

PHILOSOPHY IN PAKISTAN

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The idea of writing a paper, indicative of the nature and tenor of philosophical activity in Pakistan, emerged a few years ago during my correspondence with Dr. G. S. Shanker, a fellow of Oxford University. Dr. Shanker showed a keen desire to know about Pakistan and its philosophy. This, perhaps, is due to our own negligence and inability to introduce Pakistan to the international community that most scholars abroad are still not able to differentiate between Pakistani philosophy and Indian (Hindu) philosophy. The publication of *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* by Radha Krishnan (ed.) has added to the confusion, giving the impression that it represents the philosophical activity of the entire sub-continent. Thus, it was felt highly imperative to identify the nature of philosophy in Pakistan.

As it is indicated above, Pakistani philosophy is quite distinct from, and independent of, the Indian philosophy (with its six systems and Buddhism etc.). No doubt, the philosophical tradition in India dates back several centuries BC whereas the Muslims came to India as late as the seventh century of the Christian era and Pakistan came into being only a few decades ago. Then what does the title 'Pakistani Philosophy' signify? Does it imply that the present articles could not have been written out of Pakistan or prior to its inception? If so then it must necessarily imply that the inquires embodied in these pieces of writing are over-ridden with some considerations peculiar to Pakistan and, as such, they would lose their character as independent inquiries; withdraw the given preceding conditions and the whole structure will crumble to dust. Such an approach to the scope, motive and ultimate findings of these attempts is irrelevant if not absurd.

History of the sub-continent is replete with military incursions of different invaders; some of them eventually went back to their homeland while some settled down here permanently. The Muslims first set foot on the Indian soil during the period of the second caliph

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of Islam Umar Ibn Khattab; but this expedition had to be postponed for several reasons. Second time a more organized expedition was sent during the first Umayyad caliph Mu'awiyya in 664 AD which again remained unsuccessful. Finally, in 711 the famous Muslim general Muhammad bin Qasim was sent to India who succeeded in conquering Sind and its adjacent areas including Balochistan and Multan which were eventually incorporated in the Muslim Caliphate.¹ This area came to be ruled for some time by the *Qaramites* under the Fatimids of Egypt. The *Qaramites* belonged to the *Batini* movement which had produced such great philosophers as Farabi and Ibn Sina. Thus, the tradition of Muslim philosophy was first introduced in the Indian environment by the *Ismaili Du'at* (missionaries). Multan was the centre of *Qaramite* government where philosophy flourished to a great extent. But in 1010, Mahmud Ghaznavi invaded Multan to uproot the *Batini* movement which was considered to be an imminent threat to orthodox Islam. The educational centres and libraries of the Ismailis were burnt. The leading Ismailis were slain, some of them fled to Iran, Egypt and other countries and many of them went underground. The budding tradition of Muslim philosophy in the sub-continent was thoroughly hampered, in fact arrested, by dogmatic religion. Thus we hear no mention of philosophy during the early centuries of the Muslim rule in India. But this does not mean that philosophy had been eradicated once for all. Philosophical broodings continued privately and secretly and appeared in the mystical writings of the subsequent Muslim sages. Evidently mysticism was considered to be less harmful to religious orthodoxy.

The first ever recorded book of Islamic mysticism in India was written by Syed Ali Hujwairi. The tradition of philosophical thinking that had remained dormant and underground for a long time, escaping the notice of the historians, became now visible and its contours of development can definitely be traced in the subsequent periods.

One point regarding the determination of the lineage of philosophical thought should be made clear. Although the intellectual environment of the sub-continent was impregnated with various schools of Indian philosophy, the development of Muslim religio-philosophical thought despite certain conciliatory efforts, ran parallel to it without ever being influenced by it. Aziz Ahmad remarks:

“The history of medieval and modern India is to a very considerable extent a history of Hindu-Muslim religio-cultural tensions interspersed with movements or individual

efforts at understanding, harmony and even composite development. The divisive forces have proved much more dynamic than the cohesive ones As a religio-cultural force, Islam is in most respects, the very anti-thesis of Hinduism. Hinduism is a large aggregate of belief, developed in the course of many centuries, evolving from the sacrificial hymns of the Vedas to the philosophical speculation of the Upanishads, the discipline of Yoga, the metaphysical subtleties of Vedanta and passionate devotion of Bhakti. Islam, on the other hand, is bound by an austere central discipline, revolving round Qur'an, the *Vox Dei*, and Hadith, the *Vox Prophetarum*; and whatever speculation it has evolved or borrowed from external sources has been more or less adjusted to these two primary sources of religious authority. Psychologically Hinduism tends to be melancholy, sentimental and philosophical; Islam tends to be ardent and austere. Hindu genius flowers in the concrete and the iconographic; the Muslim mind is on the whole atomistic, abstract, geometrical and iconoclastic.³²

A number of factors, the warp and woof of which spread over a period of about ten centuries, have contributed to the shaping of Pakistani mind. Rather the very creation of Pakistan is a logical consequence of a long religio-philosophical movement.

