

Dr MUHAMMAD IQBAL FROM NATIONALISM TO UNIVERSALISM

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The events of 1857 dealt a shattering blow to the political supremacy of the Muslims in India. They seemed to have a bleak and uncertain future. The new rulers treated them as a vanquished enemy. By conscious efforts all avenues of progress and advancement were blocked and they were left to suffer in an atmosphere of depression and frustration. However, there was a ray of hope. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Shibli, Hali and other leaders of the Aligarh school made tireless efforts to keep them aware of their past and endeavoured to keep them together as one religious unit. In the beginning it was not possible to provide a clear picture of future objectives. Sudden infiltration of Western secular nationalism had confused the Western-educated classes. The Hindus accepted the Western concept of nationalism wholeheartedly and strove to merge all religious communities of the subcontinent to form a single secular entity. A section of the Muslim community was also carried away by this idea. But the vast majority listened to Sayyid Ahmad Khan and remained aloof from any political activity and concentrated on acquiring knowledge through Western style education.

Muhammad Iqbal, born in Sialkot in 1877, came to Lahore in 1895, as a sensitive young Muslim and joined Government College, Lahore, for higher studies. At that time it was clear that the glory of Islam was fast becoming a matter of past history. The Ottoman Empire was in the process of breaking up. The Chinese and Central Asian Islam had already been absorbed in the Chinese Nationalist Empire and Tsarist Russia. The Muslims were gradually being driven out from Eastern Europe. Iran was collapsing. Egypt was controlled by the British. France was preparing to seize Morocco.

The Muslims of India had given up all hope of regaining their lost freedom after the events of 1857. Under the British they had been reduced to a minority of one hundred million people. The Indian National Congress had been formed in 1885 and gradually the Hindu majority was acquiring more and more favour with the British. Initiative had been snatched away from Muslim hands and they lived like an old man in the past and were perpetually on the defensive.

In this condition of utter despair the Indian Muslims turned towards the movement for Islamic solidarity. This movement was called the Pan-Islamic movement and it was led by Jamal ud din Afghani. Iqbal was profoundly influenced by Afghani's vision of Islamic solidarity.

Iqbal went through a traumatic experience by moving from a nationalist to a universalist. He himself admitted in an interview with a representative of the Bombay Chronicle, 17 September — 31 December 1931, during the Round Table Conference in 1931, that during his student days he was a staunch nationalist, but a change came in his ideas later on. He wrote:

"There is no doubt that my ideas about Nationalism have undergone a definite change. In my college days I was a zealous Nationalist which I am not now. The change is due to a maturer thinking."⁷⁴

Iqbal, however, differentiated between Pan-Islamism and Islamic universalism. Islam being a universal religion does not have a nationalism of its own. Iqbal states:

"Islam is neither Nationalism nor Imperialism but a League of Nations which recognizes artificial boundaries and racial distinctions for facility of reference only, and not for restricting the social horizon of its members."⁷⁵

Iqbal was very sensitive to the fast moving changes in his milieu. One can discover a broad division of three main phases in his thought: First, Pan-Indian nationalist phase up to 1905: second, Pan-Islamist phase, up to 1926, and the third may be de-scribed as the Pakistan nationalist phase, in which he synthesised his religious Pan-Islamism of the second phase with the modern territorial nationalism.

For study of the first phase we have *Bang-i Dara* and poems posthumously collected in different anthologies. For the second phase we have the whole of the third part of *Bang-i Dara* (1924). *Asrar-i Khudi* (1914), *Rumuz-i Bekhudi* (1918), *Payam-i Mashriq* (1923) and his Urdu and English letters, speeches and statements during this period. For the third phase, we have *Zabur-i 'Ajam* (1927), [Six Lecturers on] *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1928), first published in 1930 ; "Khushal Khan

⁷⁴ B.A. Dar, Letters and Writings of Iqbal, pp. 58-59.

⁷⁵ Sir Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore, 1968), p. 159.

