

Revisiting Alama Iqbal's Poetry through a neo-Marxist Lens

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Abstract

This research is designed with the objective of analyzing Iqbal's poetry in the light of the neo-Marxist hermeneutical framework with an emphasis on Antonio Gramsci's rendition of cultural hegemony. The purpose of this work is to dissect how hegemonic discourses and colonial branding function in the selected texts of Iqbal by interpreting his poetry with the socio-political reality of colonial India in mind. This research wants to find out the form and expression of neo-Marxist critical interpretation on cultural imperialism in selected poems of Iqbal considering the methodology of close reading of poems. The study seeks to contribute to knowledge in the area of literature and ideology with a view to provide insights and interfaces into colonial and postcolonial power dynamics.

Keywords: *Cultural Hegemony, Urdu literature, Marxism, post-colonialism.*

Introduction

Allama Muhammad Iqbal is one of the most significant figures of Urdu and Persian poetry and prose of the twentieth century as well as famous for his Philosophical legacy. His poetry, which encompasses Islamic mysticism and colonial Indian context, is marked by complexity in its treatment of questions of identity, nationalism, and resistance. Thus, Iqbal's poetic discourse could be best understood within the context of British colonial presence and the politics of the Indian subcontinent in the early twentieth century. Iqbal's corpus of writing includes literary pieces such as "The Call of the Marching Bell" and "Gabriel's Wing" where Iqbal speaks of renewed Islam and freedom of Muslims from colonial domination. His poetry was not only sensical to the dream of his generation but also stimulated the intellectual and ideological changes within the South Asia region. The critical discourses on Iqbal's poetry have primarily focused on spirituality, nationalism, and metaphysical concepts, some of which are through postcolonialism and Islamic philosophy (Ahmad, 2015; Husain, 2018). Nonetheless, a Marxist analysis of Iqbal's work, and more importantly, a neo-Marxist reading of Iqbal's work through Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony has not been attempted which is, therefore, missing from the existing scholarship. According to Gramsci, cultural hegemony refers to a process whereby ruling classes in society ensure that the cultures being espoused uphold the authority of the superior classes (Gramsci, 1971).

This theoretical approach provides a politicized outlook on how culture, including literature and art, operates as a terrain of conflict and opposition. Using this lens to analyze Iqbal's poetry enables one not only to look at how his work reinforces certain aspects of colonial discourse but also to consider the subversive possibilities available in his texts. This study aims to understand the applicability of neo-Marxist criticism and reveals the matrices of ideology and power relations in

Iqbal's poetry. It aims to elucidate the ways in which Iqbal navigates the complexities of colonial domination and resistance, offering insights into the intersections between literature, ideology, and power in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Allama Muhammad Iqbal is one of the best and significant personalities of Urdu and Persian literature, mainly known for his poems and political leadership. Even though themes of Tagore's poetry are rooted in socio-political context of colonial India, his work was and remains valuable due to the multilayered sonnets on topics of identity, nation and what it is to be human. But the representative material and cultural ideologies constitute an elaborate dance that is inherent in the body of Iqbal's poetic work, born directly out of the colonial society, and recolonizing it. The objective of this research is to analyse Allama Iqbal's poetry through neo-Marxist Critics especially Gramsci's theory of hegemony. Taking it from Marx's observation, Gramsci posits that the dominant classes not only dominate coercively, but also hegemonically. From this perspective, the poetry of Iqbal is best seen as a field of collective struggle: of constructing, circulating, and counterposing ideologies, which map onto the power struggles of colonial India. Prominent among Gramsci's concepts is that of cultural domination or hegemony, whereby the dominating class ensures that their perception of existence becomes the accepted truth that engulfs minority and dissident opinions. In the context of colonial India, this hegemonic control was not limited to the political and economic realms but was also present in the cultural and ideological realms and in the narratives of identity, nationalism, and resistance (Abdul Razak, 2012, p.375).

