

IQBAL AND THE MODERN MAN

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When Pakistan - the great vision of Iqbal — came into existence, the Islamic community thought it had arrived at its destination. It put down its guards and put aside its arms. It did so when, in fact, the great struggle was just beginning. In a simple-minded fashion, political liberty was confused with spiritual and intellectual freedom. The first, doubtless, has been achieved, but achieving the second, demanded a more arduous devotion and constant effort.

2. Observing the community's performance over the last 27 years, a critic could justifiably charge that the post-partition history of Pakistan can be characterized as the beginning of a new type of Western imperialism, particularly through economic aid and trade on the one hand, and through cheap books, magazines, films and radio on the other. The power was so subtly exercised that the new slaves did not recognise the chains any more. They called them borrowed bracelets!

3. To Iqbal, the spiritually empty but externally glittering West, against which he warned the community so insistently, was a threat, looming large. Perhaps, he did not anticipate how overwhelmingly would it enchant the beleaguered community. When Iqbal rung his warning bell, against Western materialism, there were many, even in the West, who saw the symptoms but stoutly protested against the charge and claimed that basically the heart was in the right place and Western Man was spiritually as healthy as ever. Since then a great deal happened to more than justify Iqbal's pre-monition.

4. The Second World War, the discovery of the wide-spread spiritual emptiness of the Nazi and Fascist regimes and the colossal inhumanity of Stalin's regime shattered all illusions about the existence of spiritual strength in the Western Man. The display of unspeakable inhumanity in Pearl Harbour and Hiroshima, in Moscow and in Hungary, in Dachau and many other places shattered all the carefully nurtured illusions about the existence of an enviable value pattern in the Western Man. This was one facet.

5. Side by side, the total power available to mankind to produce goods for immediate satisfaction of physical needs and pleasures has increased manifold. There has come about a worldwide democratisation of good things

of life. The spiritual emptiness of the modern materialist is sought to be filled by the sound of jazz and din of automobiles. People recklessly plunge into a race for acquisition of things to distract the mind, to engage the eye, to satiate the body, and fill all the time. In the 20th century, there has been no shortage of worldly philosophers justifying the new materialism. But the newly discovered power has another aspect also. Means are now available to release the natural forces imprisoned in matter at a dimension that humanity can easily obliterate itself out of existence. The possibility of total destruction is one pervasive fact of modern world. The resultant outlook is singularly confused.

6. Notwithstanding the astounding glitter, the growing spiritual emptiness continues. The facade of normalcy shows signs of strain and decay. Each day, its mortar crumbles a little more. The much touted and so-called axiomatic principles of economics and politics seem ever so uncertain sources of strength. Democracy or its identifiable techniques do not seem any more to prevent totalitarianism, or oppression; fundamental rights bind no dictator's hand; tight monetary controls no more prevent inflation; state-controlled cooperatives or socialised farming does not increase the produce; nor the state-controlled industries assure a better lot to the individual worker.

7. The decisions are increasingly getting out of hand. A worker in a factory hardly has a meaningful say in regard to what he does or produces. At a slightly higher scale, the manager of the factory finds himself a helpless creature in the hands of yet higher and stronger combinations. The legislator in the highest national legislature feels equally helpless. The options and choices in the making of national legislative: policy originate and are dealt with at a yet different level, and often enough the legislatures are called upon to merely authenticate what has already been decided beforehand. This is true of Soviet Supreme as of British Parliament, perhaps with only a slight difference of degrees. A frustrating sense of helplessness seems to permeate society at all its levels.

8. Simultaneously, a mad struggle is on to control the communication media, the means to manipulate the human mind. The colossal battle for the control of human mind is on in full fury. Radio, television, films, newspapers, magazines and paperbacks are now locked in struggle to control human mind. All entertainment and information is objective oriented—whether to promote free enterprise in the so-called free societies, or the fearsome leviathan known as the modern socialist welfare state. Overt and covert

