

ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY OF IQBAL

Dr Khawaja Amjad Saeed

Iqbal—The Anti-Imperialist. Iqbal, the great thinker of Islam, was the first economist of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent to raise his voice against the exploitation of Muslims by domestic and foreign classes controlling the means of production. It was not an easy task to open one's mouth on such matters in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century against foreign imperialists who held Muslims responsible for the War of Independence (1857), and clamped censorship and other restrictions on speeches and writings. Yet Iqbal picked up courage to expose the designs of the alien rulers working under the cloak of "Imperial Liberalism" even when he was only a student at the Government College, Lahore, and used to recite his poetry in the annual gatherings of the Anjuman Himāyat-i Islam. In the beginning he composed his verses in the traditional low key but gradually he changed his tune until his thunders rocked the British Empire and finally ripped open the Imperial Crown glittering with the Koh-i Nūr snatched from the Muslim Emperors of India.

First Urdu Publication on Economics. Iqbal started his career in 1899 as a teacher of history and philosophy, at the Lahore Oriental College. It was in 1903 that he wrote a book on Economics in Urdu: 'Jim al-Iqtisād. That was the time when the classics of Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Ricardo, Alfred Marshall and Taussig were taught all over Europe. But in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent even teachers and scholars had only a hazy idea of this subject. In fact, except for three Universities, it was not yet introduced at the University level anywhere in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. But the talented

poet not only studied this subject, he also familiarized it to the Urdu-knowing public.

This publication established Iqbal as the first Muslim economist of the subcontinent. In the absence of a technical dictionary from English into Urdu it was no; easy to write or translate a book on Economics. Yet credit goes to Iqbal that he, not only introduced the subject in as simple a language as possible, but also, for the first time in the history of Urdu literature, rendered economic terms and terminologies into Urdu which served as a beacon light for the next generation of writers on Economics.

Poverty Affects Human Soul. This compilation of Iqbal is remarkable also in another way. He has included thought-provoking suggestions and marginal notes at various places which bespeak of his ingenuity and inquisitive mind. He has written an introduction which, in later years, proved a landmark in the political history of the subcontinent. He underscored the relations between economic activity and human psychology and raised the question of the effect that a man would have on his body and mind if he is unable to meet both ends meet. And then he himself provided the answer saying that poverty affects human soul very deeply. "The mirror of soul is tarnished," he wrote, "and man is reduced to nonentity both morally and socially". Iqbal felt deeply at the poverty of people in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent in the post-1857 war period. "Is poverty indispensable in the present-day world economic order"? Is it not possible that the heart-rending bewailings of the poor in the streets of India are silenced for ever? Is it not possible that the heart-moving and pathetic scenes of poverty are effaced from the world map for ever?

Iqbal continued his contemplation on questions he had raised in his treatise on Economics as far back as 1903, and found the answer in 1930 when he delivered his famous address at the Allahabad session of the All-India Muslim League. At that time the poverty of India and especially of Muslims had touched the rock bottom as a result of the British policy of

Imperial Preferences to shift the burden of the world economic crisis (i.e. Great Depression) of 1929-30 to the colonies. India had to resort to largescale cut in public expenditure. The most to suffer were Muslim employees, labourers and business men who were already living on margin.

Economic Genesis of Pakistan Movement. Since the Muslims had been driven to this plight by the exploitative manoeuvres and discriminatory attitudes of the domestic and the foreign rulers, the only way out, Iqbal proposed in his Allahabad address, was that the Muslim majority areas of the subcontinent should be separated from the main subcontinent. Muslims and Hindus are two separate nations and could not live together, he pointed out. An excerpt from his Allahabad Address is given below:

"I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single State. Self-Government within the British Empire, or without the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India."¹⁷²

These words of Iqbal created a flutter in the circles of vested interests, but the Muslim nation found a powerful leader in the person of Quaid-i Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah who made a great political issue of this reasonable proposal and, after seventeen years of relentless struggle, Pakistan was achieved. Iqbal, too, did not sit idle. He pursued the idea vigorously and continued fighting for the economic cause of Muslims till his demise in 1938. A few months before his death when negotiations were still going on between Quaid-i Azam and the British Government, he expressed his views emphatically on the subject and said that the only solution lay in the establishment of a separate homeland for Muslims. On 28 May 1937 he wrote:

¹⁷² Latif Ahmed Sherwani, Ed., *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal* (Lahore : Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1977), p. 10.

