

## **The Philosophical, Political and Economic Thought of Dr. Muhammad Iqbal: A Brief Reappraisal**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses some key points in the philosophical, political and economic thought of the famous Indian Muslim poet Dr. Mohammad Iqbal. Iqbal sought to reform the Muslim identity and the wider Islamic world in order to deal with the Western challenge. He was deeply perturbed by the ideological domination of the East by the West in the political, cultural and social spheres. His political and economic perceptions, as indicated in his poems, seek to revive the self-confidence and creativity in the Muslim Ummah (Community). Iqbal exhorts the Muslims to realise their identity and selfhood (Khudi) to confront the Western challenge. Iqbal's politico-economic thought is tinged with his dislike of capitalism and colonial rule. As an anti-dote to these elements, Iqbal speaks positively of socialism and its main proponents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century although he rejects the atheistic form of socialism. Iqbal also purposes a reconstruction of Islamic thought in order to make it compatible with the demands of the modern world. All in all, Iqbal's philosophy reveals an eclectic mixture of Islamic modernism, anti-imperialism, pan-Islamism and a desire for a socially equitable society within an Islamic framework.

### **Keywords:**

Khudi, Ego, Islam, Imperialism, Colonialism, Western Civilisation, Equality, Quran, Democracy, Socialism, Caliphate.

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### **Introduction**

Dr Muhammad Iqbal<sup>1</sup> (b. 1877–d. 1938) was a preeminent Muslim poet, thinker, and statesman of India in the early twentieth century. Allama<sup>2</sup> Iqbal was born in Sialkot, Punjab province, British India (present-day Pakistani Punjab). His ancestors were Kashmiri Brahmins. He was educated at Lahore, Cambridge, and Munich. Iqbal, travelled to Cambridge (1905) to study Neo-Hegelian philosophy and law. In the summer of 1907, he went to Heidelberg to learn German and submitted a thesis on “The Development of Metaphysics in Persia” at the University of Munich in November 1907.

Iqbal’s eloquent writings in Urdu, Persian, and English were aimed at reconstructing Islamic thought in the modern age and galvanising into action the dormant Muslim communities of India and other Islamic lands under Western colonial control. He was well-versed in Islamic philosophy and had extensively studied Ibn-i-Arabi and Al Ghazzali. His poetry is based on Indian and Persian literary tradition reflecting his deep understanding, and his attempt to arrive at a creative synthesis, of the Islamic and Western intellectual and literary heritage. Dr Iqbal’s vision of a separate homeland for India’s Muslims makes him the spiritual father of the state of Pakistan carved out of Britain’s Indian empire in 1947.

Essentially, Iqbal was an eclectic thinker but who propounded an ecumenical version of Islam compatible with modernist ideas but based on the foundation of its traditional spiritual heritage. In fact, it is impossible to cover the vast scope and philosophical depth of Iqbal’s works in one essay. This essay, therefore, only gives an outline of Iqbal’s perceptions on philosophy, politics and economics. It is organised as follows: Section I gives a summary of Iqbal’s philosophical ideas which had a profound impact on his politico-economic thought. Section II deals with his political thinking while Section III gives an exposition of his economic ideals. Section IV

briefly outlines of some criticisms of Iqbal and Section V concludes the essay.

### **1. The Philosophical Foundations of Iqbal's Thought**

Muhammad Iqbal was perhaps the greatest of all Islamic modernists. His level of mastery of Western philosophy, in addition to his knowledge of the Islamic tradition, was unparalleled by other great Islamic modernists such as Syed Ahmed Khan (Nationality: Indian. 1817-1898), Jamal al-Din Asadabadi – Iranian- Known widely as Al-Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammad Abduh (Egyptian. 1849-1905) and Syed Ameer Ali (Indian. 1849-1928).

For Iqbal, as was the case for all Muslim reformers, there was a deep sense of disquiet regarding the political and economic ascendancy of the West over the Muslim world, manifested in the colonisation of vast swathes of Muslim lands beginning in the 18th century. The main question troubling Muslim thinkers were “what had gone wrong?” India of Iqbal's period was no exception. It was the ‘Jewel’ in Britain's colonial empire in Asia. For many Western-educated Muslim intellectuals, the Islamic world's civilizational inferiority was due to the West's embracing of reason and the Muslim world's ostensible discarding of it. However, unlike the mainstream of Muslim reformers, Iqbal did not advocate a wholesale adoption of Western thought and reason to improve the abysmal condition of the Islamic world. Instead, he proposed the adoption of Western reason and education, but within the philosophical foundations of the spirit of Islam.

