

A Philosophical Critique of Nationalism: Reflections of Iqbal

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Abstract

In this paper, I explore Iqbal's views on nationalism, not only in the context of the Indian subcontinent but also in general terms as well. I contend that Iqbal's political philosophy is mainly inspired by the Islamic concept of *tawhid*. His profound reflections on the unity of life, the unity of the Islamic ummah, and the unity of humanity based upon the concept of *tawhid* strike the root of secularism and nationalism. His philosophy of "self" (*khudi*) and his conception of the Islamic social order also are discussed briefly in order to elucidate some of his views on humanity and the Islamic mission, which stand in complete contradiction to nationalism.

Introduction

Nationalism, regarded as one of the oldest and most virulent ideologies, has had a great impact on humanity for the past several hundred years.¹ Scholars argue that millions of people have been killed and that resources have been plundered in its name and its product: nation-state. However, at the same time, some individuals who fought for the independence and development of nation-states have risen to great heights in the name of nationalism.

Nationalism, which emerged and spread in the West with such characteristics, also penetrated the Muslim ummah and shattered its unity and integrity.² Muslim scholars in the Arab world,³ Turkey,⁴ and the Indian sub-

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continent had mixed responses to the ideology of nationalism, ranging broadly from rejectionism to accommodationism. In the Indian subcontinent, such scholars as Husain Ahmad Madani and Abul Kalam Azad responded to the theory of nationalism and its derivative terms *nation* and *nation-state* with an accommodative approach. Other scholars, however, such as Muhammad Iqbal and Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, challenged the theory from an Islamic perspective and rejected all of its basic principles and secular foundation.

The paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, Iqbal's views on nationalism are presented in the context of his conception of *tawhid* and some of his philosophical concepts. In the second part, his objections to nationalism are studied in light of his epistemology and the Islamic texts, the Qur'an, and the Prophetic traditions. This is followed by a conclusion.

Iqbal on Nationalism

Iqbal's political philosophy is deeply embedded in his broad and comprehensive Islamic conception of *tawhid*, the unity of God, the unity of life, the unity of the ummah, and the unity of humanity. His rejectionist approach toward secularism, materialism, western democracy, and nationalism is based upon his concept of *tawhid*. His philosophy of self-hood (*khudi*) and its related concepts like "man of belief" (*mard-i-momin*), "perfect man" (*mard-i-kamil*), and his conception of the Islamic social order and divine vicegerency are not only related to each other, but also are steeped in his dynamic conception of *tawhid*. Hence, all of his concepts and ideas, which bear the message and mission of *tawhid*, are contrary to the ideology of nationalism, which is rooted in secularism and materialism.

In his writings on Islam's social order, Iqbal states: "[Islam] 'finds [that] the foundation of world-unity in the principle of *tawhid* and Islam, as a polity, is only a practical means of making this principle a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind.'"⁶ At least two important points can be deduced from this statement: Islam is a practical means to make the principle of unity a reality in humanity's intellectual and emotional life, and *tawhid* supplies the foundational principle for world unity. The first point forms the basis of his concept of *tawhid* and strikes the secular origin of nationalism. By portraying Islam as a practical means for making the principle of *tawhid* a living factor, Iqbal implies that Islam unites and integrates all aspects of life (e.g., intellectual, emotional, social,

political, and others) into a unified whole. In other words, Islam totally disagrees with the artificial division or compartmentalization of life into “religious life” and “worldly life.” This unified and holistic perception of life is the exact opposite of nationalism, which bifurcates life into “worldly” and “religious” domains.

At several places, Iqbal elaborates upon Islam’s unified approach to life. He writes:

That according to the law of Islam there is no distinction between the Church and the state. The state with us is not a combination of religious and secular authority, but it is a unit in which no such distinction exists.⁷

Iqbal’s upholding of the unity of life and the unity of the spirit and matter can be seen in many of his statements. For example, he states: “All that is secular is therefore sacred in the roots of its being”⁸ and “All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the self-realization of spirit.”⁹ In other words, unlike Hegel, Iqbal did not have to make a synthesis of “reason” and “spirit” in order to form a state. For him, the state by itself is spiritual because all that is secular is spiritual in Islam. He writes: “The state according to Islam is only an effort to realize the spiritual in a human organization.”¹⁰ Here, Shamloo’s comments on Iqbal deserves our attention:

Now Islam is not a cult. It is a whole philosophy of life and political philosophy is an essential and indispensable part of it. He (Iqbal) could not, therefore, avoid being a political thinker as well. Indeed, it is his special merit which distinguishes him from most other Muslim thinkers in history, that he took a comprehensive and sympathetic view of Islam and treated it as a completely integrated unity.¹¹

Iqbal also expressed his Islamic concept of the unity of life through his philosophy of *faqr*. As explicated by Muhammad Manawwar, Iqbal defined *faqr* as “a state of spiritual elevation and loftiness.”¹² He further points out that *faqr*, in Iqbal’s poetry, “creates in man dignity of detachment, a godly state of being free of wants.”¹³ Iqbal writes:

Of those men of God, the Arab cavaliers of note!
The bearers of excellent conduct,
truthful, men of strong conviction.
Their manner of rule made clear
the wonderful mystery.
That the government by the lovers (of God)
is through *faqr* and not through kingship.¹⁴

Elsewhere, Iqbal said:

What is caliphate?
Faqr accompanied by crown and throne.¹⁵

The foregoing clearly shows that not only are matter and spirit fused in the caliphate but also in the lovers of God, who run the government and rule through *faqr*, a state of being free from material enslavement. However, it is important to note that Iqbal is not one of those thinkers who advises Muslims to abandon matter altogether in order to lead them to a narrow meaning of spirituality. Rather, he desires that Muslims be both dominant and spiritual:

Forgiveness, dominance, holiness and forcefulness –
 These four make a Muslim of a human being ...
 His intentions are the measure of destiny.
 He is like a balance, both in this life and in the hereafter.¹⁶

In reality, the underlying purpose behind the unity of matter and spirit, as well as the unity of the “religious” and “worldly” realms, is nothing but the success in this world and the Hereafter. Thus, Iqbal asserts that Islam, unlike secularism and nationalism, provides a balance in life by joining matter and spirit into a harmonious entity for a great success here and in the Hereafter.

