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IQBAL AND MATERIALISM

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ABSTRACT

Sir Muhammad Iqbal, also known as Allama Iqbal, was a philosopher, poet and politician in British India who is widely regarded to have inspired the Pakistan Movement. He is considered one of the most important figures in Urdu literature, with literary work in both the Urdu and Persian languages. Iqbal is known as Shair-e-Mushriq meaning Poet of the East. He is also called Muffakir-e-Pakistan "The Inceptor of Pakistan", and Hakeem-ul-Ummat "The Sage of the Ummah". Pakistan has officially recognised him as its "national poet". In Iran and Afghanistan he is famous as Iqbal-e Lahori (Iqbal of Lahore), and he is most appreciated for his Persian work.

Materialism is defined as an individual's practice to obtain money, status and belongings (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004). It is a combination of principles which regards materialistic goals as a symbol of achievement; whereas the goods are considered to be an important part of life and more goods will provide more satisfaction. Materialistic individuals consider attainment of possessions as the foremost goal of life (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

Key words: - materialism, comparison, pessimism, divinity.

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The most remarkable verses from his literary work Armughan-Hijaz

Like Rumi I gave the call of adhan in the harem;
From him I learnt the mysteries of the soul.
He for the tribulation of the ancient world
And I for the tribulation of the modern age.

In these verses from Armughan-Hijaz Iqbal sees himself in the role of a Messiah for the modern age as Rumi was for his age. The verses underline once again the oft repeated assertion of the poet that he is primarily a messenger and his poetry is merely an instrument for his mission. Rumi diagnosed the disease of his age, corrupted by the domination of the Greek philosophy, as the worship of the dry-as-dust reason and comparative neglect of soul and its cultivation. The disease infected even the religious men of his day whose scholasticism consisted of insipid rational discussions and philosophical hair-splitting. This was a clear deviation from the simple Quranic way of propagating the truth. The scholastic Endeavour's proved, therefore, counterproductive and led to the death of religion even as religious scholarship amazingly multiplied.

Wooden are the feet of the rationalists
And they are very undependable.

Rumi's clarion call was directed at the destruction of this dry and soul-less religiosity and a return to the Quran and the life-example of Muhammad (salallahu alihi wasallam).

Iqbal faced an almost identical situation in his day. He was born to an age steeped in materialism which turned its back on 'soul' and its requirements. Essentially there was nothing new about it. It was a dramatization of the age-old conflict between the opposing forces of truth and untruth:

The has ragged from the beginning of time to this day
Between the candle of Mustafa and the spark of Abu Lahb

Materialism had been preached before. The ancient Greek philosophers, Heraclitus (530-470 BC), Leucippus, Democritus (460-360 BC), AND Epicurus (341-270 BC) had all believed in materialism of different forms. In Heraclitus' view nothing existed beyond what was apparent. In a world of flux and change only one thing was constant and that was the law of nature and "this order, the same for all things, no one of gods or men has made, but it always was, and is, and shall be". Leucippus and Democritus, master and pupil, were the founders of the deterministic, materialistic atomism in which there was no place for the existence of spiritual reality.' In reality', said Democritus, "there are only the atoms and the void". Epicurus revived this mechanistic and materialistic philosophy and built the edifice of his Epicureanism upon this premise. Aristotle (388-322 BC) dislodged God by declaring Him to be the mere *primum mobile*, now unconcerned about universal affairs, and freed life from all superhuman control. But never in the past had materialism become a complete way of life and an all embracing code of conduct as it did after the renaissance when it shaped the individual and social life in Europe and consequent upon the European domination of the rest of the world, became the dominant ideology of all mankind.

The post- Renaissance era in Europe was the era of secularization when Europe slowly and gradually drifted away from all religious values and other- worldly consideration. Greek science and philosophy and arts were more in tune with the change outlook and became the staple intellectual food. This world and this life became the soul object of attention and everything was interpreted to suit this world-view. Physical and empirical science took the place of speculative philosophy and religious discourses. In his *New Atlantis*, Bacon summed up the attitude of the Renaissance man to life and universe.

"The end of our foundation in the knowledge of causes and of the rest motions of things and the enlarging of the bounds of the human empire to the effecting of all things possible."

Essentially there was nothing wrong about this empirical and scientific outlook nor was it incompatible with religion. Both the Quran and the Bible speak of the subjugation of all Nature to man's service. What was, however, wrong was the totally secular and materialistic outlook of the scientists themselves. Descartes was skeptical about everything except what could stand the empirical test and, like Newton, looked on the universe as wholly understandable and explicable machine."Give me the elements," he declared, "and I will construct the universe." Voltaire revived the Aristotelian conception of god as the watchmaker who has nothing to do with the watch after having made it. Hume doubted even this innocuous conception of god and finally Nietzsche proclaimed him dead.

All phenomena relating to life and universe were interpreted in material terms. To Darwin man was merely an animal who had evolved like other animals and the belief in his being the crown of creation and the vicegerent of god on the earth was consequently baseless. Marx interpreted history in purely materialistic terms declaring the economic factor to be the only decisive factor determining the course of history. Freud shattered the belief in revelation and inspiration by bringing to light the unknown psychic zones and subjecting man to uncontrollable instinctive drives and reducing all art and all religion to an attempt at wishfulfilment. Pavlov dealt the last blow by questioning the very existence of consciousness and mind itself and declaring man to be mere body with no trace of the so-called soul or mind in him. Everything on this view could be explained in terms of the stimulus to and response from the nervous system.

