

Iqbal & Ijtihad: The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam

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Abstract

Allama Iqbal was a person with ijthadi thought. He presented Ijthadi thought in a new way in the subcontinent. Allama Iqbal explained the meaning of ijthad in different ways, sometimes he said that ijthad is the name of principle of movement, somewhere he said that ijthad refers to independent opinion and independent decision. Similarly, according to Allama, ijthad was formulated to complete legislation. Allama Iqbal was not at all convinced that the door of ijthad was closed, but according to Allama, by correcting the thoughts of ijthad, Muslims can regain their lost position, Rather be critical. According to Allama, there is an urgent need to do ijthad in the style of Shah Waliullah Muhaddith Dehlvi. Allama considered it necessary to reconstruct all matters through ijthad. They praised the Turks for breaking the intellectual stagnation and doing ijthad. But he was not completely convinced ijthad of Without limits. Allama Iqbal regarded collective ijthad and parliamentary ijthad with great importance.

Keywords: Quran, sunnat, Ijthad, Allama Iqbal, Effort, ancient, contemporary, jurists

Introduction

Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877 – 1938) wanted the Muslim Ummah to regain their lost glory by identifying the reasons of their decline. One of the most important reasons, according to Iqbal, is the abandoning of ijthad. He further gave solutions to rectify these problems.

Iqbal is popularly referred to as “Hakeem Ul Ummat” (the doctor of the nation). A doctor’s job does not end after correct diagnosis, instead the job requires to propose possible lines of treatment to the patient. Iqbal hence provided complete guidance to the Muslims especially the scholars of the subcontinent in his infamous lecture “The Principle of Movement in Structure of Islam”, which he then delivered in the Universities of Madras,

Hyderabad and Aligarh between 1928 - 30. This then became the 6th chapter of Iqbal's book "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought In Islam"¹, originally published in 1930.

What is Ijtihad?

In his lecture Iqbal defines Ijtihad:

"What then is the principle of movement in the structure of Islam? This is known as Ijtihad. The word literally means to exert. In the terminology of Islamic law, it means to exert with a view to forming an independent judgement on a legal question."

He further defines 3 degrees of Ijtihad:

1. "Complete Authority; legislation which is practically confined to the founders of the school" (4 Islamic Schools of Thoughts; Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i & Hanbali)
2. "Relative Authority; to exercise within the limits of a particular school."
3. "Special Authority; determining of the law applicable to a particular case left unturned by the founders."

One thing that is clear from Iqbal's definitions of Ijtihad is that Iqbal was not convinced on the closure of Ijtihad. Instead he invited the scholars of a declining Muslim era to look up to the Muslim thinkers of the enlightened era and feel the need to re-energize the process of Ijtihad.

The Importance of Quran in Ijtihad

In a letter to Syed Suleiman Nadwi, Iqbal mentions that he is of the belief that whoever does a critical analysis of the current jurisprudence from a Quranic point of view and proves the eternal nature of the Quranic Commandments; will become the reformer of Islam and the biggest servant of the human race².

In Iqbal's opinion to create harmony between the Quranic commandments and the current era and to fulfil the demands of the present times; a revivalist work is the need of the hour. And this is possible only if we stop thinking that the door of Ijtihad has been closed on the four Imams.

Iqbal's point of view and inclination is towards studying the Islamic affairs from scratch. But this study should be done with a critical mindset instead of a follower's mindset. And this approach towards Islam is not unheard of, rather Muslims have done this in the past as well. At a time when the Greek Philosophy was considered to be the ultimate knowledge, the Muslims used

Greek Philosophy's own tools to analyze it critically. The need of the current hour requires a similar service.³

The Ijtihad of Shah WaliAllah

In his 4th lecture "The Human Ego, His Freedom and Immorality", Iqbal praises Shah Wali Ullah as a Mujtahid and mentions the need of such a person in today's time as well. He says:

"The task before the modern Muslim is, therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past. Perhaps the first Muslim who felt the urge of a new spirit in him was Shah WaliAllah of Delhi. The man, however, who fully realized the importance and immensity of the task, and whose deep insight into the inner meaning of the history of Muslim thought and life, combined with a broad vision engendered by his wide experience of men and manners, would have made him a living link between the past and the future, was Jamaluddin Afghani. If his indefatigable but divided energy could have devoted itself entirely to Islam as a system of human belief and conduct, the world of Islam, intellectually speaking, would have been on a much more solid ground today. The only course open to us is to approach modern knowledge with a respectful but independent attitude and to appreciate the teachings of Islam in the light of that knowledge, even though we may be led to differ from those who have gone before us. This I propose to do in regard to the subject of the present lecture⁴."

