

Muhammad Iqbal as a Cosmopolitan Philosopher

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ABSTRACT:

This article makes an exposition of the substantial cosmopolitan strands in Muhammad Iqbal's writings. Cosmopolitanism is a philosophical approach that recognises human beings across nations to be members of a global tribe. This approach supports the idea of world citizenship, global state or global institutions. Individualism, egalitarianism and universalism are the key principles of cosmopolitanism. I argue that Iqbal is a cosmopolitan philosopher because his philosophical thinking is consistent with the core principles of cosmopolitanism and contains essential cosmopolitan aspects, including intellectual, moral and political. Iqbal postulates the idea of the human self that acquires the idea of a unique individuality which is compatible with egalitarianism and universalism in certain ways. Iqbal's intellectual cosmopolitanism fosters the cognitive development of people for enhancing their creativity, which is based not only on the oriental and the occidental traditions but also on the inter-temporal epochs with an interdisciplinary approach ranging primarily from philosophy, religion and literature to science. Intellectual cosmopolitanism produces creative human agency. Iqbal's moral cosmopolitanism develops certain moral values to make human perfection and human fraternity. Iqbal's political cosmopolitanism envisions a federation of states in which people practising spiritual democracy in the kingdom of ends on earth create and sustains global peace. These strands in Iqbal's philosophical ideas create a creative human agency, human fraternity, reverence for humanity, and global peace, respectively. Thus, I argue that Iqbal meets all the conditions squarely to be a cosmopolitan philosopher.

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, Ethics, Politics, Muslim Philosophy.

1. Introduction

Many scholars have diverged themselves on the following disjunctive questions for contextualizing Muhammad Iqbal's personality and philosophy: first, whether Iqbal is a poet, philosopher, poet-philosopher, philosopher-poet, theologian or a mystic? Second, whether Iqbal is a rationalist, empiricist or an intuitionist? Third, whether Iqbal is a realist, idealist, pragmatist, existentialist, materialist or a spiritualist? Fourth, whether Iqbal is a pantheist, panentheist, naturalist or a deist? Fifth, the most pertinent question in the contemporary epoch is whether Iqbal is a nationalist or a cosmopolitan theorist? Certainly, Iqbal is a philosopher with unique human capabilities and with a wide range of interests. He is a polymath, polyglot and a humanist. Being a polymath, Iqbal had learnt squarely from the oriental and the occidental traditions in a broad spectrum of disciplines including history, religion, philosophy, literature, law, sociology, mysticism, psychology, economics, and science; being a polyglot, Iqbal had learnt Punjabi, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, English and German languages. Being a humanist, Iqbal created a philosophy which brought about the ideals of human unity, human friendship, human development, global peace, social justice, and above all, reverence for humanity. To defend the argument that Iqbal is a cosmopolitan philosopher, I embark on Iqbal's only three cosmopolitan strands: intellectual, moral and political.

Notably, on the English translation of Iqbal's maiden philosophical Persian poem, *Asrar-i-khudi*, done by Reynold A. Nicholson, an English orientalist, entitled, *The Secrets of the Self*, Lowe Dickinson, another English orientalist, claimed that the application of his philosophy is "particular and exclusive" which means that "only Muslims are worthy of the kingdom".¹ Dickinson, thus, repudiates Iqbal as a cosmopolitan philosopher by claiming that he considers only the Muslims while ignoring the rest of the humanity. Like Dickinson, Iqbal Singh and Wilfred Cantwell Smith are reluctant to accept Iqbal's cosmopolitan humanism. Singh argues that although there exists a humanistic urge in Iqbal's mind, it is not conscious and voluntary.² I disagree with Singh's argument because Iqbal makes a conscious effort to resolve the human predicament for a better world.

Smith states, "During the First World War he [Iqbal] was strongly pro-Islamic, pro-Turkish, and wrote some bitter verses against the enemy, i.e. Britain. Later he was an ardent *Khilafated*".³ This is true that Iqbal had a great concern for the Muslim civilization, but he never ignored humanity as a whole. Iqbal's philosophy seeks numerous common goods, including human development, human fraternity, human unity, reverence for humanity and global peace, which cannot be acquired without a cosmopolitan approach. Consequently, I argue that Dickinson's, Singh's and Smith's claims are not true. Instead, I argue that Iqbal is a cosmopolitan philosopher in his style and ideas.

