

Iqbal's Nationalism and Contemporary Muslim World

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Abstract

This paper deals with the philosophical aspects of nationalism and pan-Islamism in view of Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, a great poet and philosopher of sub-continent. The paper examines in an analytical way, how Iqbal's concept of nationalism is different from Western brand of nationalism and coincided with Jamal-u-din Afghani's ideal of pan-Islamism. The paper discusses how Iqbal reconciled his ideal with the real world-over dynamics, especially in the Muslim world after World War II. It is further argued that how far his idea of Nationalism and his concern for Muslim unity had relevance to the contemporary Muslim world, particularly in the context of predicament faced by the Muslim *Ummah*.

Keywords: Iqbal, Nationalism, Sub-Continent, Muslim Ummah-Pan-Islamics.

Introduction

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), was both a great poet and serious thinker. He had great many ideas that occupy various position along the spectrum on the philosophical social and political plan. His ideas are dynamic and romantic, provocative and profound; which can serve as a beacon for the Muslim community as well as for the humanity. He had denounced Western brand of nationalism and advanced the case of pan-Islamism in line with Jamal-ud-Din Afghani and world

Muslim unity. He had criticized the West for its materialism, for the cut-throat competition and for its values while applauding the East for its spiritualism and its concern for the soul; and condemned capitalism while preaching "a kind of vague socialism".¹ Iqbal's early nationalism replaced by the pan-Islamism is his thirst for Muslim unity. He believed that as a unifying force Islam supersedes national, ethnic and racial differences. Degeneration of Muslims was his real concern which,

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according to him, must be cured through action. Contemporary Muslim world also faces the same kind of problems that Iqbal grappled throughout his intellectual life. It is imperative to refocus our attention on the problem of degeneration of Muslim *Ummah*, and to find effective ways and means to achieve Muslim unity in order to meet the challenges faced by the Muslim world in the present uni-polar world. This paper focuses on some philosophical aspects of Iqbal's nationalism and pan-Islamism and its conceptual relevance in the contemporary Muslim world.

Nationalism was among the modern concepts that attracted most of Iqbal's attention. In his poetry, speeches, statements and letters he often expressed his opinion on many facets of this issue. Certainly there are some evidence to show a change in his out-looks from a fervent nationalist of the Western type to a universality of the Islamic pattern. Without attempting to identify the numerous currents and cross currents of his political thought, one may still pinpoint three important benchmarks, each representing a distinct phase and philosophy but not merging into the other. For the sake of convenience, these may be termed as the nationalistic, pan-Islamic and Muslim nationalism or Muslim universalism. For example some of the poems in *Bang-i-Dara* show him a poet of Indian nationalism. In this phase, he was profoundly influenced by the spirit of nationalism abroad, and uttered the feelings of the patriotism. *Tirana-i-Hindi* and *Naya Shiwala* are trilogy to be pointed out. Iqbal consider India more superior to the rest of the word. Iqbal laud India to the high skies, putting her on a pedestal higher than Greek, Egypt and Room, the chief citadels of ancient civilization.² After eulogizing certain aspects of the land he inculcate communal harmony, by saying that: "No religion preaches hatred and that every body living in the country is Indian and India is his land".³

To be hostile to one another,

Religion teaches not!

Indians are we all,

And Hindustan our country.

مذہب نہیں سکھاتا آپس میں بیرو رکھنا

ہندی میں ہم وطن ہی سارا جہان ہمارا

His later poems, particularly after the European inroads into the Muslim world and rise of nationalist movements in the Middle East, have a very striking pan-Islamic touch. This change in attitude made Iqbal a leading scholar-philosopher of Islam.