Iqbal is the only Muslim philosopher of the twentieth century who made an attempt to understand the modern Western philosophy within an Islamic context. He was an admirer of German philosophy. German philosophers such as Hegel, Kant, Leibnitz, Fichte, Nietzsche and Marx and several other Western philosophers had a profound influence on him. But, out of all Western and Eastern philosophers and mystics, the maximum influence and affinity on the ideas of Iqbal came from

Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, whose Mathnawi is an immortal classic of Persian mysticism.

Iqbal is a critic of the West's domination of the Islamic world. The centrepiece of Iqbal's anti-Westernism is his critique of Western imperialism and Muslim society's subjugation to Western culture by losing its traditions, identity and honour. He envisaged that through his poetry he could assist in resistance to colonial hegemony and facilitate the empowerment of the Muslims. In addition, he sought to revive the humanistic spirit of Islam based on love and affection which in his mind had been corrupted by the rigid interpretation of past Arab/Islamic scholars. He wants to propound a humanist<sup>3</sup>, non-sectarian and modern Islamic spirit within a pan-Islamic framework. In fact, Iqbal's pan-Islamic bent had great impact on Islamic modernists of the late twentieth century including prominent thinkers such as Dr Ali Shariati of Iran (1933-1977), the famous Turkish poet Zia Gokalp<sup>4</sup> (1876-1924) and many others

Foremost in Iqbal's endeavour to improve the Muslim condition is for them to realise their real self or Khudi (in Persian and Urdu). Iqbal perceived that Muslims lacked self-realisation of their identity and value and, as a result, their character and morality had become debased. They were either living in ignorance and simply following rituals often misinterpreted, especially in the context of India, by semi-literate clergy or were becoming slaves of Western culture by blindly emulating the West without any critique or reservation. In Iqbal's assessment Muslims lacked any sense of unity of purpose, empathy for their co-religionists or a direction in life. His famous poem 'Ghulamon ki Namaz' (Prayers of the Slaves), written in 1935, depicts his helplessness and disappointment through his sarcastic mockery of Indian Muslims' satisfaction in rituals and lack of struggle against foreign rule. In 1911, Iqbal had elaborated this psyche in the Urdu poem 'Šhikwā' (Complaint), in which Muslims' complain to God that he has forsaken them. A year later in 'Jawāb-i Šhikwā,' Iqbal gives the

God's answer that the indolent Muslims have brought misfortune upon themselves with their forsaking the spirit of the message of God given to the Holy Prophet Muhammad ( May the blessings of Allah be upon Him and his family). This sorry state of affairs was due to the Muslim's lack of understanding of the true nature of Islam which in turn had led to the debasement of his Khudi.

Iqbal's attainment of Khudi revolved around the theme of reviving the spiritual powers of resistance necessary for self-ascertainment and regaining dignity. Thus, his poetry emphasises that the Muslims can only reach liberation from the enslavement of Western culture if they know their Self (Khudi) and in turn foster their ego to new heights. Consequently, the attainment of Khudi and realisation of an eternally powerful ego would lead the Muslim, in Iqbal's vision, to attain the status of Mard-i-Momin, or Insan-i-Kamil- a complete moral human being with the virtues and character of the Prophets. This is the embodiment of that perfect selfhood (Khudi) that is embellished by the attributes of God—not an easy status to attain.

For Iqbal, ethically, the word 'Khudi' means 'self-reliance, self-respect, self-confidence, self-preservation, even self-assertion when such a thing is necessary, in the interests of life and the power to stick to the cause of truth, justice, duty ...' (A.M. Schimmel, 1963 :42). Iqbal thought it necessary also to warn the readers "that 'Khudi' is not used to mean pride as in the common usage of the word in Urdu, but is inked with the building of a powerful ego- which Muslims lacked due to colonial subjugation. In his view, a Muslim's purpose was to discover his khudi by demolishing obscurantism, dogmatism and inertia. He was then to inspire khudi in his community, which, in turn , would inspire the community to turn itself into a polity driven by a dynamic, evolving and progressive Islam. This process will lead to the creation of a powerful nation of forward-looking and motivated Muslims who would be able to convincingly and effectively challenge

European colonialism, economic exploitation and Western political ideas, which, to Iqbal, had become 'morally bankrupt'.

