

MUHAMMAD IQBAL'S SOCIAL THOUGHT

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The development of the social philosophy in Pakistan is greatly influenced by the social ideas of Muhammad Iqbal. His social thought reflected the peculiarity and duality of the social structure and social psychology of the Muslim middle class in colonial India, that is why he became really a leader of Muslim intellectuals.

The formation of the ideology of the middle strata was, every-where, closely connected with the reformation of religion.

Iqbal was the originator of the new trends in the re-interpretation of Islam. By the reconstruction of the religious thought he tried to form not only the philosophical background of the anticolonial liberation ideas but also a new social philosophy, which reflected not only the anti-imperialistic feelings of the Muslim middle class but also its anti-capitalistic aspirations. It reflected also people's utopian ideas of social equality of men not only before God but on earth.

The formation of Iqbal's social views was greatly influenced by the philosophy of three prominent Muslim thinkers: Shah Waliullah, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Jamal al-Din Afghani. Their philosophy attracted Iqbal first of all as an attempt to reconstruct Islam in a sense specific to their people and their time.

The social principles of Iqbal's philosophy were based on the main ideas of Waliullah's philosophy about the differences between the essence of religion and its dogmas, between a set of spiritual principles formulated on a definite pattern, and local religious laws interpreted in terms of time and place. Iqbal shared Waliullah's interpretation of the difference between *Klass* (particular) and *'Amm* (general), between *Nass* (a word having only one definite meaning, and no other possible meaning) and *Zahir* (outward meaning).

"The prophetic method of teaching, according to Shah Waliullah," —said Iqbal,— "is that, generally speaking, the law revealed by a prophet takes especial notice of the habits, ways and peculiarities of the people to whom he is specifically sent."²

Waliullah's ideas on *Ijtihād*, *Ijma'* and *Tavazun* exercised a great influence on Iqbal's social philosophy. Waliullah's teaching on *Ijtihād* reflected the dissatisfaction of the intelligentsia of the day with the stagnation and ignorance of the orthodox, who denied the Muslim right of independent judgement. Waliullah's teaching of *Ijma'* brought out as the most important human virtue, i.e., the feeling of responsibility vis-a-vis society. His teaching on *Tavazun*, or economic equilibrium was sterile in its

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² Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore, 1954, pp. 171-172.

advocacy not of qualitative change, but of a utopian balance of what is.

These ideas of Waliullah had received its further implementation in Iqbal's philosophy of re-interpretation of Islam, and his social ideas of equality and freedom.

Iqbal developed Waliullah's idea that Islamic social laws were specific to Arabic people, and pointed out that these laws cannot be strictly enforced in the case of the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. His main idea was that the Law of Islam was capable of evolution and every people and every new generation have the right of re-interpretation of Islam. "Perhaps the first Muslim, who felt the urge of a new spirit in him was Shah Waliullah of Delhi," said Iqbal.³

Iqbal's social views were also greatly influenced by the philosophy of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the head of Muslim Enlightenment in colonial India in XIX century. Sayyid Ahmad's teaching on the common good roused the mind of Muslim educated society from its torpor. As we know, he was the coinor of two expressions: *apni madad ap* (self-help) and *qaumi ham-dardi* (national fellowship) ; the former, as he asserted, was operative from ancient days, the other the product of the age. Like Waliullah's teaching on *Ijma'* it was based on the idea of the responsibility of the men vis-a-vis the society, but contrary to Waliulah, Sayyid Ahmad Khan's concept of national fellowship

³ Ibid., p. 97.

had not a religious but a secular interpretation, for instance his ideas about reconciliation of Islam with nature. If religion, he argued, corresponds to nature it is true ; if it contradicts nature it cannot claim to be God-given. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, said Iqbal, "was the first modern Muslim to catch a glimpse of the positive character of the age which was coming... he was the first Indian Muslim who felt the need of a fresh orientation of Islam and worked for it."⁴

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's ideas of national fellowship were developed later in Iqbal's social philosophy of active man. Iqbal highly appreciated also the nechari philosophy, as a fresh orientation of Islam, although his own philosophy greatly differs from Sayyid Ahmad Khan's religious views.

Iqbal never shared also the pro-British orientation of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Iqbal's social philosophy even at the early stage of its development was entirely free from pro-British illusion and was directly opposed to all form of foreign oppression. This attitude reflected in Iqbal's patriotic poetry of the beginning of the century (his poem 'Taswir-e Dard' and others). In Iqbal's poetic thinking India was "the bird in the snare" and none must rest until it be freed.

