

**Prophethood of Muhammad (S.A.W.):
Some Aspects of Allama Iqbal's Perspective**

Abdur Rashid Bhat*

Abstract

Prophethood forms an important component of almost all religions in one or the other form. Islam propounds it in a clear and perfect manner. It is, in fact, the necessity of every individual being to seek guidance for living a better life in the world. God, the Creator and the Master of the whole cosmos has fulfilled this basic need of man by praising the prophets in the course of history and its chain culminates in the prophethood of Muhammad (S.A.W.). He is the last Prophet of God towards mankind and is called 'the Mercy to the whole worlds'. Allama Iqbal who is regarded as an outstanding scholars of modern Muslim world, has specially treated this theme of prophet Muhammad's Prophethood in his various writings—Lectures, poetical works, speeches and statements. The present article attempts to approach the various aspects of Iqbal's treatment of the subject. In the light of the primary Islamic sources, Iqbal explains the theme of the necessity of prophethood, message and social role of the Prophet (S.A.W.) in a profound manner. To him, prophethood in Islam is to bless man with perfect and integrative knowledge where Divine revelation has the supreme authority and man finds the proper growth of his personality while having the spiritual and the social emancipation. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) has guided the mankind on the sound principles of Faith, piety and brotherhood and evolved a unique universal civilization of mankind.

* Associate Professor, S.H. Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar (India)

1. Introduction

Prophethood (*nabuwwah*) is an essential necessity of man. Man himself is a supreme creation of Allah with enormous potential and has to be conscious about it to fulfill his role in this world. To be ignorant of it means ignoring his own self and thus deteriorating his true role. Prophethood is that blessing of Allah upon man which endows him with this knowledge and guidance through the chosen persons to identify his purpose and responsibility in the world. This idea is some what present in all religions of the world and Islam propounds it in a clear, consistent and perfect way. It not only explains the value of the Divine message but also the finality of this message and religion (Islam) that culminated in the prophethood of Muhammad (S.A.W.). The present essay is an attempt to examine some aspects of Iqbal's perspective on prophethood of Muhammad (S.A.W.). It will focus on the necessity of prophethood, Muhammad's (S.A.W.) message for the mankind and the finality of prophethood in him. It will also highlight briefly his role in reforming the individuals for building a model social order of humanity. *Lectures*, poetical works, speeches and statements of Iqbal are used as the basic sources to develop our analysis of his perspective.

2. The Necessity of Prophethood

The existence of man in the world signifies his distinctive creation. He is superior to other creatures of Allah, having a definite purpose and role. Its truthfulness or reality emerges as a fundamental question before each human being. Almost every body tries to answer it in his own way or by dint of the sources he is equipped with. Without it, it would be difficult for him to express his own self and interact with the world around him. In his struggle to understand this Reality he has been using the four sources down the ages. First is the reason which finds cause and effect and presumes the nature of the things on this basis. The

second is the sensory experience i.e. observation or experimentation. It is also called scientific method by the Westerners and its aim is to judge things through observation and experience. The third source put forth is the mystical one. It seeks reality in the inner or mystical experience of man. The fourth and the last one is the religious source which comes from Divine Being- Allah. It comes through Allah's chosen ones called Prophets whom religious truths are revealed rather than acquired by them:

Nor does he speak out of his desire. This is nothing but revelation that is conveyed to him.¹

In another verse the Qur'an explains:

Verily! We have sent you with the Truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and as a Warner; and there is not a community but there has passed away among them of a warner.²

Iqbal also talks about these three sources which the philosophers, empiricists or scientists and mystics use respectively. He examines them critically in terms of their merits and demerits vis –a –vis the truth of religion.

In case of reason he holds that it has role to find links between the things to know their nature and reality. But this use itself cannot grasp the reality without the other aids because it has its own limitations. It is in this context that Iqbal appreciates Ghazzali and Kant who found inconsistencies in human reason in their own ways³. Although on the other grounds Iqbal disagrees with Gazzali yet both uniformly describe reason insufficient for perceiving Reality properly⁴. In his poetry too, Iqbal defines reason a useful tool of knowledge, yet it is not truth itself:

Go ahead beyond reason, for this light
Is simply a road-lamp and not the goal.
Intellect does not have more than information
Your remedy lies solely in insight.⁵

At another place, Iqbal explains its weakness as:

The outcome of reason is to be away from the immediacy (of God)
Philosophy is away from (practical) life.