The cultivation of Khudi and, as a result, the ego, in Iqbal's verses, is the reactivation of desire, truth, love, courage, honesty, honour, perseverance, morality and spiritual resilience in the Muslim character. All these were necessary to rejuvenate the indolent Muslims from their slumber and self-resignation. The cultivation of Khudi was regarded as vital to building a character strong enough to confront Western imperialism and realise God's promise to Muslims that one day they will be the leaders of humanity. In this context, it is essential to note that the concept of Faqr (poverty) is also an essential theme of Iqbal's works. Faqr in his poetry is not the economic poverty faced by the individual but the strength to resist the lower temptations of the world. To cultivate Faqr, Iqbal points out that the Holy Quran provides the main guide. He observes in the Javid Nama that:

Without the Quran, the lion is a wolf;

The poverty of the Quran is the root of empire.

The poverty of the Quran is the mingling of meditation and reason.

I have never seen reason perfect without meditation. (Arberry, 1966 Trans: 89)

In Iqbal's perception 'Faqiri' and Faqr (Poverty) is the urge to inculcate the inner detachment and moral self-control which can enable a person to be a part of the world and yet not serve any god but God. Iqbal associated a true Muslim was imbued with the spirit of faqiri- he was other worldly in his soul, but in this world he was a man of action who cultivated his/her ego. To his son, he wrote:

My way lies not in wealth but in 'Faqiri',

Your Selfhood (Khudi) do not sell - in poverty make a name (Iqbal, Bal-i- Gibril: 189)

In 1915, Iqbal's first major Persian work *Asrār-i khudi* 'The Secrets of the self' was published. In this work, written in the style of Rumi's *Maṭhnavi*, he preaches the strengthening of personality,

activity, honour, self-respect and courage- it rehashes his main theme of building Khudi and dynamism/ action as the essence of Islam's principles (A. M. Schimmel, 2002). Later, in *Ramuz-i BeKhudi* 'Mysteries of selflessness,' Iqbal explained the individual's duties in the ideal community of Muslims and the role of this community in the world: as the 'seal of communities.' Muslims should act, following the Prophet's example, as 'mercy for the worlds' (The Holy Quran, 1969, Pickthall trans: v 21:107).

A recurring theme in Iqbal's Urdu and Persian poems is his love of the Prophet (Peace be upon Him and his family). His numerous poems idolize Imam Hussain's (A. S.) sacrifice in Karbala as the ideal symbol of revitalized Khudi and an example of struggle against evil of a true Momin (Mard-i- Khoda). Similarly, he gives the example of Hazrat Fatima Zahra (A.S.) as the ideal woman's example to humankind. In a similar vein, he eulogises Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib (A.S.) as the symbol of courage, love, humility and faqr. In *Asrar-i-Khudi*, he had expressed his respectful love and admiration for Imam Ali (A.S.) which he considers as the repository of Muslim knowledge and values imbued with Khudi and the true spiritual ideals of Islam.

## **2. Iqbal's' Political Thought**

Iqbal political perceptions are complex and often difficult to interpret. However, there are certain consistencies which one can detect in his views. Iqbal is an anti-imperialist as well as anti-capitalist. He was indebted to Western thought but criticised everything Western. He was a political poet because his aim was to awaken the self-consciousness of Muslims, primarily in the Indian subcontinent but also in general. One can also call him as an Islamic poet, because of his firm belief in the Quran and the deep and sincere love of the Holy Prophet as an eternal model for mankind. Muhammad Iqbal's political thought was essentially an extension of what he had asserted in his Persian and Urdu poetry. It revolved around developing a political system for the

Muslims which was compatible with the ethical and moral principles of Islam yet based on modern lines.

Iqbal's political thought is not systematic but is contained in the entire corpus of his Persian and Urdu poetry. His Persian answer to the German poet Goethe's *West-Östlicher Divan* (West-Eastern Divan), the *Payām-i Mašreq* 'Message of the East,' written in 1922 contains not only quatrains in the classical style but many interesting remarks about European philosophers and politicians. One year later, a collection of Iqbal's Urdu poetry appeared, called *Bāng-i- Darā* 'Sound of the caravan bell,' which further give insights on Iqbal's political thought. His other works *Arghaman-i- Hejaz* ( Gift of Hejaz), *Pas Che Bayad Kard Ay Aqwam -i-Sharq* ( What Should be done o' People of the East), *Bal-i- Gibril*, all contain political perceptions.

