

MUHAMMAD IQBAL AND MEHMED AKIF'S CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

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There is a deeply rooted historical as well as cultural link between Turks and the Muslims of India and Pakistan. The Urdu language and literature is the outcome of Turko-Islamic culture that flourished in India under the patronage of Ghaznavids, Khiljeits, Timurids and southern turkish dynasties of Kutab Shahies and Adil Shahies.²⁵ It was, therefore, natural for the Muslims of India to regard the Turks of Turkey as great heroes against the challenging advancement of the English imperialism. Indians, whole heartedly, supported Turks and Muhammed Iqbal wrote poems about their bravery and chivalry. As national poets Iqbal and Mehmed Akif (1873-1936)²⁶ had similar messages to deliver to their nations that fought for independence.

Although Akif and Iqbal never came face to face yet they had great sympathy for each other. Since Akif knew Persian well, he was able to appreciate Iqbal's works, particularly *Esrar-i-Khudi*. How much Iqbal had knowledge of Akif's Turkish poetry is not known.

Akif wrote the following lines about Iqbal in his letter to his friend Hafiz Asim on 8. 3. 1341 A.H:-

“Last week they (the Indian Muslims) sent me two books of Iqbal's verses. I had already seen his small booklet (treatise) at Ankara and I had found him to be very much like me. Iqbal is really a genius poet because he studied all the great mystics of the East first, then he went to Germany where he diggested the Western philosophy. There is hardly anyone among the Indian Muslims who does not know some of his poems by heart. It is natural that he has written his poems in Urdu, but the poems I have seen are in Persian. He has good study of Rumi and he loves him. He calls himself

²⁵ See my article entitled” Turkish Elements in Urdu”, *The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, VI, Enderun Kitabevi, Istanbul 1986, p. 1-30.

²⁶ *ide* prof. Dr. Ali Nihat Tarlan, Mehmet Akif, University of Istanbul, 1968 for complete biography of the poet.

“disciple of Rumi”. The copy of the work I have is entitled Payam-i-Mashrik. He has wonderful qitas (sections) and ghazels. Some of his ghazels made me cry out like an intoxicated person. Iqbal’s Arabic is also rich. His knowledge, culture and poetical efficiency is above mine²⁷”.

Although the traditional lives of the two nations may differ, yet the two poets had discerned the similar shortcomings of the Muslims of those days. The mystic trends had led the Muslims to live a passive life by surrendering themselves to fate. Iqbal by studying the Western and the Eastern philosophy equally well, found his answers in the works of Great Master Rumi, while Akif was left alone between the devil and the deep sea i.e. the materialistic world and the spiritual. Iqbal was lucky to receive medicine from the great spiritual doctor which gave him an endless source of mystic dynamism the Akif failed to obtain²⁸

Iqbal saw two extremities- the East and the West. In the East people would labour for the world hereafter, while in the West they would struggle for scientific as well as economic purposes regardless of the spiritual satisfaction. He found solution in Islam that promises prosperity of this world and of the other. Akif joined Iqbal in this cause. The hearts of both the poets beat for the unity of Islam without racial discrimination. They wanted to wake up the Muslim world. Akif addressed Turks in almost the same way as Iqbal did. He said:-

If you fail to wake up, you cannot reach the goal, see, is 5 there any traces of those who were wide awake?²⁹

I don’t realise what is meant by meekness, what are you then waiting for? While God says” That man can have nothing but what he strives for”.³⁰

Behold there is darkness everywhere yet it is bright!

For see the sky is awake, the stars are like the windows of divinely sight

²⁷ See Eshref Edib, M. Akif Hayati ve Eserleri, Asari ilimye Kutuphanesi, Istanbul p. 143.

²⁸ Nihat Tarlan, op. cit., p. 25.

²⁹ Mehmed Akif, Safahat, Inkilap ve Aka, Istanbul, 1975, p. 29.

³⁰ Surah” Al-Nejim, ayet No. 39.

(Safahat p. 102).

Don't give up thy determination due to the gloomy darkness, If there is the meanest way of dying then this the one indeed, O' the living dead, can't you earn your own bread?

Move on, the hands and the head they all belong to you, You have no feelings, no actions; are you a living corpse? You make me think and wonder because you were never so.

(Safahat p. 209)

Muhammed Iqbal has a similar message in the following verses:-

“I have called you “Muslim” rather expediently, otherwise thy breath has no warmth of the day of resurrection”.

(Zarb-i Kalim)

“Your Islam is probably of a different kind, for you hold asceticism and monkery equal”

(Zarb-i Kalim, Faqr-u Rahibi)

“If Mulla (the Islamic preast) has permission of prostrating he, the fool, thinks that islam is free(in India)”.

(Zarb-i Kalim, Hindi Islam) “O the Divinely bird, it is better to die,

Than to eat the food that hinders you to fly.”

(Bal-i Jibril) Addressing the young Muslims he says:-

“O you, the young muslims have you ever pondered?

What kind of sky it was of which you are the broken star?

You have been brought up in the lap of the nation, That had crushed down Dara's crown under their feet.

You have no similarity, at all, with your ancestors,

For you only talk while they acted; they were planets and you are a star.

(Bang-i Dara)

Iqbal encouraged the Muslims of India who felt themselves helpless and disappointed by such verses as follows:-

“raise your selfness (khudi) to the height where God consults his lover(slave) before writing his fate”

and

“You are like a hawk, your duty is to fly on because there are several other skies in front of you”

This was the message that warmed the hearts of the Indian Muslims who finally established a Muslim state in 1947. Mehmet Akif’s message also put the hearts of the Turks into action. They, too, swarmed around their leader kemal Ataturk to form a modern Turkish Republic.

