

SOME THOUGHTS ON ISLAMIC STUDIES

DR. SIR MUHAMMAD IQBAL

We are publishing below a note on Islamic Studies written by Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbal to Sahibzada Aftab Ahmed Khan on 4th June 1925. The letter has been copied from the records of the Muslim University, Aligarh and is being published through the courtesy of Dr. S.M. Yousuf, Head of the Department of Arabic, University of Karachi. Although the Urdu translation of this letter has been published in *Iqbal Nama* the original English letter remains unpublished. We are publishing it here as it will interest the students of Iqbal to know his thoughts on Islamic Studies in his own words.

—Editor

My Dear Sahibzada,

I have read with great interest your excellent note on Islamic Studies to which, it seems, you have given a great deal of thought and attention. The subject has to be looked at from various points of view and in reference to the birth or rather rebirth of humanism in the world of Islam today. However, I beg to offer a few stray thoughts which have come to me. Before I proceed further I would state the objects of what you call Islamic Studies as follows:-

1. To educate and train well-qualified theologians, divines etc. (This is your first object on page 4 of your letter and I fully agree with it).
2. To produce scholars who may, by their researches in the various branches of Muslim literature and thought, be able to trace genetically the continuity of intellectual life between Muslim culture and modern knowledge. (This requires a little more elucidation. The political fall of Islam in Europe unfortunately took place, roughly speaking, at a moment when Muslim thinkers began to see the futility of deductive science and were fairly on the way to building inductive knowledge. It was practically at this time that Europe

took up the task of research and discovery. Intellectual activity in the world of Islam practically ceased from this time and Europe began to reap the fruits of the labours of Muslim thinkers. The Humanist movement in Europe was due to a large extent to the force set free by Muslim thought. It is not at all an exaggeration to say that the fruits of modern European humanism in the shape of modern science and philosophy are in many ways only a further development of Muslim culture. Neither the European nor the Mussalman of today realises this important fact because the extant work of Muslim thinkers still lies scattered and unpublished in the libraries of Europe, Asia and Africa. The ignorance of the Mussalmans of today is so great that they consider thoroughly anti-Islamic what has in the main arisen out of the bosom of their own culture. If, for instance, a Muslim savant knew that something like the theory of Einstein was seriously discussed in the scientific circles of Islam (Abut Ma'ali quoted by Averroes) the present theory of Einstein would appear to him less outlandish. Again his antipathy to modern Inductive Logic would be very much diminished if he knew that the whole system of modern Logic started from Razi's well-known objection to the deductive logic of Aristotle.)

The production of such scholars is absolutely necessary as they alone can help in the assimilation of modern knowledge.

3. To turn out Muslim scholars well-versed in the various aspects of Muslim History, Art, General Culture and Civilisation. (This is really your third object mentioned on page 4 of your letter, which I have a bit narrowed by excluding science and philosophy from its scope.) This will include your object No. 2.
4. To produce scholars who may be fitted to carry on researches in the legal literature of Islam. As you know, our legal literature, a good deal of which is still unpublished, is simply enormous. In my opinion it should be treated as a separate branch of Muslim learning. (By law I mean the law relating to *fiqh* only).

It is in the light of these general considerations that we should devise a scheme of Islamic Studies in the Muslim University at Aligarh.

I will now proceed to consider the practical aspect of the matter:-

The *Study of Muslim Theology*: Our first object in which we both agree is the training of well-qualified theologians to satisfy the spiritual needs of the community. But the spiritual needs of a community change with the expansion of that community's outlook on life. The change in the position of the individual, his intellectual liberation and infinite advance in natural sciences have entirely changed the substance of modern life so that the kind of scholasticism or theological thought which satisfied a Muslim in the Middle Ages would not satisfy him today. This does not mean an injury to the spirit of religion. But it certainly contradicts traditional views. If rejuvenation of Muslim life and the regaining of original depths are desirable then a rebuilding of theological thought is absolutely necessary. The vision of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan on this point, as on many others, was almost prophetic. As you know he himself undertook the task, which did not, and could not, prosper because it was mainly based on the philosophical thought of a bygone age. I am afraid I cannot agree with your suggested syllabus in Muslim Theology (para 4 of your letter). In my opinion it is perfectly useless to institute a school of Muslim Theology on older lines unless it is your object to satisfy the more conservative portion of our community. Spiritually, the older theology is, generally speaking, a set of worn-out ideas; educationally, it has no value in view of the rise of new, and restatement of old problems. What is needed today is intellectual activity in fresh channels and the building of a new theology and *Kalam*. This can obviously be done by men who are properly equipped for such a task. But how to produce such men?

