

IQBAL AND THE DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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Some political analysts of the US have propounded theories the conclusion of which is that after collapse of the Soviet Union, Islam is the next ideology of hate and that the world is likely to witness a clash of cultures of Islam and the West in the 21st century. The main issue in this debate in the West is that in the future a united Islamic World will pose a threat to the interests of the Western civilization.

Among these experts, Bernard Lewis is of the view that there would be a clash between Islam and Christianity because the two civilizations are incompatible, they present rival modes of life, have confronted each other since the past 1300 years and that what is unacceptable to Islam is Western secularism and modernity (Roots of the Muslim Rage). John Esposito thinks that while the Western leaders are proceeding to establish the New World Order, transnational Islam is generally being regarded as the new global monolithic enemy of the West (Islamic Threat-Myth or Reality). Huntington believes that Islamic and Confucian (Chinese) civilizations could join together against the West because of their basically different beliefs and value systems. He maintains that Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, free markets, and the separation of church from the state are not found in Islamic and Confucian cultures. Therefore a clash between the Western civilization, with its universalist vocation and global attraction, and the Islamic and Confucian cultures is inevitable (The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order).

According to Fukuyama, their Japanese counterpart, history of mankind has been generated as a result of tension and conflict between ideas. Every idea endeavors to establish itself as the universal principle and constructs a society and a political order in conformity with the model set up by it. In this struggle only the superior ideas survive and the inferior ones are destroyed. The West, by vanquishing the socialist creed of the Soviet Union, has established superiority of its ideas. Therefore, history has now ceased to

move forward and has been brought to a halt (The End of History and the Last man).

It is difficult to reconcile the theories of Lewis and Huntington with that of Fukuyama. If the clash of civilizations amounts to a continuous battle of beliefs and values then history, even after the collapse of the socialist order, is bound to be moving along instead of becoming static and immobile. Some of the Chinese scholars reject the Fukuyama theory on the ground that it smacks of the cultural hegemonies of the West. They also repudiate the view that one civilization is superior to the other or that the Western model should be considered as a universal standard for the entire world to follow after the end of the cold war.

As for the views of Huntington respecting the collaboration of Islamic and Confucian civilizations for the extermination of the Western civilization, one is reminded of the nineteenth century propaganda in Europe under which terms like “Pan-Islamism” and “Yellow Peril” were evolved. The term “Yellow Peril” was coined in order to make the West conscious of the Japanese threat. The Japanese had started competing with the West by throwing cheaper goods in the so-called free markets established by the West for economically exploiting Asia and Africa. However, “yellow Peril” has now been replaced by the “Confucian” threat probably because the Chinese (also considered as a “Yellow” race in Western terms) are likely to emerge as a great economic power by the next century.

“Pan-Islamism” was an expression used by the journalists and policy-makers of Europe to emphasize that Islam contemplated the union of its forces against Christian Europe. The underlying purpose of Western diplomacy during those times was to revive the old Christian hatred against a fundamentally aggressive Islam. Therefore, if there was a desire on the part of weak Muslim countries to offer a joint front against the penetration of European Colonial Powers, it was interpreted as the old Muslim plot to blow up Europe.

Thus the term “Pan-Islamism” was coined in the nineteenth century by the Western diplomacy to serve as a scurvy pretext for the spoiling of the fast decaying Muslim states. According to Zafar Ali Khan, “To the man in the street (in Europe) Pan-Islamism was synonymous with a gigantic union of the Moslems of the World, having for its cherished object the extermination

of Christianity as a living political force. As long as Morocco, a Tripoli, Persia, or a Macedonia had to be grabbed, the bogey of Pan-Islamism was a most useful adjunct. It helped the stalwarts of Christendom to constantly confront their fanatical dupes with an imaginary peril, the bare possibility of which was to be removed by depriving the Moslem of his hearth and home. “(Nationality and Empire by B. C. Pal)”. So when the Western theoreticians maintain that Islam is the future enemy, the Muslims, by their past experience, are left with no other alternative except to interpret this statement as another move on the part of the West for economic or political exploitation of the Muslim lands.