indoctrination goes on constantly. In the evenings or at night, after the day's chores are done, hardly any conversation or exchange takes place between parents and children or husband-wife. They are all being talked to, by the Radio or the television, who represent either the 'big industry' or the "big brother". The hard-earned free hours have become the covert schools for deprivation of all freedom. Freedom implies a genuine possibility of choice — an exercise of critical faculty. But where all media reaching the most private sanctuary of a man's home give no information but constantly serve creation of a desired opinion, then the critical faculty is put to a deep slumber; it has no chance of survival. However, when the performance of a self-proclaimed welfare state fails to match its promise, large doses of propaganda whet the appetite but fail to carry conviction; the daily widening gap between expectations and achievements produces two typical reactions: scepticism and apathy in some and commitment to violent and revolutionary politics in others. Scepticism and apathy produce lack of commitment and nothing is more tragic than a soul without faith and without commitment. On the other hand, the revolutionary politics of gun reduces humans to irrational animal level and destroys the under-pinning of law on which the edifice of civilization is built. Informalism and return of mysticism represent reaction of yet another type where it is not merely imitative, it is essentially a search for authentic experience. For the third world, the problem is compounded because a spirit of thought-less imitativeness permeates the avant-garde of the developing countries. Everywhere elites count, but they do a great deal more in developing countries. Our elites thoughtlessly, without an authentic experience of the spiritual and intellectual crises that faces the Western youth, imitatively adopt the external styles of the current categories. Far too many are phoney hippies madly engaged in their hedonistic frenzies; vocal socialists furiously building up bourgeoisie industrial or agricultural empires for them-selves. Such widescale absence of authenticity at every level double confounds an already confused situation. In such a situation, old songs of wisdom and of moderation find few listeners.

9. Constant and speedy change has become a special feature of modern times. The revolution in technology and the cosequent changes in the very structure of human society has made yesterday's solutions otiose for today's problems. Whether it is the field of crop-raising or making of raiment or manipulating of public mind, father's wisdom and experience has become irrelevant for the son. This has had understandable effect in other fields also.

If father's technology could be improved upon, why not his morality, is a growing question in many a young mind, particularly when he is being constantly exposed to aggressive secularism.

10. Things are no better in regard to the past also. There was a time when it provided an image of what people had to aspire for it provided the wisdom which could be trusted as dependable means to solve all problems. Alas! the past has no such promise for the modern man. Over the centuries, a great change has come about in the West. The orthodox Church insisted that everything pronounced by it was as valid and binding as 'the religion', as if the Church was immune from error; no part could be rejected without involving rejection of the eschatology of the whole. Protestantism was a rebellion from within the Christian community, but the rise of scienticism was rebellion without. The very argument that rejection of the part amounts to rejection of the whole was utilized by the modern scientists with deadly effectiveness. They asserted that if a part of what the Church claimed to be revealed could be demonstrated as false or erroneous, no guarantee remained for the truthfulness of the rest. The rise of scienticism provided a great impetus to the modern secularism which seems to have eroded the foundation of religion in the West. When the Church's world view was shaken, its ethical teachings also lost their authority. This was not all. The proponents of all the earth-oriented and secular philosophies borrowed left and right to give new blows to hereafter oriented religions. The theory of relativity was plainly abused to justify the thesis that there was nothing permanent about ethical values and they were also relative in content and application; that there was no higher moral law above the Man, and Man was the maker of all laws including the moral laws. Freud and Marx provided theoretical foundations for mounting fresh attacks.

11. One discernible result of some of above trends is that many, feeling powerless to control their future and finding no meaningful guidance from the past, imagine that the present alone holds the possibility for their meaningful participation, for they can still possess the moment. By choosing to live only in the present, the modern man cuts himself from those values which had propped man's vision of himself as hero in history. The sense of unfolding of a divine design has no meaning for him; long-terms goals have lost their relevance. Institutions like marriage and filial ties have become forms without their former content. Marriage was for protection of virtue; it becomes outmoded where extracting the last drop of pleasure from the

fleeting time is the top priority. Without an identifiable and permanent frame of reference, everyone feels free to seek perpetuation of what he thinks best. The opponent is, by necessary logic of the situation, either wrong or misguided. The issue in conflict is, therefore, not resolved on principle but gets sorted out on the basis of power. The unresolved conflicts continue to increase. The future appears full of foreboding symptoms.

12. Iqbal was keenly aware of the dangers that were implicit in the West for people in the East who were then actively seeking political independence. He warned against the gathering threatening clouds. He persistently pleaded for a clear-sighted commitment to Islam. He boldly sought a separate Muslim State to provide a refuge for the Muslim community wherein it could separately build up the spiritual and physical resources to meet the new challenge.

