

The Reconstruction of Islamic Philosophy of Iqbal: An Appraisal by Dr. Fazlur Rahman

Social Sciences

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Abstract

In 1928, Iqbal has expressed his thought and delivered six lectures to the Muslim audience which was published titled as, "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam". The lectures delivered by Iqbal were quiet comprehensive for advocating reforms in Islamic theology under the guidance of reason and scientific knowledge but not in the manner that ethical and spiritual sphere should accept separate task from theology. Like other Islamic modernist, Iqbal found the ideal polity in the early history of Islam. It was in the "Mohammedan" community that Muslims had reached the pinnacle of their spiritual and worldly power -the full realization of human destiny. It was that vision of the past that guided his prescription for the future. He became convinced that man was able to realize the full potential of his destiny only in the context of the revival of Islam, in an order wherein the perfection of the soul would be reflected in the excellence of social relations. Idealization of Islam went hand-in-hand with advocating religious reforms. Iqbal argued that Islam can serve man only if it is reformed and reinterpreted in the image of Muhammad. Iqbal did not view this exercise as innovation or reformation, but rediscovery and reconstruction of Islam. Iqbal advocated that Islam should work boldly and courageously for the reconstruction through fresh experience. Fazlur Rahman says that the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam contained extensive reforms in English which is not understood by majority of peoples and his poetry meant for public is free from reforms. He further says that Iqbal who determinedly called the Muslims to rediscover his place in the world and not to follow Western culture slavishly

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The lectures delivered by Iqbal were quiet comprehensive for advocating reform in Islamic theology under the guidance of reason and scientific knowledge but not in the manner that ethical and spiritual sphere should accept separate task from theology. He makes an effort to establish a critical philosophical and empirical scientific inquiry. It is not the sufficient condition but necessary for gaining knowledge regarding the ultimate truth which can grab just intuitively through mystic experience and faith, which is being spiritual. Iqbal pivotal thesis cannot be expected to be found in Iqbal himself, although it's adequately strong yet partial formulations and indications are spread everywhere in his writings. The primary reason is that Iqbal is a thinker and not an interpreter. In order to interpret someone the interpreter has to give what he regards as the kernel of the interpreter's message. (Rahman, 1963, 440) Fazlur Rahman says:

It appears that when during his studies in the West, Iqbal began developing a positive philosophy of life under which he evolved definite attitude to this world, this involved if it did not even presuppose, an acute perception and awareness of Reality; that is to say Iqbal had become conscious of a Reality that was essentially demanded both of itself and of others. (Rahman, 1963, 440)

No doubt that Iqbal's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* and *Payam-i-Mashriq* were written under the Western influence. He has very skillfully used the Eastern and Western thoughts for the exposure of man especially for Muslims of Sub-Continent. His poetry and prose reflects Islamic traditions and Western Modernity. He pleaded for a critical interpretation of Islamic and Western thought. He is against blind imitation and conservatism. He rejects blind following of Western culture. Fazlur Rahman says:

The foregoing analysis of Iqbal's thought and motivations also helps to explain his contradictory stand on the West. Actually, he did not always address the West as such as alone but Westernism as well. Thus when he says in his first Lecture that the Muslim world is intellectually moving Westward with rapidity and encourages this movement, he is primarily addressing Westernism. He is therefore, so far, intellectually a Modernist, although ethically a revivalist, as we

have seen. But when addressing the West, he condemned its intellectualism in such strong terms, that he positively discouraged intellectual Westernism and so Modernism—an ironical lesson indeed. And it is also related irony, of no less import, that the book which set out to reconstruct religious thought for the world would-be Modernist, should, by what it actually says, leave little room for thought at all. (Rahman, 1958, 95)