In the development of Iqbal's social thought the period before the First World War was of great importance. He was closely connected with the political activities of the radical Muslim

⁴ Shamloo (ed.) Speeches and Statements of Iqbal (Lahore, Sep. 1948), p. 131.

intellectuals, who represented the interests of the Muslim middle strata. In this time Muslim progressive public thinking largely assumed the Pan-Islamic forms. Jamal al-Din Afghani and his followers among the Egyptian educators and the member of the Young Turk movement exercised a strong influence on the emergence of the Pan-Islamic views of Iqbal. First of all Iqbal was attracted by Jamal al-Din's ideas of the revivalism of Islamic traditions and their new interpretation in order to turn them into an impulse of the independent progressive development of the colonial people and a mean of consolidation of the Muslims of the World against the oppression of the West. Iqbal had given a very high appreciation of the role of Jamal al-Din Afghani in the development of Muslim social thought. 'If his indefatigable, but divided energy, could have devoted itself entirely to Islam as a system of human belief and conduct," said Iqbal, "the world of Islam, intellectually speaking, would have been on a much more solid ground today."⁵

Iqbal's own social philosophy was also based on the ideas of the reconstruction of the religious thought. He wanted to revive such traditions of Islam, which were dear to the hearts of the Muslim masses. The goal of his new interpretation of this tradition was to awake national consciousness and political activities of the Muslim masses and to give a philosophical basis to his social ideals.

⁵ Iqbal, Reconstruction, p. 97.

Of great interest, from this point of view, is Iqbal's poetic message to the students of the Aligarh University, written at the time of the awakening of the liberation movement during the years 1905-1908. At a time when the chiefs of the Aligarh University tried to isolate the students from the revolutionary movement and revolutionary ideas, Iqbal called for the political activities of the Muslim intellectuals. At the same time he recognised that the new consciousness was not yet formed and the moment did not come to throw away the tradition of the past.⁶ But he was sure that such a moment will come. The awakening of the masses was, from his point of view, the sacred duty of the intellectuals.

Iqbal was the first philosopher, who speaks about the civic duty of the poet. The poet, he said, must be the "all-seeing eye of the people," closely linked with his body—the masses of the people. The intellectuals were, after Iqbal's social concept, the natural leaders of the people, and the working masses—"people's hands and feet."⁷

At the same time Iqbal's social philosophy was based on the ideas of social equality and utopian socialistic ideals. The formation of this ideal was greatly influenced by the October Socialist Revolution in Russia, by the broad participation of the masses in the liberation movement in colonial India, and last but not least by the inception of organised working class struggle in

⁶ "طلبہ علی گڑھ کالج کے نام" بانگ درا، لاہور، 1952ء، صفحہ 119

⁷ "شاعر" بانگ درا، صفحہ 53

the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Iqbal greeted the October Socialist Revolution, which set, as he said, the beginning of a new era, the era of the workers, the era of the ruin of the old orders, the end of the old World. Iqbal's poetic symbol of this change is Kuhkan—stone mason who wanted to rise to the place of Parwiz, the place of a ruler?⁸

The idea of the inevitability of the revolution was symbolized in Iqbal's social philosophy. It received a concrete form in his poem "Inqilab".⁹

دلوں میں ولولہ انقلاب بے پیدا
قریب آگئی شاید جہان پیر کی
موت

The hearts are throbbing with a yearning for revolution. Perhaps the days of the old world are numbered.

He pointed out that after the October Revolution the peoples of the East cannot suffer further the colonial yoke. Their psychology is changing, their national consciousness must inevitably rise.

چشم بگشای اگر چشم تو صاحب
نظر است
زندگی در پی تعمیر جہان دگر
است

Open your eyes ; if you have a discerning look, See, Life is planning a New World.

⁸ "پیام" پیام مشرق، صفحہ 325-326

⁹ "انقلاب" ضرب کلیم، صفحہ 139

—he said in one of his best poems "Payām".¹⁰

In the foreword to Payam-e Mashriq Iqbal wrote, that "the East, especially the Muslim East after a longlasting somnolency had opened her eyes."¹¹ Yet, while writing so, he preferred the way of evolution.

He pointed out, that to be able to create a new World, the man must change his own nature. From his point of view, the moral perfection of Man was an indispensable condition of the social changes and the only effective way of this change was the way of Islam.

At the same time Iqbal never shared the idea of the divine pre-determination of the destiny of Man and of the passive attitude of Man in the World.

In one of his best philosophical poems Asrār-i Khudi he wrote:

The pith of life is contained in action,
The delight of creation is the life of life.¹²

His social philosophy was a philosophy of an active man. As one of the Pakistani scholars, Hafeez Malik, pointed out in his book, Iqbal "sees his mission in stimulating creative activity among the Muslims and imbuing the idle looker-on with restless

¹⁰ "پیام" پیام مشرق، صفحہ 325-326

¹¹ پیام مشرق، صفحہ

¹² اسرار و رموز، صفحہ 34

impatience."¹³ He calls to action in the name of Islam. He considers the chief remedy against the deterioration of Muslim society self-recognition of the man (Athbāt-i Khudi) and self-recognition of the duty of Man before society.

