

IQBAL ON QUR'ANIC CONCEPT OF HISTORY

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The literal meaning of the word "*tarikh*" is to write, to narrate and to make entries. If we have to say that a letter had been written on such and such a date, we would use *mu'arrakhab*, i.e. written on: be it 11 September 1977. On the death of a certain historian a poet said mournfully:

وكان يؤرخ
ذكر الانام
وهـاهـو
اليوم قد
ارخـا

[He used to write the accounts of other people.

Lo! today he himself has been written down.]

In more plain words, the above verse means that the historian himself became a "part of history". This shows that in technical terms "history" deals with the past, but not the past at large; it is rather the past of man in a society. Professor Toynbee defines history a bit more precisely. In his words: "What we call history is the history of man in a civilized society."³²

Professor Toynbee, continuing, maintains that if history means all that period which human beings have spent on this earth, then the civilised span will be only two per cent of the total. Keeping this stance in view, perhaps it would not be far from truth if history, as a particular branch of knowledge, is

³² A Study of History (abridged edition, 1971), I, 61. 11

considered as a link with the dawn of civilisation. Prehistoric ages, on the contrary, should be studied under the title of Anthropology.

Now if history is taken for the story of the past, then what is the purpose served by the study of history? Should it be studied as we study fiction? That eventually would mean a sort of amusement. Surely it is not like this; at least Muslim historians did not accept it as fiction or fable. According to Muslim historians, the contents of history are living realities. Therefore, they invite those who are really alive to listen attentively and to observe the phenomena of the past with vigilant eyes. This will make man learn lessons which will add to his knowledge and wisdom and will reshape him into a better human being.

In fact, the viewpoint of Muslim historians is influenced by the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'an asks the human beings time and again to go through the world with open eyes and diligent hearts "(so that they may) see what was the End of those before them. They were superior to them in strength: they tilled the soil and populated it in greater numbers than these have done."³³

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, interpreting the above-quoted verse of the Qur'an, lays down:

"Let not any generation think that it is superior to all that went before it. We may be 'heirs to all the ages, in the foremost files of time'. That is no reason for arrogance, but, on the contrary, adds to our responsibility. When we realise what flourishing cities and kingdoms existed before, how they flourished in numbers and prosperity, what chances they were given, and how they perished when they disobeyed the law of God, we shall feel a sense of humility, and see that it was rebellion and self-will that brought them down."³⁴

Those who transgressed the limits and gave themselves to covetousness, carnal pleasures and cruelty were annihilated. There were others who lost heads on account of power. Power corrupted them so much so that they saw in themselves the attributes of God and declared that they were gods. The reality was simple; they had ceased to live as human beings. What else could be the result? They collided with the pervasive order of God and became

³³ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Tr., The Holy Qur'an, xxx. 9.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 1053, footnote 3515.

extinct.

Whenever and wherever human beings lose balance, the inevitable consequences are anarchy, cruelty, chaos, bloodshed, carnage and ruin. All the Prophets of God preached Justice, i.e. equilibrium, individual as well as collective, in all fields of life. They instructed people to outgrow animality and attain humanity. Man is not all matter. Man is not all soul. Soul and matter go together. Balance has to be maintained. Wherever, in some era and in some society, the great majority of individuals became temperate, society became strong, prosperous, integrated and free. It is only this kind of society which can produce great individuals who in return add glory to their society—sometimes to all man-kind. But the hard fact is that temperateness and equilibrium are seldom maintained for a long time. Ease brought about by affluence and nonchalance, resulting from a sense of security, begin to tell. Then the bell tolls. That is the march towards the end. Ups and downs, with short levels in between, be it material or spiritual, construct the story of man in society.

What else history is? One should not forget that man himself is the author of this sad and gay story, repenting now and taking pride then. He is the author because he is a thinking, analysing and foreseeing existence. He is not like inert matter; he does not belong to the world of plants and animals as such. History asks man to feel his responsibility and be always on the alert. History is among the open books of God. It must be studied in the light of the Book.

Taqī al-Din Maqrīzī (845/1441) in his renowned book *al-Khitāṭ* writes:

"In short there are two kinds of knowledge, rational and revealed. One should be proficient in both kinds of knowledge, according to one's needs. After that he should get absorbed in the study of history and speculate over the lessons taught by it. He whose heart is open and eyes awake, by the grace of God, gets to know as a reward for his deep thinking the ruinous end of those who prided in their wealth and fighting forces. And so on and so forth."³⁵

The same author, in another book, *Al-'Uqūd al-Farīdah*, explains:

³⁵ *Al-Plan Bi al-Taubikb* (Urdu translation, Markazi Urdu Board, Lahore), p. 86.