The sheet anchor of *tawhid* is one’s ultimate loyalty to God. Since Islam makes no division between state and mosque, it demands ultimate loyalty to God and implies that His laws prevail in all spheres of life, including the political, which further implies the Shari’ah’s supremacy. Iqbal writes:

It (Islam) demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man’s loyalty to his own ideal nature.¹⁷

Contrary to this loyalty, nationalism demands supreme loyalty to the nation-state. Since nationalism is basically secular, behind its division of life into “religious” and “worldly” realms lies the division of loyalty: one to the state and another to God. Moreover, in the case of a clash between loyalty to God and loyalty to the state, nationalism says that loyalty to the state must prevail. The rationale for such a view is that nationalism, being a political concept, demands political loyalty to the state and would like to see the state’s laws prevail over all other laws. Iqbal therefore writes:

In the present-day political literature, however, the idea of nation is not merely geopolitical: it is rather a principle of human society and, as 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.¹⁸

This clearly shows that political principles and the laws of a nation-state would clash with Islamic principles and laws, because Islam would like to see its own principles and laws work and prevail in all of a society’s institutions, including political institutions. Iqbal further elaborates this point by saying:

[I]n its principles of human association, Islam admits of no *modus vivendi* and is not prepared to compromise with any other law regulating human society. Indeed it declares that every code of law other than that of Islam is inadequate and unacceptable.¹⁹

Iqbal strongly holds the view that Shari’ah (Islamic law) is so integral to the Islamic ummah that without it, the ummah would shatter into pieces. This is clear from the following poetic lines:

When 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 Apostles’ faith.²⁰

Iqbal was fully aware of the fact that the nation-state that would emerge from the secular ideology of nationalism would clash with Islamic law and would become an “idol” to be obeyed fully and worshipped by the people. Tracing the origin of nationalism to Machiavelli’s views, Iqbal referred to him as: “That Florentine worshipper of Untruth.” Iqbal points out that Machiavelli blinded the eyes of the people and wrote a new code of guidance for rulers, thereby sowing the seeds of war and conflict:

His mind fashioned new patterns (of principle)!
His religion made the state into a deity.
And presented what was evil as god!
He kissed the feet of this deity.
And tested truth on the criterion of profit!²¹

Iqbal forcefully explained these divisive and mischief-making characteristics of nationalism in the context of the Indian subcontinent and in

general terms. He pointed out that if nationalism was accepted in the sub-continent, Muslims would have two wrong ways before them: “The Muslims as a nation can be other than what they are as a ‘millat’”²² and “Muslims would have to forget Islam as a complete system of life.”²³ Iqbal then pointed out how the leaders of the Hindu majority community persuade Muslims to believe that religion is a private affair. According to those leaders, Muslims “should not regard themselves as a separate nation: they should rather lose themselves in the majority.”²⁴ Iqbal asserted that accepting such a viewpoint would reduce Islam to a private affair, and that this would have dangerous implications for the subcontinent’s Muslim community.²⁵

It is very important to note that during the time of Iqbal, when the sub-continent was under British imperialism and Iqbal was expressing such ideas on nationalism and other ideologies, that land’s Muslims were in a very critical situation. Some Muslim leaders and organizations associated themselves with the Indian National Congress, led by Mahatma Gandhi, in order to attain the common aim: independence. They held the opinion that after independence, Muslims would be able to represent themselves in the decision-making bodies and their rights would be duly protected by the newly independent nation’s constitution.

An important organization of Muslim scholars, like the Jamiyyat-i-Ulama-i-Hind and its leadership, held the same opinion.²⁶ As its president, Hussain Ahmad Madani, and his supporters developed the theory of “united nationalism” (*muttahid-a-qaumiyat*) as opposed to the “the two-nation theory” (*do qaumi nazariyya*) of the Muslim League. According to Madani, Muslims should join with the Hindus, since both communities regardless of their religions, are one Indian nation with one homeland. They should fight against the common enemy, the Britishers who destroy everything and deprive them of their common national interests. They should unite together to expel the oppressive and merciless force, the British imperialism, and shatter the chain of slavery.

On the future prospects of various communities in independent and free India, Madani stated the following:

No one will interfere in the religious affairs of another, and all the people who live in India will be free to adhere to their religion and fulfil its commandments.²⁷

Madani’s statements clearly reveal that he followed the accommodative approach toward nationalism. In addition to him, another well-known

leader by the name of Abul Kalam Azad, who initially had rejected secularism and nationalism, later made an accommodation and advocated the idea of a united nationhood. He also joined the Indian National Congress and was convinced that Muslims in an independent India would be fully protected. Azad stated:

[I]n future constitution determined by Indian representatives, the Hindus and Muslims will have to think of the position and interests not as a Hindu or (a) Musalman and so on, it will be nothing worth unless it reflects equality of opportunity and economic freedom for all.²⁸

But not all of the great scholars adopted the accommodative approach of Azad and Madani. One who refused to do so was Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, a pioneer of the contemporary Islamic resurgence, who rejected nationalism on the grounds that it is antithetical to Islam. Hence, like Iqbal and unlike Madani and Azad, Mawdudi's approach to nationalism was that of a rejectionist. He contended: "Nationalism can take birth only from cultural nationality; and every one who has eyes can see that the people of India do not constitute a cultural nationality."²⁹ In fact, according to Mawdudi, nationalism and Islam are so incompatible to each other that if one flourishes the other will decline. He writes:

Islam cannot flourish in the lap of nationalism, and nationalism too cannot find a place in the fold of Islam. The progress of nationalism would starve Islam to death and the progress of Islam would sound the death-knell of nationalism.³⁰

Islam entails the complete liberation of all people from human-made ideologies and domination. It would not make much difference to the Muslim community if it liberates itself from British imperialism and surrenders itself to secular nationalism and secular democrats.

