

A UNIQUE LETTER OF IQBAL

by

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As a student of M. A. Final Class in the Faculty of Economics during the academic session 1931-1932 of the University of Allahabad, I was required, under the University Regulations, to write a research paper on any subject connected with Economics to be submitted two months before the annual examination. I selected "Economic Theory in Islam" as my subject for the research paper, a subject which was so far unthought of by any teacher in the Faculty. When I broached it to the Head of the Department and other teachers, they expressed their concurrence but at the same time they showed their concern over the meagre material available for research.

I wanted to consult Iqbal in this connection but a friend from Lahore advised me that Iqbal was making preparations to go to Europe and that he would not be available quite for sometime. However undaunted by the difficulties I began my work.

I discovered in the University Library a very useful book *Muhammadan Theories of Finance* by Aghnides, published by the Columbia University. Aghnides was a Turkish citizen of Greek Orthodox Church. He worked as an official in the Revenue Department of the Ottoman Empire, for it was the practice in those days that the Ottoman Government employed mostly

Greeks for collection of taxes and other revenue work. In order, therefore, to facilitate the Revenue work and to bring it in line with the theory of Finance in Islam, the Ottoman Government deputed Aghnides to study Islamic theory of Finance at the Columbia University so that it could be applied later on to the Ottoman practice. Aghnides went to the U. S. A. sometime before the First World War and stayed at Columbia for more than two years. His book came out in 1916. In a way he was a pioneer in this field.

Aghnides has in his book dealt only with Taxation and Public Finance and has not touched upon other branches of economic life. My line, however, needed a more extensive field.

With whatever material I could lay my hand on, I wrote an 80-page paper which was duly approved and appreciated by the examiners, one of whom was a famous Indian economist. But I was not satisfied with it. Long after the examination, when Iqbal was back again in Lahore I sent the paper to him, seeking his guidance and advice. And the following letter I received in reply.

Lahore, 29th May, 1933

Dear Sir,

I am extremely sorry I have no time to read your Essay. But I would suggest that you should make a careful study of the ideas of Mussolini. The essence of Islamic Economics is to render the growth of large capitals impossible. Mussolini and Hitler think in the same way. Bolshevism has gone to the extrem of abolishing capitalism altogether. In all aspects of life Islam always takes the middle course. Says the Quran :

وكذلك جعلناكم امة وسطاً لتكونوا شهداء على الناس و يكون الرسول عليكم

⁸⁰شہید

The subject of the شرايع of Islam is only a recent discovery in Europe. Its importance is likely to attract the attention of European scholars. Indeed some German scholars have already begun to work at it. You may also read with advantage a book called the *Sociology of Islam*. I forget the name of the author.

Yours truly

⁸⁰ . ii. 143: "And thus we have made you an exalted nation that you may be the bearers of witness to the people and (that) the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you."

The *Sociology of Islam* is by Prof. Reuben Levy who taught Persian Language and Literature at the University of London. Incidentally he produced this book in the late twenties. The book has now come out with more elaborate theme under a different title.

In this letter reference to Mussolini and Hitler, specially to Hitler, is rather interesting. Iqbal had met Mussolini in Rome in 1932 and was much impressed by his dynamic personality. He saw that Italian life was galvanised by Mussolini. The spirit of siesta was being replaced by feverish activity in all departments of life. Thus being favourably impressed by what Musolini was doing, Iqbal wrote an eulogistic poem about the Italian dictator which has been characterised by the critics of Iqbal as a poem in praise of Fascism.

But three years (1935) later when Mussolini attacked undefended and poor Abyssinia, Iqbal came out with two scathing poems full of acidity and sarcasm, condemning the Italian aggression in his own manner. In the first poem he painted Mussolini as an *enfant terrible* of Western imperialism which had had ruthless expansion in Asia and Africa, crucified humanity on the cross of gold and sacrificed non-white races at the altar of greed. In the last two lines of the poem Mussolini is made to address the western imperialists as follows:

تم نے لوٹے بے نوا صحرا نشینوں کے خیام

تم نے لوٹی کشت دہقان! تم نے لوٹے تخت و تاج

پردہ تہذیب میں غارت گری، آدم کشی

اکل روار کھی تھی تم نے، میں روار رکھتا ہوں آج

(ضرب کلیم)

You looted the tents of the poor denizens of the desert,

You appropriated the harvest of the farmers And destroyed
thrones and crowns.

