

IQBAL AND JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Professor Riaz Hussain

Whereas in provincial politics Iqbal was virtually the leader of opposition to feudalists like Fazl-i Hussain and Sikandar Hayat Khan, on all-India level he wins a counterpart of Jawaharlal Nehru. Both had certain affinities: intellectual sophistication of a high order, patriotism, love of freedom, an international outlook and zeal for economic modernisation. What set them apart was Islam. At the Annual Session of the Indian National Congress held at Lahore on 31 December 1929, Jawaharlal Nehru declared that the goal of the Congress Party henceforward was "Puma Swaraj" (Complete Independence) and the establishment of a secular Federation in India. At the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim League held at Allahabad on 30 December 1930, Iqbal declared the Muslim goal to be the partition of India to set up a sovereign Islamic State. The contrast is too significant to be passed over lightly. In spite of this, many Western and Indian writers, foremost among them Nehru himself, are considerably at pains to establish Iqbal as a camp follower of the secular Nationalists. In his *Discovery of India*, Nehru levies two malicious charges on Iqbal. "Edward Thompson has written that in the course of conversation Iqbal told him that he had advocated Pakistan because of his position as President of the Muslim League, but he felt sure that it would be injurious to India as a whole and to Muslims especially." A little further on he describes a personal interview with Iqbal. "A few months before his death, as he lay on his sick-bed, he [Iqbal] sent for me [Nehru] and I gladly obeyed the summons. As I talked to him about many things I felt how much we had in common, in spite of differences, and how easy it would be to get on with him. He was in reminiscent mood and wandered from one subject to another, and I listened to him talking little myself. I admired him and his poetry, and it pleased me greatly to feel that he liked me and had a good opinion of me. A little before I left him he said to me, 'What is there in common between Jinnah and you? He is a politician, you are a patriot.'³⁹⁸

Nehru's bid to represent Iqbal as his admirer and Jinnah's critic was promptly foiled by Iqbal himself. Nazir Niyazi in his *Iqbal Ke Hudur Men*

³⁹⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (New York, 1946), p. 353.

reports that when Nehru's version of the interview was laid before him, Iqbal explained that patriotism was a basic quality, but that politics demanded men of practical and realistic views and consequently an honest politician stood on a higher pedestal than a mere patriot.

Iqbal opened his Presidential Address to the All-India Muslim League Session at Allahabad (December 1930) with the remark: "I lead no party, I follow no leader." Ten years later he unequivocally declared in a Press statement: "Our nation has full confidence in Jinnah's integrity and political judgment. It is for this reason that reactionary leaders are flustered."³⁹⁹

In fact, on the political plane Iqbal and Nehru were poles apart. Their views on some of the basic questions of the day were divergent. An instructive case in point is their different reactions to the Round Table Conference, 1931. In the *Discovery of India*, Nehru attacked the Muslim viewpoint at the Round Table Conference as reactionary and poured scorn over the role played by Sir Agha Khan. Actually, the boot was on the other leg. A prominent liberal Hindu leader, Sir Chimanlal Sitalvad, of Bombay, who attended the Conference as a delegate, says in his book *Recollections and Reflections*:

"After we reached London well in advance for the Round Table Conference it was arranged that some representatives of Hindus and of Muslims should meet to consider the question of a communal settlement. Sapru, Sastri, myself, Jayakar, Moonje and Ambedkar were deputed for this meeting and the Agha Khan, Jinnah and one other gentleman represented the Muslims... . When we first met, I put the question to the Agha Khan, whether, if we arrived at a satisfactory settlement on other points, he would agree to Joint Electorates. He said: 'If you satisfy our demands on all other matters we would agree to Joint Electorates, with reservation of seats for Muslims.'"⁴⁰⁰

Sir Chimanlal then states that Sapru, Sastri and himself would have agreed immediately to these demands, but they were seriously disappointed in the attitude of Jayakar and Moonje, the Mahasabha delegates.

³⁹⁹ *The Civil & Military Gazette*, Lahore, 9 May 1936. Also Ashiq Husain Batalvi, Iqbal Key Akhiri Do Sal, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁰⁰ *Recollections and Reflections*, p. 358.