Like Mawdudi, Iqbal also believed that replacing western democracy for western imperialism would not be worthwhile for Muslims in the sub-continent. He said: "Personally I shall have nothing to do with a *swarajya* divorced from religion."³¹ He strongly believed that the "Indian Muslim is entitled to full and free development on the lines of his own culture and tradition in his own Indian homelands."³² It should be clarified here that Iqbal's opinion was not based on communalism; rather, it was based on his perception of Islam as an all-pervasive social order that accepts no division of life, unlike nationalism. He writes:

The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is organically related to the social order, which it has created. The rejection of the one will eventually involve the rejection of the other.³³

It was mainly for this reason that Iqbal proposed the formation of a separate Muslim state. This idea eventually materialized, in the formation of Pakistan, after his demise.

Besides his Islamic conception of life, which is contrary to nationalism, the second component of his political thought (the unity of the ummah and the unity of humanity, which is also based upon his concept of *tawhid*), also goes against nationalism, which is based upon the racial, physical, linguistic, and other earthly rooted differences of humanity. Iqbal observes:

The law of Islam does not recognize the apparently natural differences of race, nor the historical differences of nationality. The political ideal of Islam consists in the creation of people born of a free fusion of all races and nationalities. Nationality, with Islam, is not the highest limit of political development; for the general principles of the law of Islam rest on human nature, not on the peculiarities of a particular people.³⁴

The main concept that unites all Muslims of diverse social, linguistic, ethnic, territorial, and other backgrounds into one unified and open-ended community is the ummah. This concept also is inspired by the concept of *tawhid*, defined as the unity of God, the unity of life, the unity of humanity, and the unity of Muslims. For this reason, Iqbal rejects the principle in nationalism that emphasizes the social, linguistic, and similar differences among people to form nationalities in order to shatter human unity. He points out that “the inner cohesion” of the Islamic ummah does not lie “in ethnic or geographic unity, not in the unity of language or social tradition but in the unity of the religious and political idea or in the physiological fact of like-mindedness.”³⁵

Iqbal denounces all of the characteristics of nationalism that divide humanity into tribes and nations, as we can see in his classical poems *Asrar-i-Khud* and *Rumiz-i-Bekhud*. In *Rumiz-i-Bekhudi*, he writes:

They have undermined foundations of brotherhood.
And establish nationalism on the basis of the country!
When they made this idea the assembly’s lamp,
Mankind split into warring tribes!
Humanity became but a legend,
And man a stranger to man!

The soul fled from the body,
 Only the outer forms remained!
 Mankind disappeared from the earth,
 Only separate nation remained!³⁶

Thus, according to Iqbal, nationalism made people strangers to each other on the basis of color, race, language, and territory. When nations emerged on the basis of such differences, they took the forms of idols and deities. These idols did not remain quiet; rather, they instigated wars and bloodshed and slaughtered humanity. Iqbal says:

This deity is thrilled by the shedding of blood,
 It is variously named as colour and race and country!
 Mankind has been slaughtered like sheep.
 At the alter of this inauspicious Idol.³⁷

Nationalism's divisive and destructive tendency is not only identified by Iqbal and a few other Muslim scholars, but also by some western scholars who also have critiqued it sharply. For instance, according to Elie Kedourie, nationalism "has created new conflicts, exacerbated tensions, and brought catastrophe to numberless people innocent of all politics."³⁸ Similarly, Lord Action asserts that nationalism "will be marked with material as well as moral ruin, in order that a new invention may prevail over the works of God and the interests of mankind."³⁹

Contrary to this doctrine of nationalism, Prophet Mohammad set a unique example for humanity through his migration from Makkah to Yathrib (later known as Madinah). Although he was born and brought up in Makkah, he migrated to Madinah in the cause of God, and thereby revealed that a Muslim's identity cannot be tied to any geographical entity; rather, it extends worldwide. Iqbal says:

Our Master fleeing from his fatherland,
 Resolved the knot of Muslim nationhood
 His wisdom founded one community
 On the foundation of the *Kalimah*!⁴⁰

Thus, from the above discussion on the two important and basic ingredients of Iqbal's concept of *tawhid*, namely, unity of life and unity of people, he clearly does not accept nationalism as a potential political principle. Mazharuddin Siddiqi reaches the same conclusion: Iqbal's political ideas have a common source in *tawhid*, which "leads us to offer our final and definitive allegiance to God and to the laws of God as revealed to His

Prophet.”⁴¹ He further points out that this makes our loyalties subservient to the primary loyalty to Allah. Similarly, according to Sayyidain, Iqbal’s rejection of nationalism places him among those thinkers “who believe that, unless there is a reorientation of political loyalties and the world is organized for peace, education and other social influences, [it] will fail to produce any far-reaching and fundamental change for the better.”⁴²

However, his love for the country cannot be ignored. His deep love for India is expressed throughout his *Javid Nama* and *Zarb-i-Kalim*. In the *Javid Nama*, he states that even a blade of grass of India is more precious than a garden. He also talked about India’s mosques and temples, and then said the following:

My heart still bleeds for love of this land,
Its memory is as dear as life itself!
Imagine its grief from the depth of our own –
Alas for the beloved who knows not the lover!⁴³

Similar sentiments are expressed in his poem *Shu’a-i-Ummid* (The Ray of Hope) in *Zarb-i-Kalim*:

This is the land, center of the hopes of the East;
This is the land, watered by Iqbal’s tears!
This is the land, light of the eyes of the moon and stars,
Whose shells are precious as the finest pearls.⁴⁴

Besides this, his popular poem *Tarana-i-Hindi* (Song of an Indian), in which he sings that “in the whole entire world, India is the best ...” is still sung on all important and historic occasions in India. In fact, according to Iqbal there is no contradiction between *country* (taken in a geographical sense) and *Islam*. He stated quite categorically that *country* is “merely a geographical term and, as such, does not clash with Islam,”⁴⁵ and that a country’s boundaries change with time. But “every human being loves the land of his birth and, according to his capacity, remains prepared to make sacrifices for it.”⁴⁶ Further, he also adds that the “love of one’s native land is a natural instinct and requires no impressions to nourish it.”⁴⁷

Iqbal’s love for India, however, did not become an obstacle to his love for Islam, the ummah, and humanity as a whole. Perhaps this is because of his clear perception of Islam, his thorough understanding of the western ideologies, and his critical judgments on them, not to mention his awareness of India’s sociopolitical problems, the ummah, and of the world at large. Thus he found no contradiction between his love for his country, the

ummah, and humanity. Hence Iqbal, who sang the *Tarana-i-Hindi*, also later on could sing *Tarana-i-ie Milli* (Song of a Muslim Millat): “China and Arabia are ours; Hindustan is ours; We are the Muslims, the whole world is ours...”⁴⁸

In fact, Iqbal not only believed in Islam’s moderation and harmonious unity, but also tried to follow it as closely as possible. Hence, although he emphasized the importance of individuality, he also cautioned himself with society’s importance and the individual’s relationship with it. For this reason, he could save himself from extreme individualism. Similarly, although he talked so much about the ummah’s universality and universal mission, he saved himself from becoming a communalist or an imperialist because of his selfless love and interest in humanity. Nicholson also observes this:

Iqbal thus escapes from libertarianism by limiting the individual’s freedom, making him a member of a homogeneous community and from totalitarianism by limiting the community’s authority, making it a challenge and not an insurmountable obstacle to the individual’s self-realization.⁴⁹

As described by Iqbal, Islam is above geographical, social, linguistic, and all kinds of superficial differences. It unites and integrates all believers into a single knot of Islamic community, irrespective of all differences. Hence, he holds that “Islam, in its essence, is above all conditions of time and space. Nationality with us is a pure idea; it has no geographical basis.”⁵⁰ However, he points out that the average Muslim would like to see Makkah as the material center of nationality “so that the basis of Muslim nationality combines the real and the ideal, the concrete and the abstract.”⁵¹ According to him, “the ultimate ideal of Islam as a community” is to free humanity from superstitions. Hence, he urged the ummah not to involve itself in sectarianism and class distinction, and disputes over the “interpretation of ‘truth,’” and to think of its common mission. He warned the Muslims that their work “will ever remain undone if the emancipators themselves are becoming gradually enchained in the very fetters from which it is their mission to set others free.”⁵²

This vision and mission, as described above, goes entirely against nationalism and the nation-state. The reason, as pointed out by Iqbal, is that “the membership of this community, consequently, would not be determined by birth, marriage, domicile, or naturalization. It would be determined by a public declaration of ‘like-mindedness.’”⁵³ Iqbal further states:

The ideal territory for such a nation would be the whole earth. The Arabs, like the Greeks and the Romans, endeavored to create such a nation or the world-state by conquest, but failed to actualize their ideal. The realization of this ideal, however, is not impossible, for the ideal nation does already exist in germ.⁵⁴

Obviously, all of these ideas about a world-state with Makkah at its center contradict the secular foundation of nationalism and all of its elements. Nicholson comments on Iqbal: "He is a religious enthusiast, inspired by the vision of a New Makkah, a worldwide, theocratic, utopian state in which all Muslims, no longer divided by the barriers of race and country shall be one. He will have nothing to do with nationalism and imperialism."⁵⁵ But Iqbal's envisioned worldwide state was neither theocratic nor utopian. The world-state of Islam would be based on Divine vicegerency, not on the Christian or western concept of theocracy. Furthermore, such an Islamic state was actually established in the past and Iqbal, like all other revivalists, aspires for its establishment in the near future. Thus it is not utopian or imaginative. However, Nicholson seemed to be aware of this fact, as is obvious from his following words:

Holding that the full development of the individual presupposes a society, he (Iqbal) finds the ideal society in what he considers to be the Prophet's conception of Islam. Every Muslim in striving to make himself a more perfect individual is helping to establish the Islamic kingdom of God upon earth.⁵⁶

Apart from all of these, Iqbal's whole philosophy of self and ego (*khudi*) is antithetical to the ideology of nationalism. He points out that "the Ego in its movement towards uniqueness has to pass through three stages": obedience to law, self-control, and divine vicegerency.⁵⁷ He contends that in the last stage, humanity's vicegerency for God is "the completest Ego, the goal of humanity,"⁵⁸ and that "he is the real ruler of mankind, his kingdom is the kingdom of God on earth."⁵⁹

In order for people to realize this selfhood and become vicegerents of God and rule the world, Iqbal asserts that they should have a purpose, a goal, and a desire. He writes:

Life is preserved by purpose:
Because of the goal its caravan bell tinkles.
Life is laden in seeking,
Its origin is hidden in desire.
Keep desire alive in thy heart,
Lest thy little dust become a tomb.⁶⁰

What should people desire? Obviously, they should desire to manifest themselves in the world. This desire would inspire and motivate them to become a vicegerent of God. He writes:

He knows the mysteries of part and whole,
He executes the command of Allah in the world
When he pitches his tent in the wide world
He rolls up this ancient carpet.⁶¹