According to Iqbal, Shah WaliAllah Dehlvi was the first Muslim to have felt the need of a new spirit in the Ummah. Iqbal believed that Shah Dehlvi was the person who felt the importance and the extent of the work. Whereas Jamaluddin Afghani tried to create a link between the past and the present. But even his unfathomable energy could not bring complete results due to being distributed, that is why we need solid steps in today's time and era. And we should not try to find escape routes from this.

Preparing Ulema for Ijtihad

Allama Muhammad Iqbal considered it imperative to renew all aspects of Fiqh using Ijtihad. He even tried to prepare Ulema for this renewal at various opportunities. Amongst these were Syed Suleiman Nadvi whom Iqbal requested for this task and Molana Shibli Naumani on whose demise Iqbal

expressed regret in not being able to engage him during his lifetime towards this important duty⁵.

Iqbal used to emphasize that the kind of service performed by Imam Abu Hanifa is required yet again by the Muslim Ummah. According to Iqbal the renewal of Islamic Law requires an Islamic Jurist (Faqih) of the highest level who has a strong grip over reasoning and commands breadth in vision and intelligence⁶.

Turkiye's Ijtihad

Not only was Iqbal a promoter of expanse in the principles of legality, rather he was convinced of a complete change altogether. He wished that the Ummah progress, and that this progression cannot happen until and unless it breaks the inertia of immobility. Time has brought with it new problems. It is hence imperative that the solutions to these new problems demand new regulations. Age old solutions would not be able to answer contemporary questions. In this regard Iqbal used to cite Turkiye as an example. He praised the country for doing Ijtihad and breaking the inertia of immobility. That is the reason, according to him, that they are on a trajectory of success. They woke up from the dream of conservatism and achieved the blessing of wisdom. As a result, they left the imaginary fancy and entered the world of reality. This then broadened their vision. Iqbal believed that our Nation requires a similar effort⁷.

Renewal of Principles (Tajdeed-e Usool)

Iqbal showed immense courage in having and expressing this opinion. Whereas other educated thinkers did not go to this extent in their opinion; Iqbal believed to perform Ijtihad even in the principles itself. Dr. Khalid Masood writes:

*“Allama Iqbal reasons that Ijtihad is a dynamic principle. Hence the Islamic Jurisprudence does not require any external action to regain movement and progression. Instead the very nature of this law, its purpose and its demands; to keep man close to the realities of life; to complete the human welfare and prosperity; to achieve man's material auspiciousness and spiritual maturity; (this nature) compels the law from within to keep running the process of building and expansion of the law.”*⁸

Importance of Existing Fiqh Collection

It would be absolutely wrong to infer from Iqbal's inclination that he believed in looking away from the existing fiqh collection (of Islamic Jurisprudence). Instead Iqbal used to emphasize the necessity of keeping the historical fiqh collection in sight. Benefit from it, but don't consider it the last word. It is possible to change it, reduce it or add to it. It is also possible to leave these principles completely and make new ones, if need be. One thing is very clear from this, that Iqbal was not only convinced of Ijtihad, instead he believed in Ijtihad-e Mutliq.

