Jamaluddin Afghani and Iqbal: Unwavering Supporters of Islamic Awakening

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Igbal was profoundly influenced by the reformist movements of the 19th Century initiated by Allama Syed Jamal ud Din Afghani and Syed Ahmad Khan, whose dynamic stewardship of reform in Islam had deeply impacted the Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent. He undertook the mission of carrying forward the seminal campaign of these reformists and remained passionately involved, throughout his life in educating the Muslims of the South Asian region to promote a more rational and practical understanding of Islam, in accordance with the contemporary demands of the time. Igbal thus proved to be the last link in the chain of the Reformist Movement aimed at purifying Islamic teachings, of the sordid beliefs that had befuddled Islamic philosophy and its practical manifestation across the entire Islamic world. According to a well-considered view of most of the Iqbalian scholars, Iqbal was the last of the liberal Islamic reformists of the Sub-continent, the reform movement in India having been initiated by Shah Waliullah in the 18th Century, which led to an active Jihad waged by some of his followers like Syed Ahmed Barelvi Shaheed and Shah Ismail Shaheed.

In one of his essays, titled "Islam and Ahmadism" Igbal had said: in the 19th Century, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was born in Hindustan, Syed Jamal ud Din Afghani in Afghanistan, and Mufti Alam Jan in These scholars had probably been influenced by Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahab, who was born in the year 1700 AD in Najdi. Igbal assiduously followed this reformist tradition and devoted his entire life to bring about a revival of the true Islamic values amongst the Muslims. Since Iqbal was the immediate successor of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, he eulogized his efforts towards Islamic awakening in his essay "Islam and Ahmadism" in words to this effect: he was the first Muslim of the modern era who had clearly envisioned the future, and had come to the conclusion that contemporary knowledge was the need of the time. He had declared modern education as the panacea for the ills of the Muslims. Syed Ahmad Khan's true greatness is based on the fact that he was the first Indian Muslim, who had appreciated the need to portray and present Islam in light of the emerging trends and dedicated his efforts to promote aware of this needii.

The above-mentioned reformist leaders had strongly felt the urgency to cleanse Islam of the intellectual, conceptual and philosophical pollutants, and revive the Islamic faith to its pure and pristine form, removing the impediments that lay in the path of the accomplishment of this mission. They had identified very clearly that "Autocracy" in all its manifestations, be it Monarchy or Dictatorship (Mallookiyat); Muslim priesthood (Mullaiyat); and Mysticism (Tasawuft) in its decadent form were the ills and the impediments in the way of resuscitating Islam to achieve conformance with the precepts set out in the Quran. Dr. Javid Igbal says in one of his essays that the purpose of these reformist movements was to eradicate the afflictions that had permeated the Islamic thinking and practices under the influence of *Tasawuff*, Mullaivat and totalitarian rule of the Ottoman Sultans. Muslims all over the world were impacted by these movements, as the reformist leaders preached the revival of the original purity and natural simplicity of Islam. They had declared the essence of Tauhid (Unity of God), Risalat (Prophethood); and Quran and the Sunnah (Practices of the Prophet) to be the only elements of faith worthy of being adopted; and the only means of ridding Islam of the heretic innovations and practices that negated the spirit of the Sharia. Paying tribute to the dynamic personages of Jamal ud Din Afghani, Mufti Muhammad Abduh and Syed Ahmad Khan, who adorned the grand stage of Islamic Revivalist Movement, Iqbal had expressed his thoughts in the following manner: "what was the purpose of the struggle waged by these eminent men?" The answer to this question is that these magnificent souls had found three distinct forces that ruled the world of Islam, and challenging them, they applied all their immense intellectual strength and ability to rebel against them. It was under the inspiration received from the glorious lives of these dedicated men, and his own immense self-motivation to see Islam's revival to its former magnificence that Igbal openly and courageously rebelled against the obscurantism of the debilitating forces identified in the preceding paragraphs.