Khattak: the Afghan Warrior Poet," 1928 ; Speeches in the Punjab Legislative Assembly (1927-30) ; Presidential Address at the Allahabad Session of the All-India Muslim League (1930); *Javid Namah* (1932), "McTaggart's Philosophy" (1932) ; *Bal-i Jibril* (1935) ; *Pas Chib Bayad Kard* (1936) ; *Darb-i Kalim* (1936) ; Letters to Jinnah (1937); "Polemics with Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani" (1938), *Armughan-i Hijaz* (posthumous).

Between 1895 and 1912 Iqbal's attention was attracted by numerous subjects. In fact, he wrote on whatever moved him. He was fascinated by Nature. He wrote about "Himalah"; and expressed himself on topics like love, solitude, loneliness, etc., and wrote ghazals in the conventional style of Dagh. Between 1895 and 1905, he wrote poems in support of Indian nationalism. His appeal was for union of the two communities which together formed what he thought of as one Indian nation. He desired for the extinction of bigotry and fanaticism:

<p>سارے جہاں سے اچھا ہندوستان ہمارا ہم بلبلیں ہیں اس کی یہ گلستان ہمارا مذہب نہیں سکھاتا آپس میں بیر رکھنا ہندی ہیں ہم وطن ہے ہندوستان ہمارا یونان و مصر و روما سب مٹ گئے جہاں سے اب تک مگر ہے باقی نام و نشان ہمارا</p>
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In his poem "Naya Shivalah," he expressed the same sentiments:

<p>خاکِ وطن کا مجھ کو ہر ذرہ دیوتا ہے</p>	<p>پتھر کی مورتوں میں سمجھا ہے تو خدا ہے</p>
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Thus in this phase his poetry shows him as an ardent supporter of nationalism.

During this period, although he wrote poems in the satirical style of Akbar Allahabadi and poems for children, his most moving poems are those in which he bewailed the miserable plight of the Indian Muslims or lamented the sorrows of the Muslims of the Middle East involved in their bitter

struggle for independence.

This period terminates with the famous poem "Shikwah aur Jawab-i Shikwah" (The Complaint and the Answer) which was written in 1911-12. A careful selection was made and compiled by Iqbal and, alongwith some later ones, *Bang-i tiara* was published in 1924. Although the message element is non-existent in the poems of this period, the lyricism of Iqbal is captivating.

It was during this period (1895-1905) that he founded his political ideas on a pantheistic philosophy and wrote poems in support of Indian nationalism. But side by side with this trend proceeded the love for his own religio-cultural tradition which found expression in numerous exquisite poems, written in the same period, in which he spoke of the Muslims as "Tasvir-i Dard" (The Portrait of Pain) or as "Nalah-i Yatim (The Sighing of an Orphan).

Iqbal went to Europe in 1905 as an ardent supporter of pan-theism, nationalism, patriotism and at the same time of Islamic solidarity. He went to Europe for higher studies and stayed there till 1908. His interests were primarily Philosophy and English Common Law. Iqbal's three years' stay abroad was divided between Cambridge, Munich and London. He studied philosophy at Cambridge, obtained doctorate on the *Development of Metaphysics in Persia* from Munich and was called to the Bar in London.

Iqbal was not influenced by materialistic and atheistic trends in European thought of early twentieth century. Actually it was during his stay in Europe that Iqbal became disgusted with pan-theism, secular nationalism and territorial patriotism and subsequently referred to his own pantheistic and nationalist period (1895-1905) as "my phase of ignorance and folly".

Iqbal's three years' stay in Europe helped him a great deal in the development of his thought. The libraries of Cambridge, London and those in Germany were easily accessible and Iqbal read voraciously and discussed matters with European savants and scholars. His outlook on life underwent two important changes about this time. He evinced an utter dislike for the narrow and selfish nationalism which was the root cause of most political troubles in Europe and his admiration for a life of action and struggle became more pronounced.