Another Hindu delegate Kanji Dawarkadas states: "The communal and Depressed Classes problems would have been settled in London at the Round Table Conference, but Gandhiji was under the influence of Hindu Communalists — Pandit Malaviya and G.D. Birla."⁴⁰¹

The discussions between the Muslim delegates and Gandhi were held at the Ritz Hotel suite of The Agha Khan who says in his *Memoirs* (London, 1953): "The Mahatma sought to impose a first and fundamental condition that the Muslims should, before they asked for any guarantees for themselves, accept Congress interpretation of Swaraj [Self-Governmentment] as their goal, to which Mr. Jinnah very rightly answered that since the Mahatma was not imposing this condition on the other Hindu members of the various delegations attending the Round Table Conference, why should he impose it on the Muslims?"⁴⁰²

Recounting behind-the-scene discussions between the Muslim delegates and Mr Gandhi, Iqbal said in a statement issued on 6 December 1933:

"Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru has described His Highness the Agha Khan as the greatest inspr rer of 'political reactionaryism' among Muslims. The truth, however, is that it was the Agha Khan himself who assured Mr. Gandhi in the presence of several Indian delegates, including myself, that if the Hindus or the Congress agreed to Muslim demands, the entire Muslim community would be ready to serve as his (Mr. Gandhi's) camp-followers... .

"Mr. Gandhi weighed the Agha Khan's words and his offer to accept Muslim demands came later and was hedged round with conditions. The first condition was that Mr. Gandhi would accept the Muslim demands in his personal capacity and would try to secure, but not guarantee, the acceptance of his position by the Congress, I [Iqbal] asked him to wire to the Congress Executive and secure its consent to his offer. He said he knew that the Congress would not make him their plenipotentiary on the question.

"Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru can easily refer to Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, who sat near me at the time, as to her observations which she shared with me

⁴⁰¹ *India Fights for Freedom* (1966), p. 404.

⁴⁰² P. 229.

on Mr. Gandhi's attitude. Mr. Gandhi was then asked to secure at least the Hindu and Sikh delegates' con-sent to his offer. He did make something like an attempt to do so but failed and privately expressed his disappointment with their attitude.

"Mr. Gandhi's second and most unrighteous condition was that Muslims should not support the special claims of Untouchables, particularly their claim to special representation. It was pointed out to him that it did not lie in the mouth of Muslims to oppose those very claims on the part of the Untouchables which they were advancing for themselves and that if Mr. Gandhi could arrive at a mutual understanding with the Untouchables the Muslims would certainly not stand in their way. Mr. Gandhi, however, insisted on this condition. I should like to know how far Pandit Jawahar Lal with his well-known socialist views would sympathise with such an inhuman condition.

"This is the inner history of the negotiations between Mr. Gandhi and Muslim delegates. "⁴⁰³

Iqbal proceeded to say that if Pandit Jawahar Lal

"is unable to accept this [the Agha Khan's] offer let him at least not accuse Muslims of political reactionaryism but leave those who understand the motive and purposes of Hindu communalism to draw the conclusion that he is in essential agreement with the Mahasabha in the latter's campaign against the Communal Award. "⁴⁰⁴

The sharpest clash between Iqbal and Nehru was over the Qadiani problem. Nehru, due to his inherent incapacity to understand the mechanics of Islam, had imbibed the idea that Bahaism in Iran and Qadianism in India were reform movements in Islam. Iqbal disabused the Pandit's mind of these false notions, and categorically told the Pandit that his interference in the internal affairs of Islam was not welcome.

The Pandit believed that modernisation in Turkey had alienated that

⁴⁰³ S.A. Vapid, Ed., *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal* (Lahore : Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1969), pp. 363-65.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

country from Islam. Well, this was not true. Islam, said Iqbal, was jealous of its frontier, but within those frontiers it allowed considerable freedom of *ijtihad* (independent judgment). Therefore, modernisation was not necessarily anti-Islamic.

Not many people apparently know that Nehru's mass contact movement was a reaction, conscious or unconscious, to Iqbal's mass-oriented propaganda for the League in the Punjab. To sum up, Iqbal's attitude towards Nehru was patronising, even indulgent, but uncompromising on basic principles.

Notes and References

Relationship of Knowledge Gained Through Intellect and that Through Love and Intuition*

"I have generally used the word 'knowledge' in the sense of knowledge based on the senses. It gives man Power which should be subordinated to Religion. If it is not subordinated to religion, it is a Satanic force. This knowledge is the first step to true know-ledge....

"Knowledge, which cannot be circumscribed within consciousness and which is the final stage of Truth, is also called Love or Intuition....

"A Muslim should try to convert such Knowledge, which is based on senses and is the source of limitless power, to Islam, i.e. transform this (unbeliever), Bu Lahab, into (the perfect Momin), Ali. In other words, if the power of knowledge is inspired by religion, it is the greatest blessing for mankind."

* Iqbal to K.G. Saiyidain (see Saiyidain's Iqbal's Educational Philosophy (Lahore : Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1971 reprint), pp. 89-90).