

Iqbal and Politics

Riffat Hassan

Iqbal was interested in the political situation and problems of his country as no sensitive and intelligent young Indian could fail to be, but “it was only when he realized that most of the political leaders of the Muslims were lacking in political acumen and foresight that he stated taking active interest in politics.” (S. A. Vahid, *Studies in Iqbal*, Lahore, 1967, p. 266).

Iqbal was a member of the Committee of the Muslim League formed in London in 1903 by the Rt. Hon. Amir Ali (S. R. Wasti, *Lord Minto and the Indian Nationalist Movement 1905-1910*, Oxford, 1964, p. 277). On his return from England Iqbal took interest in the working of the Muslim League but did not participate actively in politics from 1910- 1923. “During this period he was busy creating political consciousness and awakening amongst his people.” (*Studies in Iqbal*, p. 266).

In 1924, Iqbal joined the National Liberal League of Lahore but not finding it very effective resigned from it later on. In 1926, he was elected as a member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, (A. M. Salik, *Zikr-e-Iqbal*, Lahore, 1955, p. 134) and as the various speeches and statements made during his membership of the Council indicate, he took interest in, and made important contributions to, the deliberations of the legislative body.

League Secretary

In 1928, Iqbal became Secretary of that branch of the Muslim League which functioned under the Presidentship of Sir Muhammad Shafi (M. A. Khan, *Iqbal Ka Siyasi Karnamah*, Karachi, 1952, p.121). Along with other members of the League, he appeared before the Simon Commission which had been appointed by the British Government to report on the introduction of further political reforms in the sub-continent. The Commission was considerably influenced by the evidence given by the delegates of the League.

While participating eagerly in Punjab politics, Iqbal was also interested in All- India politics. In 1929, he attended the Muslim Conference held in Delhi under the Chairmanship of the Agha Khan, and made some important contribution to the deliberations of the Conference. In 1930, he was selected to preside at the Annual Session of the Muslim League held at Allahabad. In his historic Presidential Address, Iqbal said, “I would like to see the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state. Self-Government within the British Empire, the formation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim State appears to me to be the final destiny of the Muslims, at least of North-West India.” (S. A. Vahid, Editor, *Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, Lahore, 1964, pp.170-171). In his “remarkable speech” Iqbal laid down the exact historical composition of what is now West Pakistan. As an eminent

historian remarks, “much was to be done before that conception could make its way into the hearts and the souls of Muslims masses, but the idea was born.” (L. F. Rushbrook Williams, “Iqbal Day Speech,” London, 22 April, 1959).

Round Table Conferences

In 1931, Iqbal attended the Second Round Table Conference in London and served as a member of the Minorities Committee. He returned to Lahore on 30 December 1931, “most disappointed at the attitude of Mr. Gandhi and other Hindu leaders at the Conference, and convinced more than ever, that the only solution of the political troubles of the sub-continent was a division of the country” (*Studies in Iqbal*, p. 283).

On 21 March 1923, Iqbal presided at the All-India Muslim Conference held at Lahore. In his momentous address Iqbal stressed the intimate link between individual and collective life. “He who desires to change an unfavorable environment must undergo a complete transformation of his inner being. God changeth not the conditions of a people until they themselves take the initiative to change their condition by constantly illuminating the zone of their daily activity in the light of a definite ideal. Our ideal is well- defined. It is to win in the coming constitution a position for Islam which may bring her opportunities to fulfill her destiny in this country” (*Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal*, pp. 213-214).

In 1923, Iqbal was invited to attend the Third Round Table Conference. While the Conference was in progress, Iqbal grew so dissatisfied with its proceedings that he resigned and returned to India (Azim Hussain, *Fazl-e-Hussain, A Political Biography*, London, 1946, p. 219)

Vital Role in the Founding of Pakistan

In 1936, on Mr. Jinnah’s suggestion, Iqbal undertook to work for the Punjab Parliamentary Board, which was to conduct elections under the 1936 Constitution. Muslim politics was in chaos at that time and Mr. Jinnah was facing a very hard time. “But in the midst of all this darkness there shone a flickering light in Lahore and this was Iqbal who stood steadfast by Jinnah in those trying days and helped him to charter the course of Indo-Muslim politics.” (*A History of the Freedom Movement*, Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi, Vol. III, part II, p. 315)

