

NAQSHBANDIYYA AND IDEOLOGY OF MUSLIM NATIONALISM

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At a critical juncture in the history of Muslim India, when even most of the 'Ulama (religious divines) were despaired of Islam as a living political force and were busy collaborating with the Indian National Congress in propagating the political creed of composite Indian nationalism. Muhammad Iqbal (1877 — 1938), the poet-philosopher of Islam, declared that Muslim India will never accept this idea because it amounts to a loss of its distinct cultural identity. Acting upon the Naqshbandi principle of KHALWAT DER ANJUMAN (solitude in society) Iqbal came forward with a sense of mission to guide Muslim India in the realm of political activity. Stressing the need for a separate Muslim homeland in the Indian sub-continent, Iqbal articulated and unfolded the ideology of separate Muslim nationalism. In his address to the annual session of All India Muslim League, in 1930, he argued that:

'the nature of the Prophet's religious experience, as disclosed in the Qur'an, however, is wholly different. It is

individual experience creative of a social order. Its immediate outcome is the fundamentals of a polity with

implicit legal concepts whose civic significance cannot be belittled merely because their origin is revelational. The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is organically related to its social order which it has created. The rejection of the one will eventually involve the rejection of the other.'

While rejecting the idea of a composite Indian nationalism and formulating the ideology of a separate Muslim nationalism, Iqbal's approach is similar to that of the famous Naqshbandi saint, Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi (1564—1624). Iqbal's attitude towards the prevalent forms of Sufism was always critical. But in spite of his rejection of stagnating pantheism and his sharp criticism of hereditary "pirism", he was an ardent

follower of Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi. His son, Javaid Iqbal has narrated that:

"a year or so before I was born (1924), father visited the mausoleum of Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi, also known as Mujaddid Alf Thani. At the mausoleum, my father prayed

for a child — a son. His prayer was heard, and later, in the summer of 1934, when I had attained an impressionable age, he took me to Sarhind. I can recollect our visit to the mausoleum of Shaikh Ahmad, for it is impressed vividly on my mind. Father took me inside of the mausoleum, sat close to the grave of the saint, and recited the Qur'an. I felt afraid of the darkness and was terrified by the grave; yet I was aware of a peculiar familiarity with my hushed and desolate surroundings. I watched father recite the Qur'an. His sad voice vibrated through the dark dome of the mausoleum and tears streamed down his cheeks.²

Iqbal venerated the Naqshbandi saint in his poetry more than once. In one of his verses he prayed for his reappearance on the spiritual and political horizon of Muslim India.³ According to him the socio-political situation of Muslim India in the early decades of the twentieth century had reached a similar point of crisis in which it was in the sixteenth century. To him Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi was divinely inspired in spear-heading the Naqshbandi reaction against Akbar's experiments in eclecticism. Thus he sang in his poem "To the Punjab Pirs!":

I stood by the Reformer's tomb: that dust

Whence here blow an orient splendour breaks,

Dust before whose least speck stars hang their heads

Dust shrouding that high knower of things unknown

Who to Jehangir would not bend his neck,

Whose ardent breath fans. every free heart's ardour,

Whom Allah sent in season to keep watch

In India on the treasure-house of Islam.

I craved the saints' gift, other-worldliness;

For my eyes saw, yet dimly. Answer came:

'Closed is the long roll of the saints; this Land

Of the Five Rivers stinks in good men's nostrils.

God's people have no portion in that country

Where lordly tassel sprouts from monkish cap;

That cap bred passionate faith, this tassel breeds

Passion for playing pander to Government.⁴

Iqbal's attitude towards Sufism is vividly reflected in this little, illuminating poem. He was born and brought up in a family steeped in Sufism, but he was conscious of the dangerous consequences of the prevalent forms of decadent Sufism. Hence his vehement criticism of the life-denying, miracle-selling and time-serving Pirs, but at

the same time his veneration of the Naqshbandi Saint Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi. Iqbal regarded him as 'a great religious genius;⁵ and 'a *great reformer of Sufism*'⁶ whose 'fearless analytical *criticism of contemporary Sufism* resulted in the development of a new technique.'⁷ Presenting Iqbal *in the context of Indo-Muslim mystical*

reform movement, Annemarie Schimmel observes that:

Iqbal follows even more closely the line of the great Delhi mystics in the 18th century. They, like him, had to face *grave* problems *in a* time of utter *destitution of the* Muslim community in India and tried to help the community to find a new way towards self-identification. These three leaders were Shah Waliullah, Mazhar Janjanaan and Khawaja Mir Dard. All three were initiated in the Naqshbandi Mujaddidi Silsila; all the three defended the importance of the unmitigated Shari'a and believed in the political activity of the mystical leader . . . Among the Delhi mystics Iqbal mentions particularly Shah Waliullah, who saw his special duty, to which he devoted most of his writings, as the purification of the Muslim community so that they might reach prosperity in this world and the next ... *However, not* only Shah Waliullah *but all three* Delhi mystics of his time developed a theory of prophecy which sounds very modern and which has been taken up also by Iqbal.⁸

It is symptomatic of the development of Naqshbandi Sufism in Muslim India, that, in order to check the religio-political disintegration of Islam, it combines strong fundamentalism with deep mystical insights and practices. Perceiving the danger of spiritual submergence of Islam into Hinduism, Sarhin,i reacted against Akbar's (1556—1605) heresy by stressing the purity of Islam and highlighting the separate identity of the Muslim community in India with full emphasis on his command. Once again in the middle of the seventeenth century, the same crisis reappeared and became polarized in the conflicting outlooks of two brothers Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb. The influence of Sarhindi continued to work after him. His sons and followers carried out his mission under the banner of Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya and their writings and influence prevented Islam from disintegration into syncretic heresies of Dara Shikoh. They not only helped Aurangzeb in the war of succession, but also guided him in formulating policies aimed at preservation of the separate identity

of the Indian Muslim community. Similarly during the period of rapid disintegration of Muslim India and the rise of anti-Muslim anarchic forces, the Naqshbandiyya leadership in the 18th century placed a renewed emphasis on the person of Muhammad by formulating the concept of *Tariq'a-i-Muhammadiyya* (the Muhammeden Path). This new and dynamic concept reintegrated the formalistic dynamics of Islam with the inner vitality of Sufism and inspired Ismail Shahid and Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi to launch the militant movement of the Mujahidin, in the first half of the-19th century, for the restoration of the prestige of the Muslim community in India. Giving a brilliant analysis of the phenomenon of continuity and change in the role and strategy of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya leadership from the 18th through the 20th century. Warren Fusfeld observes that

the assertion by the individuals at the head of the tradition

of a chain of authority connecting them to Muhammad

and the earliest of his followers lay at base of popular

belief in the authenticity of this form of Islamic leader-

ship. It also provides the basis on which actual change in

meaning and significance of the tradition could be accepted in a context of a high value being placed on the

avoidance of change (bidah or innovation). Thus, it is not

only "modernists" or revolutionaries who rethink their

cultural and societal systems, but also those who continue

to view the world through traditional systems of belief.⁹

Seen in this perspective of continuity and change, Iqbal's response to the deepening crisis of Muslim India in his own times is rooted in the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi tradition of Sufism. Muslims were on the decline throughout the world but the situation of the Muslims in British India was more dangerous. They were face to face with the danger of syncretic merger into Hinduism. An acute awareness of this situation led Iqbal to develop in the Indian Muslim community an inner sense of solidarity and identification with the wider Muslim world. His poetry exercised a magnetic influence to link his audience to symbols of Muslim identity and his political thought and activity created a formidable movement of political dimensions for creation of a separate Muslim homeland in the Indian sub-continent. The *ijma'* of Muslim people accepted the ideology of separate Muslim nationalism, but,

most of the religious divines denounced it on basis of identification of a nation with the land it inhabits, irrespective of

r religious differences.

