

A COMMONWEALTH OF MUSLIM NATIONS

—*Nazir Ahmed Khan*

Many great Muslims have, from time to time, put forward the idea of a political Muslim bloc or that of a practical demonstration of a world Muslim brotherhood, transcending all barriers of race, colour, geographical situation or notions of nationalism.

Syed Jamāluddīn Afghānī is the protagonist of the first idea; Iqbāl of the second.

Syed Jamāluddīn's movement was for the union of Islāmic countries and was, therefore, treated as a political (Pan-Islāmic) threat to Christendom by the European Powers, which did their utmost to defeat it, by all possible means. They employed most of the present methods which they now attribute to Soviet Russia in its cold war, *i.e.*, infiltration, indoctrination, creating political unrest and frustration, causing doubts and confusion, and finally sabotaging of the movement. The result of this mostly cold (and occasionally hot) treatment was, that the movement fizzled out, to the great detriment and shame of the Muslim world.

Iqbāl also seems to have been aiming at a Muslim Union which would be based on religious affinities disregarding all artificial barriers. An intellectual renaissance of Muslims was Iqbāl's suggestion for achieving the world Union of Muslims. But unlike Syed Jamāluddīn's practical approach, Iqbāl, the philosopher, had to journey long to reach his ultimate destination. He started as a nationalist, singing of his motherland—India.

سارے جہاں سے اچھا ہندوستان ہمارا

This was, however, a passing phase.

His deep study of Muslim past and present, his contacts with the Western world, and his extensive travels abroad, made him realise that nationalism was, perhaps, not the answer to solve

mounting world tensions, and could not possibly resolve the political rivalries which world events had generated. He therefore, started taking a peep into internationalism as the penacea for some of the major political imbalances of his time.

It appears, however, that he soon found that internationalism, too, had its limitation.

He, therefore, started preaching a universal brotherhood, based on intellectual unity and moral values, in which the Muslims would naturally be the principal architects and builders. In the dedication of *Payām-i Mashriq* (1923), he says: "In the modern world, especially the Eastern world, every effort, which aims at widening the human horizon so that it transcends all geographical limitations, and creates or reorientates a truer and stronger concept of human values and affinities, is to be respected."

Iqbal's concept of such a world does not seem to be based on any immediate political design or pattern. However, even a cursory glance at his teachings would convince the reader, that his concept of a مومن and his firm belief in the destiny of Muslims, was certainly the core of his philosophy of universalism. His teachings in the *Secrets of the Self* (اسرار خودی) and *Selflessness* (رسوز بے خودی) all point unmistakably to the evolution, in course of time, of a Muslim political entity, though it would not seem to be based on political expediency.

آبرو باقی تری ملت کی جمعیت سے تھی

جب سے جمعیت گئی دنیا میں رسوا تو ہوا

فرد قائم ربط ملت سے ہے تنہا کچھ نہیں

سوج ہے دریا میں اور بیرون دریا کچھ نہیں

and his faith in a centre مرکز

قوموں کے لئے موت ہے مرکز سے جدائی

ہو صاحب مرکز تو خودی کیا ہے؟ خدائی!

This brief resume of his thought leads me to the view that Iqbāl's teachings clearly support the idea of a Union of Muslim Nations, call it by whatever name you choose; "A Commonwealth of Muslim Nations" or "Muslim Bloc".

His faith in a "Centre", is again a pointer towards my conclusion that if Iqbāl had been with us today, he would have lent the weight of all his authority to the establishment of a Commonwealth of Muslim Nations.

I hinted (on an earlier occasion) to the institution of Ḥajj and the true significance of Mecca being our yearly meeting place. Mecca symbolises in essence the spirit and message of Islam. It was (and can be the centre round which Muslim reconstruction can be built up.

Iqbal believes in what is perhaps the first requisite for Union of Muslim States, a symbol—a Centre.

