

IQBAL'S LECTURE ON IJTIHAD

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Iqbal's lecture on *ijtihād* ("The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam") constitutes the sixth chapter in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. The first six of the seven chapters in this book were delivered as lectures in the Universities of Madras, Hyderabad and Aligarh during the years 1928 and 1930.

Although much has been written about these lectures, yet the one on *ijtihād* has not earned as much scholarly attention as it deserved. It has been evaluated variably by commentators, mostly with a slight regard for the originality of its thought. The reasons for the complacency or indifference of the scholars to this lecture are worth investigating. In fact, this lecture has suffered from these attitudes from the day it was delivered. The history of the writing, presentation and publication of this lecture is curiously stretched over a longer period than any of Iqbal's writings. An investigation about the dates of the various stages of this lecture is quite interesting as well as revealing. The limited space of this paper does not allow to elaborate upon the relevance and significance of such an investigation for an understanding of this lecture. This requires a separate study.¹ This paper only attempts to ascertain the dates of the various phases of this lecture. We are, therefore, limiting ourselves to the following questions:

- (1) When was the first draft of Iqbal's lecture on *ijtihād* written?
- (2) When did Iqbal start the actual, writing of the lecture and how many years did its preparation take?
- (3) When was the lecture delivered in Lahore?
- (4) When was it presented in South India?

Before we begin exploring answers to these questions it is essential to preface this attempt with a brief introduction to the problem of *ijtihād* with the salient points in this lecture.

Ijtihād is an Arabic word which literally means "to exert one's efforts". Technically it is defined usually as "the putting forth of every effort in order to determine with a degree of probability the question of Islamic law".

¹ Ref. Author's unpublished monograph on *Iqbal Aur Ijtihād*.

Although the technical definition did not even implicitly limit *ijtihad* to mean to found a school of law, yet in common parlance the term came to be understood as such. Whenever someone claimed *ijtihad* he was condemned in certain quarters as a heretic and innovator. No *ijtihad* was necessary or allowed after the establishment of the schools of law in Islam. These were, therefore, extremely confident and intrepid souls who chose to speak on this problem from time to time. Naturally they had to face a bitter opposition.

Iqbal does not completely accept the conventional definition of *ijtihad* in his lecture. He rather defines *ijtihad* as a principle of movement in Islam, hence the title of his lecture. In this lecture Iqbal analyses various definitions of *ijtihad* and rejects the static view implied therein. He discusses the phenomenon of the relapse of *ijtihad*. Among the causes of its immobility, he enumerates the following:

- (1) Orthodox reaction to rationalist movements such as the Mu'tazilah ;
- (2) apprehensions about Sufism: and
- (3) destruction of Baghdad.

These factors forced the Islamic society to discontinue *ijtihad* activities. This analysis leads Iqbal to a discussion of the history and working of *ijtihad* in modern times. He discusses "Wahhabism" and traces its origin to Ibn Taimāyyah. The impact of Wahhābī movement continued in modern era and culminated in the reform movements in Islam. He does not entirely approve of these re-forms in Turkey. He particularly singles out Zia Gokalp as a symbol of modern trends in Islam in Turkey, and criticises his views on the emancipation of women. After this analysis he comes to grapple with the actual problem of *ijtihad* in the present situation. In his view the crux of the problem lies in facing certain fundamental facts. He emphasises that until the rise of the Abbasids there was no written law of Islam apart from the Qur'ān. Secondly, during the first four centuries of Islam the activities of *ijtihad* which culminated in the appearance of nineteen schools of law, not only demonstrates the dynamism of Islamic law but also points out that the formulation of Islamic law was the result of these activities. With these preliminary remarks Iqbal goes on to discuss the four sources of Islamic law, i.e. the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, Ijmā' and Qiyās. He brings out the dynamic character of these principles. He gives an entirely new interpretation to the institution of Ilmī. Instead of letting it remain a passive material source of legal reasoning, he proposes it to become an active functional source in the form of a legislative assembly.

Having summarised Iqbal's views, let us now turn to the questions we have raised above.