Maulana Jaffer Phulwari also supports the claim that Allama Muhammad Iqbal believed in reviewing and revisiting Islamic Jurisprudence in various aspects of life from scratch. In Iqbal's view if these matters were ignored, then the whole Shariah will be frozen stuck, which is against the very nature of Shariah itself.⁹

Unrestricted Ijtihad (And its Harmful Effects)

It would be wrong again to infer from Iqbal's views and inclination that he was a believer of Ijtihad without any boundaries, preconditions or prerequisites. Instead he was never a proponent of Ijtihad without restrictions and boundaries. According to him if Ijtihad be practiced without conditions then it would bring harm instead of benefit. This kind of Ijtihad will then be used to find escape routes from the obvious and clear commandments. Iqbal expressed this view in his various poems and prose:

اس قوم کو تجدید کا پیغام مبارک
ہے جس کے تصور میں فقط بزمِ شبانہ
لیکن مجھے ڈر ہے کہ یہ آوازہ تجدید
مشرق میں ہے تقلیدِ فرنگی کا بہانہ¹⁰

Bless the message of revival to this Nation

Who thinks of but the night gathering

But I fear that this call of revival

In the East is but an excuse to the Western-Following

Iqbal wants to say that if revival is left open without restrictions and boundaries then it becomes a tool to avoid duties instead of performing them better. Similarly, at another occasion he says:

آزادی افکار سے ہے ان کی تباہی
 نہیں رکھتے ہیں جو فکر و تدبیر کا سلیقہ
 ہو فکر اگر خام تو آزادی افکار
 انسان کو حیوان بنانے کا طریقہ¹¹

*From the freedom of worries is their destruction
 People who are not skillful in reflection and deliberation
 If reflection is faulty then freedom from reflection
 Is the way to turn human into animal*

He further states:

ہے کس کی جرات کہ مسلمان کو ٹوٹے
 حریت افکار کی نعمت ہے خدا داد
 قرآن کو بازیچہ تاویل بنا کر
 چاہے تو خود اک تازہ شریعت کرے ایجاد¹²

*Who is brave enough to question the Muslim
 Independence from reflection is a blessing granted by God
 Making Quran a toy of justification
 If he pleases to invent a fresh Shariah himself*

In Iqbal's view the only accepted revival is the kind which is practiced in the light of Quran and Sunnah. Any other way is going astray. In the following couplet he states that safety is only in the human reflection which is obedient to Islam:

گو فکر خدا داد سے روشن ہے زمانہ
 آزادی افکار ہے ابلیس کی ایجاد¹³

*Although the era is enlightened with God-gifted reflection
 Freedom from Reflection is an invention of the Satan*

According to Iqbal a person who does not possess the ability of Ijtihad, is not permitted to do Ijtihad. It is compulsory for such a person to accept the following of the ancestral scholarship instead of doing a wrong Ijtihad. He writes:

نقشِ بردل معنی توحید کن
 چارہ کا خود از تقلید کن¹⁴

Iqbal's Ideology of "Ijtihad Mutliq" and "Collective Jurisprudence"

Common requisites for having the ability to do Ijtihad has been discussed in Chapter 1. Iqbal's point of view in this regard is different than the majority's point of view. He believes that the right of Ijtihad lies with an assembly rather than with individuals. A collective effort is necessary to find solutions to problems. Ijtihad Mutliq is not a one-man job. With regards to Ijtihad, Iqbal was a proponent of Ijtihad Mutliq. Iqbal writes:

*The theoretical possibility of this degree of Ijtihad is admitted by the Sunni's, but in practice it has always been denied ever since the establishment of the schools, inasmuch as the idea of complete Ijtihad is hedged round by conditions which are well-nigh impossible of realization in a single individual. Such an attitude seems exceedingly strange in a system of law based mainly on the groundwork provided by the Qur'an which embodies an essentially dynamic outlook on life.*¹⁵

Practical Example of Collective Jurisprudence

Allama Muhammad Iqbal was the flagbearer of *Collective Jurisprudence*. He presented a practical example of Collective Jurisprudence. With reference to the Turkish Cooperative Movement, Iqbal collected the scholars and requested them to collectively deliberate on this movement from all possible angles and to issue a joint announcement. He further advised them to Compile a program for the Turkish Cooperative Movement after discussion and debate. In this he tried to gather the top brass from all religious doctrines as well as people from various professions¹⁶.