Again, in شمع و شاعر he says

پھر دلوں کو یاد آجائے گا پیغامِ سحر
پھر جبینِ خاکِ حرم سے آشنا ہو جائے گی

Similarly, he is the most effective advocate of pulling down of all barriers which false notions of nationalism have put up. In his opinion, such shibboleths must be destroyed. This is how he treats these limitations in 'طلوعِ اسلام'

ہوس نے کر دیا ہے ٹکڑے ٹکڑے نوعِ انساں کو

Again:

یہ ہندی وہ خراسانی یہ افغانی وہ تورانی
تو اے شرمندہ ساحلِ اچھل کر بیکراں ہو جا

غبارِ آلودہ رنگ و نسب ہیں بال و پرتیرے
تو اے سرخِ حرم اڑنے سے پہلے پرفشاں ہو جا

Incidentally, it will be noticed that Iqbāl is now journeying from 'nationalism' to 'internationalism' which was for him a high-road based on Muslim ideals or at least of the Muslims of the world.

Stronger currents of thought for world Muslim unity are soon noticeable in his teachings. They were the result of a deep study of history, specially, Muslim history, and current events.

Western Powers had since long, made Asia a sort of happy hunting ground. In fact, they had treated other lands also in much the same fashion (*i.e.*, Africa), but as Asia was the pivot of world domination schemes in those days, and had pronounced civilisations which must be destroyed to make it supine and easy to assimilate, European powers directed their particular attention towards liquidating this great erstwhile centre of world civilisation and advancement. Western diplomacy connected with, or emerging out of the first world war, made it plain to a seer like Iqbāl, that Asia was in the greatest danger of disruption and piecemeal annihilation.

For Asia's existence and regeneration, Iqbāl clearly defined the role of Muslims and opined that it was through their unity that not only Muslim countries but the whole of Asia could be saved from the octopus of European greed.

Mark his words in 'خضر راہ':

ربط و ضبط ملت بیضا ہے مشرق کی نجات
ایشیا والے ہیں اس نکتہ سے اب تک بے خبر
ایک ہوں مسلم حرم کی ہاسبانی کے لئے
نیل کے ساحل سے لے کر تا بخاک کاشغر
جو کرے گا امتیاز رنگ و خون مٹ جائے گا
ترک خرگاہی ہو یا اعرابی والا گہر

Again, it will be noticed that in a world movement of Muslim regeneration the important role which a centre must play has been stressed in prophetic words.

These random extracts from Iqbāl's writings are a clear proof of my assertion that Iqbāl was the fondest dreamer of a world Muslim Union.

He had a firm—an unshakeable—conviction that Islām and its practicality provided all that a movement needs to establish itself as a world force. It had a centre, a common faith, high ideals, moral, and ethical values, proud achievements, unprecedented contributions towards the happiness of mankind, in short a glorious past and therefore, an even more glorious future.

True, the conditions in which citizens of India were then living (between the two world wars), made it impossible for Iqbāl to launch a movement which a freeman like Syed Jamāluddīn could do. Even that movement failed. How could then Iqbāl hope for the success of a positive and clear-cut political movement for the regeneration and union of Muslims throughout the world? India was, then, under British domination. The British rulers of India had not forgotten the events of 1857. In fact, they had utilised the Muslim participation in that struggle, as an excuse for crushing, by every possible means, any sign of revival or reawakening amongst the Muslims.

Having destroyed the Centre of Muslim solidarity (the Khilāfah), and treacherously cut up the Arab world into Balkanised and unstable States, the British (and their allies) were most suspicious and intolerant of any movement for Muslim world solidarity. In these depressing conditions it would have been futile to launch any overt, tangible political movement for a Union or Commonwealth or Bloc of Muslim States. In fact, there were hardly many Muslim countries in those days which could claim to be independent and free to follow their own policies. Each one of them was either under foreign domination, or under such terrific foreign influence as to be completely immobile in actions of any magnitude or importance.

Moreover, Iqbāl was not a 'politician'. He was a philosopher, a sage and a seer. It was not for him to launch a cut and dried political scheme.

He therefore, gave the *thought* to the Muslims of the whole world. This thought was nothing but a living interpretation

of the pristine message of the Holy Qur'ān, and the Holy Prophet (peace be on him).

His six lectures on "The Reconstruction of Islāmic Thought" and his message conveyed through his verse, were based entirely on these two sources which are an everlasting source of inspiration for Muslims all over the world. Iqbāl was thus engaged on an intellectual regeneration of Muslims wherein would be manifest all the glory of Islām.

It was a message of hope, of faith in God, and faith in the Muslims' own ultimate destiny. Shorn of all philosophical refinements, I can say simply that it conveyed three basic ideas:

1. The individual having faith.
2. The individual merging himself in the Millat.
3. The Millat to pattern its life on the primeval teachings of Islām, and to assume the leadership of world affairs, in the interest of world morality.

