

IQBAL'S CONCEPT OF SPIRITUAL DEMOCRACY

Dr. ABDUL HAQ

In his sixth lecture under the heading: "The principle of movement in the structure of Islam" Iqbal winds up his discussion on Ijtihad by saying, "Humanity needs three things today a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis." Although he recognizes Europe's contribution to some idealistic systems that it has built on these lines yet he rejects them on the ground that anything evolved by pure reason without the sanction of 'inspiration' cannot survive. "It is incapable of bringing that fire of living conviction which personal revelation alone can bring," he says. "This is the reason why pure thought has so little influenced men while religion has always elevated individuals, and transformed whole societies. The idealism of Europe never became a living factor in her life, and the result is a perverted ego seeking itself through mutually intolerant democracies whose sole function is to exploit the poor in the interests of the rich." Disappointed by unguided intellectualism of the West and finally declaring that Europe is the greatest hinderance in the way of man's ethical advancement he looks towards the Muslim youth and fixes his gaze upon him for the fulfilment of his hopes. He is quite justified because it is the Muslim youth alone who is in possession of these ultimate ideas on the basis of a revelation, which, speaking from the inmost depths of life, internalizes its own apparent externality. So he insists upon the Muslim youth to appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of the ultimate principles, and evolve, out of the hitherto revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate of Islam.

These lectures were delivered some sixty years back when Muslim nation was disunited under the yokes of foreign slavery and socially, morally and intellectually impoverished. This state of stand-still and absolute helplessness was against the evolutionary dynamism of Islam. Grieved by this sad situation the great thinker, philosopher and lover of Islam repeated, through his unparalleled poetry, the Qura'nic message of freedom, equality, fraternity, justice and unity. As we all know, half a century later, some of his visions came true, especially of the emergence of Pakistan as the strong fortress of

Islam, but many of the ideals which he had set before this nation particularly, and before the whole Muslim world generally, have yet to be realized. Out of these unrealized objectives the one he calls 'spiritual democracy' has not so far been clearly defined. Although the Muslim youth of today is in many ways better equipped with world-knowledge, technical know-how etc. and has a wider outlook than his preceding generation yet in his practical daily life he experiences such contradictions, disagreements in word and deed, sectarian frictions, wealth-craze of the masses and their uncompromising attitude that he finds himself in the unhealthy atmosphere of aloofness rather than amidst a unified homogeneous society the ideal of his dreams with which he wants to work on a reciprocal basis.

Outside of his home situation the pressure of the rising waves and rushing currents of foreign ideas and thoughts is so strong that it is difficult for him to resist being carried away by its forceful pull. When he looks around for help he sees no one whom he can call or who is fully equipped with life-saving devices. Iqbal had visualized this critical situation also, but his optimistic views about the intellectual prowess of the future youth and the high respect he had for their freedom did not permit him to leave behind any ready-made code of behaviour-patterns for them. His writings, however, contain many guidelines that can safely and surely lead them to the right path.

The interpreters of Iqbal have said very little about what exactly Iqbal had in mind when he coined the phrase 'spiritual democracy'. As we all know democracy is a special term belonging to politics rather than to religion. In politics it has been defined as 'government of the people, by the people, for the people.' The advocates of democracy further profess that through this system alone they can realize the values of liberty, equality and fraternity. How far this claim of theirs has proved its correctness is well known to the world. In actual practice none of these values has crossed the arbitrary boundaries of class, colour and country. The fact is that fourteen hundred years ago the Holy Qur'an explicitly gave to the world not only these three values but many more, e.g., dignity for the children of Adam, justice, co-operation rather than competition, equal and equalised opportunities for all and not for the selected few, importance of means rather than the end, etc. Moreover, Islam welded these values into a perfect system and made this system obligatory for all its followers without the least exception. The failure of Western democracy is due to lack of universal applicability of its values,

and, for that purpose, lack of faith at the back of it, and its detachment from other allied universals. Islam, on the other hand, integrates all its universals into a perfectly organized one, whole in such a way that no value can be detached from the other. *The individual and society both are given equal status in Islam and for both of them there are clearly defined rights and obligations.*

