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Allama Muhammad Iqbal Critique of Western Democracy and his Vision of Spiritual Polity of Islam

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Abstract:

Allama Muhammad Iqbal was one of the greatest Muslim philosopher and thinker of the 20th century. He is well-known poet of the east, called with the names of mufakkir-e-Pakistan, mussawir-e-Pakistan and spiritual father of Pakistan. Apart from the national hero of Pakistan, he is considered one the visionary man who remains critique to western democracy and presented new form of democracy, the idea of spiritual democracy, based on the religion Islam. Iqbal spiritual concept cannot be understood without his criticism on western political democracy. This article has examined the core assumptions of Iqbal critiques on western democracy, and highlighted his visionary spiritual democratic concept of Islamic political system. Allama Iqbal was a critic as well as supporter of democracy. In the poetry as well as prose he seems to be a staunch critic of western democracy, while in prose he is considered as supporter of democracy by forwarding his concept of spiritual democracy of Islam, for peaceful co-existence, well-being and prosperity of human being.

Keywords: *Allama Iqbal, western democracy, spiritual democracy, Islam*

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Introduction

Democracy is a political system established mostly in west and across the world, where sovereignty belong to the people. It is the people who through their votes decide the structure of the government, and the affairs of the state in western democracy. The government of such political system always runs by the people and people have the authority to decide their future. One of the greatest democratic Abraham Lincoln explained democracy as “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”¹ Though being considered one of the best political systems in the world, democracy, has also problems and issues for human beings from time to time. Thus western political democracy with its some sorts of demerits has generated scholarly debate where few prominent thinkers including Iqbal remain critics of western democracy. While remains critic to the democracy (western), Iqbal has forwarded his own concept of spiritual democracy, in prose, poetry, and especially in his prose work, the reconstruction of religious thought in Islam.²

Allama Iqbal and Criticism on Democracy

Since ages democracy was used as a political concept. The western democracy remains dominant political system in the world for almost centuries and currently almost half of the world population having the political system possessing some sort of basic democratic institution. The demerits related to democratic system causes debates amongst scholars from time to time, with the innovative ideas of some sorts of new democratic forms of political system like social democracy (Charles Tocqueville), economic democracy (Marxism), Industrial democracy (Sidney Webb) and spiritual democracy (Allama Iqbal).

The French philosopher Charles Tocqueville for the first time used social democracy, and envisaged his idea of freedom, liberty compromise in the interest of equality. His concept of social democracy was for the purpose of democratization of the society whereas there must be equal respect and treatment for everyone means the “quality of estimation”. He noted that “to instruct democracy, if possible to reanimate it belief, to purify its mores, to regulate its movements, to substitute little by little the science of affairs for inexperience, and knowledge of its true interests for its blind instincts, to adopt its government to time and place; to modify to circumstances and men”.³

In the socialist society the expression of economic democracy was later one emphasized by Marxism that means the economic equality of human beings need be insured in any democratic culture. Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb have given a new concept of Industrial democracy that involves workers by their own making decisions and the authority in the workplace. He noted that “those who believe that pure democracy implies the direct decision, by the mass of the people, of every question as it arises, will find this ideal realized without check of limit in the history of the larger trade union.”⁴

Allama Iqbal though considered democracy one of dominate political system of his times but he continuously remain critic to the western political system of

democracy. Iqbal don't compare democracy with the other forms of government like monarchy, oligarchy, timocracies and aristocracy. He criticized western democracy in way of introducing imperialism in the world and failed to developed personality development on equality basis and has forwarded his own concept of spiritual democracy based on Islam. Allama Iqbal Criticism have been explored in the following concentrated on two aspects western imperialism and personality development.

