

Rafique Muhammad

IQBAL ON THE FINALITY OF PROPHETHOOD

Muslims claim that they belong to the final religion. They say so because they believe that there would be no prophet after Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last Prophet. This is a big claim, but, I am afraid, they do not fully appreciate the requirements of the finality of religion. What is important is not simply that there will be no religion after this or that religion; but rather to know the real reason for which the prophetic revelations have now been stopped by God. Muslims have been subscribing to the idea without knowing its full significance. Let us try to know how Iqbal justifies this claim.

The first and foremost point to note in this respect is that there must be some solid and cogent reasons for terminating the institution of prophethood. Termination of a thing requires that the purpose of creating or introducing that thing is fulfilled. What is terminated here is the prophetic revelation.

Why was prophetic revelation introduced ? The consensus of opinion is that this was to guide humanity in its childhood. See the words of Iqbal:

Now during the minority of mankind psychic energy develops what I call prophetic consciousness a mode of economising individual thought and choice by providing ready made judgments, choices, and ways of action. ¹

Prophetic consciousness, then, was a phenomenon of the minority of mankind. And since man is now considered to have come of age, the same is no longer needed. This coming of age is explained by Iqbal as the birth of reason and critical faculty.

With the birth of reason and critical faculty, however, life, in its own interest, inhibits the formation and growth of non-rational modes of consciousness through which psychic energy flowed at an earlier stage of human evolution. 2

In Iqbal's view, man was primarily governed by passion and instinct. But to be the master of his environment man should possess inductive reasoning. He ascribes the inductive intellect to the birth of Islam. It means that Islam introduces the idea of deciding a problem by keeping in view the actual background of the particular problem; meaning thereby that no precedents can be fully helpful in deciding the newly arising problems. And this is, no doubt, a great break-through in the advancement of human attitude. To introduce the inductive intellect means that given law, strictly speaking, cannot help in solving the problems arising out of the new requirements. This is why Iqbal is so keen to construct a new jurisprudence for the Muslims of the modern age. His plea is quite cogent when he says that Abu Hanifa, a great jurisprudent of one of the Sunni schools of thought, did not make any use of the traditions of the Prophet only because he understood the true character of the newly arising problems in that they could not be solved through applying the decisions of the period of the Prophet, although the two periods were not so far away from each other. In the words of Iqbal:

It was perhaps in view of this that Abu Hanifa, who had a keen insight into the universal character of Islam, made practically no use of these traditions.

The fact that he introduced the principle of ISTIHSAN, i.e. juristic preference, which necessitates a careful study of actual conditions in legal thinking, throws further light on the motives which determined his attitude towards this source of Muhammadan law. It is said that Abu Hanifa made no use of traditions because there were no regular collections in his day. In the first place it is not true to say that there were no collections in his day, as the collections of Abd al Malik and Zuhri were made no less than thirty years before the death of Abu Hanifah. But even if we suppose that these collections never reached him, or that they did not contain traditions of a legal import, Abu Hanifah, like Malik and Ahmad Ibn Hanbal after him, could have easily made his own collection if he had deemed such a thing necessary. On the whole, then, the attitude of Abu Hanifah towards the traditions of a purely legal import is to my mind perfectly sound; and if modern Liberalism considers it safer not to make any indiscriminate use of them as a source of law, it will be only following one of the greatest exponents of Muhammadan Law in Sunni Islam. ³

This is the true implication of introducing the inductive intellect in the matters of religion. Iqbal has tried to bring home the idea that Islam is the final religion with the implications that the foregoing solutions of the problems of life are not going to help in the changed circumstances. Only this makes Islam a religion able to claim finality. I may quote some lines from his own writings to make the point clear. These lines are in sequel to those quoted above:

Man is primarily governed by passion and instinct. Inductive reason, which alone makes man master of his environment, is an achievement; and when once born it must be modes of knowledge. There is no doubt that the ancient world produced some great systems of philosophy at a time when man was comparatively primitive and governed

more or less by suggestion. But we must not forget that this system building in the ancient world was the work of abstract thought which cannot go beyond the systematization of vague religious beliefs and traditions, and gives us no hold on concrete situations of life⁴

The following points can be necessarily derived from these lines:

a: To believe in the last religion requires, in Iqbal's view, to believe that the systematization of religious beliefs was a character of the minority of man. With the birth of inductive intellect, such systematization is inhibited. This amounts to saying that dogma, non-rational mode of consciousness, is replaced by ideas created by reason, the critical faculty.