This piece is one of Iqbal's most famous poems included in his series known as 'Javid Nama', and reflects the problems that the colonized felt under the rule of the colonial masters. In this poem Iqbal mourns for the sorry fate of the Muslim umma and their plight under the foreign yoke while at the same time berating the ruling classes for their lack of character and their failure in their duties to the community. In "Shikwa," imagery and rhetoric are used artfully to express the extent of Iqbal's complaint of colonization as antithetical to the spirit of liberty and sovereignty. Iqbal is successful in not only addressing the grievances of colonialism but also in dismantling the authority of colonial rule and the discourse that legitimises it. Likewise, in the poem "Jawab-e-Shikwa" (Response to the Complaint), Iqbal boldly responds to the unfairness of colonial rule by calling for the Muslims to regain the fighting spirit and take action against the odds. By using the Islamic motifs and historical references, Iqbal wants his audience to rise up against the policies of subjugation adopted by colonial powers and to strive for freedom and liberty. In deconstructing these poems, this study intends to examine the power relations and the ideological formations present in Iqbal's poetic worldview. By acknowledging the imperialist power structures at play in Iqbal's works, the arguments put forward in this paper are positioned to reveal how the poet both embodies and subverts colonial discourse to understand the role of Indic politics of identity and nationalism in the colonial context. Analyzing a number of poems chosen into the current research, along with the subsequent critical interpretation aided by the Marxist approach, this study aims to elucidate the complex nature of Iqbal's Poetry and its consequences for the assessment of the relations between literature, ideology, and power in colonial and postcolonial paradigms. Thus, it is with this particular aim that the present research seeks to support the critical understanding of

literature as the ground upon which the battle against hegemonic oppression and domination is waged (Mughal, & Gohar, 2020, p.20).

Statement of problem

The poetic oeuvre of Allama Iqbal, celebrated for its philosophical depth and nationalist fervor, has been subject to extensive analysis and critique. However, a significant lacuna persists in the critical discourse: the absence of a Marxist perspective, particularly one informed by Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony. Despite numerous postcolonial, feminist, and literary interpretations, the political economy and power dynamics embedded in Iqbal's poetry remain unexamined through a Marxist lens. This research aims to address this gap by applying Gramsci's theory of cultural domination to Iqbal's poetry, situating it within the socio-political context of colonial India. Through a critical close reading of selected poems, this study seeks to expose how Iqbal's work reflects, reinforces, and potentially subverts dominant ideologies and power structures. By integrating Marxist principles with literary analysis, this research endeavors to illuminate the intricate relationships between literature, ideology, and power in colonial and postcolonial contexts, thereby enriching our understanding of Iqbal's poetry and its continued relevance to contemporary debates on nationalism, identity, and resistance.

Research Objectives:

1. To analyze selected poems of Allama Iqbal within the socio-political context of colonial India, with a focus on identifying and examining the ideological underpinnings and power dynamics inherent in his poetic discourse.
2. To apply the theoretical framework of Marxist theory, specifically Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, in order to explore how Iqbal's poetry reflects and perpetuates dominant ideologies and power structures.
3. To investigate the potential for subversion and resistance within Iqbal's poetry, particularly in relation to colonial oppression and hegemonic discourse, and to assess the ways in which his work challenges or reinforces existing power dynamics.

Research Questions:

This research will investigate the following research questions:

1. How does Allama Iqbal's poetry reflect the socio-political context of colonial India, and what ideological underpinnings and power dynamics are embedded within his poetic discourse?
2. How does Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony help to illuminate the mechanisms through which Iqbal's poetry operates as a tool of ideological domination and resistance?
3. What strategies does Iqbal employ in his poetry to critique colonial authority and advocate for alternative visions of identity, nationalism, and resistance?

Research Methodology:

The method used as the primary research tool in this study is textual analysis to analyze the poetry of Iqbal from the neo-Marxist point of view with emphasis on Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural domination. Content analysis can be defined as the scientific process of using text analysis to analyze textual material in order to understand latent meanings, themes and ideologies (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Thus, the selected poems of Iqbal function as the main subject of investigation, which can produce valuable knowledge of colonial India and the poet's position in relation to the colonial discourse. Textual analysis has several steps that are often carried out repeatedly. Firstly, some of the poetry of Iqbal will be taken including but not limited to "Shikwa" and "Jawab-e-Shikwa" that would be selected depending on their thematic similarity to the research questions of the study. These poems will then be subjected to close reading in which attention will be focused on language features and patterns, rhetorical devices, and motifs that either reinforce or subvert the existing political and socio-cultural regimes of meaning (Foss, 2009). Applying Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony for the analysis, the author will attempt at defining hegemonic discourse present in Iqbal's poetry and, in turn, moments of contestation or subversion. This will entail learning how Iqbal builds specific discourses of identity, nationalism, and power into his work, as well as how he maintains these discursive formations (Fairclough 2013). In the process of analysis of the poems of Iqbal it will also be taken into consideration that during the time he wrote, South Asia was under the rule of Britain. In achieving this goal, this study seeks to understand how colonial power relations played them out in literary texts, and how Iqbal positioned himself within the structure (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2013).

Lastly, based on the findings of the textual analysis, an integration of literature, ideology, and power will be established within colonial and post-colonial contexts. By adopting this methodological approach, the study aims to contribute to current debates within literary and cultural studies concerning the place of literature as a sphere of struggle against domination.

