

Nationalism and Allama Iqbal

An Overview

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Nationalism is commonly defined as a love for one's country. In Latin, 'natio' and 'natus' means 'the place of birth.'¹ Hayes writes about nationalism as "loyalty and attachment to the interior of the group (namely the nation and homeland) are the basis of nationalism."² Hans Kohn says:

The co-existence of a special group in a single realm is the factor for forming a nation. Being brought up in a natural and geographical environment creates the greatest unit of tribal solidarity between individuals. The group which on this basis feels a joint interest and expediency forms a nation.³

Nationalism is an ideology related to the concept of human social and cultural identity that holds that nations (either ethnically or culturally defined) are the "fundamental units" for human social life, and as such take precedence over any concepts of universalism. A nation may be defined as a group of free people held together by ties such as race, language, religion, manners and customs, traditions, history, geographical surroundings, commerce, laws etc.⁴ Nationalism means an enthusiasm for, devotion to or cultivation of one nation in particular, or the principle of nationality in general, while a nationalist is a person who feels such devotion or practices such cultivation.⁵ He exhibits great pride in their people's history and traditions and often feels that their nation has been specially chosen by God or history. It is an excessive or fanatical devotion to a nation and its interests, often associated with a belief that one country is superior to all others.⁶ Like a religion, Nationalism provides the individual with a sense of community

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and with a cause worthy of self-sacrifice. It provides new beliefs, martyrs and “holy” days that stimulated reverence.⁷ The displays of the national flag, singing of the national anthem, were the signs of increased national pride.⁸

Although Nationalism is unique to the modern world, some of its elements can be traced throughout history. The first roots of nationalism are probably to be found in the ancient Hebrews, who conceived of themselves as both a chosen people, that is, a people as a whole superior to all other peoples, and a people with a common cultural history. The ancient Greeks also felt superior to all other peoples and felt a sense of great loyalty to the political community. These feelings of cultural superiority (ethnocentrism), which are similar to Nationalism, gave way to much more universal identifications under the Roman Empire and with the Christian Church through its teaching of the oneness of humanity.⁹

Throughout history people have been attached to their native soil, to the traditions of their parents, and to established territorial authorities; but it was not until the end of the 18th century that Nationalism began to be a generally recognized sentiment molding public and private life and one of the great, if not the greatest, single determining factors of modern history. Because of its dynamic vitality and its all-pervading character, Nationalism is often thought to be very old; sometimes it is mistakenly regarded as a permanent factor in political behavior.¹⁰ European Nationalism in its modern sense, of the desire of such a community to assert its unity and independence vis-a-vis other communities or groups, is mainly a product of the 19th century.¹¹ Actually the American and French Revolutions may be regarded as its first powerful manifestations.¹² Nationalism is said to have emerged from the French Revolution. It was from here that nationalism began to play a significant role in the evolution of mankind.¹³ Starting as a crusade for “liberty, equality and fraternity”, the French Revolution turned into a war of the French people against

foreign aggressors. When Napoleon took power and began to create a French empire, other nations fought back. From Spain to Russia, people rose in defense of their nations against French Imperialism. After Napoleons' fall, Nationalism continued to develop. Political and social institutions were secularized and transformed to serve the purpose of a national state.¹⁴

The power of Nationalism can be seen in the history of modern Socialism, which began as an international workers movement. When world war 1st broke out in 1914, the European socialist parties abandoned internationalism and supported their national governments. The soviet communists who took power in Russia in 1917 proclaimed the beginning of an international movement on behalf of working classes everywhere, only to become nationalistic as time went on. Communists in other countries, such as China and Vietnam, have developed their own types of Nationalism.¹⁵ After penetrating the new countries of Latin America, it spread in the early 19th century to central Europe and from there, toward the middle of the century, to eastern and southeastern Europe. At the beginning of the 20th century, Nationalism flowered in the ancient lands of Asia and Africa during the struggle against Colonialism after World War I and II. Nationalist movements succeeded in such important countries such as Egypt and India.¹⁶ The doctrine of state absolutism is now commonly associated with creeds of Nationalism; for it is a 'nation' rather a ruler or government, to whom the citizen is called upon to surrender his individuality.¹⁷ Nationalism in Muslim lands was incited by the Westerners, with the British and French missionaries and Orientalists having a great share in it. It was then expanded by colonial plots and used by Colonialists as a tool for breaking up Islamic unity and destroying the Ottoman Empire. In this connection, Christian and Jewish minorities and pro-Western intellectuals were the principal executors of these imperialistic plans.¹⁸