This phase came to an abrupt end after Iqbal's visit to Europe (1905-1908). After 1908 Iqbal was thoroughly convinced that Natinalism is "Poisonous for the modern civilization of man; and it is particularly so in the case of Muslims because it is contrary to the fundamentals of their faith".⁴ It appears that Iqbal's understanding about this issue was much deeper and more in consonance with the Quran and *Sunnah* than that of his opponents. He thought nationalism divided men from their fellow men and nations from nations. He believed that as a unifying force, Islam supersedes national, ethnic and racial differences. That means universal oneness of the Muslims regardless of geographical loeations and racial disparities. Because of his profound knowledge in Western philosophy, his initiation into modern Western thought and his close contact with Western life proved stimulating factor in the maturity of his thoughts rather to have acted as a catalyst, enabling him to perceive things in wider perspective and in clearer terms. Due to his fruitful personal experience by living in Europe and studying its history and philosophy, Iqbal could easily visualize that the onward march of nationalism had actually bred racialism in many countries. Thus, Turks, the Egyptians, Iranians and the Arabs had laid emphasize on the unique and particular racial origins and their racial differentiation from each other, in order to build up their own separate nationalistic states under the impact of nationalism. That had undermined the Islamic concept of *Ummah*, enfeebling the Muslim

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world, and in consequence, laying it all the more open to the Western designs, aggression, and exploitation. In reply to a statement of Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni, he said:

“I have been repudiating the concept of Nationalism since the time when it was not 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 to pieces.”⁵

Millat (community), according to Iqbal, is not circumscribed by territorial limitations. A Muslim does not belong to India, Rome or Syria, Islam is his destiny. In other words, the *Millat* (community) demands unity of hearts and belief rather than that of race or territory.⁶ Iqbal believed that regeneration of Muslims is only possible in holding Muslims together in pan-Islamism. His concept of *Millat* was basically pan-Islamic, a movement that was started by Syed Jamal-ud-Din Afghani (1839-96).

Despite the march of history in the previous two or three decades, driving the Muslims on the back seat, the Afghani legacy still dominated the Muslims mind to the point of becoming its magnificent obsession.⁷ This was particularly true of Indian Muslims as evidenced by their reaction to the unprovoked Italian raid on Tripoli (1911), the Balkan war (1912-14) and the still later *Khilafat* question (1918-24).⁸ Iqbal certainly was the great admirer of Afghani and advancing the cause of Afghani.⁹ As keen observer of Muslim affairs, Iqbal, like Afghani, suggested the Pan-Islamic ideal in

response to a desperate situation confronting the Muslim world. Post-war events rivened the Muslim world. The Credo of the young Turks, the revolt of Sharif Hussain of Makkah (1916), the Sykes-Picot Pact (1916) stipulating the division of conquered Ottoman territories among the victorious Allied powers, the iniquitous Balfour Declaration of 2 November, 1917 establishing a “national home” for the Jews in Palestine, and the earlier (1907-9) strangulation of the Persian constitution-all these events portended that Muslim peoples, now isolated from one another, had become a convenient target of Western designs, which had questioned the universality of Islam itself. Hence, Iqbal lamented Muslims for becoming race-conscious and race-oriented and exhorted to build up a single *Millat* or *Ummah*. The message to Muslims was conveyed, in his poetry, to unite for the defence of Baitul Haram from the banks of the Nile to the frontiers of Kashaghar.

From the banks of the Nile

to the soil of Kashaghar

The Muslims should be united

For the protection of their sanctuary¹⁰

ایک ہون مسلم حرم کی پاسبانی کی لیں

نیل کی ساحل سے لیکر تا بخاک کاشغہ

Iqbal believes in the universality of the *Millat* (Muslim community). The basis of such a community is the common belief in *Tauhid* (unity of God) and *Risaalat* (prophethood of Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) which constitute as a separate entity in the comity of nations.¹¹ He had denounced the concept of *watniyat* (nationalism) which, he felt, had divided Muslims and riven the Muslim world. Nationalism and pan-Islamism are competing ideologies-the one founded on the immutability of race, language and territory, and the other on the common legacy of a universal religion, and a cosmopolitan culture.

Neither is our heart

Of India, or Syria or Rome,

Nor any father land do we profess

Except Islam¹²

قلب ما از هند و روم و شام نیست

مردم یوم او بجز اسلام نیست

These are not two ends of a continuum, but are based on dichotomy. Hence, it is argued, that Iqbal's abandonment of nationalism for pan-Islamism represents a radical shift in his position, and not an evolution of thought. To many observers Iqbal's undiminished zest for a pan-Islamic society is just an ideal. But according to Iqbal himself, the ideal and the real are not two opposite forces, which defy conciliation. Idealism does not mean a complete break with realism. In fact, it is his perpetual endeavor to bring the ideal appropriately closer the real.¹³ Being a keen observer of Muslim affairs world-over, he could not have escaped perceiving the harsh fact that his panacea of pan-Islam in its idealistic and classical form was not practicable or relevant in the Muslim world situation of the twenties. It was a harsh reality that several Muslim countries had opted for nationalism for politics based on *asabiyat*- i.e. racial and linguistic unity-and were seeking nationalist solutions to their problems, Nationalism now, was a ground reality in almost all the Muslim countries, with territorial frontiers constituting an integral part of the basis of nationhood in Muslim countries in the post-war era.¹⁴

