

Iqbal's idea of Nationalism: Wataniyat

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study how concept of Nationalism was an idol carved by Western imperialism and wanted to replace this **Wataniyat**. The Muslim Renaissance in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent was primarily inspired and activated by Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and Dr Sir Muhammad Iqbal. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, pragmatic genius as he was, had laid its foundation in the late nineteenth century; and later in the twentieth century, Dr Iqbal, through his poetic vision and political insight, as reflected in his writings, speeches, and political works, elaborated for the Indian. Iqbal is best known as the composer of Saare jahaan se acchha (from Taraanaa-e-Hindi), which extols wataniyat, or love for the homeland, where all its denizens are bulbulein, or songbirds, in this garden/country.

His early poems “made him the darling of the Indian people”. Iqbal wrote of freedom from all distinctions and oppressions: religion, caste and class. His words evoked the syncretic impulses that remain at the heart of India’s diversity. Bacche Ki Dua (A Child’s Prayer) was ubiquitous in classrooms in India even in his time. Self-Community Iqbal's concepts of Self (Khudī) and community (Millat) are fundamentally derived from the Quranic source. The individual believer in Islam is described in the Qur’ān as Muslim (one who surrenders his will to the will of Allah) and Mumin (one who has faith in the oneness of Allah) whom the Muslim mystics usually call the perfect man (insān-i kāmīl). According to the Quranic cosmology, Adam, the first man, was created as the masterpiece of God's creations—highest of all beings (ashraf al-makhlūqāt) and was endowed with the Divine virtue of knowledge (allamah al-ismā) and the rare gift of free will. Obviously, therefore, in, the Qur'an man is called the vicegerent of Allah on the earth (khalīfah). In a nutshell, it is the potentiality of self-awareness, moral consciousness, and spiritual vitality for ceaseless struggle which distinguish man from other creatures. He wrote of the land and its geography in poems like Himalaya and Taraanaa-e-Hindi; its great seers and deities in ‘Nanak’ and ‘Ram’ (whom he called Imam-e-Hind, or Prophet of India); and its poets in ‘Mirza Ghalib’ and ‘Dagh’. Iqbal even translated the Gayatri mantra from the Sanskrit into Urdu verse as Aaftaab (The Sun). In Nayaa Shivala (New Temple), Iqbal deifies his homeland. Using a vocabulary more Hindi than Persian, his views are syncretic of Hindu and Muslim thought

Key words: Allama Iqbal, wataniyat, Hindu, Taraanaa-e-Hindi, Muslim thought

Introduction

Being a poet more than a philosopher, in the case of Iqbal, the felt overwhelmed the observed. Throughout his life he was chasing certain ideals. His poetic sensibilities did not let him appreciate territorial or competitive nationalism one bit for he could see their drawbacks and comprehend the much severer threats in store in subscribing to those political concepts. Iqbal was aware of how modern nationalism’s peak point was war, a reality Tagore reflected on at length in his writings on nationalism.

There is a poem composed by Iqbal titled *Wataniyat* (Patriotism) wherein right after the title Iqbal has clarified that patriotism in that composition is looked at as a political concept. In that poem he writes:

Country, is the biggest among these new gods!
What is its shirt is the shroud of Deen (Religion).
This idol which is the product of the new civilization
Is the plunderer of the structure of the Holy Prophet's Religion.
The limitation to country results in destruction
Live like the fish in the ocean free from country.
In political parlance country is something different
In Prophet's command country is something different
The antagonism among world's nations is created by this alone;
Subjugation as the goal of commerce is created by this alone;
Politics have become bereft of sincerity is by this alone;
The destruction of the home of the weak is by this alone.
God's creation is unjustly divided among nations by it
The Islamic concept of nationality is uprooted by it.