"The problem of bread is becoming more and more acute. The Muslim has begun to feel that he has been going down and down during the last 200 years. Ordinarily he believes that his poverty is due to Hindu money-lending or capitalism. The perception that it is equally due to foreign rule has not yet fully come to him. But it is bound to come."¹⁷³

This realization came to the Muslim masses through Quaid-i-Azam who waged the twin battle against the Hindu bourgeois and British imperialism and, in the end, succeeded in creating Pakistan where the Muslims are free to tackle with their problems in any manner they like.

It was Iqbal who issued a clarion call for the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent, and it was this call which initiated the long, arduous, and historic struggle for the achievement of Pakistan. His verses, speeches and letters stand testimony to the fact that it was he who first hit upon the two-nation theory which led logically to the idea of two separate homelands.

It may be observed here that Iqbal had not yet clearly pro-posed a separate and independent State for Muslims. In the beginning' he formulated the two-nation theory and later proposed sovereign Muslim States in the Muslim majority areas as the only definite goal of the long, persistent and glorious struggle for independence. It was emphatically stated by him between May 1936 and November 1937 in his correspondence with the Quaid-i-Azam.

In his Allahabad Address Iqbal stated:

"The character of a Muslim State can be judged from what the Times of India pointed out sometime ago in a leader on the Indian Banking Enquiry Committee. 'In ancient India,' the paper points out : 'the State framed laws

¹⁷³ Iqbal wrote thirteen letters to Mr M.A. Jinnah (four in 1936 and Nine in 1937). The extract is from his letter dated 28 May 1937, See Letters of Iqbal to Jinnah (Lahore : Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1974), p. 17.

regulating the rates of interest; but in Muslim times, although Islam clearly forbids the realisation of interest on money loaned, Indian Muslim States imposed no restrictions on such rates', I therefore demand the formation of a consolidated Muslim State in the best interests of India and Islam. For India it means security and peace resulting from an internal balance of power; for Islam an opportunity to rid itself of the stamp that Arabian Imperialism was forced to give it, to mobilise its laws, its education, its culture, and to bring them into closer contact with its own original spirit and with the spirit of modern times."¹⁷⁴

Iqbal provided a framework for an individual and for the Muslim national identity through his philosophical doctrine of Khudī which he expressed in his captivating poetry.

Historical Addresses of Iqbal delivered three speeches¹⁷⁵ on Budget in the Punjab Legislative Council of those days. He also delivered a speech on the resolution regarding application of the principle of assessment of income tax to the assessment of land revenue of 23 February 1928 in the Punjab Legislative Council. His two historical Presidential Addresses of Allahabad¹⁷⁶ and Lahore¹⁷⁷ are of significant importance and give the outlines of the strategy for his economic thinking.

Islamic Law Should be Further Developed in the Light of Modern Ideas. Islam is the basic ideology of Pakistan. This was clearly stated by Iqbal in his letter of 28 May 1937 to Quaid-i Azam:

¹⁷⁴ Sherwani, Ed., op. cit., p 11.

¹⁷⁵ 192728 Budget, 5 March 1927: 1929-30 Budget, 4 March 1929 : 193031 Budget, 7 March 1930. For relevant Budget speeches, see *ibid.*, pp. 44-45, 59-61 and 62-65, respectively.

¹⁷⁶ Presidential Address delivered at the Annual Session of the Muslim League at Allahabad on 29 December 1930. Reproduced in *ibid.*, pp, 3-26.

¹⁷⁷ Presidential Address delivered at the Annual Session of the All-India Muslim League at Lahore on 21 March 1932. See *ibid.*, pp. 26-43.

"Happily there is a solution in the enforcement of the Law of Islam and its further development in the light of modern ideas. After a long and careful study of Islamic Law I have come to the conclusion that if this system of Law is properly under-stood and applied, at least the right to subsistence is secured to everybody."¹⁷⁸

Iqbal visualized early the enforcement of Islamic Economic System as a solution to the economic problems of Muslims. An excerpt from his above-mentioned letter is given below in this context:

"But the enforcement and development of the Shariat of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim state or states. This has been my honest conviction for many years and I still believe this to be the only way to solve the problem of bread for Muslims as well as to secure a peaceful India."¹⁷⁹

The economic plight of Muslims prominently figured in his mind and he was desperately keen to find a solution to this problem. He attributed the following factors responsible for the poor economic conditions of Muslims: (1) Hindu money-lenders; (2) Capitalism; (3) Foreign rule.

