

UNDERSTANDING THE RATIONALE OF SHAH WALI ULLAH, SHIBLI AND IQBAL

Muhammad Suheyl Umar

Years back, while preparing a dissertation for the fulfillment of my M. Phil. degree in Iqbal Studies, I had to analyse the contents of Iqbal's *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*¹²⁸ once again. During the course of my readings in the sixth lecture "The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam"¹²⁹ I observed that, while unfolding his thesis, Iqbal had built his argument on a key-concept borrowed from Shah Wali Ullah on the authority of Shibli Nu'mani's *Al-Kalam*.¹³⁰ Further reading revealed that the quotation given in Shibli's work, on which Iqbal based his views, differed considerably from the original text of Shah Wali Ullah.¹³¹ In fact it was a 'cut and paste' kind of extract which Shibli had presented in his usual summarizing style of compilation. The inference drawn therefrom was, in my opinion, not tenable for two reasons. Firstly, it was categorically opposed to the views of Shah Wali Ullah that he had expressed, on the same topic, in "al-Hudud" section of *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*.¹³² Secondly the inference drawn from the 'manufactured' quotation altogether changed the perspective of Shah Wali Ullah's discourse which was confined to a relationship between

¹²⁸ M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Edited and annotated by M. Saeed Shaikh, Published jointly by Iqbal Academy Pakistan and The Institute of Islamic Culture, -Lahore, 1989, 249 p.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 116-142.

¹³⁰ See Shibli Nu'mani, *Ilm al-Kalam-o- al-Kalam*, Nafis Academy, Karachi, 1979, pp. 237-38. One is inclined to think that, perhaps, Iqbal did not have the chance to look at the actual passage in *Hujjatullah al-Balighah* by that time. Otherwise it is hard to explain as to why did Iqbal use the text provided by Shibli which we have referred to in the foregoing lines.

¹³¹ Shah Wali Ullah, *Hujjatullah al-Balighah*, Dar al-Kutub al-Hadithah, Qairo, n.d., Vol. I, .pp. 247-8. The reference provided in the annotations of M. Saeed Shaikh, (op. cit., p. 196) does not seem correct since there is no such passage on p. 118 of Shah Wali Ullah's book. More over, the fact has escaped the notice of the editor that, the text of the passage quoted from Shah Wali Ullah in Shibli's *al-Kalam* lacks six lines from the middle and two from the end. We have briefly alluded to the point in our dissertation *Tashkil Jadid- nai Tanazur men*, forth coming.

¹³² Shah Wali Ullah, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 756-777.

Shari'ah bi'l jumlah and Shari'ah bi'l itlaq (Principles of Religious law and instances of their application).

Sayyid Sulayman Nadvi, Shibli's successor and intellectual heir to him in many respects, had earlier expressed his disagreement from the interpretation¹³³ which Shibli seemed to have imposed on Shah Wali Ullah's idea.¹³⁴

Later on, we had a chance to present the problem to Dr. Javid Iqbal. After examining the relevant texts of both the authors he commented that Shah Wali Ullah, for what ever reasons, did not articulate the idea in an explicit manner. However, in his opinion, the inference drawn by Shibli and, later on, adopted by Iqbal was correct and represented the real intention of Shah Wali Ullah.

As the readers can surmise, this discussion, apart from its academic or legal value, had a direct bearing upon the on going debate about the immutability/adaptability of the rulings of the Islamic Law and especially the Hudud punishments. If the aforementioned rationale is accepted and the line of argument is adopted there are some drastic conclusions that inevitably confront us as a necessary corollary.¹³⁵

We also had the opportunity to discuss the issue of determining the correct interpretation of Shah Wali Ullah's text and arguments with some of the leading authorities on Shah Wali Ullah and/or Islamic Law and Jurisprudence, namely, Dr. Muhammad al-Ghazali, Javid Ahmad Ghamidi and Dr. Muhammad Amin. Both Dr. Ghazali and Javid Ahmad Ghamidi were not inclined to accept the interpretation Shibli had suggested. Mr. Ghamidi was more explicit on the point. In his view Shibli's interpretation was neither in harmony with Shah sahib's over all point of view on the issue nor in accordance with the specific issue of the application of religious law to the cases removed in time and space form the age of the Prophet.

¹³³ See, Shaikh ' Ata Ullah, Iqbal Namah, Lahore, 1951, Vol. I, pp. 160-163.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 161, Note 1.

¹³⁵ We had the occasion to point out to it while commenting on the views expressed by one of the speakers of the Iqbal Day Seminar, Lahore, 7th November, 1994.

Dr. Amin, taking his cue from our discussions in the Iqbal Academy, went into print and expressed his point of view in his Urdu article “Shah Wali Ullah awr Islami Hudud”.¹³⁶ The interpretation Shibli gave to Shah Wali Ullah’s statements was not acceptable to him either. Unfortunately, Dr. Amin, some how, did not give the actual text of Shibli nor the subsequent usage it was put to, Instead, he opened an other avenue of discussion. Dr. M. Khalid Masud, an eminent authority on Islamic law and jurisprudence, responded to Dr. Amin’s article¹³⁷ by defending the interpretation advanced by Shibli and, to a certain extent, Iqbal. However, remaining in the tracks of Dr. Amin’s arguments, he, perhaps involuntarily, marginalized the main issue.

In the next issue of Iqbal Review we intend to take up the issue again and offer our views on the question of finding the true rationale of our thinkers. The same issue would carry an other study of Iqbal’s comments on the hadith literature by Dr. Altaf Hussain Ahangar from the International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

¹³⁶ See, Fikr-o-Nazar, Islamic Reasearch Institute,,Islamabad Vol. 32, No. 2 October-December, 1994, pp. 59-74.

¹³⁷ Dr. M. Khalid Mas’ud, “Islami Ahkam awr ‘ Adat”, Fikr-o-Nazar op.cit. Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 63-80.