

Editor's Introduction

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, the Merciful

The College of Divinity and Islamic Studies of Tehran University published a booklet entitled "احياء تفكر اسلامي" ("Revival of Islamic Thought"). In 1982 it commemorated the subsequent of fourth anniversary of martyrdom of Ustad Allamah Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, the author of the booklet's five lectures delivered in 1970 at the Husseiniyeh Irshad Lecture Hall, Tehran. The lectures discussed mainly the Persian version of a book in English entitled: "The Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam" by Allamah Dr. Shaikh Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), published at Lahore in 1934.

The publishers of the booklet evidently refrained from editing the tapes or transcription of the lectures beyond insertion of numerous subtitles. Thus, it represented more or less an incoherent transcription of the lectures, in that not even the Quranic or other references were identified. These and other similar deficiencies were reflected in the draft English version given to this writer for editing. It did show the translator's effort to avoid repetitions. Nevertheless, the Editor found it necessary to redo himself the first two chapters completely and revise partly the others.

Despite rigorously sustained efforts, a few references could not be traced at all and the draft English version remained to be fully recast and improved. With the anticipated further co-operation of all concerned, it is to be hoped that the next edition of this booklet will be a fully revised one. In this context, it seems worthwhile to point out the broad nature and content of the difficulties encountered while editing the proposed English version. These do highlight the language and comprehension problems arising from two things.

Firstly, a translator's or an editor's task involves recognition of an author's or speaker's lack of familiarity with the original language of a book, which is indicated by latter's reliance on its translation – with all the incidental merits and demerits. This was the case with Murtadha Mutahhari's evolution of the above-mentioned book by Iqbal.

Secondly a mere linguistic approach is often insufficient, as when any painstaking editor find it necessary to revise an almost literal translation of an originally an unedited and, as such, virtually incoherent contents of a book. In the present case, the crucial points and the statements translated into English required a critical appraisal of their meaning and contextual significance in the light of both Mutahhari's and Iqbal's lectures in Persian and English respectively.

Clearly, one must demonstrate more than mere proficiency in languages, especially when dealing with abstract and abstruse ideas, such as encountered in religious books. It is more necessary when a pliable editor happens to be unavailable to make up for shortcomings on a translator's part.

With regard to the subject matter of the present work, it emphasizes the need for proper assimilation and dissemination of Islamic ethos in the process of its revival. This necessarily implies an adequate indication of the thinking that characterized the Muslims some five hundred years ago, as well as a broad identification of the deviations since then. The lecture of the Iqbal and Murtadha Mutahhari both are hardly enough in this regard.

Iqbal's "Reconstruction..." was found inadequate (for reasons different from the above) by two recent critics of diverse cultural backgrounds. The first critic, a Persian-speaking one, suggests that it was a "Condescending and apologetic study of Islamic Thoughts from the point of view of Western Philosophy"¹. He does not necessary imply that Iqbal was unaware of the "Still-living tradition of Islamic Philosophy" manifest in Arabic and Persian languages in particular. This may be due to the fact that Iqbal wrote in Persian, too.

The other critic affiliated to Western Europe suggests that Iqbal's "Reconstruction" could have been that of "Thought" rather than that of "Religious Thought in Islam". He opines that Iqbal's work boils down to no more than emphasizing that "Islam must be rethought in modern terms"². He did not evidently consider it worthwhile to assign any reasons for this verdict.

On the other hand, Murtadha Mutahhari's "Revival" evidently presupposes the "Death" of Islamic Thought evolved by earlier generations of Muslims. He invites present-day Muslims to retrieve and adhere to the original Islamic way of thinking based on "Tawhid" or subservience to the One and the Only God. The Islamic values have been obscured centuries ago when the Caliphates began to symbolize monarchies rather than typify any sustained human qualitative excellence (conductive to the divine viceregency on the earth of man), such as exemplified and sought by the Holy Prophet (May God's peace and Benediction be upon him & His family) and the pious Imams (May God's peace be upon them).

