

Iqbal's Universalism and the Concept of Pakistan

Riffat Hassan

As a political philosopher, Iqbal has been accused of inconsistencies and radical shifts in position. This accusation stems from the customary division of Iqbal's political thought into three rigidly demarcated phases - the nationalistic phase, the anti-nationalistic phase and the final phase in which he became an advocate of the Pakistan idea. In my opinion, Iqbal's political philosophy is best understood if studied as a totality in the light of his all-embracing vision of universal Love. I substantiate this point-of-view by a systematic reconstruction of Iqbal's political ideas, demonstrating that the concept of Pakistan which he put forward is in no way inconsistent with his philosophy of universalism.

It is customary to divide Iqbal's career into three phases. The first phase which ended in 1905 was a period of restless searching, of unquestioning idealism. This phase is usually described as "Iqbal's nationalistic phase" - a phase in which the young poet sang impassioned songs to the spirit of his country. He was deeply disturbed by the bitter conflict all around him and strove, with the unrelenting energy and courage of youth, to teach the people of India the lesson of love and faith. He addressed not only those who defiled his sacred land with religious and communal bickering, but also the little children who were to be the future citizens of Iqbal's united homeland. It was the tragedy of Iqbal's youth that the India-mother-of-all myth which meant so much to him was shattered before the children who sang his songs grew to adulthood.

It is generally assumed that having been disillusioned with the idea of nationalism in the first phase of his career, Iqbal began, in the second phase which lasted from 1905-1908 and coincided with his stay in Europe, to think about the nature of the Islamic "*millat*" (community) and that, in the third phase which lasted from 1908 onwards he repudiated the idea of nationalism completely and preached Islamic universalism.

Most students of Iqbal, misled by most commentators on Iqbal's political philosophy, think that Iqbal changed from being a nationalist to a universalist in much the same way as politicians change from one point-of-view to another. But this is not the case and the wrongness of this view cannot be demonstrated more clearly than by asking the question: If Iqbal had changed from being a nationalist to a universalist then why did he advocate the idea of Pakistan? Iqbal seems nothing but a mass of contradictions when his political philosophy is stated in a formula such as "nationalist-anti-nationalist-nationalist."

Spiritual Founder of Pakistan

The Western readers of Iqbal know that he was the spiritual founder of Pakistan but they often remark that there is much inconsistency in his thought because "he changed sides so frequently." These readers cannot really be blamed for holding this view because this is the view expressed in an overwhelming majority of writings on Iqbal most of them by Pakistanis. The reason for this erroneous view - and a view which has stood dangerously in the way of understanding of Iqbal - is that when writers (who may have written with insight upon other aspects of Iqbal's thought) come to his political philosophy, they seem to forget that he was not a politician driven by considerations of expediency, but a poet-philosopher of undoubted integrity and calibre, who had an informing vision which knit together the various so-called phases of his thought. If Iqbal's political philosophy is studied not in the light of isolated utterances (often quoted out of context) but of his total vision one finds a remarkable consistency in his thought!

To begin at the beginning, let us, for a moment discard familiar distinctions, and look anew at the early writings of Iqbal. These writings contain poems both patriotic and nationalistic. This in a sense was inevitable as E. M. Forster observed in his article on Iqbal, "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." ("The Poetry of Iqbal," *The Athenaeum*, London, 1920, p. 803). A number of Iqbal's early writings were devoted to the subject of India but it would not be true to say that this was the only theme which interested him. From 1901 to 1904, Iqbal read at every annual meeting of the *Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam* (a great occasion for Muslims of India) poems concerned about the plight of his co-religionists.

Just as it is possible to glimpse Shelley's vision of Love through the turbulent pages of his first great poem *Queen Mab*, it is possible to see Iqbal's vision of Love underlying the different poems or his youth. The young poet believed above all things in the principle of Love. When he looked around himself he was struck most of all by two things - the hostility between Hindus and Muslims, and the political bondage of his Indian homeland. His vision of Love - of universal Love - could not be implemented, he thought, until Hindus and Muslims were able to resolve their differences, and until his country was free. (He was also inclined to think that the second was dependent on the first). This is how he saw it and with all the ardour of his feeling soul he sang to these themes such songs as resounded throughout the length and breadth of India.