Politically, Muhammad Iqbal perceived Islam, not in terms of the details of Sharia (Islamic law), but in three broad and interrelated levels: (1) Islam as a faith, a religious and moral system whose cardinal beliefs mark its adherents as Muslims; (2) Islam as a culture, a way of life that would integrate Muslims into a nation state; and (3) Islam as a political-ideological system whose set of values could socialize Muslims into a viable, separate political community. This conception contrasted with that of many religious scholars, especially those of the Indian Deobandi school [influenced by the Wahhabi doctrines prevalent in present-day Saudi Arabia] in the United Provinces of India, who envisioned an Islamic state where Islamic law would be strictly implemented (Hussain, 2006).

Islamic modernism found expression in the works of Iqbal. His vigorous pleas to reactivate the 'principle of movement' in Islam—*ijtihād*—to reinterpret the foundational legal principles of Islam in the light of modern conditions and ideas, and to work toward the reconstruction of Islamic religious thought have been a driving force for Islamic modernism in South Asia. Nonetheless, Iqbal is not an admirer of the Western political system or even the Western political



doctrines such as Liberalism<sup>5</sup>. His disdain for these systems can be gleaned from his famous poem written in Urdu in 1936 called *Iblees Ki Majlis- i-Shura* (The Parliament of Satan). *Iblees Ki Majlis- i-Shura* is a scathing criticism of the major socio-political and economic systems offered by the West.

In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, six lectures given by Iqbal at the University of Allahabad in the early 1930s, the poet's political thought is more clearly delineated. In these lectures, Iqbal emphasises that a political system of Islam should be based on knowledge, humanity and reason. The ruling elites should govern on the basis of trust given to them by God. He quotes the Quranic verse, 'Verily We proposed to the Heavens and to the earth and to the mountains to receive the trust, but they refused the burden and they feared to receive it. Man alone undertook to bear it, but hath proven unjust, senseless!' (The Holy Quran, 1969 Pickthall trans: v. 33:72). Here Iqbal interprets 'the trust' as the trust of personality (self/ego), while historically it was interpreted either as the trust of Tawhid or obedience to God. Iqbal makes a fundamental break from the traditional interpretation in an effort to revitalise Muslims towards action. For Iqbal, the discovery and cultivation of the ego marks the pinnacle of religious life. The strengthening of the ego with the divine principles is the true end as it allows man's fulfilment of his God-given role as His vicegerent on earth.

Iqbal rejected Western democracy as in his view this was a cover for many injustices. It was a tool in the hands of imperialism and capitalism: He observed in a poem in *Bang -i- Dara* that:

The democracy of the West is the same old organ,

Which strikes the self-same note of Imperialism:

That which thou regardst as the fairy Queen of Freedom

In reality is the demon of autocracy clothed in the garb of deception.

(Hassan, 1971:155)

Iqbal also criticised Western democracy in which persons are 'counted' not 'weighed' according to their character, morality and ethics (Hassan, 1971: 155). He sought a political system in which educated leaders and enlightened persons should be elected or selected to legislate for the community.

He generally supported a republican form of government based on the Islamic principles but which would give considerable personal freedom to the citizen. He had noted that the essence of Islam's basic principle of Tawhid was based on implementing the notions of 'equality, solidarity, and freedom'. A Muslim state's 'endeavour' is 'to transform these ideal principles into space time forces, an aspiration to realise them in a definite human organisation' (Iqbal, 1982: 154). In addition, the needs of the individual are subordinate to the needs of the community in an Islamic order. At the same time, Iqbal is not averse to a dictatorial form of government as long as it serves the interests of the community. This can be detected from his ambivalent attitude towards dictatorial statesmen of his period such as Benito Mussolini of Italy, Mustafa Kemal 'Ataturk' of Turkey and Vladimir Lenin of Russia.

Muhammad Iqbal was a supporter of the Sunni Ottoman Empire which in his perception had kept the unity of the Muslim world for a long period. However, he also endorsed the republican style of government introduced in Turkey after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. He, in fact, backed the Turkish dictator Mustafa Kemal 'Ataturk's' reforms of Turkey's societal, cultural and educational spheres. The movement of reform initiated by Mustafa Kemal, Iqbal believed, despite many flaws that it may encompass, was wholesome in general and to be encouraged as an illustration of how Muslim thought might be reactivated in the modern era. In Iqbal's view, these reforms may have been necessary to save Turkey from further dismemberment by the West. Intriguingly, Iqbal believed that Turkey had exercised Ijtihad- independent reasoning on Islamic issues- under its post-

Ottoman leadership and thus its action should be understood in this context.

