

Distorting Iqbal

Following a tradition that goes back to Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, many of our present-day thinkers think that the downfall and weakness of the Muslim *Ummah* is rooted in its adherence to a religion that is not “progressive” enough. Consequently, they have come to believe that progress and material well being should be pursued by following the “successful” nations of the world, both in thought and deed, and if this entails the trimming of the sharp edges of Islamic faith and practice, so be it. Since the historical and emotional attachment of the Muslims to their traditions make it impossible for them to achieve a complete divorce from religious faith, a middle ground has to be discovered so that they can remain “Muslims” and still become “moderns.” Moreover, since the original Islamic texts cannot be changed — and since changing our own selves in accordance with their imperatives is out of the question — the only way left is to present their teachings in a manner that conforms to the ideals of modernity, and if this requires a certain amount of distortion and misinterpretation, so be it. The esteemed position accorded to Iqbal in our country has met a similar fate.

This year, on the 27th of Ramadan, Pakistan completed 53 years of independence according to the lunar calendar. Unfortunately, its *raison de'être* is an issue regarding which there is no consensus. Articles appearing in large numbers in our Urdu and English dailies are a clear proof of this. As a consequence of this confusion and uncertainty, the Pakistani Muslims can neither adopt a purely secular polity and turn Pakistan into a full-fledged “nation-state,” nor can they progress wholeheartedly towards the implementation of Islam in its totality. Indeed, uncertainty and doubt are worse than slavery! The whole nation is on the horns of a dilemma. Let us focus our attention on Iqbal in this context.

Muhammad Iqbal, spiritual father of Pakistan, spent his mental energies and literary genius in demolishing the false idols of the mind — idols that manifest themselves as ideologies competing with Islam, such as territorial nationalism, materialism, and secularism. Iqbal based his philosophy on the teachings of the Qur'an and upon the love and obedience of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). As any serious student of Iqbal will testify, the Qur'an and the Prophet (SAW) are two of the most central themes of his thought, frequent references to which are found throughout

his Urdu and Persian poetry. Although innumerable volumes and treatises have been written to interpret Iqbal's thought, and many more will be written in the future, his message to the Muslim *Ummah*, in the final analysis, is nothing more than this: Return to the Book of Allah (SWT) and to His Prophet (SAW). Indeed, the ideas embodied in the poetry and writings of Iqbal constitute a forceful revolt against modernity, as well as a clarion call for the revival of Islam in its pristine glory.

Keeping in mind the esteemed position that is accorded to Iqbal in our country, it is hardly surprising that his couplets and sayings are often used — and sometimes misused — to substantiate divergent viewpoints. Instead of enhancing and expanding his thought, such attempts tend to create confusion about the “real” Iqbal. The fact that Iqbal had a multi-dimensional personality that grew and developed over several decades may be cited as one reason to why his thought seems to allow diverse interpretations. However, such apparent “contradictions” can usually be resolved if one refers them to the context of times and events in which they are located. In this regard, it must be noted that even though he did change his views regarding numerous issues, such as territorial nationalism and *Wahdat Al-Wujud*, the fundamental features of Iqbal's thought had remained more or less constant throughout his career — whether they are found in his poetry or his prose. These features constitute the essential framework of Iqbal's thought, on the criterion of which all his opinions and sayings must be judged. Any other approach will only betray an attempt to distort Iqbal.

