

THE MEANING OF REVELATION

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Among the devotees and intimate friends of Iqbal, Sir Ross Masud occupies an eminent place. He was the son of Justice Syed Mahmood and the grandson of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. On retiring from the Vice-Chancellorship of the Aligarh Muslim University, Sir Ross Masud joined service at Bhopal in the capacity of Minister for Education and Religious Affairs, from 1934 till his death in July 1937. This friendship resulted in Iqbal's visits to Bhopal and was the occasion for the presentation of his "*Zarb-e-Kalim*" to His Highness the late Nawab Hamidullah Khan, the ruler of the State, with the words:

بگیر این همه سرمایہ بہار از من

کہ گل بدست تو از شاخ تازہ تر ماند

(Take from me this Glory of Spring,

For in thy hand the flower is fresher than it was on the bough.)

Iqbal, on his part, had a great love for Ross Masud, and a great admiration for his capabilities and the qualities of his heart and head. In the words of Iqbal:

"He inherited the heart of his grandfather and the head of his father and with such heart and head he served his country and nation all his life."¹

On the death of Ross Masud, Iqbal has thus expressed his deep sense of regret upon human helplessness and the destruction wrought by death:

¹ "Letter to Lady Masud" *Makateeb-e-Iqbal* Part I, page 392

رہی نہ آہ زمانے کے ہاتھ سے باقی

وہ یادگار کمالات احمد و محمود

زوال علم و ہنر مرگ نا گہاں اس کی

وہ کارواں کا متاع گراں بہا مسعود

مجھے رلاتی ہے اہل جہاں کی بے دردی

فغاں مرغ سحر خواں کو جانتے ہیں سرور

نہ کہہ کہ صبر میں پنہاں ہے چارہٴ غم دوست

نہ کہہ کہ صبر معمائے موت کی ہے کشود

”دلے کہ عاشق و صابر بود مگر سنگ است

ز عشق تا بہ صبوری ہزار فرسنگ است“ (سعدی)

(Alas from the cruel hands of Time could not be protected,

That monument of the accomplishments of Ahmad and

Mahmood.

His sudden death marks the decline of learning and talent,

For Masud was a valuable possession of the caravan.
I weep over the callousness of people;
They take the lament of the morning bird for a song.
Tell me not that in endurance lies the remedy of the pang
of separation,
Nor that it unravels the mystery of death.
It is callousness for the lover to be patient,
For it is a long distance from love to endurance.)

This deep attachment of Iqbal was responsible for those thought-provoking, fine poems which he composed in his sojourns at Bhopal at the house of Sir Ross Masud. It will be of some interest to remember the words of Dr. Zahir-ud-Din Ahmad Aljamaee, Head of the Department of Religious and Cultural Affairs at the Osmania University:²

"Once on my way to Lahore, I broke journey at Bhopal in order to see Sir Ross Masud. Iqbal was at that time staying with him, but was ill and nearly confined to bed. It was *Shab-e-Me'raj* (the night of the Ascension of the Holy Prophet). In his capacity as Minister for Religious Affairs, it was incumbent upon Sir Ross Masud to be present at a meeting in the Shahjehan mosque. He took me to the meeting. A divine was delivering his sermon. The vulgar manner in which he spoke on the mysteries of Revelation and Prophethood and the brazen-faced way in which he quoted Iqbal in his support, greatly pained Sir Ross Masud. He could not stay there for long, as it was not possible for him to stand that kind of nonsense.

²اقبال کی کہانی کچھ میری اور کچھ ان کی زبانی، صفحات ۵۵-۶۳

"On returning home, we found that Iqbal had not yet gone to bed, for he was a little restless on account of heart trouble. Ross Masud, who was a fine conversationalist and had a lively sense of humour, and whose words were a nectar to the ailing Iqbal, went up to him and narrated the entire incident, which had depressed him but which amused Iqbal. It greatly comforted him and a broad smile beamed upon his face, and in a sportive yet serious tone, he retorted:

" 'If the divine has quoted my verses to his purpose, there is nothing strange in it, for a similar incident happened to (Imam) Ghazali. When after a long and tiresome journey, he arrived at Damascus, on a Friday, it was time for prayer and he decided to go to the Ummayyid mosque in the city. The mosque was already filled to capacity, and Ghazali had to accommodate himself on the steps where the devotees leave their shoes, for he did not like to push his way through the congregation, but was content to be seated at that very spot. When the prayers were over, a preacher tried to prove his eloquence. At one stage he quoted Ghazali in his support. The Imam was taken aback at being so grossly misquoted but due to his own good nature, ascribed the preacher's misquotation to be based upon some misapprehension.