"God Almighty makes mankind inhabit the world generation after generation, split into tribes. The aim is that the forerunners should leave behind the lessons to be learnt by those who follow and that they who follow should keep the stories of their for-bears fresh to be related to others so well that the wise refrain from things despised and the well-mannered adopt the agreeable conduct."³⁶

Another historian, al-Badr Ḥusain al-Ahdal, states in the beginning of his book *Tuḥfat al-Zamān* Ta'riḫ-i Sādāt-i-Yaman:

"This [history] is a very useful branch of knowledge. Through it the successors come to know of the circumstances of their pro-genitors and thus the just stand higher in the estimation of men than the unjust. The reader of history profits by its lessons. He is enabled to evaluate the intellect and wisdom of the former gene-rations. He comes to understand their rationale. Had there been no history, mankind would not have been able to know the affairs and conditions of various governments, lineages, characteristics, causes and events of the preceding peoples. There could then have been no discrimination between the reasonable and the unreasonable, the foolish and the wise."³⁷

Yet another Arab historian, Abu 'Alī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ya'qūb al-Rāzī Miskawaiḥ, states that when he studied the circumstances and events of foregoing nations, the character of their kings and the description of their cities and when he read the books of history, he realised that he had gained the knowledge of things that occur again and again. Thus the occurrence of like events is expected any time. This is why he wrote his book called *Tajārib al-Umam wa 'Awāqib al-Himam*—which is in four volumes.³⁸ The book deals with the experiences of various nations belonging

to the past ages, what they did, desired, deserved and how they met their end.

Through these and other like references it becomes crystal clear that, in the opinion of Muslim historians, history does not mean the history of kings and their kingdoms. It is rather the stories of nations which include kings

³⁶ Ibid., p. 88.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

also. History describes the character and behaviour of different peoples. It records the extent of their intellect, wisdom and other accomplishments. It depicts the phenomena of collective rise and fall of communities. It re-ports the causes and reasons of the rise and fall that appear again and again. Ibn Khaldūn vehemently says:³⁹ فالماضى اشبه بالاتي من الماء [The past is more similar to the present than water is to water].

Ibn Khaldūn also defines in the manner the other Muslim historians have done. However, he emphasises that history should be studied with profound contemplation so that truth may be achieved, realities of things may be discerned and one may know the causes behind the creation, evolution and changes that occur in things. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the study of history demands depth of knowledge, breadth of visioa and clarity of thought which enable one to understand Causes and Effects. Ibn Khaldūn asserts:

فهو (التاريخ) لذلك اصيل في الحكمة عريق و جدير بان يعد في علومها و خليق.⁴⁰

[Hence it (history) is solidly rooted in philosophy and is quite worthy of being treated as one of its departments.]

Hegel stresses: "Philosophy of history means nothing but the thoughtful consideration of it."⁴¹

The truth is that with the thoughtful study of the Qur'ān a particular worldview takes place giving birth to a particular behaviour. And if we penetrate a bit deeper, the study of the Qur'ān brings us to the conclusion that the fountainhead of several sciences and disciplines is the Book itself. History is one of them.

Faqīr Sayyid Waḥīd al-Din narrates:

"When Dr. Iqbal was residing at a bungalow on the McLeod Road, a new

³⁹ *Al-Muqaddimah* (al-Maktahah Tijārīyyah, Egypt), p. 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴¹ *Philosophy of History* (Dower Publications, New York), p. 8.

visitor called at him. Stray conversation went on for a while. Then the new visitor put a question to Dr Iqbal saying, 'You have read books on religion, economics, politics, history, philosophy, etc. Which one of them is the best and most pro-found in respect of wisdom? Dr Iqbal stood up from the chair, made a gesture with his hands indicating that he should wait as he would be back in no time. So he went in. After two or three minutes he returned with a book, He put the book into the hands of the questioner and said, "The Qur'ān'." ⁴²

At the moment we are not concerned with other branches of knowledge. We are here to deal with history only. According to Iqbal, the general historic vision of Ibn Khaldūn had sprung from the fountainhead of the Qur'ān. It goes without saying that Ibn Khaldūn is the founder of sociology and is regarded as a pillar of philosophy of history. This is how Iqbal explains:

"...It is, therefore, a gross error to think that the Quran has no germs of a historical doctrine. The truth is that the whole spirit of Prolegomena. of Ibn-i-Khaldūn appears to have been mainly due to the inspiration which the author must have received from the Qur'ān. Even in his judgements of character he is, in no small degree, indebted to the Quran." ⁴³

Almost all Muslim historians and a great majority of Orientalists are of opinion that the beginning and development of Islamic history has been due to the Holy Qur'ān. Iqbal also upholds this

view. He points out that the Holy Qur'ān has established a principle for knowing the facts correctly.