Ineffective are the notes of such thoughts, and
Stay zeal from active life and achieve naught.⁶

The second source of experimental or scientific enquiry is dealt by Iqbal in good deal in his *The Reconstruction of Religion Thought in Islam*. In fact, it is the seminal theme of book where the value of religious truths is examined in the light of scientific and empirical facts. Iqbal wants to emphasise here how religion is related to scientific enquiries and to what extant man can test its truths on this ground. He does not, however, mean by it that the method is the sole criterion of judging Reality. It is dependent on other aids emanating from metaphysics and morality. By the close unity of the two there becomes the possibility of building a worthy civilization:

It is reflective contact with the temporal flux of things which trains us for our intellectual vision of the non-temporal. Reality lives in our appearances and such a being as man, who has to maintain his life in an obstructing environment, cannot afford to ignore the visible. The Qur'an opens our eyes to great fact of change, through the appreciation and control of which alone it is possible to build a durable civilization.⁷

Indeed, the West has made tremendous progress in the empirical domain, yet the direction of its method leads merely to material and secular goals. It has failed to guide and teach man how to judge good and bad, useful and harmful. This is clearly stated in the following verses:

'When love is absent, reason bites (man) like a snake.'
The man could not make reason subservient to insight.
One who tracked the orbits of the stars,
Could not travel in his own world of ideas.
He is entangled in labyrinth of his science
Till today, he could not decide what is good and bad?
One who conquered the solar energy,
Yet could not bring dawn to life's thick night.⁸

As for the mystical source of seeking reality is concerned Iqbal is conscious about its importance in bringing out the feelings

emotions and experiences of man. This he relates to the Quranic *fuad* – heart and the states through which it undergoes. He talks about mystic experience in a general way and finds, no doubt, its closeness to religious one and calls it immediate yet never characterises it as the criterion of Reality. He puts the experience in the perspective of modern psychology in order to describe it as a knowledge source and make it a subject of scrutiny. In the context of William James's following observation he cautions about its dangers.

Some have always been too patently silly, among the trances and convulsive seizures some have been too fruitless for conduct and character, to pass themselves off as significant, still less as divine. In the history of Christian mysticism the problem how to discriminate between such messages and experiences as were really divine miracles, and such others as the demon in his malice the child of hell he was before, has always been a difficult one to solve, needing all the sagacity and experience of the best directors of conscience. In the end it had come to our empiricist criterion: By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots⁹

In his critique of all these sources of approaching Reality Iqbal's stand is two- fold. One is that these sources have their own value in life in developing knowledge and society yet can not form reality itself. The second aspect is that the genuine criterion of Reality lies beyond them which comes through prophets whom Allah raises for the guidance of people among themselves. It is important to note here that the truths of religion are, no doubt, revealed and transcendental yet they can be testified by the various methods – rational, scientific, mystical or psychological. When he speaks of such approaches he never means reduction of religion nor does he take these methods in their narrow Western context. His is the motive to underscore the organic nature of reality and its close accessibility and contact is exclusively possible through religion. He sums up this fact in the following words:

The result of an intellectual view of life, therefore, is necessarily pantheistic. But we have a first hand knowledge of the

appreciative aspect of life from within. Intuition reveals life as a centralising ego. This knowledge, however, imperfect as giving us only a point of departure is a direct revelation of the ultimate nature of Reality. Thus the facts of experience justify the interference that the ultimate nature of Reality is spiritual, and must be conceived as an ego. But the aspiration of religion soars higher than philosophy. Philosophy is an intellectual view of things and as such does not go beyond a concept which can reduce all the rich variety of experience to a system. It sees Reality from a distance as it were. Religion seeks a closer contact with Reality. The one is theory; the other is living experience, association, intimacy. In order to achieve this intimacy thought must rise higher than itself, and find its fulfillment in an attitude of mind which religion describes as prayer- one of the last words on the lips of the Prophet of Islam.¹⁰

In one of his poems, Iqbal refers to this religious truth in terms of *Shari'ah* and love:

Seek thou no other meaning in the law
 Nor look save light to find within the gem;
 God was the jeweler Who fashioned forth
 This jewel, diamond through and through,
 Law (*Shar'iah*) is the only knowledge of the Truth,
 Love the sole basis of the prophets code;
 The individual through law attains
 A faith maturer and more fair adorned.
 The rule of law secures an ordered life to all the nation,
 By the strong social order permanence is achieved.¹¹