Following in the footsteps of the struggle of Syed Jamal ud Din Afghani, Iqbal took up the cudgels against the Western culture. Dr. Farman Fatehpuri said in this regard that Iqbal promoted consciousness and general awareness among the Muslims against

the dangers and adverse consequences of following the Western culture. Besides this, he raised the ardor of the Muslims by recounting to them the history of their past glory and the monumental achievements of their forebears. Iqbal's poetry and prose bear ample testimony to the fact that on the one hand, he waged a "Jihad" against the infirmities that had beset the Muslim religious culture itself, while on the other hand, he also awakened them to the pitfalls of outwardly glamorous influences emanating from the West. His message, both in his poetry and prose exhorted them to honestly follow the teachings of the Quran and the practices of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his companions.

The first among the three ills identified earlier, autocracy was considered by Igbal to be the mother of all the menacing diseases that he opposed tooth and nail in his poetry, prose, written statements and discourses. *Mallookivat*, the autocratic sovereignty of one individual was one of the primary targets of his scathing criticism and repugnant opposition. On 1st January, 1938, just a few months before his death, in his New Year message delivered through a radio broadcast, he said that despite all the progress, ruthless autocratic dispensation has manifested itself in various forms viz. democracy, communism, fascism, hiding their ugly reality behind many a veil. Thus disguised, the values of freedom and human dignity are being trampled to an extent that no example even in the darkest pages of human history can match. The so-called statesmen entrusted to lead and govern mankind have proven themselves to be the worst deities of bloodshed, tyranny, and subjugation of human beings under the garb of freedom. In their overzealous ardor of despotic autocracy and imperial interests, they have slaughtered and decimated millions of helpless human beings, in order to satiate the greed and lust of a chosen group of people. After having subjugated weaker nations, they subjected their morality, their religion, their social traditions, and their literature to their tyrannical ruthlessness. Thereafter, having sown the seeds of discord in their ranks, they embroiled them in fratricidal conflicts, so that they remain listless and ignorant in their opium induced stupor, inviting the leeches of imperialism to drain them of their blood. This brave and rebellious indictment of the imperial powers was delivered at a time when the British were ruling India.

The fact is that Iqbal was a bitter enemy of all forms of monarchic and dictatorial dispensation, which included even the so-called

Muslim emperors of the Islamic world. In his famous treatise titled "Islam and Ahmadism", he said Muslim kings (Sultans) were always focused on protecting their own dynastic interests; and in order to safeguard them, they did not hesitate even to barter away the interests of their homelands. The prime objective of Syed Jamal ud Din Afghani's mission was to prepare and motivate the Muslims to rise in rebellion against the status quoⁱⁱⁱ.

It is a sad truth of Muslim history that while the Muslims were able to secure spectacular victories against the super powers of their time on the basis of their unshakeable faith and extreme level of motivation, coupled with superior generalship, and above all, the moral strength bequeathed to them by Islamic faith, they fell prey to the cultural and religious influences of the vanguished nations, who undoubtedly were more advanced with regard to their civilization and refinement of their culture. Igbal expatiates on this point in many of his writings. He was of the view that the Muslims could not nurture the principles and precepts of the Quran, which had been very well applied and practiced during the period of Khilafat-e Rashida, but were not duly transplanted in the lands and the nations conquered by them. In their magnificent Islamic empire, their political ethos and culture were tainted by non-Islamic coloration, as the Muslims became oblivious of the phenomenal range, span and depth of the Islamic principles underlying political governance, societal structure, and economic dispensation based on the Islamic fundamental of economic justice and equitability. In short, beliefs and practices that had developed during centuries of despotic rule in the lands acquired through conquest, penetrated Muslim culture and thought as well. Igbal's objectives viz a viz propagation of the pure Islamic thought were to raise consciousness amongst Muslims about the Quranic doctrines of human dignity; justice and equality for all; peace and harmony in the society; and guaranteed religious, social and religious freedom for all communities and segments of the society. In order to support the above viewpoint, Dr. Muhammad Anwar Sadiq, quotes Igbal in his famous treatise "Igbal aur Ahya e Deen" that till the time, this so-called democracy, this unholy nationalism, and accursed "Malookiyat" are not obliterated from this world; till the time man does not practically adopt the principle of "human kind as a family of God"; till the time territorial nationalism and discriminations on account of color and creed are not rooted out, man will not be able to lead a life of wellbeing and felicity; and the truth underlying the glorious words like human solidarity, freedom and equality will never be truly manifested in the human society. Dr. Javid Iqbal holds the view that the Allama agreed with the decision of the Turks to abolish the caliphate. He viewed with satisfaction the awakening of democratic spirit in Islamic states, because in his view, the phenomenon was a welcome inclination towards attainment of Islam's real and natural simplicity.