The first prerequisite for establishing spiritual democracy, according to Iqbal, is to interpret the universe spiritually. In this respect we must not lose sight of the unity of the objects of Nature in their purpose, co-operative attitude, strict obedience to law, and inter-relationship of the parts to form one whole proving thereby that it is really a *universe*, not *multiverse*. The Holy Qur'an repeatedly invites the attention of man to the flawless, purposeful, and accurate working of the varying and progressively growing objects of Nature which exhibit orderliness, right proportion and high serviceability. All these characteristics speak eloquently of the spiritual behaviour of the forces of Nature which extend their friendliness to man at every beck and call. The most wonderful discoveries that scientific knowledge has today placed at the door of man proves pragmatically the infallibility of the Qur'anic truth about man's aptitude for 'giving names to things' and about the bowing down of the hidden powers of Nature that run its working, before the power of knowledge. These hidden powers are wild, unruly and furious as long as they remain out of the *reach* of understanding. The moment man grasps the laws that govern them and understands their working principles they throw themselves at his feet as tame and docile and meek as slaves ever ready to obey and serve him. In the words of Iqbal, 'in interpreting Nature in this way the ego understands and masters its environments, and there by acquires and amplifies its freedom.

The spiritual lesson for man, therefore, is to conquer Nature and place the benefits of his conquest at the service and use of entire humanity for its healthy and progressive evolution. Spiritual emancipation means adopting an attitude of rising *with* the world, not rising *in* the world.

Iqbal's first books of Persian verse, *Asrar-i-Khudi* or 'The Secret of the Self' contains many beautiful poems in which some fundamental principles of Islam have been explained. In fact spirituality in the life-system called Islam has for its base two very strong convictions: *Tauhid* and *Risalat*. The first is the faith in the unity of God and the second is faith in the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Iqbal argues that fear, despair and frustration are the worst of evils because

they cut at the very root of 'life and no remedy can cure these ills except unflinching faith in the unity of God. This faith involves, in its practical aspect, faith in the oneness of purpose in the universe, faith in the oneness of humanity as a whole and faith in the oneness in the spiritual origin of all 'life'. According to the Holy Qur'an 'man' has been created in the best moulds and all the children of Adam have been honoured and dignified. This purely psychological foundation of human unity and dignity enables man lift himself above the muddy mire of animality and makes it possible for him, if he so wants, to emancipate from the dustful earth. Islam as a polity, says Iqbal, is only a practical means of making the principle of 'Tauhid' a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind. It demands loyalty to God, not to thrones. And since God is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to God virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own nature.

What is man's ideal nature, then? The Verses of the Holy Qur'an which give scientific details of the creation of man very clearly tell us that when in its mother's womb the embryo developed and reached its animal stage God breathed into it something of his own 'Spirit' and with that it turned into an altogether new creation; before that it was to be just a 'thing' but now it became a person. All creation upto the level of animals is categorised as things, not persons. 'Man is the trustee of a free personality which he accepted at his peril.' A person is one who is endowed with the faculties of knowledge, understanding, feeling and willing. Man's personality is imperfect because the element or animality in him drags him down to earth rootedness,, but his spirituality of 'something of the breath of God in him' lifts him up from that mean level. For this uplift man has to call for his help his own 'will'. Thus, on the one hand the human self has within it the possibility of either splitting up into pieces or integrating itself formidably, and, on the other, it has natural affinity for goodness, beauty and virtue. This second quality (of his having been created in the best of moulds) is proved by the fact that he can recognize only 'the truth' and not falsehood. He rejects falsehood outright whenever it presents itself before him in its real form; he is deceived only when falsehood puts on the borrowed clothings of truth and appears before him in this deceptive guise. This 'neither-good-nor-bad' (but certainly inclined towards goodness, beauty and virtue) nature of man has also the potential to rise upwards stage by stage and march along the straight path of perfection progressively. Without the endowment of this realizable potential in him and his faculties of choice and free will man could never

build art, culture, high civilizations, education, science, technology etc. In fact 'creativity' is the gift which only man has been favoured with.

On the emotional side also no other creation of God equals man. Laying down life for a higher value, for an ideal or for a supreme cause is purely human activity. Making sacrifices for the uplift of humanity, service above self, living for others, fighting against ignorance, poverty and disease, keeping 'Rizq' in constant circulation and creating goodness, beauty and virtue in word and deed, too, are spiritual actions as against those which have their motivational urge in animal instincts only.

