

ISLAMIC DEMOCRACY AND THE
INTEGRATION OF SPIRITUAL AND
TEMPORAL REALMS: IQBAL'S VISION
FOR A UNIFIED POLITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Iqbal's perspective on Islam as an integrated system where the spiritual and temporal are inseparable, providing a holistic framework for governance and society. Unlike Western political models, which often separate religion from state, Iqbal asserts that Islam unites both in a single reality, aiming to establish the "Kingdom of God" on earth. The paper delves into Iqbal's view of Islam as a complete polity or "deen," not merely a religion but a political and ethical system aimed at actualizing spiritual ideals in worldly governance. It emphasizes Iqbal's belief that Islam is inherently democratic, rooted in the equality of spirits, and distinct from Western democracy, which grew out of economic considerations. The study highlights the historical achievements of Islamic democracy, where the principles of justice, equality, and accountability were exemplified in the early Islamic states. Iqbal critiques the modern Muslim world, identifying two major challenges: the loss of strong, integrated personalities and the disintegration of communal solidarity. He proposes remedies, including focusing on the unity and spiritual principles of Islam, organizing into strong, independent Muslim republics, and addressing humanity's spiritual needs. Iqbal envisions a global transformation led by Islamic values that emphasize a spiritual interpretation of the universe, individual emancipation, and universal principles to guide societal evolution. Ultimately, Iqbal's vision calls for a return to Islam's foundational ideals to counter materialism and achieve moral and spiritual renewal in the world.

Islam does not make any distinction or bifurcation between the spiritual and the temporal; they are not two distinct domains. According to Iqbal, 'In Islam it is the same reality which appears as Church looked at from one point of view and State from another.... Islam is a single unanalyzable reality which is one or the other as your point of view varies.¹ The Quran is very emphatic on this point as it 'considers it necessary to unite religion and state, ethics and political in a single revelation.² In Islam, the spiritual and the physical are not intermingled that the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is reported to have said, "The whole of the earth has made the mosque and the purifier for me."³ This saying of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) is extremely important in the life of a Muslim, because it does away with the profane nature of the world as is generally thought. In fact, according to Islam, the ultimate has to be attained through conquering this world (and not by being conquered by it as is the case with non-believers). "The State' according to Islam', says Iqbal, 'is only an effort to realize the spiritual in a human organization'.⁴ Iqbal goes to the extent of saying that "The truth is that Islam is not a Church. It is a State conceived as a contractual organization long before Rousseau ever thought of such a thing and animated by an ethical ideal which regards man not as earth-rooted creature,..., but as a spiritual being...⁵ Hence, Islam is not only a religion, it is rather a complete polity, a complete system of life, a "*deen*"; it is rather a means or a machinery to actualize the ideal or the system of ideals and thereby to introduce the "Kingdom of God" on earth, that is, to actualize the spiritual in the earthly domain which is the final goal of Islam in this life, Now, what is the nature of the "Kingdom of God" on earth and what are its pre-conditions or pre-requisites?

According to Iqbal, Islam is democratic in its spirit. He expressly says, "The republican form of government is not only thoroughly consistent with the spirit of Islam, but also has become a necessity in view of the new forces that are set free⁶ in the world of Islam'. Iqbal is referring to the growth of the republican spirit in the Muslim countries of the world today. He says, "The growth of republican spirit, the gradual formation of legislative assemblies in Muslim lands constitutes a great step in advance."⁷ He appreciates the 'transfer of the power of Ijtihad from individual representatives of schools to a Muslim legislative assembly which, in view of the

growth of opposing sects, is the only possible form Lima can take in modern times,...⁸ That Islamic spirit in democratic is obvious from the following occurrences. When the Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h.) became the leader of the Muslim world he is reported to have proclaimed, “I am a man like you; like you my forgiveness also depends on the mercy of God”, Iqbal quotes him. Iqbal added, ‘In fact the idea of personal authority is quite contrary to the spirit of Islam...’⁹ Again, when the 1st Caliph of Islam, Abu Bakr (R.u.u.h) succeeded the Holy Prophet he was hastily elected to the position of a Caliph. ‘Omar, however, afterwards held that the hurried election of Abu Bakr, though very happy in its consequences and justified by the need of the time, should not form a precedent in Islam; for as he is reported to have said, (Reinhart Dozy in his famous book *Spanish Islam: A History of the Muslims in n Spain*, “an election which is only a partial expression of the people’s will is null and void”¹⁰ This means that the Muslim set up in the times of Caliphs was a completely democratic type of set up; it may rightly be said that Islam introduced an unparalleled type of democracy in which an ordinary nomad could stand up and question the then Caliph, which was again great Omar, whence he could get his garment which could not be stitched from the piece of cloth which went to his share alongwith any other Muslim free man. The Caliph had to satisfy him before he was allowed to proceed with his sermon. This type of democracy is unknown to the Western world, rather to the modern world which is following the model of the Western democracy. Iqbal is of the view that the Western type of democracy in which m heads are just counted is not suitable to all the countries and the systems.