It is interesting to note how the Chinese have reacted to the Huntington thesis of the Confucian civilization’s clash with the West. Chinese scholars hold that the history of mankind reveals that different civilizations have always clashed and merged with each other at the same time. China absorbed Buddhism, and the Western civilization. They think that in the light of modern scientific developments it is possible to construct a universal civilization of the West—willing to learn from other. There are also thinkers who are opposed to the concept of fusion and believe in the diversity of civilization. However, they too reject the theory of Huntington holding that cultural diversity does not necessarily lead to conflict but different cultures have coexisted and can co-exist. Some of them feel that the clash theory is being advanced for diverting attention from the real issue, which is the clash of economic interests.

When the European Colonial Powers penetrated the Islamic world, the Muslims’ reaction to the new ideas imported from the West was:

- (i) of total rejection;
- (ii) of acceptance and adaptation; and
- (iii) of reconciling the new ideas with Islam.

The Muslims belonging to the first category, consisting mostly of religious zealots, was considered as “Conservative”. The second category was called “Westernized”, and the “conservatives” also designated the third category that came to be known as “liberals” or “reformists” as “westernized” Muslims. Ever since Islam entered modern history the “Westernized” have usually sided with the “liberal-reformists” as against the “conservatives”.

Therefore, there exists an inter-civilizational conflict between the “conventionalists” and “reformists”, and this divide within Muslim societies cannot be considered as a clash between two different civilizations but a clash within a single culture.

The resistance on the part of the “Conservatives” could not stop the advance of the European Colonial Powers into the Muslim world because they were totally unaware of the progress made by human knowledge as well as science and technology in the West. They fought against the long-ranged guns of the imperialists with time-worn rifles and swords. Subsequently when the pragmatic reformers like Syed Jamal uddin Afghani etc. preached that in order to know the secret of Western power, the Muslims must acquire the new knowledge, they opposed them as “Westernized” Muslims. The problem of “conservatism” was handled in two ways in Turkey and Muslim India. In Turkey Kamal Ata-turk eliminated the Ulema completely from the religious life of the Turks. But in Muslim India reformers like Syed Ahmed Khan and Iqbal tried their best during their life time to educate and train the Ulema so as to create among them a group of new Ulema to provide a new enlightened motivation for Islam to the new Muslim society which they thought of bringing into being.

The former “conventional” or “conservative” Muslims, who are now being categorized as “fundamentalist”, “radical”, “militant” or “political” by the West, do not accept the new Western ideas. They regard “change” as an “innovation”, therefore they reject “modernity”. Furthermore, since the Western notions of individualism, liberalism constitutionalism, human rights, the rule of law, nation-state etc. stem from “secularism”, which, according to them amounts to “Godlessness”. All these are also repudiated. “Secularism” is denounced since it is defined as “not sacred”, temporal or “profane”. It is an ideology that aims at the destruction of the very foundation of religion. The Western concept of “nation state” is likewise unacceptable as it divides humanity into groups, establishes barriers between man and man, and therefore conflicts with the Islamic notion of “Ummah” (oneness of the Muslim community). According to them the Muslims’ constitution is the Quran; their concept of the “rule of law” is the “supremacy of the Shari’ah”; “individualism” and “liberalism” have no equivalent in Islam, as every Muslim is to act in accordance with the injunctions of Islam. Islam has its own system of “rights of God”, ‘rights of human beings” and “rights which

are common to both God and human beings”. This system is superior to the man-made system of “human rights”. Islam is founded on the principles of equality and liberty of Muslims. It does not tolerate separation of church from the state as there is no “church” or clergy in Islam. The free-markets are permitted to function so long as they abide by the rules of the Shari’ah. Finally, the “new world order” of the West must be repudiated because every Muslim is enjoined to impose the “Divine Order” (Nizam-i-Islami) in the whole world. Briefly this is the manner how the so-called “fundamentalist” Muslims confront the Western ideas. But this confrontational posture towards the West of some individuals in different Muslim societies does not represent the views of the entire community that believes in peaceful co-existence with the other communities.