Iqbal wrote another poem, 'Hindustani bachhon ka qaumi geet' ('The national song of Hindustani children'), before 1904, which refers to the same idea of India being constituted by continuous migration and diverse cultures:

Chishti ne jis zameen par paigham e haq sunaya,
Nanak ne jis chaman mein wahdat ka geet gaya
(The land where Chishti delivered the true message,
the land where Nanak sang the song of unity)
Tatariyon ne jisko apna watan banaya,
jis ne hijaziyon se dasht e arab chhudaya
(the land the Tartars made their home,
for which the Arabs forgot their desert)
Mera watan wohi hai, mera watan wohi hai

(that land is my homeland, that land is my homeland)

Iqbal's religious fervour made him believe in another possibility in relation to bringing people together. That said, his religiosity is not to be understood in a conventional dichotomous fashion. It was about an informed comprehension of the limitations of the "worldly". Nationalism as a political ideal could not enchant Iqbal for he knew it could not last that long. He could not believe in nationalism's potential in relation to peace, security and harmony. Given the temperament of modern nationalism Iqbal knew very well that it was altogether impossible to have a non-religious pluralist state based on one nation. Rather than talking about moral reformation of the individual alone, in the light of basic teachings of Islam, he advocated some sort of a fundamental revolution in the social life which should facilitate the creation of a purely human consciousness. Nationalism failed miserably in that respect.

here is no point debating the merits of Iqbal's arguments in the context of nationalism. The poet-philosopher shared his vision as forcefully as he could and left the scene. Now we are left with the present state of affairs in the subcontinent to make sense of his observations and prophecies. Pluralism in India is in bad shape. Indianism of a peculiar, rigid, and ahistorical kind is imposed on every mortal that inhabits the Indian territory without paying scant attention to the idea of diversity, plurality and multiplicity of traditions and practices. There is a full-fledged argument wherein minorities (especially Muslims) are expected to lose themselves in the majority. Muslims as part of Indian nation are asked again and again to forsake their communal ethos. And all of this is carried out in the name of nationalism, one that is disturbingly emotional and uncommonly rigid. Iqbal warned us of all this way back. He warned us of a politics that was devoid of understanding unity in the most overarching sense. He urged us to remain conscious of the dark side of modernity; one that was all about consumerism, racism, competitive nationalism and imperialism. Human beings after all, as he held throughout his intellectual and poetic career, were meant to follow much higher ideals than the likes of territorial nationalism.

The political ideology, as elaborated by Iqbal, is deeply rooted in the Islamic values contained in the Quranic teachings, and the traditions (Sunnah) of the Prophet, the founder of the world community of Islam. A close study of Iqbal's works shows that, for Iqbal, the political ideology of Pakistan would primarily be composed of two basic elements, namely, the Quranic concept of the universal Millah (community) and his concept of the Self (khudī). It was, in fact, within such an ideological framework that Iqbal was confronted with the problem of redefining the political status of the Indian Muslims in accordance with the contemporary political terminology.

Objective:

This paper intends to explore and analyze how **Iqbal** had been a passionate Indian autonomist. Also as a strong proponent of **wataniyat** or love of the territorial homeland

Wataniyat

The skin-deep charm of the Western civilization hypnotized the Muslim world instantaneously. Nationalism was one of those products imported to the realm of the Muslim politics, which received uncritical credence at the hands of both Muslim academics and laymen alike. Allama Iqbal, the cherished Muslim ideologue, having dug deep into the corpus of the western philosophy, came scathingly out in condemnation of the Western Territorial Nationalism dubbing it a mirage,

which had brought the humanity on the brink of annihilation. He was particularly perturbed by the blind aping by the Muslim world of the Western Territorial Nationalism around whose neck Iqbal saw hanging the beads of aggression, imperialism, and atheism. Taking to his poetic shafts he warned the Muslims to guard themselves against this infernal bane. As a substitute for the Western nationalism, he put forward the idea of “Cultural Nationalism” that drew the divine sanction in entirety from the Holy Quran, and the Sunnah. Unlike the western nationalism, which was divorced from the ethical and spiritual elements, and was predicated upon the trivial foundations, the cultural nationalism sought the unification of the mankind on the basis of the loftiest ideal of Islam. Iqbal pleaded passionately for universalism, and a kind of ‘League of the Muslim countries’.

