Iqbal's Thinking Pattern :

A Reconstruction of Islamic Values

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Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) has approached Islam as well as the modern adjustment problems of the Muslims to the realities of the life generated by new scientific discoveries and advancement of human knowledge with a comprehensive angle. To him life in all its variations of individual, social, religious, political and economic aspects is a complete entity. A new vision of life on the basis of new thought and scientific advancements needs to be constructed. In this process of reconstruction one should not be oblivious of the spiritual value of Islam and Quran. The inspiration from the Quran thus received needs to be adjusted in the environment of modern realities of life. This should, however, be remembered that in this process of adjustment every Muslim nation should not lose its natural identity. While different individuals are part of this society in their conduct to maintain link with the social group to which they belong, they should not lose their individual identity which is conceptualised by Iqbal as self or his philosophy of *Khudi*.

In his 'Preface' to *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Iqbal himself reveals the nature of thought contained in his publication of six famous lectures which he delivered 'at the request of the Madras Muslim Association' at Madras, Hyderabad and Aligarh towards the end of 1920s. These words of the preface are of signal importance for the nature of his thinking pattern of Islam:

"The more genuine schools of Sufism have, no doubt, done good work in shaping and directing the evolution of religious experience in Islam; but their latter-day representatives, owing to their ignorance of the modern mind, have become absolutely incapable of

receiving any fresh inspiration from modern thought and experience. They are perpetuating methods which were created for generations possessing a cultural outlook differing, in important respects, from our own. 'Your creation and resurrection', says the Quran, 'are like the creation and resurrection of a single soul'. A living experience of the kind of biological unity, embodied in this verse, requires today a method physiologically less violent and psychologically more suitable to a concrete type of mind. In the absence of such a method the demand for a scientific form of religious knowledge is only natural. In these lectures, ... this urgent demand by attempting to reconstruct Muslim religious philosophy with due regard to the philosophical traditions of Islam and the more recent developments in the various domains of human knowledge. And the present movement is quite favourable for such an undertaking. Classical Physics has learned to criticise its own foundations. As a result of this criticism the kind of materialism which it originally necessitated, is rapidly disappearing; and the day is not far off when Religion and Science may discover hitherto unsuspected mutual harmonies. It must, however, be remembered that there is no such thing as finality in philosophical thinking. As knowledge advances and fresh avenues of thought are opened, other views, and probably sounder views than those set forth in these lectures, are possible. Our duty is carefully to watch the progress of human thought, and to maintain an independent critical attitude towards it".[1]

In his third lecture on "The Conception of God and the Meaning of Prayer", he explains that the 'classical' interpretation of Islam is not the only truth. Islam is more to be understood in the modern age. Explaining this alongwith the need to reconstruct Islamic thought he says :

"I have said before that in my opinion the spirit of the Quran is on the whole anti-classical. I regard the Ash'arite thought on this point as a genuine effort to develop on the basis of an Ultimate Will or Energy, a theory of creation which, with all its shortcomings, is far more true to the spirit of the Quran than the Aristotelian idea of a fixed universe. The duty of the future theologians of Islam is to reconstruct this purely speculative theory, and to bring it into closer contact with modern science which appears to be moving in

the same direction. The second proposition looks like pure materialism. It is my belief that the Ash'arite view that the 'Nafs' is an accident is opposed to the trend of their own theory which makes the continuous existence of the atom dependent on the continuous creation of accidents in it. It is obvious that motion is inconceivable without time. And since time comes from psychic life, the latter is more fundamental than motion. No psychic life, no time; no time, no motion. Thus it is really what the Ash'arite call the accident which is responsible for the continuity of the atom as such. The atom becomes or rather looks spatialized when it receives the quality of existence. Regarded as phase of Divine energy, it is essentially spiritual. The 'Nafs' is the pure act; the body is only the act become visible and hence measureable. In fact the Ash'arite vaguely anticipated the modern notion of point-instant; but they failed rightly to see the nature of the mutual relation between the point and the instant. The instant is the more fundamental of the two; but the point is inseparable from the instant as being a necessary mode of its manifestation. The point is not a thing, it is only a sort of looking at the instant. Rumi is far more true to the spirit of Islam than Ghazali when he says :