Iqbal criticized western democracy in way of introducing imperialism in the world. He was very critique of western democracy because he saw in his period the spread of western imperialism that had caused the spread of corruption and had exploited the entire human population. The general issues problem created by democracy in the world society was exposed by Iqbal. Criticizing the western democracy Iqbal said: "The tyranny of imperialism struts abroad, covering its face under the masks of Democracy, Nationalism, Communism, Fascism and heaven knows what else besides. Under these masks, in every corner of the earth, the spirit of freedom and the dignity of man are being trampled underfoot in a way to which not even the darkest period of human history presents a parallel. The so-called statesmen to whom government and leadership of men was entrusted have proved demons of bloodshed, tyranny and oppression. The rulers whose duty it was to protect and cherish those ideals which go to form a higher humanity, to prevent man's oppression of man and to elevate the moral and intellectual level of mankind, have in their hunger for dominion and imperial possessions, shed the blood of millions and reduced millions to servitude simply in order to pander to the greed and avarice of their own particular groups. After subjugating and establishing their dominion over weaker peoples, they have robbed them of their possessions, of their religions, their morals, of their cultural traditions and their literatures. Then they sowed divisions among them that they should shed one another's blood and go to sleep under the opiate of serfdom, so that the leech of imperialism might go on sucking their blood without interruption."⁵

Iqbal was critics of democracy because of the problems created by democracy around the world. He said that "Democracy means rows", and added that "Democracy lets loose all sorts of aspirations and grievances which were suppressed or unrealized under autocracy".⁶ In his opinion the lack of empirical considerations has created the debate and controversy over the concept of democracy and democratic form of government. However he did not as a whole rejected democracy, but rather than indentified the general problems related to democracy. In *Armaghan-i-Hejaz*, Iqbal wrote

"Didn't you see western democratic track,
Whose face is shining but inner is black."
He further added:
"Was it not we, when men began to observe
And to reflect, who dressed autocracy
In democratic costume ? The true power
And purpose of dominion lie elsewhere,
And do not stand or fall by the existence
Of Prince or Sultan. Whether parliaments

Of nations meet, or Majesty holds court.
Whoever casts his eye on another's field Is tyrant bom.
Have you not seen in the West
Those Demos-governments with rosy faces
And all within blacker than Ghengiz' soul ?”⁷

On the voters, elections and form of government he noted that “the form of government in which persons are counted, not weighted.”⁸ Everyone is same counted for democratic process, and no one is counted more than one time, if that person deserves the most. The absence of good mind people weightage and their abilities is considered by Iqbal as flaw of democracy. A writer noted that “Iqbal should have pointed out something obvious by no means indicates that he was against democracy”. Iqbal was drawing attention scholars that in democracy society takes note of an individual which to him is just a material notion but not counted the personality that the spiritual fact of human.⁹ In *Zarb-i-Kaleem* Iqbal wrote:

“Jumhooriyat Ek Tarz-e-Hukumat Hai Ke Jis Mein,,

Bandon Ko Gina Karte Hain, Tola Nahin Karte!

Translation:

“Democracy is a certain form of government in which Men are counted but not weighed.”¹⁰

Allama Muhammad Iqbal was the critique of western democracy. He criticized the western secular democracy in his book *Zarb-e-Kalim*. In his opinion the western democracy count only heads and there is less room for the brain. In *Payam-e-Mashriq* he suggested that one shall aloof from the democracies that have been presented by western. Allama Iqbal usually criticized the western democracy which uses individual as means to an end and not as end in themselves. According to him democracy is arresting the growth of individual and freedom and failed to develop personality leadership.¹¹ He criticized western democracy failed to developed personality development on equality basis. Like Allama Muhammad Iqbal many thinkers' were critiques of western democracy like Plato and Nietzsche. The famous work of Plato, *The Republic* has already criticized democracy from a verity of angles. He consider political democracy as irresponsible form of government, thus he doesn't accept democracy as the best form of government. According to him the leaders elected from voting does not means they have the highly morality and skills to rule.

The German thinker Nietzsche considered political democracy a way of life preventing higher minds growth. In his opinion it is just a conspiracy of slaves' people and common masses that they can rule the higher mind, suppressing free men and intellectuals of the society. According to Iqbal the blind numerical calculation and counting of heads don't guarantee collective wisdom and insurance of justice, thus democracy counts rather than weighs human.