Being a visionary futuristic, Iqbal could not have possibly ignored all these historical facts, and was going to reconcile his ideal with the realism. In a reply to Sir Fazal-i-Hussain, on his remarks in the Council of State that political pan-Islamism never existed in Islamic history, he said:

Sir Fazl-I-Hussain is perfectly correct when he says that political pan-Islamism never existed. It has existed if at all, only in the imagination of those who invented

the phrase or possibly as a diplomatic weapon in the hands of Sultan Abdul Hameed Khan of Turkey. Even Jammal-ud-Din Afghani whose name is closely associated with what is called pan-Islamic movement, never dreamed of a unification of Muslims into a political State.¹⁵

In his Allahabad address (1930) in Muslim League session, Iqbal clearly told the audience:

Cannot ignore facts, however, unpleasant they may be. The only practical course is not to assume the existence of a state of things, which does not exist, but to recognize facts as they are, and to exploit them to our greatest advantage.¹⁶

Hence, Iqbal tried to resolve the conflict between nationalism, the fact of life and pan-Islamism, the ideal towards which he would like to see the Muslim people strive. He was convinced that the universality of Islam was vital to the faith itself and the Muslim peoples remain firmly anchored to their dynamic Islamic legacy and heritage.¹⁷ He firmly believed that if the Muslim nations were to survive in the competitive world, they must find out some devise, which could again link them together as one compact entity. Thus, Iqbal like Afghani, arrived at the concept of 'Islamic'; but more accurately, 'Muslim universalism'.¹⁸ Afghani, while preaching and working for pan-Islamism had also supported local nationalism wherever he found them to fit in within the broad framework of his ultimate goals.¹⁹

Iqbal, it may be argued, had reconciled himself to the prevailing concept of nationalism followed by most of the Muslim world, if only because he found that: "no non-Muslim group has cut across a Muslim society for a nationalist one".²⁰ To quote Professor Wilfred Cantwell

Smith:

- ... Wherever nationalism has been adopted in the Muslim world, and in whatever form, the 'nation' concerned has been a Muslim group. No Muslim people has evolved a national feeling that has meant a loyalty to or even concern for a community transcending the bonds of Islam.²¹
- ... Muslim groups differ as to the degree to which the Islamic interplay with nationalism is overt and explicit. They do not differ in the fact that every where their nationalisms are enthusiasm for Muslim nations.²²

Professor Smith further remarks.²³

- ... The driving force of nationalism has become more and more religious the more the movement has penetrated the masses. Even where the leaders and the form and the ideas of the movement have been **nationalist on a more or less** Western pattern, the followers and the substance and the emotions were significantly Islamic.

Iqbal was quite satisfied with the positive developments in various Muslim countries that was not going to cut across the Muslim nationalism. India was the test case for Muslims giving allegiance to a predominantly non-Islamic nationalism. Hence, for a while, the Muslims generally "gave themselves with zeal" to a composite Hindu/Muslim, Indian nationalism ... presently collapsed in shreds so far as the general Muslim group was concerned".²⁴ This development undermined, among others, one basic fact of Muslims *vis-à-vis* nationalism: "a non-Islamic nationalism could

not, for Muslims, stand against them".²⁵ The Indian experiment also testified that "the appeal to the Muslim group for loyalty to a society other than its own religious one"²⁶ was bound to fail sooner or later.²⁷

