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Iqbal and the Contemporary Challenges

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Abstract:

In this paper the attempt is made to attract the attention of sensitive readers to focus at least on the basic challenges of the contemporary period like few of them are Emprico-rationalist epistemology of the modern West, maintained gap between Modernity and Religion, Ethnocentricity, modern man's attempt to replace the God as a centre of power as is evident in the writings of Nietzsche like his *Man and the Superman*, one sided view of modernity, Islam on the

contrary takes in a way dualist view of reality. The real is not one, but two. It is spirit as well as matter. It does not separate them from each other, for it is in their union that we see signs of God both in *Anfus* (Self) (the holy Quran, 41:53, 51:20) and *Afaq* (Universe) (the holy Quran, 41:53, 51:20). The writers, most importantly religious writers are more prone to make present modern man aware about the contemporary challenges in almost every sphere of life. The modern World no doubt has brought the man in the realm of economic and industrial success but has snatched from his hands the strings of faith which resulted in his total mental frustration and disbelief. Therefore, the main focus of the present paper will be on the contemporary challenges that world is facing with special reference to the works of World known poet Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal.

Keywords: Emprico-rationalist epistemology, Ethnocentricity, Disintegration, chaos, contemporary situation, Solution.

Introduction

The disintegration of Muslims throughout the world is growing strong day by day, at evening all news channels show massacre of humanity and mankind especially of Muslims across the World. Do Muslims have gone astray from their roots or have they lost the spiritual power that once made them to rule? Whatever may be the case but fault lies somewhere in us, the hunger for the matter merely developed the evil desires in present Man and it's not ceased up to Muslims only but the whole mankind has become its slave, a slave of matter. As everyone knows this logic that if an object falls from the height, the fall and the speed of that object will depend on its prior attained point of height, if it had gained the utmost height in its reaction the fall would be more lethal and worse. Similar is the case with contemporary Man the height of spiritual elevation that he had attained in past was enormous as we witness in the poems of Iqbal like *Musjid-e-Qurtaba* (Mosque of Cordova) *Sikliya* and other poems, such was the grandeur of Muslims. But modern man could

not stand upon that zenith as against to move forward he fall off from that grandeur and he is still falling off, its repercussions are before the eyes of every sensitive being. Iqbal being the insightful pulse reader came to know about the roots of contemporary disharmony and he as per his understanding has given the solution in his poetry and lectures to overpower the modern challenges and his message is for the whole mankind not merely for any particular community. He asserted the need to reinterpret and reapply the principles and ideals of Islam, formulating new responses to the challenges of Europe and modern life.

Emprico-rationalist Epistemology: An Iqbalian Response

Emprico-rationalist epistemology of the modern West believes in human reason as an exclusive source of all knowledge and values, of all truth and reality and of the essential nature of man itself. It relentlessly aims at establishing and widening the control, of man over the stupendous forces of nature, as held by Huston Smith (Smith, *Beyond the Postmodern Mind*). Production of knowledge, according to it, is simultaneously production of power, as is held by Kuhn, Habermass, Foucault and others. The core of religion, on the contrary, is Transcendence. Its epistemology is, therefore, a blend of Revelation and Reason, of values and facts; it derives the humanity of man from divine metaphysical reality and is grounded in it. It relentlessly aims at establishing and deepening the control of man over himself. Virtue, not power, is its cherished goal. Religion, as opposed to science, gives us a total vision of reality. But it is far from being enough. Iqbal has truly experienced it at heart as he at one place in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* says, “Vision without power does bring moral elevation, but cannot give a lasting culture. Power without vision tends to become destructive and inhumane. Both must combine for the spiritual expansion of humanity (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction*)”. Therefore, there is need to integrate power with virtue, facts with values, science with Religion. In order to infuse spirit ones again into a modern man who is

surrounded by machines and carnal temptations it is necessary for him to embrace religion. This is the Islamic response to the power epistemology of the modern West as per the thought of Iqbal.