Quite contrary to the perception of some people, not only that Iqbal was not opposed to democracy, except the former based on superficial foundations and a façade that hid the ugly reality of coercion and cruelty for which he severely criticized the West on account of their dual standards, he in actual fact was fully convinced of the merits of pure democracy: and was indeed an admirer of the concept that is based on man's spiritual life as against the one founded on discrimination of color and creed. At the end of the sixth lecture on "Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam", Iqbal exhorts the Muslims in their collective lives in these words: let the Muslim of today appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in light of ultimate principles, and evolve, out of the hither to partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam.

Another crucial battle that Igbal had to fight in his life was the Islamic clergy referred to as "Mullaiyat". In his famous treatise "Islam and Ahmadism" Iqbal says: The *Ulema* (Religious Scholars) have always been a fountain head of a great force, but after a lapse of many centuries, particularly after the fall of Baghdad, they became extremely traditionalist in outlook and would not allow any freedom of *Ijtihad*iv. As a consequence, our religious scholars became symbols of imitation and longing for the past (*Tagleed*) and stagnation of thought; as a result of which, Islam lost its verve and appeal to play a dynamic role in the world for which it had been revealed to the Prophet by God Al mighty. Iqbal tried his utmost, through his poetry and works in prose to break the strangle hold which the *Ulema* had gotten themselves into and tried to motivate them to adopt the path of rationalization, and seek to modify and reconstruct religious thought in the light of the demands of emerging realities. His seven famous lectures, compiled in a book titled "Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" are a testimony to Igbal's passion for bringing about realignment of intellectual direction amongst the Muslims. Bold and courageous as he was, he duly earned the reward in the form of edicts of heresy and severe chastisement at the hands of the religious brigade (Mullaiyat). They vehemently opposed his ideas on Islamic Fiqah and Shariah, and his vigorous espousal of the cause of Muslims of the Sub-continent, and the revolutionary interpretation of Islam presented by him in his lectures on Reconstruction of Religious Thought. There are two excerpts from the statements of two famous religious scholars of the time, which show their indignation, their obduracy and outright rejection of many of his thoughts. Maulana Najam Ud Din Islahi said in his remarks about Iqbal: "we regard as a Shar'i crime to give a higher status to Iqbal than that of a mere poet and a philosopher. We have carefully examined his works. There is no denying the facts that there are hundreds and thousands of his verses which may be considered as useful; never the less among them, there are numerous such verses which openly hit Islam and Islamic way of "thinking."

The second excerpt is from the remarks of Maulana Abul Hassan Nadvi: "One finds such interpretations of Islamic beliefs and philosophy in Iqbal with which it is impossible to agree. Unlike some enthusiastic young Muslims of today, I do not subscribe to the view that no one has understood Islam better than Iqbal or that except him, no one could reach the depths of Islamic Sciences. In his Madras lectures lie scattered many ideas which are in direct conflict with the collective principles of Sunni Islam. It would have been better if these lectures were not published". vi

The role of the Muslim clergy (*Mullah*) became prominent in the lives of the Muslim masses in India, when in 1864 AD, the British Rulers abolished the department of legal jurisdiction. In this regard, Dr. Javid Iqbal writes in one of his essay's titles "Iqbal and the Islamic State" that with the abolition of this department, the practical relationship of the Muslim masses ended; and Muslims were entrapped in the net cast by the uneducated, nit picking and incapable *Mullahs*. The Mullahs were able to sway the Muslim mind towards concepts based on their self-concocted interpretations of the Quran.

