

The Socio-Political Context of Iqbal's "Talu-e-Islam"

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Abstract

The twentieth century dawned with no good omen for the Muslim World. Its first two decades were particularly harmful for a declining Ottoman Muslim Caliphate. The events unfolding shortly after the First World War washed away the entire structure of that Islamic Caliphate. In its aftermath, Caliphate Movement and Non-Cooperation Movement took the driving seat of protest and violence in India against the British to whom these movements' leaders had held responsible for disintegration of the Muslim Caliphate. The decline of the Ottomans paved the way for the emergence of a number of Muslim countries and liberation movements from the imperialist control. Allama Iqbal felt the pain and joy of these events. For him, if, on one hand, the decline of Caliphate had harmed the Muslim unity, it had given a new dimension to the rise of Islam in the world, on the other. His long poem 'Talu-e-Islam' is a reflection of that impact which Iqbal had received as result of these events and the optimism he expressed in this poem concerning the future of the Muslim World.

Keywords: Iqbal, Caliphate, Talu-e-Islam

A complete awareness of the product of a creator demands a careful study of his time and the socio-political and economic conditions within which his creation has been shaped out. This helps understanding the psychological state of mind which leads to a masterpiece creation on the one hand, and the events and elements which have impacted his writing, on the other. In this spotlight, if the background of Allama Iqbal's famous long poem 'Talu-e-Islam' is searched out, a good number of historical and political references are available which have influenced the soul of this poem. According to Dr. Ghulam Hussain Zulfiqar, Iqbal had presented this poem on 31st March 1923 in the 38th annual meeting of the Anjuman Himayat-e-Islam.¹

This was the time when liberation movements had been rising in the entire Muslim World. The Non-Cooperation Movement was at its peak in which majority of prisoners were Muslims. The Muslims of the

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Subcontinent had been rendering massive sacrifices for their identity and liberty and for the protection of the institution of the Islamic Khilafah.

In Afghanistan, King Aman Ullah Khan had established his state on firm footings and grossly the political environment had been cleaned of British influence in Afghanistan's internal and external affairs. Iran had also been passing through a revolutionary phase and the life in Iran was taking a new turn under the dynamic and bold leadership of Raza Khan Pehlvi. In Egypt, Saad Zaghloul Pasha was spearheading the liberation movement and his efforts helped Egyptians to break the shackles of slavery in the later period. The Spanish armies were on retreat in Morocco because of freedom fighter Abdul Kareem's military strategy. At the same time, the dishonoring of promises by the British in 1920 sparked off a chain reaction of liberation movements, which ultimately compelled British government to give independence to Iraq on 3rd October 1932 in a bid to protect its long range of interests in this Muslim land.

On the other hand the Turks in their counter attack attained great success against the Greeks. "After the war of Saqaria in 1921, they even occupied Samarna in September 1922. The Indian Muslims celebrated this victory to the extent of burning oil lamps in mosques. And the Turks got the eastern Greece and Adarna back."²

In this way, Mustafa Kamal had defeated the Greeks despite poor resources thus broke the backbone of European conspiracies. In short, pleasant and hopeful waves started blowing at every place in the Muslim World and it was felt that there was a Muslim reawakening for liberty.

*Urooq-e-murda-e-mashriq may khoon-e-zindagi dawra
Samajh sakthy nahi is raaz ko Seena wa Farabi
Musalman ko musalman kardiya toofan-e-maghrif nay
Talatun haa-e-darya he say hay gawhar ki sairabi*

Iqbal was well aware of these revolutionary feelings of the Muslim World while creating this poem. According to Ghulam Rasool Mehir, "This poem is replete with the sentiments of resurgence of Islam"³ Whereas, Dr. Saleem Akhter has this to say, "When because of the willingness of Allah victory became our fate then he welcomed it by saying a poem like 'Tulu-e-Islam.'⁴

If the prevailing political situation of the Indo-Pak Subcontinent is taken into consideration, two very powerful movements i.e. Caliphateist and Non-Cooperation movements emerge as the most popular Muslim movements of that era. The Balkanization process of the Ottoman Turkish Kilafat by imperial powers of that period like Great

Britain as a result of Turkey's defeat in the First World War along with its ally Germany had compelled the Muslims of the Subcontinent to launch the Caliphate Movement around 1919-22. The Hindu leaders of Congress like Mahatama Gandhi fully supported this movement and even they went on non-cooperation with the British in India and decided not to accept any constitutional reform package from the British like reforms of 1919. This Tehrik-e-Caliphate later turned into complete boycott of the British products and it excommunicated a large number of Muslim and Hindu leaders from the British. Eminent Muslim leader Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar and Maulana Shaukat Ali were on forefront of the Caliphate Movement and when this movement enjoined Non-Cooperation Movement, it garnered the support of prominent Hindu leaders of that time.