Ethnocentricity Led to Jingoism and Chauvinism

The contemporary society is ethnocentric, it is a “a state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation state (*Encyclopedia of Britannica*, Vol. V, *Nationality*)”. It is a big challenge before us in the present scenario. As per this the prejudices of colour, race, language and territory determines the structure of a nation, which in turn has given rise to chauvinism and jingoism- unwarranted pride in one’s own nationality and unjustified hatred for other races and nation. Modern man has given more importance to ethnicity than humanity the fresh evidence is in front of the whole World that what happened in Burma or what is ongoing in Syria? the infanticide and the genocides of Muslims on the basis of religion and territory, rather the whole East, that once was dominant force, was known for the spiritual values seems now in danger. The modern man is near to become a cannibal or has he turned to that needs to be think of. Iqbal had read the pulse of the West that is why he had been warning the East for not following the West. Iqbal looked into the heart of Europe and found it diseased. Nationalism, Imperialism and Materialism, he saw, were eating into the vitals of Europe and leading it to a suicidal warfare. Nationalism as per him is not only opposed to the universal outlook of Islam but was also being used by the European Imperialists as a weapon against the Islamic unity in the Muslim world. Iqbal wrote:

At the very start it had become clear to me from the writings of the European authors that the Imperialist designs of Europe were in great need of this effective weapon – the propagation of the European concept of Nationalism in Muslim countries- to shatter the religious unity of Islam to pieces (Iqbal Speeches, Writings and Statements).

However, Muslims are being trampled all over the World, are they themselves responsible for that? It is another question to be

pondered over. However, it reminds us of following verses from Iqbal's *Shikwa* and *Jawab-e-Shikwa*:

*Rehmatein hai Teri agyaar ke kashaanu per
Barq gerti hai too becharay Musalmanoo per*

— Iqbal *Shikwa*

But the reality is that the present Muslim is even ineligible to ask such a question that Iqbal has complained about. The right reason for his ineligibility is given in the answer to that complaint, in *Jawab-i-Shikwa* of Iqbal:

*Yeuv too sayed be ho 'Mirza be ho' Afghan be ho
Tum sabhi kuch ho' batav too Musalmaan be ho*

Or

*Kalab mein sooz nahi rooh mein ehshaas nahi
Kuch be phaigam Muhammad ^{SAW} ka tumay paas nahi*

— Iqbal *Jawab-i-Shikwa*

This gives the birth to an important question, Do Muslims exist now or have merely Muslim names been left? Every person knows the answer if not, then, it is right time to introspect our inner selves.

This whole picture takes us back to the Darwinian concept, does man by losing his intellect is at the verge to get transform into an animal or has he already transformed? Here, vice versa of Darwinian biological theory seems possible if not physically but ethically the downward evolution from higher to the baser virtues is still going on. The modern man has lost the balance of soul and physic; he has forgotten soul and gives to their new generations the knowledge of physic only. This is one of the main reasons for the disintegration of present Muslims. As in this Post-Colonial era our minds are still colonized no doubt physically and politically the East has been set free but the West is not letting it to grow at their free will directly or indirectly is still holding rein towards the path of their own interests. The gap that a man has developed between him and his religion and

ethical values has brought a drastic change in him and his mind, it has now taken an anti-course, psychological changes is occurring in him and animal instincts are taking more and more control over him.

Disintegration and Chaos

Being an integral entity a Man is the blend of spirit, matter, reason, emotions, instincts and sentiments. He is the throbbing heart of the Universe. As has been sent by God as vicegerent on earth he has assigned responsibilities to fulfill by his creative skills endowed to him by God. The other significant element that he added to his elements mentioned above is faith on unseen which through the religion links him with the ultimate reality and he keeps absorb in him the virtuous values to elevate towards reality. But the Greek speculations and modern scientific, social and political theories brought disintegration and pushed a man into the chaos. The other agents in the masks of Democracy, Nationalism, Communism, Fascism and Capitalism are responsible for the disintegration among the mankind. With a very deep concern and heavy heart Iqbal stated:

Under these masks, in every corner of earth, the spirit of freedom and dignity of men are being trampled underfoot in a way of 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 to servitude simply in order to ponder to the greed and avarice of their own particular groups. After subjugating and establishing their dominion over weaker people, they have robbed them of their religions, their moral, of their cultural traditions and their literatures. As I looked back on the year that has passed and as I look at the World in the midst of the Year's rejoicings, it may be Abyssinia or Palestine, Spain or China, the same misery prevails in every corner of man's earthly home, and hundreds of

thousands of men are being butchered mercilessly. Engines of destruction created by science are wiping out the great landmarks of man's cultural achievements. The governments which are not themselves engaged in this drama of fire and blood are sucking the blood of the weaker people economically (Iqbal Speeches, Statements and writings).

The matter made a human being self-centered and hypocrite the love got replaced by the hatred. A man crumbled in the midst of concrete capitalistic markets. Everywhere people are busy in the competitive races to have victory on others, alienation and chaos took place. Gradually modern man forgot his origin and even gives no heed towards futuristic end, the final destination. The worldly materialistic complicacies made them the victim of different types of anxieties and frustration which even resulted in the forgetfulness of religion also. Man became the centre of attention the human values are given the importance, luxuries, comfort and money became the utmost concern for the modern man. But unfortunately man himself brought the disintegration and chaos in the World for his materialistic interests but on the other side he lost his hold over religion, spirituality and love.