In order to neutralize the ill effects of Mullaiyat from the Islamic societies, Iqbal emphasized upon adoption of "*Ijtihad* (reconstruction)". In his famous lecture, "The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam", he expatiated on this issue at great length. He discussed the Turkish efforts to reform their society and its political structure and said, "passing on to Turkey, we find that the idea of "Ijtihad", re-enforced and broadened by modern philosophical ideas, has long been working in the

religious and political thought of the Turkish Nation. This is clear from Halim Sabit's new theory of Mohammadan Law, grounded on modern sociological concepts. If the renaissance of Islam is a fact, and I believe it is a fact, we too one day, like the Turks, will have to re-evaluate our intellectual inheritance."

In the same lecture, Iqbal poses the question: "is the law of Islam capable of evolution?" He then goes on to survey a wide range of opinion and factors that impinge on this question. His own conclusion on this regard is very poignant: "these views of modern European critics of Islam make it perfectly clear that, with the return of new life, the inner catholicity of the spirit of Islam is bound to work itself out in spite of the rigorous conservatism of our doctors. And I have no doubt that deeper study of the enormous legal literature of Islam is sure to rid the modern critic of the superficial opinion that the law of Islam is stationary and incapable of development."

It would be of interest to refer to a statement of Prof Max Horten, an eminent German orientalist that appears in the discussion of the crucial questions posed above "The spirit of Islam is so broad that it is practically boundless. With the exception of atheistic ideas alone, it has assimilated all the attainable ideas of surrounding peoples, and given them its own peculiar direction of development".ix

Iqbal was of the opinion that one of the primary causes of the Muslim decline and decadence was the implant of Sufi thoughts, which under the influence of Christianity, Neo-Platonism and Buddhism had permeated the very fabric of Muslim soul and thought. After extensive research, Iqbal had arrived at the conclusion that *Tasawuff* bore no relationship to the internal dynamics of Islam. In one of his letters to Syed Suleman Nadvi, he had explicitly written: "There is not a shred of doubt that *Tasawuff-e-Wajudi* (Unity of Being aka Pantheism) is an externally planted sapling in the soil of Islam, which has been nurtured in the mental climes of the *Ajamis*."

In order to protect the Muslims from the ill effects of this "foreign implant," Iqbal had no option but to extirpate this plant from Islamic thought, which in the era that Iqbal lived in had become a robust tree.

Professor Muhammad Ikram Akram of the Punjab University, Lahore, expatiates at length as to why Iqbal became skeptical of the age-old philosophy of *Tasawuff*, which had been highly revered in the Muslim culture. In fact, Sufi circles and their lineages considered *Tasawuff* the true spirit of Islam and life's ultimate objective of achieving communion with the Ultimate Reality.

The aesthetics of the higher genre of literature in Islam, undoubtedly owed its debt to Sufi philosophy, the adroit use of linguistic expressions and the beauty it lent through its analogies and parables. In light of the established status of Sufism in Islam, it was impossible to imagine that *Tasawuff* would be subjected to criticism by Iqbal, who himself was a scion of Dervish family, and he often claimed that his natural inclination was towards *Tasawuff*. Iqbal subjected the prevalent practices of *Tasawuff* to critical analysis, in order to restore its original luster. Iqbal firmly believed in the eternal truth of the Quran, and any concept, belief, philosophy or law that was even slightly in contravention of the teachings of the Quran was disdainfully rejected by him. He considered all philosophical postulates of *Tasawuff* which had made a surreptitious entry into the house of Islam through the back door as utterly unworthy of trust and credibility.

After the era of *Khilafat-e-Rashida*, the exemplary political system of Islam, which was adorned with a strong democratic spirit, soon gave way to the autocratic dispensation in the style of the Romans and the Persians. Along with the vast troves of wealth that came to the Muslims as a result of their conquest, numerous and variegated un-Islamic concepts and philosophical beliefs of these vanguished nations penetrated and influence the mind and hearts of the Muslims. Greek, Christian, Zoroastrian and Hindu thoughts adversely affected the Muslim mind. The Sufis and Muslim philosophers paid particular attention to the writings and philosophies of Plato and Plotinus. Some noble personages amongst the Muslims preferred to isolate themselves from society to lead their lives in complete solitude, as a reaction to the bad governance, oppression and cruelty; and opulent life styles of the rulers. The intellectuals on the other hand resorted to the application of their intellect to rhetoric and philosophical nit pickings with the tragic consequences that Muslims became habituated to indolence and inaction.