It should be made clear that Iqbal never endorsed all the contributions of the Kemalist secular experiment, as is sometimes thought, in its anti-clergy and anti-Sufi interpretations of Islam. However, Iqbal's qualified support for Turkey's so-called secular reforms overlooked the fact that the Kemalist leadership was transforming Turkey into pro-Western client state - a situation the country still faces. Hence, it can be asserted that Iqbal may have been too optimistic about Turkey's supposed Ijtihad or misunderstood the nature of the post-Ottoman Turkish state. All facts suggest that the Turkish leadership at that juncture was leading their country towards an ill-planned, secularist model and had little interest in exercising Ijtihad. Their 'reforms' were creating a cultural and religious confusion in the Turkish national identity.

The Islamic state in Iqbal's view is to be based on consensus and should empower to exercise Ijtihad in order to 'reform' Islamic practices. Iqbal saw his project as being one of redefining Islam in response to colonialism and cultural imperialism. Islam for him was a means of achieving the freedom, independence and self-creation. Iqbal had a pan-Islamic vision. Overall, he advocated the somewhat Plutonian enactment of a 'spiritually enlightened' and learned assembly of men who would decide the political, economic and legislative fate of the Muslims. Iqbal called this 'spiritual democracy' (Iqbal, 1982: 180).

Dr Iqbal's thought emphasised that the traditional aversion to legal innovation in Islam has been due to conservative fears of social fragmentation. This fear has caused Muslim conservatives, primarily from the Sunni school of thought, to resort to an increasingly systematic and puritanical understanding of Islamic law. By rejecting the use of reason to interpret Sharia according to changing contexts, Iqbal argued that the 'unthinking masses' were left by Muslim elites in the 'hands of intellectual mediocrities' and that this compelled them to adhere

‘blindly’ to the most dominant schools of jurisprudence. (Iqbal, 1982: 174). He observed that Islam’s laws and practices must reflect its universality and remain in harmony with the times by carrying forward the principle of evolutionary thought within the Quran. Iqbal emphasised that Muslims should reinvigorate the Islamic principle of Ijma, or consensus, as well as Ijtihad which constituted major sources of Quranic jurisprudence to reformulate Islamic political thought.

Iqbal’s poetry also indicates his considerable interest in the international issues pertaining to the Islamic world of his time. He was particularly interested in developments in Turkey, Iran, Palestine and Afghanistan. His doctoral thesis titled *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* is a comprehensive survey of Iranian philosophical thought over the centuries – from Zoroastrian times to the Islamic period. In fact, he believed that the most important event in the history of Islam was the conquest of Iran as it played a major role in the subsequent intellectual, political and cultural development of the religion.

He wrote in an Urdu poem:

Tehran ho gar aalam-e-mashreq ka Geneva  
Shaayad kura-e-arz kee tadqeer badal jaae

[Trans. If Tehran could become the Geneva of the Orient, the fortunes of this hemisphere might change - Iqbal in his poem *Jamiyat-e-Aqwam* or *League of Nations* in *Zarb-i-Kalim*]

As observed in this paper, Dr Muhammad Iqbal was a fervent opponent of imperialism. In this context, he had denounced the ‘Balfour Declaration’ of 1917 in which the British government gave its permission to Zionist European Jewry to establish their state in mainly Arab-Muslim Palestine. He noted before his death that: ‘The Jews also have no right over Palestine. They had bid farewell to Palestine willingly long before its occupation by Arabs. Zionism also is not a religious movement in addition to the absence of any interest among religious Jews in Zionism’ (Lone, 2012). In a poem in the *Zarb-i-Kalim*,

Iqbal advised the Palestinian Arabs to cultivate Khudi to struggle for their rights as their salvation did not lie in 'London or Paris' (Iqbal, Zarb-i-Kalim, 1977:75).

Iqbal was also quite severe in his criticism of the Arab elites of his time, particularly the Hashemite dynasties imposed by Britain on Jordan and Iraq. He condemned them over their treachery to the Ottoman Empire by siding with the British in First World War. He was scathing in his criticism of Arab Kings and Sheikhs who had 'sold' their religion to the British and stabbed their Ottoman brothers.

