

Economic Vision of Allama Iqbal

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GENERAL REMARKS

Allama Iqbal used both poetry and prose in Persian, Urdu and English to convey his multi-dimensional feelings and thoughts. According to one scholar, “Iqbal was a humanist and true citizen of the world. His works testify to his acknowledged roles as poet and philosopher, educator and student of cultures, lawyer and politician, missionary and visionary, psychologist and sociologist, freedom fighter and inspirer of a new nation, scholar and a man of action, mystic, seer and statesman”.¹

As an all time great poet, Allama Iqbal had two shining characteristics—an artistic one that presents poetry for leisurely enjoyment and a visionary one that propels inspirational beams for action and reform. As a great poet he also had a huge canvas to paint on, and his subjects are big issues like humanity. In most of his writings Allama Iqbal talks about the significance of man and his dignity, freedom not only from political subjugation and intellectual servility but also from hunger, ignorance, physical and spiritual illnesses and other social and economic development issues facing the poor and the weak nations of the East. As a universal humanist, Allama Iqbal waged a relentless struggle to promote and defend human self-esteem. Some scholars believe that “even his advocacy of Pakistan was really based on humanist considerations”. He could not bear to see one religions group dominating another simply because of numerical majority.²

Allama Iqbal’s seminal ideas articulated the values, ideas and aspirations that are near and dear to millions of voiceless people in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Allama Iqbal’s messages are refreshingly relevant to the colossal problems of the third world in general and Pakistan in particular. Against the general background of mass poetry, Allama Iqbal contrasted the deplorable gap between affluence and

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¹“Iqbal and the Third World”, by Professor W. S. Karunaratne in *Iqbal Centenary Papers*, Vol. I, p. 78. University of the Punjab, Lahore, 1977.

²*Iqbal—a humanist*, by Vahid (1974) *Glimpses of Iqbal*, p. 189. Iqbal Academy of Pakistan, Karachi.

SOME SPECIFIC IDEAS⁶

First published about 100 years ago in Urdu, *Ilmul Iqtisad* (II) is a highly valuable, historic and unique book that has maintained its usefulness even today. Economic and finance were not of Allama's central interest when compared with his tremendous pull towards philosophy, politics and legal subjects. It is, however, clear from this book that the Allama maintained an abiding interest in the social and economic uplift of the masses, especially the poverty-stricken Muslims in the subcontinent. In the letter of May 28, 1937 to his friend Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Allama Iqbal posed a deeply disturbing question, "how the Muslims of the subcontinent can escape the poverty trap".⁷ Allama Iqbal clearly recognised the internal reasons (money lenders and capitalists) and external factors (British imperialism) behind the plight of the Muslims. And, these observations of Allama Iqbal had a powerful influence on the Father of the Nation whose relentless efforts and brilliant articulation ultimately changed the map of the world by giving us a country in 1947.

II provides some fascinating glimpses into what keeps growth low and poverty at unacceptably high levels.

- Absence of a full-scale exposure of the poor to education, skill development and knowledge in general.
- Excessive population growth, inefficient land use and famines.

Allama Iqbal's ruthless analysis showed that human deprivations affect the poor masses in many ways—reducing their productivity, lowering their wages, injuring their self esteem and destroying their spiritual values (p. 31).

Allama Iqbal stated that it was essential to produce wealth but wealth enhancement and welfare of the society is not one and the same thing. Excessive greed and lust for wealth can play havoc with the harmony and sustainability of a society. Therefore, purely economic phenomena of development and wealth production cannot be divorced from the social, cultural and political considerations. In Allama's views, in the acquisition of wealth itself, it is essential to keep ethics in view (p. 58).

Production of wealth depends on land, labour and capital. Land is a God-given gift to humans on earth. The productivity of land depends on the supply of water and climate—also God-given factors and is subject to laws of diminishing returns (pp. 64-65). Hence his insistence on judicious use of water and environmental robustness.

