

ISLAMIC ALLUSIONS IN THE POETRY OF IQBAL

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Constantly searching for new ideas, themes and subject-matters, the poet looks around him and tries to perceive even the slightest phenomenon in the environment. He examines various institutions for possible sources of ideas and chooses the right symbols and imagery for his poetry that may describe some vicarious experience. In the process, he may be moved to express his ideas and feelings in some poetic language. He may, in effect, communicate to either the world or himself alone, or, probably, both.

One poet who writes about the physical, social, religious and economic factors of his environment is Muhammad Iqbal, known as the "Poet of the East". Beautifully expressed in his poetry are his ideas on and attitudes toward a wide variety of things, practices, schools of thought, and institutions.

This paper, however, discusses only the messages of Iqbal that are directly implied or fully expressed by his poetic allusions to Islam. The quotations here given are taken from V. G. Kiernan's translation of his book of poetry entitled *Poems from Iqbal*, published in London in 1955 by the John Murray Publishers Ltd.

In his poems, Iqbal acknowledges the fact that Islam includes doctrines that are humanitarian in approach and that it submits practical solutions to various problems of daily life. His allusions to Islam reveal his ideas on life itself and the religion's relevance to the social configuration of the people and institutions in India.

But Iqbal also despises some religious conventions that are boring and uninteresting. On a note of disgust he declares in "A New Altar":

I'll tell you truth, oh Brahmin,
if it may make so bold!
These idols in your temples —
these idols have grown old;
To hate your fellow-mortals is all
they teach you, while
Our God too sets his preachers
to scold and to revile;

while resenting the fact that the Brahmin has learned the hatred which the idols teach and saying that the preacher in the Mosque has been taught also by his god, Allah, "to scold and to revile." Iqbal goes on to say that divinity can be found not in the temple

and shrine alone; for one need only fix his sights upon the ground and find divinity even in the "country's poor dust":

In every graven image you
fancied God: I see
In each speck of my country's
poor dust, divinity.

It is often said that religion draws both the high and the low together, dispels their biases against each other, and inspires them to identify with one another through a unique spirit of brotherhood. In the same poem, however, Iqbal contends that despite the existence of temples and shrines there is still no unity among people. With patriotic fraternalism, therefore, he invites for unity:

Come, let us lift suspicion's thick
curtains once again,
Unite once more the sundered wipe
clean division's stain.

Iqbal finds chaos in the world and so, feeling sick of it, he "sets out" to seek silence and peace of mind. His poem, "Before the Prophet's Throne," tells us of his restlessness in the world. He observes the various events transpiring around him and feels sad because all peoples on earth do not live like brothers, loving and caring for each other. Thus, in this poem he says that, when he gets tired of the world, he "sets out" from earth and angels lead him to the Prophet, popularly known in the West as Mohammed.

Appearing before the Prophet gives Iqbal a chance to complain against the disorderly state of things on earth. So he says:

Master! there is no quiet in that
land of time and space
Where the existence that we crave
hides and still hides its face;

and laments his observation that people do not love each other as children of Allah:

Though all creation's flowerbeds
teem with tulip and red rose,
The flower whose perfume is true
love — that flower no garden knows.

Iqbal's community, it might be mentioned, is one where feudal landlords are powerful and domineering, a social condition that offends his sense of propriety deeply. Hating the injustice they do to the peasants, he attacks these landlords with his poetic philosophy that the earth is not anybody's property but God's (Allah's). In other words, he uses his poetry to strengthen his protest against injustice. In the

poem: "The Earth is God's" he scorns the landlord and warns him that the pieces of land he (the landlord) usurps belong to Allah:

Landlord! this earth is not thine,
 is not thine,
 Nor yet thy father's; no, not thine,
 not mine.

Furthermore, Iqbal expresses his awareness of Allah, who is responsible for all things found in Nature, and re-affirms his confidence in His goodness. To strike belief in the Prime Mover of things, he asks:

Who rears the seed in the darkness
 of the ground?
 Who lifts the cloud up from the
 ocean wave?
 Who drew here from the west the
 fruitful wind?

In this poem, Iqbal also asks everybody to discern the order in Nature as such order may be effected only by God. He maintains that Allah created the earth and so only He may own it. He believes that it is in the sensing of natural things that man can initially realize that the earth is Allah's. Thus, by asserting His presence in all creations, Iqbal declares it is a grave mistake and strongly inhuman for the landlord, whom he addresses in the poem, to claim and possess the peasant's pieces of land. In his lifetime, Iqbal witnesses the landlord's injustice to the peasant which causes profound sadness in his poetic heart. Denouncing the landlord for his covetousness by reminding him of the existence of Allah in all His creations, he asks further:

Who made this soul, or who that
 light of the sun?
 Who filled with pearls of grain the
 tasselled wheat?
 Who taught the months by instinct
 to revolve?

which somehow brings into focus the general question, "Who is the Creator of all things?" This question, of course, involves one's belief and, while answering it, one should examine the origin of things in the context of religion.

