

Iqbal's Concept of Society

ISMAIL AB. RAHMAN

ABSTRAK

Muhammad Iqbal mengemukakan fikirannya mengenai konsep masyarakat melalui koleksi sajaknya yang terkenal Rumuz-I Bekhudi. Konsep ini adalah lanjutan dari konsep manusia yang digambarkan dalam koleksi sajaknya yang lain iaitu Asrar-I-Khudi. Konsep masyarakat yang mahu dikemukakan oleh Iqbal dalam koleksinya itu didasarkan kepada beberapa rukun dalam Islam seperti: Tiada Tuhan melainkan Allah dan Muhammad pesuruh Allah. Doktrin-doktrin di atas membentuk kriteria pertama dan kedua masyarakat idealnya. Iqbal juga menyatakan bahawa masyarakat ideal itu mesti dipandu oleh undang-undang Tuhan dan ini membentuk kriteria ketiga konsep masyarakatnya. Kriteria keempat masyarakat idealnya seperti yang digambarkan di dalam Rumuz-I-Bekhudi ialah menjadikan Kaabah sebagai pusat masyarakat Islam. Masyarakat Islam juga perlu menjaga perpaduan dan ini membentuk kriteria kelima di dalam masyarakat idealnya. Kriteria terakhir dari konsep masyarakat Iqbal ialah masyarakat Islam perlu bekerja keras untuk menguasai dunia ini. Jelas sekali bahawa konsep masyarakat Iqbal didasarkan kepada kombinasi di antara aqidah dan syariah Islam.

Iqbal expounds his doctrine of society, basing it on his poem *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* or *The Mysteries of Selflessness*. This collection of poems relates the growth of Society and its development. The concept of society which Iqbal composes in the poem is the continuous development of his doctrine of *Khudi* or the Self in *the Secrets of the Self* or *Asrar-i-Khudi*.

Professor A.J Arberry in his introduction to *The Mysteries of Selflessness* said that ideas of the individual and society are not something new but:

What is new, and that what justifies Iqbal's pretension to be a leader of thought, is the application of this philosophical theory of individuality and community to the religio-political dogma that Islam is superior to all other creeds and systems.¹

According to Professor Arberry again, Iqbal could not organise his concept of Selfhood, isolating it from his concept of society because this isolation will bring the selfhood to 'unmitigated egoism and anarchy'² In other words, Iqbal's self-realising individuals with their strong determination, need society in order to play an important role in that society. Those individuals with their strong ambitions also need society in

developing their self-affirmation on the right way. Otherwise, as Professor Arberry says, those self-realising individuals will involve in egoism and anarchy. Those self-realising individuals are able to help society develop in a perfect condition, because as Iqbal understands, they are perfect men and automatically they can help build the society by the guidance of the laws of God.

...it is only as an association of self-affirming individuals that the community can come into being and perfect itself,³ says Professor Arberry

The philosophical problems with which Iqbal is concerned do not only relate to the individual's development in society, but also to the evolutionary process of an ideal society

...he [Iqbal] was not interested merely in the individual and his self-realization; he was equally concerned with the evolution of an ideal society, or community as he preferred to call it,⁴ Professor Arberry says.

Iqbal clearly uses the first pillar of Islam as his basic doctrine of an ideal society. He says:

*There is no god but God: This is the soul And body of our pure Community,
The pitch that keeps our instrument in tune,
The very substance of our mysteries,
The knotted thread that binds our scattered thought.
And when these words, being uttered on the lips,
Reach to the heart, they do augment the power
Of life itself; graven upon the rock,
They wake a heart therein; but if the heart
Burns not with remembrance of that faith
It doth convert to caly.⁵*

The above quotation illustrates how Iqbal regards the Islamic faith of the Unity of God (لا اله الا الله) as body and soul of the Islamic community. The belief in the Unity of God, as Iqbal understands, is the very strong affinity of thought, theologically, among members of Islamic community. This is the first characteristic of Iqbal's ideal society.

Iqbal stresses that the Islamic Community of *Ummat* should be built on the foundation of the Unity of God. The members of that community must always remember god, otherwise as Iqbal says above:

if the heart
Burns not with the remembrance of that faith [Unity of God]
It doth convert to caly.

