

THE IMAGE OF 'TURKEY AND TURKISH DEMOCRACY IN IQBAL' S THOUGHT AND HIS CONCEPT OF A MODERN ISLAMIC STATE

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When the Indian Sub-Continent was being transformed from Muslim-India into British-India, the interests of Muslims grew in Turkey as the Turkish Caliphate had awakened among the Muslims a new sense of solidarity. The predecessor of Iqbal, Shibli poet and scholar had visited Turkey in 1892. Shibli was the first Muslim poet who in his poems wrote on the misfortunes of Turkey and thus through his writings brought Turkey closer to Muslim-India.

In 1911 Italy attacked Tripoli and the Balkan war which deprived Turkey of her European territories followed in 1912. These events for the first time turned Iqbal's eyes towards Turkey. Following Shibli he wrote three of his famous poems on Turkey which stirred Muslim-India. One of his famous poems, namely, Jawab-i-Shikwa was recited in the Badshahi Mosque at Lahore. in 1912 in order to raise funds in aid of the Turks wounded in the Balkan war.

In 1920-21 the Khilafat Movement for the preservation of Turkish Caliphate and against the dismemberment of Turkey swept over the Sub-Continent. During this Movement almost the same number of Muslims lost their lives or were uprooted as subsequently in 1946-47 when the struggle for the establishment of Pakistan was on. The total number of immigrants from Muslim-India to Afghanistan in those days was estimated between 500,000 and 2,000,000. Sentiment in favour of Turkey was expressed violently by the Moplahs (Muslims of mixed Arab and Indian Descent) of Malabar whose uprising followed in 1921. They were a peasant community numbering about one million but the end in store for them was far worse than that of the immigrants. Irrespective of its disastrous after-effects, this magnificent sacrificial Movement clearly indicates the deep rooted love of Muslims of the Sub-Continent for their Turkish brethren. There is no parallel

in contemporary history of sacrifice of a people on such a large scale for another people.

From 1912 onwards Iqbal's interest for Turkey grew many fold and he was deeply involved with the Turkish cause also for the reason that through this association Muslims of the Sub-Continent could re-discover their own national identity and consolidate themselves politically. But he did not agree with the Khilafat leaders on the preservation of Turkish Caliphate. The subsequent events proved the soundness of Iqbal's reasoning. Therefore on the abolition of Caliphate Iqbal alone raised his voice in favour of the new legal order in Turkey. He welcomed the growth of a republican spirit in Turkey as a return to the original purity of Islam. He was likewise pleased with the growth of nationalism in Turkey although he attacked nationalism in the Western sense as he was of the view that the Muslims' attitude towards the West should be critical and not that of blind imitation. He even justified the initial isolation of Turkey by maintaining that for the time being each and every Muslim nation must concentrate on herself only until all were strong enough to form a living family of republics by adjusting their mutual rivalries through the unifying bond of Islam. It is in this context that he proclaimed that Islam is neither nationalism nor imperialism but a commonwealth of nations.

In the late thirties Pandit Jawahir Lal Nehru wrote a series of articles in order to persuade Muslims to adopt a secular attitude and join the Indian Nationalist Movement. He cited the example of Turkish secularism maintaining that Turkey had ceased to be Muslim by adopting nationalism, developing a pragmatic outlook, changing to Latin script and European dress, abolishing polygamy, curtailing religious privileges by licentiating Ulema, separating the department of religion from other departments of the state and replacing Muslim Personal Law by European codes of civil law.

