IQBAL AND ISLAMIC RESURGENCE

Prof. Dr. M. Yakub Mughul
Director: Pakistan Study Centre, University of Sind.

The decline of the Muslim Political Power, after the death of the last great Mughul Emperor, Aurangzeb Alamgir (1658–1707 A.D.) created many Political, Social and Religious problems for the Indian Muslim Society. The Indian Muslims had enjoyed privileges during the Mughul rule in India, but with their decline they gradually lost their administrative power, properties and moral pride.

According to Allama Iqbal[1] "The year 1799 is extremely important in the history of the World of Islam. In this year fell Tippu, and his fall meant the extinguishment of Muslim hopes for political prestige in India. In the same year was the battle of Navarnoo which saw the destruction of the Turkish fleet. Prophetic were the words of the author of the chronogram of Tippu's fall which visitors of Serangapatam find engraved on the wall of Tippu's mausoleum *"Gone is the glory of Ind, (Hind) as well as of Roum."* Thus in the year 1799 the political decay in Asia reached its climax. "But just as out of the humiliation of Germany on the day of Jena arose the modern German nation, it may be said with equal truth that out of the political humiliation of Islam in the year 1799 arose Modern Islam and her problems."

During the War of Independence of 1857–58 the Muslims suffered heavily at the hands of the British, after its suppression began a period of systematic prosecution and political annihillation for the Muslims all over the country. "By the end of the Mutiny," says Dr. B.R. Ambedkar,[2] 'The Mussalmans, high and low, were brought down by these series of events to the lowest depths of broken pride, black despair, and general penury. Without prestige, without education and without resources the Muslims were left to face the Hindus. The British pledged neutrality, were indifferent to the result of the struggle between the two communities. The result was that the Mussalmans completely worsened in the struggle."

In the times of crisis, nations somehow produce men to pull them through. Ability to do so is the evidence of the vitality of a nation. Indeed a reformer of outstanding merit with a breath of vision, an insight into the true spirit of Islam and a thorough experience of the under-lying principle of the Western Culture, was the need of the day. Iqbal fulfilled this role to a remarkable degree. He possessed all the qualities and has performed this duty quite successfully.

Paper read at the 2nd Internation Congress on Allama Iqbal held in Lahore, November, 1983.

Like Rumi, Iqbal refused to be overawed by the pall of gloom which again hung over the World of Islam. His stay in England and Germany in the first decade of the present century made him painfully conscious of the ruthless materialism of the West on one hand and lengthening shadows of the imperialism on the other.

The time when Iqbal appeared the new discoveries were made and science had flourished and there was a belief that science would take place of worn-out religious systems and religions were now out-dated. During the last three hundered years, the Muslims World had been intellectully mostly inactive and the younger generation of the Muslim Ummah not being satisfied with the old interpretation were interested in a fresh orientation of Islam. The System of Education introduced by the Europeans in the Muslim World, which was under their occupation had totally changed the out look of the new generation of Muslim Community and under their influence they had began to think that so long as the Islamic teachings were not conformed to the standard of Science, Islam would not be able to face the challenge of the modern age.

As a thinker Iqbal deserves to be included amongst the greatest philosophers of the Islamic World. "If ever there was a Poet-prophet it was Iqbal," says Professor Arberry an orientalist of great repute. It was Iqbal alone among all the contemporary thinkers and pioneers who succeeded most in persauding the Muslims to get rid of their apathy and pursue the path of liberty and Islamic glory. Endowed with the gift of poetry Iqbal decided, to put it to the best use. He therefore used his poetry as a vehicle of his message. The paramount question before him was now to approach the younger generation of Islam, who were not proprly educated.

Reviewing the prevailing system of Education in India, Iqbal in a letter to Fazli Karim says:[3] "The knowledge of Arabic language is gradually dying out and the Muslim Educational Institutions are not paying any special heed to it..... Personally I would like our young scholars to devote themselves to the study of Muslim Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, History and Jurisprudence. In the best interest of Islam, it is the study of these branches of knowledge which is needed today. This alone will bring modern Muslims into touch with the roots of modern knowledge, and we will make them appreciate the meaning of modern problems."

Iqbal thinks that with the reawakening of Islam, it is necessary to examine in an independent spirit what Europe has thought and howfar the conclusions reached by him can help us in the revision and if necessary re-construction of theological thought in Islam.