In *Javid Nama*, Iqbal again explains the meaning of Muslim community when he says:

What is *Millat*, [Muslim Community] ye believers in the oneness of God?
It means having one sight in a thousand eyes!
Men of truth follow the same reasoning, make the same claim:
"Our tents may be apart but our hearts are united!"
Unity of outlook transforms specks of dust in the sun;
With a singleness of Vision, you will see Truth unveiled;
Do not look down upon this unity of outlook;
It is a reflection of the unity of God!
Art thou dead? This unity of outlook will revive thee;
Give up this life without a centre and attain firmness.
Wouldst thou attain prestige and power?
Strive for the unity of thought and action.⁶

The unity of God, as Iqbal believes, is able theologically to unite Muslim thought. Iqbal suggests and urges Muslims to make great efforts to unite among themselves in thought and action in order to get power and prestige;

Wouldst thou attain prestige and power?
Strive for the unity of thought and action.

Peoples must have one thought, and in their minds
Pursue a single purpose; to one draw
Their temperaments respond, one testing-stone
Discriminates their hideous from their fair.
Though nations' destinies their lands control,
Though nations build their edifice on race,
thinkest thou the community is based
Upon the Country? shall so much regard

Be blindly paid to water, air and earth?
It is dull ignorance to put one's boast
In lineage; that judgement rests upon
The body, and the body perishes.
Other are the foundations that support
Islam's Community; they lie concealed
Within our hearts. We, who are present now,
Have bound our hearts to Him who is unseen,
And therefore are delivered from the chains of earthly things.
Well-pointed arrows of one quiver are we,
One showing, one beholding, one in thought;
One is our goal and purpose, one the form,
The fashion, and the measure of our dream.
Thanks to His blessings, we are brothers all.
Sharing one speech, one spirit and one heart.⁷

Iqbal says that even though other nations (he does not mention which nation) use the geographical and racial factors as the factors which unite themselves, why should Muslims follow them? Why should Muslim link

other Muslims on racial and the geographical grounds? Therefore he urges Muslims not to be proud on the racial ground. Iqbal stresses that Muslim community is based on feelings of brotherhood in their hearts. The feeling of brotherhood derive from the same belief in the unity of God. Thus, Iqbal asks Muslims to become united through believing that essential pillar – Unity of God – of Islam.

Discussing on the same subject, Dr. K.G. Saiyidain says:

...it is not racial or geographical unity – mere accidents of time and space – which can form the right basis of a people's coherence. It is the unity of emotions and outlook, of purpose and endeavour, the merging, cooperative ideals and objectives, the sharing of common sufferings and achievements which cement a collection of individuals into a genuine *Millat* or community.⁸

Through the strong affinity of belief in the unity of god among the members of Muslim community, they live as brothers and sisters. Thus, according to Iqbal, Muslims move with one step, talk with one tongue and think with one aim.

The second characteristic of Iqbal's ideal society is based on the prophethood of Muhammad (محمد رسول الله). Iqbal regards the prophet Muhammad as the source of strength for Muslim Community. Thus Iqbal says:

The Prophet, power and strength of soul and heart,
 Becometh more beloved than God himself, His
 Book is reinforcement to the hearts
 Of all believers; through his wisdom flows
 The lifeblood of the whole Community;
 To yield his garment's hem is death – the rose
 So withers at the blast of Autumn's wind.
 His was the breath that gave the people life;
 His sun shone glory on their risen dawn.
 In God the Individual, in him
 Lives the Community, in his sun's rays
 Resplendent ever; his Apostleship
 Brought concord to our purpose and our goal.⁹

Furthermore, Iqbal, continues, praising the Prophet Muhammad who is regarded by him as 'the breath' in which Muslims breathe:

He breathed fresh life in Adam's weary bones,
 Redeemed the slave from bondage, set him free.
 His birth was mortal to the ancient world,
 Death to the temples of idolatry.

Freedom was born out of his holy heart;
 His vineyard with discriminations all,
 His soul was pregnant with Equality.¹⁰

What Iqbal wants to give his readers in the above poem is that freedom, equality and brotherhood among all mankind are the purpose of Muhammad's mission.

In another poem speaking about Islamic society being based on Belief in the Unity of God and Apostleship, and therefore not bound by space or geographical area, Iqbal says:

Our Essence is not bound to any Place;
The vigour of our wine is not contained
In any bowl; Chinese and Indian
Alike the sherd that constitutes our jar,
Turkish and Syrian alike the caly
Forming our body; neither is our heart
Of India, or Syria, or Rum,
Nor, any fatherland do we profess
Except Islam.

The Muslim true
Is not contained in any land on earth;
Syria and rum are lost within his heart.
Grasp thou the heart, and in its vast expanse
Lose this mirage of water and of clay.¹¹

What Iqbal is putting across in the above poem is that the Islamic Community is bound by the unity of faith in the unity of god among its members rather than the territorial and racial factors. Belief in the message of the Prophet Muhammad also, theologically unite themselves. In other words, Islam unites members of the Islamic community. Thus, Islam becomes their destiny of life.