The cosmopolitan approach is not new, but it has become ubiquitous since the beginning of the twenty-first century. In western philosophy, Diogenes, Cicero, Immanuel Kant and Kwame Anthony Appiah posit and defend cosmopolitan approaches in different ways. A standard view of cosmopolitanism consists of three central principles: individualism, egalitarianism and universalism. I hold that Iqbal's cosmopolitanism is compatible with these cosmopolitan principles. Yet, cosmopolitan theorists diverge on the question whether a global state, global institutions and a federation of states could be a viable way to govern the human world. However, Iqbal supports the idea of a federation of states for establishing global peace.

2. The Standard View of Cosmopolitanism

Etymologically, the expression, 'cosmopolitanism' means 'world citizenship': the Greek term, 'kosmos' means 'world' and 'polis', means 'citizenship'. The twenty-first century can be declared as a cosmopolitan age. The idea of cosmopolitanism is based on Diogenes' classic declaration: "I am a citizen of the world".⁴ In this declaration, Diogenes ignores his local citizenship and claims his world citizenship. In his seminal work, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Kwame Anthony Appiah succinctly explains his philosophy of cosmopolitanism, which means, "universality plus difference".⁵ By 'universality' Appiah holds that every human being matters in the world.⁶ In other words, no human being is worthless. By 'difference', he holds, "People are different, ... and there is much to know from our differences. Because there are so many human

possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life...there will be times when these two ideals – universal concern and respect for legitimate difference – clash”.⁷ So, according to Appiah, every human being should respect differences.⁸ Appiah’s claim is true because the nature of every human person is unique. Diversity does not only exist in the human world but also in the natural world. The diversity among human beings helps us understand one another.

Many cosmopolitan theorists argue that human beings are members of a human community. Appiah recognises, “Cosmopolitanism as an ethical commitment strain to extend our concrete realities to include some distant and generalized ‘others’ who, we are told, are our global neighbours”.⁹ Some cosmopolitan theorists defend the idea that no one is alien to others. We, human beings, belong to one another. The standard view of cosmopolitanism is based on three core principles: individualism, egalitarianism and universalism. First, cosmopolitan individualism states that human individuals are (or ought to be) the ultimate units of concern rather than communities, nations or states.¹⁰ It is the individual, not the group, that matters in cosmopolitan thinking. Second, cosmopolitan egalitarianism means that “the status of ultimate unit of concern attaches at every living human being equally, not merely to some subset, such as men, aristocrats, Aryans, whites, or Muslims”.¹¹ Equality is a cardinal value of a cosmopolitan society. Third, cosmopolitan universalism explains that “persons are ultimate units of concern for everyone – not only for their compatriots, fellow religionists or suchlike”.¹² The major problem is whether human identity¹³ rather than racial, cultural, linguistic or religious identities, could matter in a cosmopolitan society. The idea of human identity is not parochial but universal. These principles support Appiah’s idea that we are global neighbours to one another.

The key problem of political cosmopolitanism is whether a world government, world institutions or a federation of states is essential for establishing a global community in which people could create peaceful co-existence. Cosmopolitan theorists converge on something which is global, but they diverge on whether it would be a global state, global institution(s) or a federation of states. Some cosmopolitan theorists support the idea of a global state for eradicating the conflicts among states to create global peace. Diogenes’ idea of world citizenship is a precursor of the idea of global government.

Other theorists support the idea of global institutions to govern human society across borders; for instance, United Nations and International Monetary Fund are global institutions. Yet, some cosmopolitan theorists support the idea of a federation of states. In modern western political theory, Immanuel Kant develops and defends the notion of a 'league of states'. Kant holds, "a league of states according to the idea of an original social contract is necessary, not to intervene in the domestic differences of one another, but to protect one another against attacks from the outside".¹⁴ Kant's notion of the league of states which needs to establish perpetual peace in the world is the crux of the modern cosmopolitan social, moral, political and legal philosophy. So, cosmopolitanism condemns any kind of division in human beings while it propounds the idea that all human beings are members of a human community.

3. Iqbal's Tripartite Cosmopolitanism

I argue that Iqbal is a cosmopolitan philosopher because his writings are consistent with the core principles of cosmopolitanism: individualism, egalitarianism and universalism. The cornerstone of Iqbal's philosophy is the idea of *khudi*, which he calls ego, self, *I-amness* or personality. One of the central attributes of Iqbal's *khudi* is the idea of unique individuality. This notion of *khudi* is consistent with the cosmopolitan's account of individualism. So, Iqbal's individualism posits a unique, creative and active human agency. This human agency holds the capabilities of moral, political and cognitive development. With these capabilities, Iqbal's human agency acts as God's co-worker. The human agents are God's vicegerents in His kingdom on earth. Iqbal condemns the disparities of colour, race and language. However, Iqbal's mind acquired three distinct stages in his entire life: in his youth, Iqbal was an Indian nationalist. *Tarana-e-Hindi* (1904) – whose first couplet reads: "Our

India is better than the entire world; We are its nightingales, and it is our garden” – manifests Iqbal’s Indian nationalism. In his middle age, Iqbal became a Muslim nationalist. In his *Allahabad Address* (1930), Iqbal envisaged an idea of Muslim nationalism, which eventually become the cause of the creation of a new state, Pakistan, in 1947. In his later age, Iqbal appeared to be a cosmopolitan humanist. Iqbal’s grand Persian epic poem, *Javed Nama* (1932) and a new year’s message entitled, *Brotherhood of Man* (1938), are the embodiments of his cosmopolitan humanism.

