

# SOME ASPECTS OF IQBAL'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE CAUSE OF ISLAM

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Iqbal's influence in the spheres of literature and philosophy and from thence to popular politics and the formation of certain attitudes and tendencies among the Muslims of South Asia started taking shape in the first quarter of the twentieth century. From then on the depth and significance of the meaning of his philosophy is ever on the increase. He was one of those few fortunate persons whose greatness is acknowledged in their lifetime by their people. The Muslims of South Asia had, and still have, an immense love and respect for Iqbal. By his calculated philosophical prose he impressed the Western-educated men who could appreciate a message better if presented in the language of Western philosophy and intellect. On the other hand, his poetry had an inflaming effect upon the educated and the uneducated alike. His greater success, however, is that his works have not only stood the test of time but their effects are still multiplying. Newer and newer significant meanings of his works are coming to light which further augment and add to the grandeur and effect of the earlier interpretations of his works. According to Dr Yūsuf Husain,<sup>442</sup> "There is no limit to his effects. He himself says that he has done his work. Lamentation was one of the essentials of love, so that too he had done. Now it was for others to see its effect:

عشق کو فریاد لازم تھی سو وہ بھی ہو چکی

اب ذرا دل تھام کر فریاد کی تاثیر دیکھ

Iqbal's greatest service to the Muslims was that he reawakened them to face the hard facts and problems of their religious, social and political life in the light of the genuine spirit of Islam itself. He bitterly opposed the alien

<sup>442</sup> Dr Yūsuf Husain, *Rūh-i Iqbal* (Urdu), (5th Edition, 1962), p. 141

elements which were inimical to the creative, active, mobile and realistic approaches of Islam towards life and universe but which had somehow crept into the Muslim community under various garbs and disguises. He did all that he could to break these idols which had worn the mask of Islam. He purged Islam of many such evils and presented it once again as a code of life imbued with realism and progressivism, not only generating the spiritual satisfaction, but also making life on this concrete earth equitable, judicious and egalitarian which is in fact the original pure form of Islam. His purpose was:

“to tear off from Islam the hard crust which has immobilized an essentially dynamic outlook on life, and to rediscover the original verities of freedom, equality, and solidarity with a view to rebuild our moral, social, and political ideals out of their original simplicity and universality.”<sup>443</sup>

In this article I would first mention a few of those influences which were distorting the religious and national identity of Muslims in South Asia such as the pantheistic mysticism, other-worldliness, fatalism and the expansion of heterodoxy in the name of modernism, eclecticism, etc., etc. Then I would show how Iqbal waged an intellectual war against these negative influences in the form of his prose and poetry.

Muslims of South Asia, like those of other places, had accepted undue influences from the traditions of non-Islamic philosophies, and many alien concepts and beliefs were imported and adopted by them. The pure and basic teachings of Islam were adulterated by the Graeco-Roman, Persian and Hindu influences. Mysticism or *taṣawwuf* generally played a great role in weakening the Islamic community and providing inroads for many non-Islamic concepts and practices and attitudes of mind towards life and universe. In the beginning mysticism in Islam did not try to formulate or propagate any particular theory or philosophy. It was a practical mode of life rather than a matter of theorising. It dealt mainly with the intuitive experiences. The later mystics, however, tried to give rational interpretations to their experiences. Regular and disciplined theorising started. In this process they made use of certain terms and methods alien to Islam. In the

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<sup>443</sup> Sir Mohammad, Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1962 reprint), p. 156.

words of a famous scholar:

“They combined Neo-Platonism, Stoicism, Manichaeism, and Vedantism to produce a strange compound of philosophical mysticism which could hardly fit in with the Islamic system of morals and beliefs. The mystic orders were regarded as independent of the Islamic Shari’ah and the private aspect of life was cut asunder from the public side. As a result, the limits prescribed by (Islam for lawful and unlawful were neglected, the religious injunctions were practically violated, and personal whims and desires were made the arbiter in all affairs of life.”<sup>444</sup>