Meeting Conditions of Ijtihad Mutliq

To fulfill the conditions of Ijtihad Mutliq, Iqbal opted for collective jurisprudence, so that the conditions are fulfilled collectively. This way eligibility criteria of Ijtihad Mutliq can be met fairly easily. Next comes the prerequisite of having proficiency in the sources of Islamic Sciences. Since these sources are in Arabic, so then how may a person not having command over the language be able to participate in the process of Ijtihad? Hence it then becomes a problem for the non-Arab jurisprudence experts. To resolve this barrier Dr. Khalid Masood took help from Imam Shatibi's point of view. According to Imam Shatibi having Arabic knowledge is a precondition for problems whereby it is required to take inference directly from the nasooos. Otherwise for problems where it is required to take inference from masaleh

and Shariah Objectives, then knowledge of Arabic is not necessary, but instead guidance taken merely from translations is enough.¹⁷

Iqbal considered the right to perform Ijtihad belongs to an organization instead of individuals. These organizations act as people's representatives. In this regard, Dr. Javed Iqbal writes:

"Iqbal was emphasizing the renewal of Islamic Jurisprudence by doing Ijtihad, not to create conformity with the present times' and conditions instead he feared the Western Capitalist Democracy on one side and Russian Atheist Communism on the other. Iqbal does not give the right to Ijtihad to either scholars nor to Islamic Jurists on individual level. In his opinion this right should be delegated to the constitutional assemblies of the countries of the Islamic World. This shape and form of collective jurisprudence is possible in today's time and era, to bring Ijtihad to life".¹⁸

Iqbal's Ideology of Parliamentary Ijtihad

Iqbal gave special importance to consultation and collectivism in Jurisprudence. He wanted to connect this specialty of Islam with another of Islam's specialty namely movement and continuous effort. Since Ijtihad Shad is the name of effort and strive. By combining these two Islamic strengths, Ijtihad would be safe from the dangers to a great extent. That is why Iqbal got convinced to delegate the right of Collective Ijtihad to the Parliament. He mentions:

According to Sunni Law, the appointment of an Imam or Khalifa is absolutely indispensable. The first question that arises in this connection is this - Should the Caliphate be vested in a single person? Turkey's Ijtihad is that according to the spirit of Islam the Caliphate or Imamate can be vested in a body of persons, or an elected Assembly. The religions doctors of Islam in Egypt and India, as far as I know, have not yet expressed themselves on this point. Personally I believe the Turkish view is perfectly sound.¹⁹

The practical shape and form Iqbal suggested for Ijtihad in today's time and era was to consider the Parliament as an Institute of Ijtihad. To Iqbal "Consensus", the third root of Islamic Jurisprudence, held great importance in itself. However practically not much benefit was derived from it after the initial period of Islam. Otherwise by now this would have existed as permanent departments in countries. But it was in the better interest of the rulers that the right to Ijtihad remain with individuals, that is why they didn't

give it much attention or care. But rest assured, today new and modern forces are appearing and getting strong footings. Muslim understanding is being developed due to the experiments of western countries. The birth of a collective spirit in Muslims is a revolutionary step. This would benefit when the nation would turn from individual Ijtihad to Collective Ijtihad, and when far sighted scholars will take part in it then the true spirit of our systems of jurisprudence will be reborn anew.²⁰

Iqbal emphasized that the affairs of Ijtihad should be delegated to the parliament, so that the problems are resolved through joint reflection and consideration. To accept Iqbal's view, especially considering the current statuses of the parliaments, is difficult as well as hopeless. Ijtihad, as established earlier, is not anybody's job. It is absolutely necessary for a Mujtahid to have the ability to do Ijtihad. Such people are not only close to non-existent in the parliament, but it is also very difficult for them to become a part of it. If Iqbal's ideology holds true, then it will be incumbent for every member to be highly proficient in the matters of Ijtihad.