"O believers! If any bad man comes to you with a report clear it up at once." ⁴⁴

In this regard Iqbal explains:

"Since accuracy in recording facts which constitute the material of

⁴² *Rūzguār-i Faqīr* (ed. Nov. 1963), pp. 92-93.

⁴³ *Reconstruction* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1944), p. 139.

⁴⁴ The Holy Qur'an, Xlix. 6.

history is an indispensable condition of history as a science, and an accurate knowledge of facts ultimately depends on those who report them, the very first principle of historical criticism is that the reporter's personal character is an important factor in judging his testimony."⁴⁵

Fāsiq means a profligate, wicked person, who leads a disorderly life and, therefore, becomes untrustworthy. He who is of a vicious nature must create, concoct and spread scandals. If such a person holds a pen and assumes the role of a recorder of events or of a historian, can he be expected to hold fast to truth and support it? His vicious nature will certainly mar the face of events in order to quench his own thirst for scandal-mongering. Ibn Khaldūn is quite aware of this sequel. He refers to a number of scandalous narrations and states thus:

"There are many such stories. They are always cropping up in the works of the historians. The incentive for invention and re-reporting them shows a tendency to forbidden pleasures and for smearing the reputation of others. People justify their own subservience to pleasure by citing the supposed doings of men and women of the past. Therefore they often appear very eager for such information and are alert to find it when they go through the pages of published works."⁴⁶

We have already laid down that in Iqbal's opinion the *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldūn appears to have been influenced by "the inspiration which the author received from the Quran".⁴⁷ It is quite evident that, according to Iqbal, a student of history needs deep knowledge, wide experience, and mature intellect, because history encompasses the entire life. All theories and practices thereof, crafts and professions, arts and letters, politics, economics, mythologies, religions, physics and metaphysics and what not have a history and hence are to be regarded as history. But of all these multifarious, multi-coloured and multiplex activities, professions and departments, none has profound meaning if taken separately, however high the standard of any performance might be. Life is one integrated whole. It is a meaning which is always one though it has innumerable shades. Hence no art can be

⁴⁵ Reconstruction, p. 140.

⁴⁶ *The Muqaddimah*, Eng. trans. Rozenhal, abridged by N J. Dawood (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 23.

⁴⁷ Reconstruction, p. 139.

comprehended apart from life. Rather no accomplishment can fully be attained or appreciated without referring to other accomplishments. So it is with history. Without comprehending the comprehensiveness of life history and its pedigree of evolution cannot be construed. Let us take a crude example, that of an elephant. If the elephant is not kept in view, can the trunk and its functions be fully explained and understood? What does the trunk of the animal stand for, without reference to the comprehensive elephant? Similarly, no philosophic doctrine, political revolution or economic change, etc., treated separately can make us feel its full significance. Iqbal, in respect of a complete history of philosophy, states:

"The progress of thought cannot be divorced from other phases of human activity. Our histories of philosophy tell us what various peoples have thought, but they give us no information as to the various causes—social and political—which have determined the character of human thought. To write a complete history of philosophy would certainly be a tremendous task. A mere theologian cannot fully reveal to his readers the rich content of Luther's Reform. We are apt to isolate great ideas from the general stream of man's intellectual activity."⁴⁸

In this context, Iqbal's Presidential Address of 11 June 1932 may also be taken into account. It was read out in a public meet-

ing of the Muslims, held outside Mochi Gate, Lahore. The Muslims had gathered to protest against a move put before the

Senate of the University of the Punjab in which it was proposed that the Indians should be taught the history of India only and Islamic history should be excluded from the syllabus. It should be remembered that the University of the Punjab and its bodies were in those days predominantly Hindu concerns. The proposal was made at the behest of the Hindus, by Professor Bruce, who then was the Chairman of the Department of History. In this regard the strongest argument given by Iqbal was that history had never belonged to any particular group of people, related to a certain area. History in his view belonged to all mankind. For the whole of humanity history was a common heritage. A few lines from that address are given below:

"History in its totality is a movement of human soul. Human soul has no

⁴⁸ Javid Iqbal, Ed. (Iqbal), *Stray Reflections* (Lahore : Ghulam Ali -& Sons, 1961), pp. 60-61.

specific environment. The whole world is its environment.... To treat it as belonging to a particular nationality is to demonstrate narrow-mindedness. I went to Italy and came across a gentleman called Prince Caetani, who was fond of Islamic history. He has written so many books on history and has expended a large wealth in this pursuit. No Muslim country can undertake the task of even getting all this huge material translated. I asked him as to why he was interested so much in Islamic history. His answer was that it turned women into men."⁴⁹

The man was an Italian and not one of the inhabitants of Muslim lands nor was he a Muslim that he felt attracted towards Islamic history on account of religious affinity. The reason quite obviously is that history of mankind is a spiritual outcome. It represents all. It teaches all. It is a common treasury. Borders are only material impressions. There exist no borders for soul, neither spatial nor temporal. We cannot cut time into pieces. We cannot cut away the past from the present. We, for our convenience, do take into account the serial time and devise years, months, days, hours, minutes and seconds and even fractions of seconds, but the Duration is one. It is indivisible. Iqbal vehemently declares:

زمانہ ایک، حیات ایک،
 کائنات بھی ایک
 دلیلِ کم نظری، قصہ
 جدید و قدیم⁵⁰

[Time is one, Life is one, the universe is one,

To talk of ancient and modern is but shortsightedness

For Iqbal life is a continuously evolving movement which serves as a field of action for man to put his capacities to test and show his worth. The Qur'ān says:

⁴⁹ Rafiq Afzal, Ed., *Gustār-i-Iqbal* (Punjab University, Lahore), p. 153-54.

⁵⁰ *Darb-i Kalim*, p. 26.

"Every man's fate We have fastened on his neck: on the Day of Judgment, We shall bring out for him a scroll, which he will see spread open."⁵¹

Through this verse God has made it abundantly manifest that the fate of man depends on his deeds, good or evil, and they hang round his neck. Man is the maker of his fortune.

Here I feel tempted to quote some verses of Iqbal from his famous poem *Zamānah* (Time) included in *Bāl-i Jibrīl*. The diction of the poem is superb. It seems to have a celestial music. As to its meanings it is one of the most profound poems, although it consists of only ten verses. Anyway, the following verses have direct bearing on the subject alluded to above:

مَری صراحی سے قطرہ قطرہ نئے حوادثِ ٹپک
ہے ہے
میں اپنی تسبیحِ روز و شب کا شمار کرتا ہوں
دانہ دانہ!
پر ایک سے آشنا ہوں، لیکن جدا جدا رسم و راہ
میری
کسی کا راکب، کسی کا مرکب، کسی کو عبرت
کے تازیانہ!
نہ تھا اگر تو شریکِ محفل، قصور میرا ہے یا
کے تیرا؟
مرا طریقہ نہیں کہ رکھ لوں کسی کی خاطر مئے
شہ بانہ!

مرے خم و پیچ کو نجومی کی آنکھ پہچانتی
نہیں ہے
ہدف سے بیگانہ تیر اُس کا نظر نہیں جس کی
عارفانہ!

[New realities are trickling from my gohlet, drop after drop,
—I tell every bead of my rosary of day and night.

I am everybody's acquaintance but my behaviour with each of them is
different,

For some I am the rider, for some others I serve as a means of
conveyance

(or vehicle) and there are yet others with whom I deal as a whip of
warning.

If you did not attend the feast the fault is yours, not mine,

It is not my custom to hold back the nocturnal wine for any absentee.

My twists and turns are not discernible to astrologer's eye,

He who does not possess the intuitive eye cannot hit the target with his
arrow.]

No doubt, every moment is a creative moment. Things are coming to
life. Things are dying out. Every moment the universe is a new universe.
Hence no human being can afford to be inert, neither physically nor
mentally. One has constantly to be alert, up and doing. Time gives no special
consideration and makes no concession to any individual or society. Those
who capture the spirit of creation and change know what to do, how to do
and when to do. They subjugate Time. Those who are otherwise are
subjugated by Time. There are people who learn and conquer. There are
people who do not learn and are trampled upon by others. Their affliction

serves as a warning to those who follow. Moreover, it is not the knowledge of natural laws alone that leads man to the abode of reality. Development of spiritual faculties is also needed, otherwise our understanding of the world we live in will not be sound. Ideas will fall and ideals will crumble down to earth before long adding yet another sad chapter to the record book of human failures: failures caused by stubborn ambitions entertained by immature minds. But what history is otherwise?