Besides, he had seen the forces of secular nationalism and territorial

patriotism active in Europe and arrived at the conclusion that the construction of human solidarity on the foundation of race, language, colour and territory, or fighting or dying for it was not only inhuman but contrary to universally accepted spiritual values of equality and brotherhood of man.

Thus he developed new ideas which were in effect antithesis of his earlier political philosophy. He found the idea of nationalism as inadequate to solve the problems of humanity. The absence of religious sentiments on the one hand and the presence of hollow nationalism on the other nauseated him. Greedy and selfish competition between man and man and between nation and nation could not be the basis of a society which Iqbal was dreaming. The following lines, composed in 1907, reveal his changed attitude, in which he warned Europe in lines of prophetic vision of the abyss towards which her materialism was leading her:

دیارِ مغرب کے رہنے والو، خدا کی بستی دکاں نہیں
کھرا جسے تم سمجھ رہے ہو، وہ اب زرِ کم عیار ہوگا
تمہاری تہذیب اپنے خنجر سے آپ ہی خود کشی کرے گی
جو شاخِ نازک پہ آشیانہ بنے گا ناپائیدار ہوگا

[O residents of the West, God's earth is not a shop,

The gold which you are thinking to be genuine will now prove to be of low value.

Your civilization is going to commit suicide with her own dagger;

The nest which is made on a frail bough cannot but be insecure.]⁷⁶

While in London, Iqbal took active part in the nascent Muslim political movement. The All-India Muslim League was formed at Dacca in December 1906. Its London Branch with Syed Ameer Ali as President was founded in 1908. Iqbal was elected as a member of the Committee of this branch.⁷⁷

Iqbal returned to Lahore in August 1908 and joined the Government

⁷⁶ *Bang-i Dara* (1949), p. 82. Tr. S.A. Vahid, *Iqbal: His Art and Thought* (Lahore, 1948), p. 4.

⁷⁷ S.R. Wasti, *The Political Triangle in India, 1858-1924* (Lahore, 1976), pp. 119-23.

College as a part-time Professor of Philosophy and English Literature. He started practising law. He wrote poems which he recited at the functions of Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam. He was now looking at Indian politics not as an Indian but as a citizen of the spiritual realm of Islam.

"Iqbal's political arena was the Punjab. He had to deal with the political and economic equations as they then existed."⁷⁸ But the Hindu revivalist movements, anti-Partition of Bengal movement and the activities of extremist Hindu leaders also affected his thoughts. Between 1910 and 1923 Iqbal took no active part in politics. He even refused to serve on the Khilafat Committee as he did not favour the methods adopted by the sponsors of the Khilafat Movement. He devoted himself to bringing an intellectual and spiritual revolution. Iqbal was convinced that Muslims had a destiny of their own inside as well as outside India. He realised that Islam was confronted with serious difficulties. A solution of its problems required a mustering of its own strength, the closing of its ranks and the union of its worldwide forces. Unity of Muslim countries rather than unity of different communities had now become his obsession.

Designs of European powers against Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa, particularly Italy's attack on Tripoli (1911), the Balkan Wars (1912-13) and the policies of the British Government which led to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, compelled Iqbal to revolt against this concept of militant nationalism. He himself wrote:

"Very early from the writings of the European scholars I had come to know that the basic scheme of Western Imperialism was to dismember the unity of the Muslim world by popularising territorial nationalism among its various components."⁷⁹

This disillusionment from European culture made Iqbal feel the need of seeking inspiration exclusively from his own religiocultural tradition. Loyalty to the national idea was soon to be re-placed by spiritual loyalty to the world of Islam. He had gone to Europe as a nationalist. He returned as an earnest Pan-Islamist. A deeper study of Islamic history led him to the conclusion that it was pantheism, among other destructive forces, which had killed the will to

⁷⁸ Hafeez Malik, Ed., *Iqbal, Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan* (New York, 1971), p. 76,

⁷⁹ 6. Syed Abdul Wahid Mu'ini, Ed., *Maqalat-i Iqbal* (Lahore, 1963), p. 222. Translated from Urdu.

act in the Muslim peoples and resulted in the decline of Islamic civilisation.