The implications of this materialistic philosophy for human life are quite obvious. It deprives man in one stroke of his essential worth and grandeur. Even the theory of evolution puts a stop to man onward march and in Iqbal's words has brought despair and anxiety instead of hope and enthusiasm for life, to the modern world. Existence is absurd and useless and there is no scope for any hope of redemption in a dark, pessimistic world. Bertrand Russell writes:

"That man is the product of causes which had no provision of the end they were achieving ; that his origin, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no amount of heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave , that all the labour of the ages , all the devotion , all the inspiration of human genius are destined for extinction in the vast death of the solar system and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins- all these things are so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand".

Professor C.E.M. Joad vividly sums up the implication of modern materialistic philosophy;

"The implications of such a view for the prospect of humanity are not encouraging. Humanity, in fact, is doomed in advance. There was a time when our planet was not suitable for mankind; it was too hot and too moist. A time will come when it will cease to be suitable; it will be too cold and too dry. When the sun goes out, a catastrophe that is bound to be, mankind will long ago have disappeared. The last inhabitants of the earth will be as destitute, as feeble, and dull-witted as the first. They will have forgotten all the arts and all the sciences. They will huddle wretchedly in caves in the sides of the glaciers that will roll their transparent masses over the half-obliterated ruins of the cities where men now think and love, , suffer and hope. The last desperate survivors of mankind will know nothing of our genius, nothing of our civilization. One day the last man callous alike to hate and love, will exhale to the unfriendly sky the last human breath and the globe will go rolling on, bearing with it through the silent fields of space the ashes of humanity, the pictures of Michelangelo, and the remnants of the Greek marbles frozen to its icy surface".

Such a pessimistic view which robs the universe of all its significance, and man, of all his innate worth could not be acceptable to Iqbal. For him the universe that lies before us is neither absurd nor purposeless not merely material although its purpose cannot be foreknown or predetermined as that would amount to limiting the freedom of the absolute ego i.e., God, and future from this point of view is an open possibility. Iqbal rejects the thesis that the universal phenomena are the mere unfolding of a preconceived and predetermined plan as 'veiled materialism in which fate or destiny takes the place of rigid determinism". But he asserts at the same time that the whole process of evolution depends upon the formation and realization of ends. The Quran declares of the objects of sense is not batil (absurd) and it cannot be over emphasized that it is in no sense so.

Iqbal as vehemently rejects the materialistic thesis that reality is merely material. In his view the Absolutely Reality is essentially spiritual but that in no way invalidates the world of appearances because reality lives and is knowable through appearances. He rejects Ibn al-Arabi's pantheism and Shankaracharya's Maya doctrine as misinterpretation of reality. While speaking of Einstein's theory of Relativity in the context of its implications for self and spiritual reality, he forcefully asserts that 'the surest way to reach the core of it (reality) lies through its appearances. This is why the Quran again and again invites our attention to the external phenomena which led to the empirical attitude of the dynamic Islamic community in the early stages of Islam and ushered in the age of science in the history of mankind.

Iqbal regards man only next to God. God's vicegerent and representative on the earth, a being who is endowed with freedom and responsibility and in whose service the whole nature has been harnessed. He is the one whom god himself glorifies when He declares in the Quran:

I breathed of my own soul into him.

He has been honored with the inherent knowledge of the objects that lie around him:

And God taught Adam the names of all the things.

In Iqbal's view human self is to be distinguished from other objects of creation. Its relation with the absolute ego is not the same as that of the other objects of the universe. In his essay on Einstein he wrote:

Pringle-Pattison deplures that the English language possesses only one word-creation-to express the relation of God and the universe on the one hand, and relation of God and the self of man on the other. The Arabic language is, however, more fortunate in this respect. It has two words to express this relation, i.e., *khalq* and *amr*. The former is used by the Quran to indicate the relation of the universe of matter to God, and the latter indicates the relation of human self to the Divine self.

Human self is thus a repository of God's directive energy and has in it a prodigious creative potential. It is not a mere passive recipient of the impressions from without but affects and alters and, in a sense, creates the external reality. The act of knowledge is a constitutive element in the objective reality:

This world is nothing but a temple filled with idols of my imagination's making;

My seeing is the progenitor of its scenes and sights:

If I see it is, if I do not see it is not:

Time and space are the products of my thought.

Being an offshoot of the directive energy of God, human ego is free from the limitations of time and space and capable of immortality. Iqbal rejects the neo-Hegelian view of thinkers like Bosanquet and Bradley that self is a mere predicate of the absolute. For him it is a dynamic centre of experience and though not elementally immortal, yet capable of achieving immortality. In other words human ego may not claim immortality as a matter of right but it can win it, and Iqbal in his works returns again to the theme of how man can become a suitable candidate for such immortality.

Iqbal's assertion of the rights of the soul does not amount to the denial of the rights of the body. He rejects the body-mind dualism as untenable. He rejects the view held by such ascetic cults as Pauline Christianity and Buddhism that body is an evil to be sacrificed for the spiritual emancipation as vehemently he rejects the materialistic view that man is mere body and the Cartesian dualism of body and mind leading to the belief in psycho-physical parallelism. Body and mind are not antagonistic; they belong to the same category of being. Iqbal assigned 'body' to the realm which Quran calls *Khalq* (creation) and 'soul' to the realm which the Quran designates as *amr* (command or direction). Both on the Quranic view are the same as both spring from the same root. To him belong both *khalq* and *amr*.

The harmonious personality which springs from the faith in the unity of soul and body is one of the recurrent themes of Iqbal's song:

Create a body from a handful of dust

A body stronger than a fortress

In the midst of this body have a sensitive heart,

Pulsating like a rivulet among mountains.

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