Anyway ours is not a universe which is locked or blocked. It is an ever-developing and ever-expanding universe with open possibilities, where everything is in search of its ultimate fate. Man, whom Nature has equipped with material as well as spiritual powers, has also to toil constantly, consciously and wilfully to maintain his dominance over the forces of Nature. If he slackens, he falters. For him to rest is to rust. Islamic thought and especially Muslim view of history is replete with this very spirit. Iqbal explains this fact as under:

Thus all lines of Muslim thought converge on a dynamic conception of the universe. This view is further reinforced by Ibn-i-Maskawaih's theory of life as an evolutionary movement, and Ibn-i-Khaldūn's view of history. History or, in the language of the Quran, 'the days of God,' is the third source of human knowledge according to the Quran. It is one of the most essential teachings of the Quran that nations are collectively judged, and suffer for their misdeeds here and now."⁵²

After quoting the following verse of the Qur'ān: "Every nation has its fixed period" (vii. 32), Iqbal stresses that the verse "suggests the possibility of a scientific treatment of the life of human societies regarded as organisms".⁵³ Now life regarded as an organism means that nations are connected with previous nations as one generation is to its predecessor and successor generations. This shows that history is a continuous movement towards progress, a movement which cannot be divided into past, present and future. Time-process has no compartments. The seed is pre-sent in the sapling. The seed and sapling are both alive and grow in the tree. A baby growing into boyhood is really the same baby as he was born. When the boy became a full-grown human being, the baby and boy were there within him, living. Then

⁵² *Reconstruction*, p. 138.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

the organ-ism began to decline into old age, being reduced to a mere skeleton. Still it was the same person. Similar is the position of societies, nations, rather humanity at large.

It is already quite apparent that by history we mean the history of man in society. If human beings are not there the world is void. All sensibilities end. Every sort of perception or intuition is extinct. It means there would be no self-consciousness, no senses, no knowledge, neither qualities, nor quantities, neither attributes nor tributes. What a world where there is no colour! Where there is no grace. Where there is no perfume. Moreover, where there is neither pleasure nor grief nor victory nor defeat. Still further where there is no notion of good and evil. Without man the universe is deaf and dumb and blind. Meanings lose all meanings. Says Maulānā Rūmī, in one of the opening verses of his *Mathnavī*:

عالم از ما هست شد نے ما

ازو

باده از ما ست شد نے ما

ازو

[The world came to exist through us and not we through it, Wine became intoxicated through us and not we through it.)

In other words, we may say that man is the measure for all things (not the measure of all things). He is the critic, the analyst, the judge, the umpire, and the guardian examiner. It is he who lauds. It is he who denounces. All worlds from atoms to celestial spheres, all beginnings and ends, all tastes and colours, all relations and proportions, in short, the whole world of perception and ideas is in reality the world of man. Man is the meaning and all other created existences are absurdities if man is not there. Iqbal addresses God and lays bare the pride of man in humble words:

قصور وار، غریب الدیار
ہوں، لیکن
ترا خرابہ فرشتے نہ کر
سکے آباد!⁵⁴

[I am guilty, I am alien,

Yet this desolate world of yours could not be inhabited and cultivated by your angels.]

At another occasion Iqbal repeats this same theme:

نمی بینی کہ ما خاکی
نہ داداں
چہ خویش ایس خاکداں
را⁵⁵

(Do not you see that we clay-born things,

How pleasingly have decorated your Earth!]

It is all man's toil, his sweat and blood, which has made the world colourful, graceful and musical. Yet all done is just in a tiny speck of brilliance in relation to the universe. The worlds and heavens, trillions into trillions in number, are yet to be explored. Every breath taken consciously brings man face to face with awfully immeasurable challenges. To know and to conquer is man's perpetual enterprise. It is all man's manifold history. And

⁵⁴ *Bāl-i Jibril*, p. 8

⁵⁵ *Armughān-i Hijāz*, p. 18.

it is all in Time.