In Islam Iqbal saw action at once dynamic and responsible, creative yet never divorced from an overriding cosmic perspective and authority. He rebelled violently, therefore, against un-Islamic passivity and self-effacement. He saw Islam as fulfilling at once two social needs. On the one hand, it provided for continuity in social life through the enduring Shari'ah and the vast network of popularly engrained life ways which it guaranteed, not subject to any arbitrary alteration by single persons or even wilful groups. This continuity would provide inescapable long-term standards by which any individual could always measure himself and a dependable context in which individuals could unfold. At the same time, Islam embodied a principle of development. Though stable, the *Shari'ah* was not, in principle, static; built into it were devices which should allow it to respond to new needs as individuals proved creative and society evolved. Iqbal insisted that *ijtihad* must always remain open and that the Qur'an demanded searching individual inquiry and experiment. He tried to show, in fact, that it was precisely in Islam that originated the spirit and method of the empirical attitude and inductive inquiry, which he regarded as the key to conscious systematic progress.

From 1923 onward Iqbal became a serious and active politician. He was elected to the Punjab Legislative Council in November 1926 and remained a member of this Council till 1930. Now he had fully realised', that Hindus and Muslims could not live together because the Hindu-Muslim conflict was not merely religious. It was a clash of the civilisations of two peoples who had different languages, different literary roots, different concepts of art. Such a yawning cultural gulf was enough to destroy an affinity which the two peoples might have and to bring to nought all efforts at unity. According to him, these efforts had failed because:

"We suspect each other's intentions and inwardly aim at dominating each other. Perhaps in the higher interests of mutual co-operation, we cannot afford to part with the monopolies which circumstances have placed in our hands, and conceal our egoism under the cloak of nationalism, outwardly stimulating a large-hearted patriotism, but inwardly as narrow-minded as a caste or a tribe. Perhaps, we are

unwilling to recognise that each group has a right to free development according to its own cultural traditions."⁸⁰

At another place he stated:

"Islamic outlook on nationalism is different from other nations. Our nationalism is not based on the unity of languages, oneness of territory, or economic affinities. We belong to one family which was founded by the Holy Prophet, and our membership of it rests on common belief about the manifestations of the universe and the historical traditions which we all share together."⁸¹

In 1930, Iqbal presided over the twenty-first session of the All-India Muslim League held at Allahabad and delivered his famous address.⁸² In this he suggested that the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent should demand territorial specification in the form of a separate State on the basis of distinct cultural unit. He stated:

"I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single State. Self-government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State appears to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India."⁸³

Dr Manzooruddin Ahmed considers this address "as a discourse on the future of Islam and the Muslim community in the Indian subcontinent."⁸⁴ Dr Waheeduz Zaman thinks that:

"Iqbal was using the word state ; not with the meaning of a sovereign independent state but as a component and constituent unit of India."⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Latif Ahmed Sherwani, Ed., *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal* (Lahore, 1977), p. 8.

⁸¹ Quoted by Parveen Shaukat Ali, *The Political Philosophy of Iqbal* (Lahore, 1978), p. 226, from Mu`ini, Ed., op. cit., pp. 119-20.

⁸² See full text in Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, Ed., *Foundations of Pakistan*, II, 153-71 ; also in Sherwani, Ed., op. cit., pp. 3-25.

⁸³ Sherwani, Ed., op. cit., p. 10.

⁸⁴ Dr Manzooruddin Ahmed, "Iqbal's Theory of Muslim Community and Universalism," *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, 9 November 1977.

⁸⁵ Waheeduz Zaman, *Towards Pakistan* (Lahore, 1964), P. 132.