Hence reference to Pakistan is relevant only in a spatio-temporal sense, a purely accidental and superfluous allusion – it may only provide a rationale for the prevailing circumstances in Pakistan.

In Pakistan there prevails a socio-religious consciousness. It is quite deep-rooted at the sentimental level of our psyche perhaps as a hereditary trait, perhaps as an acquired prejudice which serves to delineate and consolidate our national entity which is otherwise vulnerable to distracting pulls for a number of causes, centrifugal cataclysm or magnetic attraction exercised by global powers at work in different fields of international activity. It sounds quite plausible in a geo-political context but, I am afraid, it denies or falsifies the principle of historical continuity so manifest in the process of the advent of nations.

Leaving apart these questions, the very movement for the creation of Pakistan on the world map is replete with references to this historical background. The concept of a separate homeland for the Muslims of South Asia, enunciated by Allama Iqbal, in his Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting of the Muslim League in 1930, was mainly based on the idea that Islam was an all-permeating

principle determining the behaviour of a Muslim as an individual and that of the Muslim community at socio-political level. Then there is a saying attributed to the Quaid-i-Azam that Pakistan was established with the first Muslim stepping on the coastal lands of Sind. Viewing in this context the philosophic studies undertaken in Pakistan, may, perforce, have an inherent and predominantly relevant reference to philosophical systems which were developed by Muslim scholars in the past – and this despite the fact that sufficient source material is not readily available. The original works of the Muslim thinkers have perished during the adversities of time; and those which have survived have remained alien to the present day scholars. Non-availability coupled with our inability to avail ourselves of these works because of a linguistic impediment (Arabic and Persian are not so familiar to us these days as they used to be even at the beginning of this century), it makes it difficult to establish a well-connected relationship between thought structures of Muslim philosophers of the old and the present day intellectual achievements, in a correct evolutionary perspective. Still it is possible to trace out such influences and to identify areas of affinity.

It is generally recognized that the revival of the Greek tradition of philosophy is entirely due to the interest taken by the earlier Muslim scholars in the field of learning. They did not study Greek philosophers passively or with a prejudicial point of view to find faults with them. They simultaneously developed what they terms as *Hikmat-e-Yunaniyan* (wisdom of the Greeks) and *Hikmat-Imaniyan* (wisdom of the faithful). They contributed to the development of philosophy at a level which marked the originality, depth and clarity of the original authors. It is a pit that for several reasons their efforts could not be recognized or appreciated in a proper perspective. Under the influence of Greek sages the Muslim scholars in India also contributed fairly to this heritage, particularly during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. *Ma'qulat*, as they called them, were studied and taught at the *Madaris*. The Middle Eastern countries where the *Ma'qulat* originally developed, unfortunately remained in the grip of political turmoil during this period and thus it fell to the lot of Indian Muslim scholars to develop these systems to a venerable point of perfection. We may particularly name among them Mulla Abdul Hakeem Sialkoti, Mulla Mahmood Jonepuri, and Mulla Mohibullah Behari. Strangely enough, some other local scholars of their stature were better known outside India. A systematic and coherent account of their achievements has not been handed down to our age. Allama Iqbal lamented this state of affairs which led the European scholars to believe that there did not exist any Muslim philosophic tradition in

India. The Orientalists have been tracing the Muslim legacy in various fields in the Middle East steadily but not so in the case of India. This may be due to their preoccupation with, and interest in, Indian (Hindu) philosophy or a misconception that Muslim scholars of India were only the passive followers of philosophic systems which developed in the Middle East and to a greater degree in Muslim Spain.