Allama Iqbal and Spiritual Democracy

He remained critic to the western democracy where weak people and nations have been exploited by such democratic political system, where the spiritual aspects of serving for humanity are rarely seen. Thus he presented the idea of spiritual democracy. According to him it is the spiritually duty of men to explore the nature, place achievements in the services of humanity for progressive and healthy evolution, so according to him spiritual democracy is not rising in the world but rising with the world.¹²

In fact Allama Iqbal love democracy guided by religion Islam. He was opposed to the demerits of western democracy that have colonized the eastern nations, and limited the freedom of humanity. A writer noted: "Iqbal's kingdom of God on earth means the democracy of more or less the most unique individuals possible. The rule of one wise man is better than that of an assembly of masses". He further noted "This superior man with his moral and intellectual forces is the most suitable person to guide the human society. The possibility of such development in a single individual is much more than in many. The decision of a group of people represents that of the average intellect."¹³

Allama Iqbal also criticized those democratic countries where the poor and the disadvantage class of the society were socio-economically, political and psychologically exploited. Iqbal understanding of spiritual democracy is further elaborated as he saw "the western civilization was enamored of the visible, has distance itself from prophetic consciousness, has ignored the real purpose of the creation of the universe and life, and had accepted matter as its goal instead of keeping it as its proper place of being only a means for understanding the reality." Iqbal seems that in social life of west, it has separated politic from religion, "an un-bridled democracy held sway everyone which, while endowing man with the unrestricted freedom estranged him from the real purpose of his existence". Allama Iqbal noted that the real reason behind this is the "separation of politics from *deen*."¹⁴ He was strong supporters of establishing states affairs on the spiritual foundation of religion, thus he said "segregation of religion from politics culminates in tyranny".¹⁵ He wrote in *Baal-i-Jibreel*:

"Monasticism was the church's base
Its austere living had no room for wealth.
The anchorite and the king have ever been hostile;
One has humility; the other an exalted power.
Church and state were separated at last;
The revered priest was rendered powerless.
When church and state parted the ways for ever,
It set in the rule of avarice and greed.
This split is a disaster both for country and faith,
And shows the culture's blind lack of vision.
Mankind's deliverance lies in the unity
Of those who rule the body and those who rule the soul."¹⁶

Iqbal statements have some time clearly identified the demarcation between the notion of western and Islamic democracy. His concept of spiritual democracy is the

combination of the life into the material and religious grounds. According to him with the individual consent a state unite its people under the brotherhood concept with legal grounds of equality, where everyone workout according to their capacity under the law of religion Islam. Iqbal said “The State, according to Islam, is only an effort to realize the spiritual in a human organization. But in this sense all state, not based on mere domination and aiming at the realization of ideal principles, is theocratic.”¹⁷

He considered the real democracy an integral part of his own belief of “Tauhid”, which built his own thought of the spiritual democracy. To him the principle of the Oneness of God who crated all human beings and thus he considered it as the basis of solidarity, freedom and equality. To him these basic principles are the essential component of the real democratic society. He concluded that there is a dire need to “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.”¹⁸ Commenting on the Iqbal democratic concept a writer has pointed out that “By considering Islam as a complete code of life, Iqbal does not separate ethics from politics; therefore, an ideal Islamic state is based on theology which determines its ethical values, but not a theocracy”.¹⁹ Thus Iqbal concept of spiritual democracy never means of theocracy.

The spiritual democracy of Iqbal thus has its roots in the teaching of Islam. He believes that Islam is neither racial, national nor personal, not geographic limited, it is purely nature and human, egalitarian and humanitarian. Islam works for the perfection of humanity-a high spiritual life, and thus gives the universal idea of humanity and unity of spirit and material. Iqbal “calls the essence of Tauhid as a working idea of equality, solidarity and freedom”, for “establishing a state based on spiritual democracy”.²⁰

In Iqbal viewed religion Islam as the only social system for the entire humanity; a binding force of unification of people, irrespective of their language, race, or geographical limitation. He said: “As an emotional system of unification it recognizes the worth of the individual as such, and rejects blood-relationship as a basis of human unity. Blood-relationship is earth-rootedness. The search for a purely psychological foundation of human unity becomes possible only with the perception that all human life is spiritual in its origin”.²¹