Thus, the 19th century has been called the age of

Nationalism in Europe, while the 20th century has witnessed the rise and struggle of powerful national movements throughout Asia and Africa.¹⁹ Today Nationalism remains a strong ideology and an important force in world politics.²⁰ Nationalism was one of the most powerful forces that molded the history of the Western world between 1830 and 1914. From a vague sentiment during the early centuries of the modern era, it grew into a veritable cult. For millions of deluded folk it became a stronger force than religion; surpassing Christianity in its appeal to the emotions and to the spirit of sacrifice in a holy cause.²¹ According to Machiavelli, the nation state is the only objective of the life of man and the highest reality in the universe:

“For the establishment and maintenance of the state the statesman had very often to go against the treaties, sincerity, humanism and religion.” Religion is not able to maintain its super most position in Nationalism; however, it can take a position subordinate the politics. Whenever any clash of interests takes place between these two, the political interest is given to priority. It is supposed to be a great achievement that through this ideology politics has been freed from the hold of religion.²² In short, Nationalism holds that the world is divided into nations, each of which has its own character and destiny; that an individual’s first loyalty is to his or her nation; that the nation is the source of all political power; that to be free and fulfilled the individual must belong to a nation; that each nation must express its authentic nature by being autonomous; and that a world of peace and justice can only be built on autonomous nations.²³

This is how Nationalism is generally defined. This definition does not apply to the Muslims who are not a nation according to the Western political terminology. Islam is a divine religion having its own independent, spiritual, practical, political and social system; it comes into conflict with the

ideology of Nationalism. Islam has its own social and philosophical worldview, and provides a set of economic and political principles. Nationalism, too, has its own social and political principles based, however, on set of different beliefs and criteria. Therefore, conflict between Islam and Nationalism is inevitable. A Muslim cannot, at the same time, be a Muslim and a polytheist, or a Muslim and communist. Muslims are not united by a common race or by a common tongue. They do not belong to a particular territory. Their loyalty is to their religion-Islam-and not to any other ideology. Their unity is spiritual. Nationalism is incompatible with Islam, both systems represent two opposite ideologies. They are opposite poles in their spirit, essence, direction and goal.

The subject of Nationalism has been very vital for exploiters, oppressors and enemies of Islam. It has been an effective tool in the hands of superpowers and other groups of people in general for shattering the very mighty unifying force among Muslims generated on the basis of Islamic principles of the “international” and not the “national” brotherhood. Horrified by the current Islamic resurgence and a world-wide rising wave of unity among Muslims, the world oppressive, arrogant and Zionist forces are engaged day and night in sharpening more and more this tool of Nationalism and using the same very cunningly against Muslims and all the interests of Islam.²⁴ Thus, the dangerous dimensions of Nationalism make it imperative for the Muslim world to unveil its true visage. However, there are abundant Muslim scholars who have responded this ideology. As for as Allama Iqbal is concerned he proclaims:

Do not analogize with western nations.

The religion of the holy Prophet (SAAS), who came of the Hashemite clan, has been shaped in a specific manner.

Western nations are based on territory and race.

Where as the strength of your community rests on the

might of your religion.²⁵

Nationalism is one of those concepts which Iqbal subjected to a very severe criticism as it runs counter to the very basis of his philosophy which is humanitarian in character. Of all the forces newly unleashed, the orgy of Nationalism proved the most potent force which loomed large all over the world. The Westerners embarked on a fearful race for colonization and plundering the Third World countries. They pounded upon Asian and African nations like bloodthirsty wolves. With such actions, they badly needed a strong ideology to justify their pillage and crimes, while, at the same time, to provide a motive for further plunder and colonization. Thus, in the heat of these attempts at colonization, Nationalism rose as an ideology and a living creed of the West.

