

## LEAVES FROM A POET'S DIARY

By  
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Delhi, 16 February, 1739 A.D.

Terrible news has been received from Karnal. The Imperial army has been decimated by Nadir Quli Khan's Iranian horde. Amongst the thousands who have fallen in Nawab Samsam Ud Daulah, royal paymaster, who had been patron and protector since I came to Delhi. No *Quaseedah* I write in his praise could be justice to his greatness and magnanimity. Nawab Sahib was like a rain-cloud of generosity above my head, May Allah rest his noble soul in peace! Now I have no one to shield me from the barbs of envious pen-pushers nor anyone before whom I can spread the apron of my poverty. I have been left poor, weak, helpless and alone. It is in the nature of lightning strike; it has struck your nest O Meer!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Meer Taqi Meer (1723-1810) leading Urdu poet of his time was born in Agra, came to Delhi at the age of 17, immigrated to Lucknow in 1782 where he died in 1810. He witnessed the capture of Delhi by Nadir Shah in 1739 A.D. and despoilation of the city by the Afghans under Abdali, the Marathas, Jats, Rohillas and Sikhs.

## Notes

1. Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal, Farsi* (Lahore: Sh. Ghulam Ali, 1973), p. 120, *Rumuz-i-Bekhudai* (1918).
2. Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat-i-Iqbal, Urdu* (Lahore: Sh. Ghulam Ali, 1973), p. 23, *Bang-i-Dira* (1924), "Himalaya" (before 1905).
3. *Kulliyat, Farsi*, p. 732, *Javed Nama* (1932).
4. *Kulliyat, Urdu*, p. 392, *Bal-i-Jibril* (1935), "Masjid-i-Qartaba" (ca. 1932)
5. *Ibid.*, p. 362, *Ibid.*, *ghazal* no. 50, second set.
6. See this expression as early as *Payam-i-Mashriq* (1922) in *Kulliyat, Farsi*, pp. 204, 215, and 216. and *Zabur-i-Ajam* (1927?) in *ibid.*, pp. 86-88.

defensive and confuse him. Take for example the opening clause of the Pakistan Constitution(s) that talks about the 'sovereignty of God Almighty over the Universe. This clause, which kept the Pakistan Constituent Assembly tied up for six or seven years, represents a sheer confounding of the fundamentalists between the Qur'anic assertion that "to God belongs the kingdom of the heaven and the earth." and the idea of political sovereignty discussed in modern political theory. Such confusions have pervaded and bedeviled all public fields of Pakistan life – not the least being the fundamentalist contention that modern banking is unlawful in Islam because the Qur'an had banned an extremely cruel and exploitative system of usury called Riba. There can be no doubt that fundamentalism will be short-lived because being essentially a reaction, it can offer little positive, but its brief career probably will not end without doing great damage to Pakistan in several ways, unless, of course, the actual exercise of power on the part of its representatives (should they be able to wield power for a considerable time) should result in a drastic change in some of their attitudes.

over the past thirty or more years. A few years before the partitioning of India, a fundamentalist party had been founded in what is now Pakistan with its center at Lahore. This organized fundamentalism was the culmination of a strong trend of reaction against both the West and the Muslim Modernists who, since the mid-nineteenth century, had interpreted certain modern Western institutions (political democracy, women's rights, modern education) in Islamic terms in order to reform Islamic society. The fundamentalist reaction, which became ever stronger since the turn of this century along with political anti-Westernism, gained momentum as the goal of freedom from British colonialism drew nearer. In such situations all societies make bids for cultural reassertion against the intrusion of the dominating and domineering imperial culture and this development is not only natural but perfectly healthy. Such a phenomenon, since it reacts, is valuable as a protest against compromises if these go too far and puts its foot firmly down at certain points. The Pakistani Islamic fundamentalism (like most other Islamic fundamentalist phenomena), however, substituted its essentially reactionary role for the positive Islamic reconstruction program and was able to enlist the support of middle and particularly lower-middle urban classes. The most surprising thing is that while it itself was a defensive mechanism, it managed to put the Modernist on the

camp others who might be called ideologues, properly speaking. There was thus no middle term linking the vision of Iqbal with the immediate practicality of Jinnah, a middle term that could translate Islam effectively into policy goals and imperatives of public life in the newly-born "laboratory of Islam" as Liaquat Ali Khan described Pakistan. Hence the bewildering variety of "experiments" that have been tried in this "laboratory" during its brief but checkered history. It is undeniable, however, that Jinnah did adopt the doctrine of economic justice, at least in general terms, as propounded by Iqbal. The clearest proof of this is the speech delivered by him on the occasion of the inauguration of the State Bank of Pakistan (the speech was actually drafted by Zahid Husain, the first governor of the State Bank), in which he heavily attacked the landlords' class and accused them of the socio-economic ruination of the peasantry, the large bulk of the inhabitants of Pakistan. Jinnah died too soon for not only the materialization of this goal but also for the actual spelling out of that goal itself into concrete policies. The goal still remains obscure and unpredictable and, at present at least, under heavy clouds.

