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“ISLAMIC TRADITION AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF DR MUHAMMAD IQBAL”.

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Abstract:

In this paper attempt has been made on Iqbal's political philosophy from the point of view of Islamic tradition. Here I have endeavoured to offer a critical appreciation of Iqbal in the light of Islamic tradition along with contend to appropriate elements in Iqbal's philosophy which represents continuity with the tradition of Islamic intellectual heritage. Iqbal's essential spirit, his opinions on nationalism, state, democracy, and sovereignty are analyzed in this paper. Iqbal's position on the relationship between religion and politics; points of convergence and divergence between modern Western political philosophy with that of Iqbal and comparison of Iqbal's ideas with other contemporary Muslim thinkers has been dealt with in this paper.

KEY WORDS:

political philosophy , democracy, and sovereignty , religion and politics.

INTRODUCTION

Iqbal's philosophy is an extension of the tradition of Islamic thought alone. Iqbal's thought is organically linked to his own Muslim background. Iqbal's concept of the Truth, God, the universe, Khudi and Mard-i-Mumin themselves have roots in Islamic thinking. He himself traces the roots of each of his concepts to the history of Islamic philosophy, and when he finds the affirmation and support of his concepts in Western science and philosophy he cites them as additional support. He also criticizes the philosopher whose thinking is not in conformity with the foundations of his thought.

Iqbal is considered as one of the greatest a religious thinker of Islam. The basic source of personal identity and inspiration of Iqbal was Islam and the Holy Qur'an. It was the holy Quran from where he quoted frequently for the expression of his diverge ideas. The Prophet of Islam was his 'perfect man'. Besides, Muslim sages and scholars influenced him in a strong manner.

It may be contended that Iqbal was first a religious thinker and then a political thinker. Because political thinking alone does not assist in the study of religion whereas the rigorous study of religion leads to tremendous assistance in the study of philosophy as well as politics. The political philosophy of Iqbal's is a by-product of his religious thinking and in converse his political thinking only reinforced his preoccupation with religion and did not minimize it.

The traditional Islamic philosophers always dealt with philosophical subjects of metaphysical importance in their works. The discussion of political philosophy and politics came much later if it ever did. Iqbal's style of writing has not been a classical Islamic one; he is far-off from being purely modern. Although the discussion of politics occurs frequently in his poetry and other writings, his scope cannot be reduced to that of a 'political philosopher' alone. Throughout the entire Islamic history, we rarely find philosophers who are only political philosophers and nothing else. Philosophers, whom we mostly do find in the Islamic Tradition deals with religious and metaphysical subjects, and later they also philosophize on the issues of society, history and politics. This can be observed in the cases of most Islamic philosophers,

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starting from al-Farabi to Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra. Contemporary intellectual trends in the Islamic world began to be transformed because of modernity and the impact of modernism on Islamic ways of thinking. The modern Islamic world has witnessed different types of world conditions, and therefore different quantity of political philosophy and different quality of political thinking. As a consequence of conditions of modernity and impact of modernism on the Islamic way of thinking, political philosophy in the contemporary Islamic world has become more prevalent.

To demarcate Iqbal's political ideas distinct from other religious and philosophical ideas is a difficult task. His political thoughts are the outcome of his religious bent of mind. The deplorable social conditions of Muslims prompted him to embark upon the crusade of awakening them. For doing that, he had to look into the historical and intellectual causes of their depression. In this way the ever recurring theme of decline of the Muslims constitutes the major element of his political worldview. We shall deal with these themes individually in the political thought of Iqbal in a way that does not do injustice to the overall spirit of the works of Iqbal.

The idea of Iqbal on the issue of nationalism has ranged from his soft view of nationalism to a critically hard one, especially when it came to European experience of nationalism. In his thought “the idea of nationality is certainly a healthy factor in the growth of communities. But it is apt to be exaggerated, and when exaggerated it has a tendency to kill the broad human elements in Art and Literature”.¹

Iqbal boldly propounded the idea of religious nationalism. The law of Islam does not recognize the apparently natural differences of nationality. The political ideal of Islam consists in the creation of a people born of a free fusion of all races and nationalities. In Islam, Nationality is not the highest limit of political development; for the general principles of the law of Islam rest on human nature, not on the peculiarities of a particular people. The inner cohesion of such a nation would consist not in ethnic or geographic unity, not in the unity of language or social tradition, but in the unity of the religious and political ideal; or, in the psychological fact of 'like-mindedness'.²

Like many other religious thinkers of the Indian Sub-continent, Iqbal seems fully cognizant of the antagonistic relationship between Islam and the idea of modern secular nationalism. Because of its universality, Islam does not recognize the differences of race and geography. It can be safely assumed that Iqbal sought to legitimize the nationalist movement of the North-western Indian Muslims. In his thought the Muslims of Northwest India, having a state of their own with good relations with their Persian neighbours, would constitute a better option to empower Muslims.