" 'In keeping with the conventions of renunciation, Ghazali, however, did not interrupt the preacher during the course of the sermon, but no sooner was it finished, the meeting being dispersed, he moved towards the speaker, in utter humility and requested him to be permitted to have a private audience with him. The preacher dismissed the request summarily, calling him a child and saying that there was no need of granting a private audience for he permitted him to say publicly whatever he had in mind. When Ghazali pointed out the mistake, the preacher flew into a wild rage. 'Are you crazy that you should call yourself Ghazali? Even if your father named you thus, you cannot impersonate Imam Ghazali', rebuked the preacher. At this Ghazali quietly came away without offering any reply to him'.

"After narrating the incident, Iqbal cheerfully added: 'Had I told the divine that what he had expressed was quite foreign to my purpose, I do not expect to have been treated any better than Ghazali'.

"This short talk made Iqbal feel as if he had regained health. Sir Ross Masud, however, did not like to wait upon him any longer and left after bidding the poet good night.

"The idle talk of the divine spurred Iqbal on, and proved to be a fine source of inspiration, for out of evil cometh good." Dr. Zahiruddin Ahmad has further recorded that, "when on the following morning all of them sat down for tea, Iqbal informed them he had spontaneously expressed his views on the Meaning of Revelation. Ross Masud, for whom every word of Iqbal was a revelation, was all ears and he requested the poet to recite his new poem, which Iqbal did in his usual dignified manner:

عقل بے مایہ امامت کی سزاوار نہیں

راہبر ہو ظن و تحم یں تو زبوں کار حیات

فکر بے نور ترا اور عمل بے بنیاد

سخت مشکل ہے کہ روشن ہو شب تار حیات

خوب و نا خوب عمل کی ہو گرہ وا کیونکر

گر حیات آپ نہ ہو شارح اسرار حیات

(Poor as Reason is, it is not capable of guiding;

Miserable would be life if the guide suffered from doubts.

Thy thoughts lack the light of Faith and thy acts are utterly without a foundation.

The dark night of existence can hardly receive any light from thee.

How can the riddle of good and evil be solved?

If Life itself be not the interpreter of the Secrets of Life)

"The exposition of the meaning of Revelation from Iqbal's own lips cast a spell on the audience, which can better be felt than described. Sir Ross Masud was almost besides himself and was repeating the verses time and again. This original exposition of the meaning of Revelation removed every sense of strangeness and remoteness attached to this problem, and made us realise that Revelation is not a superim-posed commandment, on the other hand it is a stream springing out from the depths of human heart. The heart of the Prophet is a bright mirror for humanity, reflecting the individual conscience of man and the natural needs of human life. From the heart of the Prophet there springs the stream of knowledge and intuition which slake the thirst of human nature, and represent the conscience of entire humanity.

"What a wonderful and satisfying exposition of the Revelations? It proves that while passing through the evolutionary process, life gets involved in different problems and doubts and loses its way. Reason, being subservient to life, can only doubt and guess but is incapable of setting a sure standard to be followed. When it finds itself helpless in solving these riddles with the aid of the senses, it goes to solve these riddles without the aid of senses and at last takes the right and sure path to the real destination. This solution of the riddle is according to Iqbal 'Revelation'."

"The birth of Islam, as I hope to be able presently to prove to your satisfaction, is the birth of inductive intellect. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves

the keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings; that in order to achieve full self-consciousness man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Quran, and the emphasis that it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality."³

Similarly *Shariat* or the Divine Law, whose fountain head is Revelation, is no superimposed commandment. On the other hand, it is a set of rules originating from the depths of life, to which Iqbal refers thus:

فاش م ی خواہی اگر اسرار دین

جز باعماق ضمیر خود میں

(If you want to know the secrets of the Faith,

Do not look anywhere, but into the depths of your own hearts)

In other words:

حقیقت را بہ رندے فاش کردند

کہ ملاکم شناسد راز دین را

(The Truth dawned upon the Libertine,

For the Divine scarcely comprehends the secrets of the Faith)

³ The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, reprinted January 1962, page 126.

The term revelation as used by Sir Ross Masud is synonymous with poetic inspiration. Hence it must be differentiated from Revelation when used in its strict sense.

Sir Ross Masud held that Iqbal's poetry is a fine specimen of poetic inspiration, which is distinguished from Revelation in so far as Revelation presupposes some divine agency through which divine commands are conveyed; on the other hand inspiration is the inner voice, which is further distinguished from Intuition. Intuition is the developed form of Intellect. It presupposes training in a particular field; while inspiration is the inner voice or the outburst of one's conscience. Hafiz beautifully illustrates this subtle point:

سر خدا که عارف سالک یہ کس نہ گفت

در حیرتم کہ بادہ فروش از کجا شنید

(The secret of God which the gnostic never revealed to any body I am at a loss to know, how it inspired the wine-seller.)