Literature Review

Much scholarly work has been dedicated to Allama Muhammad Iqbal and his poetry in the realm of literature, philosophy and politics. Iqbal's poetry has been analyzed from various theoretical approaches such as postcolonial, feminist, and even religious criticisms; nevertheless, the present literary work lacks a neo-Marxist criticism, especially through Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. An extensive discussion of Iqbal's notion of 'khudi', and its philosophical value in the context of the poet's work, Ahmad (2015). Ahmad insists that the concept of 'khudi' which Iqbal espouses is an Islamic understanding of self and collective individuality that underpins his poetry in general. Ahmad's study though sheds light on the philosophical aspects of Iqbal's works, largely remains within personal spiritual conflicts rather than social-political realms. On the other hand, Husain (2018) undertakes a comparative study of Allama Iqbal's poetic philosophy with Western metaphysical positions. For his part, Husain views Iqbal's poetry as a synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophical systems, where existentialism and humanism are most clearly

manifest. Unlike Husain's work, the current paper outlines the socio-political concern of the poetry of Iqbal but does not discuss neo-Marxist theory.

In an effort to provide a historical study that is currently lacking in the academic literature, the present study aims to use Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony as the theoretical lens through which the poetry of Iqbal can be understood in the context of colonial India. In his notion on Cultural Hegemony, Gramsci proposes that dominant classes perpetuate their rule through making the populace embrace ideas that support the domination (Gramsci, 1971). In this regard, the application of this theoretical approach to understanding the themes and meanings of Iqbal's poetry will aim to reveal not only how his poetry conforms to societal tenets but also how it subverts the prevailing colonial ideologies and relationships to power. In addition, this study extends the contribution of postcolonial thinkers, including Said (1978) and Spivak (1988), who underscore the way literature offers a symbolic venue for the decolonization struggle. While Said's schema of "Orientalism" and Spivak's terminology of "strategic essentialism" offer rich theoretical frameworks for approaching how the language casts and recasts Iqbal as hero through colonial mode of identity and nationalist tropes. Consequently, this study endeavors to align with the previous studies that aimed at extracting philosophical and literary qualities of the poetry of Allama Iqbal but will analyze his poetry with the help of the neo-Marxist theory of cultural dominance forged by Antonio Gramsci. In so doing, the study seeks to shed light on the means by which Iqbal engages with colonial subjugation and anticolonial struggle, and on how his poetry contributes to understanding literary and ideological relationships to colonialism and its aftermaths.

Poetry of Allama Muhammad Iqbal

Iqbal's poetry is philosophical in nature, dotted with spiritualism and containing revolutionary theme. Navigating through the resources that are rooted in the Islamic mysticism, Persian poetry, and the Western philosophy, Iqbal was able to produce lines that touch the hearts of various readers today. His poetry is, in a way, highly political, especially when viewed in the context of colonial India, and deals with themes of the rebirth of the Muslim ummah and the concept of individual political awakening and the need for the evolution of a collective self.

Here are excerpts from two of Allama Iqbal's renowned poems, along with English translations:

1. شکوہ (Shikwa) - Complaint

اے خدا مرا بھی اس زمانے میں ہوں

کہ میرا شکوہ کیا ہے، ہم غریبوں کا

ترے راز کو میں نے ہمیشہ پردہ کیا

محبت کی راہ میں میں نے کبھی کام نہیں کیا

ترے ارشاد کا ہنگامہ بندہ کو کیا ہے
وہ تیرا تبصرہ آج کیا ہے، کل کیا ہوگا

Translation:

O God! I, too, am a dweller of this age,
For what do I complain? I am among the poor.
I've always veiled Your secret,
In the path of love, I've never acted.
What's the use of Your guidance's tumult?
What is Your interpretation today, what will it be tomorrow?

2. جواب شکوہ (Jawab-e-Shikwa) - Response to the Complaint

تو نے مقدس ہو کر اپنے خوابوں کا جنازہ چلایا
ہم نے زندگی کی تماشائیاں چھوڑ دیں
تو نے کیسے کیا حساب ذات و میں محبت کی ہم نے
تو خود کو دھوکہ دیا، خود سے پیار کیا
تو نے کیا عالم نگر کا فسانہ سنا دیا
ہم نے بھی سچ کا دھواں اُٹھا دیا، جھوٹ کی بھاگ دو

Translation:

You, in sanctity, conducted the funeral of your dreams,
We abandoned the pleasures of life.
How did you account for the essence of love?
We deceived ourselves, loved ourselves.
You narrated the tale of the world,

We also raised the banner of truth, fled from falsehood.