In the same theme in this poem, Iqbal explains the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina and how he established the Islamic community there. Therefore, he resolved the problem of Muslim nationhood in Medina. Through his wisdom, the prophet Muhammad created one community based on the unity of God. by his generosity, the entire earth is made our (Muslims) mosque.¹²

After discussing two most essential characteristics of the Islamic community – the Unity of God and the prophethood of Muhammad – as Iqbal elaborates in his poem, it is clear that the Islamic Community, too, must be guided by the Divine Law Or as S.A. Vahid says that the Islamic community “must have a code for its guidance.”¹³ According to Iqbal, the Qur'an is the law of the Muhammadan Community This is the third characteristic of Iqbal's ideal society. Thus he says:

When a community forsakes its Law
Its parts are severed, like the scattered dust.
The being of the Muslim rests alone

On Law, which is in truth the inner core
Of the Apostle's faith.

Knowest thou what thy Law is, wherein lies
Beneath you spheres the secret of thy power?
It is the living Book, that wise Koran
Whose wisdom is eternal, uncreate.
The secrets of the fashioning of life
Are therein written; instability
Is firmly established by its potency.
Undoubted and *unchanging*¹⁴ are its words,

Its verses to interpretation not
Beholden; in its strength the raw desire
Acquires maturity, the bowl fears not
to dash against the rock ...
The final message to all humankind
Was borne by him elect of God to be
A mercy unto every living thing,¹⁵
By this the worthless unto worth attains,
The prostrate slave lifts up his head on high.¹⁶

Iqbal as a Muslim poet believes the Qur'an is unchanging. The Qur'an is the inner core of the Prophet Muhammad's faith. The Qur'an as Iqbal says, is the final revelation of God to all humankind brought by the Prophet Muhammad who was elected by God to be a mercy for all creatures.

According to Iqbal again, the maturity of communal life gets from obeying the Divine Law (the Qur'an). Iqbal says:

Law is the only knowledge of the Truth,
Love the sole basis of the Prophet's code;
the Individual through Law attains
A faith maturer, and more fair adorned.¹⁷

In *the Mysteries of Selflessness*, Iqbal regards the sacred House of Mecca (الكعبة) as the centre of the Islamic community. This is the fourth characteristic of Iqbal's ideal society. The *Ka'ba* is not only the religious symbol of worship but the focus of the Islamic Community. Iqbal continues:

The Sacred House at once our secret is
And guardian of our secret, our heart's fire
and instrument whereon our passion plays.
We are a breath nurtured within its breast;
The body we, and it the precious soul.

According to Iqbal, the Islamic principles of the Unity of god and the

finality of the Prophet Muhammad are sources of Muslims' solidarity and brotherhood. Muslims must strengthen their Islamic brotherhood and spread the message of God. The preservation and propagation of these principles, as Iqbal says, are the communal objective of the Islamic community. Iqbal continues:

Allahu Akbar! This the secret holds of thy
existence; wherefore let it be Thy purpose to
preserve and propagate *No other god*. If thou a Muslim art,
till all the world proclaims the name of God
Thou canst not rest one moment. Knowest thou not
The verse in Holy Scripture, calling thee
To be a *people just, God's witnesses?*

Thou art the glow and glory of the days,
and made to testify to all mankind;
To all who comprehend the weight of words
Make general proclamation, and impart
The learned gospel of God's Messenger.¹⁸

It is clear from the above poem that the goal of the Islamic community, as Iqbal understands is to preserve and propagate Unitarianism to all mankind. This is, in fact, the fifth characteristic of Iqbal's ideal society.

Iqbal, in *the Mysteries of Selflessness*, too, explains the Islamic community must work hard in order to gain control over the forces of world order.¹⁹ This is, according to Iqbal, the last of the six requirements needed by the Islamic community in order to be an ideal society. Iqbal says:

O thou who slumberest, by dull opiates drugged,
And namest mean this world material,
Rise up, and open thy besotted eyes!

Seize thou this world, that it may not seize thee
And in its pitcher swallow thee like wine
The stallion of thy thought is parrot-swift,
Striding the whole wide heavens in a bound;
Urged ever onwards by the needs of life,
Raised up to rove the skies, though earthbound still;
That, having won the mastery of the powers
Of this world-order, thou mayest consummate
The perfecting of thy ingenious crafta.²⁰

The above poem clearly elaborates Iqbal's urge to members of the Islamic community to strive and work hard until they can 'seize this world'. In other words, Muslims, as Iqbal says, must be strong politically and economically.