Even on his death bed Iqbal reasoned that each and every reform promulgated in modern Turkey was not repugnant to Islam. He wrote that so long as the Turks believe in Tauhid and the finality of Prophethood, they do not step out of the fold of Islam, whatever may be their interpretation of the Law. The development of pragmatic outlook was in perfect harmony with Islam. Similarly change to European dress or Latin script did not imply renunciation of Islam because Islam as a religion had no territorial

attachment and as a culture had neither any specific mode of dress nor any particular script nor language. The reforms such as abolition of polygamy were not anti-Islamic for according to Islamic law the Head of a Muslim State could suspend a legal “sanction” if the social conditions so demanded. As for the licentiate Ulema, according to Iqbal, only the Head of a Muslim State or those whom he appointed had the right to preach or give a Fatwa - (an opinion on law). Again the distribution of departments into religious and civil in a Muslim State should not be confused with the European conception of the separation of the Church from the State. The former was only a division of departments whereas the latter was founded on a fundamental duality on spirit and matter. The separation of the department of religion therefore did not mean the exclusion of Islam from the life of modern Turkey. As for the adoption of European civil codes, Iqbal argued that this arose out of the youthful zeal for reform excusable in a people furiously desiring to go ahead. In his view such situation were bound to arise in other Muslim countries also and hence he raised the question of the revision of old Muslim institutions in the light of modern experience. It was in this background that he insisted on the opening of the gates of Ijtihad and the study of Islamic law in the light of modern jurisprudence so that it can be reinterpreted to suit the needs and the requirements of each and every Muslim generation.

It is therefore evident that Iqbal was deeply influenced by the developments in modern Turkey. He evolved the concepts of Islam as a nation building force for Muslim minorities, the carving out of viable independent States in their homelands, giving the power of Ijtihad to an elected legislative assembly and finally the assimilation of Muslim national States as a powerful family of republics, through receiving inspiration from the experiences of the modern Turkish nation.

According to Iqbal the following led to the political and cultural decay of Muslims:

- a) Autocratic Sultanate,
- B) Conservatism of the Ulema,
- C) Preachings of the other-worldliness and inactivity of the Sufis.

In the Indian Sub-Continent Iqbal had opened his eyes in the period of Islamic renaissance and thus was a successor of the intellectual movement started by Syed Ahamd Khan and Jamaluddin Afghani. As a path-finder his convictions were:

a) Islam was not only a Religion, but also a Culture.

Laying emphasis on the factor of change, he launched an attack on the static elements of Islam e.g. traditional as well as populist approaches towards Islam, and advocated the cause of reformist Islam. According to him under the Quranic teachings Muslims turned their attention towards acquisition of knowledge through sense-perception and discarded the speculative method of the Greeks. Thus Muslims were founders of modern sciences. In this background, in the field of culture, Iqbal wanted to re-join the severed connection between the ancient Islamic sciences with modern sciences, in order to rekindle the spirit of curiosity, inquiry, research, innovation, invention and creativity among Muslims. He was of the firm view that Islamic theological thought needed reconstruction as the traditional theological interpretations were based on ancient notions of the Greek speculative sciences which were now outmoded. He therefore felt the need of evolving modern Islamic theology on the basis of new discoveries in the fields of psychology, mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, etc. He believed that Christians learnt from Muslims how to reconcile revelation with reason and sense-perception, and in this process they had gone far ahead than Muslims. It was therefore necessary and in accordance with the needs of modern times that scholastics should reconstruct religious thought of Islam in the light of discoveries of modern sciences and this was the only way through which they could strengthen the Faith in the hearts of modern generation of Muslims.

He also emphasised the re-interpretation of Shariah Law in the light of modern experience and changed conditions of modern life. In this connection he approved of a philosophical approach which he termed as “Permanence-in-Change”.

According to him religious obligations of Islam (Ibadaat) were permanent for all times to come but worldly matters involving life (Mua'mallaat) were subject to the law of change. Thus when he felt the need

of re-interpretation of the Foundational Principles of Shariah Law it was in the sphere of worldly matters.

b) Islam was a Nation Building Force.

Iqbal advanced the concept of Muslim nationhood as opposed to territorial nationalism. A Nation was created by the development of a sense among people of belonging to one another. This may be created through a common race, colour, language and territory. Thus on the basis of Muslim nationalism he dreamt of creating a new Muslim society and a new Muslim Commonwealth of the Culture.

c) Islam cannot be apprehended without Power.