3. The Purpose of Prophet Muhammad's (S.A.W.) Message and Its Finality

It is clear that the true consciousness about ones self and the world around him, is possible only through religion which the prophets taught to mankind. This is Allah's great blessing upon them. It is He who created man in the best form and granted him guidance through the prophets:

Every people has its prophet.¹²

And Prophet Muhammad is the continuity of this chain of prophets. His prophethood is not confined to a particular region, nation or tribe but for all mankind. This is the distinction that characterizes the universality of his message:

(Say, O Muhammad: O people! I am Allah's messenger to you all.¹³

In the first place it can be said that Iqbal describes Prophet Muhammad as a link between the ancient and the modern. He says that the ancient people were lead by revelation and their thought was little developed and the message of the Prophet (S.A.W.) imbibes it along with the spirit of the modern. This characterizes its universality and finality. The divine guidance in the form of the *Quran* sets the code for human life. It is the Book of Allah whose message is eternal and permanent and it guides man in all domains of life:

Knowst thou what thy law is? Wherin lies
Beneath you sphere the secret of thy power?
It is the living Book, that wise Qur'an
Whose wisdom is eternal
The final message to all mankind¹⁴

Secondly, Iqbal terms the Prophet's (S.A.W.) advent as the birth of scientific culture. To him it is neither the Greek thought (which is sometimes wrongly regarded as the motivating factor to European science) nor the latter itself as the pioneers of scientific method on culture. To him, it is the distinction of Islam as preached by the Prophet (S.A.W.) that inductive and experimental method got evolved in the history. The Quran itself emphatically persuades man to observe and reflect on the world of Nature and the changes taking place in it. According to Iqbal, it was this pursuit of Muslims that made them to bring out great achievements in knowledge and sciences till the 15th century. The Western renaissance is much indebted to this development of Muslim science and learning. Iqbal refers to this evolution of scientific method in the following words:

The first important point to note about the spirit of Muslim culture then is that, for purposes of knowledge, it fixes its gaze on the concrete, finite. It is further clear that the birth of the method of observation and experimentation in Islam was due not to a compromise with Greek thought but not to a prolonged intellectual warfare with it. In fact, the influence of Greeks who, as Briffault says, were interested chiefly in theory, not in fact, tender rather to observe the Muslims vision of the Quran and from asserting itself and coming to its own. I want, therefore, defiantly eradicate the misunderstanding that Greek thought, in way, determined the character of Muslim culture.¹⁵

Here again Iqbal wants to illustrate that the all embracing nature of Islam which on the one hand propounds the spirituo-ethical norms for life and on the other promotes the various methods of enquiry to investigate and accesses the principles and truths of religion. To him, it does not only give due recognition to modern scientific method but also transcend it to higher realm of knowledge and thought. However, all the other enquiry methods have to be under its control than go against it. Here lies the spirit of prophethood and meaningfulness of life. He says:

In fact, the various natural sciences are like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, and each running away with a piece of its flesh. Nature as the subject of science is a highly artificial affair, and this artificiality is the result of that selective process to which science must subject her in the interests of the precision. The movement you put the subject of science in the total human experience it begins to disclose a different character. The religion, which demands the whole Reality and for this reason must occupy a central place in any synthesis of all the data of human experience, has no reason to be afraid of any sectional views of Reality. Natural science is by nature sectional, it cannot, if it is true to its own nature and function, set up its theory as a complete view of Reality.¹⁶

It is also worthy to note here that Iqbal made illustrations about Prophethood of Muhammad (S.A.W.) in response to the controversies which rose in India in the context of Ahmadiya

Movement. He wrote in *Statesman*, Calcutta in 1935 criticising the movement for its religious adventurism on the ground of modern liberalism and thinks that it will make people indifferent to religion itself and eliminate it from the Indian community.¹⁷ He cautioned the British government that encouraging the movement is to make the people to seek substitute for religion which could be likely in atheistic materialism as in the case of Russia.¹⁸ He made it clear that the Qadianis on their non subscribing to the belief of the Finality of Muhammad's Prophethood which is strictly held by Muslim community, must be called a separate community. He suggested the government to declare them separate from Muslims as they did in case of the Sikhs who were separate community from that of Hindus¹⁹. In *Islam*, Lahore of its January 1936 issue Iqbal gives an elaborative response to Pandit Jawhar Lal Nehru²⁰ in his criticism of Allama Iqbal's statement on Qadianis and orthodox Muslims. Allama in his reply explains the political and psychological background of the emergence of the movement, which according to him, is more sponsored by the British than has any local strength. Since spiritual and mystical mind is core element to a common man's religiosity and the coming of revelation to Mirza Ahmad says Iqbal, was thought as a strong ground to attract (exploit) them. He also calls it modern liberal religious adventurism which was highly dangerous for the Indians. Secondly Iqbal succinctly elaborates the Islamic point of view about Prophethood, its finality and the consequences of ones deviation from the fundamental beliefs of Islam. He writes:

The cultural value of the idea of Finality in Islam I have fully explained elsewhere. Its meaning is simple: No spiritual surrender to any human being after Muhammad who emancipated his follower by giving them a law which is realizable as arising from the very core of human conscience. Theologically the doctrine is that the socio-political organization called "Islam" is perfect and eternal. No revelation, the denial of which entails hearsay, is possible after Muhammad. He who claims such a revelation is a

traitor to Islam. Since the Qadianis believe the founder of Ahmadiyya movement to be the bearer of such revelation, they declare that the entire world of Islam is infidel. The founders own argument, quite worthy of a medieval theologian, is that spirituality of the Holy Prophet of Islam must be regarded as imperfect if it is not creative of another prophet. He claims his own prophethood to be an evidence of the prophet rearing power of the spirituality of the holy prophet of Islam. But if you ask him whether the spirituality of Muhammad is capable of rearing more prophets than one his answer is "No". This virtually amounts to saying: "Muhammad is not the last prophet", I am the last ...As I read the psychology of mind here, in the interest of his own claim to prophethood, avails himself of what he describe as the creative spirituality of the Holy Prophet of Islam and at the same time deprives the Holy Prophet of his Finality by limiting the creative capacity of his spirituality to the rearing of only one Prophet, i.e. the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement. In this way does the new prophet quietly steals away the Finality of one whom he claims to be his spiritual progenitor.²¹

4. Social Reform

No doubt the Prophet is bestowed with the knowledge of Reality but it is not unto himself. It is of the universal value to be promulgated and applied widely to the society. The prophet has, therefore a social mission and role .While referring to the difference between the 'Unitary experience, of a mystic and a prophet, Iqbal explains that the former's experience is unto himself and that of the latter is both for his own awakening and the reformation of the people. He says:

...The Prophet's return is creative. He returns to insert himself into the sweep of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals. For the mystic the repose 'the unitary experience' is something final; for the prophet it is the awakening ,within him, of world shaking psychological forces, calculated to completely transform the human world.²²

The prophet himself is undoubtedly a model conduct (*ussawah hasanah*) for all people and to follow him is the success of humanity. Iqbal, in his description of the picture of a *Momin*, illustrates that change in the conduct of individuals, made by the prophet, endowed them with the qualities of piety, love, devotion, steadfastness and universalism. It is because of these men of piety and devotion (*ishq*) who constitute his community (*millah*) and an ideal social order got established that is a model for all the societies and nations to come. To Iqbal, Muhammad (S.A.W.) has emancipated men in such a way that they emerge as a universal community to play a unique role in the world. He says:

God fashioned forth our form
 And through apostleship breathed in our flesh the soul of life.
 In God the individual lives the community
 In his suns rays resplendent ever.
 His apostleship brought concord to our purpose and our goal
 A common aim shared by the multitude
 Is unity which when it is mature
 Forms the community, that may live only by virtue of a single
 bond.²³

The distinctive traits of this social order of the Prophet's *millah* are, however, its liberty, egalitarianism and brotherhood. There is no slavery and lordship of any person. All are creatures of Allah Whom they have to submit in their acts. All have been created from single person –Adam and are equal in terms of members of universal community. No discrimination is found in granting the basic rights and opportunities among the people belonging to the diverse faiths, races and languages. Belonging to one ancestry and submitting to one God they live as brethren with love and affection for one another to form a single unity. Iqbal expresses this role of the Prophet in the following verses effectively:

Serfdom debased man's nature, while his reed
 Throbed with threnody of his heart's blood

Until one faithful reassigned their rights
 To those whose rights they were, the Khaqan's throne
 Delivering into his subject's hand;
 Fanned their dead embers into flame anew;
 Raised up Farhad, poor hewer of the rocks.
 To Parwiz's royal height, brought dignity
 To honest toil, and robbed the taskmasters of tyrant overlordship.
 By his might he shattered every ancient privilege,
 And built new walls to fortify mankind.²⁴