Iqbal while expressing his views on certain aspects of Tasawuff had written that most of the Hindi and Iranian Sufis have interpreted the concept of "Self-Annihilation (*Fana*)" under the influence of the philosophies of Vidant and Buddhist postulates, as a result of

which Muslims, in their present state have become totally in effectual. According to my belief, this interpretation was more dangerous than the destruction of Baghdad; and in one sense, all my writings are a sort of rebellion against this very interpretation.

Iqbal made a clear distinction between the desirable and the undesirable genres of Tasawuff, as brought out by Dr. Javid Iqbal.

The concept of mysticism that Iqbal was opposed to:

- 1. The concept that preaches severance of relationship with fellow humans, and advocates solitude; considers life and nature to be unreal, and looks for escape from the challenges of life.
- 2. The one that induces a lazy stupor in man, and makes him self-indulgent to the point of indifference towards society.
- 3. The one that aims at achieving "Wisaal" with God or self-annihilation; and instead of promoting dynamism in life, cultivates in people the propensity to self-immolate.
- 4. The one that accords a secondary status to the laws of the Sharia.
- 5. The one that repudiates existing realities of life and the human Ego (*Khudi*).
- 6. The one that believes in exercising coercion; and obliterating the distinction between piety and evil, and gives man the license to ignore his ethical obligations towards society.
- 7. The one that does not discriminate between infidelity (Kufr) and faith (*Iman*).
- 8. The one that preaches to man to seek languid and purposeless peace, and superficial contentment with conditions of the Self and Society.^x

In the new Muslim society envisioned by Iqbal, he wished to see propagation and adoption of mysticism and sainthood of a kind that would be embellished with the attributes of Holy Prophet's enlightened consciousness (*Shaoor-e Nabuwat*). The salient elements of his aspirations are as under:

- 1. The one that would promote faith in the Quranic concept of "Tauhid", and remain firm in the belief that converse of "Tauhid" is not plurality but "Shirk (paganism and infidelity)".
- 2. The one which is in complete harmony with the laws of Sharia.

- 3. The one that preaches and promotes the concept of "Firaaq (Separation)" rather than "Wisaal (Union)"; and instead of self-annihilation, seeks vibrant growth and continued progress of the human race.
- 4. The one wherein "Ishq (Passionate love of God)" is pure and is imbued with dynamism and action.
- 5. The one that facilitates man to have the discretion to choose his own course in life.
- 6. The one that recognizes the existing realities and challenges of life and continuously endeavors to reform the society.
- 7. The one that keeps an eye on possible errors, and remains perpetually cognizant in order to institute needful remedies in the system.
- 8. The one that disapproves and shuns isolation, "Monasticism (Khanqah Nashini)" and "Monastic Priesthood (Rahbaniat)".xi

He wrote in "Islam and Ahmadiyat": "Muslims were dominated by such a concept of *Tasawuft*, which had closed its eyes to reality, and had embroiled them in a myriad form of superstitions. *Tasawuft*, from its erstwhile exalted status, wherein it was a spiritual force to reckon with had been reduced to a mere means to exploit the ignorance and ill-founded faith of the common people. Gradually and imperceptibly, it had weakened and softened the force of Muslim resolve to a degree that the Muslims had started to seek escape from the rigors of Islamic Law."xii

Iqbal raised his voice against this dreadful situation, and in order to protect the Muslims against the menace of the prevalent version of *Tasawuff* relentlessly preached to his followers to seek guidance from the invigorating and life-giving teachings of Islam. In order to completely eradicate the debilitating effects of the prevalent concept of *Tasawuff*, Iqbal emphasized that the Muslims should revive the erstwhile scientific spirit of their ancestors and empirical method, a gift that Muslims in their glorious era of enlightenment had bequeathed to the entire world.