But the most interesting comment has been made by Dr K.K. Aziz, who states that:

"It is grossly misleading to call him the originator of the idea of Pakistan or the poet who dreamed of partition. He never talked of partition and his ideal was that of a getting together of the Muslim provinces in the northwest so as to bargain more advantageously with the projected Hindu centre. It is one of the myths of Pakistani nationalism to saddle Iqbal with the parentage of Pakistan."⁸⁶

There are others who thought of seeking a solution of Hindu-Muslim problem on the lines of division so as to get more homogeneous and compact States. In fact, Iqbal was not the first to suggest this. But it is to his credit that he was the first to suggest a homeland for the Muslims from the platform of the All-India Muslim League, which was the only representative political organisation of the Muslims of the subcontinent. After the Pakistan Resolution was passed by the Muslim League in its Lahore session on 23 March 1940, Quaid-i Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah said to Matlub Saiyid: "Iqbal is no more amongst us, but had he been alive he would have been happy to know that we did exactly what he wanted us to do."⁸⁷

Iqbal has been criticised that the demand for a separate Muslim State appears contrary to the ideal of Islam as expounded by Iqbal himself. It has some validity only if we miss the keynote of Iqbal's political thought. The demand for a separate State was not based on nationalism, but on the negation of nationalism. A separate Muslim State was not to be an end itself. The realisation of this goal was merely a means for achieving the unification of the entire Muslim world. This unification, according to him, was possible either through a league of Muslim nations, or through a combination of several independent Muslim States tied to each other for purely economic and political considerations. Creation of a separate Muslim State was thus envisaged as a temporary measure. The ultimate objective was the union of this State with other Muslim States. He considered Islam more important than a strip of territory. In his address he stated: ". . . the construction of a polity on national lines, if it means a displacement of the Islamic principles of

⁸⁶ K.K. Aziz, *The Making of Pakistan* (Islamabad, 1976), p. 54.

⁸⁷ Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah: Creator of Pakistan* (London, 1954), p. 129.

solidarity, is simply unthinkable to a Muslim."⁸⁸ On 15 December 1932, in a speech delivered before the National League, London, Iqbal stated:

"Islam does not recognise the difference of race, of caste or even of sex. It is above time and above space, and it is in this sense that mankind are accepted as brothers."⁸⁹

In a letter to Jinnah, he wrote on 20 March 1937:

"It is absolutely necessary to tell the world both inside and outside India that the economic problem is not the only problem in the country [as pointed out by Mr Nehru]. From the Muslim point of view the cultural problem is of much greater consequence to most Indian Muslims. At any rate it is not less important than the economic problem."⁹⁰

In another letter to Jinnah he stated:

"But the enforcement and development of the Shariat of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim state or states. . . . For Islam the acceptance of social democracy in some suitable form and consistent with the legal principles of Islam is not a revolution but a return to the original purity of Islam. The modern problems therefore are far more easy to solve for the Muslims than for the Hindus. But as I have said above in order to make it possible for Muslim India to solve these problems it is necessary to redistribute the country and to provide one or more Muslim states with absolute majorities."⁹¹

Iqbal's image of the future of Islam is Muslim Universalism. Universal Muslim polity and translation of the canons of Islam in the practical life of the Muslim form the crux of Iqbal's thinking.

Notes and References

IQBAL ACADEMY PAKISTAN

HAS PUBLISHED A LARGE NUMBER OF BOOKS OF
AND ON IQBAL IN URDU, ENGLISH, PASHTO, SINDHI,

⁸⁸ Sherwani, Ed., op. cit., p. 7.

⁸⁹ B.A. Dar, op. cit., p. 76.

⁹⁰ *Letters of Iqbal to Jinnah*, (Lahore, 1974), p. 14. Letter dated 20 May 1937.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 18-19. Letter dated 28 May 1937.

WHICH HAVE BEEN HIGHLY APPRECIATED.
A COMPLETE UP-TO-DATE CATALOGUE OF
ALL THESE BOOKS IS AVAILABLE FREE ON
REQUEST.

WRITE TO:

THE DIRECTOR, IQBAL ACADEMY

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