Akif raised his voice against absolutism and imperialism forbidden in Islam:-

“Thirty million people are slaves in hands of three rebels, These enslaved people then should carry sinister burdens of the ruling class,

won’t you be ashamed if one counts the cruel and the oppressed, You (the cruel) who have no characteristics of a humanbeing, You have held your shadows of imageries higher than skies.”

(Safahat, Istibdat)

“Don’t give up if you see tomorrow in darkness, To die like this, is the meanest kind of death,

If I happen to see such a death with my own eyes, I won’t believe. For he who believes God does not die at all”

(Safahat)

Similarly Iqbal says:-

“The guarding of Oneness (vandet) is not possible without the force of arm,

The God given wisdom for this is not of any use O’ the man of God if you are powerless

Then go and abide in a cave in order to pray to god

And thus invent a kind of Islamic mysticism that depends

On eternal hopelessness, imprisonment and misery.

(Zarb-i Kalim)

Iqbal and Akif both used the word “millat” (nation) in the meaning of Islamic unity.³¹ They yearned for the union of Islam, not for the national unity.³² We find this message in their poems.

for example Akif says:-

“Your religion was Islam then what is racialism? You should have strongly attached to your own nation (Islam)”

(Safahat)

and Iqbal says:-

Muslim should unite to guard Mecca

From the bank of Nile unto Kashghar

He who has discrimination of colour and blood will vanish. May he be a nomadic Turk or a respect worthy Arab.

(Bang-i Dara, Dunya-yi Islam) We are neither Afghan, nor Turk nor a Tatar,

³¹ For details see Ertugrul Duzdag, Safahat Tetkikleri, Med Yayinlari, Istanbul 1979, p.132.

³² Nihaf Tarlan, op. cit., p. 47.

We are all production of the same garden and the trees, The discrimination of colour and smell is forbidden for us, because we have been grown up by the same spring.

(Payam-i Mashrik)

Iqbal and Akif's poetry is full of Islamic spirit. the spirit that was required those days for the Muslims of India and the peple of Turkey. Akif had the desire to see the country of Iqbal whose poems he would read every week.³³ In a letter to his friend Asim and in the poem given below he shows how much he respected the Muslims of India. As we gather from this poem entitled "India"³⁴ he did have a chance to visit haydarabad but he could not move arround freely because police chased him and checked him. Here is some part of his poem:-

“It was my great desire to travel India throughout,

I became tired so I had to surrender,

Yet I managed to be in some meetings there, Thanks to God that the Old Region (India) is still producing,

May a philosopher that equals “Rahmutullah” in knowledge

They discern the spirit of religions and wisdom of Kuran,

They have scholars in front of whom the Westerns bow,

Man also becomes surprised to see their educated young's,

Many of whom though educated in England,

Turn to be the heart and soul of their coreligionist,

They do not give up their determinations even at the cost of death,

They don't have any desires to act like monkeys, Their national feelings are so strong that they never weaken,

³³ See Ertugrul Duzdah, *ibid*, p. 31.

³⁴ Safahat p. 172.

If they take knowledge from the West, they take only science,

You behold their hands full of art yet they lack freedom,

They have neither immorality nor drinking, they have strong courage and content,

They respect and esteem the preserved laws (Shariat) more than we do,

The future of the nation that educate such children,

Deserves the independence to embrace in near future,

If not today, but soon will it come true,

If it seems too far it doesn't matter, future is future.”

While going to Haydarabad my host who came to see me off,

Uttered with grief the following words from the core of his heart:

“Alas, we are not useful elements of belief...

We never compare Islam of India with that of Turks,

They have spirit and boiling blood with bravery, We don't have such feelings and sincere nerves,

We are prisoners of meanness and shall remain for ever,

For many of us fail to see the losses we have,

All our hopes are in the strengthening of the Ottomans,

Once we hear about it, this happiness will suffuse.³⁵

These words made me cry but his (my host's) son said:-

“It is not so, our nation has dignity in their chests that is waiting for an order. They will act upon it, although they have to wait for some time. If the

³⁵ Full translation will be rendered in my Urdu article on “Mehmet and Iqbal”.

days are passing in imprisonment, it does not mean that we should let our nation be slave for ever and live a mean life because we, too, have a past like other Muslims...”

This is how Akif loved the Indian muslims who had brought forth a poet like Iqbal. Iqbal himself adored the bravery of Turks whom he praises in his poems. Ghulamun ki namaz (the prayers of the slaves), Mahasara-yi Edirne (besieg of Edirne), Khitab be Mustafa Kemal Pasha (an address to Mustafa Kemal) and Turk-i Osmani (the Ottoman Turk are worth mentioning. Here we give the translation of Turk-i Osmani:-

“The Ottoman is a commander in his country, His heart is aware and his eyes do see,

Although we cannot think that he is free from the european ties (chains),

He is still under the spell of the European’s attraction.

(Armughan-i Hijaz)

Akif praised the Indian Muslims and thus the people of Pakistan, while Iqbal considered Turks as the part of his nation. They laid the foundaton of Turko-Pak friendship that has a history long relation.

As long as, the crescented red flag of Turkey keeps on hoisting in company with the national anthem of Mehmet Akif and the crescented green flag of Pakistan as the symbol of independence; the two great poets will continue to live in the hearts of their people and will go on symbolizing the brotherhood of the two brotherly countries.