Muslim nationalism arose as a reactionary force against European colonial domination and its aim was the overthrow of European control. Nationalism as a force and sentiment also has a special affinity towards secularism. Nationalism has been an instrument of self-determination from colonialism, but it has lent itself towards secularization of society. Z.A. Ansari has argued that:

In the Muslim world nationalism has generally denoted the drive to get rid of alien control and dominance. It is nationalism in this sense that has been the most powerful driving force in the contemporary world of Islam. It is nationalism in this sense which has found a ready and enthusiastic response from the broad masses of Muslims in all parts of the Muslim world. However, in course of time there has also developed a nationalist ideology which, in its content, is hardly distinguishable from any other nationalist ideology and seems to take no notice of the peculiar ideas and institutions which characterize the Muslim society.³

According to Iqbal nationalism is territorial and not pegged in a religious worldview. Iqbal put the view that European nationalism has objective bases, i.e. language, race and territory. In contrast to this, the Muslim view of what ought to constitute a nation was subjective in nature. Iqbal makes little distinction between European nationalism and patriotism. The Prophet of Islam is known to have said that the love of watan (one's homeland) comes from iman (faith). Muslims have known and experienced larger ethnic and geographical factors of one's identity, but never had they been reduced to just that. Therefore, Iqbal is right in pointing out towards the subjective basis of identity formation among Muslims.

In Iqbal's famous Allahabad presidential address, he stated:

“I, therefore, demand the formation of a consolidated Muslim state in the best interests of India and Islam. For India, it means security and peace resulting from an internal balance of power; for Islam, an opportunity to rid itself of the stamp that Arabian imperialism was forced to give it, to mobilize its laws, its education, its culture, and to bring them into closer contact with its own original spirit and with the spirit of modern times”.⁴ Unfortunately, 'modern times' are characterized in the traditional light of thinking as those that lack spirit and it is difficult to see how 'modern times' can accommodate the totality of Islamic thinking. Iqbal said that “politics have their roots in the spiritual life of man”.⁵

Iqbal visualized for Indian Muslims a state of their own whose economy and defence was in their own hands. Iqbal's idea of the creation of Pakistan was not a search for a homeland but a state. According to

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Iqbal Gaining political power to spread the truth was essential in modern times. According to Iqbal the degeneration of the Indian Muslim's ethic was primarily due to the loss of his political power which enabled the foreign rule which had altered the Muslim's course of destiny. Iqbal is said to have remarked: “Power toucheth falsehood, and lo! it is transformed into Truth”.⁶ In order to create an ambience that favoured a Muslim way of life, a Muslim state was indispensable in Iqbal's view. Civilization in his view was merely a 'thought' of a powerful man because the powerful man creates environment and the feeble have to adjust themselves to it.⁷

Iqbal wanted an independent state for Muslims and his ethos was inseparable from the basic teachings of the Qur'an. He rejects the distinction between spiritual and temporal domains: “In Islam the spiritual and the temporal are not two distinct domains, and the nature of an act, however secular in its import, is determined by the attitude of mind with which the agent does it”.⁸

According to Iqbal, Islam was a single 'un analysable' reality and in his view the state (and state sovereignty), like other institutions in Muslim societies must bear the stamp of Islam. The essence of Tauhid (oneness of God) as a working idea is equality, solidarity, and freedom. The state, from the Islamic standpoint, is an endeavour to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a definite human organization. The Ultimate Reality, according to Qur'an, is spiritual, and its life consists in its temporal activity. The state according to Islam, is only an effort to realize the spiritual in human organization and in this sense all state, not based on mere domination and aiming at the realization of ideal principles, is theocratic”.⁹

It was Iqbal who represented a break from the Islamic intellectual tradition of hundreds of years. All throughout his works on several occasions he insisted that democracy and equality are the true Islamic systems. Iqbal rejected the divine right of kings to rule.¹⁰

On the issue of democracy, Iqbal has plenty of references in his poetry, but he was not successful to do so from a purely traditional Islamic point of view. The primary Islamic sources of Islam like the Qur'an and Hadith have said nothing against democracy. It should be noted that democracy as it exists in the modern world was not known to the Arabs among whom Islam came, because the modern notions of democracy are linked to structural changes in society that only happened in the very recent phase of world history. The notion of democracy, long before the Arabs and Persians, had been dealt with in the Greek tradition. The Greek philosophers such as Plotinus and Aristototele dealt with this concept. The best articulation of democracy is found in Plato's representation of Socratic thought. The Muslim scholars throughout Islamic history knew about it and endorsed the Platonic view that democracy was one of the least desirable forms of government.

In the lines of Plato's concept of the Philosopher-King the traditional Islamic thinking, saw the perfect type of rule in the covenant of Medina and associated it with the rule of the Prophet-Statesman, the Prophet of Islam. Iqbal, too, has fallen in this trap. It is important to remember that just like Islam says nothing against democracy; it says nothing against kingship, or other forms of government. The referent object of good statesmanship and sensible government is justice, regardless of the form of government. Equality, not being the same thing as justice has never been important. In the modern period particularly, it is next to impossible to talk in favour of kingships or against Montesquieu's theory of separation of powers. All power in Islam in its perfection belongs to God. Among humans, the power and the sanction of law belongs to the law of God, the Shariah (Islamic tradition). The duty of King, Caliph, Sultan, Imam or a parliament is to make sure that the law of God is promulgated and there is no hindrance in practicing it. At the summit of human custody of power, all powers should convene and be consolidated, not separated.

CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion it seems apparent to us through the ethos of Iqbal that his notion of democracy and nationalism was merely an instrument of awakening Muslim masses and their mobilization for the sake of collective. While going through the vast corpus of Iqbal, it is important to distinguish between his unwavering principles and his policy recommendations. A person of Iqbal's calibre knew not only Islam's position on nationalism, nation-state and democracy, but realized the nature of transformation that had already taken place in the Muslim world.

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