These movements could not achieve their desirable goals as they spotlighted the ongoing enmity of the Hindus against the Muslims. But the movements provided sound foundations for the Indo-Pak Freedom Movement. A look at the political landscape of Afghanistan revolves around Aman Ullah Khan who assumed power in March 1919. He released the prisoners who were put behind the bars on account of their anti-Anglicanism by his father. He won the hearts and minds of the people for initiating different relief packages. In March 1919 Aman Ullah Khan wrote to the Vice Roy of India for declaring him as the King of Afghanistan. But his demand was overlooked by the English due to their enmity against him. When Aman Ullah Khan discovered the true designs of the English, he turned to Lenin (Russia) for the same who not only acknowledged him as the King but also assured him of all possible help.

After a few days the tragic incident of "*Jalyanwala Bagh*" happened. The Indian Muslims voiced their anger against this incident and constituted a Jarga that met Aman Ullah Khan in Kabul and informed him about the cruelties of the English. Aman Ullah Khan delivered a very passionate speech to the prominent members of his court. It proved instrumental in winning support for the Indian Muslims. The speech also provoked the local clerics who called for Jihad against the English during Friday prayers. The sensitivity of the situation led to the deployment of Afghan forces along the border and the subsequent on and off skirmishes between the Afghans and the British. The English occupied "Dakka" on 14 May 1919 but access to Jalal Abad was denied to the English due to the heavy loss inflicted by the Afghans. Meanwhile the Afghan forces under the command of Nadar Khan attacked the British India and occupied "Tall" fort. This made the English anxious about the safety of their own territory and they realized the invincible

nature of the Afghans. In addition to it, they also called for armistice. According to Abdul Hai, "The Afghans did not receive any help from Russian or they asked for any in this regard."⁵

Eventually on 8 August 1919 a peace truce was signed according to which the British government recognized the freedom of Afghanistan. Shah Aman Ullah Khan established diplomatic relation with the entire world through his ambassadors and his state started flourishing and progressing in every possible sense of the word. In nutshell, the whole political atmosphere of Afghanistan was purged of the British influence and the people of Afghanistan took a sigh of relief after passing through hard time and they were able to show the signs of progress. A perceptive mind like Iqbal could not ignore such happenings and he took the victory of Afghans as a disguised version of the elevation of Islam.

In 1918, Russia, the neighboring country of Iran, established a communist regime which created political unrest along the bordering areas of Iran. In 1919, the quarrelsome tribes of Iran revolted and to quell this revolt, Qazaq Brigade was launched. The Brigade fought undauntedly against the tribes. Raza Khan belonged to an average family and who later was acclaimed as Raza Shah Pehlavi earned great fame because of his military and strategic skills in this war against the tribesmen. Most of the officers in the Brigade were Russians and when the idea of replacing Russians with Iranians was floated, Raza Khan was assigned this task who performed it with great competence and diligence. Raza Khan also played a pivotal role in re-organizing the Brigade and it was primarily because of this that he was holding the military command. He through a military coup deposed the prime minister.

During 1920-21 the worsening situation of the country created unrest among the youth who looked at the Brigade as the saviour of the country. Then out of the blue, a great patriot, revolutionary and a literary man who enjoyed absolute immunity to both English and Russian political system appeared. This was Syed Ziauddin Taba Tabai who was neither in league with the emperor Ahmed Shah Qachar nor with the barons of the country. He wanted to undo the lame duck parliament and to establish an efficacious government that would root out foreign influences. He met with one of the Iranian officers with this purpose but the meeting proved a failure. Next he turned to Qazzaq Brigade as he knew that the Brigade is now free from Russian influences. Raza Khan himself was upset due to the instability in the country. Taba Tabai and Raza Khan developed consensus and decided to take the reins of the country in their hands. Accordingly on 15 February 1921 Qazzaq Brigade with a token strength of 2500 under the command of Raza Khan

entered Tehran without forcing any resistance from the police. In fact, a major part of the police sided with the Qazzaq Brigade.

It is to be mentioned that Raza Khan had declared allegiance to the Emperor Ahmad Shah Qachar despite being the leader of the revolution. Therefore Ahmad Shah did not think it reasonable to put up resistance. Next day Ahmad Shah declared Ziauddin as the prime minister and appointed Raza Khan as the Chief of the Iranian army.

Taba Tabai followed a very rigid policy regarding the landlords so he could not maintain this post for very long and rendered his resignation. Qawam-us-Sultanat succeeded him as the prime minister. According to Sarwat Sawlat:

*"Prime Minister Qawam-us-Sultanat was in favor of Agreement with the English but Raza Khan was against it. Hence the Prime Minister plotted to remove Raza Khan from the way, Raza Khan discovered it on time and arrested the prime minister along with other conspirators."*⁶

Raza Khan was sworn as Prime Minister on 31 October 1923 and after three years ascended the throne as "Pehlavi" Raza Khan Pehlavi reformed the different institutions of the country.