Contemporary Situation

The contemporary situation of the World offers a rather bleak picture. Man, especially the Western man has gained powers of science and technology but has lost the spiritual vision. He has stepped into a new age by giving birth to new information gadgetry, computers, machines, satellites etc., but all this freedom has been gained at the cost of precious social and human values which are fast declining and for which the West is perhaps more responsible since it is more powerful. This grim situation has been depicted very aptly by the famous Czech writer, Milan Kundera. He admits:

I thought of the fate of Descartes' famous formulation: man as 'master and proprietor of nature'. Having brought off miracles in science and technology, this 'master and proprietor' is suddenly realizing that he owns nothing and is

master neither of Nature (it is vanishing little by little from the planet) nor of History (it has escaped him) nor of himself (he is led by the irrational forces of his soul) but if God is gone and man is no longer master, then who is master? There it is, the unbearable lightness of being

— Kundra *The Art of the Novel*

The similar sordid picture was projected by Allama Iqbal also. He says:

*Love fled, Mind stung him like a snake, he could not
Force it to vision's will
He sought the orbits of the stars, yet could not
Travel his own thought's World,
Entangled in the labyrinth of his learning,
Lost count of good and will;
Enchained the sunbeams, yet his hand no drawn
On life's dark night unfurled*

— Victor Kiernan, *Poems from Iqbal*

The contemporary situation is getting worst day by day; humanity is in danger rather gets killed after every second throughout the World. Rapes, murders, extortion, embezzlements, kidnapping, harassments constantly remain the headlines of the newspapers. Now, the West has introduced novel agents for spreading immorality, sexual contents, obscenity, nudeness through social networking Applications like *Tik Tok*, *Instagram* and other sites. The Eastern youth is licking that sweet poison very frequently. However, it is not the way to modernize the society but pure imitation of the West. Iqbal states in *Bal-e-Gibril* (Gabriel's Wing) verses 495-6, that:

*Modern civilization has given me liberty,
Which is only apparently a liberty, but in fact it is servitude*

— Iqbal *Bal-e-Gibril*

Conclusion

The problems discussed in the present paper could be resolved by understanding the present scenario then dealing present challenges with the same tools as have discussed by Iqbal in his poetry and philosophy. The picture of the contemporary period is no doubt murky and dismal but there is always a solution to overcome the darkness. The greatness of Iqbal lies here that he admits that:

*Humanity needs three things today- a spiritual interpretation
of the Universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual and
basic principles of a universal import, directing the evolution
of human society on a spiritual basis*

— Iqbal *The Reconstruction*

Being an earnest soul Iqbal wished to see this World a happy abode of justice, peace, harmony, ethical values, Spiritual elevation, religiosity and advanced knowledge where men of action are living safely. The man of his desired World is an emblem of innovation and originality. He at one place writes that:

*Human radiance is based on innovation and originality
While the celestial bodies continue to act
As they have been acting ever before*

— Iqbal *Kuliyat*

Iqbal's message is universal and his outlook is unlimited. He urges his fellow-countrymen to rise against not only imperialist forces but against all material and spiritual odds. But the people should free themselves from the shackles of idol worshipping. He writes that:

*You have freed yourself from the Western lords
But you are still worshipping graves and tombs.
You are so used to being lulled to sleep
That you will carve your stone idols.
While you are yet bound by water and land
You talk about being a Rumi (Turk) or Afghani.*

*I a above all, a human being regardless of colour
And peculiar odour.
Only after that, I am either an Indian or Turanian*

— Iqbal Payam-e-Mashriq

It is not out of place to mention here that Allama Iqbal has thrown a broad light on the condition of the present man in his remarkable poem *Zamanai Hazir ka Insaan*:

*Ishq naa payed we khrid may gazdash surat maar
Aqal ko tabeyeah fermaan nazar ker ne saka
Doondnay wala sitaroo ke guzar gahhuu ka
Apnay afkaar ke dunya mein safar ker ne saka
Apni hikmat k kham we pache mei uljha aisa
Aaj tak faisla nafa we zarer ker ne saka
Jis nay suraj ke shauoo ko ghriftar kiya
Zindge ke shab-e-tareekh sahr ker ne saka*

— Iqbal Kulyat-e-Iqbal

The present man failed to recognize his endowed powers, he messed himself into the material greed and remained continuously in darkness. The present man yet has time to recognize his given stature and should live his life in the light of religion. The Iqbal's message was for all humanity irrespective of religion, sect and creed.

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