3.1 Intellectual Cosmopolitanism

The central problem is whether truth belongs to a particular group, nation, culture, civilisation or the entire human world. The key thesis of intellectual cosmopolitanism asserts that truth belongs to the entire human world. According to Javed Majeed, Iqbal is an intellectual cosmopolitan philosopher because he embraces a wide swathe of textual references and intellectual thinking in his works from across divergent traditions and epochs.¹⁵ I agree with Majeed’s claim that Iqbal’s writings contain a cosmopolitan approach. Yet, Majeed’s claim of Iqbal’s intellectual cosmopolitanism is drawn only on Iqbal’s *The Reconstruction*. Instead, I hold that Iqbal’s entire writings, produced in Urdu, Persian or English, contain intellectual cosmopolitanism. Majeed argues that the intellectual cosmopolitanism in India is a result of British colonialism because it does exchange not only commodities and goods but also thoughts and books in numerous tongues and translations.¹⁶ Majeed’s claim is true that British colonialism brought about intellectual cosmopolitanism in its colonies, at least particularly in British India. This intellectual cosmopolitanism, according to Majeed, created “cosmopolitan thought zones” in Indian society, which influenced Indian minds through writings from all over the world.¹⁷ Majeed holds that these cosmopolitan thought zones greatly influenced Iqbal’s mind.¹⁸ Majeed, particularly, uses the phrase, ‘cosmopolitan thought zones’ for Iqbal’s scholarly mind and style. These cosmopolitan thought zones influenced not only Iqbal’s mind but also his contemporaries, such as Rabindranath Tagore, Mohandas K. Gandhi, B. R. Ambedkar and Abul Kalam Azad.

In his *The Reconstruction*, Iqbal uses approximately forty-nine scholars, from both the Muslim and the European traditions, to explain the key philosophical problems and themes. He juxtaposes Muslim and Western scholars; for instance, Iqbal compares and contrasts the ideas of al-Ghazali and Kant.¹⁹ In a similar vein, M. M. Sharif states, "Iqbal has been deeply influenced by the thinkers of the West as well of the East".²⁰ Significantly, Iqbal has a critical mind which accepts what is good and rejects what is bad across the horizons. Moreover, he de-temporalizes the history of thought in such a way that the intellectuals from different traditions and epochs seem as if there were contemporaries to one another and engage the discussion on the same philosophical and metaphysical problems.²¹ This is certainly an incredible capability that Iqbal sets the stage for different ideas of different times in one place. In *Javed Nama* and *The Reconstruction*, Iqbal de-temporalizes scholars of different times in such a way that they were sitting together to engage in dialogue with one another. Iqbal's scholarship and his treatment of ideas "sometimes means that the text reads as if cosmopolitan eclecticism were in its own right".²² Thus, I agree with Majeed's claim that Iqbal's writings contain cosmopolitan strands.

In his poetry and prose, Iqbal's scope is not parochial but cosmopolitan because he investigates the ideas of God, the universe and humankind. Ontologically, nothing is remaining beyond the domain of God, the universe and humankind: he focuses on what is all there. Intellectually, there is another significant aspect existing in Iqbal's work is the element of universalism. Iqbal is best known to be a philosopher of universality. Like classic world-class poets, such as Dante Alighieri, John Milton, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Iqbal composed grand epic poems, including *Javid Nama*, *Asrar-i-khudi*, and *Rumuz-e-Bekhudi*, and *Piyam-i-Mushraq* for explaining the status of human and God in the universe. In addition, Iqbal delivered a series of lectures, in Madras, Aligarh, Hyderabad and London, published entitled, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1934), in which he explains the nexus of humans, universe and God.

