

IQBAL'S CONTRIBUTION TO 'LIBERALISM' IN MODERN ISLAM

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In the eighteenth century the moral, political and economic deterioration of Islam under the Ottoman, the Russian and the British rule had reached its climax. This general decadence was followed by the growth of 'puritanic' reform movements in Arabia, North Africa, South Russia and India.

Although these movements were not linked with one another and it was a mere coincidence that they existed in numerous parts of the Muslim world more or less at the same time, they were identical with regard to their object which was to purify Islam from the corruptions introduced by Sufism, conservatism and the arbitrary Ottoman Sultanate. The Muslims were influenced everywhere by these 'puritanic' reform movements, for the reformers preached a return to the original simplicity of Islam by laying emphasis on God's Unity, the sufficiency of the Qur'an and the Tradition as 'precedents for the Muslims, and the complete rejection of all innovations or heresies. Notwithstanding the fact that these movements encouraged communal tendencies among the Muslims, particularly of those countries where they constituted a minority, these movements remained, generally speaking, entirely internal in character, because Islam, at that stage, had not become fully conscious of the threat of European expansion.

By the close of the eighteenth century the economic considerations of the European Colonial Powers necessitated a penetration in the world of Islam. This penetration resulted, in some cases, in the occupation, and in other, the economic exploitation of the Muslim countries on the part of the European Powers. The contact with the West led to the infiltration of such new ideas as constitutionalism, secularism, nationalism and radicalism into the world of Islam. But by the time the Muslims abandoned their passive role the outer 'fringe' of the Islamic world had fallen into the hands of the Great Powers. The Muslims of the 'heart' or the 'core' of the world of Islam at any rate, looked forward to holding their own at least in those territories where they predominated. Accordingly Islamic 'puritanism' of the later half of the eighteenth century culminated in the condemnation of Western civilisation. The followers of Muhammad Ibn'Abd-al-Wahhab in Arabia, Muhammad al-

Sanusi in North Africa, and Sayyid Ahmad of Bareilly in India were violently anti-Western.

However, within a generation or two, the 'puritanic' beginning of the Muslim revival broadened into what has been termed 'liberalism', and the work of Islamizing the Western ideas was taken up by Midhat Pasha in Turkey, Mufti 'Alam Jan in South Russia, Sheikh Muhammad 'Abduh in Egypt and Sayyid Ahmad Khan in India. For a time it appeared that the two groups (the 'puritans' and the 'liberals') would develop in opposition to one another. But as both the groups were still apprehensive of external European threat, they contributed jointly towards the religious and territorial defence of Islam. In connection with the reconciliation of these two seemingly antagonistic trends of 'puritanism' and 'liberalism' within Modern Islam, the name of Jamal-al-Din Afghani has been frequently mentioned. He laid stress on the acquisition of the technique of European progress and exhorted the Muslims to grasp the secret of Western power. Actually it was due to the influence of Jamal-al-Din Afghani that 'liberalism' together with 'puritanism' developed into 'Pan-Islamism', and shortly after the 1914-1918 War, when the Ottoman Empire was being dismembered, 'Pan-Islamism' further developed into 'Muslim nationalism'. 'Liberalism', 'Pan-Islamism' and 'Muslim nationalism' therefore, were movements which were stimulated by external European pressure.

In the Indian sub-continent 'liberalism' seems to have developed hand in hand with 'political conservatism'. Perhaps with the exception of Shibli and his followers who had 'radical' tendencies and who found no objection to joining the Indian national movement, the 'liberalism' of all the other reformers of the Indian sub-continent was based on the Muslim separatist policy, and was confined to the uplift of the Muslims generally and particularly of the Indian sub-continent.