13. A great surge of enthusiasm got the Muslims a separate homeland. However, quite erroneously, many thought that they had arrived at the destination. Everyone imagined that they could now within the safe sanctuary of the new-found State carry on as before. Few realized that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Little was it realized that modern media of communication recognised no frontiers. The shrinking of the world creates problems common to all humanity. The 'learned in religion' were not yet willing to take a lesson from the experience of Catholic Church in the West. Many persisted as before in refusing to make a distinction between the faith and the historical, space-time oriented experience of the community; between the guiding spirit and the historical shell. Many are quite deaf and blind to what Iqbal was attempting while writing the closely reasoned six lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam. Not many realized that by re-stating the metaphysics of Islamic thought Iqbal was not rejecting the glorious historical past of the Muslims, but was merely re-applying the first principles afresh, in the light of new knowledge. When many persons are travelling to a distant town, the visions of its outlines would be different at different distances. The view of one looking from a distance of ten miles would certainly give a description different in many particulars from one who observed from a distance of twenty miles. His views will not involve attributing a wilful falsification of his predecessor. He would stand obliged to his predecessor for making his journey possible, by providing the initial guidelines. It is for this reason that for all its modern capabilities, say, in the field of optics, humanity will always remain obliged to Ibn-Haithem, in the

field of radio to Marconi, in philosophy to Aristotle.

14. Iqbal also spoke for urgent fresh and fundamental reconstruction of Islamic Law. A glorious history of a thousand years had amongst other reasons provided a great respectability to the time-tested legal institutions of Muslim people. The immoral attempts of the Rulers during the period of decay and decline to find legal cover for their misdeeds compelled the popularization of the principle of 'Taqlid' by the Ulema. But the new dawn for the Muslim community required a fresh look at the historical heritage. Iqbal was keen that even during his very lifetime he should see a new attempt at rationalization of legal institutions to enable the community to carry the burden of new responsibilities that freedom will bring. He could visualize the new importance that law would acquire in the new world that was shaping. Some work was done, but a very great deal remains. There are innumerable fields wherein the bewildered humanity could grate-fully learn from Islam. In the field of constitutional law, family law, of contract or crimes, Islam has something of great significance to contribute. The pity is that as if in a great big dark hall, the true light-bearers do not as yet know how to switch on their lights. The re-statement of Islamic law for the twentieth century is a project yet awaiting completion. An 'Ijtihad', guided wholly by the spirit of Quran and Sunnah and operating within the limits of Allah, has yet to find universal recognition, acceptance and articulation.

15. To carry the message of Islam to a sick world, is the immediate task which faces all the serious-minded Muslims and particularly those who would like to tread the path that Iqbal lighted. Change — constant change — is, like sheer speed, a new element of the 20th Century world. To discover and stick to an abiding frame of reference is the most challenging problem of the modern Man. We shall have to discover a way to restore Man his dignity. For, the Beat generation is a generation of orphans, cut off from the past and severed from their future. They have heard too many lies and seen too many satans donning angelic masks. Their education has been one great effort in debunking. For them old history dressed up in new garbs would just not do. It is for this reason that the orthodox modernist carries little conviction with the youth. Their loudly-touted old legal institutions are showing signs of great strain and stress. The solutions shall have to be more radical. We will have to study the Prophetic example anew in fresh light. We have been commanded to follow the guidance of the Prophets. No Prophet was bound by sheer history; nor did they ever feel so; they were makers of history and

not its slaves; they were absolutely committed to principles, which they were willing to apply vigorously and consistently and to all new situations. Whether it was in regard to governance of society or fighting of wars or even choice of the apparel to be worn, the Prophet was willing to select a new institution, a new weapon and even a new dress if it served the principle better. Noah was a great ship-builder, and David made coats, of mail. The Prophet (ﷺ) adopted an Iranian style of defence by digging a defensive canal; he ordered his companions to make and use the long Iranian bow in preference to the short Arab bows. He adopted testud and catapult. He chose the Iranian 'shalwar' as a wearing apparel in preference to loin cloth worn by the Arabs, and when asked for the reason for this preference he is reported to have said to the effect that it was more suited to protection of modesty and that he was commanded to guard his modesty. To strike upon a new solution is as much a Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ) as treading the trodden path. Examples of many new institutions adopted by Umar constitute a classical example.