There were of course many suits who did not fall a prey to the temptation of ignoring the basic commands of Islam, but many of them had committed the mistake of believing in pantheism which not only detracted them from life and reality but also gave nourishment to many heterodoxical opinions and beliefs. If all that is God and all the phenomena are His manifestations, then why should one not worship any one of His phenomenal manifestations? What distinction does there remain between truth and falsehood? What was the justification for declaring one thing good and another evil? There is, in fact, left no justification for praising something as good and condemning the other as evil. There remains no room for any responsibility or effort for improving upon the prevalent state of affairs because nothing is better or worse than anything else. The result was that many people started preaching that the Rama of Hindus and the Raḥīm of Muslims were identical.<sup>445</sup> The preachers of the Bhagti Movement had repeatedly stated that there was no difference between Hindus and Muslims, that the mosque and the temple were the same thing and that all religions were, in their essentials, one and the same. Now, this was a very dangerous move, for if Islam and Hinduism were one, then the Muslims had no reason to be proud of their religion or to preserve their own separate national identity. Without the Muslims’ pride in their religion, Islam would have merged like Buddhism into the ocean of Hinduism.

In the name of eclecticism and modernism, the heterodoxical elements

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<sup>444</sup> A.A. Maudoodi, *A Short History of the Revivalist Movement in Islam* (Lahore., 2nd Ed., 1972), p. 75.

<sup>445</sup> Dr. Ishtiaq Hussain Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pak Subcontinent* (Urdu Tr.), p. 145.

have many a time deliberately tried to rob Islam of its strength and purity of form by importing and propagating many such teachings and concepts as are fundamentally opposed to the spirit of Islam. They start with the false claim of having the intention to bring together all the merits and good things of all religions and philosophies, but their ultimate motive is always to secure a complete exclusion and repudiation of Islamic injunctions and principles. In India, too, many such attempts were made and their protagonists slighted and ridiculed the concept of prophethood, revelation, prayer, etc. The person of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was freely made the object of criticism and fun-making. The Qur'an's being the Word of God and the possibility of revelation was doubted. Ascension of the Holy Prophet was openly regarded as improbable. Prayers and other acts of worship were ridiculed as useless wastage of time and energy. Now, if a nation or community has certain of its signs and symbols and if the members of that community are slowly but gradually made to be indifferent and disrespectful to those symbols, they cannot revive and assert themselves.

Although a greater majority of Muslims had not gone to that extent, yet they too had become ignorant of the basis of their national identity. A large majority of the Muslims accepted the Western concept of *Wataniyat* which, in simple words, amounts to accepting that the nations are formed on the basis of geographical boundaries, races or languages. A continued adherence to this concept would have proved suicidal for them, because that could have resulted in their complete absorption and annihilation into the milieu of Indian nationalism which would have been just another name of Hindu nationalism. Iqbal, who has duly been called the *Hakim al-Ummat*, i.e. the physician of the nation, correctly diagnosed these negative influences and he communicated his clarion call against these evils to the masses. "Through his poetry, Iqbal reached the masses; through his sophisticated prose writing, he communed with the learned."<sup>446</sup> He very effectively rejected the concept of nationalism as based upon geographical territories or racial and linguistic considerations. Geographical nationalism, for him, is foreign to the Islamic polity. He goes on to say that Islam is the country for a Muslim and he belong to the Muslim nation:

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<sup>446</sup> Dr L.S. May, "Iqbal and His Philosophy," in M. Saeed Sheikh, Ed., *Studies in Iqbal's Thought & Art*, p. 6.

بازو تیرا توحید کی قوت سے قوی ہے

اسلام تیرا دیس ہے تو مصطفوی ہے<sup>447</sup>

When a prominent and famous scholar of Islam, i.e. Husain Aḥmad Madanī of Deoband, said that the nations had their bases in their geographical boundaries he retorted:

عجم ہنوز نداند رموزِ دیس ورنہ

سرود بر سرِ منبر کہ ملت از وطن است

زدیو بند حسین احمد ایس چہ بو العجیبی است

چہ بے خبر ز مقامِ محمدِ عربی است

بمصطفیٰ برسائے خویش را کہ دیس ہمہ اوست

اگر بہ او نرمیدی تمام بولہبی است<sup>448</sup>

It may, however, not be taken to mean that Iqbal had no room for patriotism. The fact is that, for him, “nationalism in the sense of love of one’s country and even readiness to die for its honour is a part of the faith of a Muslim. It comes into conflict with Islam only when it begins to be the sole principle of national solidarity demanding that Islam should recede in the background as a mere private opinion and cease to be a living factor in the national life.<sup>449</sup> The geographical boundaries are not condemnable in themselves. They are expedient for the administrative purposes of a polity. But the point to note is that neither the administrative purposes nor the geographical boundaries are an end in themselves. That ideology alone is the

<sup>447</sup> Iqbal, *Bāng-i Darā*, p. 174.

<sup>448</sup> Iqbal, *Armaghān-i Hijāz*, p. 49.

<sup>449</sup> Haft Abbadullah Faruqi, "Iqbal's Concept of State," in M. Saeed Sheikh, Ed., op, cit., p.

end-in-itself for which they are instrumental. When the Muslims of South Asia were passing through the greatest crisis in regard to their political and national identity, there was every possibility of their being effaced out as a distinct political entity. Now, it is very obvious that if a nation is made to perish, the ideology that it represents also has to suffer. That is why we find that Iqbal advised the Muslims of South Asia to adopt Muslim nationalism which they did and consequently succeeded in establishing Pakistan.

Iqbal could not believe in pantheism because he was the preacher of the philosophy of Ego, whereas pantheism denies the possibility of individual ego. For Iqbal, every experience by nature has its ultimate reference to an ego. “The more important regions of experience, examined with an eye on a synthetic view, reveal, as the ultimate ground of all experience, a rationally directed creative will which we have found reasons to describe as an ego. In order to emphasize the individuality of the Ultimate Ego the Quran gives Him the proper name of Allah, and further defines Him as follows:

“Say: Allah is One

All things depend on Him;

He begetteth not, and He is not begotten;

And there is none like unto Him.”<sup>450</sup>

According to Iqbal, the very ideal of perfect manhood in Islam is to be able to retain full self-possession even in the case of a direct contact with the all-embracing Ego. In this connection he refers to the Qur’an’s statement of the Prophet’s vision of the Ultimate Ego: “His eye, turned not aside, nor did it wander.” (liii. 17).

As for the inactivity, passivity and obliviousness of the empirical world, Iqbal regrets that religion in his days was known by the unfortunate name of mysticism which had come to be regarded as life-denying, fact-avoiding attitude of mind directly opposed to the radically empirical outlook. “Yet higher religion,” in his words, “which is only a search for a larger life, is essentially experience and recognized the necessity of experience as its foundation long before science learnt to do so. It is a genuine effort to clarify human consciousness, and is, as such, as critical of its level of experience as

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<sup>450</sup> *Reconstruction*, p. 62.

Naturalism is of its own level.”<sup>451</sup>

Iqbal strongly disliked inactivity, passivity, immobility and inertia of thought or action. Such beliefs and controversies as could not find any expression in acts and deeds did not make any appeal to Iqbal. In the Preface to his Reconstruction he states that “Quran is a book which emphasizes deed rather than ‘idea’.” While discussing the spirit of Muslim culture he states that “The first important point to note about the spirit of Muslim culture then is that for purposes of knowledge, it fixes its gaze on the concrete, the finite.”<sup>452</sup> Again, “Knowledge must begin with the concrete. It is the intellectual capture of and power over the concrete that makes it possible for the intellect of man to pass beyond the concrete.”<sup>453</sup> The Book of God engenders among its believers a general empirical attitude. Iqbal says: “But the point to note is the general empirical attitude of the Quran which engendered in its followers a feeling of reverence for the actual and ultimately made them the founders of modern science.”<sup>454</sup>

Similar views were expressed by him in many of his verses in beautiful and impressive artistic language. Thus, while criticising fatalism and other-worldliness, he laments the attitude of those Muslims who draw justification from the Qur’an for their fatalistic attitude:

اُسی قرآن میں ہے اب ترکِ جہاں کی تلاش  
جس نے مومن کو بنایا مہ و پرویں کا اسیر  
تن بہ تقدیر ہے آج اُن کے عمل کا انداز  
<sup>455</sup> تھی نہاں جن کے ارادوں میں خدا کی تقدیر

Again, he says:

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., p. 14

<sup>455</sup> *Darb-i Kalim*, p. 8.