### **3. Iqbal's view on Economics and Social Inequality.**

Dr Iqbal's views on economics were greatly influenced by his concern over social inequality. This prompted him to be influenced by the philosophy of socialism which was becoming the prominent social concept amongst many Asian and Middle Eastern intellectuals at the dawn of the early twentieth century. Socialism, as understood by Iqbal, was the system of social organisation that calls for public ownership of key instruments of production and equitable distribution of wealth and property. Iqbal tried to find a modus vivendi between the precepts of Islamic Sharia and socialism.

Iqbal's views on socialism were multifarious and complex as were his thoughts on social revolution, Marxism and Bolshevism.<sup>6</sup> He perceived Islam as compatible with socialism. In his well-known Urdu poem Karl Marx key Awaz (the voice of Karl Marx), he has Marx assailing European economists who intentionally conceal the predatory and oppressive structure of capitalism and imperialism. He declares in this poem that the world has run out of patience with the capitalist economists' theatrical show of 'flowing curves' and exploitation of economic science to 'serve only the interests of the ruling classes'. (Marek, 1971)

Iqbal was very critical of what today is called neo-liberal capitalism, the idea that the market should be allowed to make major social and political decisions; the idea that the State should voluntarily reduce its

role in the economy, or that corporations should be given total freedom, that trade unions should be curbed and citizens given less rather than more social protection. Hence, for Iqbal, Karl Marx is an admired person, but at the same time, his atheism deeply disturbs the poet. In a very well known Persian poem 'Communism and Capitalism' in the Javid Nama Iqbal called Marx<sup>7</sup> 'Sahib-e-Sarmaya az nasl-e-khalil: yani a'an paighambar-e-bi-Jibraeel' [Trans. The master of the book "The Capital" who was from the family of Abraham (Marx's Jewish heritage)], He was a messenger without a Gabriel] (Vahdat, 2015:80). He further stated that Marx's heart is of a Mumin but his mind is of an infidel (Kafir). He concluded the poem by condemning capitalism (mulukiyat) because of its materialism but even Marxism for its atheism!

Even in his final lectures, Iqbal had questioned the philosophers of his time over their assertion regarding the 'finality of the present capitalistic structure of society' (Iqbal, 1982:111). Iqbal saw in socialism, a ray of hope in a dark world of greed and inequality. He appropriates Marx to highlight the exploitative role of capitalism but imbues his socialistic ideas with an Islamic spirit. Marx's Influence on Iqbal, however, is undeniable and becomes obvious in many of his poems. Some of his Persian poems about workers in Payam-i- Mashreq are obviously Marxist in their tone. His sympathy for socialism was, in part, due to the fact that he had seen the destructive impact of the imposition of capitalism by the British in India. The colonisation of India by the British had destroyed local industry and created a class of usurious money lenders, landlords and commercial traders who exploited India's extremely poor workers and peasants. Socialism to Iqbal was the answer to eradicate feudalism, tribalism and capitalism in India.

The Socialist Revolution in Russia in 1917 had a great influence on Indian Intelligentsia, and particularly Iqbal. According to him, it would 'open a new era of the workers.' It sent out a message to the Indian

people and intelligentsia that masses can play a significant role in liberation movements. However, Iqbal's philosophy reflected that the Islamic states of the East should develop in their own distinct way, but could borrow ideas from the socialist order being built in Russia. An interesting approach towards the socialist revolution was shown in Iqbal's poem *Ishtirakiyat* (Socialism) where he exclaimed that the progress of Russia actually was a proof that time has come to implement and establish the Quranic principle of 'spend. Say whatever is superfluous.' (The Holy Quran, 1969 Pickthall trans: v. 2:219). However, Iqbal was opposed to Russia's godlessness and saw it as the chief flaw. In his poem 'Bolshevik Russia,' he declared that the failure and corruption of the Russian Orthodox Church was mainly responsible for the 1917 October Revolution. Nonetheless, in a letter to Sir Francis Younghusband, a British officer in India, he writes, 'Bolshevism (Soviet socialism) plus God is almost identical to Islam.' (Hassan, 1971:154).