When Iqbal died, Mr. Jinnah sent this message to his son: “To me he was friend, guide and philosopher and during the darkest moments through which the Muslim League had to go he stood like a rock, and never flinched on single moment” (Quoted in S. A. Vahid, *His Art and Thought*, London, 1959, p.19). On March 24, 1940, when the Pakistan Resolution was passed by the Muslim League at Lahore, Mr. Jinnah said: “Iqbal is no more amongst us, but had he been alive he would have been happy to know that we did exactly what he wanted us to do.” (H. Bolitho, *Jinnah, Creator of Pakistan*, London, 1954, p. 129)

No one today disputes that Iqbal “played a very vital part in the founding of Pakistan” (A. J. Arberry, *Oriental Essays*, London, 1960, p. 214). However, a full appreciation of Iqbal’s political wisdom and farsightedness is yet to come. Perhaps, Iqbal was not a politician in the sense on which Mr. Jinnah or Mr. Nehru were, but he could see further than almost any other of his contemporaries could.

Recounting his meetings with Iqbal, L.F. Rushbrook Williams observes, “Looking back on that time, it seems to me that many of us who were working as we hoped, for the federation of a united India, tended to undervalue the skill and sagacity of Sir Mohammad Iqbal, and indeed I would not altogether exempt from that category Quaid-e-‘Azam himself because I remember being present at various meetings in which Sir Mohammad Iqbal insisted that pre-requisite of the full participation of the Muslim population of India in any projected federation must be their continued protection by a communal electorate. At that time Quaid-e-‘Azam was not convinced and I myself who was working as a delegate and representative of the Indian states side of India, thought that much of Sir Mohammad Iqbal was saying, however, valuable it might have been in the past, was perhaps outdated in 1930 and yet how right he was and how wrong we were because no sooner were the beginnings of the first stage of federation in operation in 1937 than all the fears that he had outlined with such gravity and with such prophetic foresight were, from the standpoint of the Indian Muslim community only too fully realized” (“Iqbal Day Speech”).

Characteristics of a Muslim State

It was “part of Sir Mohammad Iqbal’s greatness” that he not only formulated the conception of an Islamic state in India, and outlined its physical boundaries but laid down the characteristics which such a state must have, “if it were to provide that inter-play between the individual and the society in which the individual lives, which Iqbal knew to be essential for the highest development of both” (“Iqbal Day Speech.”).

Iqbal believed that a Muslim State should have the following characteristics:

- (i) It should be founded on *Tauhid* (monotheism) which Iqbal regarded as an essential element in the conception of human brotherhood/sisterhood. *Tauhid* “can act as a unifying force, and break down the division of mankind into warring tribes and antagonistic camps.” As Iqbal said:

This one breath, winding in a hundred breasts,
Is but one secret of the Unity (*Tauhid*)

(*Rumuz-e-Bakhudi*, p. 182; translated by A. J. Arberry,

The Mysteries of Selflessness, London, 1953, p. 69)

- (ii) It should have inspired and devoted leadership or prophethood. Iqbal writes:

On Prophethood is based our existence on this earth,
From Prophethood are derived our religion, our code.
The Prophet molded hundreds of thousands of us into one,
So that various parts were inseparably welded into each other
From Prophethood we attained unity of tune,
It imparted to us the unity of breath and the unity of objective

(*Rumuz-e-Bekhuri*, pp. 16-17; translated by S. A. Vahid, : *His Art and Thought*, p. 50)

- (iii) It should have an ethical code embodying the ideals and aspirations of that society. For Muslims, such a code is the Qur'an:

The final message to all humankind
Was borne by him elect of God to be
A mercy unto every living thing.

(*Rumuz-e-Bekhuri*, p. 140; translated by A. J. Arberry, *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, p. 38)

- (iv) It should have a cognizable centre in space - a territorial focus of the activities and loyalties which such a state would engender. For Muslims the spiritual centre is Mecca.
- (v) It should have an ideal objective.
- (vi) It should aim at conquest over the forces of nature. It should utilize the mechanical and scientific discoveries of the West without subordinating itself to Western values and culture.
- (vii) It should give full scope for the development of womanhood in all its potential and actual aspects.

“Iqbal and Politics,” in *The Pakistan Times*, September 20, 1968