b: 'Inductive intellect', once born, must be reinforced by inhibiting the growth of other modes of knowledge.' This means that modes of knowledge other than induction, which include dogmatic beliefs, are inhibited naturally. In other words, the age of dogmatic beliefs is over.

c: To be governed by suggestion was another characteristic of the minority of man. Now man should not be governed by suggestion. He should be governed by his own rational efforts and by the ideas thus created.

d: To have the hold on the concrete situations of life is a boon bestowed by the rational mode of consciousness. Abstract systematization of vague religious beliefs and tradition gives no hold on the concrete situation of life. Dogma should always be supplemented with the ever-growing consciousness, and the element of creativity and novelty thus emerging should be made the discipline of life. It is only this

healthy merger of the dogma with consciousness which can guarantee a hold on the concrete situations of life.

In this connection I may quote more from Iqbal so that the implication of believing in the last religion may be appreciated properly.

Looking at the matter from this point of view, then, the Prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction.⁵

We gather the following necessarily emerging points form it:

- a: To be the last prophet means to stand between the ancient and the modern. Only ancient, i.e. the revelatory tradition, does not do because the Prophet is the last messenger of God. Modern modes of consciousness are needed to supplement the revelatory aspect of the last prophet.
- b: Life should discover in the personality of the last Prophet sources of knowledge other than the conventional religious revelation.

Now, what can these sources of knowledge be other than revelation? They should be what can supplement the guidance as provided strictly by revelation. In Iqbal's view they are the man's own resources. And what does man have his own as resources of knowledge? They are, according to Iqbal, man's inner experience and his outer experience. Ultimately, both are human. In his inner experience come the mystic experiences which are not above criticism, as all personal authority on the basis of these experiences has

come to an end. The outer experience consists of the study of Nature and History. The guidance provided by these two sources will now supplement the guidance provided previously by revelation only. And this, in Iqbal's view, is the true connotation of the finality of prophethood; meaning there by that now prophethood, as such, has completed its role and the time of the abolition of this institution has visited the birth of the last Prophet. In Iqbal's own words:

The birth of Islam, as I hope to be able presently to prove to your satisfaction, is the birth of inductive intellect. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings; that, in order to achieve full self consciousness, man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Quran, and the emphasis it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality.⁶

We can derive the following necessary points from it:

a: Islam is the name of the birth of inductive intellect.

b: Inductive intellect, as defined by Iqbal himself, stands here for the wisdom which necessitates the solution of the newly arising problems by keeping in view the special circumstances responsible for the origin of those problems. That is, no problem can be solved in the light of the foregoing happening of the same kind, as the particularity of each newly arising problem is its own, and it is never a repetition of any happening of the past.

c: This view necessitates the idea that the old *Shariat* literally was not for the future, it was only for the period it was given in. New circumstances demand a new set of solutions. The law was not strictly a part of the universal *Deen*.

d: The finality of prophethood does not mean that the law given by him will be for all the coming generations. It means only that the method of induction introduced by him will continue for the coming generations enabling mankind to find out the solutions of their problems in view of their own circumstances.

e: Prophecy as an institution of keeping life in strings is abolished. This abolition is the need discovered by the perfection of prophethood. This is done in the interest of humanity itself. Without it humanity could not achieve full self-consciousness. To achieve full self-consciousness, man must be thrown back on his own resources.

f: The new sources of knowledge, substituting the religious revelation are Reason, Experience, Nature, and History. To accept them as such is to believe in the finality of prophethood. The ones who do not accept them as such do not, in fact, believe in the termination of prophethood. They are, so to say, believing in the continuity of the religious revelation, though, in fact, it is terminated because man has out grown his minority period. And this period of outgrowing is extended to the whole future.