I

It was in 1904 that Iqbal first expressed his views on the problems of *ijtihad* in an article entitled: “*Qaumī Zindagī*”. He said:

“if we contemplate on the present situation we will come to the conclusion that as, in order to support the fundamentals of religion, we need a new theology, similarly we need great jurists for the reinterpretation of Islamic law. The jurist must be able not only to codify Islamic law on a modern pattern but he should also be capable of extending these principles, by his power of imagination, to cover all the possible situations of the present-day social needs. As far as I know there is no one such single jurist born yet in the Islamic world. Considering the significance and volume of the work it appears that this requires definitely more than one mind.”²

From this excerpt we may see that, Firstly, Iqbal was conscious of the insufficiency of *fiqh* for the present-day needs. Secondly, therefore, he felt the need for its reinterpretation. “Thirdly, he had come to the conclusion that *ijtihad* required a collective effort instead of individual attempts.

Although the remarks about *ijtihad* in this article clearly demonstrated Iqbal's grasp of the problem, yet it took Iqbal a decade or so to fully develop his views on *ijtihad*. He delivered a lecture on this problem first in Lahore in 1924 and then in South India perhaps in 1930. It was eventually published as the sixth chapter of the *Reconstruction*.

The question, however, arises: when was the first draft of this lecture completed? Iqbal's biographers and commentators have given different dates. The earliest date is given by Sayyid ‘Abd al-Vāhid al-Muʿīnī as 1920,³ and the latest as 1925 is suggested by Rashīd Aḥmad Ṣiddīqī.⁴ As we shall see shortly, the first date is too early and the second is too late. We know this from the internal evidences such as Iqbal's letters or the reminiscences of his

² Iqbal, “*Qaumī Zindagī*” *Makbẓan*, October 1934, vide ‘Abd al-Valid Muʿīnī, *Maqālāt-i Iqbal* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963), p.55.

³ S.A. Vahid, Ed., *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), p. xiv.

⁴ R.A. Ṣiddīqī, “*Ba Yād-i Iqbal*,” *Jawhar*, Dehli, 1938. Reappeared in R.A. Ṣiddīqī, *Iqbal: Shakhshīyat Aur Shā lei* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1976), p. 3.

contemporaries.

During the writing of this article Iqbal consulted a number of scholars. His correspondence with Sayyid Sulaimān Nadvī on this point is dated 1925.⁵ The letters to ‘Abd al-Mājid Daryābādī in which he refers to this lecture also dates as 22 March 1925.⁶ From this we can conclude that possibly Iqbal had started writing the article in 1920 and kept on improving it until 1925. There are, however, two substantial evidences that put this date a bit differently. One is a letter that Iqbal wrote to a certain friend of his, Sayyid Muhammad Sa’id al-Dīn Ja’farī, on 3 August 1922, in which he said: “I am writing a comprehensive article in English entitled: ‘The Idea of Ijtihād in the Law of Islam.’”⁷

This shows that it would not be correct to say that the article was completed in 1920. It is evident that until 1922 he was still occupied with the compilation of this article.

It would be equally wrong to conclude on the basis of Iqbal’s correspondence with Nadvī and Daryābādī in 1925 that the article was completed as late as 1925. Firstly, because the letters, particularly that of Daryābādī, imply that the article was already completed and Iqbal was asking his addressee for his comments. Secondly, it is now certainly known, as we will explain shortly, that Iqbal delivered this lecture in Lahore in December 1924. We would not deny, however, the possibility of several drafts having been written on various dates. Also it is still a question whether Iqbal delivered the same lecture in South India which he did in Lahore.

II

We have seen that Iqbal’s interest in the problem of *ijtihād* began in 1904 and he started drafting his lecture in question probably in 1920 and delivered it in 1924 and again in 1930. Naturally the question arises why it took Iqbal so long to prepare this lecture. Even if it is admitted that Iqbal kept on improving and revising his draft, the need for such revisions is still to be explained. The very first answer one can give is that the subject was very

⁵ Sh. ‘Ata’ Allāh, Ed., Iqbal Nāmah [Collection of Iqbal’s Letters], (Lahore : Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, n.d.), I, 13.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Vide B.A. Dar, Ed., Anwār-i Iqbal [Collection of Iqbal’s Letters], (Karachi : Iqbal Academy, 1967), p. 285.

delicate as well as controversial. Iqbal was apprehensive of the reaction of the conservative ‘*ulmā*’ and the general public. This is why, whereas in 1904 his medium of expression was Urdu, in his later years his addressees were the English-reading public.