Being an idealistic, Iqbal may have overlooked or was not cognisant about the totalitarian aspects of socialism imposed on Russia by Lenin and his associates which resulted in gross violation of human rights and the democratic ethos. Nevertheless, in his famous Urdu poem *Lenin Khuda Kay Hadhur Mein* (Lenin before God) Iqbal has Lenin protesting to God against Western civilisation and capitalism: Lenin states in the words of Iqbal:

What they call commerce is a game of dice:  
Profit for one, for millions swooping death.  
Their (West's) science, philosophy, scholarship, government  
Preach man's equality but (instead) drink man's blood (Kiernan, 2004:35)

The famous Canadian scholar W. C. Smith had noted that Iqbal's writing were 'throughout tinged with socialism but he did not know what socialism was.' (Smith, 1946: 64). However, this was a totally wrong assertion. Iqbal completely knew what socialism was and at the

same time had a deep understanding of the Quran and Islamic history. His interpretation of socialism was that this social order, at least in theory, gives humanity the best option to create an equitable and just society devoid of exploitation - to this day this is one of the goals of socialist philosophy.

Despite admiring certain aspects of the socialist experiment in Russia, Iqbal also predicted that the experiment could fail if it negates religion (Vahdat, 2015: 48) and this is what eventually happened in 1991 with the ignominious collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus, in this sense, Iqbal had also showed his profound understanding of the inadequacy of socialism if implemented without a religious or moral foundation. Nonetheless, the socialist ideal, in Iqbal's interpretation of Islam corresponded to true Islamic ideals-the annihilation of exploitation of man by man and the liquidation of kingship and autocracy. (N.P. Anikeyev, 1971:277). At the same time, Iqbal's works clearly indicate that he was opposed to secular socialism and liberal capitalism as both perpetuated the separation of the church and the state. In Iqbal's view, Islam combined both. Thus, a system based on spirituality and combining some of the key economic principles of socialism was in his perception close to the ideal Islamic system.

It appears from a careful examination of Iqbal's economic thought that his sympathy for socialism came from his deep dislike for injustice and despotism. He detested capitalism as it was based on profit, war and imperialism. Capitalism's basic ethos was against Iqbal's quest for the just humane order in society. Iqbal was a practising Muslim with a deep sense of humanism and sensitive to human suffering. He wanted justice for all humans whether they be Muslim or non-Muslim. However, it should be emphasised that Iqbal completely rejected the atheistic socialism and, thereby, Marx's materialist interpretation of history. Nonetheless, he accepted many major goals of socialism primarily aimed at alleviating social inequality.

#### **4. Some Paradoxical Elements in Iqbal's Thought**



It cannot be denied that Iqbal's works do contain contradictions and paradoxes. While backing some aspects of Kemal 'Ataturk's' secular reforms in Turkey, he argues for Sharia law in Muslim society albeit in 'reconstructed' manner which is compatible with contemporary period. However, Ataturk was not too keen to retain the Sharia as the foremost legal system for Turkey. Thus, it appears that Iqbal seems to have misunderstood the secular aims of the post-Ottoman Turkish leadership. He naively believed that this leadership may retain the trappings of an Islamic framework in the new state structures. This was not to be. Moreover, post-Ottoman Turkey also failed to forge an independent stance in the area of foreign policy. Its leadership had closely tied Turkey with the Western European powers of the time and, hence, forfeited claims of keeping Turkey fully independent. In this context, it certainly appears that Iqbal failed to appreciate the true nature of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's policies.

Iqbal's philosophical beliefs also appear sometimes to be confused and contradictory. In the *Reconstruction of Islamic Thought in Islam*, he writes rather positively about certain 'orthodox' Sunni Ulema like Ibn-e-Taimiyya (1262-1327 AD) who was extremely sectarian in outlook. Ibn-e-Taymiyya was against Shi'ism, Sufism and Greek philosophy! The writings of Taymiyya and his students provide the core of so-called contemporary Salafi theological corpus. Later significant Salafi thinkers came from the Wahhabi movement, a pseudo-Sunni sect founded in the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792). Salafism focuses on eliminating idolatry (shirk) and affirming God's Oneness (tawhid). Salafis view themselves as the only true Muslims, considering those who practice so-called 'major idolatry' to be outside the bounds of the Islamic faith.

