

## Book Review

**Brig. (Retd.) Dr. M. Ashraf Chaudhri**, *The Muslim Ummah and Iqbal*, National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Islamabad, 1994; Hard bound 350 pages; Price Rs.250.00, \$18.00, £12.00.

The author discusses Iqbal's views on the Muslim Ummah, which openly challenge the position held by the orthodox Muslim theologians that Islam had fulfilled all its manifestations in the Middle Ages and, therefore, did not need any rejuvenation in terms of the modern times. He sees general lack of dynamism, deep rooted inactivity and passivity as the main causes for Muslim decadence and proposes "Back to the dynamic spirit of the Quran", as Iqbal's solution to the problem.

The book comprises six chapters. In the first, the author discusses the social thought of eight prominent western philosophers from Plato to Marx. He highlights their quest and views as to what features were necessary to form an ideal society, how societies self-realized themselves and what factors were essential to maintain their unity. He also brings out the salient features of the Greek ideal society as propounded by Plato, in his famous work, 'The Republic'. This exhaustive probe into the Western social thought is made to bring into prominence, the salient features of an ideal society, as perceived by the West.

In the second chapter, after discussing the evolution of the Muslim Society (The Ummah), the Author discusses in detail, the Islamic ideal society, that was organized by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) al Medina. The chapter culminates in making an analytical study of 60th the ideal societies, the one propounded by Plato (the Utopia that was never operationalised)



and the other, that was factually established at Medina by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). About half a dozen common features are established; with the conclusion that whereas education, rationality, individual freedom, justice and power (to bring change) were indisputably common between the two societies, obedience to the Quranic law and faith in the certainty of the Day of Judgement were the two additional features, typical to the Islamic society, which had helped it to develop itself into an ideal society.

The third chapter discusses Iqbal's views on Man and Society. The aim is to stress that Man was the best of God's creations and society was essential for his self-realisation.

In the fourth chapter, taking Ego as a unit of social structure, the author has exhaustively discussed, Iqbal's philosophy of Ego, wherein he highlights the necessity and importance of systematically training Ego to develop its uniqueness. Iqbal does not visualize the development of Ego in isolation. It has to be in a society alongwith the other Egos, where it becomes a morally accomplished unit having a persuasive influence on them, by upholding and propagating 'goodness' and 'excellence'. Iqbal's views regarding the classical relationship between Man and Society are discussed in their theological dimensions, where everything appears to revolve around the fortification of the individual as well as the societal Ego. The inherent traits of action, struggle, creativity and Love (commitment and dedication to the cause) in an Ego are explored to the maximum so as to become synonymous with the development of the individual and societal Ego.

The fifth chapter brings out the present state of the Muslim Ummah in which the author provides answers to the Muslim decadence, as seen through Iqbal's thought. He recalls its continuous deterioration in the 20th century primarily as a result of the neglect of the aforesaid struggle and creativity that had reduced the Muslim societies to a collectivity of hopelessly dependent nations. Efforts made by half a dozen reformers in the 19th and the 20th centuries had proved futile. The Muslim Ummah continues to lay in deep slumber.

In the present state of its helplessness, the only hope seen by the author is in rediscovering the true spirit of Muslim



culture and reverting back to the dynamism of classical Islam, as propounded by Iqbal.

The idea of the finality of the Prophethood, is interpreted by Iqbal as a clear directive to the Muslims that they must resort to inductive reasoning in solving their day to day problems, rather than apply outdated interpretations of the past to solve modern problems, which had brought the Muslim societies to a grinding halt. Man had acquired enough wisdom now. He must, therefore, resort to exploring Nature, History and his own 'Self' as the sources of knowledge. From here on rationality was the key word and the guiding principle to govern resolution of the various problems confronted by the Ummah, to help meet the challenges of the modern times. Ijtehad, the principle of movement in Islam, as seen by Iqbal, was, therefore, the only way out for Muslim recovery. No fiqh is seen as final and every generation is seen to have a right to evolve fresh interpretations to the Shariah and work out suitable solutions to its problems through Ijtehad. A bold attitude was necessary as against a conservative and conformist approach. Caution was, however, to be exercised not to fall prey to westernism in the garb of modernism.

In the last chapter, after giving a summary of the five chapters, the author concludes that it is by the fortification of the individual and the collective Egos that the Muslim societies could help rejuvenate themselves and Islam, which recognises no distinctions of blood, caste, and gradations of worldly status. Since Islam had been charged with the task of working out a model of an ideal society to be emulated by the rest of the humanity, the Muslims had an obligation to fulfil for which ever fresh interpretations of the Quranic wisdom were required to scale over the ever emerging challenges of modernism.

The book unites in one volume, the various aspects of Iqbal's thought on the Muslim Ummah, and examines them analytically for their applicability and relevance to the modern times. Taking Ego as a unit of social structure, it brings out in concrete terms as to how the Muslim societies could stage a 'come back' in the world, not only as viable entities in themselves but in providing lead to the contemporary societies with a rationally enlightened and yet a theologically oriented approach.



The author deserves to be commended for having brought out Iqbal's views clearly and boldly without idealising him. They are convincingly relevant and seem to apply to the Muslim societies even today provided they are prepared to approach their problems with the enlightened interpretations of the law of the Shariah in the light of the modern thought and experience.

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