It is quite clear from the above that Iqbal's vision of a vicegerent who realizes his or her selfhood and his vision of the "kingdom of God" do not comply with secularism and nationalism. It also is worth emphasizing here that Iqbal did not present such views on an Islamic state as a mere poetic fantasy, but that he was quite serious about it. He quoted the following lines of Ziya Gokalp in this connection:

In order to create a really effective political unity of Islam, all Muslim countries must first become independent, and then in their totality they should range themselves under the caliph. Is such a thing possible at the present moment? If not today, one must wait.⁶²

Iqbal was realistic enough to understand that such an Islamic political entity would not be realized during his lifetime. But he did not give up the hope. As pointed out by Esposito, "for Iqbal, the Muslim community must pursue an immediate as well as a long-range goal."⁶³ First, Muslim nation-states should attain independence and then join together as a League of Nations. Iqbal quotes the following lines of Gokalp:

It seems to me that God is slowly bringing home to us the truth that Islam is neither nationalism nor imperialism, but a League of Nations which recognizes artificial boundaries and not racial distinctions of reference only and not for restricting the social horizons of its members.⁶⁴

From the above words, it is evident that Islam recognizes racial, ethnic, and tribal differences only for the sake of reference, and not as the ultimate identity or destiny. The Muslims' ultimate identity, irrespective of racial, linguistic, and geographical difference, lies in the ummah, as mentioned earlier. Iqbal was quite aware that nationalism was such a divisive weapon of the West that it would shatter the ummah's unity and integrity. He writes:

I have been repudiating the concept of nationalism since the time when it was not well known in India and Muslim world. At the very start it had become clear to me from the writings of European authors that the impe-

realistic designs of Europe were in great need of this effective weapon – the propagation of the European conception of nationalism in Muslim countries – to shatter the religious unity of Islam to pieces.⁶⁵

Iqbal's apprehensions proved true. As pointed out by Zafar Ishaq Ansari:

[T]he fears of Iqbal were vindicated very soon when during the first world war, a section of Muslims in the Arab world collaborated with the British against the Turks. For nationalism had made them abandon their former line of thinking.⁶⁶

But the Arabs' and Turks' acceptance of nationalism was never justified by Iqbal. He traced the history of religions and pointed out that in ancient times, religion was national, as with the case of Egyptians, Greeks, and Iranians. Later on, religion became "racial, as that of the Jews," while for Christians, religion was an individual and private affair.⁶⁷ For this reason, Europe looked to the state as being responsible for the social order of humanity. Then, Iqbal writes:

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 and private, but purely human and that its purpose was to unite and organize mankind despite all its distinctions.⁶⁸

Iqbal also pointed out that when nationalism shattered Europe's religious unity, Europeans began to search for the basis of national life, and that they found it in *nationality*, which resulted in a war "between the principles of religion and state [which] eventually led to 'irreligiousness.'"⁶⁹ Hence, Iqbal argued that using nationality as a sociopolitical order proved inadequate. Then, he pointed out a crucial fact: forming a nation requires, among other factors, "indifference towards religion, absorption in the day to day political issue."⁷⁰ In fact, this is one of the main reasons why Iqbal rejects nationalism in India. He stated that those who think that religion and nationalism are compatible with each other "have fallen into the error."⁷¹ He states:

I want to give a timely warning to the Muslims that this course will ultimately lead to irreligiousness. And if this does not happen, Islam will be reduced to an ethical ideal with indifference to its social order as an inevitable consequence.⁷²

Iqbal asked why some members of the Prophet's family rose against the Prophet if the sentiment of nationalism was so important.⁷³ After raising such questions, Iqbal pointed out that as the Prophet began to establish his ummah, the status of his people as a nation became secondary.⁷⁴ Muslims who joined together in a single community differ from other communities not only because of their faith, but because of their own social order, which differ from others. For Iqbal, "to ignore the Muslims or to make them subservient to some other social order, and then to seek some other kind of freedom, was simply meaningless."⁷⁵

Iqbal argued that it was quite easy for Prophet Mohammed to tell the Makkan unbelievers to continue their "idol worship" and to mind his own belief which was revealed to him. But as he was sent to purify all nations of the abuses that go by the name of time, place, land, nation, race, geneology, country, and so on. Hence, the Prophet introduced a revolutionary concept: the ummah. Consequently, believers from various tribes and lands joined the ummah. Iqbal stated: "Formerly they (people) had been slaves of land and race; land and race now became their slaves."⁷⁶ Taking this phenomenon into consideration, Iqbal remarked: "Islam has done something in thirteen hundred years what other religions could not do in three thousand years."

Iqbal expressed his aversion to nationalism in *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* more forcefully. He says:

What is this folly, identifying the Millat with the country? What is this folly, worshipping water and air and clay? It is foolish to pride oneself on one's ancestry, for it has sway over the body and the body is mortal. Our Millat lies on entirely different basis – It is enshrined in the sanctuary of our hearts.⁷⁷

Sayyidain rightly commented about Iqbal: "He has an uncompromising antagonism to the whole idea of race and colour, and to the narrow doctrines of nationalism and patriotism which obstruct the development of a broad human outlook."⁷⁸ He pointed out that according to Iqbal, "it is the unity of emotions and outlook of purposes and endeavour" that unite all believers in the Millat. Iqbal writes:

What is Millet, 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!⁷⁹

According to Iqbal: “Prophethood is the basis of our organization, our religion and our law. It creates unity in our diversity and makes us into a well-knit community.”⁸⁰ This fact of the unity in diversity is further beautifully expressed by Iqbal in *Asrar-i-Khudi* (The Secret of Self):

We belong to the Hijaz and China and Persia,
 Yet we are the dew of one smiling dawn.
 We are all under the spell of the eye
 of the cupbearer from Makkah,
 We are united as wine and cup.
 He burnt clean away distinctions of lineage.
 His fire consumed this trash and rubble.
 We are like a rose with many petals
 but with one perfume.⁸¹