M. M. Sharif mentions the cosmopolitan aspects of Iqbal's intellectual cosmopolitanism. According to Sharif, Iqbal, despite being a poet of Islam, composes more poetry on Hindu Indian and European culture than any Hindu or European poet in the Islamic world. Some titles of Iqbal's poems, including Ram, Swami Ram Tirath...Shakespeare, Locke, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Comte, Napoleon, Goethe, Browning, Wilhelm Kaiser, Bergson, Tolstoy, Marx, Lenin, Nietzsche and Mussolini, shows his cosmopolitanism.²³ Iqbal's wide subject matter in poetry shows his sympathies across borders and the global outlook.²⁴ Hence, Iqbal's works comprise essential features of intellectual cosmopolitanism.

3.2 Moral Cosmopolitanism

The central problem of moral cosmopolitanism is whether all human beings are moral subjects. Moral cosmopolitanism asserts that people are moral subjects and they are equal to one another. Iqbal's moral cosmopolitanism encompasses the notions of human perfection and human fraternity for the creation of a perfect human society. There is a lot of evidence which supports Iqbal's moral cosmopolitanism. First, Iqbal equates ethics with human experience. In his *Stray Reflections*, Iqbal writes: "History is a sort of applied ethics. If ethics is to be an experimental science like other sciences, it must be based on the revelations of human experience".²⁵ If ethics depends upon the revelation of human experience, this experience does not refer to a particular society, nation or culture but to all human beings. All human beings have unique human nature which helps develop ethics. People's mutual interaction causes the creation of acceptable moral norms in society. Thus, the revelation of human experience is the cause of the development of ethics.

Second, Iqbal's moral cosmopolitanism acquires the unity of humanity. Drawing on the Quran, "Your creation and resurrection, ... are like the creation and resurrection of a single soul"²⁶, Iqbal writes in the Preface of his *Reconstruction*: "A living experience of the kind of biological unity, ... requires today a method physiologically less violent and psychologically more suitable to a concrete type of mind".²⁷ He juxtaposes the biological and psychological ontologies of human experience. If biological unity is less likely to be accepted

by scientific evidence, psychological unity is likely to be accepted by social evidence. Accordingly, the psychological method serves to explore the mental unity of humanity.

Third, Iqbal's moral cosmopolitanism seeks human development transcending racial, cultural or ethnic disparities. In a letter to Nicholson, Iqbal argues that through his Persian poetry he does not defend a case for Islam, but he aims to discover a universal social reconstruction without the disparities of caste, rank and race.²⁸ A spirit of rethinking social reconstruction has a cosmopolitan approach. This kind of social reconstruction cannot be possible without cosmopolitan agency. Iqbal's concept of a person is a cosmopolitan person who is an individual with creative, sovereign and social elements. Iqbal expounds on the relationship between person and world in his poem, *Bang-i-Dara*, employing the metaphors 'bough' for the person and 'tree' for the community:

Remain connected to the tree, keep the hope of Spring
The bough of the tree which got expurgated in Autumn,
Is not possible to be alive with the clouds of Spring.
The Autumn season for this bough is ceaseless,
You should learn a lesson from the expurgated bough,
You are unaware of the customs of the world.
Keep sustaining your relationship with the community,
Remain connected to the tree and keep the hope of Spring.²⁹

Iqbal's main thrust is on the existence and development of persons in the community which means that outside of the community, persons can have neither existence nor cognitive, moral and political development. However, Iqbal does not explain the nature of community which may negatively control the cognitive, moral and political developments of its persons. An authoritarian community humiliates a person's creative ways of life.

Fourth, Iqbal's moral cosmopolitanism leads to human fraternity. The key idea is that all human beings fraternity with one another. In a New Year message, entitled *Brotherhood of Man*, Iqbal articulates:

"It is as if the day of doom had come upon the earth, in which each looks after the safety of his own skin, and in which no voice of human sympathy or fellowship is audible. The world's thinkers are stricken dumb. Is this going to be the end of all progress and evolution of human civilization, that asks, that men should destroy one another in mutual hatred and make human habitation impossible on this earth? Remember, man can be maintained on this earth only by *honouring mankind*, and this world will remain a battleground of ferocious beasts of prey unless and until the educational forces of the whole world as directed to inculcating in *man respect for mankind*...Only one unity is dependable, and that unity is the brotherhood of man, which is above race, nationality, colour or language."³⁰

Iqbal's main thrust is the idea of human fraternity which is the only dependable unity among human beings. This idea of human fraternity suggests acquiring reverence for humanity transcending the artificial differences of race, language, colour, nationality or even religion, for global peace. Like the cosmopolitan individual, Iqbal's notion of the human person is universal transcending racial, cultural, ethnic or linguistic disparities. Thus, Iqbal's account of moral cosmopolitanism holds that a perfect human agency acquires the capability of human fraternity in the world.