On this analysis of Iqbāl's message, it is quite obvious that Iqbāl's ultimate aim was a Union or Bloc of Muslim Nations or States for leading mankind through the righteous path of Islām and thus to usher in a peaceful and a better world.

A BALANCING FORCE

I am quite sure that if Iqbāl had lived to see the devastating effects of the Second World War and its aftermath in the form of a shattered generation devoid of all faith and if the present catastrophic stage of two eternally warring blocs had emerged as clearly then as now, he would have inevitably come to the conclusion that only hope for world peace was a third Bloc—a neutral Bloc—of Muslim nations which would not augment the potential for a world conflagration, but would be a restraining force to balance the fast toppling world.

From most of what Iqbāl said, at least from the time of the first world war, one purpose can be easily spelled out. It is a current of thought which is so obvious that one cannot possibly miss it.

This is the theme of Muslims being one Millat irrespective of colour, cast, or geographical situation or even national pride. He saw clearly that the future of the Muslim nations lay only in one course of action. To unite into a bigger nation, the *Millat-i Islāmīa* the *Millat-i Baiḍa*. This glorious and ennobling teaching was based on five realities—one God, one Book (The Qur'ān), one Prophet, one *Ka'abā*. With these five unities, is it really very difficult to conceive of one Muslim Millat? Sings he in 'جواب شکوہ'

مٹنعت ایک ہے اس قوم کی نقصان بھی ایک
ایک ہی سب کا نبی دین بھی ایمان بھی ایک

حرم پاک بھی اللہ بھی قرآن بھی ایک
کچھ بڑی بات تھی ہوتے جو مسلمان بھی ایک

True this ideal has not been achieved so far.

What does that prove?

Is it impossible of achievement?

My answer is an emphatic No !

Is it difficult? Yes! But

مشکلے نیست کہ آمان نشود

The true cause of all our immobility is, that we have not made any effort towards achieving the end. We Muslims have become 'soft', pulverised; not tough, resilient.

We have lost heart before even taking the first step towards the goal. This is not like a *Mo'min*; not even like an ordinary Muslim.

Iqbāl himself stresses the importance of effort, supreme, ceaseless, unending, super-human effort to achieve the seemingly impossible.

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راز حیات پوچھ لے خضر خجستہ گام سے
زندہ ہر ایک چیز ہے کوشش ناتمام سے

Let us take the first step towards achieving Iqbāl's fond dream—one Muslim Millat; and we would notice that each point gained becomes a fresh starting point for future achievement, till this puny human being has the courage to say

ستاروں سے آگے جہاں اور بھی ہیں

The Russians have demonstrated this already on a material plane.

Cannot the Muslims do the same on the moral plane *i.e.*, with a view not to destroy the world, but to save it for a grateful humanity which may praise God for the excellence and beauty of His creation!

That the bond of Islām is a real linking force throughout the world has been my conviction born of my travels abroad.

Recently, my visit to some countries in the Far East has convinced me of the importance of this cementing force. Only it has not been utilised. It is like a gold nugget lying under a mass of debris. Superficially, you cannot possibly conceive of it as a lump of gold. But remove the overlying rubble, wash the metal and polish its surface and behold there is the lustrous material in all its glory!

This is exactly what happened to this noble ideal of Iqbāl. we have done nothing to achieve it.

But, I believe, now is the time to make a start. The two 'isms' are fast approaching a head-on clash. Camp followers of either merely augment the danger or expand the sphere of operations. They cannot possibly avert a clash.

On the other hand, a bloc of some 700 millions of sturdy, independent and free human beings morally dedicated to the cause of world peace, and not subscribing to any of the 'isms'; can certainly be the most hopeful, most potent force for averting a clash.

Secondly, the very existence (and the tall claims) of an unnatural, unreal anachronism of British Commonwealth of

Nations, is an unanswerable argument for the establishment of a real and natural Union based on common moral values and dedicated to noble ends!

I repeat, we have done nothing, nothing at all, to gain this objective.

We have accepted a defeat before firing a single shot! This defeatist attitude is negation of Iqbal's teachings.¹

¹ This article appeared in Pakistan Times, April 21, 1961, but its content is now more important for the Muslims than ever.