But when the unity in the petals dwindles, all of them scatter and the rose and its fragrance enter oblivion. At some other place, Iqbal said that when the believers lost their unity, “they fell into a hundred mazes.”⁸²

Another important part of his political thought is his concern for humanity. Unlike nationalists or narrow communalists, Iqbal was searching for a social order for all humanity, not just for the ummah. Sayyidain pointed out that when Iqbal was criticized for narrowing his vision from the world of humanity to the world of Islam, he replied that he was really interested in searching for a social order, but that Islam’s social system, which abolished distinctions of race, color, and so on, could not be ignored.⁸³ Iqbal contended that “if the purpose of human society is to ensure peace and security ... then one cannot think of any other social order than [that] of Islam,”⁸⁴ for:

[A]ccording to my reading of the Qur’an, Islam does not aim at the moral reformation of the individual alone; it also aims at a gradual but fundamental revolution in the social life of mankind which should altogether change its national and racial viewpoint, and create in its place a purely human consciousness.⁸⁵

But, regretfully, “at the present moment, the national ideas are racializing the outlook of Muslims and thus materially counteracting the humanizing work of Islam.”⁸⁶ Therefore, Iqbal earnestly prays to God to bring unity back to the Islamic community:

We are dispersed like stars in the world; Though of the same family, we are strange to one another. Bind again these scattered leaves, revive the law of love! Take us back to serve thee as of old, commit thy cause to them that love thee!⁸⁷

Iqbal's Epistemology and His Objections to Nationalism

Iqbal applied Islamic epistemology and the Islamic methodology of knowledge both to develop his political thought and to critique western political ideologies. Unlike nationalism, which is based upon the secular epistemology and secular methodology of knowledge, his main sources of inspiration were the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions, along with reason, observation, and intuition.

According to Iqbal, reason and sense-perception alone cannot provide true guidance for humanity, because they only help people make, sell, and worship idols. He writes:

Modern knowledge is the greatest blind
Idol-making, Idol-selling, Idol-worshipping!
Shackled in the prison-house of phenomenon
It has not overleaped the limits of the sensible!⁸⁸

Without Qur'anic revelation, intellect and sense perceptions confine people to the world of phenomenon and fail to lead them to their real destination. He says:

Pass beyond the Intellect-post.
It merely lights the way;
It is not the goal.⁸⁹

Iqbal therefore asserted that "love" or "intuition" is "the perceptor of the intellect, the heart and the vision."⁹⁰ He believed that without love, what one attains through the intellect and senses as knowledge is shallow and vain imaginations. He also argued that knowledge based on the senses gives people power, which should be subordinated to religion so that it does not become a satanic force. It may not be an exaggeration to say that these ideas on "knowledge," which form Iqbal's epistemology and methodology of knowledge, are the stimulating and dynamic principles at the foundation of his political thought. They also enabled Iqbal to analyze critically theories of nationalism, democracy, socialism, and capitalism, and to comment on their fundamental flaws and limitations.

Based on the above reflections, we can say that Iqbal's rejectionist approach toward nationalism was based on the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions.

Iqbal's main objection to nationalism, due to its secular foundation that separates religion from the nation-state or that reduces religion to insignificance in the political sphere, is based on the Qur'an, which describes Islam as the complete system of life. The Qur'an says: "The Religion (the *din*) before Allah is Islam" (3:19).

Some scholars argue that English has no exact translation for *din*. The word *religion*, as used in the translation for the Qur'anic word *din*, cannot convey the full meaning of the word *din* in Arabic. The *din*, which Allah revealed for humanity is (Islam) as expressed in the above verse. According to Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, Islam means complete submission to Allah, which means obeying all of His commands in all aspects of one's life, including the political realm.⁹¹ In other words, Islam is an all-embracing order of life that provides systems and institutions for all spheres of life.

Therefore, the Islamic political system is an integral part of Islam. This implies that Islam does not believe in the superficial division of life into religious and worldly realms. It also underlines the fact that separating the church (or mosque) from the state, and politics from religion, are against Islam's unified concept of life. Many other Qur'anic verses throw light on this point, as well as that Muslims should follow Islam in its entirety: "O you who believe! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly and follow not the footsteps of the Evil One; For he is to you an avowed enemy" (2:208) and: "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted" (3:85).

Iqbal's second objection to nationalism is concerned with the formation of nation-states on the basis of geographical, racial, linguistic, and such other differences. This raises two problems: superficial differences are made the criterion of nationality as well as identity for people, and the nation-states that emerge from such peculiarities demand absolute loyalty. Iqbal's disapproval of nationalism was based upon these very reasons, as well as upon the Qur'an:

O mankind! Lo, We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Lo, the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo, Allah is Knower, Aware. (49:13)

Clearly, Islam acknowledges the differences of ethnicity and nationality only for reference, and rejects ethnocentrism and nationalism. In fact, such differences are recognized as God's signs: "And among His signs is

the creation of the heavens and Earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors. Verily in that are signs for those who know” (30:22).

Several Prophetic traditions also can be cited in this connection. The Prophet is reported to have said:

You have one God as you have one father (Adam). There is no distinction between an Arab and a non-Arab. There is no preference for the black over the white, or the fair [(white)] over the black. There is distinction only in submission to God. The most victorious among you is the most honorable in the eyes of God.⁹²

On some other occasion, the Prophet said: “The whole of mankind is the family of God and he amongst His family is dearest to Him, who does good to others.”⁹³ On one occasion, a Companion asked the Prophet about prejudice and whether loving one’s nation was considered prejudice? He replied: “No, whenever one goes with one’s nation even when it is wrong, it is prejudice.”⁹⁴

This clearly shows that Islam’s objection to nationalism is mainly due to its inherent egoistic element, which compels a nationalist to say: “My country, right or wrong.” This sentiment is a menace to human civilization. Islam has no objection to a person loving his or her birthplace. What Islam objects to is that type of nationalism that demands absolute loyalty to the nation, thereby overriding one’s loyalty to God. This absolute loyalty is objectionable when it exaggerates the geographical, ethnic, national, and other differences, while overlooking the fact that all of humanity is one and that such distinctions are only for reference; and when it drives people to national glorification and national self-aggrandizement for its own sake, thereby ignoring the fact that only God possesses the absolute right to each drop of human blood in His cause – not for the cause of national pride or national prejudice. For this reason, the Prophet clearly stated: “Whoever dies for *‘asabiyah* is not one of us. Whoever calls toward *‘asabiyah* is not one of us. Whoever fights for *‘asabiyah* is not one of us.”⁹⁵

Most of Iqbal’s arguments against nationalism are based on the spirit of the above-quoted Qur’anic verses and Prophetic traditions.