The Qur'ān says: "And teach them to remember the days of God,"⁵⁶ and "Such days (of varying fortunes) We give to men and men by turns."⁵⁷

Both the above-quoted verses relate to human beings. In brief, Time is the touchstone of human performances whether they were pure or dross. Thus to them who are blessed with vision, history shows how to live. To them history is a record of the manifestation of human capabilities. Simultaneously it is a "whip of warning". So that man's endeavours continue to make him better every moment. If Time is not taken as a vital reality, then Iqbal's whole philosophy loses its very basis. Self-consciousness, self-preservation, self-fulfilment, in other words full realisation of man as such cannot be apprehended in a universe which is not ever-growing. An inert world is a senseless concept. It must move on, it must progress and evolve. It's not even to slow down. And its rest is its end. Similarly, man in this world—a restless world—cannot rest. In rest lies his death. Iqbal says:

ہمہ سوزِ نا تمام، دردِ آرزویم
بگماں وہم یقینِ را کہ شہیدِ
جستجویم

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[The whole of me is burning and it has not burnt out the whole of me
is a series of pangs of unfulfilled desires.

I turn certainty into uncertainty because I am madly devoted to search
and inquiry (and it should never come to an end)

It has been stated in the beginning, in relation to Maq'rīzī, Ahdal and Ibn Khaldūn that the stories of the past related by the Qur'ān are not just a stock for amusement. It is rather a school where the call *fa'tabirū*, i.e. "learn from

⁵⁶ xiv. 5.

⁵⁷ iii. 140.

⁵⁸ *Payām-i Mashriq*, p. 87.

the plight of former generations" keeps resounding perpetually. Like the great majority of Muslim historians, Iqbal too is of opinion that history is not simply a collection of amusing anecdotes, stories or tales. He very artfully and yet in plain words tells what history stands for:

چيست تاريخ اے ز خود

بيگانہ _____

داستانے، قصہ، افسانہ؟

ايس ترا از خوِشتن آگہ

کنند _____

آشنائے کار و مردِ رہ کند

ہمچو خنجر برفسانت می

زند _____

باز بر رومے جہانت میزند

شمع او بخت اُمم را

کوکب است

روشن از وے امشب وہم

دیشب است

چشم پرکارے کہ بیند

رفتہ _____ را

پیشِ تو باز آفرینند رفته را

سرزند از ماضی تو حالِ

تو

خیزد از حالِ تو استقبالِ

تو

مشکن از خواهی حیاتِ

لازوال

رشتهٔ ماضی ز استقبال و

حال⁵⁹

(Do you know what is history? But you do not know even your own self. Do you think it is just a story, a tale or a romance?

Instead, it makes you know yourself. It makes you know your purpose and then sets you to the path (of achievement).

It sharpens you as a dagger on the whetting-stone and then strikes you against the face of the world. .

Its candle is like fortune-star of nations which illumines the present and the past night.

It is an eye well trained. It reads the past, recreates it, and puts it

⁵⁹ *Asrar-o-Rumūz*, pp. 147-148.

before you. . . .

Your past bursts forth into the present and from your present your future is born.

If you desire to live a life everlasting then do not cut asunder your past from your present and future.]

The Qurʿān has instructed human beings repeatedly to get acquainted with the affairs of former generations. They should explore the world and see how the ancestor nations and societies became exterminated although they were very strong in every respect. They had huge man-power and unlimited wealth. Nothing could save them from ruin. The Qurʿān emphasises off and on that lessons should be learnt from history which is an open book containing guidance as well as warning. Good things of the past should be upheld and imbibed, bad ones are to be avoided. This shows history lives in us as a vital force. Therefore, we must always keep in mind factors which gave strength to individuals and societies in the past and also the factors which brought about their doom. Hence the concept of history with Semetic races, i.e. the inheritors of revealed books, was different from those who had none. For example, the Greek mind had been dominated by the idea of frequency and recurrence of events, while the Semitic religious thought held that events were immediate, non-recurrent and unique, and this fact introduced dynamism to historical movement.⁶⁰

B.A. Dar proceeds further with this idea and, explaining Iqbal's view of history, lays down:

"History as thus considered is both creative and conservative and the historical process would be incomplete with either. The conservative element means a tie with the spiritual tradition and an acceptance of the sacred heritage of the past. But it also demands a dynamic-creative element, a creative purpose, an urge towards fulfilment."⁶¹

One thing is of great import. It is that far Iqbal, as for almost all the Muslim historians, history is not essentially the history of kings, courts and caliphs. Iqbal, as is the Qurʿānic way, always deals with communities, races,