Allama Iqbal also focused on the gender question. In his view during the initial phases of development and culture, activities involving labour are generally differentiated between man and woman by physique but gradually this differentiation

⁶The following culls ideas on Iqbal's economic vision from *Ilmul Iqtisad*, Sheikh Muhammad Iqbal, Lahore, 1977.

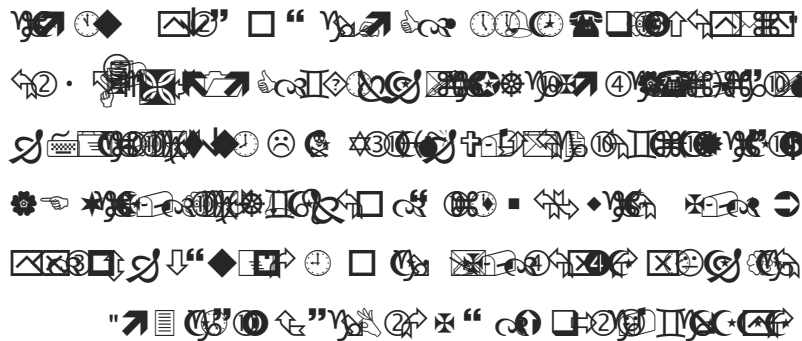
⁷Preface to *Ilmul Iqtisad* by Mumtaz Hasan, p. 13.

disappears and gender-equality surfaces as a result of education, knowledge and personal capabilities (p. 80).

Allama’s global reach is clearly shown by his appreciation of trade among nations. Across countries, production should be guided by conditions of comparative advantage (p. 83). He considered humanity like a body and various nations as its limbs. Humanity’s survival depended on recognition of a comprehensive and indispensable mutual dependence of various parts of the body (p. 83). Unilateralist approach had no place in his mind.

According to Allama Iqbal, national savings were essential to produce more wealth in the future and depended on frugality, among other things. These savings contribute to capital enhancement. However, capital is productive only if put to enhance production and unproductive if flittered away. Savings and wealth will enhance only if returns on savings were attractive and laws existed to protect wealth and property (p. 91).

Allama Iqbal was absolutely clear on the issue of population dynamics. He quoted the views of some scholars including Malthus to the effect that population doubles every 25–30 years. If a nation uses its wealth to enhance the productivity of its people, it will have beneficial effects, if not, then poverty and disease will be rampant (p. 248). Consequently, economic activities and population dynamics must be studied simultaneously. Let me quote Allama Iqbal’s remarkable insights on this subject.



According to Allama Iqbal, a strong reason for writing II was that study of economics was essential to come to grips with poverty. Allama Iqbal was not a stray-eyed idealist. He knew that economics and politics were inter-twined and affected people’s lives deeply and pervasively. Therefore, he blended his message for poverty reduction with the philosophy of fair play. He insisted that human beings were the central and crucial subjects of economics. He firmly believed that political freedom must lead to economic and cultural emancipation. He warned the nations of the East that the West will continue to subjugate them economically and culturally. If the

nations of the East do not diligently and consciously reduce their dependence on the West and do not rely on their own resources—material, technical and intellectual, then the process of exploitation will not end.

There are hundreds of thoughtful ideas in Allama Iqbal's 1930 publication entitled, "Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" but one recurring message is loud and clear. "Islam encourages knowledge, arts and sciences", and the muslims can, and should, benefit from the fund of knowledge being produced in the world.

I have picked up only a few glimpses of economic vision emerging from the vibrant, strong, powerful and forward looking mind of Allama Iqbal. In my judgement even these few fascinating glimpses show vividly that if we had carefully studied, digested and implemented some of the Allama's amazingly insightful ideas and concepts given to us about a century ago then we: (1) would have had an absolutely perfect blueprint for social and economic development for the nation as early as in 1947 and (2) would have been way up in the league of nations and not at its lower rungs.

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