It may not be quite relevant for the present study to delve into, or dilate upon, the achievements of Muslim scholars outside India except that they were the predecessors of the men of learning who lived in India. It may suffice to say that the philosophic studies developed in the Muslim countries under the Abbasids for the first time. Al-Kindi was the first one to receive the title of *Failsoof-al-Arab*. But, with the decline of central control over the Muslim states, there spread a wave of inconsistencies, upheavals and political instability leading to bloodshed. In these circumstances, the strictly Muslim systems of thought and ideology suffered confusion and paved the way for certain schools of thought which apparently leaned on philosophy to project and sustain the atheistic element in their movements. They had their periods of ups and downs coinciding with the rise and fall of their political patrons. Most of these movements developed an emblem of mystery about them which suited their political, treacherous designs and also served as a garb to protect them against the wrath of the steadfast rulers. The leading pioneers of these movements such as Zakriyya Razi, Ibn Sina, and the anonymous authors of *Rasail-e-Ikhwan-as-Safa* were well-versed in philosophic traditions, and their own contributions were no less formidable. This is another thing that they have been condemned as they led the Muslims astray so far as religious belief and practice are concerned.

Side by side with these thinkers there flourished a mystic tradition. The earlier mystics in Islam did not show much reverence for philosophy. But there does exist a close relation between the mystic experience and philosophic broodings, so to say. Both try to reach the Ultimate Reality, or inversely, try to bring down the 'Transcendental Real' to be within the reach of sensuous experience or permit sensuous descriptions. The mystics depend more on their direct experience of the 'Real' which they terms as 'encounter' (*wisal*). Here they part ways with the philosophers. The mystic, after the ultimate experience of encounter, is hardly ever able to describe it or sustain it. It was perhaps for this psychological factor that Allama Iqbal in his book *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia* observed that the best metaphysical thinking of the Iranians found

expression in isolated verses of *ghazal* (a form of poetry where each verse expresses a self-contained idea or experience).³ But there have been mystics of a very high order who were able to explain their experience, although in highly mysterious tones. Of them all Ibn Arabi combines in himself the best qualities of a philosopher, a poet and a mystic. His religio-mystical philosophy has had powerful and far-reaching influence on the development of philosophical thought in the sub-continent.

With this background and local Bhakti movement and *Din-e-Elahi* of Akbar, we come to the Moghul period of Muslim India. Towards the end of this period Shah Wali Allah appeared on the scene in whom we find a culminating point of all our wholesome and purely rational tradition. At the end of this period, with the advent of British rule, we find the Muslims of India making hectic efforts to preserve their illustrious heritage of religion, culture, civilization and learning in various fields. This brings us to the door-steps of Pakistan.

But before proceeding further, I ought to pause here for a while. I have left out a congenial lineage of thinkers who expressed themselves, perhaps, in a more sound and a more plausible strain. In them seems to have been combined the wholesome traditions of *Shari'at*, *Tariqat* and *Hikmat*. They had al-Ghazali at the source-head, a philosopher who turned out to be a staunch antagonist of, and tried to defeat, philosophy with the same method as it adopted for its fortitude. Rumi displayed the same characteristics and finally it came down to Shah Wali Allah who upheld their tradition in India. It is through his encyclopaedic writings that the whole heritage of early Muslim theology, mysticism and philosophy was disseminated in Indian intellectual life.

The Pakistan movement did not take this name till 1932 or still later, but the under-current of thought, which crystallized in a formula enunciated by Iqbal in 1930 and then adopted as a political demand by the Muslim League in 1940, was discernible, right from the movement when for the first time somebody thought of a plan of action for the downtrodden Muslims of India to bring them back into the body politic of this region. Strangely, this was not a straightforward plunge into active politics. It started with a humble rehabilitating effort to pull the Muslims out of despondency, by educating them in a way that they may be well-equipped to play the role which they were destined to play in the future years. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was the man to give the lead. One main problem he faced was posed by the Christian missionaries. This, on the one hand,

hardened the Muslims in their faith (with of course some freakish breakthroughs) but, on the other hand, tended to broaden and deepen the cleavage between Christian rulers and their Muslim subjects. Claiming secularism, the British regime never shook off its complex against the Muslims and this worked favourably and to the advantage of the Hindus who were full of hatred and revenge for Muslims and tried all possible means to win the favour of the British rulers at the cost of the Muslims.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan was quick enough to grasp the implications of the situation and thought that education was the only panacea to cure the Muslim crowds of their suicidal rigidity and to enable them to join the main stream of the socio-political activities. To dispel the Christian prejudices against the Muslims, he strived hard to explain away the theological differences between the Muslims and the Christians by a handy rational approach for which he coined the term 'Nature'. This was no doubt a crude attempt both at the religious as well as the rational level, far less to claim for itself the title of theology or philosophy. Dr. Abdul Khaliq observes:

"In spite of his [Sir Syed's] declared objective to reveal the 'original bright face of Islam', Sir Syed Ahmad Khan imperceptibly advocates the relative primacy of scientific naturalism."⁴

(With due reverence to Dr. Abdul Khaliq, I may add that Sir Syed had no idea as to what scientific naturalism is). However, the crude rationalism he preached finally matured into the ideal of a Muslim university to introduce the Muslim youth to the modern Western advancements in fields of learning.