Disagreeing with the atheistic socialism of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as a solution to the economic ills of Muslims, he firmly believed in the Islamic Economic Order as a panacea for their problems.

New International Economic Order Iqbal was conscious of the exploitation which the rich Western nations forced upon the poor and underdeveloped Eastern countries of the world. He seems to have foreseen a new international economic order which is being hotly debated and discussed today in international forums. Iqbal thought that the policy of capturing new colonies and markets was at the root of the sharpening antagonism among

¹⁷⁸ Letters of Iqbal to Jinnah, p. IS,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Western countries. His sense of justice was outraged by the colonial system which permitted developed nations to subjugate the less developed ones. Condemnation of the exploitative nature of Western civilization frequently appears in his poetry during this period. In 1936 he wrote:

امتے بر امتے دیگر چرد
دانه ایس می کارد، آن حاصل کرد
از ضعیفان ناں ربودن حکمت است
از تن شان جان ربودن حکمت است
شیوہ تہذیب نو آدم دری است
پردہ آدم دری سودا گری است¹⁸⁰

[One nation pastures on the other,

One sows the grain which another harvests,

Philosophy teaches that bread is to be pilfered from the hand of the weak,

And his soul rent from his body,

Extortion of one's fellowmen is the law of the new civilisation. And it conceals itself behind the veil of commerce.]

He strongly stood as a valiant champion of the economic emancipation of Muslims as is testified by the following excerpts from one of his speeches made at Lahore:

"I am opposed to nationalism as it is understood in Europe, not because, if it is allowed in develop at India, it is likely to bring less material gain to

¹⁸⁰ Pas Chih Bāyad Kard Ay Aqwām-i Sharq/Kulliyāt, p. 30/826.

Muslims. I am opposed to it because I see in it the germs of atheistic materialism which I look upon as the greatest danger to modern humanity."¹⁸¹

"The people of Asia are bound to rise against the acquisitive economy which the West has developed and imposed on the nations of the East. Asia cannot comprehend modern Western capitalism with its undisciplined individualism."¹⁸²

The following well-known verse from his poetry indicates the frame of his mind about his feelings towards the exploitative attitude of the West:

دیار مغرب کے رہنے والو خدا کی بستی
دکھناں نہ ہیں یہ
کھرا جسے تم سمجھ رہے ہو وہ اب زر کم
عیسار ہو گئے¹⁸³

[O, Residents of the West! God's earth is not a shop;

The gold you think to be genuine will now prove to be debased.]

Austerity, Developing countries are all caught up in the crisis of underdevelopment in the face of vast unlimited resources and in the face of steadily rising curve of needs and ambitions. Caught in this paradox, one important strategy for them is to adopt austerity as a guiding inflexible rule to allow resources to go into economic construction. Iqbal was a great

¹⁸¹ Presidential Address delivered at the Annual Session of All-India Muslim Conference at Lahore on 21 March 1932. See Sherwani, Ed., op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁸³ Bāng-i Darā/Kulliyāt, p. 141.

champion of this cause and recommended it time and again. Examine the following statement:

"[My] Father was not very fond of European clothes. He always advised me to wear our national dress. Similarly he disapproved of expensive material for clothes, and rebuked me if I spent money unnecessarily."¹⁸⁴

Socio-Economic Changes Iqbal believed that socio-economic changes were necessary for the establishment of social justice.

At the same time he qualified the implementation of these changes dependent on the moral perfection of man, in which Islam must have a deciding role.¹⁸⁵

"What they call Commerce is a game of dice:

For one, profit, for millions swooping death.

Their science, philosophy, scholarship, government Preach man's equality but drink man's blood."¹⁸⁶ Socio-Cultural and Economic Strategy. The five-point plan which Iqbal proposed in his Presidential Address on 21 March 1932 at Lahore is summarized below:

(1) The Muslims should join one all-embracing political organisation with provincial and district branches all over the country.

(2) To raise a national fund of Rs.50 lac for setting up a Muslim political organization.

