearned increment."<sup>46</sup>

Iqbal's sympathy for socialism flowed out of his passionate dislike for injustice and despotism. Economic injustice had starved and depraved the body and religious despotism had shackled the spirit. As demonstrated in his poem *Lenin Khuda Kay Hadhur Mein* (Lenin before God), he was one with Lenin when the latter protested against Western civilization:

What they call commerce is a game of dice:  
For one, profit, for millions swooping death.  
There science, philosophy, scholarship, government  
Preach man's equality and drink man's blood.<sup>47</sup>

Iqbal was also relieved to see the house of God purged of idols:

Unsearchably God's edicts move; who knows  
What thoughts are stirring deep in the world-mind!  
Those are appointed to pull down, who lately  
Held it salvation to protect, the priests;  
On godless Russia the command descends:  
Smite all the Baal and Dagon of the Church!<sup>48</sup>

That Russia was godless, Iqbal knew. That she would remain godless he did not anticipate, as he wrote to Sir Francis Younghusband: "The present negative state of Russian mind will not last indefinitely, for no system of society can rest on an atheistic basis."<sup>49</sup> Iqbal attacked "Atheist Socialism" but never socialism, for to him "Bolshevism plus God is almost identical."<sup>50</sup> In a letter to Jinnah he wrote: "If Hinduism accepts social democracy, it must necessarily cease to be Hinduism. For Islam the acceptance of social

democracy in some suitable form is not a revolution but a return to the original purity of Islam.”<sup>51</sup>

It is sometimes asserted that Iqbal did not know what socialism was. There are of course several interpretations of the doctrine of socialism. Marxist interpretation describes dialectical materialism as scientific socialism. To be a dialectic materialist is “to regard nature as primary, to hold that matter is independently real and that the mental develops out of the material and must be explained in physical terms. This view has to be understood as negation of the Hegelian idealism. The reality of thought and other mental phenomena is not denied, only their primacy. Idealism and materialism are treated as being the only possible philosophical positions.”<sup>52</sup> There is no indication in Iqbal’s ideas, however, “that there is a dichotomy of matter and spirit,”<sup>53</sup> as has been maintained by Professor W. C. Smith. To say that man has spiritual as well as physical needs is not necessarily to admit the duality of spirit and matter. Had Iqbal admitted such a duality, he could not logically have claimed that the union of religion with socialism would amount to Islam. (Here Islam is a symbol of man’s material and spiritual unity and development.) Obviously such a statement assumes an organic relationship between matter and spirit. Denying the primacy of the material phenomena over the spiritual, Iqbal rejected the Marxist determination of dialectical materialism. Does this rejection amount to lack of knowledge or understanding? It has never been explained.

Smith has rather naively maintained that Iqbal’s writings are “throughout tinged socialistically,”<sup>54</sup> while saying at the same time that Iqbal did not know what socialism was. Should it be inferred that Iqbal wrote socialistically without any understanding of this doctrine? Since Iqbal wrote on socialistic themes he obviously adopted a brand of socialism. According to *The Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, the six characteristics common to all socialistic ideologies throughout history are: “First, a condemnation of the existing political and social order as unjust; second, an advocacy of a new order consistent with moral values; third, a belief that this ideal is realizable; fourth, a conviction that the immorality of the established order is traceable not to a fixed world order or to the changing nature of man but to corrupt institutions; fifth, a programme of action leading to the ideal through a fundamental remolding of human nature or of institutions or both; and sixth, a revolutionary will to carry out this programme.”<sup>55</sup> All these characteristics are present in Iqbal’s sociopolitical thought.

## **DEMOCRACY OR DEMOCRACY OF THE WEST**

It is often asserted that Iqbal did not believe in democracy. Iqbal did indeed write against democracy, but criticism is not rejection, and it should be remembered that he wrote much in favor of it as well.

It was not democracy itself but “democracy of the West” that Iqbal had difficulty in accepting. Western democracy, in his view, was a cover for far too many injustices. It was, for instance, a weapon in the hands of imperialism and capitalism:

The democracy of the West is the same old organ,  
Which strikes the selfsame note of Imperialism;  
That which thou regard'st as the fairy Queen of Freedom  
In reality is the demon of autocracy clothed in the garb of  
deception.

Legislation, reforms, concessions, rights and privileges  
In the materia medica of the West are but sweet narcotics.  
The heated discussions of assemblies  
Are the camouflage of capitalists.<sup>56</sup>

Iqbal was outraged because Western democracies used individuals and nations as means to an end, not as ends in themselves. Other aspects of democracy did not particularly appeal to Iqbal, and he pointed them out forthrightly: “Democracy means rows,” he said, referring to the endless debate and controversy, not always very constructive, that seemed prevalent in democracies; “it lets loose all sorts of aspirations and grievances,” which may have an anarchic tendency; “it arouses hope and ambitions often quite impractical.”<sup>57</sup> Iqbal also indicated some misgivings about democracy's addiction to excessive legalism:

“Democracy has a tendency to foster the spirit of legality. This is not in itself bad; but unfortunately it tends to displace the purely moral standpoint, and to make the illegal and wrong identical in meaning.” Although Iqbal was apprehensive of the difficulties created by democratic processes, he did not despair of this form of government. “Democratic government,” he said, “has attendant difficulties but these are difficulties which human experience elsewhere has shown to be surmountable.”<sup>58</sup>

The common assumption of Iqbal's disbelief in democracy rests largely on his satirical view that democracy “counts” rather than “weighs” people:

Run away from the democratic form [of government],  
Be a slave to a wise man,  
For even the brains of two hundred donkeys  
Do not produce the thought of a man.