⁶⁰ BA. Dar, *A Study in Iqbal's Philosophy* (Ghulam Ali & Sons, Lahore), p. 253.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 253-54.

groups and societies—kings no doubt included. Kings, kingliness and kingdom is just one department of the comprehensive life of society. That department is administrative-cum-political. Surely this department is of utmost importance. Yet the difference between the collective life of communities and kings is made adequately manifest in the following quatrain:

سکندر رفت و شمشیر و
علم رفت
خراج شهر و گنج کان ویم
رفت
امم را از شهاں پاینده تر
دان
نمی بینی که ایران ماند و
جم رفت؟⁶²

[Went away Alexander and with him his sword, his banner,
and all sorts of tributes that came from cities, his treasures (of pearls
and rubies) brought from mines and seas.

Know that communities are much more lasting than the kings;
Do you not see that Iranian nation is there while Jamshid is no more.]

Yet the influence of lords, chiefs, dignitaries and families that wield power and also individuals and groups possessing vast riches is great because they are imitated by others who are less fortunate. People bereft of character, education and self-confidence are sheer imitative animals. Hence the responsibility of the "Biggies" is commensurate with the extent of their influence. They influence the society they are related to, according to their

⁶² *Payām-i Mashriq*, p. 70.

importance [This is what the famous Arabic saying connotes: *الناس على دين ملوكهم* [People follow the ways of their kings].

This imitation right from the uppermost circles of a society comes down step by step to the lowest one. This is why the Holy Prophet enjoined upon every individual, man and woman, to feel his and her responsibility to their juniors in age and station:⁶³ *كلكم راع و كلكم مسئول عن رعيته* [Every one of you is a herdsman (guardian) and hence accountable for his charge].

And higher the station, the greater the accountability. According to the Qur'ān, evil-doing spreads in a society much more easily through the wealthy and affluent individuals than through any other mode. This is why whenever a certain society met its ruinous plight, it could be taken for granted that the well-to do members of it had surely fallen into bad ways. They were followed by others. Gradually the whole social body became a moral wreck. Then they heard the call. Their time was up.

"(And) when We decide to destroy a population, We (first) send a definite order to those among them who are given the good things of this life, and yet transgress; so that the word is proved true against them: then it is that We destroy them utterly."⁶⁴

Interpreting the above verse says Abdullah Yusuf Ali:

"Those who are highly gifted from God—it may be with wealth or position, or it may be with talents and opportunities—are expected to understand and obey. They are given a definite order and warning. If they still transgress there is no further room for argument. They cannot plead that they were ignorant. The command of the Lord is proved against them, and its application is called for beyond doubt. Then it is that their punishment is completed."⁶⁵

As already quoted, Iqbal believes that one of the most essential teachings of the Qur'ān is that nations are collectively judged and suffer for

⁶³ *Riyāḍ al-Ṣalīḥīn* (Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, Beirut), p. 281.

⁶⁴ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Tr., *The Holy Qur'ān*, xvii. 16,

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 693, footnote 2192.

their misdeeds here and now. The Qur‘ān emphasises the fact that whenever the majority of the members of a society fall into evil ways, the nation is deemed fit for punishment. Then it is given no time. If good individuals form the majority and those who are bad are in minority, then a society is treated to be a healthy society and it can pull on. But the position is reversed when the society is to be taken for a diseased body which without timely and proper treatment may give way and expire. Individual evil-doers are also not let off. They along with the majority receive punishment here but the punishment in the next world is far severer and longer. Says Iqbal, as already quoted:

فطرت افراد سے اغماض بھی کر
 لیتے ہیں
 کبھی کرتی نہیں ملت کے
 گناہوں کو معارف⁶⁶

[Nature may at times ignore individual misdeeds,

but the collective misdeeds of a community are never ignored or forgiven.]

Individual laxity is like a negligible defect in a body otherwise healthy and stout. The body can put up with it, but when ills become strong and rule over the body, the body crumbles. Similarly, a small number of ill-meaning and evil-doing persons can be, though with reservation and reluctance, tolerated, but when evil gets hold of society due to overwhelming numbers, then there can be no remedy. The result is death. This death, i.e. collective punishment, takes place in the shape of epidemics, earthquakes, droughts, excessive rains, floods, famines, foreign invasions, civil wars and, worst of all, slavery. Slavery is collective death in life because the slave societies are like breathing dead bodies. The fact needs no amplification.