Iqbal, it may be argued, seems to be a pragmatic after dramatic developments in the Muslim world after World War-I. Nationalist movements in various countries-in Turkey, in Iran, in Egypt, and elsewhere-provided at that time only means for getting rid of foreign domination or for successfully withstanding Western designs, as well as for rehabilitating mundane Islam in these countries. It is construed, that nationalist experiments in various Muslim countries, notably in Turkey, there seems to be a radical shift in his ideas accordingly, which considered his contradictions by some scholars.²⁸ On the one hand Iqbal had bemoaned the abolition of the Caliphate with the verse: Lo! The unthinking Turks have torn as under the mantle of *Khilafat*;²⁹ on the other hand, five years later, he defended Mustafa Kamal Ataturk's (1880-1938) precipitate and extremely controversial decision.³⁰ More importantly he considered 'perfectly sound' the decision of Turkey's *ijtihad* in vesting in Grand Assembly an elected body. If the one represented the anguished cry of a pan-Islamist, the other represented the enthusiastic defence of a nationalist venture by the leader of a single Muslim country in a matter intrinsically Islamic without consulting rather in complete disregard of the consensus of the rest of the Muslim world.³¹ This indicates Iqbal's radical shift from his pristine pan-Islamic stance and orientation.

Iqbal was convinced that Muslim world despite its imperative need to find nationalist solutions to their desperate problems could maintain some sort of unity among themselves. Following Zia Gokalp, the chief theoretician of Turkish nationalism, he advocated multi-nationalism—with a view, of course, to energizing Muslims and rehabilitating Islam.

For the present, every Muslim nation must sink into her deeper self, temporarily focus her vision on her-self alone, until all are strong and powerful to form a living family of republics. A true and living unity, according to the nationalist thinkers, is not so easy as to be achieved by a merely symbolical overlordship. It is truly manifested in a multiplicity of the independent units whose racial rivalries are adjusted and harmonized by the unifying bond of a common spiritual aspiration. It seems to me that Islam is neither Nationalism nor Imperialism, but a League of Nations which recognizes artificial boundaries and racial distinctions for facility of reference only, and not for restricting the social horizon of its members.³²

Post-war developments in the Muslim world resulted to create artificial boundaries and racial distinction, yet Iqbal wanted to make sure that they should not be allowed to restrict the social horizon of Muslims. As long as their horizon was based on Islam, there was every hope that nationalism would turn into an enthusiasm for Islam, that ethos would remain essentially Islamic, and that the door for cooperation between various Muslim countries would remain wide open. Thus, the inherent conflict in the nationalism-pan-Islamism dichotomy was resolved through the formulation of a synthetic concept of 'Muslim universalism'. This crucial difference made others as nationalists while making Iqbal basically pan-Islamic.³³ The structural approaches and format are cast in the nationalist framework, the ethos are inspired by Islam. It is a translation, on the political plane, of Iqbal's self-perception of his own message.

What-if my goblet is non-Arab?

Its contents are Hijazi, after all!

What-if my lyric is Indian?

Its rhythm is Hijazi, after all!³⁴

عجمی خم بھی تو کیا کی تو حجازی بھی مری
نغمہ ہندی بھی تو کیا۔ کی تو حجازی بھی مری

On this analogy, he laid the intellectual foundations of Muslim nationalism in India and demanded "the creation of autonomous States" on the basis of "unity of language, race, history, religion, and identity of economic interests".³⁵ These were the attributes of nationalism that justified viable territorial frontiers (and territorial unity) to be incorporated among the basis of "Pakistan"³⁶ demand, religion was to be the leavening factor. However the consequences were to be spelled out in essentially Islamic terms. Thus, Iqbal laid the intellectual foundation of Muslim nationalism in India, and envisioned for Muslim India a destiny. What was remarkable about it was that while being congruent with the ideological legacy of Indian Islam, it provided a viable and constructive answer to Muslim India's current problems and predilections.

One of the underlying theme in Iqbal's thought and action throughout the whole span of his active life that held together his thoughts and ideas, although diversified they were, rehabilitation of Muslims in the contemporary world. He believed that the regeneration of Muslims could not be accomplished but only within an Islamic framework, nor could it be brought about without an Islamic resurgence.³⁷

Now, in the light of Iqbal's conceptual framework of "Muslim universalism," what is the true picture in the contemporary Muslim world? Notwithstanding political unity, how much social unity between the Muslim countries and their people is there? Unfortunately there is sorry state of affairs while looking into the contemporary Muslim world on the international political scenario, in terms of their material as well as spiritual progress and taking into account of their unity.