Politically and economically subjugated Muslims according to Iqbal could not claim themselves to be Muslims. Muslims therefore in order to realise authentic Islam must always aspire for Power. Islam must always be free and freedom must always be bracketed with power.

d) Establishment of a State as Manifestation of Muslim Power.

Iqbal had provided all philosophical and moral justification to the Muslims of the Sub-Continent to struggle for the creation of Pakistan.

Fundamentalist Ulema had always opposed the ideas of Iqbal. Remarks of Maulana Najmuddin Islahi may be noted. (Muktubat-e-Sheikhul Islam, Vol. III, Page 141):

“We regard as a Shar’i crime to give a higher status to Iqbal than that of a mere poet and a philosopher. We have carefully examined his works. There is no denying the fact that there are hundreds and thousands of his verses which may be considered as useful; nevertheless among them there are numerous such verses which openly hit Islam and Islamic way of thing king-----

----- In Pakistan the principle of law making can be adopted in the light of Iqbal’s thought because the Islam on which Pakistan has ‘been founded is another name of the philosophy of Iqbal.”

The remarks of Maulana Abul Hassan Ali Nadwi may also be perused (Naqoosh-i-Iqbal pages 39-40):

“One finds such interpretations of Islamic beliefs and philosophy in Iqbal with which it is impossible to agree. Unlike some enthusiastic young Muslims of today I do not subscribe to the view that no one has understood Islam better than Iqbal or that except him no one could reach the depths of Islamic sciences-----

----- In his Madras lectures there lie scattered many ideas which are in direct conflict with the collective principles of Sunni Islam. It would have been better if these lectures were not published.”

Now we come to the question as to what is Iqbal’s concept of a modern Islamic State. The important features are:

Sovereignty of Allah According to him the idea of personal authority is contrary to the spirit of Islam. He says:

“The Prophet of Arabia succeeded in commanding the absolute submission of an entire people; yet no man has depreciated his own authority more than he. “I am, “he says, “a man like you; like you my forgiveness also depends on the mercy of God”. Once in a moment of spiritual exaltation, he is reported to have said to one of his he is reported to have said to one of his companions, “Go and tell the people - he who says - there is only one God - will enter the paradise,” studiously omitting the second half of the Muslim creed - “And Muhammad is his Prophet.” The ethical importance of this attitude is great. The whole system of Islamic ethics is based on the idea of individuality; anything which tends to repress the healthy development of individuality is quite inconsistent with the spirit of Islamic law and ethics. A Muslim is free to do any thing he likes, provided he does not violate the law. The general principles of this law are believed to have been revealed; the details, in order to cover the relatively secular cases, are left to the interpretation of professional lawyers. It is, therefore, true to say that the entire fabric of Islamic law, actually administered, is really judge-made law, so that the lawyer performs the legislative function in the Muslim constitution. If, however, an absolutely new case arises which is not provided for in the

law of Islam, the will of the whole Muslim community becomes a further source of law.”

The inference which can be drawn from this view of Iqbal is that Allah being sovereign, His Sovereignty is to be delegated to the representatives of the peoples. He therefore advances the view that “Election” is the method approved in the Quran on which the Islamic State could be founded. It may be pointed out at this stage that there is no direct Verse of the Quran in respect of “Election” or approval of the establishment of a democratic or republican order. However Iqbal’s argument on this point is based on Sura 42: Verse 38, in which Muslims have been described as those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation. Some important questions arise here and these are: firstly, all the members of the Muslim community cannot conduct their affairs by mutual consultation and therefore such mutual consultation is only possible through their elected representatives; and secondly, when this elective body is brought into being as an assembly would it be a consultative assembly or an advisory assembly. In Iqbal’s view in modern times it is to operate as a consultative assembly, and for the purposes of law making, it must assume the role of Ijma (Consensus of the Community). The formation of these elected legislative assemblies in modern Muslim States, according to him, amounts to a return to the original purity of Islam. As shall be pointed out later, he gives power of Ijtihad (Interpretation of Islamic law and Its Promulgation) to these assemblies. He has no hesitation in approving the establishment of a multi-party system or political groupings in modern Islamic Democracies, for, in his opinion, this was in accordance with the practice of early republican phase in Islam.