Iqbal wanted to convince that Islam promotes the strivings towards progress of Science and Technology and explortation and utilization of nature in the service of human progress. He says that "In the past centuries no difference had arisen in the principles enunciated by Islam. Due to the advancement of Science in the present age

and the knowledge gathered in different spheres of life as a result there of it has become necessary to know the basic principles of Islam.[4] "

He further states:

"Islam in my opinion, is the only positive system that the world possesses today provided the Muslims apply themselves to it and rethink the whole thing in the light of modern ideas. The Indian Muslim in my opinion is likely to play a very important role in the future of Islam. New Islam relies more on the younger generation which has received more education with necessary grounding in Islam..[5] "

As a matter of fact, Iqbal highly conscious of the fact that the Muslim world was passing through the same process of readjustment that the West had passed through some centuries earlier. In a letter dated 18th March 1926 addressed to Maulana Suleyman Nadvi, he says, "The Muslims are about to enter the same phase of intellectual transformation which began in the European history with Luther".[6] According to Iqbal[7] the modernisation of the Islamic Law was feasible but only on the condition that the world of Islam approaches it in the spirit of Umer the Second Caliph.

Iqbal wanted to reinterpret Islamic theology in modern terms, to free it from its medieval garb, to stress the immanence of God which had been lost sight of by the medieval Muslim mind (except in sufi-circles who had plundered into pantheism) without destroying the transcendent aspect of the divine being.

His conception of Islam was certainly different from the commonly accepted orthodox view, to Iqbal, Islam meant reverence for ones higher self and a passion for socially useful and creative work. He totally refused to believe that a man who did not respect : his ideal self or lacked the creative urge to enrich humanity could be called a muslim. He Says:

هر که اُو را قوت تخلیق نیست
پیش ما جز کافر و زندیق نیست

"He who lacks creative urge and capacity is nought but a misbeliver."

He further says:

منکر حق نزد ملا کافر است
منکر خود نزد ما کافر تر است

"He who disbelieves in God is an infidel according to the Mulla, but to me he is a greater infidel who denies his ownself."

Iqbal is opposed to blind imitation of the West, but he exhorts people to adopt its spirit of research and urge for harnessing the forces of nature. Iqbal seeks to lead the Muslims back on the path of Islamic glory which will link them with the time of the Holy Prophet and the Pious Caliphs.

In fact Iqbal combines in his teachings the spirituality of the East and dynamism of the West and this to him is the real Islam.

The advent of Islam heralded a modern era of enlightenment and continuous progress of mankind for all time to come through continuous acquisition of knowledge and constant improvement in human thought and action so that faith in Almighty God was consolidated and mankind advanced continuously to achieve the highest status of the best of His creation.

Giving a brief account of the expansion of Islam Iqbal says:[8]

"The history of Islam tells us that the expansion of Islam as a religion is in no way related to the political power of its followers. The greatest spiritual conquests of Islam were made during the days of our political decrepitude. When the rude barbarians of Mongolia drowned in blood the civilisation of Baghdad in 1258 A.D. when the Muslim were mercilessly killed or driven out of Cordova by Ferdinand in 1236, Islam had just secured of footing in Sumatra and was about to work the peaceful conversion of the Malay Archipelago.

"In the hours of its political degradation (says Professor Arnold), Islam has achieved some of its most brilliant conquests. On two great historical occassions, infidel barbarians have set their foot on the neck of the followers of the Prophet, the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh and the Mongols in the thirteenth Century, and in each case the conquerors have accepted the religion of the conquered.

"We undoubtedly find (says the same learned scholar elsewhere) that Islam gained its greatest and most lasting missionary triumph in times and places in which its political power has been weakest, as in South India and Eastern Bengal.

"The truth is that Islam is essentially a religion of peace. All forms of political and social disturbance are condemned by the Quran in the most uncompromising terms. It quote a few verses from the Quran:

"Eat and drink from what God has given you and run not on the face of the earth in the matter of rebels.

"And disturb not the peace of the earth after it has been reformed; this is good for you if you are believers.

"And do good to others as God has done good to thee, and seek not the violation of peace in the earth, for God does not love those who break the peace[9]."

After the destruction of Baghdad in 1258 this advancement of knowledge was stagnated and the doors of ijtihad were closed, which ultimately left the Muslims behind. Allama Iqbal describes this as follows:

> "During the last five hundred years religious thought in Islam has been practically stationary. There was a time when European thought received inspiration from the World of Islam. The most remarkable phenomenon of modern history, however, is the enormous rapidity with which the World of Islam is spiritually moving towards the West. There is nothing wrong in this movement, for European Culture, on its intellectual side, is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islam. Our only fear is that the dazzling exterior of European Culture may arrest our movement and we may fail to reach the true inwardness of that culture. During all the centuries of our intellectual stupor Europe has been seriously thinking on the great problems in which the philosophers and scientists of Islam were so keenly interested.[10]"

Allama Iqbal further states:[11]

> "The political fall of Islam in Europe unfortunately took place, roughly speaking, at the moment when Muslim thinkers began to see the futility of deductive science and were fairly on the way to building inductive knowledge. It was practically at this time that Europe took up the task of research and discovery. Intellectual activity in the World of Islam practically ceased from this time and Europe began to reap the fruits of the labours of Muslim thinkers."