Somewhere in "God's Command to His Angels" Iqbal deploras again the living condition of the common man and the landlord's usurpation of his land. He still echoes his protest against the injustice of the landlord when, in the form of Allah's command, he says:

Find the field whose harvest is no
 peasant's daily bread —
 Garner in the furnace every
 ripening ear of wheat!

He puts his command into the words of Allah to give it authority and force. Allah is the Supreme Being and His commanding words constitute a line of conduct that will help man correct or improve on his past mistakes and make him realize that his life is a mere means to attain eternal union with Him in the hereafter.

The strength and impact of any command are determined largely by him who gives it, his powers and influences, and his immediate interests in the compliance of such command. Thus, by giving his command through God's lips, Iqbal achieves some authority, some kind of dominion over everything. With some powerful effect, he gives his command that should deliver the peasant from his poverty and protracted suffering under the yoke of the landlord's injustice:

Close the hour approaches of the
kingdom of the poor—
Every imprint of the past find
and annihilate!

Earlier in the poem Iqbal calls upon the poor to wake up from his "slumber" and contemplate on his condition, for it is time he improved his economic life and his pursuit of happiness was generated fully:

Rise, and from their slumber wake
the poor ones of my world!
Shake the walls and windows of
the mansions of the great!
Kindle with the fire of faith
the slow blood of the slaves!

He, also, asks the "angels" to send the mumbling priest away from the house of Allah for he has ceased to mediate between God and man and, instead, has brought man away from Him:

Banish from the house of God
the mumbling priest whose prayers
Like a veil creation from Creator
separate!

So far, two views may be noted in Iqbal's allusions to Islam. Firstly, by putting his commands into the words of Allah, who is just and most powerful, he justifies his giving some correctives to the social evils of his time. Secondly, by portraying the Brahmin as a useless and inefficient religious leader, he rebukes the existing formalism of religious practices and beliefs which the religious sector of his society still observes.

While Islam is presented as a means to correct the mistakes of society, one easily understands, however, that these mistakes, in Iqbal's poetry, are actually doings of unscrupulous individuals. To minimize, if not avoid, these mistakes, everybody in the Islamic society should

know and execute judiciously his roles toward himself and others, his physical environment, and, in a larger scale, his community. This simple and basic form of self-knowledge corresponds to the individual's awareness of his status in society, and generates in him a more or less definable set of values that may guide him in dealing with others. Religiously speaking, this form of self-knowledge which constitutes one's working understanding of his hierarchy of values, social interests and moral duties, may help one determine the degree to which he may have identified with God. Self-knowledge, in this sense, may be achieved by utilizing some religious means toward a "soul-searching" experience — that is, first by becoming aware of the world and then conforming with its laws according to reason and faith, which can hardly conflict with or contradict one another as regards spiritual issues. Most, if not all, of the living religions of the world suggest, though, that self-knowledge be acquired through meditation, holy retreat, examination of conscience, and spiritual reading and advising.

To Iqbal, therefore, man's worshipping in the temples and shrines is not a guarantee that he will attain union with Allah, and, as the poet reveals in "A New Altar," one can also find divinity even in the "country's poor dust." What matters is that one sees himself in the light of Allah's creations and thinks and acts in accordance with His commandments. Salvation is in the "self"; it is in the purging of its own mistakes, worldly desires and selfish actions by which the "self" can possibly cleanse itself of the ignominy of sins and diabolical interests.

In "The Earth is God's," Iqbal elaborates on this God-Man relationship by advancing the thesis that the knowledge of Allah's ownership of all things should serve as a reminder that He values all creations. Thus, if the landlord usurps the land of the peasant, he is actually usurping no less than His property. Allah provides man with different useful things to enable him to improve himself and his environment according to the dictate of reason and morality, not at the expense of other people.

The deteriorating state of the God-Man relationship may be reflected in the character of the Brahmin. In "A New Altar," he, now corrupt, appears at the Mosque like a cheap ornament, without seeking to bring the people closer to Allah. Like others, he hates, scolds, and mocks, too.

Iqbal's concept of Islam as a practical escape from one's pains and sorrows is beautifully described in his poem, "Before the Prophet's Throne," in which he tells us that peace of mind and soul can be found in some communion with Mohammed. In an earnest supplication to Mohammed, be it in prayers or hymns, one feels relieved of his disappointments and failures in life, a "healing" process or therapy that purges one of his offended and over-burdened emotions.