It is an imperative need to reawaken the Muslim world to undertake long over-due "reconstruction of religious thought" to produce a blueprint for a tolerant, democratic and just human society with the pristine spirit of Islam. For, Iqbal had urged for *Ijtehad* to make Islamic laws and ethos compatible with the modern world.³⁸ There are enormous challenges faced by the Muslim ummah. The gravity and the multitude nature of the problems, in fact, pose challenges to Islamic thought. Challenges in one form or another, one dimension or another, single or cumulative, direct or indirect in terms of complexity, have confronted Islam throughout its chequered history. Indeed, all through history, Islam has shown resilience to a remarkable degree to meet, offset, counter and can overtake challenges to its thought. Equally important, the more remarkable thing is that it did all this on the challenger's plane, and in his terms. Imam Ghazzali's *Tahafut al-Falasifah* provides a capital instance.³⁹ Hence, if Islamic thought faces a complex of challenges today-and it must be acknowledged that it does unless we go in for a frog-in-well approach-Islam has the resilience to meet these challenges.

A few crucial problems demand immediate attention of the Muslim ummah taking unanimous worldview on certain key issues like Palestine problem and Kashmir issue that threaten the world peace. Israel, in defiance of International law and norms, killing civilians, bulldozing houses and burying alive the inmate and her tanks rolled and made incursions into Palestinian Authority administered territory even destroying Arafat's headquarters, which hardly stirred Washington or International community.⁴⁰ Same is the case of Kashmir where innocent people struggling for the their right of self determination are subjected to state terrorism and high-handedness of India defying the UNO's resolution conceding their unalienable right of self determination. Rather India, after September 11,2001, incident turning

world-wide propaganda campaign against Pakistan accusing her for cross-border terrorism, despite the fact that Pakistan stood with International community in war against terrorism ceaselessly and faced the consequences as a frontline state.⁴¹ Afghanistan torn by the internal warfare and heavy bombardment by allied forces in thrust of Osama, needs to consolidate and reconstruct her out of wreckage. Iraqi people suffered a lot and are still suffering after befoolish decision of their leadership to wage war against Kuwait facing disastrous consequences. Iraqi people are facing intermittent bombardment by USA/Britain. Has Muslim *Ummah* an answer to these problems as a unified force?⁴²

Time has come for the Muslim *Ummah* to develop into an efficient and coherent force in international politics. There are fifty Muslim states encompassing vast areas with rich natural resources and vital geographical locations from the point of view of international sea and air passages.⁴³ At present, there are multifarious challenges faced by Muslim *Ummah* in a complex uni-polar world. The greatest among these are modernity and Western cultural intrusion, Science and technology and modern education and globalization and its implications for Muslim world. These issues are both multi-dimensional and complex which needs to be immediately addressed with all-out efforts by the unified Muslim world. What makes it imperative to translate the ideas of great reformers like Afghani and Iqbal into action compatible with the modern world requirements. Islam does not separate service to Allah from service to humanity. Fulfillments of duties to both constitute the essence of righteousness, and men and women are called upon to be in pursuit of righteousness throughout their life.⁴⁴ Allah has promised power and prosperity to the believers in this world as well.⁴⁵ It is for Muslims themselves to find out how that could be realized. Present alarming situation faced by Muslim *Ummah* demands reawakening of Muslim community in

order to answer the questions posed by the modern world to redefine Islamic thought as well as to prepare the *Ummah* to meet with the new challenges in the real world. Material progress, professional excellence and social status among the world community must be our objectives achieved through solidarity of the Muslims.

The only viable forum for Muslim ummah at International level, is OIC, which was created in 1969 and formulated its charter and created its formal structure in the early 70s. OIC, by its very nature, is an international organization; composed of its states that are Muslim in terms of socio-cultural and religious identity and not necessarily in the sense that they have adopted Islam as their official religion. Thus, Islam provides a source of affinity to a group of countries, which have joined together, under the state-centric framework of OIC-an organization of sovereign nations.