Iqbal concludes his chapter on “The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam”¹¹ in the following suggestion:

‘Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve, out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam’.¹² The spiritual democracy, Iqbal adds, unlike European democracies, did not emerge from any economic considerations. In his Introduction to *Israr-e-Khudi* (1916) he writes, ‘The democracy of Islam did not grow out of the extension of economic opportunity; it is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that every human being is a centre of latent power; the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating certain type of character’.¹³ What Iqbal has referred to is that the West was ignorant of democracy till his imperial

reigns in India, Africa, Australia, etc. bestowed unprecedented riches and power on the Western rulers, and it was this affluence which taught them the merits of democracy and the Western countries started turning democratic. Iqbal, in a letter to R.A. Nicholson, writes: 'The Kingdom of God on earth mean the democracy of more or less unique individuals, presided over by the most unique individual possible on this earth.'¹⁴ Thus Islam does not net an ideal which is not attainable in this world. The basic difference between the Western democracy and Islamic democracy in that the latter is that 'where human society is founded not on the equality of stomachs but on the equality of spirits,..., where private ownership is a trust and where capital cannot be allowed to accumulate so as to dominatable the real producer of wealth'.¹⁵ This democratic system is achievable in this world and was achieved in truly Muslim states in the past.

What according to Iqbal ails the Muslim world today and what is the remedy he suggests? The Muslim world today is ailing of suffering from two major evils: (i) 'The first is the want of personalities' and (ii) 'The second evil... is that the community in fast losing what is called the herd instinct',¹⁶ He adds, 'This makes it possible for individuals and groups to start independent careers without contributing to the general thought and activity of the community.'¹⁷ This deterioration has been caused by the introduction of racism, sectarianism, lingual prejudices, etc, which were unknown to the Muslim world and racism forbidden by Islam. Iqbal suggests under the circumstances the following remedies:

(i)'If today you focus your attention on Islam and seek inspiration from the ever-vitalizing idea embodied in it, you will be only reassembling your scattered forces, regaining your lost integrity, and thereby saving yourself from total destruction'.¹⁸

(ii) When there is a political crisis you need 'to achieve the organize wholeness of a unified will... Rise above sectional interests and private ambitions, and learn to determine the value of your individual and collective action,...'¹⁹

(iii) Iqbal, however, suggests that 'For the present every Muslim nation must sink into her own deeper self, temporarily focus her vision on herself alone, until all are strong and powerful to form a living family of republics. It is truly manifested in a multiplicity of free independent units whose racial rivalries are adjusted and harmonized by the unifying bond of common spiritual aspiration'.²⁰ Thus, what Iqbal eventually envisages is a family of Muslim

republics which are beyond all prejudices and sources of mutual hatred and enmity.

Iqbal was not only concerned about the formation of the living family of the Muslim republics, he rather envisaged the whole of humanity in the embrace of Islam as the final ideal to be achieved. He regrets that the humanity today has become too materialistic in its approach to the world problems, and also that the individual man has been shackled in the net of materialism, as a result whereof the humanity is heading towards self-destruction. So, he offers following remedies for the humanity at large needs three things today:- He says, 'Humanity needs three things today:-

(i) 'a spiritual interpretation of the universe;

(ii) 'spiritual emancipation of the individual; and

(iii) 'basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis.'²¹

These three things, which humanity needs today, can be provided only by Islam which can extract humanity from the shackles of materialism which is gnawing her ethically and spiritually. Today morality has been confined to business with the Western people with all the other necessary facets of morality having been ignored.

Notes and References

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- ¹ Muhammad Iqbal, Allama, *The Reconstructin of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2021, p. 122
 - ² Ibid, p. 132
 - ³ *Sabih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1167
 - ⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, Allama, *The Reconstructin of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 123
 - ⁵ Sherwani, Latif Ahmad, *Speeches, Writings & Statements of Iqbal*, Iqbal Academy Paksitan, Lahore, p. 12
 - ⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, Allama, *The Reconstructin of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 125
 - ⁷ Ibid, p. 138
 - ⁸ Ibid.
 - ⁹ Sherwani, *Speeches, Writings & Statements of Iqbal*, p. 142
 - ¹⁰ Ibid, p. 139
 - ¹¹ Muhammad Iqbal, Allama, *The Reconstructin of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 116
 - ¹² Ibid, p. 142
 - ¹³ Sherwani, *Speeches, Writings & Statements of Iqbal*, p. 157
 - ¹⁴ A.J. Arberry (Eng-tr.), *Javid Namah*, Intro., p. 11
 - ¹⁵ Sherwani, *Speeches, Writings & Statements of Iqbal*, p. 44

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 27

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 29

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Muhammad Iqbal, Allama, *The Reconstructin of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 126

²¹ Ibid, p. 142