In Iqbal's opinion, the spirit of Western culture was based on secular nationalism and capitalistic economic system, which had proved to be a curse for the spiritual ethos of man. Commenting on the European political concept of nationalism, in his presidential address to the Muslim Conference meeting at Lahore on 21st March, 1932, Iqbal said thatI am opposed to the European concept of nationalism. This is not for the reason, that

if adopted in India, it would be detrimental to the material interests of the Muslims. My opposition to this concept is because I can see the seeds of atheistic materialism in it, which in my view, poses a grave danger to humanity. Iqbal also subjected the European concept of "absolute equality" between man and woman to scathing criticism in one of his essays, wherein he wrote that he cannot support absolute equality between man and woman. In the Western world, since the time women started to step out of the four walls of their homes, to earn a livelihood alongside the man, it was assumed that the economic independence of women will considerably help increase the growth of Capital. But experience has negated this assumption, and proved on the contrary that this independence broke the bond of family unity, which constitutes an extremely important element of the spiritual existence of man.

Iqbal vehemently opposed the separation of religion and nationalistic politics. Iqbal also virulently criticized Western system of secular nationalism in his seminal presidential address on 29th December, 1930 at Allahabad on the eve of the annual conference Muslim League. He said the following: "Europe uncritically accepted the duality of spirit and matter, probably from Manichaean thought. It is, then, this mistaken separation of spiritual and temporal which has influenced European religious and political thought, and has resulted practically in the total exclusion of Christianity from the life of European State. The result is a set of mutually ill adjusted state dominated by interests, not human but national."xiii

In order to reinterpret and reconstruct Islamic thoughts in accordance with the demands of modern time and the ever expanding horizons of human knowledge, Iqbal had for long envisaged the establishment of an Islamic Research Institute, wherein experts in religious an emerging disciplines were to be brought together who could carry out in depth research on Islamic history, culture and jurisprudence; and compile books on the subjects on accordance with the Quranic concepts to serve as the basis of an Islamic Revolution. In 1937, with the cooperation of a close associate, namely Ch Niaz Ali Khan, Iqbal succeeded in establishing a basic school at Pathan Kot in Indian Punjab, which was named "Dar-ul-Salam". But Iqbal's death on 21st April, 1938, soon after the establishment of this institution did not allow the fruition of this lifelong cherished dream of Allama Iqbal.

Iqbal's long crusade against the ill effects that Autocratic Monarchy (*Malookiyat*), *Mullaiyat* (Decadent stewardship of the clergy) and *Tasawuff* (in its prevalent form), had left on the Muslims was a herculean intellectual accomplishment in its own right, for which he would always be revered as one of the greatest champions of the Islamic Reformist Movement. What he aimed at was clearly enunciated by him in his sixth lecture which focused on Ijtihad as under:

"The essence of *Tauheed*, as a working idea, is equality, solidarity and freedom. The state, from the Islamic stand point, is an endeavor to transform these ideal principles into space – time forces, an inspiration to realize them in a definite human organization."xiv

It was nearly a decade after Iqbal's death that his envisioned independent Islamic State came into being in August 1947. Whether we are able to practically achieve the manifestation of the ideals of Spiritual Democracy, which are the essence of his message remains a challenge not only for Pakistan, but for the entire Islamic world.

Endnotes

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ii Ibid. p37

iii Ibid. p41

iv Ibid. 39

^v Maktubat-e-Sheikh ul Islam, vol. III, p 141

vi *Nagoosh-e-Iqbal*, pp. 39-40

vii Iqbal, Sir Muhammad, the Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam, in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, Booksellers & Exporters, Lahore, p153

viii Ibid. 164

ix Ibid.

^x Iqbal, Dr Javid, *Khudi*, *Nabuwat*, *Wilayat aur Arfa Shairi*, Sang-e meel publications, Lahore, 2005, p 70

xi Ibic

xii Letter to Syed Suleman Nadvi, dated 13 November, 1917

xiii Shafique, Khurram Ali, *Iqbal: an Illustrated Biography*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2010, p 136

xiv The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam; 2012, p 122,123