It is based more in the nature of fraternity rather than a coherent doctrine of unity.⁴⁶ Present world is shrieked to such an extent to be referred to as a 'global village', which increased the inter-state interaction in economic, political and other fields and thereby created a new system of inter-dependence. This system of inter-dependence has stimulated the creation of international organizations and countries continue to come together not only for a positive contribution in the field of cooperation in social, economic and political spheres.⁴⁷

European union is an example to be quoted. The Muslim states can extend their cooperation from economic sphere to social sector, by initiating joint ventures from trade and commerce to heavy industry and mobile as well as to communication. Another important area that needs concrete steps to be taken is joint defence mechanism of member countries like NATO. Moreover, there are so many unexplored avenues like health and education, research on science and technology as well as human development which can be pushed forward with the joint efforts and sharing

mutual experience of the member countries.

The OIC has made considerable headway not only in its working, but also in being able to evolve a number of subsidiary organs and institutions to coordinate the activities of member states in the area of their common interest, but still there is plenty of room to broaden its scope and functional structure. Since its inception, despite numerous Summit conferences and Foreign Minister's conferences at regular intervals, it fell short of the expectations. In order to produce tangible results either OIC has to be transformed into a vibrant forum or to create a new commonwealth of Muslim countries, which must be an effective coherent force in International politics.⁴⁸ There is an imperative need to broaden the scope of the organization (either existing OIC or new commonwealth) on the economic, political and social front. Real hard work is needed to attain the spirit of unity of Muslim *Ummah* and advancement with the pace of the rest of the world, in the field of science and technology and social economic development. Some sort of permanent arrangements are needed to sustain the growth and development in each major sector with mutual cooperation and pooling the resources of whole Muslim *Ummah*. Quran's also uphold the right to "in the good life to the Believers".⁴⁹ Hence, human face of Islam would be manifested through action, which is the real message of Iqbal.

Iqbal being a seer who could see beyond time and space an outstanding intellectual, who had the ability to visualize the Muslim situation in light of its past history and current predicament and give serious thought to their short and long term problems. Muslim *Ummah* again has to consolidate its energies and to initiate concurrent efforts to come out of current problems and predicaments. The entire train of Iqbal's thought gravitates towards such kind of Muslim Universalism and collective Ego of the community,⁵⁰ which had to be translated into reality. As advocated by Iqbal, real action

is needed to be initiated to free the spirit of the East, to shatter the shackles imposed by the West. The contemporary world crises are dominated by two gigantic struggles. The outstanding problem is the struggle of the nations of Asia & Africa against the political domination and economic exploitation of the West under the garb of democracy and human rights minus equity and justice. There is a right time to give a wake-up call to the Muslim *Ummah* to maintain coherence and unity among themselves and avail once more the opportunity of regeneration of Muslims in accordance with the essence of Islam.

Conclusion

Some of Iqbal's critics have found his ideas on nationalism inconsistent and contradictory when he justified the abolition of Ottoman *Khilafat* as an *Ijtihadi* act by the Grand National Assembly.⁵¹ As argued in the above discussion, he along with the experience and world-wide changing circumstances has tempered his idealism, adjusting his position *vis-à-vis* nationalism and pan-Islamism, in seeking to resolve the conflict by evolving a synthetic concept of Muslim nationalism or Muslim universalism, which embodies the inherently Islamic direction. That personified Iqbal's pragmatism and above all creativity of high order. Indeed, Iqbal was not opposed to nationalism *per-se*. What he was against to a sort of nationalism that led to cut throat competition between nations in the West, that deification of the state at the expense of morality, that became the easy tool for the Western exploitation of the East. He, once opposed to the nationalism based on race, language or territory, however, applauded the venture when a nationalist upsurge was exploited for regeneration of Muslims and for rehabilitating the power and prestige of mundane Islam. He applied same analogy, for setting up a "consolidated Muslim State" in India. Thus he seems to be pragmatic enough despite his sheer idealistic

approach throughout his poetry.

Iqbal a visionary philosopher who could see beyond time and space had a conviction that all independent Muslim territorial units after having achieved sufficient power would adjust racial rivalries and gain enough strength and vigour by the unifying bond of common spiritual aspiration. Cherished ideas of *Ummah's* unity, envisioned by Iqbal, that still are valid has to be translated into reality by the contemporary Muslim world, which is the real answer to their problems and predicament. How that is to be achieved, that is the task of Muslims, which is essential for the re-generation of Muslim *Ummah* in the light of true spirit of Islam.

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