Iqbal, too, realizes the paramount importance of the principle of "*Tawhid*". He considers it to be "the foundation of world-unity"³. For, he points out the principle "demands loyalty to God, not to thrones"⁴. He commends its retrieval from the long-accumulated heathenish entrustment of Islam due to the loss of the religion's "universal and impersonal character... through a process of localization", so as to

“rediscover the original verities of freedom, equality and solidarity with a view to rebuild our moral, social and political ideals out of their original simplicity and universality”.⁵

Iqbal considers that the eternal principles, such as “Tawhid” are necessary for regulating a society’s collective life “for the eternal gives us a foothold in the world of perpetual change”.⁶ He attributes the failure of Europe in political and social sciences to what appears to be their renunciation of eternal principles. Further, he points out that the Islamic principles should not be “understood to exclude all possibilities of change, which, according to Qur’an is one of the greatest ‘signs’ of God”.⁷ He cites “the immobility of Islam during the last 500 years” as a case in point.⁸ Then, he proceeds to identify “the principle of movement” inherent in Islam as that of “Ijtihad”.⁹

“*Ijtihad*” (اجتهاد) literally means a “painstaking effort” of a positive kind, carried out to the utmost of one’s capability. In the contest of Islamic *Fiqh*, it refers to any extraordinary attempt at discerning the meaning and practical significance of Sharia’s laws and commandments for the purpose of inferring their applicability to changing situations.

In the year 665 AH/ 1245 AD, it was formally announced in Egypt that no school of jurisprudence (*‘Fiqh’*) other than that of the Hanafi, Shafe’i, Maliki and Hanbali (Sunni Sub-Sects) could be officially recognized. This has had the effect of “closing the gate of Ijtihad” for Sunni Muslims. Thus, their contributions to the Islamic *Fiqh* over the subsequent centuries were practically confined to summarization and consolidation of the original materials of the four recognized schools.¹⁰ The centuries-long hiatus in the growth of Sunni Ijtihad continued until 1376 AH/ 1958–59 AD. Then, a Fatwa (a religious verdict) was issued at Cairo’s thousand-year-old University of Al-Azhar by Mufti ‘Azan Shaikh Mahmood Shaloot. It formally recognized the possibility of Sunni *Ijtihad vis-à-vis* that of Shi’a Muslims that had continued through the centuries.¹¹

Iqbal explains “*Ijtihad*” as follows:

“The word literally means to exert. In the terminology of Islamic Law, it means to exert with a view to form an independent judgement on a legal question. The idea, I believe, has origin in a well-known verse of the Qur’an:

“And to those who exerts We show our path”. (29:69).

We find it more definitely adumbrated in a tradition of the Holy Prophet. When Ma’ad was appointed ruler of Yemen, the Prophet has reported to have asked him as to how he will decide the matters coming up before him. ‘I will judge the matters according to the Book of God’, said Ma’ad. ‘But if the Book of God contains nothing (Specific-Ed.) to guide you?’ Then I will act on precedents of Prophet of God.’ ‘But if the precedents fail?’ ‘Then I will exert to form my own judgement;”¹²

Although Iqbal does not specifically refer to any closure of “the gate of Ijtihad”, he does not indicate a negative development to this effect, as follows:

“The theoretical possibility of (complete) Ijtihad is admitted by Sunnis, but in practice it has always been denied ever since the establishment of the schools, in as much 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.”¹³

According to Iqbal, the cause of this “intellectual attitude which has reduced the Law of Islam practically to state of immobility”¹⁴ can be related to:

The divisive impact on Muslims of the early Islamic controversies between ‘Rationalist’ and ‘Conservatives’ while the Abbasid Caliphs favored one or the other on a basis of political expediency;

The rise and growth of Ascetic Sufism that had involved an unrestrained (non-Islamic) speculation in thinking that led to rejection of all objective ‘Appearance’ (ظاهر/*Zahir*) and concentration on subjective ‘Reality’ (باطن/*Batin*), or other-worldliness, leaving the masses to be guided by mediocre intellectuals and leaders:

The destruction of mid-thirteenth century of the ‘center of Muslims intellectual life’, Baghdad, by invading Tartars, which brought about “a false reverence for past history and its artificial resurrection (which) constitute no remedy for a people’s decay”, especially in the absence of any realization that “the ultimate fate of a people does not depend so much on organization as on the worth and power of individual man.”¹⁵

In the above context, it is notable that Iqbal only indicated what in his opinion were the factors contributing to the stagnation of the “Law of Islam”. Murtadha Mutahhari’s lectures elaborate on at least two of the above-mentioned factors:

1. the ‘rationalist-conservatives’ controversies, and
2. Ascetic Sufism.

Where Iqbal refers to the adverse impact of the controversies only in general terms, Murtadha Mutahhari specifies at least one of the controversial groups; the Murjites. What is more, he pinpoints the negative social impact of the controversies, such as created by the Murjites, in terms of popular scorn for acting upon what one believes in. At the same time, Murtadha Mutahhari fixes the responsibility for the negative ethos on the mostly adverse policies and conditions of the Caliphates since the Umayyads.

Furthermore, Murtadha Mutahhari, well-versed in traditional Shi’a Islamic Learning, views the negative development of the Muslim Ethos as something representing a people’s spirit that is “dead”. He explains the abstract idea by citing illuminating references from the Qur’an and the Islamic traditions.

With regard to asceticism, Murtadha Mutahhari emphasizes its Islamic sense of moderation, sacrifice and disinclination to enjoy things in face of others’ dire wants. He affirms that asceticism should not be

misconstrued in any non-Islamic sense of renunciation of the world and points out that there is no monasticism in Islam.

Finally, one can hardly discern any basic difference in Dr. Iqbal's and Ayatullah Mutahhari's assessments concerning the need for reviving or promoting the original "vital élan" of Muslims. Any seeming difference, perhaps, lies in the things they have emphasized, which ultimately converge on the above-mentioned need. Murtadha Mutahhari stresses knowledgeable and emphatic action as *a sine qua non* of a Muslim's faith.

Iqbal underlines Ijtihad's legislative aspect in the context of a dynamic realization of the eternal principles of Islam in an ideological Islamic State that treats (in the words attributed to the Holy Prophet) the whole of the earth "as a mosque".¹⁶

Even legislative innovation through Ijtihad ought to be sufficiently capable of enlivening the Islamic spirit of Muslims. As Iqbal has put it in his "Jawid Nama", a poem named after his son, the question, after all, is: "Art thou in the stage of 'life' or 'death' or 'death-in-life'?"

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Tehran,

16, Jamadiul-Awal 1403.

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2. G. H. Jansen: "Militant Islam" Pan Books, London, 1979, p. 94
3. Allamah Dr. Shaikh Mumammad Iqbal: "The reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam" Ashraf Printers, Lahore, Reprint 1982, p. 147.
4. Allamah Dr. Shaikh Mumammad Iqbal: "The reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam" Ashraf Printers, Lahore, Reprint 1982, p. 147.
5. Ibid. p. 156
6. Ibid. p. 147.
7. Ibid. p. 148.
8. Ibid. p. 148.
9. Ibid. p. 148.
10. Dr. Subhi Muhamsani: "Falsafatil Tashree'i fil Islam", Dar al-Kashaf, Beirut, 1952, as quoted in "Risalai-Noveen Imam Khomeinei" Vol. 1, compiled by A. K. Biazar Shirazi, New Print (1982), p. 34.
11. Dr. M. M. Madani, former Principal of the College of Islamic Laws, University of Al-Azhar, Cairo, in an article translated into Persian and published in "Islam A'in Hambastagi", intisharat Be'that, Tehran, pp– 73–91
12. Ibid. pp. 148–151.
13. Ibid. pp. 148–151.
14. Ibid. pp. 148–151.
15. Ibid. pp. 148–151
16. Ibid. p. 154

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