16. What then must be done now. The first step is to re-state for the benefit of the humanity in general and the Muslim community in particular what Islam has to say to a modern man. The cob-webs of confusion must be removed. The challenge of secret doubts must be squarely met. In the process, we will have to make a sharp distinction between Islam — which, as a 'deen', was completed during the life-time of the Prophet (ﷺ) — and historical experience of the community. Our attempt to pass it off also as 'deen' has created a perpetual feeling of guilt for the committed, and silent apathy for the uncommitted.

17. According to Quran, the main field of effort for spiritual development consists in unflinching commitment to moral effort within the social group. We will have to accept and propagate by word and deed a profile of Islam wherein people gear up to performance of their social obligations.

18. The second step in this behalf would be to work incessantly for restoration of human dignity to Man--to make the Quranic declaration: "Verily — We have honoured the children of Adam", a living reality. Ibn Maaja reports that once circumambulating the Kaaba, the Prophet (ﷺ)

said; 'How agreeable are you and how fragrant is your atmosphere. How sanctified are you and how hallowed is your station (but) I swear by Him who has Mohammad's life in His hand, the sacredness of a Momin with Allah is greater "than " yours.'

19. This sharing of holiness would create in Man a self-view, befitting his station in the creation. Quran has characterized the Muslims as people who have faith, in God, in hereafter, in believers and in themselves. The transformation of Arabs after acceptance of Islam is a perfect example justifying the above assertion. It would not come except by re-affirming the great covenant between God and Man by giving back to Man his responsibility in the universal order of things. It will come if we all actively proceed to give effect to that great commitment made by Prophet on *Hajj-at-ul-Wida* when amongst other things he said:

"Allah says 'O mankind We have created you from a male and a female; and We have made you into families and tribes that you may recognise one another. Verily, the most honourable in the sight of Allah is he who is most righteous amongst you. A coloured man has no preference over a white man, nor a white man over a coloured man, nor an Arab over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, except for righteousness.

"O People, your lives, your honour and your properties are to be respected by one another till the Day of Reckoning comes. They are to be respected as you respect this day (Youm-al-Arfa) and this month (Al-Ha jja) in this city."

To see that each person is assured the opportunity to acquire knowledge and to develop capacity to fulfil his destiny is the extreme limit of society's domain over an individual. To over-see that justice is done and that every one is assured his rights is the obligation of every man and woman in Islam, for the Prophet (ﷺ) when asked as to when justice would be established on earth, is reported to have said: "Justice will be established only when the onlooker feels as outraged as the sufferer of an injustice." Imitating the West, we keep crying for our rights without performing our obligations, when, according to Quran, the whole life of a believer consists in discharging his obligations under his covenant with Allah.

20. Lethargy and lack of commitment are the main diseases arising out of spiritual confusion. People are activated and inspired not by discourse alone but also by deed. Working out an enviable social order wherein an individual could proceed from stage to stage in his evolutionary path is the immediate obligation of all believers. The field of economics and of law need immediate attention. But, even, before the great intellectual framework of a great Islamic society is worked out, there is room even now and here for putting into practice the qualities that according to Quran characterise a Muslim. The Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions were good Muslims even in Mecca before the migration and before the establishment of a truly Islamic State in Medina. In fact, the major cause of contemporary disillusionment with religion is dichotomy demonstrably found between preaching and performance. To a generation fed on propaganda and on an intellectual tradition of debunking of all idealism — whether it be by Comte and Voltaire of old or by the logical positivists, the Freudians and the Marxists of recent times—faith comes with difficulty.

21. Some who live in the West are disillusioned. But there are others—and they are many — who claim disillusionment in sheer limitation. Be that as it may, the problem now has a universal dimension, and the solution shall have to be of the same dimension. In fact, it has to be so because the Prophet (ﷺ) was sent as mercy for the whole mankind. There is room for Muslim intellectuals to enter the current debate in the Western world with confidence and with fervour. It will require a lot of re-thinking because notwithstanding Islam's universal-ism, the Muslims as a community have been too obsessed with their history.