تقدیر کے پابند نباتات و جمادات

456 مومن فقط احکامِ الہی کا ہے پابند

He emphasises that man should mould the forces of this universe to his own ends and purposes. If he strives wholeheartedly in this process “God becomes a co-worker with him”:

ہاتھ ہے اللہ کا بندہ مومن کا ہاتھ

457 غالب و کار آفرین، کار کشا، کار ساز

A Muslim, for Iqbal, is not the mere product of historical processes or chance happenings; he is rather the creator of those processes and happenings. Thus he says:

مہر و مہ و انجم کا محاسب ہے قلندر!

458 ایام کا مرکب نہیں، راکب ہے قلندر!

Addressing the mystic he invites him not to be oblivious of the empirical world:

تری نگاہ میں ہے معجزات کی دنیا

میری نگاہ میں ہے حادثات کی دنیا

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>457</sup> *Bāl-i Jibril*, p. 132.

<sup>458</sup> *Darb-i Kalim*, p. 36.



تخیلات کی دنیا غریب ہے لیکن  
غریب تر ہے حیات و ممات کی دنیا! <sup>459</sup>

If the speculations of a mystic have no beneficial effects for the community and if they do not contribute to the enrichment of individual egos, then they are of no value whatsoever:

یہ حکمتِ ملکوتی یہ علمِ لاپتوتی  
حرم کے درد کا درماں نہیں تو کچھ بھی نہیں  
یہ ذکرِ نیم شبی یہ مراقبے یہ سرور  
تری خودی کے نگہباں نہیں تو کچھ بھی نہیں <sup>460</sup>

Although Iqbal had a first-hand knowledge of the European thought and philosophy, and he had had a personal contact with Western civilisation during his stay in Europe, yet he never let his Islamic identity wane. He never felt any shame or humiliation in being a Muslim, nor did he ever repudiate the basic symbols, concepts or practices of Islam such as prophethood, revelation, prayer, etc. He regards in high esteem the experiences of a prophet because when a prophet, according to him, returns from the repose of his “unitary experience,” his return is creative. “He returns to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals.”<sup>461</sup>

Iqbal has great love and respect for the Holy Prophet of Islam, Ḥaḍrat Muhammad (peace be upon him). He considers him to be the herald of the modern world. He brought a religion, i.e. Islam, which gave birth to inductive intellect and abolished the concepts of priesthood and hereditary kingship. Thus he says:

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>461</sup> *Reconstruction*, p. 124.

“In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the ancient world ; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction. The birth of Islam... is the birth of inductive intellect. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings; that in order to achieve full self-consciousness man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Qur’an, and the emphasis that it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality.”<sup>462</sup>

The birth of the Prophet of Islam is thus the blooming of life and the true interpretation of the dream of life.

نہیں مکن جز بہ قرن زیستن	اے ظہور توشبابِ زندگی
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As for the Ascension of the Holy Prophet Iqbal not only believes in it but also thinks that it is a proof of the fact that the whole of the universe can be conquered by man.

سبق ملا ہے یہ معراجِ مصطفیٰ سے مجھے
<sup>463</sup> کہ عالمِ بشریت کی زد میں ہے گردوں

Similarly, he gives much importance to prayer or act of worship. For Iqbal, prayer or act of worship is the agency through which a more intimate knowledge of and association with the Ultimate Ego or God is achieved. He clearly states that prayer is something that results in spiritual illumination. To quote Iqbal:

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>463</sup> *Bāl-i Jibril*, p. 44.