During the initial period of Iqbal, he was so much actuated by his hatred of the British Imperialism that he could not give a serious consideration to the practical implications of the theory of Nationalism. Besides he had yet to develop his own philosophy of life which he could use as a criterion of judgment between right and wrong²⁶. Iqbal had a view of all the revolutionary changes and could not remain indifferent to the fast- changing scenario of the world. As a result of that, he was considerably influenced by Nationalism but his Nationalism was the innate love of a good- natured man for his motherland. In fact, love for one's own country is a natural instinct. Prior to his departure for Europe in 1905, Iqbal's poems were mostly tinged with the sentiment of Nationalism like *Tasweer-i-Dard*, *Hindustani Bacho ka Qaumi Geet*, and *Tarana-i-Hindi* in which Iqbals' nationalistic fervors has reached its peak.²⁷ These poems are innocent expressions of the natural patriotic feeling of an Indian and do not reflect his faith in Nationalism as a philosophy of life.²⁸ In his collection of poems entitled *Bang-i-Dara* several poems deal with this theme of patriotism, and Nationalism. His belief in the cult of Nationalism and patriotism had reached its climax in his poem

Naya Shiwalah (New Temple) in which while addressing a Brahmin; he proudly declared that patriotism was a sacred religion for him as each particle of the dust of the country was a god.

Thou doest imagine that God resides in the images of stone:

But for me each particle of the dust of the country is a God.²⁹

However, Iqbal was soon disillusioned with the cult of Nationalism and patriotism and discovered that Islamic universalism and humanism can not be contained within the narrow framework of contemporary Nationalism. He now critically surveyed his own past and found there something to reverse. Thus for the *Tarana-i-Hindi* he wrote his *Tarana -i-Mille* (The Anthem of the Muslim *Ummah*). And in place of the deification of the dust particles of his homeland, he now called upon Muslims to shatter the idol of nationalism and mingle it with dust:

O, followers of Islam, destroy the concept of Nationalism completely³⁰.

In any case, Iqbal's live contact with Western life, his grounding in Western philosophy, and his initiation into modern Western thought served as a catalyst, enabling him to perceive things in a wider perspective and in more critical terms. From the vantage point of a European base, he could easily see that the onward march of Nationalism had bred racialism in several Muslim countries. Under the impact of Nationalism and in order to build up their own separate nationalistic altars, the Turks, the Egyptians, the Iranians and the Arabs had tended to emphasize their particular racial origins and strains, and worse, their racial separation from one another. This, in turn, had ravaged the Islamic *Ummah* concept, enfeebled the Muslim world, and had laid it all the more open to Western aggression, exploitation and designs. And this, above all, disillusioned Iqbal with the nationalist credo beyond repair. Not only the political

misfortunes of the Muslim peoples, but also their civilization decline motivated his thinking towards pan-Islam. Thus Iqbal who had left India as a nationalist returned to it in 1908 as a firm believer in Islam and in an integrated *Ummah*. So towards the end of his career, he became the great advocate of internationalism. He realized the way the frenzy of Nationalism was whipped; it was crude ethnicity and linguistic prejudice. Iqbal never approved such a Nationalism which would cause bloodshed and sufferings of humanity on such a colossal scale.

The concept of narrow and aggressive Nationalism, the division of nations on territorial bases, the discrimination of races and colors, formalism, convention, low standard of morality and character- all these created in him spirit of revolt. He revolted against the dismemberment of human kind into regional and sectional compartments. He believed in the futility and inefficacy of such a racial distinction in which man is set against man, creed against creed and color against color. Dissatisfied and annoyed with the western society and culture, he advocated the demolition of man made barriers to regenerate humanity and rescue it from the thralldom of tyranny, conflict and hatred. He demanded allegiance to some thing enduring, permanent and noble, and found it in a common interest and universal outlook.³¹ Iqbal therefore ceased to be a nationalist in his outlook, because he considered Nationalism not a feeling worthy of cultivation as it ultimately gave birth to petty, narrow and selfish considerations, throttling the cosmopolitan outlook and proving detrimental to the interests of humanity as a whole. In his book *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he writes:

The growth of territorial Nationalism with its emphasis on what is called national characteristics has tended rather to kill the broad human element in the art and literature of Europe.³²