In relation to this we must also keep in view that Iqbal was highly conscious of his limitations. His lack of knowledge about Arabic sources, especially on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, made him more and more cautious. There is yet another factor to be taken into account. The books on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence were not readily available to him in those years, particularly Abū ishāq al-Shāṭibī’s *Al-Muwāfaqāt*⁸ and Shawkānī’s *Irshād al-Fuḥūl* on which he drew extensively, became available only in 1924. In fact, he was one of the first Indian Muslims to have used them. To make up for his mastery of Arabic sources he turned to as many scholars and as many times as was possible for him. We know from Chaghatā’ī’s⁹ account that he consulted extensively the following scholars when he was in Ludhiana: Maulānā Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān, Mufti Na’īm, Miyān ‘Abdul Ḥayy and Maulānā Muhammad Amin.

In Lahore he was constantly in touch with Maulānā Aṣghar Alī Rūḥī and Maulānā Ghulam Murshid. As we have already mentioned, he was also in correspondence with Sayyid Sulaimān Nadvī on this point. These consultations and deliberations on these advices did demand time.

Furthermore, the book which particularly incited Iqbal to de-line his view was that by N.P. Aghnides, *Mohammedan Theories of Finance*.¹⁰ Aghnides was a Christian Greek from Turkey who was sent in 1911 to Columbia University, New York, by the Turkish Government. He wrote this book as his Ph.D. dissertation for the University in 1916.¹¹ The book was published soon after, but Iqbal came to know of it only in 1923 when a certain Raḥmat ‘Alī in New York sent it to him for his comments.¹² Aghnides shows a good command of original Arabic sources of Islamic jurisprudence. In his formulation of the problem he adopted the approach of an Orientalist. This provided Iqbal with

⁸ For a study of Shāṭibī’s legal thought, see the present writer’s *Islamic Legal Philosophy*, Islamabad, 1977.

⁹ Dr ‘Abdallāh Chaghatā’ī, “Allāmah Iqbal Kay Madras Kay Lekcharon Ka Pas Manzar” [Background of Iqbal’s Lectures], Daily *Imroze*, Lahore, 22 April 1956.

¹⁰ First published by Columbia University, New York, in 1916.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, and Appendix.

¹² Chaghatā’ī, *op. cit.*

a view of *ijtihad* which was refreshingly different from the conventional one. It was, however, as Iqbal observed, erroneous at many places.

The points where Iqbal found himself differing with Aghnides gave him an opportunity to reconstruct his views more profoundly. We would like to point out only three important points of difference between Aghnides and Iqbal. Firstly, Aghnides criticises Islamic law as a mechanical system.¹³ This criticism had deep reaction on Iqbal's thinking. In fact, one can say that Aghnides' characterisation of this concept as mechanical compelled Iqbal to reinterpret the whole development of Islamic thought in order to stress its dynamic rather than mechanical nature. If we study the seven lectures in the *Reconstruction* we find this theme running through the whole book almost as a refrain. Iqbal rejects the characterisation of Islamic worldview as static. He singles out the notion of *ijtihad* as the principle of movement *par excellence*.

The second point of contention with Aghnides was the question of *Hadith*. While Aghnides accepted the traditionist point of view in taking all the *ahādith* as a reliable source of law,¹⁴ Iqbal did not fully endorse his idea.¹⁵

The third point of difference was the question of *ijma'*. Aghnides says that, according to some Muslim jurists, *ijma'* can repeal the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*.¹⁶ Iqbal disagreed with him on this point as well.¹⁷

It shows that the problem of *ijtihad* was not a simple one. It involved the whole ambit of Islamic thought. The modern social problems gave it an entirely new dimension. Adding to it a lack of command on original sources inhibited Iqbal to progress rapidly.

III

Dr Iqbal, in one of his letters, states that he delivered the lecture on the problems of *ijtihad* in Lahore, but he does not mention any date. Dr Ghulām Jilānī Barq, in one of his interviews, recalls that this lecture was delivered in

¹³ Aghnides, *Mohammedan Theories of Finance* (Lahore: Premier Book House, 1961, reprint), p. 143.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁵ Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, p. 173.

¹⁶ Aghnides, op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁷ Iqbal, op. cit., p. 174.

Lahore after Iqbal's return from South India.¹⁸ This remark places the date around 1929-30. This, however, is not acceptable in view of a number of evidences that we shall discuss shortly.