Yet as long as he knows how it is to bear physical and moral sufferings; as long as he can distinguish between sadness and happiness, between pain and pleasure; as long as he experiences that poverty leads to disillusionment, hunger and sickness, and wealth to contentment, comfort and economic security, the rational man will often do his best to improve himself with the aid of education, technology, and economic investments, and aspire for glory whenever he feels self-importance or self-love.

Here, the question of self-interest takes root; and self-preservation as a primary principle in maintaining one's search for happiness becomes more apparent. In this connection, one may even look into himself and attempt to justify his wants.

Nevertheless, excessive desire for material things, Islam teaches, should not be fostered. Earthly goods that give man pleasure and comfort should not be taken as the ultimate goal of life. Iqbal says that man is greedy but his greediness, as he states in "Ghazal No. 13," can be overcome or avoided through the help of the "self":

Your heart is your candle, your
Own self is all the light you need;

which leads our discussion to the concept of the self.

The idea of the self as the core of individuality is based on the understanding that every man has his own peculiar "self" that corresponds to his personality. Although it recognizes marked individual differences, Islam claims that the individual self is patterned after the image of Allah, the Eternal Self. The purpose is to establish a common identification for all individuals, which is important to make them feel they belong to only one group that possesses more or less common religious interests and attributes.

Also, in "Ghazal No. 13," Iqbal points out the universality of individualism and of the aim at self-glorification:

Each atom pants for glory; greed
Of self-fruition earth's whole creed!
Life that thirsts for no flowering — death:
Self-creation — a godlike deed;

and observes the workings of the Self that governs the universe. He holds that everything can happen only by Allah's will:

Through Self the mustard-seed becomes
A hill: without, the hill a seed.

Thus in his poetry, Iqbal combines two different cultural institutions: the institution of Islam and the institution of experience. Islam becomes contemporary in his verses that, in turn, strengthen the validity of its doctrine, bring to the fore the values of Islamic tradition, and translate Islamic temperaments into literary experiences. Iqbal's poetry

expounds the doctrine of Allah's existence and His infinite rule over all creations. Speaking of the Islamic tradition, he writes in "The Way of Islam":

What, shall I tell you then, is a
Muslim's life?
Ecstasy's summit joined with
profundest thought!

Islamic values are determined in part by one universal feeling: love. It is love for Allah that binds all Moslems into one unified group; it is love for one another that creates peace and order in the Moslem society; it is love for their heritage that forces the Moslems to preserve their culture and traditions; and it is love for their way of life that the Moslems remain Moslem in thoughts and deeds despite the various influences they meet from other cultures. In Iqbal's poetry this ardent love for what is Moslem is highly dramatized and presented according to contemporary events. There are reflections in his poems of modern sensibilities, like the desire to eliminate tenancy and the concept of temples and shrines as outmoded means to achieve perfection and divinity.

The institution of experience in Iqbal's poetry is evident all throughout the messages of his poems. Aside from Islam, he gathers poetic ideas from various areas of experience. Some of the titles of his poems bear witness to this: "Lenin Before God," "At Napoleon's Tomb," "Modern Man," "Bolshevik Russia," "European Politics," and "League of Nations." In short, Iqbal writes poetically about economics, politics, sociology, and other fields of knowledge and experience.

A poet can write with depth and power about a subject-matter only if he has some knowledge about it. This knowledge is acquired through experience—actual or vicarious. One's actual experience is that in which he gets involved, body and mind, in a real situation, while his vicarious experience is that which he acquires from reading, listening, or the like as an effective substitute for an actual experience.

As a poet, Iqbal derives from his experiences—actual and vicarious—profound ideas that, when expressed in his works, may embody his insights and visions. Thus, he writes about his actual experience in temples and shrines in the poem "A New Temple," and about his vicarious experience in appearing before Mohammed in "Before the Prophet's Throne."

Iqbal's genius, in short, may be seen in his subtle fusion of the institution of Islam and the institution of experience into his poetry that serves as a testimony to his remarkable philosophy on the phenomenon of God and Man. With his allusions to Islam he reveals his religious ideals, his inner thoughts on the formalism and conventionalism of the religion, and his staunch concept of the Almighty. With

his allusions to Islam, too, he comments on the social workings of his society and the immediate effects of social stratification upon the life of the Moslems.

In doing all this, Iqbal communicates to the world and, probably, to himself the ideas, themes and subject-matters he draws from Islam and the Moslem culture.