Iqbal builds his thesis of supplementing the prophetic revelation with man's inner and outer experiences on the plea that mystic and prophetic experiences are qualitatively the same. The difference between the two periods, that of prophecy and mysticism, is only that in the period of prophecy life was kept in the leading

strings, which phenomenon has now passed. Now the inner experience of man will not keep life in leading strings, it will rather be made subject to criticism so as to divest it of the personal authority claiming a supernatural origin. However, by retaining mystic experience as a valid source of knowledge, Iqbal has maintained that ultimate fate of life is not a complete displacement of emotion by reason. This helps Iqbal plead the case of possibility of religion in the future. Had mystic experience been denounced by him as spurious, the finality of prophetic revelation would have amounted to a complete replacement of revelation by reason. But then, Iqbal retains mystic experience and subjects it to criticism, so as to ensure the complete hold of human role on the modes of life in the future. Let us read it in his own lines:

The idea, however, does not mean that mystic experience, which qualitatively does not differ from the experience of the prophet, has now ceased to exist as a vital fact. Indeed the Quran regards both *anfus* (self) and *afaq* (world) as sources of knowledge. God reveals His signs in inner as well as outer experience, and it is the duty of man to judge the knowledge-yielding capacity of all aspects of experience. The idea of finality, therefore, should not be taken to suggest that the ultimate fate of life is complete displacement of emotion by reason. Such a thing is neither possible nor desirable. The intellectual value of the idea is that it tends to create an independent critical attitude towards mystic experience by generating the belief that all personal authority, claiming a supernatural origin, has come to an end in the history of man. This kind of belief is a psychological force which inhibits the growth of such authority. The function of the idea is to open up fresh vistas of knowledge in the domain of man's inner experience.⁷

The following necessary points emerge from it:

a: Mystic experience does not qualitatively differ from the experience of the prophet. Or, at least, some mystic experiences do not qualitatively differ from the experience of the prophet.

b: Mystic experience exists as a vital fact. But it is human through and through. This is why it is subject to critical scrutiny through reason and consciousness.

c: It is man who is to judge the knowledge-yielding capacity of all aspects of experience. This is a very important aspect of the finality of prophethood signifying that man is thrown back on his own resources now.

d: Finality of prophethood signifies that all personal authority, claiming supernatural origin, has come to an end in the history of man.

Earlier cultures had, in Iqbal's view, clothed the outer with Divine character. Islam divests it of that Divinity. And what is the effect of this divesting? The effect is that now the whole phenomenon is to be taken as natural and human, which it was not believed to be before. Now to bring every thing under discussion becomes justified. Man comes of age in true sense of the phrase. He is no longer a minor to be guided by something other than his own resources. And this is the true significance of believing in the last revelation and the finality of prophet according to Iqbal.

Nature and History, in view of Iqbal, are two other sources of knowledge for those who believe that prophetic revelation ceases to be available now. They are the outer sources of knowledge. The spirit of Islam is seen at its best in tapping these two sources of knowledge. The Quran sees the signs of Ultimate Reality in the whole of Nature as revealed to the sense

perception of man. It is in tapping these two sources of knowledge that the modern consciousness could be possible. Let me quote the exact words of Iqbal to this effect:

But inner experience is only one source of human knowledge. According to the Quran there are two other sources of Knowledge — Nature and History; and it is in tapping these sources of knowledge that the spirit of Islam is seen at its best. The Quran sees signs of the Ultimate Reality in the 'sun', the 'moon', 'the lengthening out of shadows', 'the alternation of day and night', 'the variety of human colour and tongues', 'the alternation of the days of success and reverse among peoples' — in fact in the whole of Nature as revealed to the sense perception of man. And the Muslim's duty is to reflect on these things and not to pass by them 'as if he is deaf and blind', for he 'who does not see these signs in this life will remain blind to the realities of the life to come.'⁸

Iqbal has enlightened us with his concept of finality of the prophethood, as he enumerated certain inner and outer sources of knowledge to supplement the guidance which was earlier provided by the prophetic revelations. An important point to note is that Iqbal makes all these deliberations in his lecture entitled 'The Spirit of Muslim Culture'. This clearly show that in his view the idea of finality of prophethood has to do much with the concept of Muslim Culture. The real spirit of Muslim culture cannot be appreciated, in his view, without keeping in mind the points highlighted by him herein. Now it is up to us, the Muslims of the modern world, to see whether we can shape our culture on the lines of inductive intellect, or we shall retain the same dogmatism in religion which has resulted in devastating sectarianism.

REFERENCES:

1. Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 100
2. *Ibid.* p. 100
3. *Ibid.* p. 137
4. *Ibid.* p. 100
5. *Ibid.* p. 100
6. *Ibid.* p. 101
7. *Ibid.* p. 101
8. *Ibid.* p. 102

The references have been taken from the edition of *The Reconstruction* edited by M. Saeed Sheikh, Printed by the Institute of Islamic Culture, Club Road, Lahore, 1986.