Prominent among those who claim to understand the “real” Iqbal is a group of intellectuals that may be described as “modernists.” Following a tradition that goes back to Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, many of these thinkers preach that the downfall and weakness of the Muslim *Ummah* is rooted in its adherence to a religion that is not “progressive” enough. Consequently, they advise that progress and material well being should be pursued by following the “successful” nations of the world, both in thought and deed, and if this entails the trimming of the sharp edges of Islamic faith and practice, so be it. Since the historical and emotional attachment of the Muslims to their traditions make it impossible for them to achieve a complete divorce from religious faith, a middle ground has to be discovered so that they can remain “Muslims” and still become “moderns.” Moreover, since the original Islamic texts cannot be changed — and since changing our own selves in accordance with their imperatives is out of the question — the only way left is to interpret their teachings in a manner that conforms to the ideals of modernity, and if this requires a certain amount of distortion, so be it. Just like the “modernist”

interpretation of Islam, the “modernist” understanding of Iqbal also involves distortion and misinterpretation — sometimes obvious and blatant, often subtle and suggestive. Today, along with Islam and Iqbal, the ideology of Pakistan has also become the prime target of this distortion, as all three are intimately related to each other.

One conspicuous example of the above phenomenon is provided by an article written by Dr. Javid Iqbal, entitled “The problem of implementing Iqbal's ideas in Pakistan” and published in *Dawn Magazine*, June 21, 1998. After making a few general remarks and observations about Iqbal, he goes on to talk about the “Islamic state” and the issue of “legislation of Islamic laws.” After describing the capitalistic and atheistic versions of secularism, Javid Iqbal claims that the “spiritual democracy” of Iqbal can be implemented only in a purely secular state, saying that: “He probably contemplated that state as genuinely Islamic in which all religions were equally free, authentically tolerated, respected and accepted.” This is a truly astonishing statement. A state in which *all religions* are treated in exactly the same way, and no preference is given to any of them, can be anything but an Islamic state. If we want to have an *Islamic* state, then Islam has to be given a clear and decisive preference over all other religions, all other systems of life, and all other ideologies. Otherwise, it would be sheer hypocrisy to call a state “Islamic” if the people and the state do not intend to surrender themselves completely before the Qur’an and Sunnah.

By definition, an “Islamic state” is one where Islam reigns supreme as the dominant politico-socio-economic order, and where all other religions, systems of life, and ideologies are tolerated as long as they do not challenge the supreme status of Islam. In this sense, an “Islamic state” is not synonymous with a “Muslim majority state.” Defending the idea of secularism and demoting Islam to the rank of a powerless dogma, at par with other religions, is not an authentic interpretation of Iqbal. In fact, attributing a secular interpretation of Islam to Allama Iqbal is a blatant and brazen travesty of truth.

In his Presidential address to the Annual Session of the All India Muslim League at Allahabad, on December 29, 1930, Allama Iqbal had made the following observations:

Is religion a private affair? Would you like to see Islam, as a moral and political ideal, meeting the same fate in the world of Islam as Christianity has already met in Europe? Is it possible to retain Islam as an ethical ideal and to reject it as a polity in favor of national polities, in which religious attitude is not permitted to play any part?... The proposition that religion

is a private individual experience is not surprising on the lips of a European. In Europe the conception of Christianity as a monastic order, renouncing the world of matter and fixing its gaze entirely on the world of spirit, led by a logical process of thought to the view embodied in this proposition. The nature of the Prophet's religious experience, as disclosed in the Qur'an, however, is wholly different... It is an individual experience creative of a social order. Its immediate outcome is the fundamentals of a polity with implicit legal concepts whose civic significance cannot be belittled merely because their origin is revelational. The religious ideal of Islam, therefore, is organically related to the social order which it has created. The rejection of the one will eventually involve the rejection of the other....

This quote makes it quite clear that Iqbal did not favor secularism, nor was he a proponent of a secular interpretation of Islam.

Javid Iqbal has correctly observed that Iqbal criticized materialism by arguing that the discoveries of modern physics make the position of a materialist very untenable. The following sentences are taken from Iqbal's lectures on the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, as quoted by Javid Iqbal in his article. However, the inference he draws from this quote is totally irrelevant and simply does not follow from what Iqbal has said. According to Iqbal:

The ultimate reality, according to the Qur'an, is spiritual and its life consists in its temporal activities. The spirit finds its opportunities in the natural, material and the secular. All that is secular is therefore sacred in the roots of its being. The greatest service that modern thought has rendered to Islam and as a matter of fact to all religions, consists in its criticism of what we call material or natural, a criticism which discloses that the merely material has no substance until we discover it rooted in the spirit. There is no such thing as a profane world. All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the self-realization of the spirit. All is holy ground." (*Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.155)

Iqbal has made a very significant point here. He has made it clear that there is no dichotomy in Islam between the religious and temporal spheres of life. Islam gives us detailed guidance not only on how to perform prayers and how to purify our souls, but also on how to conduct our daily lives, how to interact with each other, how to perform our financial transactions, how to dispense justice, and how to run a state. The teachings of Islam are not restricted to the personal and the private but they also include and cover such fields as the social, legal, cultural, economic, and political domains of human activity. Secularism, on the other hand, divides human existence into two airtight compartments: It

allows individuals to have whatever religious beliefs they choose for themselves; it permits them to conduct their acts of worship and to perform social ceremonies in accordance with their respective beliefs. However, secularism refuses to allow any religion to play any meaningful role in the running of the collective affairs of the society or of government. Under a secular polity, all matters concerning social organization, economic norms, legal practices, and political affairs are to be decided and executed in terms of liberal, democratic, and non-religious criteria, while religion is to be treated as a personal and individual concern.

In sharp contrast to secularism, Islam asserts that the entire human existence is one unified whole; it cannot be bifurcated into the religious or spiritual on the one hand and the secular or mundane on the other. The kind of obedience that is accepted by Almighty Allah is the one that encompasses all realms of a person's life. Dividing up human life into numerous compartments and obeying Allah in one of these domains and disobeying Him in the others, is a sure way to earn the Divine Wrath (Surah Al-Baqarah, ayah no. 85). As such, Islam demands its domination over all spheres of life, whether private or public, spiritual or mundane. The affairs of a "worldly" nature are not to be discarded as unclean and unworthy, rather they are to be conducted as a religious duty and in accordance with Divine Guidance. There can be no doubt that the credit for reviving this dynamic concept of Islam in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, after centuries of neglect and stagnation, goes, among others, to the genius of Allama Iqbal.

Despite the clarity of Iqbal's vision, however, Javid Iqbal makes the following muddled observation: "In the light of the above analysis and in Iqbalian terms, to consider secularism as profane is a Christian way of talking and not Islamic. Therefore, Muslims are not justified in regarding "secularism" as something bad, wicked, profane or anti-God." This is another astonishing statement by the learned writer. What Iqbal has actually said is that the "secular" (or the worldly aspect of life) is not profane as everything comes from the spirit, and Javid Iqbal concludes that since the "secular" is not profane, therefore "secularism" is not bad, wicked, profane or anti-God," incorrectly assuming that "secular" is the same as "secularism." They are not the same: "secular" simply means worldly, mundane, or temporal, whereas "secularism" is a political ideology that refuses to allow any religion to play any significant role in the public domain. Javid Iqbal's conclusion is diametrically opposed to what Allama Muhammad Iqbal has really said!

Javid Iqbal has observed about Allama Iqbal that: “Any interpretation of Islam which approved feudalism and discriminated between man and man, was not acceptable to him.” This is an accurate interpretation of both Islam and Iqbal’s view of Islam, but the question that is to be addressed is the following: Is this idea only to be propounded and celebrated or do we need to implement it in reality too? If it is to be implemented, is it possible to do so without establishing a true Islamic state? Can we eradicate feudalism and establish equality, peace, and harmony among the Muslims while disregarding the imperatives of Islam concerning social justice? And if we succeed in establishing Islamic justice in Pakistan, would that be a secular state or an Islamic one?

Allama Iqbal firmly believed that a free Muslim country was needed both for the revival of Islam and for the establishment of social justice through the implementation of Islamic Shari’ah. In his Allahbad address, Iqbal had said:

I therefore demand the formation of a consolidated Muslim State in the best interest 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 law, its education, its culture, and to bring them into closer contact with its own original spirit and with the spirit of the modern times.