At this stage three relevant questions may be raised: First, why does the West regard the Muslim world as its new enemy? Second, why are the so-called “fundamentalist” Muslims opposed to the West? And third, how have the ‘reformist’ Muslim thinkers, particularly of South Asian Islam reconciled the Western ideas with Islam and, as a result, stand for peaceful co-existence with the West and other civilizations?

The West’s antagonism against Islam dates back to the times of the Crusades. The memories of Muslim rule over Spain, the fall of Constantinople, the siege of Vienna, the defeat of Gallipolis and numerous other such recollections, make Westerners feel threatened by Islam, particularly when new challenges come forth from its “militant” factions. Generally speaking the three major events in the recent past that have raised the Western apprehensions of a new Islamic resurgence are Khomeini’s revolution in Iran, Sadat’s assassination, and the victory of the Mujahidin in Afghanistan over a “super power”. The image of an aggressive and revolutionary Islam, which believes in a fusion of the spiritual and the temporal, recognizes no territorial boundaries, cuts across continents, nations and races, and besides Christianity, is the only other global religion, could be a matter of concern. As a proselytizing faith Islam is convinced of its ultimate triumph and universal prevalence. Therefore, as a rival ideology, this by itself is a challenge to the West’s arrogance of its own civilizational superiority claimed on the basis of secular humanism, and the belief in its ultimate victory. In this background, according to Shireen Hunter, “Islam is the ideal

candidate for the new enemy figure that will fill the gap created by the fall of communism (The Future of Islam and the West).

As for the Muslims' opposition to the West, their memories of Western domination are more recent and fresh. Generally speaking, the roots of their rage are to be found in the past three centuries of humiliation under the expansion of Western imperialism from Africa to South East Asia. The situation was aggravated by the creation of Israel and humiliation of the Arab Muslims because of the Western military support of Israel. The support to anti-people rulers like the Shah of Iran, pushing Sadat to the Camp David for a gun-marriage with Israel, the Gulf War, continuous blockade of Iraq and the denial of democracy to "Islamists" in Algeria are some of the many irritants. The continuing genocide of the Muslims in Bosnia, Kashmir, Chechnya and Kosovo and a large number of Muslim refugees leaving their homes in these countries have been completely ignored by the West. They are convinced that the U. S. and her allies in the West have no moral standards where Muslims are involved. They lower their standards of human rights and the rule of law when dealing with Muslims. For instance, the resolutions of the U.N. against Israel are always ignored whereas those against Iraq are immediately complied with, leading to the Gulf War and Muslim casualties. In short, the false promises and fork-tongued diplomacy of the West, particularly the U.S. is responsible for engendering aggressive extremism in some Muslim circles.

As it has been pointed out, a large number of members of the Muslim community in the world who stand for peaceful co-existence with the West and other civilizations, have either accepted the new Western ideas or have reconciled them with Islam. The "liberal-reformist" Muslim thinkers differentiate between "modernity" and "Westernization". According to them "modernity" is the acknowledgement of "change" as a normal process in the life of a society. But "Westernization" is the adaptation of an alien culture. It is possible to remain tied up with one's own cultural traditions and yet welcome "change" or "modernity".

Muslim "liberal" thinkers in South Asia, e.g., Syed Jamaluddin Afghani, Syed Ahmed Khan, Shibli and Iqbal successfully reconciled the new ideas imported from the West with Islam. Syed Jamaluddin Afghani exhorted the Muslims to acquire the new scientific and technological knowledge in order to discover the secret of Western power. Syed Ahmed Khan disseminated

modern education among the Muslims and made them realize that there were two nations in the Indian subcontinent, and in this way, reconciling the Western concept of territorial nationalism with Islam, paved the way for the development of religious (or cultural) nationalism among Muslims. This consciousness was further reinforced by Iqbal's philosophy of "Individual and Collective Ego", led Quaid-i-Azam M. A. Jinnah to establish the state of Pakistan, as homeland for the Muslim nation in South Asia. Thus Pakistan is a product of the fusion of new Western ideas with Islam.