As Iran was passing through this revolutionary Phase, a far sighted and visionary person like Iqbal was observing it with keen interest and he interpreted it as a blessing in disguise for the Ummah Islamia.

*Dleel-e-subh-e-roshan hay sitaro ki tunak tabi
Ofaq say aftar obhra gaya dawr-e-garan khwabi*

During these days, Egypt too was experiencing such movement which was led by Zaghlol Pasha. Though the movement could not prove a great success, but it laid the foundation for the future independence of Egypt.

Morocco too was no exception. Among the numerous movements for freedom, one led by Amir Abdul Kareem started in 1920 mentions a special merit. Morocco suffered the European bondage till 1956 and it was primarily due to Amir Abdul Karim's movement that it witnessed the dawn of freedom.

After the First World War, the British occupied Iraq. The worsening situation compressed the English to appoint Faisal (son of Sharif Hussain) as ruler of Iraq. The ongoing freedom movements finally bore fruits in 1932.

The period of First World War was conspicuous for its instability and panic. These events are always at the backdrop of Iqbal's poetry.

"Talu-e-Islam" revolves around the Turkish scenario in particular and other Islamic countries in general. First World War put an end to Caliphate and generated anti-Arab sentiments among the Turks. Foreign forces got hold of Istanbul at the first place and the caliph was forced to sign "Seures Treaty". In the light of this treaty, Usmani government not only lost its hold over the territories but Turkey was also broken into fragments.

The Turks were passing through their critical time. Along with the state, they were losing their existential and cultural identity. But the light at the end of the tunnel was that even though the Usmani Army had lost the battle but the Turks had not lost their will and their hope for victory. The whole nation rejected the "Seures Treaty" and the Turkish parliament demanded the territorial safeguard.

Mustafa Kamal was a general in the Turkish army. He fought on different fronts and baffled the people by defeating the allied forces at Durdanyal. The government sent him to tackle the freedom fighters at Anatolia but once there he parted ways with the government and organized the freedom movement. During this time, Asmat Pasha and Kazim Pasha were the intimate friends of Mustafa Kamal. First military action against the attackers was taken by Kazim Pasha and consequently expelled the attackers from North Eastern Turkey. As a result of this expulsion, France and Italy called back their forces from Turkey. Only the Greeks were left on the field. According to Sarwat Sawlat:

"Mustafa Kamal turned towards the Greeks. He first defeated them in Saqaria in September 1921 and later in Demlopinar in August 1922. Finally in September 1922, he expelled them from Azmir (Samarna)".⁷

The allied forces left Istanbul after witnessing the triumph of the nationalists. In July 1923, a deal was struck between Turkey and the allied forces. According to this deal, the allied forces accepted the freedom of Turkey in accordance with the will and wishes of the people of Turkey. Hence the five year war culminated in the freedom of Turkey and the Republic of Turkey appeared on the map of the world.

Iqbal was deeply aggrieved over the fall of Caliphate-e-Usmania but at the same time he had some satisfaction that the Turkish Muslims had defeated their enemies at different fronts and maintained their most precious asset that was their national liberty and as an independent nation they would now be able to march on the road of prosperity and wellbeing. He was sure that the Turks would emerge as a lightening star of the Muslim World in future:

Agar Usmanioun par koh-e-Gham toota to kia gham hay

Ke khoon-e-sad hazaar anjum se hoti hay sahar paida

The events unfolding in the aftermath of the First World War hit hard the Muslims across the globe particularly the Muslims of the Subcontinent remained restless because of these painful events. As what Raees Ahmad Jafferi had described that "These were the situations when Muhammad Ali Jauhar had once deliberated/contemplated even to commit suicide."⁸

A large number of Muslims had migrated from India to Afghanistan and other Muslim majority areas of the Subcontinent. Many of the Muslims went into self imposed oblivion. But Iqbal was altogether different from the others in these aggrieved situations. His eyes were seeing light in this darkness and he was not ready at any cost to be pessimist about the future of the Muslims. His letters are evident of his optimism about the future of the Muslims and one can easily understand his eagerness for the uplifting of the Muslim Millat. He was not ready even for a moment to entertain the idea that Muslims could be wiped out from the face of the earth and, God forbid, Islam could be abolished as a living and working religion. Raees Ahmad Jafferi has rightly observed that:

*"In these difficult times he (Iqbal) wrote an immortal piece of poem 'Tulu-e-Islam' which according to its impression and impact and way of expression is an answer in itself."*⁹

Notes & References

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- ⁷ Ibid., p. 262
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- ⁹ Ibid.