In Iqbal’s view modern Islamic State is founded on three principles, and these are:

- a) Human Solidarity,
- b) Equality, and
- c) Freedom.

According to him the essence of Tauhid (Unity of God), as a working idea, is to realise the ideals of human solidarity, equality and freedom.

Therefore the State from the Islamic standpoint is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realise them in a definite human organisation. He advances a novel argument to the effect that since no further revelation is binding on man, the Muslims should regard themselves as spiritually the most emancipated peoples on earth. He observes:

“In view of the basic idea of Islam that there could be no further revelation binding on man, we ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated peoples on earth. Early Muslims emerging out of the spiritual slavery of pre-Islamic Asia were not in a position to realise the true significance of this basic idea. Let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy, which is the ultimate aim of Islam.”

Now each of the three foundational principles of modern Islamic State may be considered separately:

a) Human Solidarity. It is interesting to note that the first principle on which his modern Islamic State is to be founded is Human Solidarity instead of Muslim Solidarity. Why this is so? Because in this State the basis of Muslim nationhood would be common spiritual aspiration, whereas their solidarity with the non-Muslim minorities would be based on common territory, for, it is only through this two-fold dispensation that the ideal of human solidarity in a modern Islamic State could be realised. In his famous Allahabad Address of 1930, in which he for the first time proposed the establishment of an independent Muslim State, he explained his views on religious tolerance in this way:

“A community which is inspired by feelings of ill-will towards other communities is low and ignoble. I entertain the highest respect for the customs, laws, religious, and social institutions of other communities. Nay, it is my duty according to the teachings of the Quran, even to defend their places of worship, if need be”.

While making this statement, the Quranic teachings to which he has referred are contained in Sura 22: Verse 40. Therein it is stated:

“Had Allah not created a Community (Muslim Community) to ward off the others from aggression then churches, synagogues, oratories and mosques where Allah is worshiped most would have been destroyed”.

According to the early jurists, these Quranic teachings made it obligatory on the Islamic State to protect Jewish and Christian communities who were regarded as “People of the Book” but after the conquest of Iran, some Muslim jurists expanded this Quranic injunction so as to cover the followers of Zoroastrian faith by designating them as “Like the People of the Book”. Similarly during the Mughal rule over India some Muslim jurists gave the status of “Like the People of the Book” to the Hindus, and in this way they went on expanding the interpretation of this Quranic injunction in order to suit the needs and requirements of times. Even otherwise according to the Quranic teachings there is no compulsion in religion. Therefore if Iqbal’s idea of religious tolerance in a modern Islamic State is realised then it certainly contains the qualities for which an ideal secular State may aspire.

b) Equality. Under this head Iqbal discusses his concept of modern Islamic social democracy. In the field of economics he was as against socialist or communist economic order as he was against capitalist economic order. In his view the Quran provided the best remedy for the economic ailments of humanity. If one were to make an overall picture of his social democracy, it would appear that he contemplated it as a welfare State of the middle class based on mixed economy. In this field also he felt the need of re-interpretation of Shariah law in order to suit the economic requirements of the community. His views are worth quoting:

“The peoples 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. The faith which you represent recognises the worth of the individual, and disciplines him to give away his all to the service of God and man. Its possibilities are not yet exhausted. It can still create a new world where the social rank of man is not determined by his caste or colour, or the amount of dividend he earns, but by the kind of life he lives; where the poor tax the rich, where human society is founded not on the equality of stomachs but on the equality of spirits, where an Untouchable can marry the daughter of a King, where private ownership is a trust and where capital cannot be

allowed to accumulate so as to dominate the real producer of wealth. This superb idealism of your faith, however, needs emancipation from the medieval fancies of theologians and legists. Spiritually we are living in a prison house of thoughts and emotions which during the course of centuries we have woven round ourselves. And be it further said to the shame of us - men of older generation - that we have failed to equip the younger generation for the economic, political and even religious crises that the present age is likely to bring. The whole community needs a complete overhauling of its present mentality in order that it may again become capable of feeling the urge of fresh desires and ideals.”