There was, however, an early setback. Shibli No'mani who started as a disciple of Sir Syed, decided to part company with him and established *Nadwatul Ulama* which discarded the scientific naturalism of Sir Syed. Although Shibli himself wrote a book (in two volumes) on *Ilm-al-Kalam*, his institution and other Islamic *Madaris*, on the whole, predominantly condemned rationalism, an ill omen for philosophy. For some steadfast and austere devotees of Islam too much emphasis on reasoning and on attempts to harmonise dogma with the principles of science and philosophy amounted to interfering with the fundamental belief system of Islam. This tradition of rationalism suffered immensely at the hands of Qasim Nanotavi, Abul Kalam Azad, Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Syed Sulaiman Nadvi and Muhammad Ali Jauhar. This also marked a definite cleavage between religio-philosophical writings, on the one hand, and orthodox preachings, on the other. Liberal interpretation of dogma and

philosophising flourished at Aligarh, whereas strict adherence to dogma and austerity and purity of faith became the hall-mark of such institutions as Dar-ul-Uloom Deoband, Nadvat-ul-Ulama and Jamia Millia, Delhi. In fact these two attitudes contributed to the formation of two almost parallel stances of the religious mind in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent which have come to stay.

And now we come to Iqbal who stood for the rational interpretation of dogma. There has been some controversy over the years following his demise as to whether Iqbal was a philosopher or not. But long enough before that he himself made the point clear.

“Most of my life has been spent in the study of European philosophy and that viewpoint has become my second nature. Consciously or unconsciously I study the realities and truths of Islam from the same point of view. I have experienced this many a time that while talking in Urdu I cannot express all that I want to say in that language.”⁵

Dwelling on this theme, Dr. Taseer went on to make the point that

“Iqbal was great enough to be a bridge between the East and the West.”⁶

“It is a mark of his greatness that he is in line with the great thinkers of the world and, having absorbed the best thought of the day, has kept his individuality, and contributed something to the world thought.”⁷

“And it is as an activist – ‘practical philosopher’, as Russell terms it – that Iqbal should be judged. As such his main contribution to thought is his development of the conception of Ego. Before this Ego was a merely philosophical concept. Iqbal pregnated it with practical content.”⁸

That may suffice although much water was flown down the stream since Dr. Taseer made these observations. They help us to construct an image of Iqbal without falling prey to many ‘ifs’, and ‘buts’.

The greatest contribution of Iqbal to his posterity is that he has created an atmosphere of confidence which has helped the present generation to outgrow the apologetic tone that had almost become a predicament. Now we can say, whatever we have to, without looking for authority from the occidental sources.

And it is here that we can pick up the thread to approach and assess the value of the collection of writings embodied in the present volume, viz. an attempt to bridge the chasm between the old and the new; between the East and the West; between dogmatic assertions and analytical ponderings; the present day scientific theories regarding the nature of the matter and the metaphysical thought that endeavours to connect them into a coherent whole – thereby leading to a realization of the all-embracing unitary or unifying (whatever one prefers to call it) principle underlying all existence.

At the time of the creation of Pakistan, philosophy at post-graduate level was taught only at Government College, Lahore. But very soon postgraduate departments were established in different universities of the country. In 1954, Pakistan Philosophical Congress was formed. Professor M. M. Sharif was its first president and Khalifa Abdul Hakim, Dr. C. A. Qadir, Qazi M. Aslam were its founder members among others. Since 1954, Pakistan Philosophical Congress has been holding its annual sessions regularly at various universities of the country. Its proceedings and a quarterly *The Pakistan Philosophical Journal* are also being published. Some important symposia are also published in separate volumes. The publication of several books including an excellent English translation of al-Ghazali's *Tahafut-al-Falasifa*,⁹ also goes to its credit. The monumental work *A History of Muslim Philosophy*,¹⁰ compiled and edited by M. M. Sharif, is a major landmark in the intellectual history of Pakistan.

In Pakistan various types and brands of Western philosophy are not alien. Yet these philosophical trends have failed to catch roots in this soil. These are studied and accepted only in an indigenous framework, i.e. Pakistani mind accepts only those elements of Western philosophy which accord with its temper. It is, however, premature to form a judgement on the nature of philosophy in Pakistan. It is only when the readers have carefully perused and critically appraised these articles that something definite could be said about it.

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