Faqīr Sayyid Vaḥīduddīn has given this date as 1925.¹⁹ It is probably a conjectural remark. A more concise and succinct account of this lecture is given by Dr 'Abdallāh Chaghata'ī.²⁰ He explains that this lecture was delivered before Iqbal's journey to South India. He also mentions that it was delivered on 13 December 1924. This is confirmed by an announcement in *Zamīndār*, Lahore. We also know that Iqbal delivered almost all of his lectures in Lahore at various annual sessions of Anjuman-i Himāyat-i Islām, before his journey to South India. This fact has been very ably documented by Ḥanif Shāhid in his book *Iqbal Aur Anjuman-i Himāyat-i Islām*.²¹

The announcement in the *Zamīndār* is a very solid and comprehensive evidence on this point. Hence we would like to quote it *verbatim*:

“Allāmah Shaikh Muhammad Iqbāl will read a very important paper today, the 13th December, at 6.30 p.m. in Ḥabībīyah Hall in Islamiyah College. The paper is entitled as: 'Ijtihād in Islam'. Shaikh 'Abd al-Qādir will preside. The article will be in English.”²²

From this evidence there should have remained no doubt that the exact date of the delivery of this lecture in Lahore was 13 December 1924. Dr 'Abdallāh Chaghata'ī adds that there also appeared comments, reviews and criticism of this lecture in the Lahore press. However curious it may be, we have not been able to find any news reports or comments in the Urdu and English press in the days after the lecture was delivered.

IV

Iqbal was invited to deliver lectures at the University of Madras in 1928.

¹⁸ *Vide* Raḥīm Bakhsh Shāhīn, *Anrāq-i Gum Gashtab* [ʿAllāmah Iqbāl Kī Ghayr Mudawwanah Taḥrīren], (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1975), pp. 191-93.

¹⁹ Faqīr Sayyid Vaḥīduddīn, *Rūzgār-i Faqīr* (Karachi: Lion Art Press, 1968), II, 87.

²⁰ Chaghata'ī, *op. cit.*

²¹ M. Ḥanif Shahid, *Iqbal Aur Anjuman-i Himāyat-i Islam* (Lahore: Anjuman-i Himāyat-i Islam, 1976), p. 110.

²² The Daily (?) *Zamīndār*. Lahore, 12 Dec. 1924. I am grateful to the Research Society of Pakistan, Lahore, for allowing me to consult their files.

In this tour he also visited Hyderabad. He made another lecture tour in 1930. It has, however, been difficult to find out when and where *ijtihād* lecture was given. It is certainly known that the lecture was not given in his first tour to Madras in 1928-29. It is hard to explain why, when the lecture was already prepared and had in fact been delivered in Lahore, should it not be included in the first three lectures delivered at Madras. There is only one indirect reference to the effect that it was given at Hyderabad in 1930.²³ Besides this we have no other evidence on this point.

The fact that, despite its availability, the lecture was not delivered in Madras, raises a number of questions. With the present status of information on this point we can explain this delay only by referring to Iqbal's apprehensions of the criticism of his views on *ijtihād*. He had experienced it in his correspondence with Maulānā Daryābādī. It is also possible that when he presented this lecture in Lahore he might have been criticised by a section of his audience. This is, however, only a surmise. It is also possible that, although the lecture was prepared, Iqbal was not confident enough to present it to his Madras audience. He still wanted time to improve and revise it before the final presentation. Now, if this is true, then the question arises whether the present lecture included in the Reconstruction is actually the revised version of the Lahore lecture or it is the same. It would have been interesting to compare the drafts of both these lectures, but, unfortunately, the text of the Lahore lecture is not available. The original manuscripts or the drafts of these papers might hold the key to explain this point, but so far scholars have not been able to trace the original manuscripts.²⁴

A MESSAGE FROM THE EAST

Being Versified English Rendering of

IQBAL'S

PAYAM-I MASHRIQ

²³ I am thankful to Professor M. Saeed Sheikh, Director, Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, for information on this point.

²⁴ In an interview, Dr Jāwīd Iqbāl has recently confirmed that the said MS is not extant. See recorded interview: Islamic Research Institute Library.

M. HADI HUSSAIN

THE *Payam-i Mashriq* was published in 1922. It was intended as the response of the East to Goethe's *Oestlicher Divan*. During his productive period, extending over almost half a century, Iqbal was very much concerned with the human situation in the phenomenal world. The Faustian element in the human drama engrossed his attention no less than the voluntaristic urges manifested in the universe. His robust optimism led him to formulate a melioristic philosophy of the perfectibility of the human ego in an existential setting of ceaseless struggle and striving. The egalitarian system of Islam . . . was regarded by him as the base for the emergence of a universalist democracy of unique individuals presided over by the most Unique Individual—God. But his was not a mere dry-as-dust philosophy. Richly endowed with the poetic sensibility, his genius burst forth into songs of exquisite beauty and power.

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