I fully agree with you in your suggestion that a system be devised for utilising the best material from Deoband and Lucknow. But the point is what would you do with these men after having trained them up to the Intermediate standard? Would you make them B.A.s and M.A.s after the suggestion of Sir Thomas Arnold? I am sure that so far as the study and

development of theological thought is concerned they will not serve your purpose. These Deoband and Lucknow men who disclose a special aptitude for theological thinking should, in my opinion, be given a thorough grounding in modern thought and science before you allow them to pass through Arnold's course, which, for their purpose, will have to be very much shortened. After completing their study of modern thought and science they may be required to attend lectures on such subjects in Arnold's course as have a direct bearing on their special study e.g., sects of Islam and Muslim Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy. With this equipment they may be made University Fellows to give original lectures on Muslim Theology, *Kalam* and *Tafsir*. Such men alone will be able to found a new school of Muslim Theology in the University and serve our object No. 1. My suggestion, therefore, is that if you wish to satisfy the more conservative portion of our society you can start with a school of Theology on older lines as suggested in para 4 of your letter but your ultimate aim must be gradually to displace it by the work of original thinkers produced in the manner I have suggested.

Coming now to our second object, those among the Lucknow and Deoband men who disclose a special aptitude for purely scientific research should be given a thorough grounding in Mathematics, Science or Philosophy according to their respective aptitudes. After having completed their study in modern science and thought they may be permitted to pass through Arnold's course, which will have to be shortened for their purpose also. For instance, a man who has studied Physical Science only should be called upon to attend lectures on "Science in the Muslim World", Arnold's No. 3 in the M.A. course. You can then make him a University Fellow to devote all his time to researches in the particular science he has studied.

Coming to our third object, Arnold's full course should be opened to those who do not happen to possess a special aptitude for science or philosophy but want a general training in the principles of Muslim culture and civilisation. But this need not be confined to men from Deoband or Nadwa only. Your own University men with a better knowledge of Arabic

may take it up. I would find a place for Muslim art and architecture in this course.

Coming to our fourth object i.e., the study of Muhammedan Law and Legal History, we should pick up more brilliant men from Deoband and Lucknow who happen to possess a legal mind and disclose a special aptitude for legal subtleties. In view of the fact that the whole system of Mohammedan Law stands in need of constructive readjustment we should give them a thorough grounding in modern Jurisprudence and principles of legislation and perhaps also in modern Economics and Sociology. You can make them LL.B.s if you like and then permit them to pass through Arnold's course, which will have to be shortened in their case also. For instance, they may be required to attend lectures on such subjects as Muslim Political Theory and development of Muslim Jurisprudence. Some of them may be allowed to take up the profession of law. Others may accept your University Fellowship and devote themselves to legal research work. The present state of the administration of Muhammedan Law in this country is simply deplorable and there are difficulties which can be solved through legislative agencies only. Mohammedan professional lawyers thoroughly well-grounded in the principles of Mohammedan Law will be of the greatest help both in court and council.

Briefly my suggestions are: I accept the course of study suggested by Sir Thomas Arnold. But the whole of it should be opened only to those candidates who do not disclose a special aptitude for Law, Theology and Science. In so far as the study of Theology is concerned, I allow your suggestions (para 4 of your letter) but consider it is only a tentative measure to be displaced eventually by the work of original thinkers, who shall have to be trained in the manner I have suggested in the course of my letter. For these men as well as for those who take up the study of Law and Special Sciences, Arnold's course will have to be shortened according to their needs. It is hardly necessary here to point out that a workable knowledge of

German and French is absolutely necessary for those who take up the study of Muslim thought, literature, art, history and even of Theology.

Yours Sincerely,

(Sd.) Muhammad Iqbal.