Temple of Love

The Temple of Love may be said to symbolize the first "phase" of Iqbal's writing career. E.M. Forster has not quite understood the nature of Iqbal's vision as bodied forth in this symbol for he describes the New Temple as "The Temple of India" and observes, "the glory of the court yard from Mecca shall inhabit the temple; the image in its shrine shall be the gold inscribed Hindustan, shall wear both the Brahman thread and the Moslem rosary, and the Muezzin shall call worshippers to prayer upon a horn." The New Temple is in India, but it is not of India. Nor is it conceived by Iqbal as being emblematic of a faith composed of elements taken from different faiths, for such a faith would not be an organic unity, yet it would destroy the distinctness of either faith. The Temple is raised not to Hindustan but to Love which transcends the image in which it is expressed.

Almost all the poems written during the second phase of Iqbal's career are concerned with love. This is no accident. As a poet, Iqbal had believed in love as a principle of eternity which in a world of ever-changing flux gave meaning and stability to human life. In the West, he became aware of the importance of love not only as a poetical but also as a philosophical concept. It was love that was to be the informing vision giving unity to all his diverse writings.

The young Iqbal had visualized a particular fulfilment of his universal vision of love and goodwill in a united India. As his muse and his philosophic thought grew older he realized that unity in order to be real had to be organic. Even if it were possible to impose some kind of unity on the naturally ill-adjusted multiplicities of India, such unity would neither be real nor lasting. In answering Lowes Dickinson who had accused his

philosophy of being narrow and meant only for Muslims, Iqbal gave his reasons for moving (away from nationalism) towards the conception of the Islamic community as a means to the fulfilment of his ideal: "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 exclusively in some sense 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 (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 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." (S. A. Vahid, Editor, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, 1964, pp. 98-99).

Iqbal's ideal was universal and he wanted to see humanity linked together by ties of goodwill and fraternity in spite of distribution into groups by the exigencies of time and space. But in order to evolve this linkage it was necessary for each group to have self-determination. Owing to the social and political conditions that prevailed in the sub-continent, a community or group could be suppressed not only by a foreign imperialist power but also by one group's domination over another. Iqbal was convinced that it was necessary for Muslims in the sub-continent that they should be allowed to live their own lives preserving their religious and cultural identity. As is very obvious from Iqbal's writings, he felt very strongly about the preservation of cultural identity. For him "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." (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 162). He attached so much importance to the preservation of cultural identity

that he said: "In so far as India is concerned I can say with perfect confidence that the Muslims of India will not submit to any kind of political idealism which would seek to annihilate their cultural entity." (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 288).

In Iqbal's view, in order to make possible the development of the communal ego of Muslims in India, it was necessary for the Muslim community to achieve "self-determination as a cultural entity." One might say that to seek a cultural unit is in the same thing as seeking a political unit if it involves distribution of territory, but there is a difference in intent. Political autonomy may be sought as an end in itself. On the other hand, it may be sought as a means to an end. Political power, for Iqbal, was a means to an end - the end being the preservation of the Muslim identity in India - not an end in itself.

Iqbal's interest in politics was not primary but secondary. In his historic address at Lahore in 1932 he made this clear: "Politics have their roots in the spiritual life of man. It is my belief that Islam is not a matter of private opinion. It is a society, or if you like, a civic Church. It is because present-day political ideals, as they appear to be shaping themselves in India, may affect its original structure and character that I find myself interested in politics." (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 288).

Iqbal had believed 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." (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 169). But could this right be exercised in India? Less than a year before his death, Iqbal wrote to the Quaid-e-'Azam, "The enforcement and development of the *Shari'at* of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim state or states." (M. A. Jinnah, Editor, *Letters of Iqbal to Jinnah*, 1963, p. 18). This realization inevitably led to another one, "the life of Islam as a cultural force in this country very largely depends on its centralization in a specified territory." (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 171). This centralization in a specified territory did not originally extend as far as a sovereign state. The "consolidated North-West Indian Muslim state" which appeared to Iqbal "to be the final destiny of Muslims at least of North-West India" was to be part of a confederation or a "Muslim India within India." (*Thoughts and Reflection of Iqbal*, p. 170).