The main reason for this situation and for the inability of Pakistan to define her Islamic goals in concrete terms has been the terribly confused ideological situation

economic egalitarianism or a socializing ideal, expressed in very strong terms in his Urdu poems "Lenin Before God" and "God's Command to Angels" in *Bal-i-Jibril*. In his correspondence with Jinnah in the middle thirties, he criticized Jinnah for not paying enough heed to the economic problem of the average Muslim, and for the fact that the leadership of the Muslim League was thinking in aristocratic rather than democratic terms. He advocated the re-adoption of the principle of Zakat, provided it was suitably interpreted in the light of modern conditions.

In those years (around 1935-36), Jinnah was still pre-occupied with his fight for the rights of Muslims in a unitary India, a game which was purely political. He did not seriously believe in Pakistan as a separate entity until 1938. It is understandable, therefore, that his thoughts did not move from the immediate political issues to longrange economic ones. Even later his attitude seems to have been that his job as a lawyer-politician was to obtain Pakistan from the British, while the actual shape that Pakistan should take was the business of the people of Pakistan. A brilliant lawyer and astute politician, his sense of the immediately practical and the achievable set him quite apart from the visionary Iqbal. Nor did Jinnah have in his

was the task of a Muslim – his “man of faith” (*mard-i-mu'min*) or “perfect man” (*insane-i-kamil*), who could comprise the Muslim Community if only it could recover solidarity and its true being.

It was for the realization of this ideal that Iqbal dreamed of Muslim autonomy to be carried out in the Muslim majority areas of the Indian sub-continent. And it was for this reason that he explicitly rejected Indian territorialism as the basis for nationhood since nationhood, for him, was squarely based on ideology. Iqbal did not talk merely of “two nations” in India but of “nations”—apparently more than two—in his correspondence with Jinnah. Yet, since he did not explicitly speak of a multiplicity of sovereign states in India (perhaps because he did not think it realistic under the then existing conditions in the sub-continent), it is a moot point to ask whether and how India could become not only a multi-religious but a multinational state.

In the later years of Iqbal's life, this general Islamic orientation developed more specific content, at least in the economic field: a content which as an expression of Islamic egalitarianism and parallel to political democracy, had explicitly surfaced already in his *Payam-i-Mashriq* and all through his middle period (i.e., the twenties of this century).<sup>1</sup> This was

Let us see what is thrown up from the bottom  
of this ocean,

What new turn the blue canopy of the heavens  
takes!<sup>14</sup>

Compare the "cycle of time" metaphor in the previous quotation with that of the "new turn of the canopy of the heavens" which has nothing of the past about it. Indeed, the gaze of Iqbal was now so fixed on a new future that he was even prepared to abandon the "old Muslim world" to the past:

Men of vision will establish new settlements;

I am not looking [back] at Kufa and Baghdad!

Iqbal was convinced that Islam, which means the Qur'an and the performance of the Prophet Muhammad, was the cure for the ills of mankind, for Islam was the only genuine movement in history which ethically oriented the raw materials of history rather than compromised with them under the convenient cover of secularism. The very early generations of Islam helped implement this ideal further and, hence, when Iqbal pointed to certain events in past Islamic history, he did so not because he wanted to go back to the past but because they yielded some sort of inspiration. His values were vertically "up," not horizontally in the past. To bring these values into play in the arena of the spatio-temporal world



often pointed out in our writings that his is not the romanticism of the West, as it has often been dubbed. True, during his "nationalist" phase he did define himself romantically as, for example, in the last verse of his poem, "The Himalaya":

Race backward, O Cycle of Time!<sup>2</sup>

But after his adoption of Islam as the ideological basis for reconstruction of the world social order and his discovery of Islam's nature as ethical dynamism and its formulation in terms of a creative forward movement *a la* Western philosophy from Hegel, through Bergson to Whitehead, Iqbal not only never spoke again of cyclic time but denounced it as the surest enchainment of human progress. In the *Javed Nama* the Spirit of India, he complains about the Indian:

His gaze is fixed on the past,

He is burning his heart with an extinguished fire!

Indeed, in the "Mosque of Cordiva" itself, he looked to a new Islamic future and not to the past, when, after speaking of Western revolutions, the Protestant and the French, he said:

The same restlessness exists today in the  
spirit of the Muslim;

This is a divine secret which the tongue  
cannot utter.