Iss Dour Mein Mai Aur Hai, Jaam Aur Hai Jam Aur

Saqi Ne Bina Ki Rawish-e-Lutf-o-Sitam Aur

Muslim Ne Bhi Tameer Kiya Apna Haram Aur

Tehzeeb Ke Azar Ne Tarshawaye Sanam Aur

In Taza Khudaon Mein Bara Sub Se Watan Hai

Jo Pairhan Iss Ka Hai, Woh Mazhab Ka Kafan Hai

The notions of this century, its proponents, and its ideological fathers are all new. The ruler has devised new and creative styles of oppression and exaltation for the ruled. So much so that Muslims also bought into their ideas and accepted their principles. And the modern civilisation which was creating for every nation an idea to stand on, also made Muslims to create a similar one. And of all these ideas, the most effective proved to be nationalism – whose principles stand in stark contrast to the basis of religion.

The portrayal of nation/country in this para as new false gods is remarkable. In Islam the conception of God is such that all praises are referred back to Him, He is the one to be ultimately Glorified, and He should be the cause of all of believers’ endeavours: “Say: Indeed, my prayers, my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah – Lord of the worlds.” And we can see the ‘motherland’ swiftly taking over the place of Allah so conveniently even among Muslims!

Ye But Ke Tarashida-e-Tehzeeb-e-Nawi Hai

Gharatgar-e-Kashana-e-Deen-e-Nabwi Hai

Bazu Tera Touheed Ki Quwwat Se Qawi Hai

Islam Tera Dais Hai, Tu Mustafavi Hai

Nazzara-e-Dairina Zamane Ko Dikha De

Ae Mustafavi Khak Mein Iss Butt Ko Mila De!

The idol (false god) of the current civilisation – nationalism -is detrimental to the core to the structure on which stands the religion of the Prophet ﷺ. But as Muslims, you have been blessed with power of true monotheism – Tauhid. And the actual nation is the nation of Islam, and your overriding identity is that you are follower of the Prophet ﷺ. Thus you ought to exhibit your strength and vanquish this ideal of nationalism – just as your forefathers had done.

Idea of nationalism

The idea of nationalism is said to be the plunderer of Islam because as explained afterwards, Islam strengthens its followers by the truth of Unity in Godhood as opposed to the hollow vanity of the nationalist in his birthplace. And while others draw their identity on geographic/linguistic/racial lines, Muslims are to consider Aqidah (belief/ideology) as the governing authority for identification. Then the poet asks to emulate the Salaf – the generations succeeding the prophet ﷺ, in rooting out idol-worship as they had done it in their times with perfection, and had abandoned even their tribal relations to join the Prophet ﷺ.

Ho Qaid-e-Maqami To Nateeja Hai Tabahi

Reh Behar Mein Azad-e-Watan Soorat-e-Mahi

Hai Tark-e-Watan Sunnat-e-Mehboob (S.A.W.)-e-Elahi

De Tu Bhi Nabuwwat Ki Sadaqat Pe Gawahi

Guftar-e-Siasat Mein Watan Aur Hi Kuch Hai

Irshad-e-Nabuwwat Mein Watan Aur Hi Kuch Hai

The result of confining oneself to a piece of land is destruction. Thus one should live as a fish lives in the ocean. To renounce one's country is the way of the Prophet ﷺ. You should also testify to the truth of his prophethood by similar action. The connotation of the word 'nation' is very much different in political parlance and in Prophet's ﷺ commands.

The destruction caused by confining one to a piece of land is letting go of his Muslim identity by undermining it. Thus one should live in this world like fishes live in the ocean – without boundaries; unlike caged animals in the zoo with assigned restricted spaces. And renouncing one's country is so noble a cause that the Prophet ﷺ himself has performed it. Every Muslim is bound to testify to his prophethood and thus of the idea that a piece of land can never precede faith. Then the poet has hit a nerve with the last couplet of this para. Conflating the prophetic and political idea of love for one's nation is either done by an ingenious amateur or a nationalist with vested interest masquerading as a religious guide. While nationalism calls for living and dying for the sake of the country – no matter what, Prophet's ﷺ love for Makkah was primarily because Allah chose it as a center of guidance for the whole world – and its love didn't determine anything ie, it didn't even stop him from making Hijrah.