c) Freedom. It has already been pointed out that according to Iqbal the establishment of democratically elected legislative assemblies in some Muslim countries amounted to a return to the original purity of Islam. But the important point to note here is that while formulating his ideas on a new democratic order in Islam how much he was influenced by modern Turkish democracy. He was in favour of giving the power of Ijtihad to the law-making assembly and in this respect the example cited by him was of the Turkish experiment. His argument is as follows:

“Let us now see how the Grand National Assembly has exercised this power of I Ijtihad in regard to the institution of Khilafat. According to Sunni law, the appointment of an Imam or Khalifah is absolutely indispensable. The first question that arises in this connexion is this - Should the Caliphate be vested in a single person? Turkey’s Ijtihad is that according to the spirit of Islam the Caliphate or Imamate can be vested in a body of persons, or an elected Assembly -----

-----Personally, I believe the Turkish view is perfectly sound. It is hardly necessary to argue this point. The republican form of government is not only thoroughly consistent with the spirit of Islam, but has also become a necessity in view of the new forces that are set free in the world of Islam-- ----- In order to understand the Turkish view let us seek the guidance of Ibn Khildun - the first philosophical historian of Islam. Ibn Khildun, in his famous ‘Prolegomena’, mentions three distinct views of the idea of Universal Caliphate in Islam. (1) That Universal Imamate is a Divine institution, and is consequently

indispensable. (2) That it is merely a matter of expediency. (3) That there is no need of such an institution. The last view was taken by the Khawarij. It seems that modern Turkey has shifted from the first to the second view, i.e. to the view of the Mu 'tazillah who regarded Universal Imamate as a matter of expediency only. The Turks argue that in our political thinking we must be guided by our past political experience which points unmistakably to the fact that the idea of Universal Imamate has failed in practice. It was a workable idea when the Empire of Islam was intact. Since the break-up of this Empire independent political units have arisen. The idea has ceased to be operative and cannot work as a living factor in the organisation of modern Islam -----

Such is the attitude of the modern Turk, inspired as he is by the reality of experience, and not by the scholastic reasoning of jurists who lived and thought under different conditions of life.”

According to him the transfer of the power of I Ijtihad from individual representatives of schools to a Muslim legislative assembly was necessary in modern times because in this way contributions could be made to legal discussions from laymen or experts in other fields of knowledge who happened to possess a keen insight into affairs and that in this way alone the dormant concept of life in the legal system of Islam could be stirred into activity and given an evolutionary outlook. This was a very radical view which had been inspired by the Turkish experiment with democracy. However Iqbal raised the question as to how the possibility of erroneous interpretation of Islamic law could be avoided- when a modern Muslim assembly may consist mostly of men possessing no knowledge of the subtleties of Islamic law. He suggested that a Board of ulema could be formed as a part of the Muslim legislative assembly for helping and guiding free discussion on questions relating to law. But he also warned that this arrangement was not free from danger and that it may be tried if at all only as a temporary measure. In his opinion the only effective remedy of the possibilities of erroneous interpretation was to reform the present system of legal education in Muslim countries, to extend its sphere, and to combine it with an intelligent study of modern jurisprudence, In his view the lot of most of the Muslim countries today was that they were mechanically repeating old

values, but he made the Turks an exception, who according to him were on the way to creating new values. The Turk, he said:

“has passed through great experiences which have revealed his deeper self to him. In his life has begun to move, change, and amplify, giving birth to new desires, bringing new difficulties and suggesting new interpretations. The question which confronts him today, and which is likely to confront other Muslim countries in the near future is whether the law of Islam is capable of evolution - a question which will require great intellectual effort, and is sure to be answered in the affirmative, provided the world of Islam approaches it in the spirit of Umar - the first critical and independent mind in Islam.”