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Hindu leaders of the Congress party professed to establish an apparently secular state which meant the separation of state from religion. Their attitude led Iqbal to believe that there were weighty reasons for demanding a homeland for Indian Muslims. First of all, there was the question of religious protection for a community of nearly 100 million, then there was the question of cultural protection and finally there was the question of

State policy. However, even when faced with a desperate situation and with no alternative except the division of the country, Iqbal was still willing to negotiate. In a statement issued on December 6, 1933, explaining the attitude of the Muslim delegates to the Round Table Conference, Iqbal said: "The Muslim wants safeguards not because he is afraid of democracy but because he has reason to be afraid of communal oligarchy in the garb of democracy in India. He wants to ensure the substance of democracy even at the expense of its conventional form." (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 167). He went on to say: "In conclusion I must put a straight question to Pandit Jawaharlal. How is India's problem to be solved if the majority community will neither concede the minimum safeguards necessary for the protection of a minority of 80 million people nor accept the award of a third party; but continue to talk of a kind of nationalism which works out only to its own benefit? This position can admit of only two alternatives. Either the Indian majority community will have to accept for itself the permanent position of an agent or British Imperialism in the East or the country will have to be redistributed on a basis of religious, historical and cultural affinities so as to do away with the question of electorates and the communal problems in its present form." (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 167).

Since Iqbal was not alive in 1947 to see the actual creation of Pakistan, the question must, in a sense, remain hypothetical whether he would have supported the idea of Pakistan as a sovereign state. But keeping in mind all that he wrote and the general trend of his thinking, it is certain that he would have done so. His position is clear from the following statement in his letter (dated June 21, 1937) to the Quaid-i-'Azam: "To my mind the new constitution with its idea of a single federation is completely hopeless. A separate federation of Muslim provinces, reformed on the lines I have suggested, is the only course by which we can secure a peaceful India and save Muslims from the domination of non-Muslims. Why should not the Muslims of North-West India and Bengal be considered as nations entitled to self-determination just as other nations in India and outside India are?" The question with him, had he been living in 1947, would not have been - as it had never been - of simply choosing between his loyalty to his Indian homeland and his loyalty to his fellow-Muslims. Iqbal believed that Islam was the basis of an ideal society because it transcended all (PARA CONTINUES HERE)

divisions and ideologies which divide humankind into belligerent camps. He saw that in India, Islam was in danger of being crushed out of existence due to lack of freedom and opportunity. Iqbal considered it essential for the continuance and well-being of Islam in India that Muslims were allowed to preserve their cultural entity. He could not accept “a polity on national lines if it means a displacement of the Islamic principle of solidarity” for such a polity would have been “simply unthinkable to a Muslim.” (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, p. 167)

Nehru

Referring to Iqbal, J. L. Nehru said, “Iqbal was one of the early advocates of Pakistan ... (but) his whole outlook on life does not fit in with the subsequent development of the idea of Pakistan or the division of India.” (*Discovery of India*, 1947, p. 298). By “his whole outlook” Nehru probably meant Iqbal’s constant reference to the universality of his ideal and his condemnation of nationalism as a narrow political concept. But Mr. Nehru was wrong, as so many of Iqbal’s commentators are wrong, in their evaluation of Iqbal. The idea of Pakistan, as Iqbal conceived it, not only fits in with “his whole outlook” but was in fact a gradual working out of his ideal. Iqbal was the spiritual father of Pakistan in a sense more profound than is generally realized. In the last bitter years of his life, Pakistan became Iqbal’s most cherished dream. He saw it as the only way through which his ideal of universal love and goodwill - an ideal to which he clung through a life filled with many disappointments just as Keats had clung to the principle of Beauty even as sickness and sorrow consumed his mortal self. The vision which inspired Iqbal remained constant, from the first to the last, though his melody became more solemn as the buoyant, heart-lifting, full-throated case of the first fresh notes of his singing became laden with experience and the burden of prophecy .

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