Aqwam-e-Jahan Mein Hai Raqabat To Issi Se

Taskheer Hai Maqsood-e-Tajarat To Issi Se

Khali Hai Sadaqat Se Siasat To Issi Se

Kamzor Ka Ghar Hota Hai Gharat To Issi Se

Aqwam Mein Makhlooq-e-Khuda Batti Hai Iss Se

Qoumiyat-e-Islam Ki Jar Katti Hai Iss Se

It alone is responsible for: the antagonism along world's nations, subjugation being made as the goal of commerce, politics bereft of sincerity, destruction of the home of the weak, unjust division of God's creation into nations, and uprooting of the Islamic concept of nationality.

How striking is the change in Iqbal's ideas about the nation! From the Himalayas as the sentry of a geographical nation, we jump to a nation of faith being guarded by that 'first idol-less house of God'. It is also striking that Iqbal ends the first sher with the same words that Akbar uses: 'sara jahan hamara'. However, what is common to both those phases is an obsession with geography. In 'Tarana e Milli', he refers to markers of a shared Islamic geography, such as Andalusia in Spain and the river Tigris. Later in Iqbal's life and career, many of his couplets refer to the territorial idea of the nation as a dangerous political concept, as reflected in the poem 'Wataniyat':

Is daur mein mai aur hai, jam aur hain, jam aur

saqi ne bina ki ravish e lutf o sitam aur

(In this age, the wine is new, the cup is new and the emperor is new,

The cup-bearer has invented new ways of reward and punishment)

tahzeeb ke azar ne tarashwaye sanam aur

muslim ne bhi tameer kiya apna haram aur

(The idol-maker of this age has created new idols,

even the Muslims have declared a new sacred direction]

in taza khudaon mein bada sabse watan hai

jo pairahan iska hai wo mazhab ka kafan hai

(of all these recent deities, the nation is the greatest,

and the cloth that makes its clothes is the shroud of religion)

Iqbal saw territorial nationalism as something that divided humanity and co-religionists, something that ought to be destroyed, and through this poem he urged Muslims to bury the false idol of nationalism. The poet obliges to do the same, and points out that Nationalism is the cause of so many evils in the world today. It has caused all nations to go antagonistic towards each other. It made business a tool to subjugate weak nations and destroy them for eg, British colonisation of India through East India Company. Attainment of good end of one's nation and unbelief in afterlife, has rendered those participating in politics bereft of trustworthiness. And above all – it unjustly divides the Creation of Allah into nations, and uproots the Islamic concept of nationality.

Conclusion

Muhammad Iqbal remains one of the most significant Muslim figures in the modern world. Iqbal's life and thought remain exceedingly crucial in the context of understanding the ways in which nationalism as a political ideal was understood in 20th century colonial India. Given the period he both belonged and responded to, he becomes indispensable for anyone interested in engaging with questions related to religion, identity and politics. His poems found easy acceptability with their images of reconciliation and mutual respect. National leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore praised his verse. Speaking in favour of the desired political autonomy for religious communities, in his piece titled *Islam and Nationalism*, Iqbal rejected this thesis by arguing how boundaries changed with time. Iqbal insisted that in the 20th century the term "nation" did not only imply the geographical but also political and it is the latter with which Islam, as a law of human society, comes into severe conflict.

His life and work have been analysed and scrutinized constantly by literary critics and religious ideologues alike, in print, in talk shows, on Internet forums and on blogs, where determined attempts are made to cull certainties and universalities from his writings. *Shikwa* and *Jawaab* are no longer mere poems but manifestos, and the abstractions inherent in his poetic turn of phrase are heightened to the point of dogma.

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