A glance at the works of Muhammad Iqbal, the last of the great 'liberal' reformers, from 1907 onwards, reveals that all his ethico-philosophical teachings, *e.g.*, his stress on the importance of the Individual and the Community, his vigorous optimism, his emphasis on creative activity, his constant striving for the absolutely new—were motivated by one permeating desire, the consolidation of Islam generally and particularly of the Indian sub-continent. In his 'liberalism' were blended the 'political conservatism' of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Iqbal was opposed to the

idea of the Muslims joining the Indian national movement, and consequently he was not in favour of surrendering separate electorates, the 'radicalism' of Muhammad Shibli (like Muhammad Shibli, Iqbal was aware of the need of economic uplift of the Muslim agriculturists), and the 'Pan-Islamism' of Jamal-al-Din Afghani. This synthesis made it possible for Iqbal to interpret 'Muslim nationalism' as the political emancipation of numerous races, speaking different languages, but professing Islam and inhabiting those territories which comprise the world of Islam, without that emancipation coming into conflict with the general principles of equality, fraternity and solidarity among the Muslims as established by their religious usage and cultural coherence.

Islam, he asserted, is hostile to nationalism when nationalism isolates itself from Islam and as a political creed, based exclusively on race, colour, language or territory, puts forth rival claims in opposition to those of Islam. However, patriotism or a readiness to lay down one's life for one's country, belief, historical traditions or culture, is, according to him, an integral part of *a* Muslim's faith.

Iqbal envisaged an international Islam when he preached that Islam was neither 'nationalism' nor 'imperialism' but a 'commonwealth of nations' which accepted the racial diversity and the ever-changing geographical demarcations only for the facility of reference and not for limiting the social horizon of its members.

Life viewed from the standpoint of Islam was his principal theme and a philosophical foundation was provided for that basic theme. Iqbal, unlike his predecessors, was neither polemical nor apologetic. He boldly attempted a socio-political reconstruction of the Muslims by insisting on the development of 'Self' through which the Muslims could achieve freedom and power once again. He preached that the Muslims should endeavour to cultivate Islamic character and thereby become perfect as individuals. Islamic community, in his opinion, was a unique community composed of unique individuals. Thus through Islam he provided an 'ego' of their own particularly to the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent.

In replacing nationalism by Islam as a nation-building force, Iqbal helped the growth of 'Muslim nationalism' which in its turn led to the secession of Islam from the Indian sub-continent. A nation was constituted

on the basis of Islam as a culture or a civilization and this nation eventually managed to secure self-determination as well as territorial specification.

As for an Islamic interpretation of 'constitutionalism', Iqbal regarded the Turk's decision to abolish the Caliphate as perfectly sound. He approved of the growth of a republican spirit in the Muslim countries, which was, in his opinion, a return to the original purity of Islam. He was likewise pleased at the establishment of legislative assemblies in the Muslim lands. These developments, he maintained, necessitated the revision of old Muslim institutions in the light of modern experience. Accordingly he laid emphasis on the need for a reform in Muslim Law as well as Muslim legal education, and recommended the revival of *Ijtihad* for a re-interpretation of Islamic Law in the light of modern experience, but in such a way that the original spirit of that Law was not lost.

Iqbal denounced 'secularism' which had resulted from the fundamental duality of spirit and matter in Christianity, and which led to the exclusion of religion from the life of the Western states.

Iqbal even provided the Muslims with an Islamic interpretation of 'socialism'. He was greatly impressed by the economic implications of the Muslim Law of Inheritance, and believed that Islam could create a new world where the social rank of man would be determined not by his caste or colour, or the amount of dividend he earned, but by the kind of life he lived. From the standpoint of Islam human society was founded on 'the equality of spirits' not on 'the equality of stomachs'; and, notwithstanding private ownership which was regarded as a trust, Islam did not allow capital to accumulate in such a way as to dominate the real producer of wealth.

Iqbal influenced the course of events in Muslim India through the force of his poetry and writings, but he died before Pakistan actually came into being. It is necessary that the 'liberal' spirit, to which Iqbal and his predecessors contributed, should be kept alive in Pakistan, and also that 'liberalism' should be safeguarded and protected from being abused at the hands of those who are not acquainted with the sources, history and limitations of this movement. Islam is good for all times. It tends to look forward with the help and under the guidance of its past experience, therefore we must be always ready and prepared to adapt our ways of life to changing conditions *without losing our integrity*.