3.3 Political Cosmopolitanism

Iqbal's political cosmopolitanism defends the idea of a world federation of states. He has not posited his notion of a world federation in some concrete form, but one can infer from his ideas that he does neither support nationalism and global state nor global institutions. This means that he defends the idea of a world federation for creating peaceful co-existence. Iqbal's ideas of spiritual democracy and the kingdom of God help us understand his account of political cosmopolitanism. In his cosmopolitanism, the idea of human agency is vital. According to Iqbal, human agents are God's vicegerents on earth. However, Iqbal holds that nationalism can be a transitory means but cannot be a cardinal end. He states, "Nationalism is needed only as a stage in social development. The

ultimate aim must be international, a world federation in some form or other".³¹ Iqbal's account of a world federation is akin to Kant's idea of a league of states.

Iqbal's notion of spiritual democracy is an application of political cosmopolitanism. Iqbal maintains, "Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve, out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam".³² Iqbal argues that the ontological character of Reality is spirituality and there is a need to comprehend the universe and human world based on spirituality. Spiritual democracy does not support those factors which divide humanity. It recognises human beings as cosmopolitan individuals who do not bear any racial, cultural, ethnic or religious disparities. According to Iqbal, spiritual democracy aims to "abolish all artificial barriers between [hu]man and [hu]man, has always espoused the cause of the down-trodden by removing all disabilities, social, economic and political, and has given to humanity a message of freedom, social equality and human brotherhood".³³ So, spiritual democracy and cosmopolitanism are not contrary.

For defending his account of spiritual democracy, Iqbal states that Islam is a cultural movement which presents a dynamic view by repudiating the traditional static view of the universe. According to Iqbal, Islam "recognizes the worth of the individual as such and rejects blood-relationship as a basis of human unity. Blood relationship is earth-rootedness. The search for a purely psychological foundation of human unity becomes possible only with the perception that all human life is spiritual in its origin".³⁴ In his book, *The Reconstruction*, Iqbal develops a cosmopolitan standpoint of humanity: "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".³⁵ In this context, Fazlur Rahman states that Iqbal gives significant importance to people's individual and collective freedom to develop human self-hood.³⁶ Thus, it is the individual, not the groups, societies or states, that matters.

Dickinson's claim that the application of Iqbal's ideas is only for the Muslim world, is not true. Iqbal is a cosmopolitan philosopher who wants the common good for the entire humanity. Iqbal states, "All men [,] and not Muslims alone [,] are meant for the kingdom of God on earth, provided they say good-bye to their idols of race and nationality and treat one another as personalities. Leagues, mandates, treaties...and imperialism, however, draped in democracy, can never bring salvation to [hu]mankind. The salvation of man lies in absolute equality and freedom of all".³⁷ In the kingdom of God, the ideas of race and nationality are detrimental. Significantly, Iqbal argues that treat one another as human personalities. Without a true spirit of equality, freedom and fraternity, the institution of democracy, covered in leagues, mandates, treaties...and imperialism, is detrimental to humanity. So, Iqbal's cosmopolitanism entails the ideas of human unity, human fraternity and peaceful co-existence in the world.

4. Conclusion

In this article, I argued that Muhammad Iqbal is a cosmopolitan philosopher, particularly a cosmopolitan humanist. A standard view of cosmopolitanism comprises three central elements: individualism, universalism and egalitarianism. Iqbal's notion of unique individuality is akin to cosmopolitan individualism. According to cosmopolitanism, a cosmopolitan person envisages oneself to be a member of a human community. Iqbal's cosmopolitan philosophy holds the following features. First, the notion of unique individuality holds that human persons are replete with numerous potentials. Second, Iqbal's notion of the human person is not parochial but universal beyond race, culture or colour disparities. This person does not confine oneself to acquiring knowledge from one tradition while acquiring it wherever it is available throughout the world. Third, Iqbal supports the idea of human egalitarianism. No one is superior or junior to the other but equal.

I have analysed Iqbal's philosophy from intellectual, moral and political perspectives. From the intellectual standpoint, Iqbal learned from both the oriental and the occidental traditions, from all domains including religion, economics, mysticism, literature politics, science, psychology and philosophy. Iqbal's intellectual cosmopolitanism develops creativity among human persons around the world. From the standpoint of moral cosmopolitanism, Iqbal developed ideas of perfect human and human solidarity. This standpoint of cosmopolitanism develops peaceful co-existence. From the standpoint of political cosmopolitanism, Iqbal develops the ideas of spiritual democracy and the kingdom of ends on earth for human unity and peaceful co-existence. Thus, I argued that Iqbal's writings contain a tripartite standpoint which comprises intellectual, moral and political cosmopolitanism.

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