

THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF IQBAL

THE VOICE OF ISLAM

Vol. 8, No. 2,

Nov. 1956

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By Professor Khurshid Ahmad

IQBAL was a versatile genius. The myriad aspects of his personality dazzle the eyes like the sparks of a giant-diamond. Some people are enamoured of the elegy of his style and the beauty of his art. Some others are impressed by the width of his knowledge and the depth of his thought. Still others seek light from his philosophical vision and political acumen. But, when I look at Iqbal, I feel that although he was a great poet, a noble master of his art, a unique mind, a talented thinker and an illustrious philosopher, he was something more than all that. He was a pioneer of the Renaissance of Islam in this century. To me his greatness lies in this.

The Muslim society had long been undergoing a spell of degeneration. The disintegration which set in after the Early Caliphate continued to sap the foundations of the Islamic Civilization gradually and after a long period of rout and rally the dark night of gloom and stupor was cast over it. The creative faculties were benumbed and the political power was lost. Although different reform movements grew and many leaders of thought endeavoured to awaken the Muslims from their slumber and infuse a new life in the Muslim society, little ice was actually broken. The most tragic part of it was that Islam no longer remained a dynamic politico-cultural force. It was reduced to a religion of few rites and rituals and was denied, unfortunately by its own followers, its real role of culture-production. This was the unfortunate position when the British took hold of India. They very cleverly tried to impose the Western civilisation upon the people of this region. This gave birth to a plethora of new problems.

Impact of West on India

The political and economic supremacy of the West and its nasty system of education created a slavish mentality among the Muslims. They got engrossed in an inferiority complex. Even the last vestige of their political confidence was destroyed. They were reduced to a very hectic existence.

Signs of new awakening appeared on the horizon when Comrade, Al-hilal and Zamindar shook the Muslims from their stupor and stirred them to rise and do their duty. Khilafat Movement proved a great boon. It spurred the emotions of the Muslim India and encouraged it to enter the arena of political fight and cultural revolt. But the new awakening lacked in proper intellectual and philosophical foundations. It was Iqbal who laid these foundations. He was a true pioneer of the modern renaissance of Islam in India.

Iqbal had a keen vision and a penetrating mind. He studied the conditions of the Muslim society and fully realised the ills that infested its body. He clearly understood the real impact of the Western culture and read the writings on the wall. He knew that a revolutionary change in the outlook of the Muslims was the greatest need of the hour. He warned them that if they ignored the great challenge of their time they will be eliminated from the surface of existence and be relegated to the dust bin of history.

Iqbal's Diagnosis

Iqbal's diagnosis of the problem was that the long period of cultural disintegration and the influence of the modern West had destroyed the moorings of the Muslim society. Muslims

declined because they left Islam and because they adopted an easy life of submissiveness and inactivity. Under the spell of the West their confidence in their values was shaken and they began to ape the Western ways of life. Moreover, an inferiority complex developed in them and an estrangement between social life and the religious values ensued. The influence of non-Islamic Sufism further sapped the springs of activity and Muslims became what they became.

This was a realistic appraisal of the situation and Iqbal harnessed all his energies to pull the Muslims out of this mire of degradation. Firstly, Iqbal asked the Muslims to revise their attitude towards the West. He said that all was not good in Europe. He critically studied the fundamentals of the Western civilization and exposed their fallacies. He criticised those who blindly followed the West and asked them to use reason and vision. He said:

"The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but INDEPENDENT attitude." He expressed his fear "that the dazzling exterior of the European culture may arrest our movement." He took the lid off the destructive potentialities of the Western civilization and warned against the dangers of atheism and Godlessness. How beautifully he says in "Pas che Bayad Kurd Aai Aqwam-i-Sharq":

**"Humanity is in agony at the hands of Europe
And life has lost its joyful tumult
What, then, is to be done, O peoples of the East
That the lost glories of the Orient be regained?
A revolution has taken place in the depths of her being
The night is passed and the sun has risen
Europe lies smitten by its own sword
And has given irreligion to the World;
A wolf in lamb's skin Ever in ambush for the lamb It has brought trouble to humanity
And life, but a random caravan without a destination."**

Iqbal gracefully declared that religion alone could extricate mankind out of the present babel of social chaos and intellectual confusion, He said:

"And religion can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement motivated by an inhuman competition, and a civilization which has lost its spiritual unity by its inner conflict of religious and political values Iqbal, on the one hand presented the true merits and the real weakness of the Western civilization so that the blind imitation of it may be stopped and on the other hand conclusively showed the indebtedness of the West to Islam in those things which led to its rise and growth and thus inspired the Muslims with confidence in their own values. He said:

**"Science was not brought into being by the West;
In essence it is nothing but the delight that lies in creation;
If you ponder well, it is the Muslims who gave it life;
It is a pearl we dropped from our hands.
This spirit is from the flask of our own ancestors;
Bring this fairy back, for she hails from our own Caucasus."**

Reconstruction of Islamic thought

Secondly Iqbal realised the need and the importance of the reconstruction of the Islamic thought itself. He knew that the modern attack on religion could be fought only with new weapons. The opponent will have to be met on his own grounds. He also felt that Islam is a dynamic d revolutionary movement but centuries of stagnation had laid some layers of dust over its religious ought. He stepped ahead to re- move the dust and bathe the diamond clean so that it may again radiate light to the world groping about in e dark.

His seven lectures on Reconstruction of Religious bought in Islam' are an attempt to fulfil this need. One may disagree with some of his interpretations but it s impossible to honestly deny the revolutionary message these lectures contain and the tremendous influence they exerted on the mind of Muslim India.

Thirdly, Iqbal had a still higher mission in view. He was not a mere philosopher who could feel satisfied with the mere intellectual exposition of the ideology of Islam. He wanted to stir every fibre of a nation that had fallen in slumber and to arouse it to play its rightful role in the fashioning of the future. In his two masnavies, 'Israre Khudi and Rumuze-Bekhudi,' he delineated the factors of individual and social growth. Iqbal discussed the causes of millat's decline and threw light on the alien influences which disrupted its body- politic. Iqbal asked the Muslims to return to the real message of Allah arid his apostle.

The fundamentals of Islam, he said, were Tawheed, Risalat; Aakhrat and Jihad. Tawheed provides for all members of the society unity of thought and unity of action. It is the greatest revolutionary force under the sun.

"That which leads to unison in a hundred individuals is but a secret from the secrets of Tawheed. Religion, wisdom and law are all its effects, Power, strength and supremacy originate from it. Its influence exalts the slaves. And virtually creates a new species out of them. Within it fear and doubt depart, spirit of action revives, And the eye sees the very secret of the Universe."

He dwelt upon the basic concepts in detail and showed the potentialities of the faith. His words gave a new message of life to a nation "forgotten so long, neglected so long."

Iqbal's message was a message of action. He was a pioneer of Islamic Renaissance in this sub-continent and, as I have already said, their lies his real significance. I have very briefly outlined the great and gigantic work he did. But I could present only a few glimpses of his work, for you cannot bottle sunshine! Let me end with those immortal words of this great revolutionary which moved a nation to carve out a new state. These words worked as a clarion call:

"Vision without power does bring moral elevation but cannot give a lasting culture. Power without vision tends to become destructive and inhuman. Both must combine for the spiritual expansion of humanity."

On another occasion he observes:

**"The standard-bearers of truth live by being strong;
The strength of every nation lies in unity;**

**Wisdom without worldly power is but a fraud and a myth;
And worldly power without wisdom is madness and folly."**

has developed statehood and organized system of Government, adapted to the conditions of the time and the people. It has in the course of its history developed autocracies and hereditary monarchies. But it never took the form of theocracy in the sense of ecclesiastical church or priestly rule. The Muslim world has never known the institution of a ruler by grace of God as an appointed one. Every Islamic ruler or chief of state and every Islamic government finds in the Quran pre-ordained constitution, to which they have to abide.

This of course could still be called "theocracy". In that case, however, theocracy in the strictest sense of word: recognizing state and government as part of the Divine world-order under . His law. But this, I repeat does not mean "church" or "priestly rule", both non-existent in Islam and a plus forte raison, identification of church and state. Therefore also there can be no reason for the so called "disestablishment or separation of church and state."

What it does mean is that religion must live in every individual followers of the faith and thereby pervade the life of the community and find expression in statehood, in government and in legislation, never however, the fact being lost sight of, that there are worldly concerns, on which the people must decide for themselves, in consultations, as is said in the words: "and their affairs are decided in consultation amongst themselves" (XLII: 38).

The development of statehood and government under the Holy Prophet and his earlier successors in the affairs of state, as well as the development of the schools of thought in theology, show that there is room enough left for evolution within the limits of the Quranic principles and precepts. But the one principle remains, that God has given the limits, hudud-Allah—to which we have to abide.