Seldom before in the history of Islamic India had the 'Ulama' taken a stand so contrary to the political instinct of the intellectual elite and the masses of the people.¹⁰

This rejection of the political ideal of Islam by some of the leading religious divines had brought Muslim India to a point of religiopolitical disaster. Iqbal argued that the advocacy of composite Indian nationalism on the basis of Islam amounts to a revolt against the original spirit of Islam. The situation demanded another mujaddid (renovator) of Islam in India. Iqbal took up the challenge. Upholding the theory of *Wahdat-al-Shubud*, in the typical Naqshbandi way, Iqbal placed his whole emphasis on the person of the Holy Prophet. In order to refute the heresy springing from the religious innovation at Akbar's court, Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi had written *Ithbat-i-Nabuwmat* and had declared:

Only one who followed the Prophet followed God. "

Likewise, in his poetry as well as his religio-political polemics, Iqbal passionately advocated the idea that the essence of Islam lies in the life and teachings of the Holy Prophet. Closely following the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi tradition, Iqbal combines rational and mystical elements in his prophetology and highlights the politico-social role of the Holy Prophet. When Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madni extended his full support to the political creed of the Indian National Congress, Iqbal reacted sharply from his death bed.

It was a very easy course for Muhammad to tell Abu Lahb, Abu Jahl, or the unbelievers of Mecca that they could stick to their idol-worship while he himself would hold fast to worship of God and that they could together form an Arabian unity by virtue of factors of race and land common to them both. God forbid, but if he had adopted this course, it would certainly have done him credit as a patriot but not as the last Prophet. The ultimate purpose of the prophetic mission of Muhammad is to create a form of society, the

constitution of which follows that divine law which the Prophet Muhammad received from God. In other words, the object is to purify the nations of the world of the abuses which go by the name of time, place, land, nation, race, geneology, country etc., although the differences of nations, tribes, colours and languages are at the same time acknowledged. It is thus to bestow upon

man that spiritual idea which at every moment of his life remains in constant contact with Eternity. This is where Muhammad stands and this is the ideal of the Muslim community.¹²

The Muslim community rejected the creed of composite Indian nationalism, as it had rejected, a few centuries ago, Akbar's *Din-i-Ilahi*. Looking from this angle, it seems to me that the ideology of separate Muslim nationalism i.e. the vision of Pakistan as unfolded by Iqbal, is the culmination of the continuous Naqshbandi reaction against successive attempts at deviation from the true Muhammadan path in Muslim India.

1. Sherwani (Latif Ahmad), ed. *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, Lahore, Iqbal Academy, 1977, p. 7.

2. Malik (Hafeez), ed. *Iqbal, Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1971, p. 56.

3. 'Tyn sau sal say hain hind kay maykhany band ab munasib kih tra faid hu am ay saqi'

Mian Bashir Ahmad has disclosed that in reply to his query Iqbal had indicated that he had made a reference in this verse to the role of Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi as renovator of Islam in the second millenium, *Humanyun*, (Urdu magazine), Lahore, April 1955.

In a letter to Sayyid Sulaiman Nadvi, written in 1917, Iqbal states that:

Khawaja Naqshband and the Mujaddid of Sarhind hold a very high rank in my heart.

Nizami (Mahmud), ed. *Malfuzat-i-Iqbal*, Lahore, 1949, p. 79.

4. Kiernan (V. G.), ed. *Poems from Iqbal*, London, John Murray, 1955, p. 58.
5. Iqbal (Muhammad), *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore, 1971, p. 192.
6. *Ibid.*, p.193.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
8. Brelvi (Ebadat), *Jashnnama-i-Iqbal*, Lahore, 1977, pp. 165,166, 170.
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9. Lawrence (Bruce B.), *Ibn Khaldun And Islamic Ideology*, Leiden-E. J. Brill, 1984, p. 104.
10. Ahmed (Aziz), *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan*, London, Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 193.
11. Sarhindi (S. A.), *Maktubat-i-Mujaddid Alf-i-Thani*, Vol. 11, p. 103.
12. Sherwani (L. A.), *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*, Lahore, 1977, p. 261.