Describing the ignorance of the Muslims in the same letter Iqbal says:

"The ignorance of the Mussalamans of today is so great that they consider thoroughly anti-Islamic what has in the main arisen out of the bosom of their own Culture. If for instance, a Muslim savant knew that something like the theory of Einstein was seriously discussed in the Scientific circles of Islam (Abul, Maali quoted by Averroes) the present theory of Einstein would appear to him less out-landish. Again his antipathy to modern inductive logic would be very much diminished

if he knew that the whole system of modern logic started from Razi's well-known objection to deductive logic of Aristotle.[11]"

In a letter dated 2nd September 1925 addressed to Sufi Ghulam Mustafa, Allama Iqbal[12] further narrated the conditions of the Muslims all over the World in the following words:

"In all the Muslim countries, Muslims are either fighting for their liberty or thinking about the Islamic laws (except in Iran and Afghanistan). But in these two countries also, sooner or later, this question is bound to come up. It is a matter of regret that the Muslim jurists are either ignorant of modern trends or stick to their conservation. In my view Islam is being tested by the modern age.[12]"

Iqbal wanted to convince that Islam promotes the strivings towards progress of Science and Technology & exploitation and utilization of nature in the service of human service. He, therefore, disagrees with Renan, a great philosopher–thinker of France and says:

"Renan was wrong when he said that Science was the greatest enemy of Islam. No., it is the race idea which is the greatest enemy of Islam. In fact, of all humanity, and it is the duty of all lovers of mankind to stand in revolt against this dreadful invention of the devil. Science I find that the idea of nationality based on rac or territory is making headway in the world of Islam, and since I fear that the Muslims, losing sight of their own ideal of a universal humanity, are being lured by the idea of a territorial nationality. I feel it is my duty as a Muslim and as a lover of all mankind to remind them of their true function in the evolution of mankind.[13]"

Dr. Iqbal delivered the Lectures on "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" at Madras, Hyderabad (Deccan) and Aligarh, at the request of the Madras Muslim Association.

These Lectures are impressive achievement of Allama Iqbal. In these Lectures he tried to prove that Islam is a living and dynamic force and capable of facing the challenge of the modern world. He presented Islamic Philosophical ideals in such a way that his message became a beaconlight for those who would care to read and understand his works. In fact his illuminating and thought provoking lectures have contributed towards Islamic resurgence. This was a new approach to Islam and challenge to the West.

"Prophet of Islam" wrote Iqbal: "seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world, In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the ancient world, in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the modern world."

Iqbal knew that the task of reconstructing religious thought in Islam was immense but he had firm belief that it was imperative. He, therefore, suggests in one of his lectures as follows:

> "The task before the modern Muslim is, therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past. Perhaps the first Muslim who felt the urge of a new spirit in him was Shah Waliullah of Delhi. The man, however, who fully realized the importance and immensity of the task, and whose deep insight into the inner meaning of the history of Muslim thought and life, combined with a broad vision engendered by his wide experience of men and manners, would have made a living link between the past and the future, was Jamalud-Din Afghani. If his indefatigable but divided energy could have devoted itself entirely to Islam as a System of human belief and conduct, the World of Islam, intellectually speaking, would have been on much more solid ground today. The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us.[14] "

To sum up, we may say that Allama Iqbal is the foremost thinker of the modern Islamic world, who not only played a great role in reawakening the Muslims all over the world, but at the same time he has contributed towards Islamic resurgence in the light of the modern philosophical concepts.

1. Latif Ahmed Sherwani, Speeches, writings and statement of Iqbal, Lahore 1977, pp. 185–6.
2. DR. B.R. Ambedkar, Pakistan or the Partition of India, Lahore 1976 p. 31.
3. B.A. Dar, Letters of Iqbal, Lahore, 1978, p. 208.
4. B.A. Dar, Letters and Writings of Iqbal, Karachi, 1967, p. 53.
5. B.A. Dar op. cit. pp. 60–61.
6. Shaikh, Ataullah, Iqbal Namah I Lahore n.d. p. 143, quoted by Mazheruddin Siddiqi The image of the West in Iqbal, Lahore, 1965, p. 9.

7. Iqbal the Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, reprinted, 1982, p. 162.

8. Latif Ahmed Sherwani, Speeches, writings & statements of Iqbal, Lahore 1977, pp. 98–99.

9. Latif Ahmed Sherwani op. cit. p. 99

10. Iqbal, op. cit.

11. B.A. Dar. Letters of Iqbal, Lahore 1978, p. 152.

12. Ibid, p. 152.

13. Shaikh Attaullah, Iqbal Namah, Lahore (n.d.) pp. 50–51, quoted by Mazheruddin Siddiqi op. cit. p. 10

14. Letters of Iqbal, op. cit., p. 145.

15. Iqbal, the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, reprinted, 1982, op. cit. p. 97.