According to Iqbal man is a spiritual unity and reality that lead to self-ego, then the ultimate ego and reality, which is spiritual in nature. He said: Reality is, therefore, essentially spirit... “I have conceived the Ultimate Reality as an Ego; and I must add now that from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed. The creative energy of the Ultimate Ego, in whom deed and thought are identical, functions as ego-unities”.²² Allama Iqbal wrote *Armaghan-i-Hejaz*:

“An old game of needs this mean world’s tact,
To heavenly host hopes a cold blood act.
That Great Maker bent to wreck earth soon,
Who gave it a name of ‘KAF’ and ‘NOON’.

To Europe I gave the kingship's dream,
I broke the spell of church and mosque's team.
I taught to the poor a lesson of fate,
To the wealthy I gave the wealth's craze great.
Who can put out that fire's big blaze,
Of riots whome Satan had set ablaze.
To plants we watered, caused to be trees,
Who can bring that old tree to knees."²³

Commenting on the Iqbal concepts of *Insan-i-Kamil*, *Mard-e-Momin*, *Mard-e-Khuda* a writer said that they have been generated in the sense of *khudi*, the attribute of god. He noted that "This development of self, which starts from within so as to find an expression in the outer world, is not a new idea. Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, thought of it long before Iqbal. Even Iqbal's idea of an Ego is not peculiar to him"... "It is the same as Schopenhauer's 'Genus, Carlyle's 'Hero' and Schiller's Karl Moor.' Spinoza's 'Conatus Preservandi,' Fichte's 'Itch,' Schopenhauer's 'will to live,' Nietzsche's 'will to power,' Bergson's 'Elan Vital,' are all in the same line of thought."²⁴

His spiritual democracy concept was based on the teaching of Islam. It is the acceptance of God in nature, and in each individual "nature-a truly democratic notion... it is the science of God that become a necessity to begin and end with nature." While Islam integrate all universal values into an organize one, that no one value can be detached from others, i.e. equality of all human irrespective of their status, origins and areas.

According to Iqbal democracy with equality is the Islamic system thus he rejected the concept of divine right of the kings for ruling, looking to the concept of English kings. In the same way he also rejected *zill-i-Ilahi*, the Persian concept of emperor as the shadow of god. Thus he presented forwarded his own concept of spiritual democracy based on Islam.

Iqbal during his first speech in English Lahore April 1908 said that "Democracy, then, is the most important aspect of Islam as a political ideal" and "There is no aristocracy in Islam". According to Iqbal the idea of spiritual democracy based on religion Islam has two core propositions, first "The Law of God is absolutely supreme. Authority, except as an interpreter of the law, has no place in the social structure of Islam. Islam has a horror of personal authority. We regard it as inimical to the unfoldment of human individuality",²⁵ and second the complete equality of the humans, members of the society.²⁶

In the reconstruction of religious thought he pointed out that "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."²⁷

Conclusion

Allama Iqbal though considered democracy one of dominate political system of his times but he continuously remain critic to the western political system of democracy. Iqbal don't compare democracy with the other forms of government like monarchy, oligarchy, timocracies and aristocracy. Allama Iqbal was a critic as well as supporter of democracy. He criticized western democracy in way of introducing imperialism in the world and failed to developed personality development on equality basis and has forwarded his own concept of spiritual democracy based on Islam. In the poetry he seems to be a staunch critic of western democracy, while in prose he is considered as supporter of democracy by forwarding his concept of spiritual democracy of Islam, for peaceful co-existence, well-being and prosperity of human being. Allama Iqbal poetry and prose signify scathing critiques of western democracy and has forwarded with a solution of best political democratic system in the shape of spiritual democracy of Islam which according to Iqbal would serve for the greater happiness and prosperity of humanity.

Though Iqbal concept of spiritual democracy has been very little explored by interpreters; it is generally accepted that democracy related to the politics and political system, rather than religion. It is considered government of the people by the people and for the people. However, according to Iqbal the failure of western democracy is due to the lack of universal values, and faith and purpose. He presented his idea of spiritual democracy which is the realization of the oneness of humanity with nature, universe and all its forces, that serving the humanity for peace, progress, happiness on collective and unified basis.