Life must not be contemplated but changed. "The final act," said Iqbal, "is not an intellectual act, but a vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego and sharpens his will with the creative assurance that the world is not something to be merely seen or known through concepts, but something to be made and re-made by continuous action."¹⁴

Iqbal's social philosophy was based on the idea of the active fight against the social evil.

In Asrār-i Khudi Iqbal contrasted the soft coal (symbol of passive Man) to the diamond (symbol of active Man). The diamond said to the coal:

فارغ از خوف و غم و
وسواس باش
پخته مثل سنگ شو
الماس باش
در صلابت آبروئی
زندگی است
ناتوانی ناکسی نا پختگی
است

Bevoid of fear, grief, and anxiety;

¹³ Hafeez Malik, Muslim Nationalism in India and Pakistan, Washington, p. 242.

¹⁴ Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 198.

Be hard as a stone, be a diamond!

In solidity consists the glory of Life;

Weakness is worthlessness and Immaturity. 11.1221-2,
1229-30.

Only the activity, the self-recognition. of his active possibilities can a coal into a diamond.

To Descartes' interpretation of the true being: "I think so I am" ("cogito ergo sum") Iqbal opposed his own interpretation: "I act so I am." The activity of Man was, from Iqbal's point of view, the manifestation of his free will. Iqbal tried to reconcile Kant's interpretation of the "free will" with the Sufian interpretation of an "Ideal Man". He saw the direct connection between the immortality of Man and his activity on the earth. But not all forms of activity can be recognised as true but only such a form, which is useful to society, which can aid the progressive development of society. Iqbal's interpretation of social progress was based on the idea of the struggle between the two original principles: the good and the evil. This concept was quite dialectic and was based on the realisation of the possibility of the Man to change evil into good.

On the collective activity of man depends the progress of the society.

On the thorny question of man's relationship to society he admitted the conflict, but in common with so many utopian and even reactionary theorists, he found it resolved in service to God.

But he was not a religious chauvinist. After his concept of Islamic democracy, society and state must eschew every type of religious prejudice and defend the interests of the Muslim and the unbeliever with scrupulous impartiality.

At the same time Iqbal interpreted "service to God" as the fulfilment of the moral principles and social ideals of Islam. From his point of view Man has the attributes of God and so he must be the viceregent of God on earth.

The main idea of Iqbal's social concept was, that the social order in Islam is founded on the principle of tawhid—unity of God--the essence of which is equality, solidarity and freedom.

Equality was first of all the equality of men before God. At the same time he calls also for just distribution of material wealth and social rights in the society. He was sympathetic to all the economic aspects of Socialism and shared an utopian idea that Islam and socialism can supplement each other.

Iqbal's idea of solidarity was an idea of Muslim solidarity. But his ideal of freedom included the condemnation of Western imperialism and capitalistic exploitation.

In his poetic and philosophic works Iqbal condemned the exploitation of the peoples of the East by the imperialism of the

West, the exploitation of the peasant by the landlord, of the worker by the capitalist. He ridiculed and condemned the Western democracy and denied the right of the landlord to exploit the peasant and the right of the capitalist to misappropriate the fruit of the labour.

In Iqbal, philosophy and the poet were not always of one piece' Notwithstanding such duality and weakness, his social philosophy was redolent of deep humanism. His own social duty Iqbal saw in the service to his people. In this service he saw the criterion of the truth of his philosophy and of the success of political activity.¹⁵

ملت کے ساتھ رابطہ
رکھ استوار
پیوستہ رہ شجر سے امید
رکھ بہار

The pain and anguish born of love Is like a precious ware:

I would not change my bondman's state For lordship free
from care.

How can this life or life to come A lover's heart enslave?

An endless life must pinch him there And here the fear of
grave.

¹⁵ بانگ درا، صفحہ 280

The veil that keeps your beauty hid In flames a lover's heart:
The fire of love still brighter burns If the Dear keeps apart.

On mountains bleak, in deserts waste, The hawk can find
some rest:

He thinks it as too mean and base To seek a cosy nest.

Was it the bounty of a glance

Or tutor's skill or art ;

From whom the son of Hajar learnt

To play the filial part?

The brave and firm for pilgrimage To my tomb shall wend:

For way-side dust from me hath learnt The secrets of
Alwand.

Good thoughts can spare a rhymer's art To make them trim
and smart:

To give the tulip crimson hue

Nature shall play its part.

—A. A. Shah English rendering of a ghazal in Bal-i Jibril,
pp. 21-22.