While discussing Iqbal's multivalence, Fazlur Rahman noted that while he rejected Western ethics and society generally, he was, at intellectual level, still a Modernist Westernist, although we noted too that by declaring Western thought to be basically void of spiritual direction, he has necessarily discouraged intellectual and philosophical Westernism as well. The most salient feature of the subsequent outlook has a total rejection of Western intellectualism in favour of a new future of Islam. (Rahman, 1958, 95) Fazlur Rahman says, nevertheless, the young educated Muslim progressively felt the vacuum and soon looking for quarters whence guidance for liberal Islamic thinking would emerge to fulfill his dream of running the modern State on the bases of Islam. This powerful desire had generated in him by the tremendous call of Muhammad Iqbal who untiringly called the Muslim to rediscover his place in the world, not to follow culture slavishly and to develop his spiritual and moral future from his own fountains. (Rahman, 1968, 2)

Iqbal defended Muslims against rigid nationalism. He gives importance to Islam as a religion and as well as a civilization. He has firm faith in Prophet Muhammad and that the project of Islam, which was started in Arabia in seventh century. There is a deep influence of the Qur'an on Iqbal's thought.

In *'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam'* Iqbal tried to reconcile the Islamic traditions with Western knowledge without uprooting the chronological and textual proportions and tradition. According to Fazlur Rahman, "Muhammad Iqbal, for instance, wrote his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, which contained sweeping reform proposals in English—a language not understood by the masses or the '*Ulama*', and kept his powerful and moving poetry—meant for the common man—mainly free of such reforms. (Rahman, 1970, 324) The significance of Iqbal's Islamic modernism is, "a dynamic worldview and an activist reinterpretation of the religion of Islam in the twentieth century perspective. To him, man himself and his world both are by nature free for creative movement." (Rahman, 1963, 161)

Before discussing Iqbal's view, we have to make distinction between Modernity, Modernization and Modernism. "Modernity belongs to the whole social fabric, modernism to only art and modernization to ways of adopting modern methods, techniques at some or all segments of society. Epistemologically modernity (and consequently its other forms) is based on rational, authoritative, self-sufficient human self, negating metaphysical and traditional grounds. Iqbal poetry shows some similarities with western concept of modernism. His philosophical thinking seeks to adopt modernity rationally, preserving metaphysics. Iqbal does not accept loneliness, absurdity and meaninglessness of existentialism but he glorifies man's individuality. He argued that it is the realization of their destiny that the spiritual salvation and political emancipation of Muslims can be realized. Fazlur Rahman says:

Nevertheless, the young educated Muslim progressively felt the vacuum and was soon looking for quarters whence guidance for liberal Islamic thinking would emerge to fulfill his dream of running the modern state on the basis of Islam. This powerful desire had been generated in him by the tremendous call of Muhammad Iqbal who untiringly called the Muslim to rediscover his place in the world, not to follow the Western culture slavishly and to develop his spiritual and moral future for his own fountains. (Rahman, 1968, 2)

Islam holds the key to the realization of that destiny, for faith is central to a Muslim's life. It is religion that defines human existence, and it is through religion that man may raise to greater heights. That height is predicated on rediscovery of the true faith and that rediscovery is in turn tied to the reconstruction of the Islamic community. (Nasr, 2002, 26) Like other Islamic modernism, Iqbal found the ideal polity in the early history of Islam. It was in the "Mohammedan" community that Muslims had reached the pinnacle of their spiritual and worldly power -the full realization of human destiny. It was that vision of the past that guided his prescription for the future. He became convinced that man was able to realize the full potential of his destiny only in the context of the revival of Islam, in an order wherein the perfection of the soul would be reflected in the excellence of social relations. (Nasr, 2002, 26) Fazlur Rahman explains:

Much more significant, however, was the thinking of Muhammad Iqbal whose message, delivered in moving poetry, summoned the Muslims to rise and shape their own destiny. Iqbal sought inspiration from his image of the pristine Islam of the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an—a spiritually creative and dynamic Islam which he saw buried under negative, non Arab forms of medieval *Sufism* and dead formulas of the *Kalam* on the one hand and, on the other, beguiled by

the superficial creativity of the West, which had lost the purpose of life amid its tumultuous and riotous technology, and threatened to numb the moral faculties of man.