The path of life, according to the Holy Qur'an is not circular but straight; it leads on and on without any returns or coming back to the position of as-you-were. This progressive and evolutionary process of the never-ending stream of life necessitates that each generation, guided by the torch-bearers of the past, but not hampered, should be allowed maximum freedom to solve its own problems. The State's function should also be to provide the young people with full opportunities to realize the "spiritual" in them to its possible extent and thus be a visible model of the Qur'anic Universals.

Spiritual liberty, as implied in this particular sort of democracy, has yet another important aspect also. Iqbal asserts that the birth of Islam is the birth of inductive intellect. 'In Islam prophecy (meaning prophethood) reaches perfection in discovering the need of its own -abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings; that in order to achieve full self-consciousness man must finally be thrown back on his own resources.' The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Holy Qur'an, and the emphasis it lays on Nature and History as sources of knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality.'

The doors of 'prophethood were securely sealed for ever and, instead, the most perfect guidance comprising unalterable values of universal application, was preserved with a meticulous accuracy in the Holy Qur'an to stop the appearance of fake prophets and to ensure full play of human intellect under the umbrella of this Divine Guidance. But somehow self-styled holies, false 'pirs' and 'sufis; disguised as spiritualists, have dug holes and opened windowes in the walls of the closed citadel of prophethood and tried to break the seal of its finality. Similarly a belief has been fixed in the minds of the simple-minded Muslims that just near the Day of Judgment

someone will come down from heavens to solve their problems, therefore, till then they should continue to bear their sufferings patiently and without raising a voice against these. On the economic side some traditions have been concocted to make the people- believe that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) loved poverty, therefore only the poor will go to paradise. These false 'gods' are not only venerated but virtually worshipped, as worship is nothing else than calling persons and things other than God for help. Spengler very rightly said that the idea of the world-historical struggle between good and evil prevailing in the middle period, and the good finally triumphant on the Day of Judgment found entry into the beliefs of the Muslim populace from Magian sources.

Iqbal, meeting Spengler half-way explains that 'Ibn-i-Khuldun, seeing the spirit of his own view of history, has fully criticised and, I believe, finally demolished the alleged revelational basis in Islam of an idea similar, at least in its psychological effect, to the original Magian idea which had re-appeared in Islam under the pressure of Magian thought. In fact the perpetual attitude of expectation and a constant looking forward to the coming of someone is the invention of those self-styled spirituals who thus tighten their grip on the common man and exploit his credulity. These Lats and Manats keep changing their costumes and under new appearances they assume the role of Rabb-in- nas, Ilah-in-nas and - ialik-in-nas and very tactfully fleece their victims. Slavery in all its forms was wiped off from the world but the followers of Korah, Haman and Pharoah bring back this evil under one pretext or the other.

To keep the teachings of Islam practically alive and fresh the Holy Qur'an directs the Muslim Ummah: 'Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong; they are the ones to attain felicity.'3:104. In pursuance of this command great teachers like Shauikh Abdul Qadir Jilani, Shaikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi, Shaikh Junaid of Baghdad, Shaikh All Hujwairi, Bahauddin Zakarya and Farid Shakarganj of Pakistan and Nizamuddin Aulia, Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi, Shaikh Mueenuddin Chishti and many others in India emerged from the Muslim Ummah. They were very pious people, strict followers of the tennets of Islam, pure in character, popular among the masses for their simple and honest living and true in word and deed. they spread Islam by example and precept. The services that these 'friends of God' have rendered to Islam and to the people of their times can never be

forgotten or under-estimated. We have today with us a valuable treasure of their memoirs, sayings, treatises and books etc. which can illuminate the paths of the future youth.

Past experiences cannot be ignored; they may carefully be scrutinised and constructively interpreted. They cannot be blindly followed either. A progressive society needs change and variety according to the call of the changing times. Modern Muslim, says Iqbal, has to re-think the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past...he must approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though he may be led to differ from those who have gone before him.' So until and unless this realistic attitude is adopted and the individual is released from the fetters of 'Israiliat' and the bondages of fake pirs and sufis his spiritual emancipation is very difficult, if not impossible.