We are all Indians and are so called because we live in that part of the world which is known by the name of India so

with the Chinese, the Arabs, the Japanese, the Iranians etc. The word “country” used in this statement is merely a geographical term and as such does not clash with Islam. In the present day political literature, however, the idea of nation is not merely geographical. It is rather a principle of human society and such it is a political concept. Since Islam also is a law of human society, the word “country” when used as a political concept comes into conflict with Islam.³³

While the western countries, with all their power and cultural, political, and economic domination, are united together to exploit other nations, the third world countries, with all their inadequacies and with all their political, cultural, and economic backwardness, pursue separate paths isolating them from one other. Islam tells its followers that all the distinctions of color, race, and language that are observed among the nations of the world, and which have been made the criteria of their separation, are accidental having no essential reality. On the whole, these people are noble and honorable who are advancing on the path of human perfection.³⁴

Mr. K. G. Saiyidian in his article “Progressive Trends in Iqbal’s Thought” writes:

He (Iqbal) is essentially international and humanitarian in his attitude and rejects unhesitatingly the claims of the nation-state to regiment and regulate the ideas, feeling and loyalties of its subjects. For this view Iqbal draws his inspiration from the teachings of Islam and its Holy Prophet (SAAS) who stressed in unmistakable terms the oneness of the mankind and dethroned ruthlessly false ideals of the race, color and country which had gained ascendancy all over the world.³⁵

In an early lyric, Iqbal points to the obvious contradictions between Nationalism and Islamic Millat:

The Arabian architect (the prophet) has fashioned it (Millat) on a model unique in the world.

The unity of the country is not the foundation of the rampart of our community (*Millat*).³⁶

Iqbal is anxious to point out that the solidarity and internationalism of Islam is not to be overshadowed by the uprising trends of Nationalism. In the full verse, Iqbal addresses the Muslims thus:

What is the ultimate end of nature and the inner secret
of Islam?

The universality of brotherhood and the abundance of
love;

Shatter the idols of blood and color and race and absorb
thy self in the millet;

Abolish all distinctions between the Turanians, the
Persians, and the Afghans.³⁷

It is very understandable that Iqbal's mind sees Nationalism, Materialistic Atheism, and Imperialism as interrelated. In the presidential address of 1932³⁸ he says: 'I am opposed to Nationalism as it is understood in Europe... because I see in it the germs of atheistic Materialism which I look upon as the greatest danger to modern humanity. It was "Islam and Islam alone which, for the first time, gave the message to mankind that religion was neither national and racial, nor individual or private" and that "its purpose was to unite and organize mankind."

In a letter dated 11th June 1918, Iqbal wrote to Akbar Allahabadi:

These days Islam's enemy is not science but Europe's concept of territorial Nationalism which instigated the Turks to abolish Khilafat, the Egyptians to raise slogans in favor of Egypt and conjured up the ghost of pan-Indian democracy before the Indians.³⁹

He realized the dangers for the humanity that lurked in the political concept of territorial Nationalism. In an exquisite poem headed *Wataniyat* in his Urdu collection, *Bang-i-Dara* he attacked this concept as a false god fashioned by the Western thought. In his view, this kind of earth rooted-ness was inconsistent with the universalizing mission of the Islamic dispensation and it split humanity into warring factions.⁴⁰ The

last stanza of this poem reads:

“In this is rooted the rivalry among the world nations,
the objective of trade systalises into conquest, because
of it. It is what deprives politics of the grace of truth;
the home of the weak is devastated by it. It splits up
God’s creation into nations, and strikes at the root of
Islamic nationalism.⁴¹

In the opinion of Dr. Iqbal, Nationalism of Europe was but a fleeting phase, and like other momentous events, that surge had to recede in the larger interest of peace, progress, and prosperity of the entire human race.⁴² A greater part of his works deal with this concept:

Nationalism is the greatest of new god (created by the west) and adherence to it means destruction of Islam.⁴³

Because:

The nation is subject to the existence of religion and religion alone.⁴⁴

Muslims should remember that the western social system is based on race and nationality but theirs was based on religion without which the Islamic nation or *Ummah* cannot have any existence.⁴⁵ The Islamic conception of nation as one, after entertaining the particular faith, out stepping geographical boundaries and diversity of races, colors, and languages is an outstanding contribution to human civilization and society. Iqbal thus says:

Our essence is not bound by any place;
The vigor of our wine is not contained in any bowl;
Chinese and Indian
Alike the chord that constitutes our jar;
Turkish and Syrian alike the clay of India or Syria or
Rome;
Nor any fatherland do we possess except Islam.⁴⁶

Iqbal points out that the prophet’s migration from his homeland is a symbol for a Muslim to make himself free from local attachment and stand for a broader ideal to which Islam advocates. By migrating to Medina the Prophet (SAAS) made

manifest that Islam was not Makkah based. The lesson was that in case there is a conflict between the love of one's birth place and the good of Islam, the latter had to be preferred⁴⁷.

Iqbal is however pained to see that the internationalism of Islam is lost sight of because of the western emphasis on Nationalism.⁴⁸ In his address in the Muslim league session in Allahbad in 1930 Iqbal said that the rejection of the Christianity as a unifying force led to the division of Europe into different nationalities and this finally developed into political philosophies of national loyalties and parochial considerations. Once Europe got divided into a dozen of nations, their industrial and colonial interests clashed with each other and resulted into numerous wars between them. He argued that "the worship of state to which Hegel had given a philosophic grounding was actually producing thinkers like Nietzsche and Trotsky for whom power of the superman or super nation had become the ultimate goal of individuals as well as nations."⁴⁹ Iqbal believed and rightly too, that economic change has profound effect on social attitudes. Once the destiny of societies was identified in Europe with geographical loyalties and social interests were identified economic, industrial, and colonial interests, the centre of preference was shifted from faith to political authority. Religious ties were replaced by territorial patriotism and regional loyalties and Nationalism was identified with Secularism.⁵⁰

Iqbal sees Islam and Nationalism rival principles for organizing the ultimate political group. Nationalism brings people together, but it also divides them and keeps them divided, for its criteria of solidarity among men-race, language, territory -can't readily be met by the outsider. In its divisive aspect, Nationalism generates pride in one's own group and low regard for others. It legitimizes one group's imperialistic control and exploitation of another. In its identification with Secularism, it makes a religion private, consigning it to the individual's relationship with God. Thus it authorizes rulers,

majorities, kings, dictators to usurp religion's regulatory jurisdiction in social interaction. A Muslim community's acceptance of such Nationalism entails a subversion of Islam.

Indeed universalism and internationalism are the hallmark of Islam. It wants to see the entire mankind happy, prosperous and progressive. Hence it doesn't believe in an economy in which the gain of one is the loss of another or it does not justify a war which results in the exploitation and annihilation of the weak.⁵¹ He believed that *Millah* was founded on religion rather than on the idea of the fatherland. For him the spiritualism universalism of Islam, based on the concept of *Tawhid* was totally opposed to the cult of Nationalism both territorial (*Wataniyat*) as well as integral (*Qaumiyah*).⁵² Believers in one God can not entertain the Aristotelian idea of "born rulers" and "born slaves". Hence there can be no social "Darwinism". All human beings have equal rights. If God is one, the Book is one and the Prophet (SAAS) (who is the last of the prophets of God) is one, then the believers in God, provided they are sincere believers, have inevitably to be one. The idea of chosen people can never be accommodated in the framework of Islamic teachings and practices. All preferences according to Islam are spiritual. The Qur'an declares that the most honorable in the eyes of God is the one who fears God most.⁵³ He who is pious, to howsoever a low family he may belong, is more respectable, according to Islam, than an impious prince. Similarly, an alien who is a better believer than a blood-relation should be comparatively dearer to a sincere believer. Iqbal concludes that:

If some Muslims (or Islamic nations) have fallen into the error that nationalism and Islam can go hand in hand as a political concept, and then I want to give a timely warning to the Muslims that this course will ultimately lead to the irreligiousness. And if this does not happen, Islam will be reduced to an ethical idea with indifference to its social order as an inevitable consequence.⁵⁴

He says that Muslim can never be a party to a narrow

Nationalism because he is a member of such a world-wide international organism which transcends all limitations of geography, race, color or language.⁵⁵

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