After discussing six essential characteristics²¹ of Iqbal's ideal society as reflected in his work *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, it is clear that Iqbal imagines a Society which does not separate worldly and religious values. This society, as Iqbal believes, is based on the combination of Islamic theology (عقيدة إسلامية) and the Islamic way of life (شريعة إسلامية). The Islamic Community, as understood from his work – *The Mysteries of Selflessness* – must possess strong spiritual and physical values. This is in fact, his political ideal.

Having analysed individual and society separately, Iqbal then, discusses the relationship between the two with deep and keen insight in *The Mysteries of Selflessness*. He elucidates briefly the link between individual and society. Thus he says:

THE link that binds the Individual
To the Society a mercy is;
His truest self in the Community
Alone achieves fulfilment. Wherefore be
So far as in thee lies in close rapport
With thy society, and lustre bring
To the wide intercourse of free-born men.

The Individual a Mirror holds
To the Community, and they to him;
He is a jewel threaded on their cord,
A star that in their constellation shine;
He wins respect as being one or them,
And the Society is organized
As by comprising many such as he.
When in the congregation he is lost
'Tis like a drop which, seeking to expand,
Becomes an ocean.
His immaturity
Is warmed to ripeness by their friendship's flame.
Till he becomes one with the Commonwealth.²²

The above poem explains that only in the context of a society can an individual truly develop the degree of goodness. By being a member of a society, an individual gets honour from the society. Through combination of individuals, a society exists. Iqbal believes that both individual and society need each other.

Iqbal continues:

Thou, who hast not known Self from selflessness,
Therefore hast lost thyself in vain surmise.
Within thy dust there is an element
Of Light, whose single shaft illuminates

Thy whole perception; all thy joy derives
From its enjoyment, all thy sorrow springs
From its distress; its constant change and turn
Keep thee in vital being. It is one and,
being one, brooks no duality;
Grace to its glow I am myself, thou thou.²³

Having explained how happiness and enjoyment of the individual derives from society, Iqbal says again:

We can descry
The Individual within the Mass,
and we can pluck him as a flower is plucked
Out of the garden. All his nature is
Entranced with individuality,
Yet only in Society he finds
Security and preservation.²⁴

The above quotation shows strong relationship between an individual and a society and in fact, an individual feels secure when he is in a society

The relationship between an individual and a society makes them interdependent on each other. Iqbal's concept of the individual or the human ego is reflected in the famous collection of his poems called *Asrar-i-Khundi* or *The Secrets of the Self*.

The Secrets of the Self and *The Mysteries of Selflessness* clearly elaborate Iqbal's discussion of the Self whose strong determination and ambition and its Selflessness constitutes the Community

Selflessness creates a spirit of sacrifice, devotion and emergence of the individual wills into

the bigger will of the community for the greater good of all members of the community.²⁵

Self-realisation and Selflessness of both an individual and a society are the factors which can bring success to them in their life. This is the objective of Iqbal's *The Secrets of the Self* and *The Mysteries of Selflessness*.

NOTES

1. Iqbal, *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, (Eng tr. arthur J. Arberry). London: John Murray, first edition 1953, P XI – XII.
2. *Ibid.*, p. XI.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

6. Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, p. 227. Quoted in KG. Saiyidain, *Iqbal's Education Philosophy*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, rep. 1970, p. 60.
7. Iqbal, *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, p. 12 – 13.
8. KG. Saiyidain, *Iqbal's Educational Philosophy*, p. 58.
9. Iqbal, *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, p. 20
10. *Ibid.*, p. 22 – 23.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 29 – 30.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
13. Syed Abdul Wahid, *Studies in Iqbal*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Second edition, 1976, p. 40.
14. See *The Holy Qur'an Sura Baqara (The Heifer) II:2* and *Sura Yunus (Jonah) X:64*.
15. See *The Holy Qur'an, Sura Anbiya (The Prophet) XXI: 107*
16. Iqbal, *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, p. 37–38.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 54–55.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 56–59.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 57
21. The six essential characteristics of Iqbal's ideal Society are:
 1. The Unity of God
 2. The prophethood of Muhammad.
 3. The Qur'an is the law of Muslim community.
 4. The Sacred House of Mecca () is the centre of Muslim community.
 5. The goal of Muslim community is to preserve and propagate Unitarianism. ()
 6. Gaining control over the forces of world order.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 5 – 6
23. *Ibid.*, p. 6 – 7
24. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
25. Parveen Feroze Hassan, *The Political Philosophy of Iqbal*, Lahore: publishers United Ltd., 1970, p. 178.

Jabatan Usuluddin & Falsafah
 Fakulti Pengajian Islam
 Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
 43600 UKM Bangi
 Selangor D.E.