Iqbal concept of spiritual democracy has based on many core assumptions: Tauheed, the only binding force for the unity of human beings, whereas state politics would be free of any discrimination of color, language, geography, status etc); people freedom of choice to elect representative, who jurisdiction to of powers to be exercised as a sacred trust of God within the limitation of serving the human beings, the elected representative are responsible for observing divine law along with the principle of Ijtihad to meet the modern age changing needs of the society, the equal distribution of resources of state amongst masses and discouragement of fall of wealth in few hands, the rejection of divine rights of ruling elites kinship, feudalism etc, and thus to attain the ultimate objectives of human peace, and prosperity.

The concept of spiritual democracy presented by Allama Iqbal have been inspired many people in the world. It means to bring changes in the western democratic system, to make and strengthening democracy by adding the values of nature, reality and unification of all human beings. Spiritual democracy of Iqbal is thus based on democratic, welfare and humanistic values of Islam. Through spiritual democracy concept he came up with the notion of bringing changing in the human societies worldwide.

¹ Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of the United States. He took the charge as president from March 4, 1861 to April 15, 1865. Abraham Lincoln, *The Gettysburg Address*, August 24, 2010. <https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/gettysburg-address>

² Mohammad Iqbal, *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam* (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 2013).

³ Costica Bradatan and Serguei Oushakine, eds. *In Marx's shadow: knowledge, power, and intellectuals in Eastern Europe and Russia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 274.

⁴ Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Industrial democracy* (Longmans: Green and Company, 1902), 22.

⁵ Muhammad Iqbal, New Year's message broadcast on All-India Radio, 1938 Quoted in Iqbal Singh Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 199.

⁶ Latif Ahmed Sherwani ed., *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1995), 251.

⁷ Muhammad Iqbal, *Armaghan-i-Hejaz*, https://archive.org/stream/in.gov.ignca.2950/2950_djvu.txt

⁸ Riffat Hassan, "Iqbal's Views on Democracy", *Dawn*, 11th June, 2010.

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¹¹ Fayaz Ahmad Parray, "Socio-Political thought of Iqbal with special reference to Zarb-i-Kaleem" (PhD diss., University of Kashmir, Srinagar, 2013).

¹² Abdul Haq, "Iqbal concept of spiritual democracy", <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/oct86/3.htm>

¹³ Subhash Kashyap, "Sir Muhammad Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche," *Islamic Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1955): 175-81.

¹⁴ Shagufta Begum, "Iqbal's concept of spiritual democracy", *Al-Hikmat* 21 (2001), 23.

¹⁵ Wali Ejaz Nekokara, "Allama Iqbal's Political Philosophy", August 7, 2021, <https://timesglo.com/allama-iqbals-political-philosophy/>

¹⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *Baal-i-Jibreel*, Translated by Naeem Siddiqui <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/works/poetry/urdu/bal/translation/index.htm>

¹⁷ Iqbal, *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*, 123.

¹⁸ Iqbal, *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*, 142

¹⁹ Uzma Qazi, *Iqbal's Urdu Political Poems: The Writer against Colonialism* (Canada: University of Alberta, 2013), 152.

²⁰Begum, "Iqbal's concept of spiritual democracy, 26.

²¹ Iqbal, *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*, 116.

²² Iqbal, *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*, 57.

²³ Muhammad Iqbal, *Armaghan-i-Hejaz*,

https://archive.org/stream/in.gov.ignca.2950/2950_djvu.txt

²⁴ H.H. Bilgrami, *Glimpses of Iqbal's Mind and Thought: Brief Lectures on Iqbal Delivered at London, Cambridge & Oxford* (Lahore: Orientalia, 1954), 86.

²⁵ Muhammad Iqbal, *Islam as an ethical and a political ideal* (Lahore: Good Press, 2021).

²⁶ Dawn, June 11, 2010.

²⁷ Iqbal, *The reconstruction of religious thought in Islam*, 142.