5. Evolving a Unique Civilization

Iqbal also explains the uniqueness of civilization which got evolved under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) and flourished substantively during his early successive ages. Civilizations which are the result of centuries old spiritual and intellectual traditions cannot be eliminated easily nor is it sound that they are to be outrightly rejected. As a matter of fact, the Prophet is not against retaining good of the traditions of the ancient civilizations of Rome, Egypt and Far East. In the course of history of mankind, civilizations had to undergo reform and rebuilding. Coming of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) dawned the rebuilding of a new civilization which retains the spiritual tradition of the earlier ones, in its pure and final form, and integrates it closely with the day to day social life. So what happened wrong in earlier traditions which got reformed and corrected in order to meet the needs and the challenges of the coming times. Weak spirituality, ideology, tribalism and serfdom were replaced by sound and stable social and intellectual traditions under the banner of the civilizations of Islam.

The Prophet (S.A.W.) trained his men in new mode of spirituality- of *iman* (faith) and *taqwa* (piety) and transformed their conduct with the virtues of love, honesty, generosity, boldness and prosperity. Iqbal describes them in great terms of great 'men of secrets',²⁸ 'passion'²⁹ and diamonds of knowledge'³⁰ who gave

expression of their vision and consciousness in building a sound and stable civilization. Its uniqueness lies in its emancipation of man in terms of his spiritual and practical powers on genuine moral grounds.³¹ His virtues get flourished and weaknesses controlled and grows himself in a balanced way. This is hardly found in the other civilizations as they suffered by human intellectual and material corruption down the ages. Iqbal repeatedly mentions this potential of ideal man, the basic pillar of the civilization.²⁹

To Iqbal the Prophet's role is of special nature. Men who have been morally dormant and wandered and entangled with confusions of their mind got new life of sound consciousness. They turned their loyalties to God (Allah). Whatever false gods, customs and existed, the Prophet (S.A.W.) put an end to them. The new civilization under his pious leadership dawned the era of knowledge, freedom and universal community of men.

Iqbal makes it clear that the universality of Muslim civilization owes much to the unity of religious belief. It is the fundamental principle of Islamic civilization. In fact, the community cannot survive without adherence to monotheistic belief system of Islam and open refutation of false divinity and corrupted practices is another target of it. To Iqbal Muslim community is founded on these principles and sustains its civilization by them. His following words amplify the truth of the Islamic culture.

The unity of religious belief on which our communal life demands, is supplemented by the uniformity of Muslim culture. Mere belief in Islamic principle, though exceededly important, is not sufficient. In order to participate in the life of the communal self the individual mind must under go a complete transformation, and this transformation is secured, externally by the institutions of Islam, and internally by that uniform culture which the intellectual energy of our forefathers has produced. The more you reflect on the history of the Muslim community the more wonderful does it appear from the of its foundation up to the beginning of the 16th

century. For almost a thousand years this energetic race was busy in the all absorbing occupation of political expansion. Yet in this storm of continuous activity the Muslim world found time to unearth the treasures of ancient science to make material additions to them, to build a literature of unique character, and above all to develop a comprehensive system of law, probably the most valuable legacy that Muslim civilization has left us. Just as the Muslim community does not recognize any ethological differences, and aims at the subsumption of all races under the universal idea of humanity, so our culture is to the genius of one particular people.³⁰

6. Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be concluded that Prophethood of Muhammad (S.A.W.) finds a special treatment in Iqbal. While interpreting Islamic view-point about it in his philosophic and poetic language, he explains its necessity for the perfect moral life of man and under scores that the distinct component with which the Prophet is endowed i.e., Allah's revelation, in the form of His Book. The latter is also termed the absolute form of knowledge. The other forms of knowledge like reason, observation, empiricism and even intuition are subservient to this Prophetic revelation. It is infallible and in Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) it is in the final form, characterizing him the final Messenger from Allah towards the whole mankind. To Iqbal the birth of Islam is the birth of inductive reason and science that flourished in the West extensively. It is, in fact, the impact of Islam that it made upon the West during the medieval times when the latter was intellectually dormant. The purpose of the Prophet's message is to guide an individual being in his all walks of life and make him grow in a balanced and proper way vis-à-vis his society. So the Prophet's message does not serve merely unto himself but brings a social reform in history and evolves a civilization of unique character. It is founded on the principles of Islamic beliefs (*iman*), piety (*taqwa*) and brotherhood (*akhwah*) and culminates universal order of humanity.