Clearly, Iqbal demanded a free Muslim state so that the pure and pristine teachings of Islam can be actualized, and Islamic law, Islamic education, and Islamic culture can be revived and rejuvenated. Does that sound like the conception of a secular state where all religions are to accepted equally?

Allama Iqbal wrote to Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on May 28, 1937: “After a long and careful study of Islamic Law I have come to the conclusion that if this system of Law is properly understood and applied, at least the right to subsistence is secured to everybody. But the enforcement and development of the Shariat of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim state or states.” (Letters of Iqbal to Jinnah, quoted in *Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan*, ed. By Hafeez Malik). Can a state be called “secular” if it implements the Islamic Shari’ah?

Describing the Muslim political constitution, Allama Iqbal articulated the first principle of an Islamic state — the sovereignty of Allah — in these words: “The law of God is absolutely supreme. Authority, except as an interpreter of the law, has no place in the social structure of Islam.” (Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal, in *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, ed. By Syed Abdul Wahid). Can a state in which sovereignty belongs to God

and not to the people, and where the “law of God is absolutely supreme” rather than the laws made by mortals, be called a secular state?

According to Iqbal, the social order of Islam as a universal polity is established on the principle of Tawheed, and the working of this principle found its best implementation in the life of the Prophet (God’s peace and blessings be upon him), and subsequently during the time of Al-Khilafah Al-Rashidah. How, then, can we say that Iqbal thought of the Caliphate as an outmoded form of government? Because of the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in his time, Iqbal reinterpreted the system only to give a fresh vision of Islam. But he did not waver from the fundamental Islamic principles, i.e., the Qur’an and the Sunnah, as the foundation of his thought and action. Through the recent publication of the book *Musalmāno ka Siyasi Nasbul Ain* by late Dr. Burhan Ahmad Farooqi, a very important aspect of Iqbal’s life and thought has come to light. The fact that Iqbal had made efforts to establish, during the last years of his life, an Islamic revivalist party based on the traditional Islamic institution of bai’ah, provides us with concrete evidence of his unflinching faith in the teachings of Islam and their practicability.

Javid Iqbal refers to a statement by Allama Iqbal to show that he was not averse to the idea of “nationalism” in a Muslim majority state “for there Islam and nationalism are practically identical.” However it is important to realize that Allama Iqbal has emphasized repeatedly, both in his poetry and in his writings, that the idea of territorial nationalism is one of the biggest adversaries of Islam, and we seriously doubt that he would have compromised on this issue. Indeed, Iqbal fully realized and eloquently articulated the dangers inherent in the idea of territorial nationalism, at a time when even the most prominent scholars of Islam were unable to grasp its hostility to the Islamic spirit. However, what is usually not realized is the fact that, in Iqbal’s thought, there is a rare blend of the highest idealism along with pragmatic realism. While envisioning the renaissance of Islam and the revival of the Muslim Ummah in the distant future, Iqbal was fully aware of the problems being faced by the Muslims in the here and now. He preached pan-Islamism and advocated the cause of the unification of the Muslim Ummah, not along territorial lines but on the basis of their common faith and culture. At the same time, Iqbal also realized that this goal cannot be achieved in the near future as the Muslim Ummah is suffering from all kinds of divisions. His apparent tolerance of the idea of nationalism in the context of Muslim majority states should be seen as a temporary and pragmatic approach to deal with a problem of an immediate nature, not one that can be adopted as a matter of permanent policy.

As far as the idea of “Pakistani nationalism” is concerned, it must be realized that the Indian Muslims had achieved their independence on the basis of a strong negation of territorial nationalism, and that this leaves us no way to take a U-turn and start encouraging the development of a nationalism based on territory. Moreover, territorial nationalism is promoted only when there is no other way of uniting a people. Pakistani Muslim cannot be united on the basis of race or language, but they can be united on the basis of their common religion and those aspects of their culture that arise from religion. Far from uniting the Pakistani Muslims, the cultivation of a nationalism based on territory will only foment more and more separatist and schismatic tendencies along provincial, linguistic, and racial lines. And this is precisely what has happened! The only bond that can unite us is that of true Islam, everything else will only divide and re-divide us into smaller and smaller factions.