پیکر از ما هست شد نے ما ازو — باده از ما مست شد نے ما ازو

Reality is, therefore, essentially spirit. But, of course, there are degrees of spirit."[2]

The 'prayer' is the basis of all Islamic religious, social and even political philosophy because of its over all-comprehensiveness. Explaining the real content of the prayer, Iqbal says :

"The real object of prayer, however, is better achieved when the act of prayer becomes congregational. The spirit of all true prayer is social. Even the hermit abandons the society of men in the hope of finding, in a solitary abode, the fellowship of God. A congregation is an association of men who, animated by the same aspiration, concentrate themselves on a single object and open up their inner selves to the working impulse. It is a psychological truth that association multiplies the normal man's power of perception, deepens his emotion, and dynamizes his will to a degree unknown to him in the privacy of his individuality. Indeed, regarded as a

psychological phenomenon, prayer is still a mystery; for psychology has not yet discovered the laws relating to the enhancement of human sensibility in a state of association. With Islam, however, this socialization of spiritual illumination through associative prayer is a special point of interest. As we pass from the daily congregational prayer to the annual ceremony round the central mosque of Mecca, you can easily see how the Islamic institution of worship gradually enlarges the sphere of human association ... Prayer, then, whether individual or associative, is an expression of man's inner yearning for a response in the awful silence of the universe."[3]

But seeing its bearing on the political attitude on the states and society, these views seem to be limited. However, he was alive to the existence of various nationalities, cultures, languages as these words reveal :

"The division of mankind into races, nation and tribes according to the Quran, is for purposes of identification only. The Islamic form of association in prayers, therefore, besides its cognitive value is further indicative of the aspiration to realise this essential unity of mankind as a fact in life by demolishing all barriers which stand between man and man."[4]

All this complex and plural hinting emerges in Iqbal's mind because of expansion of modern knowledge, which seems transcendental over his thinking. It is on the basis of these ideas that he is forced to re-look into his own self, as Muslim, and he opines :

"The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to 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."[5]

In this process our attitude should be very realistic to the hard-facts of life without our pre-supposed prejudices either against Democracy or Communism. Whatever is best for our society should be taken from all quarters. This, however, should not be done at the cost of our Muslim identity. This adaptation should be harmonious. It should not cause split. It should also not harm any individual or group of a society. Explaining all this he said :

"But there need be no resemblance between cause and effect. If my success in life causes misery to another man, my success and his misery have no resemblance to each other. Yet every day experience and physical science proceed on the assumption of an independent existence of matter. Let us, therefore, provisionally assume that body and soul are two mutually independent, yet in some mysterious way, united things".[6]

With all this it is not necessary that we should be reactionary in our attitude; rather we should have a progressive attitude towards life having open eyes towards new kind of experiences of human conduct because the basis of Islam is not as theoretical as it is practical. Whereas there cannot be any dichotomy on theoretical aspect, variations in human conduct in every social group or nationality as well as every age, are possible. It is for this reason that Iqbal explains the basic principle of movement in the structure of Islam :

"As a cultural movement Islam rejects the old static view of the universe, and reaches a dynamic view. As an emotional system of unification it recognizes the worth of the individual as such, and rejects blood-relationship as a basis of human unity. Blood-relationship is earth-rootedness. The search for a purely psychological foundation of human unity becomes possible only with the perception that all human life is spiritual in its origin. Such a perception is creative of fresh loyalties without any ceremonial to keep them alive, and makes it possible for man to emancipate himself from the earth".[7]

Suggesting an approach for Muslim Legislative Assembly to frame laws for the specific national state in the light of their particular situation and environment they should approach the study of *Hadis* and Traditions of Prophet of Islam with a particular attitude:

"And a further intelligent study of the literature of Traditions, if used as indicative of the spirit in which the Prophet himself interpreted his Revelation, may still be of great help in understanding the life-value of the legal principles enunciated in the Quran. A complete grasp of their life-value alone can equip us in our endeavour to re-interpret the foundational principles".[8]

References

1. Muhammad Iqbal, Dr., *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. iii–iv.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 173.