As for the issue of loyalty, Islam is quite clear and explicit. According to Sayyid Naquib al Attas, Islam signifies a “willing submission” to God. Obviously, this complete and willing submission implies absolute and ultimate loyalty to Him, not to a person, a group of people, a state, an institution, or anything else. The Qur’an says: “The command is for none but

Allah. He has commanded that you worship none but Him. That is the right religion, but most men understand not" (12:40). This is why the Qur'an enjoins its believers to establish Islam with all of its systems and institutions. If the Shari'ah were implemented fully in the state, the question of loyalty to God or the state would not arise. However, as long as the nation-state continues to be secular, this clash of loyalty seems destined to continue. At this point, it is important to recall that Iqbal emphasized, for this very reason, the need to make the Shari'ah supreme in any Islamic political entity, and the necessity and urgency to continue to carry out the Islamic mission of Divine vicegerency to raise the ummah above ethnocentric and nationalistic differences.

Policy Suggestions for the Muslim World

Instead of summing up the above discussion, it seems more appropriate to raise a crucial question based upon it: If the Islamic mission of Divine vicegerency is so essential to raising the ummah above ethnocentric and nationalistic differences and improving its sociopolitical and economic conditions, how should it be performed?

It seems to us that the answer lies mainly in education. At the educational level, there is a need to work at three levels. First, all of the knowledge that has been secularized and westernized should be desecularized and de-westernized. This requires the Islamization of knowledge.⁹⁶ Second, a culture of reading and reflecting must be promoted to sharpen Muslims' critical insights in a way that will enable them to analyze critically western and other alien ideologies. Third, and most importantly, Muslims, particularly the young generation, must be informed through proper education that they have a higher purpose of life: to fulfill their purpose of vicegerency on Earth for the entire ummah vis-à-vis humanity. Hence, they should not seek knowledge only for the material benefit, but to make themselves agents of positive change in society in order to bring peace and justice to the ummah vis-à-vis humanity.

Unless this basic work is done at the educational level, the ummah's conditions may not be improved. The reason for this is quite obvious: Muslim youth will continue to attain secularized and westernized knowledge, try to imitate the West by following western models of development, or they will serve secularism and secular political leaders and thus forget their higher ummatic mission in life. Reflecting on such issues of knowledge and the possessors of such knowledge, Iqbal said:

I hold that knowledge and intelligence valueless
Which takes away the crusader's sword and shield.⁹⁷

According to Iqbal, if people acquire knowledge from “strangers” (other nations), they imitate them and become strange to themselves. But those who attain knowledge in accordance with their culture and value system become unique. He wrote:

You have acquired and stored up knowledge from the strangers
And polished your face with its rouge;
An individual becomes unique through self-realization.
A nation becomes truly itself when it is true to itself!⁹⁸

Here, it seems important to remember that all of those political thinkers who advocate nationalism place a great emphasis upon the state-controlled system of education. They also look upon education as an important means to instill nationalistic sentiments in the youth so that they may be ready to give even the last drop of their blood to their nation. Rousseau, who was deeply influenced by Plato's educational philosophy, can be cited here as an example. According to Rousseau, the young generation should be imbued with nothing except sentiment toward the nation through education. He also contends that no institution, including the church, should become an obstacle in their way of serving the cause of the nation.

This shows that education can play a key role in molding and orienting the youth toward any destination, be it a secular modern nation-state or the ummah. If young Muslims are provided with Islamized knowledge and given the necessary feedback and training so that they may reflect on the wider issues of ummah and rise above the limited ethnic and nationalistic identities, they can bring a real constructive change to the world. Through proper education and knowledge in Islam, they would know their “true self” – that although they belong to various ethnic and national backgrounds, they all ultimately belong to the same destiny: the ummah. Hence, they should know their true selfhood through Islamized education, which unites them with the ummah and inspires them to undertake Divine vicegerency.

Thus, it may be concluded that the ummah, along with its political entity, can rise high above the secular modern nation-states and can reach lofty heights if its Muslim youth, in particular, and the whole ummah, in general, remain true to themselves. The Prophet is reported to have said: “He who knows his self knows his Lord.”⁹⁹