Javid Iqbal has referred to the problem of the legislation of Islamic laws and to the issue of *ijtihad*. It must be pointed out that, in an Islamic state, the institution of *ijtihad* is meant to solve new problems and issues for which no clear verdict or guidance is found in either the Qur’an or the Sunnah, and that this is to be done without transgressing the limits set by the Shari’ah. Contrary to what some modernists have implied, *ijtihad* is not meant to change the Islamic injunctions to suite changing times. Unfortunately, this is the impression given by Javid Iqbal when he said: “...the Islamic law is to be interpreted and legislated by each generation of Muslims in the light of their own needs and requirements and the changed conditions of modern life.” Certainly, each generation of Muslims will face issues that were not faced by the previous generations and it must, therefore, resort to *ijtihad* in order to deal with them; however, *ijtihad* is — by definition — always done within the boundaries set by the Qur’an and Sunnah, and not by transgressing those boundaries. One of the most fundamental principles of an Islamic state is derived from Surah Al-Hujurat, ayah no. 1: “O you who believe, do not go in advance of Allah and His Messenger...” It is instructive to quote at length, at this juncture, Dr. Rafi-ud-Din who has seriously discussed the nature and parameters of *Ijtihad*:

A genuine *Ijtihad* is always the outcome of an intense love of Islam. In such a case it is a natural and spontaneous growth out of the Shari’ah as it was left to us by the Prophet and his Companions. Our present desire for *Ijtihad* is not the outcome of a love for Islam; it is the outcome of a concealed hatred for it —and

a covert admiration for other ideologies. It is a desire to change the tenets of Islam to suit the ideas which we have borrowed from these ideologies and we inwardly love and admire. It is an effort to equip Islam with the "wisdom" we have learnt from the lovers of other ideologies and to impart it with a new "beauty" and new grandeur" we have conceived under their ideological leadership. It is not a genuine Ijtihad, not a natural and spontaneous growth out of the Shari'ah at all, but an alteration of the Shari'ah according to our whims, a replacement of Islam by other ideologies of our liking as much as possible. (The Meaning and Purpose of Islamic Research, pp. 18, 19)

What is the best way to make Islamic laws in a modern Islamic state? Allama Iqbal believed that the republican form of government is perfectly harmonious with the Islamic spirit, and that only the elected representatives of the Muslims can perform the duty of legislation. Since even the absolute majority of the elected representatives cannot change or violate an Islamic injunction and therefore they have to make new laws within the general framework of the Qur'an and Sunnah, Iqbal came up with the idea of a Board of Ulama to guide the legislative assembly in the process of law-making. However, the problem with this idea is the following: If this Board of Ulama is given a decisive authority over the people's representatives, this will lead to the rule of a religious class and therefore to a theocratic state. On the other hand, if the function of this Board of Ulama is limited only to guide, suggest, and recommend, with no implementing authority, there is a clear possibility that the legislative assembly might violate the injunctions of the Shari'ah and no one would be able to stop it from doing so.

The problem before Iqbal was not "who will do ijthihad?" because obviously any competent scholar can give his opinion on any matter and no restriction can be placed in this regard. Instead, the problem before Iqbal was "whose ijthihad will become law?" and this is the crux of the matter. When Iqbal said that the Parliament will do ijthihad, knowing that the Parliament will not be made up of scholars and experts of the Islamic law, what he meant was that the legislative assembly will have the prerogative to decide as to which ijthihad will assume the force of law. Indeed, ten different religious scholars can give ten different opinions about a particular issue, each giving arguments to support that his opinion is nearer to the Qur'an and Sunnah, but it is the Parliament that will have the authority to decide in favor of one of these opinions, which will then become the law.