“The act of worship, however, affects different varieties of consciousness differently. In the case of the propnetic consciousness it is in the main creative, i.e., it tends to create a fresh ethical world wherein the Prophet, so to speak, applies the pragmatic test to his revelations.... In the case of the mystic consciousness it is in the main cognitive.”<sup>464</sup>

Even the timing of the daily prayer is significant. “The timing of the daily prayer which according to the Quran restores ‘self-possession’ to the ego by bringing it into closer touch with the ultimate source of life and freedom, is intended to save the ego from the mechanizing effects or sleep and business. Prayer in Islam is ego’s escape from mechanism to freedom.”<sup>465</sup> Prayer or act of worship not only frees a Muslim from mechanism, it also liberates him from prostrating before others, be they mighty or wealthy.

یہ ایک سجدہ جسے تو گراں سمجھتا ہے  
ہزاروں سجدوں سے دیتا ہے آدمی کو نجات<sup>466</sup>

So Iqbal rendered valuable services to Islam giving rational justification for respectfully upholding the basic tenets of Islam. This does not in any way mean that he was oblivious of the sociological changes brought about by the passage of time. In fact, he believed that the principle of movement was inherent in the very nature of Islam. He, however, believed in the advisability only of change taking place within the framework of the basic spirit and tenets of Islam. Islam, in his opinion, is a religion which, while retaining the basic concepts intact, does also takes cognizance of the changes brought about by time and interaction among the various social groups. Iqbal says:

“The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change. A society based on such a conception of Reality must reconcile, in its life, the categories of permanence and change. It must possess eternal principles to regulate its

<sup>464</sup> *Reconstruction*, p. 89.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>466</sup> *Darb-i-Kalim*, p. 32.

collective life; for the eternal gives us a foothold in the world of perpetual change. But eternal principles when they are understood to exclude all possibilities of change which, according to the Quran, is one of the greatest 'signs' of God, tend to immobilize what is essentially mobile in its nature."<sup>467</sup>

Iqbal believed that the Islamic view of life is essentially dynamic and progressive. According to this view life contains within itself immense potentialities which are progressively coming into being. "It is obvious that with such an outlook the Holy Book of Islam cannot be inimical to the idea of evolution. Only we should not forget that life is not change, pure and simple. It has within it elements of conservation also."<sup>468</sup>

So Iqbal maintained a much-needed equilibrium between change and continuity. Whereas change or dynamism is essential because its absence leads to stagnation, continuity is indispensable for the preservation of the national identity. Since Iqbal's thought has influenced the Muslims of India and Pakistan more than any other contemporary writer or poet, therefore we find that they are not afraid of ever-new experiences in politics, economics and other aspects of their social life; yet in this process they never alienate or dissociate themselves from the basis of their national identity, i.e. Islam. Because of this attitude prospects of a better future of Muslims and also of Islam are becoming prominent. The Islamic ideology is being more and more recognised as dynamic, equalitarian and egalitarian, and the people of the world at large are taking a more serious note of Islam.

#### Notes and References

#### THE TAVERN OF THE WEST\*\*

'Allamah Iqbal/M. Hadi Hussain

Last night, while I was in the tavern of the West,  
I was delighted by a witty thing a drunkard said.

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<sup>467</sup> *Reconstruction*, pp. 147-48.

<sup>468</sup> 27. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

\* From A Message from the East : English translation of Iqbal's Payam-i Mashriq by M. Hadi Hussain. Published by Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1977, pp. 174-75.

“This place is not a church,” said he, “that you  
should find,  
Here pretty girls and organ music and sweet songs.  
This is the tavern of the West, where wine  
Has the effect of making things that are considered  
bad seem good.  
We have weighed good and evil on another kind of scales.  
The scales of the Jews and the Christians were askew.  
What is good in you will be bad, if you should break  
your fist.  
What is bad in you will be good, if you increase your  
might.  
If you look carefully, you will find life is all hypocrisy.  
Whoever follows the path of truth and sincerity Just cease to exist.  
Claims of truth and sincerity  
Are only covers for hypocrisy.  
Our master says that brass must have on it a silver plate.  
I have revealed to you the secret of success in life.  
Let no one know of it, if you care for success.”