Notes

1. See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: 1983). See also Anthony D. S. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1983).
2. See Elie Kedouri, ed., *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* (London: 1971). For a comprehensive and deeper understanding of the concept of Islamic ummah, see Muhammed Mumtaz Ali, *Concepts of Islamic Ummah and Shariah* (Kuala Lumpur, Pelanduk Pubs., 1994).
3. See Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and Nation-State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997). For a rejectionist perspective from the Arab world, see Syed Qutb, *Milestones* (Beirut: IIFSO, 1978).
4. See William W. Haddad and William Ochsenwald, *Nationalism in a Non-National State: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977). For Said Nursi's view on nationalism, see Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, "The Letters," *The Risale-i-Nur Collection 1928-32*, trans. Sukran Vahide (Istanbul: 1994), 379-86.
5. For a study of nationalism in Indian context, see Zeenath Kausar, *Islam and Nationalism: An Analysis of the Views of Azad, Iqbal, and Mawdudi* (Kuala Lumpur: A. S. Noordeen, 1994).
6. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1994), 147.
7. Syed Abdul Wahid, ed., *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal* (Lahore: Sh. Mohammed Ashraf, 1992), 60-61. Please note that this book is comprised of the original lectures and speeches delivered by Iqbal. Syed Abdul Wahid was kind enough to compile them and write an introduction.
8. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 155.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Shamloo, ed., *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal* (Lahore: Al-Manar Academy, 1948), iv.
12. Muhammad Munawwar, *Iqbal and Qur'anic Wisdom* (Delhi, Noor Publishing House, 1986), 28.
13. Ibid, 29.
14. "Bal-i-Jibril," 133, quoted in *ibid.*, 35.
15. "Armughan-i-Hijaz," 50, quoted in *ibid.*
16. "Dharb-i-Kalim," 60, quoted in *ibid.*, 20.
17. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 147.
18. Shamloo, *Speeches and Statements*, 225.
19. Ibid.
20. Muhammad Iqbal, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi* (The Mysteries of Selflessness) (London: 1953), 17.
21. Ibid, 134.

22. Shamloo, *Speeches and Statements*, 229.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. See Abu Bakar A. Bagedar, ed., *The Ulema in the Modern Muslim Nation-State* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1983).
27. Muhammad Miyan, *Ulama-i-Haqq aur Un ke Mujahidana Karname* (The Ulema of Truth and Their Achievements), 2 vols. (Delhi: 1940), 302.
28. Quoted by A. B. Rajput, *Maulana Abul Kalam Azad* (Delhi: 1946), 158-59.
29. Mawdudi, *Nationalism and India*, 4th ed. (Delhi: 1965), 33.
30. Ibid, 10.
31. Shamloo, *Speeches and Statements*, 203.
32. Vahid, *Thoughts and Reflections*, 169.
33. Ibid, 167.
34. Ibid, 60.
35. Ibid.
36. Iqbal, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, 133.
37. Ibid, 163.
38. Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: 1966), 18.
39. Lord Action, *Essays in Freedom and Power* (Boston: 1948). Lord Action's statement quoted by Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, 9.
40. Iqbal, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, 30.
41. Mazharuddin Siddiqi, *Concept of Muslim Culture in Iqbal* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1983), 70.
42. K. G. Sayyidain, *Iqbal's Educational Philosophy* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1992), 141.
43. Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, in *ibid.*, 142, 212.
44. Iqbal, *Zarb-i-Kalim*, 107 in *ibid.*, 143.
45. Shamloo, *Speeches and Statements*, 225.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Iqbal, *Kulyat-i-Iqbal* (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1982), 83.
49. Iqbal, *Asrar-i-Khudi* (The Secrets of the Self), trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Lahore: Sh. Mohammad Ashraf, 1960), 17-18.
50. Vahid, *Thoughts and Reflections*, 51.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., 55.
53. Ibid., 60.
54. Ibid.
55. Iqbal, *Asrar-i-Khudi*, x.
56. Ibid., xiii-xiv.
57. Ibid., xxvi-xxvii.
58. Ibid., xxvii.

59. Ibid., xxviii.
60. Ibid., 23.
61. Ibid., 80.
62. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 159.
63. John L. Esposito, "Muhammad Iqbal and the Islamic State," in John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 183.
64. Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 159.
65. Shamloo, *Speeches and Statements*, 221.
66. Zafar Ishaq Ansari, "Iqbal and Nationalism," in *Iqbal Review* (Lahore) 2, no. 1 (1961): 68.
67. Shamloo, *Speeches and Statements*, 226.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., 226-27.
70. Ibid., 227.
71. Ibid., 228.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid., 235.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid., 236.
77. Iqbal, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, 116-17.
78. Sayyidain, *Iqbal's Educational Philosophy*, 58.
79. Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, 227, in *ibid.*, 60.
80. Iqbal, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudi*, 116-17, in *ibid.*, 134-35.
81. Iqbal, *Asrar-i-Khudi*, 33-34.
82. Ibid., 142.
83. Sayyidain, *Iqbal's Educational Philosophy*, 130.
84. Shamloo, *Speeches and Statements*, 226.
85. Ibid.
86. Zeenath Kausar, *Islam and Nationalism*, 89.
87. Iqbal, *Asrar-i-Khudi*, 142-43.
88. Iqbal, *Bal-i-Jibril*, 119, in Sayyidain, *Islam and Nationalism*, 84.
89. Ibid., 91.
90. Ibid., 89.
91. See Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Islamic Law and Constitution* (Lahore: Sh. Mohammad Asraf, 1983).
92. *Musnad Ahmad*, 5:411; Ibn al-Qayyim, 4:31, quoted by Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, "What Islam Stands For," in Altaf Gauhar, ed., *The Challenge of Islam* (London: The Islamic Council of Europe, 1978), 7.
93. *Mishkat al-Masabih*, quoted by Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi, "Islam: The Most Suitable Religion for Mankind," in Gauhar, ed., *The Challenge of Islam*, 20.
94. Quoted by S. A. A. Mawdudi, *Nationalism and India*, 45.

95. Qouted by Z. I. Ansari, "Iqbal and Nationalism," in *Iqbal Review* (Lahore) 2, no. 1 (1996): 62-63.
96. See AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, *Islamization: Reforming Contemporary Knowledge* (Herndon, VA: IIIT, 1994).
97. Iqbal, *Zubur-i-Ajam*, 148, in Sayyidain, Iqbal's *Educational Philosophy*, 31.
98. Iqbal, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudī*, 186, in *ibid.*, 21.
99. Quoted by Syed Muhammad al Naqib al-Attas, "Islam: The Concept of Religion and Foundation of Ethics and Morality," in Gauhar, ed., *The Challenge of Islam*, 46.