In the name of civilisation you justified genocide, Arson and
plunder yesterday,

I do the same Today. (Where is my crime?)

In another poem he took up the question of Abyssinia in the
light of international events and gave his opinion that the
spoilation of Abyssinia would prove to be the preamble of a
bigger world tragedy. His forecast was correct as later events
proved it. Here are those lines:

یورپ کے کرگسوں کو نہیں ابھی خبر

ہے کتنی زہرناک ابی سینا کی لاش!

ہونے کو ہے یہ مردہ دیرینہ قاش قاش

تہذیب کا کمال شرافت کا ہے زوال

غارت گہری جہاں میں ہے اقوام کی معاش

ہر گرگ کو ہے برہ معصوم کی تلاش!

اے وائے آبروئے کلیسا کا آئنے

روما نے کر دیا سر بازار پاش پاش

پیر کلیسا! یہ حقیقت ہے دل خراش!

(ضرب کلیم)

The vultures of Europe are not yet aware

How poisonous is the dead body of Abyssinia!

This old dead body is to be shortly cut to pieces.

The perfection of civilisation is but a decline in human dignity;

Plunder and arson provide now the livelihood of nations.

Every wolf now is in search of an innocent victim.

Alas! Rome has broken to pieces in the market place.

The mirror of the honour of the Church.

O, Father of the Church ! This is a heart-rending reality.

The reference to the Church is also interesting, for the Church in all imperialist countries of the West has all along been a strong supporter of colonial expansion in Asia and Africa. There is also the hint at the concordat which Mussolini had with the Church of Rome in 1929 and which removed the tension at least for some time between him and the Church and brought in cooperation above all in the colonial field.

Now let us come to the anti-capitalism of Mussolini which Iqbal has mentioned in the letter. G.D.H. Cole, a noted British economist, in his book *Practical Economics* (1937), says that "Mussolini has often declared that the country (Italy) is unsuitable for intensive capitalist development under present conditions" (p. 137). Then Mussolini upheld private property and wanted to bring big capitalists and other big property owners under the control of the State.

Iqbal's reference to Hitler is in a way striking, for in no other private correspondence of his, or public statements or private conversation he has been reported to have said anything about Hitler in relation to his views on capitalism and private property. Yet what Iqbal has said about Hitler is correct, at least in the pre-governmental phase of Nazism. It may be noted here that Hitler came to power on January 30, 1933, and this letter was written from Lahore on May 29, 1933, only four months after that memorable event. Then Nazism had not yet taken a capitalist position. So what Iqbal has said should pertain to the views of Hitler upto that time.

Like Mussolini, Hitler also believed in private property but wanted to restrict it to the needs of small man. As G.D.H. Cole points out, "the Nazis came to power as the decided enemies of Big Business, the friends of the 'small man' who was being ground down by the great capitalist trusts, the inveterate enemies of Marxism but the advocates of National Socialism that would put the claim of the whole people far above those of any sectional interests" (p. 107).

This is further verified by a reference to Hitler himself. In an interview given to a representative of the Associated Press in August 1932, Hitler is reported to have said, "It would not do to have wealth and property concentrated in the hands of a few people or a few concerns. When this property is wisely distributed amongst millions of our people—that is when everybody has his share of the goods of the world—then we hope to supply the proper offset to the Communists'ideas." (*The Speeches of Adolf Hitler: 1921-1939*, p. 776, Vol I, Ed. by Norman H. Baynes, Oxford University Press, 1942).

This division of property amongst the millions is certainly opposed to the principle of the growth of big capital in private hands, But it does not mean that the State should not develop big capital. As Hitler himself once said, one could not produce a railway engine in a blacksmith's workshop. For this and other similar industries the State should have big manufacturing and capital organisations. What he wanted was the restriction of

capital in private hands for it creates great deal of mischief in society and goes against social well-being.

But as later events proved, both Mussolini and Hitler abjured their former principles and bowed their heads before big business. Perhaps their external politics led them to this path. But we are not concerned here with this. Iqbal's position is, however, not affected by what happened subsequently. He cannot be regarded as a believer in the Nazi or Fascist doctrines as they culminated in the Second World War.