Interestingly, Iqbal writes ambivalently about Mohammad Ibn 'Abdul Wahhab as a 'great puritan reformer' of Najd whose 'movement had immense potentialities' although he recognised that this phenomenon was 'conservative' and 'uncritical of the past' (Iqbal,

1982:152). In reality, Abdul Wahhab was a rabidly anti-Shi'a character whose rustic, sectarian-oriented teachings are even today causing sectarianism and discord in Arab/Islamic societies. Wahhab's teachings are iconoclastic, parochial, and retrogressive. This contrasts with Iqbal's own humanist, non-sectarian and modernist interpretation of Islam. Hence, in this respect, Iqbal was certainly off the mark as he initially clearly misunderstood Wahhabism and its bigoted and perverse interpretation of Sunni Islam.

To a Wahhabi-Salafi, all those who differ with them, including Sunni Muslims, Shi'ite Muslims, Christians, and others, are infidels. All this is a far cry from Iqbal's pan-Islamic vision encompassing all Muslims irrespective of sect. It seems Iqbal was oblivious to such grossly perverted teachings which have nothing to do with the philosophical foundations of Islam. In addition, writing in the 1930s, Iqbal probably did not know the role played by imperial Britain in sponsoring the Wahhabi movement against the Ottoman Empire (Leatherdale, 1983). However, Iqbal did later acknowledge the retrogressive nature of Wahhabism, albeit indirectly, as he severely criticised the political perceptions of Deobandi school of thought in India which derived some of its philosophical inspiration from the Wahhabi doctrines. In fact, a short period before his demise in 1938, Iqbal was engaged in fierce debate with a leading Deobandi cleric, Hussain Ahmed Madani (1879-1957) over issues related to Islam's compatibility with nationalism and other issues (Sevea, 2012: 1). Thus, it appears that by the end of his life, Iqbal had recognised the reactionary and retrogressive nature of Wahhabism and affiliated schools of thought.

Nevertheless, it should also be stressed that Iqbal was not a sectarian philosopher/ poet. Not a single work of Iqbal critiques or disparages Shi'a Islam or any other sect. In all of his poems, he appeals to Muslim unity and for Muslims to rise above their petty sectarian, ethnic or linguistic differences.

Iqbal is also cited as the foremost advocate for the creation of a separate state for India's Muslims although he never made his position very clear on the issue of the partition of British India. However, the state which Iqbal envisaged for the Muslims of India which today is called Pakistan has had a profoundly pro-Western character contrary to the poet's vision. It also continues to face political instability, sectarian violence and extreme socio-economic inequality. Moreover, it remains debateable whether Iqbal would even have endorsed the bloody outcome of the partition of India which resulted in communal violence between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs leading to the killing of over one million people in 1947-48.

The late Annemarie Schimmel, the most prominent Western scholar on Iqbal, admitted that 'it is difficult to build up a system from Iqbal's works' (Schimmel, 2003: 223). However, despite the various paradoxes in Iqbal's vision, one can detect a sense of consistency in his thought even if it is put to a deconstructive<sup>8</sup> critique. He remains a strong opponent of injustice, capitalism, exploitation and imperialism and these are the recurring themes in his political and economic thought, while at the same time, his poetry underlines a humanist mindset aimed at alleviating the sufferings of human beings.

### **Conclusion**

Iqbal largely succeeded in conveying his real message- to awaken the Muslims, particularly of India, in the early twentieth century as his works became widely used in the political and educational discourse of India from the 1920s onwards. However, as pointed out in this paper, Iqbal's political ideas and interpretation of Islam are not without their problems. Iqbal is often contradictory. He supports Sharia, albeit, in a modern re-constructed manner while partially backing Western models of socialism. He supports socialism and praises its founders, but rejects absolutely the atheistic interpretation of this philosophy. He is often ambivalent towards rather sectarian minded Sunni clerics, but appeals for sectarian unity!

Nonetheless, in spite of the paradoxes in Iqbal's philosophical, political and economic vision, the questions he faced regarding reinvigorating Muslim self-consciousness and dignity in an age when the Islamic world was under colonial subjugation and social decay are still very much relevant. By and large, his poetry and perceptions on the condition of Muslims remain as true today as it was 80 years ago. The Muslim Ummah is still threatened by the same 'idols' of liberal-capitalism, Western neo-imperialism as well as cultural imperialism. Most Muslim societies continue to face the issue of creating a Muslim identity rooted in Islamic ethics and morality, but strong enough to confront the economic, political, cultural and social challenges posed by the West. A subject which Iqbal had confronted in depth almost a century earlier.



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