¹⁸⁴ Chapter 3: "Iqbal My Father," by Javaid Iqbal, in Hafeez Malik, Ed., Iqbal—Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan (Studies in Oriental Culture, Number Seven—Iqbal, New York: Colombia University Press, 1971), p. 61.

¹⁸⁵ Chapter 5: "ideology of Muslim Nationalism" by L.R. Gordon Polonskaya (a prominent Soviet Ideologist), in Hafeez Malik, Ed., op. cit., p. 121.

¹⁸⁶ V. Kiernan, Poems from Iqbal (Bombay: Longmans, 1955), pp. 42-43.

(3) Formulation of Youth Leagues and well-equipped volunteer corps throughout the country under the control and guidance of the central organization.

(4) Creation of male and female cultural institutes in all the big towns of British India.

(5) Creation of "an assembly of ulema" including also Muslim lawyers well versed in modern jurisprudence.

Iqbal Wanted Land Reforms. During Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms era, all the three Legislative Councils were dominated by the feudal class whose basic aim was to protect and promote their vested interests in the country.

Iqbal stood for the oppressed class of peasants and advocated land reforms. It will be a befitting tribute to the memory of Iqbal if we develop an equitable system of agriculture in which the cause of peasants is well looked after for ensuring social justice for the peasants and for making a major break-through in boosting agricultural production.

The memory is still fresh in our mind when "in the Nili Bar Colony the Government had decided to sell three and a quarter lakh acres of land to big land-owners. Iqbal [justifiably] proposed that half of this land should be reserved for peasants."¹⁸⁷

Iqbal came to realise that in a just polity, land as a means of production should be owned by the society for the benefit of all. "al-Ardu Liliān" ("The Earth is God's"), a poem in Bal-i-Jibril succinctly sums up the idea of ownership of land:

در خدا یا! یہ زمیں تیری نہیں،

¹⁸⁷ Syed Abdul Wahid, Studies in Iqbal (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1976), p. 263.

میری نہیں! —————
تیرے آبا کی نہیں، تیری نہیں،
میری نہیں! ¹⁸⁸

[Landlord, this earth is not thine, is not thine Nor yet thy fathers: no, not thine, nor mine.]

On 23 February 1928, he made a thought-provoking speech on land revenue. He maintained that the charging of land revenue on the theory of State-ownership of land was wrong in principle, and in this connection he said :

"Let me tell the honourable representatives for Simla that the first European author to refute this theory was the French-man Person in the year 1777. Later in 1830 Briggs made a very extensive inquiry as to the law and practice in India and relating to the theory of State-ownership of land. He gave in his book an accurate description of the laws of Manu, of Muslim law, and the practices prevailing in the various parts of India—Bengal, Malwa, the Punjab, etc., and arrives at the conclusion that in no period in the history of India the State ever claimed the proprietor-ship of land. In the times of Lord Curzon, this theory was put forward, but the Taxation Committee's report which was published sometime ago has come to a very clear finding that this theory had no basis at all.

"...However, we have to see, in the first place, how far the present system of assessment is just. Workable it is and sanctioned by a very old tradition; but we have first to see whether it has justice on its side or not, My submission is that it is not at all just. The injustice of it is perfectly clear. If a man happens to be a landowner, big or small does not matter, he has to pay

¹⁸⁸ Bāl-i Jibril/Kulliyāt, p. 119/411. Eng. trans. by Kiernan, op. cit., p. 45.

land revenue. But if a man earns from sources other than land less than two thousand rupees a year, you don't tax him at all. That is where injustice comes in."¹⁸⁹

. we do not apply the principle of progression in the case of land revenue whereas we apply that principle in the case of Incom-tax."¹⁹⁰

"Whether a man holds two kanals of land or 200 kanals of land, he is liable to pay the revenue. In the case of income-tax the principle of ability or the principle of progression is applied—that is to say, there is a graduated scale and some people do not pay income-tax at all."¹⁹¹

Rural Development the development of rural areas is at the heart and crux of the economic development of a country. It does not mean merely agricultural growth, but it also calls for improving the economic and social conditions of the rural population by raising their incomes and providing them with necessary amenities like good houses, paved streets, water supply and sewerage, health services, education, roads, power, communication,' etc.