If it is settled in the Constitution that no law can be made that is totally or partially repugnant to the Qur'an and Sunnah, then the Parliament will be bound by this and will be forced, therefore, to seek the expertise of

Islamic scholars so as to avoid any violation of the Constitution. Since the judiciary is the custodian of the Constitution, any dispute as to whether a particular law is within the limits set by the injunctions of the Qur'an and Sunnah or whether it violates those limits can be referred to the Supreme Court, which can declare it as invalid in the latter case, forcing the legislative assembly to make an alternate law.

The methodology described above is already part of the Pakistani Constitution, but it has been rendered quite ineffective by various means. The Objectives Resolution is now an operative part of the Constitution as article 2-A, which clearly lays down that sovereignty belongs to Allah and that the authority of the people, to be exercised through their representatives, is a sacred trust that is to be used within the limits prescribed by Almighty Allah. The imperative that no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to the Qur'an and Sunnah is also part of the Constitution as article 227, but is made virtually impracticable by the round about manner of its implementation provided in Section IX. The establishment of the Federal Shariat Court and the Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court through article 203 was also a step in the right direction, but numerous restrictions were also placed on the FSC which made it rather ineffective.

The overall methodology is very sound and practicable. The Federal Shariat Court is supposed to examine existing or new laws and give its verdict regarding whether or not they violate the injunctions of the Qur'an and Sunnah. If they do, the Court will inform the Parliament that the said law will become invalid after a specified period, and will ask it to make new law to replace the old one within the specified time. The authority of making laws still remains with the representatives of the people, as advocated by Iqbal, but the judiciary will make sure that no transgression of the injunctions of the Qur'an and Sunnah occurs in the process of legislation. The Court will, of course, seek the guidance of Ulama and other experts in formulating its verdict.

In order to make the above procedure truly effective, we need the following amendments in the Pakistani Constitution. Firstly, it should be mentioned in article 2-A that the Objectives Resolution shall take precedence over the entire Constitution. Secondly, a new article 2-B should be added to state that the Qur'an and Sunnah shall be the supreme law of Pakistan and therefore all existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the injunctions of the Qur'an and Sunnah and no law shall be made that is repugnant to such injunctions. Thirdly, all restrictions on the Federal Shariat Court should be lifted, the number of

its ulama judges increased, and the status of the judges of the FSC should be raised to that of the judge of High Court and Supreme Court so as to enable them to work without any pressure.

The ideas of Iqbal will be implemented in Pakistan only when we realize that, for the Pakistani Muslims, there is no escape from Islam. Our almost total reliance on the West and our disregard for the imperatives of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* constitute the primary reason for our spiritual, moral, political, social, economic and, above all, intellectual decadence. A return to Iqbal means a return to the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, and the Islamization of the Pakistani Constitution will be the first major and decisive step in this direction.

It would be instructive at this point to analyze the Pakistan Movement. The main motivating force behind the movement for independence was the fear of exploitation and oppression by a Hindu majority, although the current of Islamic revivalism was also a part of this struggle. Promises were made to Almighty Allah that the new and free Muslim homeland will be a model Islamic State. In response, Allah endowed us with Pakistan in a miraculous manner, but the Muslims of Pakistan have so far failed to make it a true Islamic State by implementing the Islamic Order. The punishment for not fulfilling a solemn pledge made with Almighty Allah is nifaq or hypocrisy, with which the whole nation is now afflicted on a collective level.

To sum up: Allama Iqbal did not endorse the Turkish experiment that not only led to the separation of church and state, but marginalised the importance of religion as well. Iqbal clearly finds it contrary to the spirit of the Qur'an, since it bifurcates the domains of the spiritual and the temporal, while the Holy Qur'an envisages as unitary. They are just the two aspects of the same reality. The change of perspective and keeping the spiritual and the temporal not only proves myopic on the ontological plane, it destroys the rationale of Islam as well.

Afzaal

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