Disapproval of Scholars of the Time

When Iqbal presented his ideology of Parliamentary Ijtihad, the top brass of the Sub-Continental Scholars out rightly rejected. According to Saleem Ahmad amongst the scholars who disagreed were Maulana Akbar Allahabadi, Syed Suleiman Nadwi, Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi and Maulana Maududi.²¹

Disapproval of Scholars of Today

Regarding Parliamentary Ijtihad, Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani says:

وہناک فکرۃ خاطیہ اخری۔۔۔۔

And there is another wrong idea

Another misleading idea in the subcontinent, brought to light by some thinkers, was to delegate the right of Ijtihad to the Parliament. The bearers of this ideology claims that whatever the parliament mutually agrees upon, is then the best way to resolve the current problems, because the members of the parliament are elected by people for this exact purpose. Considering the meaning of Ijtihad and its original demands, this thought is either based on ignorance or connivance. In Islamic Shariah, Ijtihad is not merely giving reasoning, opinions or taking decisions. It is instead the struggle of finding a Shariah Commandment based on Quran and Sunnah. And to reach that

level and degree, a person requires expertise in Tafsir (exegesis of Quran), Hadith (Tradition of the Prophet ﷺ), Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), etc. And no Tom, Dick and Harry can become an expert of these sciences. So much so even for a person, who is an expert in other sciences but not having learned the sciences of Shariah from their foundational sources, it is not possible for him to serve Ijtihad. The Parliament members these days are not elected based on their religious knowledge or Shariah Sciences. Thus delegating the duty of Ijtihad to the members of parliament is like putting them through the pain of inability. It is delegating an important religious duty to incompetent people²².

Failure to Gain Sub-Continent Wide Acceptance

Allama Muhammad Iqbal could not gain acceptance of his ideology. There could be many reasons for this. One such reason is that Iqbal did not talk about Ijtihad only, rather he talked about Ijtihad Mutliq, and then he linked it to the Parliament. Parliament, however, is not the place where Ijtihad should be practiced.

Second important reason is that if Ijtihad happens in the Parliament then amongst Ijtihad worthy people would be other people present who are not competent for doing Ijtihad. This then would not be justified that issues of such great importance be addressed with incompetence.

Summary of Iqbal's Ideology of Ijtihad

The summary of this discussion can be deduced that Allama Iqbal declares Ijtihad and Revival to be the means of breaking away from a social and financial decline. He advocated Ijtihad-e Mutliq done in the light of Quran and Sunnah; to the extent that he encouraged the renewal of even the "principles" themselves. But he approved only a competent, acclaimed and a visionary for the job. Not everybody has the ability or the capacity to perform Ijtihad. And whoever does not contain the ability to do Ijtihad would be safe in following the ancestral scholarship. Rather this followership be done as a compulsion.

Iqbal further believes that the right of Ijtihad lies with an assembly rather than with individuals. A collective effort is necessary to find solutions to problems. He then proposed a practical example of Collective Jurisprudence, with reference to the Turkish Cooperative Movement. Iqbal later got convinced to delegate the right of Collective Ijtihad to the Parliament.

Disapproval to Iqbal's ideology came in from the prominent scholars of his time. The scholars of today, however, disagree with the ideology based on the level of competence of the parliamentarians, or the lack of it.

Conclusion

The path shown by Allama Iqbal to instill a new spirit in the Muslims of the subcontinent and restore their place in the world is the path of ijtihad. Allama Iqbal tried to remove the misunderstanding of the Muslims of the subcontinent that the door of ijtihad has been closed after the four Imams. That is why there is an urgent need to further advance the work of the ancestors. Allama Iqbal used to emphasize that there is a need for ijtihad on the style of Imam Abu Hanifa. Islamic law requires a great jurist like Imam Abu Hanifah, who is also proficient in arguments and has a broad vision. Some of Allama's ideas gained popularity from the Ummah and were also criticized- Ijtihad is the completion of principles of action and creation.

There is an urgent need for absolute effort to solve the problems. New problems will be solved by new rules.

Renewal is only acceptable if the religion of Islam is subject to the Qur'an and the Sunnah-

Studying Islamic matters anew is not a new thing, but Muslims have done it before.

All matters must be reconstructed through ijtihad.

Collective effort is necessary to solve the problems

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