These excerpts offer a glimpse into the thematic richness and linguistic beauty of Allama Iqbal's poetry, which continues to inspire and provoke thought to this day.

Marxism and its relevance to Allama Iqbal's poetry

In general, marxism within the understanding of society as a social, political and economic phenomenon provides a framework through which power relations, class conflict and domination can be explained. As its name suggests, Marxism is a political philosophy that originated from the ideas of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels such as materialism, master-slave dynamic and the necessity of struggle between the classes as the motive force of history. When used in the context of Allama Iqbal's poetry, it serves as a system of criticising the historical background of the poetry as well as the political views that he had incorporated in the poetry. While this corpus undoubtedly resonates with the Islamic Sufism and Persian mysticism, it cannot be ignored how stridently Iqbal registers the social and economic inequities and colonial subjugation of the colonial Indian milieu.

One of the principle premises in neo-Marxist criticism is that of class conflict is evidenced in various ways in Iqbal's poetry. Exemplified by the oppression of the poor and the needy, Iqbal's work reflects the socio-economic injustice that characterized colonial and capitalist societies. Namely, in the poems "Shikwa" (Complaint) and "Jawab-e-Shikwa" (Response to the Complaint), Iqbal voices complaints about colonial domination and argues against the injustices within the local system that determine who gets what, or more precisely, who gets to rule the others. Furthermore, Marxism reveals how specific ideologies serve to reinforce and perpetuate the existing asymmetrical relations of domination. Among the theories proposed so far, the Italian political scientist Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony is particularly relevant for understanding how the ruling classes perpetuate their power through the circulation of ideas that support their rule. In this regard, Iqbal could be read as both situating his poetry within colonial and nationalist discourses while also resistively engaging with them. For example, in "Shikwa" Iqbal condemn the vices of modernity and the malformed moral compass of the ruling class who have failed to do their part for justice and the righteous.

Challenging the colonial power's authority and revealing the paradoxes contained in the dominant colonial discourse, Iqbal's poetry can be regarded as an ideological counter-discourse to colonial oppression. Moreover, Marxism helps comprehend the revolutionary aspect of Iqbal poetry. In calling for the rebirth of the Muslim ummah and the pursuit of the individual and collective self, Iqbal presents a vision of social transformation that rejects current social relations of power and demands a restructuring of the social for justice and equality. Neo-Marxist approach is found to be quite useful in deciphering the socio-political aspects of Allama Iqbal's poetry for understanding aspects of class conflict, domination and ideologies in colonial India. Therefore, by using neo-Marxist interpretation on Iqbal's work, it makes it easier to capture the dynamism of colonial domination and the potential for change presented by his poetic language.

Conclusion

Therefore, the aim of this scholarly work is to analyze the poetry of Allama Muhammad Iqbal, especially from the neo-Marxist framework including the idea named cultural hegemony by Antonio Gramsci. Thus, the objective of this research is twofold: it focuses on exploring the social context that surrounded Iqbal during the colonial period in India being a subcontinent of Britain then and secondly, it tries to examine the Marxism involved in his poems to understand the power-latent discourses and opportunities to resist it.

After extending some literature review, the researcher realized that, even though various researchers' studies were focused on different aspects of Iqbal's poetry by analyzing it philosophically, literarily or religiously, a socio- neo-Marxist analysis of his poetry has been paid some ill attention. Such, in essence, is the research question of this study: Based on the insights from Marxism and Gramscian theory, this study aims to help to eradicate this flaw systematically and make a methodical input into investigating the socio-political aspects of Iqbal's poetry.

The research objectives set in this proposal suggest that the focus of this study should be the author's selected poems, accompanied by the critical interpretation of neo-Marxist concepts. Therefore, this thesis undertakes a critique of some of the major themes of class conflict, dominion and the forms of ideological struggle found in Iqbal's poetry in order to explain how this poet alive to colonialism and struggling for social justice and change.

Moreover, the applied ideas apply the textual analysis as one of the prominent methodological techniques in the analysis of the socio-political aspects of the literature. Therefore, the objective of this study is to decode the meaning hidden, ideas and political, social and cultural power relations that are executed in Iqbal's poetry through the analysis of linguistic components, rhetoric figures and motifs.

Therefore, the following research proposal outlines the steps towards constructing an elaborate analysis of Allama Muhammad Iqbal's poetry that tries to utilize the Marxism theory so as to understand the relations between literature, ideology, and power within colonial and post-colonial societies. Therefore, while extending the understanding of Iqbal's work with a neo-Marxist lexicon, this research aims to enrich the debates in the methodological frameworks of literary and cultural analysis in the light of processes of literary decoding as a sphere of struggle against hegemonic domination.

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