Iqbal believes that Islam as a religion is neither national, nor racial, nor personal but purely human; and as a culture, it has no specific country, no specific language, no specific script and no specific mode of dress. His perception of Islam is humanistic and egalitarian. He creates a bridge between Islam and the West when he argues that in the sphere of knowledge the Western civilization is a prolongation of Islamic civilization.

Iqbal regards the establishment of democratically elected legislative assemblies in some Muslim countries as a return to the original purity of Islam. The Islamic state, according to him, is founded on the ideals of human equality, human solidarity and human freedom. He thinks that to consider secular as profane is a Christian way of thinking and not Islamic. He is of the opinion that modern science has revealed that the merely material or secular has no substance until we discover it rooted in the spirit. Therefore there is no such thing as a profane world. He rejects the Western idea of separation of church from the state as based on the metaphysical dualism of spirit and matter. But upholds the separation of religious and the temporal functions of the Islamic state as merely a division of functions. He subscribes to the view that the state should manage and control religious matters.

He is also of the view that "Ijtihad" (independent inquiry) should be adopted as a legislative process by modern times in the Muslim legislative assemblies. He supports the claim of Muslim "liberals" to re-interpret the foundational Shari'ah principles in the light of their own experience and altered conditions of modern life. He is convinced that the world of Islam is confronted and affected by new forces set free by the extraordinary development of human knowledge in all its directions. Therefore he suggests that each and every generation of Muslims, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems.

In short, Iqbal maintains that the real object of Islam is to establish a “spiritual democracy”. He was the first Muslim in the Indian subcontinent to define the state in Islam as a “spiritual democracy”. In other words, he considers that state as genuinely Islamic in which all faiths, sects and creeds are equally free, authentically tolerated, respected and accepted (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam). Thus in his view the state contemplated by Islam is superior to the different varieties of states evolved by the Western civilization on the basis of secular humanism.

The clash theories seem to be based on fantasies rather than facts. The theoreticians have not cared to study the recent past or contemporary history of the Muslim world. The world of Islam is composed of different nation-states, governed by different political systems, guided by different political interests, and although it is rich in resources, it is not united. Therefore it cannot pose any threat to the West. Two Muslim states, Iran and Iraq have recently fought against one another, and in the inter-Arab war between Iran and Kuwait, some Arab Muslim states made defense alliances with the Western powers under the leadership of the U. S. against Iraq. However, the main concern of the West in the Muslim Middle East is the preservation of Israel at all costs. Therefore the West feels threatened if any weak Muslim state acquires military strength.

Pakistan’s nuclear device has been named “Islamic bomb: merely because there is an apprehension on the part of the West that if the bomb is transmitted to any other Muslim state like Iran, Iraq or Libya, it may be dropped on Israel. It is conceded that Israel owns more than a hundred nuclear bombs which she can drop on all the big cities of the Muslim world if such a need arises, but her own territorial entity being small, not more than five or six such bombs may be required to cause complete annihilation.

Apparently there exists no possibility of a general clash between Islam and the West. But if the “terrorist” activities of some Muslim militants against power-drunk and arrogant U.S. goads her to retaliate by throwing missiles on sovereign Muslim state instead of picking up the culprits through other means, then the Muslim “liberal” governments in the Islamic world are likely to be affected by the spill-over and their liquidation under public pressure may lead to their replacement by extremist elements.

The “liberal” Muslim governments must remain in the field because they stand for cultural pluralism and peaceful co-existence. There are built-in complementarities between them and Western governments. They have always been involved in negotiations and dialogue with the West in order to resolve controversial economic and political issues. However, it is high time that these Muslim states that are in the process of holding dialogue with the U. S. and her allies, should suggest to them to remove the real cause of Muslim rage. It is reasonably probable that if the problems perceived by the Muslims to have been created by the West such as Israel, Kosovo, Chechnya, Bosnia, and Kashmir are justly and equitably settled, there would be nothing left to be angry about. Such a break-through may lead to the establishment of a pluralistic world where justice can be obtained through peaceful negotiations and agreements.