

IQBAL'S RELATION WITH THE BRITISH IMPERIAL POWER

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Iqbal's relation with the British Imperial Power in India was characterised by perennial friction and conflict. He was deeply conscious of his own and his nation's position as enslaved people,⁷⁵ yet he had the nerve to look straight into the eyes of the representatives of the British Raj.

Almost at the outset of his career he came into direct conflict with the highest political authority, the redoubtable Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India.

In 1903, Iqbal's elder brother Shaikh Ata Muhammad, then working as Sub-Divisional Officer in the Department of Military Works at Quetta, was involved in a criminal plot by his professional adversaries. The charges framed against him were entirely fake. Apprehending that Shaikh Ata Muhammad would be judged unfairly, Iqbal addressed a forceful letter to Lord Curzon, setting out the facts of the case in detail. The Viceroy ordered a prompt re-investigation of the case, at the end of which the charge-sheet against Shaikh Ata Muhammad was withdrawn.⁷⁶

Apart from the Viceroy, Iqbal's relationship with the Indian Civil Service, the steel frame of the British Empire in India, was none too happy.

In his speeches on the floor of the Punjab Legislative Assembly during the 1929-30 Sessions Iqbal twice⁷⁷ made some provocative suggestions to curb the vested interests of the bureaucracy. The bureaucratic elite, composed mainly of the British, drew enormous salaries, allowances which, coupled with spacious housing facilities, servants, furloughs, pensions and gratuities, gave them a much higher standard of living than any other comparable class of bureaucracy in the world. Referring to this, Iqbal categorically stated in the Council: "We spend much more than any other country in the world on the present system of ad-ministration. . . . We pay

⁷⁵ See "Taswir-i Dard" (*Bang-i Dara*, pp. 68-76) and "Ghulamun Ki Namaz" (*Darb-i Kalim*, p. 15S), in *Kulliyat-i Iqbal* (Urdu), (Lahore: Sh. Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1977).

⁷⁶ Riaz Hussain, *The Politics of Iqbal* (Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1977), PP. 3-4.

⁷⁷ See speeches delivered on 4 March 1929 and 7 March 1930 (reproduced in Latif Ahmad Sherwani, Ed., *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal* [Lahore : Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1977], pp. 59-65).

much more than our revenues justify."⁷⁸ He informed the house that "There are to my mind only three alternatives open to the people of this province— either have the present system with all its ugly daughters, such as deficit budgets, communal bickerings, starving millions, debt and unemployment or do away with the present system root and branch, or retain the form of the present system and secure the power to pay less for it. There is no other alternative. This system must come to an end if you want to live a comfortable life."⁷⁹ The last sentences of the quoted excerpt implied large cuts in the emoluments and facilities enjoyed by the civil service. Not unnaturally the statement drew a strong protest from the British official members of the house and the feudal-bureaucratic establishment dismissed Iqbal's suggestions out of hand.

During the Round Table Conference also there was a latent current of hostility between Iqbal and Britishers. Iqbal proposed to his fellow Muslim delegates to the Round Table Conference that the British government should be advised to accept Provincial Autonomy before the introduction of the principle of Central responsibility in the Government of India. In the opinion of Iqbal, without the consolidation of Provincial Autonomy a federal constitution could not function in India. Accepting Iqbal's view the Muslim Delegation resolved on 15 November 1931 not to participate in the discussions of the Federal Structure Committee.

In a surprise move, disregarding its earlier decision, the Muslim Delegation did participate in the Federal Committee on 26 November and consented to the simultaneous introduction of Provincial Autonomy and Central Responsibility.

Iqbal blamed the British politicians for this somersault of the Muslim Delegation. In bitter tones Iqbal commented: "The Muslim spokesmen were badly advised by certain English politicians in rejecting the immediate introduction of responsible Government in the provinces of British India."⁸⁰

Two years after the publication of the *Secrets of the Self* (1924 an English translation of *Asrar-i Khudi* by Reynold A. Nicholson of Cambridge University, the British Government, recognising his scholarship and poetic talent, knighted Iqbal.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 64.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Quoted from Percival Griffiths, *The British Impact on India* (London : Frank Cass, 1955), p. 330, in Riaz Hussain, op. cit., p. 86.

Iqbal did not seek this honour and it came to him unsolicited. In this he was an exception because his other contemporaries, Mian Fazl-i Hussain, Sikandar Hayat Khan and Shaikh Abdul Qadir, had earned their Knighthood by sterling service to the colonial power.

Fazl-i Hussain's and Sikandar Hayat's entire career was spent in the service of the British rule. The apathy which existed between Iqbal and these two gentlemen was mainly attributable to this cause.

The hostility between Iqbal and the British rulers is well port-rayed by Azim Hussain, Fazl-i Husain's son.

On the authority of his father's diaries, Azim Hussain tells us:

"In 1924 Fazl-i-Hussain urged Sir Malcolm Hailey to raise Iqbal to the Bench, but while the case was under consideration Dr. Iqbal alienated the sympathies of officials by unrestrained criticism of the Government. . . . On his [Iqbal's] return to India (from the Round Table Conference), he severely criticized the work of the Muslim Delegation, a criticism greatly resented by the Secretary of State because it belittled the proceedings of the Conference."

The Viceroy was also appropriately angry and only reluctantly agreed to send Iqbal to the Round Table Conference. "While the Conference was in progress," writes Azim Hussain, "he [Iqbal] re-signed and returned to India, and denounced the British Government in the strongest possible terms in his address to the Muslim League at Allahbad."⁸¹ Not surprisingly, therefore, the Viceroy refused to appoint Iqbal as member of the Public Service Commission or as Agent of India to South Africa.⁸²

It is inconceivable that Iqbal could ever have come to terms with British rulers. He regarded slavery as the greatest misfortune that could befall a man, while a free man in his eyes was a "living miracle in himself".⁸³

⁸¹ Azim Hussain, *Fazl-i-Hussain* (Bombay : Longmans, 1946), pp. 318-19.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁸³ *Darb-i Kalim* (Kulliyat), p. 78