After all what do we mean by evil? In plain words, it is the surrender of

⁶⁶ *Masterpieces of World Philosophy* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 759.

a man's soul to his animal self. It is a constant tussle between the soul and the body of a human being, one trying to subjugate the other. Sometimes the values pull up, sometimes the material considerations of pomp and pleasures transgress limits and drag down. Now a certain person enjoys the thrill of soaring high and then the same one is seen stooping down to carnal ferociousness. Now he thanks and then repents. But this process of thanks and repentance concerns only those whose spiritual death has not yet occurred. It is obvious that the complete subjugation of material self by the spiritual self is almost impossible while the contrary is not impossible. We know, people become so much reconciled to their animal level of existence that they seem no more capable of understanding what humanity denotes. According to Bergson, to become a human being an individual has to outgrow his animality. In his words: "Evolution is the effort of life to free itself of the domination of matter."⁶⁷ Similarly, Iqbal says in respect of a disciplined and principled life achievable through the observance of *Din*:

چيست ديس بر خاستن از
 رومے خـ _____ اک
 تاز خود آگاه گردد جان
 پـ _____ اک⁶⁸

[What is Din, it is to outgrow the earthliness (earth-rootedness)
 so that soul achieves self-consciousness.]

Soul's journey upward is slow and difficult. But the downward movement is always much easier as if automatic, because it is pro-earth. Relation of the body with earth is immediate. Hence matter is attracted by matter. This means the downward pull is always far stronger than the upward. But soul, as long as the complete surrender to matter does not take place, tries somehow to defend the body's individual existence and tries to protect it from mass matter (the earth) which is always after it to make it an

⁶⁷ *Darb-i Kalim*, p. 86.

⁶⁸ *Jāvid Nāmāh*, p. 62.

easy morsel. Strife is life. Surrender is tantamount to death. Says Shelley:

"First our pleasures die and then
Our hopes and then our fears and when
These are gone, the debt is due,
Dust claims dust and we die too."

It means wherever a society's demise occurs it occurs on account of the surrender of soul to matter. Societies rise trying to be human. Societies fall when reconciled to animality. Dominance of soul can be illustrated as Prophet Sulaimān who, with all his wealth and possessions, soared high in the air while the dominance of matter can be characterised as Qārūn (Korah) whose treasures dragged him down into deep dark abyss leaving no trace behind. In respect of wealth to "possess" it is spiritual. To be possessed by it is material. One state makes the master, the other slave.

For Iqbal, the whole history of mankind is a sort of perpetual strife between soul and matter. Islam for him symbolises all that is good for man and that good is the soul-dominion. To reconstruct Muslim societies, in Iqbal's view, is to enliven the soul, is to strengthen belief in God, the Fountainhead of all soul atoms. That would mean to put the flow of history in Islamic spheres again on the right track. This view was a gift of God to him through the discerning study of the Qur'ān. The Qur'an being the mirror of the past, the present and the future is the best Warner as well as the most reliable source of hope.

The concluding paragraph is the translation of Iqbal's speech delivered at Muslim University Aligarh in 1929.⁶⁹ It is helpful in respect of understanding as to how Iqbal's view of history was shaped and to what extent it was impressed by the Qur'ān. And here it is:

"Another subject, which I want to emphasise, concerns the discovery of our past. I am not one of those who love their past only, rather I have faith in the future. I need the past in order to understand the present. It is the need of the day that we should have an understanding of the mainspring of culture and civilisation so that we may comprehend the

⁶⁹ *Guftār-i-Iqbal*, pp. 104-105.

significance of the events taking place in the world of Islam today. It is for the same reason that I exhort you to know your past. As we are unaware of the principles of modern civilisation and culture, we are lagging behind the other nations in the acquisition of modern knowledge. I want you to consider and observe those lost links which relate our past to our future. One such link is the inductive method which has been applied to modern sciences. It is a blessing bestowed on the world (of man) by the Holy Qur'ān. The results and fruits of the inductive method are quite apparent today. I have been diligently studying the Holy Qur'an for the last twenty years. I recite its verses every day, but I cannot claim that I have understood even a few of its chapters. If God grants me time and courage, I shall, one day, write a comprehensive history to point out how the modern world has reached its present stage by developing the ideals of life set forth in the Holy Book. I hope that the university will produce a group of people who will dedicate their lives to the study of the Holy Qur'ān. I wish that you should collaborate with me. For the last several years I have been the owner of my body only but my soul has always remained in your service and, as long as I live, it shall continue to serve you" (applause).