On 5 March 1927, while speaking on the 1927-28 Budget in the Punjab Legislative Council, he wanted allocation, of more provision "for rural sanitation as well as for medical relief for women".¹⁹²

Excerpts from another speech are quoted below:

"Thirdly, I suggest the formation of youth leagues and well-equipped volunteer corps throughout the country under the control and guidance of the central organization. They must specially devote themselves to social service, customs reform, commercial organization of the community and

¹⁸⁹ Sherwani, Ed., op. cit., pp. 65-56.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 45. Speech on the Budget 1927-28 delivered in the Punjab Legislative Council on 5 March 1927.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

economic propaganda in towns and villages, specially in the Punjab where enormous indebtedness of Muslim agriculturists cannot be allowed to wait for the drastic remedies provided by agrarian upheavals. Things appear to have reached the breaking point as in China in 1925 when peasant leagues came into being in that country. The Simon Report admits that the peasant pays a 'substantial portion' of his means to the State. The State, no doubt, gives him in return peace and security, trade and communication. But the net result of these blessings has been only a kind of scientific exactitude in taxation, destruction of village economy by machine-made goods and the commercialisation of crops which makes the peasant almost always fall a prey to money-lenders and commercial agents. This is a very serious matter especially in the Punjab. I want the proposed youth leagues to specialise in propaganda work in this connection, and thus to help the peasantry in escaping from its present bondage. The future of Islam in India largely depends, in my opinion, on the freedom of Muslim peasants in the Punjab. Let then the fire of youth mingle with the fire of faith in order to enhance the glow of life and to create a new world of actions for our future generations."¹⁹³

Industrial Development the cause of industrial development was very dear to the heart of Iqbal. He considered the development of industries essential for mitigating the curse of unemployment. On many international platforms there is a talk of indigenous technology which is being wrongly associated with Mahatma Gandhi. The historical fact is that Iqbal was the author of this concept. Examine this excerpt from his speech:

"We spend practically nothing on industry. And as I have said before and as many other speakers have pointed out, industrial development alone can save us from the curse of unemployment. There is a good future for weaving industry and for shoe-making industry in this province and if we encourage these industries, I think we shall be able to save the province from

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 41.

unemployment, provided we protect these industries against Cawnpore and Ahmedabad."¹⁹⁴

The modern struggle, Iqbal believed, was conditioned by trade and industry. "Among the Asian Nations, the Japanese were the first to comprehend the secret of revolution. They dedicated themselves to industrializing their national economy. Today, they are recognized as one of the industrially advanced nations of the world. They had achieved this distinction because of their highly industrialized economy and not because of the contributions of any national philosopher, poet or litterateur."¹⁹⁵

Manual Worker Glorified. His advice was unequivocal: Muslims must take to industry and craftsmanship. "In my eyes," declared Iqbal, "the hands of a carpenter, rough and coarse due to the constant use of the saw, are far more attractive and useful compared to the soft and delicate hands of a scholar, which never carry more than the weight of a pen."

High Cost of Administration On 7 March 1930, discussing the Budget for 1930-31, he said:

"The problem of unemployment is becoming more and more acute every day. Trade is at a low ebb. You can easily imagine what the financial future of the province is likely to be. I am inclined to think that the present position is due not so much to stationary revenues as to the present system of administration which necessitates high salaries in the matter of which the people of this province have no say."¹⁹⁶

Inheritance Tax Iqbal proposed inheritance tax for those who would inherit property of the value of twenty to thirty thousand rupees. He

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁹⁵ Sherwani, Ed., op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁹⁶ Chapter 4 ; "The Man of Thought and the Man of Action," in Hafeez Malik, Ed, op. cit., p. 74.

described it as "death duties". Quickly Mian Fazl-i Hussain, the Unionist chief, retorted: "Living duties would be more appropriate". Not to be outwitted by the remark, Iqbal said: "It is the living who would have to pay."

Conclusion, It is time now that we made an intensive research on the economic philosophy of Iqbal and, in the process, not only learn from his great ideas but also implement them to ensure acceleration of the pace of economic development in such a manner as to ensure prosperity of the people of Pakistan and for establishing a New National Economic Order in which social justice is not given lip-service alone but is also implemented in letter and spirit. Only then we can succeed in emancipating the cause and lot of our rural and urban poor whose interest was supreme in the great poet's mind all the time.