In order to appreciate Iqbal's satire one must grasp his total philosophy and his

distinction between “individuality” and “personality,” which has been so admirably highlighted by J. J. Houben:

The notion of personality ... does not refer to matter as individuality does. It refers to the highest and deepest dimension of being. Personality is rooted in the spirit and it constitutes the secret depth of an ontological structure, a source of dynamic unity and inner unification. The spirit forms personality, enlightens and transfigures the biological individual and makes it the concrete fullness of life ... The community too readily recognizes what belongs to the world of matter, meanwhile being blind to the reality of the spirit. It sees in men only the shadow of real personality, namely the material individuality. The consequence is that the person is enslaved to the social body.<sup>59</sup>

Iqbal’s criticism that in a democracy persons are “counted” not “weighed” must be interpreted as an assertion that society takes note of “individuality” – which is a material fact, but not of “personality” – which is a spiritual fact. To “run away from the democratic form of government” is not to become enslaved to the body politic. The wise man is the symbol of a fully developed personality, who gives inspiration for the development of personality.

One writer has observed: “Iqbal’s ‘Kingdom of God on Earth’ means the democracy of the more or less most unique individuals possible. The rule of one Wise Man is better than that of an assembly of asses. ... This superior man with his moral and intellectual forces is the most suitable person to guide the human society, The possibility of such development in a single individual is much more than in many. The decision of a group of people represents average intellect. Thus Iqbal’s concept is Nietzschean through and through.”<sup>60</sup>

Iqbal’s “Kingdom of God on Earth” is, however, a moral not a political ideal, and has no relationship to Nietzsche’s “Aristocracy of Supermen” as seen from the moral standpoint. Explaining the concept of Islamic democracy, Iqbal himself outlined his differences with the ideas of Nietzsche:

Nietzsche ... abhors the “rule of the herd” and, hopeless of the plebeian, he bases all higher culture on the cultivation and growth of an Aristocracy of Supermen. But is the plebeian so absolutely hopeless? The Democracy of Islam did not grow out of the extension of economic opportunity, it is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is a center of latent

power, the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating a certain type of character. Out of the plebeian material Islam has formed men of the noblest type of life and power. Is not, then, the Democracy of early Islam an experimental refutation of the ideas of Nietzsche?<sup>61</sup>

In an essay entitled “Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal” Iqbal said plainly: “Democracy ... is the most important aspect of Islam regarded as a political ideal.” For him, the two basic principles under-lying Muslim political constitution were:

(1) The law of God is absolutely supreme. Authority, except as an interpreter of the law, has no place in the social structure of Islam. Islam has a horror of personal authority. We regard it as inimical to the unfoldment of human individuality ...

(2) The absolute equality of all the members of the community ...<sup>62</sup>

In view of these ideas, expressed with such clarity, it is difficult to see how Iqbal could be accused of being opposed to democracy and the rights of the individual.

The idea that “the individual’s truest self in the community alone achieves fulfillment” is scattered throughout Iqbal’s writings.

The community is like an ocean and  
the individual like a drop  
Which, seeking to expand,  
Becomes an ocean. It is strong and rich  
In ancient ways, a mirror to the Past  
As to the Future, and the link between  
What is to come, and what has gone before,  
So that its moments are as infinite  
As in eternity  
Since the Individual  
Alone, is heedless of high purposes;  
His strength is apt to dissipate itself.

He must learn discipline through his interaction with his fellow man. In society he also finds “security and preservation.”<sup>63</sup> The individual’s needs are not as important as that of the society, for “the individual and his needs pass away: the people and their needs

remain.” The individual, important as he is, must sacrifice his interests for the sake of social solidarity. “When it is said,” Iqbal pointed out, “that the interests of Islam are superior to those of the Muslim, it is meant that the interests of the individual as a unit are subordinate to the interests of the community as an external symbol of the Islamic principle. This is the only principle which limits the liberty of the individual, who is otherwise absolutely free.”<sup>64</sup>

If the society as a whole is more important than the individual, then what is the relationship of the individual to the social aggregate? Is the former of greater importance than the latter, or vice versa? The answer lies in the distinction already referred to between “individuality” and “personality.” “In so far as the human person entering society is a material individuality, he enters as a part whose good is inferior to the good of the whole.” Human personality, on the other hand, “is worth more than the whole Universe of bodies and material goods. There is nothing above the human person except God. In regard, therefore, to the eternal destiny of the soul and its supra-temporal goods, society exists for each person and is subordinate to it.”<sup>65</sup>

This brief outline of Iqbal’s political philosophy demonstrates that his ideas are not unsystemized, and are by no means strung together like the patchwork of a quilt. If studied as a whole, with a view to their evolution, his ideas reveal an organized system including political, philosophical, and ethical strands. Their rigid separation for an analytical exercise has led several well-meaning scholars to a blind alley and endless personal frustrations.

### **Endnotes**

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