Iqbal had, in a concrete sense, inherited the legacy of Sirhindi and Waliy Allah, his basic thought being but a restatement of Sirhindi's philosophy in twentieth century terms. And his own thought, in the same concrete sense, begot Pakistan. The thrust that had started with Sirhindi reached its final goal in altering the world map in August 1947. (Rahman, 1973, 200)

Islam is a religion which can be more practicing only if it is reformed and reinterpreted. While using the tools of philosophical analysis and mystical wisdom, Iqbal did not view this exercise as innovation or reformation, but rediscovery and reconstruction of Islam. (Iqbal, 1960, 27) Iqbal advocated that Islam should work boldly and courageously for the reconstruction through fresh experience. He was well aware that reconstruction has more severe features than simple alteration in modern state of affair in life. According to him, "humanity needs three things today - a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis. Modern Europe, has no doubt, built idealistic systems on these lines, but experience shows that truth revealed through pure reason is incapable of bringing that fire of living conviction which personal revelation alone can bring. This is the reason why pure thought has so little influenced men while religion has always elevated individuals, and transformed whole societies." (Iqbal, 1960, 127)

Iqbal stresses the call for enormous importance and requirement of developing a new *ilm-ul-kalam*, which should be based on modern knowledge and new scientific data, for the reconstruction of Islamic theology. Iqbal performed massive obligation by freeing Islamic theology from the sticky situation of Platonic thoughts and Aristotelian logic. He established the foundation of Islamic beliefs on modern experimental sciences which consist of physics, mathematics, biology and psychology. (Ahmed, 1996, 14) Iqbal's distinctive role in modern Islamic thought is of making comparable 'God consciousnesses' with modern science, which according to him is more valuable than sheer belief in God. He equalizes the scientist's observation and research of nature and environment is in quest of familiarity with God, like mystic seek out in the act of pray. (Iqbal, 1960, 45, 73) He asserts that "scientific observation of nature keeps us in close contact with the behavior of Reality (God), and thus sharpens our inner perception for a deeper vision of it. (Iqbal, 1960, 72) This alone will add to his power

over nature and give him that vision of the total-infinite which philosophy seeks but cannot find.” (Iqbal, 1960, 73)

Iqbal hails the empirical exploration of science and gives glowing appreciation to the rational assumptions. He is not restricted to speculative rationalism or scientific empiricism. Iqbal theory of knowledge comprises intuition as superior degree of perfection. Iqbal asserts that science generates genuine knowledge, he says, “we must not forget what we call science is not a single systematic view of Reality. It is a mass of sectional views of Reality – fragments of a total experience which do not seem to fit together.”(Iqbal, 1960, 33) Science state a little bit regarding life, matter and mind but it did not solve how to make a relationship among them. It is plainly changeable to provide sacred vision of Reality. (Iqbal, 1960, 33) In this way science makes an artificial effort as it is choosy in selecting components of human experience and Reality which it examines. Iqbal describes, “Natural Science is by nature sectional; it cannot, if it is true to its own nature and function, set up its theory as a complete view of Reality.” (Iqbal, 1960, 36) Science is selective in organization of knowledge. In this way Iqbal asserts that religion should not concern about science. Religion should take the essential place in the combination of all “data of human experience” and must receive the partly data from science because religion treat with the entire Reality. The main plan of Iqbal was restructuring, rationalization and reformation of the Islamic faith, that is, to rebuild perfect Muslim culture in which man has essential role and man would attain his highest ideals. He has central and key role in the perfect society. This was the task which began with the perfection of man best exemplified in example of Prophet Muhammad himself- and culminated in the creation of the ideal social order, hence for Iqbal revival of faith at individual level was ineluctably tied to the creation of perfect Islamic society, which mean that the political fortunes of Muslim would again rise in only pursuant to a revival of Islam. .”(Nasr, 2002, 162) Iqbal says:

The truth is that among the Muslim nations of today, Turkey alone has shaken off its dogmatic slumber, and attained to self-consciousness. She alone has claimed her right of intellectual freedom; she alone has passed from ideal to the real—a transition which entails keen intellectual and moral struggle. To her the growing complexities of a mobile and broadening life are sure to bring new situations suggesting new points of view, and necessitating fresh interpretations of principles which are only of an academic interest to a people who have never experienced the joy of spiritual expansion. It is, I think, the English thinker Hobbes who makes this acute observation that to have a succession of identical thoughts and

feelings is to have no thoughts and feelings at all. Such is the lot of most Muslim countries today. They are mechanically repeating old values, whereas the Turk is on the way to creating new values. He has passed through great experiences which have revealed his deeper self to him. In his life has begun to move, change, and amplify, giving birth to new desires, bringing new difficulties and suggesting new interpretations. The question which confronts him today, and which is likely to confront other Muslim countries in the near future, is whether the Law of Islam is capable of evolution—a question which will require great intellectual effort, and is sure to be answered in the affirmative; provided the world of Islam approaches it in the spirit of Omar—the first critical and independent mind in Islam who, at the last moments of the Prophet, had the moral courage to utter these remarkable words: ‘The Book of God is sufficient for us’.(Iqbal, 1960, 162)

Iqbal developed an ideology of which the fundamental thought and effect was to cleanse and develop human life in every sphere. His ideology cannot be bracketed in any ‘ism’. He can be interpreted differently. Many interpreters have seen him primarily a social reformer, although he was certainly not a socialist in the technical sense of the word. He did not know analytically and logically what is wrong with capitalism. But he was emotionally a socialist because he loved mankind. (Smith, 1947, 128) As a staunch believer in a personal God, he was also theist. Believing that all existence is constituted of egos or selves are could claim him along with Rumi and Bergson as monodologist. (Sharif, 1983, 1620)

To conclude, Iqbal dreamt of leading his people back to the original Islam, unstained by Hellenistic philosophy, and in this attempt he stands in the same line as the great theologian of eighteenth century. He is also close to them when he accuses the Sufis of indolence and considers their work dangerous for the community. He stresses for active participation in life. Without any doubt, modern Muslim world produced Iqbal, the most versatile genius. No other thinker of Indian Islam has become more widely known outside the sub-continent than Iqbal. But he is one of the reformers that emerged in the sub-continent during restless years between the two world wars. Iqbal expressed his ideas and feelings in Islamic framework and considerable part of his message has indirectly spoken to the Muslims for reawakening and revival. His ideas and writing was without any narrow minded and sectarian stuff. His ideology stresses for the dignity of life and its everlasting creativity and prosperity. He had recognized the creative need of life with love, which is a substance of intuition. Man can reach the high

heaven with the force of Love. According to Fazlur Rahman the *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, contained extensive reforms plans in English, a language not understood by majority of masses or the *Ulama*, and his powerful poetry meant for public which is free from reforms. He further says that Iqbal who determinedly called the Muslims to rediscover his place in the world and not to follow Western culture slavishly and to develop his spiritual and moral future for his own fountains.

Iqbal is perhaps the only personality in the recent history of Islam who is equally at home in modern history of Islam as well as in modern Western thought and eternal teaching of Islam. This fact, indeed, made him the only person qualified to take up the gigantic task of reconstructing the religious thought of Islam. He related Islamic thought to Western philosophy, and linked spiritual salvation to intellectual change and social development. Briefly, it may confidently assert that Iqbal was vitalist who believed in a dynamic, forward-looking approach towards life and life-problems. His goal was the renaissance of Islam in all its pristine glory and simplicity, by facing the challenge of modern science and philosophy, and thereby to achieve the salvation of the whole of humanity not only in this world but also in the life to come as well. To the attainment of this ideal he passed into service both his philosophical insight and poetic acumen. The fact that the main goal Iqbal pursued throughout his life was renaissance of Islam can be substantiated both from his verse and philosophical prose works. His intense desire for the revival of moral social and political ideals of Islam finds passionate expression in his philosophical poems.

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